

# Pauline Oliveros, Somatics, and the New Musicology

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**I**n the 1960s and '70s a loose network of “body workers” emerged in the United States to form what became known as the somatics or bodywork movement.<sup>1</sup> Advocates for somatics, though diverse in intellectual orientation, embraced one common goal: to

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<sup>1</sup> On the history of somatic practices in relation to twentieth-century spirituality and body cultures, see Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Don Hanlon Johnson, ed., *Bone, Breath & Gesture: Practices of Embodiment* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995); Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Kerry O'Brien, “Listening as Activism: The ‘Sonic Meditations’ of Pauline Oliveros,” *New Yorker*, December 9, 2016; and Kerry O'Brien, “Experimentalisms of the Self: Experiments in Art and Technology, 1966–1971” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2018), 139–86.

legitimize the body as a source of creativity and selfhood. They often called this body the “soma.”<sup>2</sup> The soma was not the body as previous generations had supposedly imagined it; it was not a subservient, disciplined body controlled by an exacting, “rational” mind. Instead, it was an “intuitive” body, possessed of its own native intelligence and capable of acting of its own accord. Somatics advocates argued that in the West the so-called rational mind had for centuries stifled the intuitive body. To solve the problem, these advocates turned to various new or newly popularized embodied practices, from yoga and tai chi to the Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method. The main nodes of the movement were countercultural growth centers such as the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, but by the 1970s somatics practitioners could be found leading workshops across the country—including in university music departments and conservatories.

Around this time, countless musicians not only explored somatic practices but adapted somatic ideas to their work. Among the most well-known musicians to do so was Pauline Oliveros.<sup>3</sup> Though historians have long recognized Oliveros’s interest in tai chi, karate, and other related disciplines, it is only recently that scholars such as Kerry O’Brien have begun to seriously examine the influence of somatic practices on Oliveros’s feminist, experimental music and identity.<sup>4</sup> In this article, I argue that Oliveros not only developed a personal, feminist brand of somatic music-making in the early 1970s but also helped instigate an influential movement to integrate somatic discourse and practice into US musical culture. I further show how scholars associated with the “new musicology” who focused on issues of embodiment applied somatic concepts in their work. Ultimately, I propose that Oliveros and the new

<sup>2</sup> The terms “soma” and “somatics” were popularized by Thomas Hanna, discussed in more detail below. Since the 1970s somatics practitioners and scholars of the movement have developed these terms for their own purposes. Here, I follow historian Jeffrey Kripal in using the terms “soma” and “somatics” to generalize about how a host of US bodywork practitioners, including Pauline Oliveros, understood the body (I also use the term “somas”). See Kripal, *Esalen*, 228–31.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Steve Reich also turned to somatic practice—in this case, yoga—around this time. See Kerry O’Brien, “‘Machine Fantasies into Human Events’: Reich and Technology in the 1970s,” in *Rethinking Reich*, ed. Sumanth Gopinath and Pwyll ap Siôn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 323–44; and Russell Hartenberger, *Performance Practice in the Music of Steve Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 12–13, 220–21. See also John Kapusta, “The Self-Actualization of John Adams,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 12 (2018): 317–44, at 319–21.

<sup>4</sup> See Heidi Von Gunden, *The Music of Pauline Oliveros* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983), 88, 133; Martha Mockus, *Sounding Out: Pauline Oliveros and Lesbian Musicality* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 42, 92, 99, 157–58; O’Brien, “Listening as Activism”; O’Brien, “Experimentalisms of the Self,” 139–86; Adam Tinkle, “The Expanding Universal: Participation and Pedagogy in Experimental Music” (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2015); and Kapusta, “Self-Actualization of John Adams.”

musicology share a history rooted in US popular culture of the 1970s. Across this period and beyond, US composers, performers, and scholars alike worked within and alongside the somatics movement to legitimize the performing body as a source of musical knowledge. To judge from the popularity of Oliveros's work today, the prevalence of embodied practices like yoga and the Alexander Technique in conservatories, and the influence of music scholarship focused on issues of the body and embodiment, they succeeded.

Scholars have long characterized Oliveros as an emblematic second-wave lesbian feminist whose works and writings challenged the patriarchal status quo and built lesbian community.<sup>5</sup> Of course, such interpretations have merit. Take, for example, Oliveros's most often-discussed composition, the *Sonic Meditations*, a 1971 set of eleven instruction-based works (expanded to twenty-five in 1974).<sup>6</sup> These works led Oliveros to develop her influential "Deep Listening" practice, but they also remain popular in their own right, particularly for the way they "posited listening as a fully embodied pursuit."<sup>7</sup> Oliveros originally composed the *Sonic Meditations* for the ♀ Ensemble, an all-female group of student musicians Oliveros founded while she was a faculty member in the music department of the University of California, San Diego. According to the group's mission statement, Oliveros founded the ensemble to investigate "the potentials of concentrated female creative activity, something which has never been fully explored nor realized."<sup>8</sup> In light of this woman-centered approach, and because Oliveros came out as lesbian in the preface to the original 1971 publication of the *Sonic Meditations*, scholars have often compared Oliveros's meditative work with the ♀ Ensemble to the activities of contemporary

<sup>5</sup> O'Brien, "Listening as Activism"; O'Brien, "Experimentalisms of the Self"; Mockus, *Sounding Out*; Stephen Miles, "Objectivity and Intersubjectivity in Pauline Oliveros's 'Sonic Meditations,'" *Perspectives of New Music* 46 (2008): 4–38; Pauline Oliveros and Fred Maus, "A Conversation about Feminism and Music," *Perspectives of New Music* 32 (1994): 174–93; Jennifer Rycenga, "The Uncovering of Ontology in Music: Speculative and Conceptual Feminist Music," *Repercussions* 3 (1994): 22–46; Timothy Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Heidi Von Gunden, "The Music of Pauline Oliveros: A Model for Feminist Criticism," *ILWC (International League of Women Composers) Journal* (June 1992): 6–8; and Von Gunden, *Music of Pauline Oliveros*.

<sup>6</sup> In this article "*Sonic Meditations*" refers to the musical work as a whole, "sonic meditation" refers to the practice (see note 42 below), and "mediation(s)" followed by a roman numeral(s) refers to individual works within the collection.

<sup>7</sup> O'Brien, "Listening as Activism." As O'Brien points out, the *Sonic Meditations* "briefly went viral" following Oliveros's death in 2016. For more on Deep Listening, see the Center for Deep Listening at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, which hosts workshops and offers teacher certification training ([www.deeplisting.rpi.edu](http://www.deeplisting.rpi.edu)).

<sup>8</sup> Pauline Oliveros, Brochure for the ♀ Ensemble, MSS 102, Box 12, Folder 1, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego. Mockus quotes and discusses this passage in *Sounding Out*, 45–46.

feminist and lesbian activists.<sup>9</sup> Many such activists not only advocated for feminist social change in the public sphere but met in small, all-female “consciousness-raising” groups to discuss experiences of oppression and debate how to achieve liberation. Martha Mockus reads the *Sonic Meditations* as both a lesbian practice and “a form of feminist sonic consciousness-raising, offering participants provocative opportunities to question dominant notions of music, talent, sound, ability, and musical authority.”<sup>10</sup> Here, Mockus interprets the *Sonic Meditations* and feminist practices like consciousness-raising as parallel techniques with corresponding strategies and aims.

O’Brien and others have recently begun to provide a more nuanced cultural history of Oliveros’s embodied musicality, including Oliveros’s connections to the somatics movement.<sup>11</sup> Here, I propose that we reorient how we think about Oliveros’s musical and feminist identity. While scholars tend to position her work within the familiar framework of women’s liberation and queer activism, we should not subsume Oliveros’s work as a somatics practitioner under her identity as a lesbian, second-wave feminist. Instead, we should understand Oliveros—or at least, the Oliveros of the early 1970s—as what might be called a somatic feminist, for whom somatic practice was synonymous with women’s liberation. In the *Sonic Meditations*, Oliveros taught women to cultivate their intuitive, music-making bodies. For Oliveros, it seems, this intuitive practice was a political end in itself.<sup>12</sup> It was not merely that the *Sonic Meditations* would empower people to protest misogyny and homophobia, the way more conventional consciousness-raising practices were designed to do. Rather, the *Sonic Meditations* would change people into somas. And this transformation, for Oliveros, was liberation.

<sup>9</sup> There are many published versions of Oliveros’s *Sonic Meditations* available. An initial set was first published in *Source* magazine in 1971. This edition was recently reissued as part of an edited collection of *Source* back issues. Oliveros published an expanded, edited version in 1974 with Smith Publications. See Pauline Oliveros, “Sonic Meditations,” in *Source: Music of the Avant-Garde* 5, no. 2 (1971): 104; Pauline Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* ([Baltimore]: Smith, 1974); Pauline Oliveros, “Sonic Meditations,” in *Source: Music of the Avant-Garde, 1966–1973*, ed. Larry Austin, Douglas Kahn, and Nilendra Gurusinge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 342–45.

<sup>10</sup> Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 50. For further comparisons to consciousness-raising, see Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, “Sounds of the Sweatshop: Pauline Oliveros and *Maquilapolis*,” in *Tomorrow Is the Question: New Directions in Experimental Music Studies*, ed. Benjamin Piekut (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 211–28, at 212; and Whitney Chadwick, “Reflecting on History as Histories,” in *Art/Women/California 1950–2000: Parallels and Intersections*, ed. Diana Burgess Fuller and Daniela Salvioni (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 19–42, at 25.

<sup>11</sup> See note 4 above.

<sup>12</sup> For another perspective on Oliveros’s emphasis on intuition, see Taylor, *Global Pop*, 99–112.

When we understand this, we can not only better interpret Oliveros's work and its politics but also judge how the specific approach to music and embodiment she developed in the 1970s influenced music studies. In the early 1990s, scholars associated with the new musicology transformed the field when they insisted that music studies could no longer deny music's inherent connection to the body.<sup>13</sup> Scholars usually explain the movement as a musicological outgrowth of feminist, gender, and sexuality studies. Here, I argue that the new musicology also owes a mostly unspoken debt to the somatics movement (and, to the extent that Oliveros helped to popularize somatic practices and ideas among musicians, to Oliveros herself). Early and vocal proponents of the new musicology insisted that those who would study music and embodiment not treat the body as a "transhistorical entity."<sup>14</sup> Still, as James Davies notes, new musicologists and their followers often wrote as if the body was something beyond or without a history—something that, in Davies's words, was "*just there*."<sup>15</sup> As I will argue, the body that "embodied" musicology sometimes took for granted often bore much in common with the seventies soma. What we have usually called the "new musicology"—or at least, the wing of the new musicology focused on issues of embodiment—might well be considered a somatic musicology.

In advancing these claims, my goal is not to trace direct lines of influence from somatic musicians to somatic musicologists—though some such lines can indeed be followed. Rather, I aim to illustrate how and where the discourse of somatic music-making and the new, embodied musicology converged, and to ask what this convergence means for us today. I also aim to credit Oliveros and other musicians who embraced somatic practices with anticipating later scholarly approaches to music and the body. By normalizing a somatic approach to music, Oliveros helped lay the groundwork for a musicological revolution. Only when we appreciate the history of Oliveros's somatic music-making in the 1970s can we fully explain the new musicology, evaluate its continued impact on our discipline, and decide what role it should play in the future.

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of the "new musicology" and its sources, see Suzanne G. Cusick, "Monteverdi Studies and 'New' Musicologies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Monteverdi*, ed. John Whenham and Richard Wistreich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 249–60; and Susan McClary, "Feminine Endings in Retrospect," in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xi–xx.

<sup>14</sup> Susan McClary, "Towards a Feminist Criticism of Music," *Canadian University Music Review* 10, no. 2 (1990): 9–18, at 15.

<sup>15</sup> J. Q. Davies, *Romantic Anatomies of Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 5 (italics in the original).

*Bodies in Revolt*

The US somatics movement traced its roots to the first half of the twentieth century, when missionaries, immigrants, and refugees from Europe and Asia began to train Americans in a wide range of embodied practices, including German gymnastics, the Alexander Technique, and yoga (to name only a few).<sup>16</sup> By the time Oliveros encountered it around 1970, the movement was fueled by many personalities and philosophies. Still, the branch of the movement Oliveros joined and eventually extended as a somatics advocate herself tended to emphasize one point: human experience, indeed human consciousness itself, was essentially binary. In *The Psychology of Consciousness* (1972), a popular book that Oliveros read and cited, the prominent psychologist Robert Ornstein declared that there are “two major modes of consciousness. . . . One mode is verbal and rational, sequential in operation, orderly; the other is intuitive, tacit, diffuse . . . less logical and neat.”<sup>17</sup> Similar dualisms had of course been proposed before, but the familiarity was part of the point. What Ornstein had, or so he thought, was proof.<sup>18</sup>

According to Ornstein, his two proposed modes of consciousness were confirmed by the latest research, which showed that the two modes were hardwired into human physiology. Ornstein based his arguments on recent neurobiological studies of so-called “split-brain” patients—people whose left and right brain hemispheres had been artificially separated. According to this research, the right brain controlled “intuitive” behavior while the left was responsible for our “rational” activities. It was a voguish idea. Among researchers and in US popular culture more broadly, the new findings sparked what contemporary observers called a wave of “dichomania,” a veritable “hemisphere fad.”<sup>19</sup> Artist Peter Angelo Simon illustrated Ornstein’s ideas and helped popularize them for a generation with his image *Left Right Brain* (1973), commissioned for a *New York Times Magazine* cover story on the apparently revolutionary discovery (fig. 1). To illustrate the “verbal” left brain, Simon plastered a dictionary definition of the word “to dance” over the left side of a human head. For the “intuitive” right, the artist drew on Edgar Degas

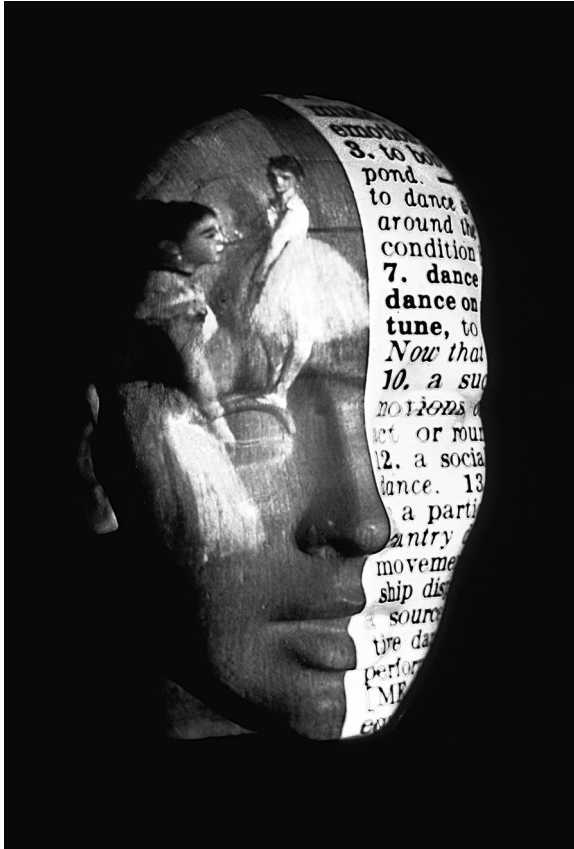
<sup>16</sup> For the history of somatic practices in the United States, see notes 1 and 2 above. I discuss the influence of the German gymnastics tradition and Alexander Technique on Oliveros below.

<sup>17</sup> Robert E. Ornstein, *The Psychology of Consciousness* (New York: Penguin Books, 1975 [1972]), 10–11.

<sup>18</sup> For a history of what became known as “split-brain” research and its influence on US popular culture, see Stephen E. Wald, “Minds Divided: Science, Spirituality, and the Split Brain in American Thought” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008); and Michael E. Staub, “The Other Side of the Brain: The Politics of Split-Brain Research in the 1970s–1980s,” *History of Psychology* 19 (2016): 259–73.

<sup>19</sup> Wald, “Minds Divided,” 48; and Staub, “Politics of Split-Brain Research,” 267.

FIGURE 1. Peter Angelo Simon, *Left Right Brain* (1973). Image © Peter Angelo Simon. Reproduced with permission.



to depict a pair of ballerinas who seem to achieve perfect coordination without recourse to “rational” thought.<sup>20</sup>

Although counterculturists of the 1950s and '60s had prepared the way, by the early 1970s “intuitive” practices that were once far-out were increasingly in.<sup>21</sup> As the *New York Times Magazine* story on left right brain research observed, the new interest in the “nonspeaking side of the human brain”

<sup>20</sup> The pair of ballerinas appear to be drawn from Edgar Degas’s *Le foyer de la danse à l’Opéra de la rue Le Peletier* (1872). My thanks to Andrew Hicks for pointing this out to me.

<sup>21</sup> On the history of what became known as “intuitive” practices among artists in the 1950s and '60s, see Phil Ford, *Dig: Sound and Music in Hip Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to*

was “probably no accident at a time when Yoga, Arica, Tibetan exercises and other nonverbal disciplines are enjoying such a vogue.”<sup>22</sup> And indeed, to the extent that somatics practitioners recognized the body as a source for psychic and spiritual development, the somatics movement overlapped closely with the many new religious movements that emerged in the postwar period (sometimes questionably labeled “new age movements”).<sup>23</sup> Other contemporary observers likewise remarked how intuitive bodily practices had gone mainstream. “All over America people have commenced to do the most singular things with their bodies,” wrote Edward Maisel in *The Resurrection of the Body* (1969), an introduction to an increasingly popular somatic practice called the Alexander Technique (and a book which Oliveros recommended to her students in the early 1970s).<sup>24</sup> Noting some “sixty or more goings-on” in this new vein of “physical training”—a phrase he placed in scare quotes—Maisel marveled that so many people in the United States “have begun to disport themselves through a whole spectrum of bizarre physical activity.”<sup>25</sup> “For better or for worse,” he added in a 1974 edition of the book, “they have taken a sporting plunge into the mysterious waters of the ‘non-verbal.’”<sup>26</sup> Through such nonverbal, embodied practices, ordinary citizens were learning what it felt like to use their right brains—and to judge from contemporary reports, it felt good.

For many observers, all these nonverbal goings-on signaled a cultural sea change. Ornstein argued that the new truths of the intuitive body promised to correct a centuries-long overreliance on the verbal mode of consciousness in the West—a cognitive imbalance that had, by Ornstein’s account, brought the world to the brink of nuclear annihilation.<sup>27</sup>

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*Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). See also O’Brien, “Experimentalisms of the Self.”

<sup>22</sup> Maya Pines, “We Are Left-Brained or Right-Brained: Two Astonishingly Different Persons Inhabit Our Heads,” *New York Times Magazine*, September 9, 1973.

<sup>23</sup> As Kripal notes, because the term “new age” has been associated with “superficiality, flakiness, anti-intellectualism, and social disengagement,” many participants in what some call “new age” movements reject the term. Kripal, *Esalen*, 474n4. On Oliveros, bodywork, and alternative spirituality, see O’Brien, “Experimentalisms of the Self,” 178–79. On the connections between split brain research and spirituality, see Wald, “Minds Divided.”

<sup>24</sup> Edward Maisel, introduction to *The Resurrection of the Body: The Writings of F. Matthias Alexander*, ed. Edward Maisel (New York: University Books, 1969), ix; Pauline Oliveros, *Meditation Project for Winter Quarter 1973*, MSS 102, Box 11, Folder 5, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego (hereafter UCSD).

<sup>25</sup> Maisel, introduction to *The Resurrection of the Body* (1969), ix.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Maisel, introduction to *The Resurrection of the Body: The Writings of F. Matthias Alexander*, ed. Edward Maisel (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1974), vii. Maisel referred to Alexander Technique as “non-verbal” in the 1969 edition as well. See Maisel, introduction to *The Resurrection of the Body* (1969), xvi.

<sup>27</sup> Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness*, 156.



Not all who plunged into the nonverbal would have gone so far, but the salutary effects of becoming more “right-brained”—a term that entered the American lexicon around this time—was now common coin.<sup>28</sup> As the prominent journalist T. George Harris observed in 1978 of the new vogue for the nonverbal, “there’s rising evidence that our logic-laden culture trains away, or partly distorts, many of our natural gifts. Cutting the head off from the breathing corpus, as our Western thought has done for at least two centuries, we have also cut ourselves off from a great deal of practical reality. That wound is now being healed as if by a super-drug. We are rushing back into our bodies in droves.”<sup>29</sup> Back to the body had become a generation’s battle cry.

Leading the charge were a host of pedagogues who traveled the country running workshops that promoted their own brands of nonverbal, bodily practices, which became collectively known as somatic practices. Such teachers often converged on countercultural growth centers such as the Esalen Institute. There, someone looking to resurrect their body could sample Esalen massage (or “Rolfing”) taught by Ida May Rolf, “Aston Patterning” taught by Rolf’s disciple Judith Aston, Charlotte Selver’s “Sensory Awareness,” as well as yoga, tai chi, and many other “nonverbal” bodily disciplines. Although such practices were especially popular at countercultural hubs, by the late 1960s there was ample opportunity to rush back into the body elsewhere. As Maisel observed, this “new body enlightenment” was now being realized at the local Y, in schools and churches, and just about everywhere in between.<sup>30</sup> Thanks to figures like Oliveros, such body enlightenment would soon be manifest in university music departments.

In hindsight, what somatics advocates described as a “return” to or “resurrection” of the body was really the birth of a new conception of the body. Under this new conception, the nonrational, intuitive body, experienced through new and newly popularized embodied practices and validated by the latest scientific research, was recognized as a legitimate source of knowledge and selfhood.<sup>31</sup> In *Bodies in Revolt: A Primer in Somatic Thinking* (1970), the philosopher and somatics practitioner Thomas Hanna coined a term for this new bodily self: the soma.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Merriam-Webster* traces the first usage of “right brain” to 1970. *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “right brain,” [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/right%20brain](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/right%20brain).

<sup>29</sup> T. George Harris, “Where East Meets West: In the Body,” introduction to *The Psychic Side of Sports*, by Michael Murphy and Rhea A. White (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978), xx.

<sup>30</sup> Maisel, introduction to *The Resurrection of the Body* (1969), ix. For a related discussion of the concept of the “enlightenment of the body,” see Kripal, *Esalen*, 21–24, 456–59.

<sup>31</sup> On bodywork in relation to notions of the modern, “loose,” self, see Binkley, *Getting Loose*.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Hanna, *Bodies in Revolt: A Primer in Somatic Thinking* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970). On Hanna, see Kripal, *Esalen*, 229–31.

“‘Soma’ does not mean ‘body,’” Hanna explained, “it means ‘Me, the bodily being.’”<sup>33</sup> Like Ornstein, Hanna identified verbal, analytical behavior with the rational state of being typical in the West and argued for a more intuitive future. The rational self, Hanna argued, was in fact a “phony” that, when given free reign, reduced a human being to mere machinery in which a thinking, speaking mind lorded over a subservient body.<sup>34</sup> Hanna and his generation thought they knew better, and now their bodies were “in revolt,” as the title of his book claimed—a revolt against “traditional culture” that would deny not only the validity but the primacy of the soma.

Built into this revolutionary somatic program was a new brand of countercultural political activism. According to Hanna, participants in the somatic revolution were quickly rendering “traditional party politics” obsolete.<sup>35</sup> If, as Phil Ford suggests, the hip and countercultural movements of the 1950s and ’60s had made “culture . . . the medium of resistance rather than politics as such,” in Hanna’s view, somatics advocates were practicing political resistance through the medium of a new body culture.<sup>36</sup>

Such views complemented those of other countercultural thinkers who, like Hanna, challenged the supremacy of the verbal and rational. Indeed, such ideas were central to the book that popularized the term counterculture itself, Theodore Roszak’s *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1969).<sup>37</sup> In another widely read contemporaneous book called *The Greening of America* (1970), cultural critic Charles Reich called not for change through “direct political means but by changing culture and the quality of individual lives, which in turn change politics and, ultimately, structure.”<sup>38</sup> This change required new techniques for “self-realization” and the fulfillment of one’s “true potential as a human being.”<sup>39</sup> According to Reich, the old model of political change had become ineffective because, in part, the techniques on which it relied were no longer viable. In short, they were left-brained. Direct political action required reasoned argument, but as Reich explained, he and many others were “deeply suspicious of logic, rationality, analysis. . . . ‘Reason’ tends to leave out

<sup>33</sup> Hanna, *Bodies in Revolt*, 35.

<sup>34</sup> Hanna, *Bodies in Revolt*, 44.

<sup>35</sup> Hanna, *Bodies in Revolt*, 255–56.

<sup>36</sup> Ford, *Dig*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969).

<sup>38</sup> Charles Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970), 19. On Reich, see Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 36–38; O’Brien, “Experimentalisms of the Self,” 177–78, 183–86; Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 134–35; and Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968–1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 122–23.

<sup>39</sup> Reich, *Greening of America*, 242.

too many factors and values—especially those which cannot readily be put into words and categories.” Direct action entailed public debate, but Reich held that “rational conversation has been overdone as a means of communication between people.”<sup>40</sup> Such arguments only bolstered the claims of somatics advocates who wanted to change the world by changing people’s bodies. For practitioners of the nonverbal, what was needed was an intuitive, somatic form of political activism free from the old reliance on verbal reasoning. Pauline Oliveros would soon compose herself into this somatic revolution.

### *The Music of the Soma*

By the early 1970s the intuitive insurrection Hanna prophesied was well underway. And as Simon’s *Left Right Brain* suggests, it was often led by dancers. Oliveros would eventually apply somatic concepts to music-making, but not before working with two somatic dancers, Elaine Summers and Al Huang.<sup>41</sup> The most important lesson Oliveros would learn from them was how to let go of the “thinking” self and experience music as an intuitive activity. Inspired by Summers, Huang, and their somatic approach to dance, Oliveros would invent the somatic musical practice she called “sonic meditation.”<sup>42</sup> Through it, Oliveros would not only teach musicians how to experience themselves as somas but foster in the performing arts a broader movement to legitimize the intuitive, performing body as a source of musical knowledge. In the bodies of new musicologists, this somatic revolution would breach the walls of the ivory tower.

Summers and Huang taught Oliveros the ways of the “right brain.” Summers herself came to somatic practice after realizing that her body could no longer sustain the left-brained approach to performance typical of midcentury dance.<sup>43</sup> Born in 1925, Summers trained at the Juilliard

<sup>40</sup> Reich, *Greening of America*, 256–57.

<sup>41</sup> For another discussion of Oliveros’s work with Summers and Huang and its impact on the *Sonic Meditations*, see O’Brien, “Listening as Activism”; and O’Brien, “Experimentalisms of the Self,” 153–54, 162–67.

<sup>42</sup> In her writings, Oliveros described the practice of “sonic meditation” as the basis of her *Sonic Meditations*. I preserve this usage below. See Pauline Oliveros, “On Sonic Meditation,” in *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963–80* (Baltimore: Smith, 1984), 138–57. Oliveros had previously experimented with various recognizably intuitive practices, from improvisation to telepathy. On Oliveros’s improvisation work with Terry Riley and Loren Rush, see the introduction to David Bernstein, ed., *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 11. Oliveros called for telepathy in her work *Aeolian Partitions* (1969).

<sup>43</sup> The biographical information on Summers in this paragraph is drawn from Ann-Sargent Wooster, “Elaine Summers: Moving to Dance,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 24, no. 4 (1980): 59–70, at 59–61; and Rebecca Loukes, “Elaine Summers and Kinetic Awareness: Part 1,” *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices* 2 (2010): 75–89, at 76–78.

School in the early 1950s, having worked with such luminaries as Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham. In 1952 Summers was diagnosed with osteoarthritis, a condition she would attribute to the extreme physical demands of her training regimen. For the devastated Summers, body enlightenment began with a dream. In the 1970s and '80s, she liked to regale workshop participants and interviewers with the story of how one night, amid her ailments, she dreamt of a sailor dancing on a vast ship, only to awake screaming, "He doesn't do two hundred pliés every day."<sup>44</sup> While this vision was still sinking in, at a friend's recommendation Summers found herself in the New York City studio of one of the most prominent somatics teachers of the day, Charlotte Selver. Selver taught Summers "sensory awareness," a somatic discipline she developed in the tradition of German gymnastics.<sup>45</sup> Inspired, Summers soon developed her own somatic practice called "kinetic awareness."<sup>46</sup>

Summers's kinetic awareness practice, which she developed over the course of the 1960s, applied somatic principles to combat the dangers that modern dance posed to dancers' bodies. In particular, she aimed to guide dancers away from the kind of rational control of the body that tended to go hand in hand with virtuosic performance. For Summers, such self-consciousness led dancers to reduce their bodies to mere machines—even destroying them in the process—rather than to respect their bodies' intuitive knowledge. While Hanna might have called this self-consciousness "phony," Summers called it "the demon."<sup>47</sup> The demon, Summers apparently taught her students, seduced dancers to "ignore what the body wants to do and execute something spectacular."<sup>48</sup> Two hundred pliés every day may have been spectacular, as Summers had learned from experience, but that wasn't what the body wanted to do.

<sup>44</sup> Wooster, "Elaine Summers," 60. Summers told the same story in January 1973, when Oliveros invited Summers to participate in her "Meditation Project" at the University of California, San Diego. In that version of the story, Summers awoke from her dream about the sailor and said, "God damn it, he doesn't practice every day." Elaine Summers, "Movement, Energy Flow, etc.," talk at the University of California, San Diego, January 16, 1973, Center for Music Experiment Recordings Archives, UCSD digital recording, <https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb2526739m>. For Oliveros's account of the Meditation Project, see Pauline Oliveros, "Meditation Project: A Report," in *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963–80* (Baltimore: Smith, 1984), 158–64.

<sup>45</sup> Summers would continue her "awareness" work in the 1950s with Selver's student Carola Speads. See Wooster, "Elaine Summers," 60; and Loukes, "Elaine Summers," 76–78. On Selver's work, see Kripal, *Esalen*, 244–45; and Charles V. W. Brooks, *Sensory Awareness: The Rediscovery of Experiencing* (New York: Viking Press, 1974).

<sup>46</sup> See Wooster, "Elaine Summers"; O'Brien, "Listening as Activism"; and O'Brien, "Experimentalisms of the Self," 153–54, 162–63.

<sup>47</sup> Wooster, "Elaine Summers," 67.

<sup>48</sup> Wooster, "Elaine Summers," 67. This quote is unattributed in Wooster's text but apparently comes from Summers herself.

In kinetic awareness, by contrast, the goal was to become “aware” of the body’s inherent knowledge about how to move. In a typical exercise, students would move very, very slowly—so slowly that the body would eventually seem to move of its own accord.<sup>49</sup> For Summers, this was how dancers learned how to transition from what some might have called a left-brained experience of dance, dominated by regimented instruction and correction, to a right-brained experience, governed by the body’s intuition. No longer their rational selves, Summers’s students learned to dance as somas. As a teacher, Summers would pass her somatic method on to artists of all stripes, including soprano Jan DeGaetani (best known for premiering works of George Crumb) and Oliveros herself.<sup>50</sup>

Exactly when Oliveros first experienced her intuitive body with Summers is difficult to pin down. It was likely around 1968 or 1969 when one of Oliveros’s choreographer colleagues arranged for Oliveros to take a one-hour lesson with Summers in New York City.<sup>51</sup> According to one interview, Oliveros left Summers’s kinetic awareness lesson intent on continuing somatic practice back home on the West Coast.<sup>52</sup> She soon found her guru in dancer and tai chi instructor Al Huang.<sup>53</sup>

Like Summers, Huang too embraced somatic practice—in this case, tai chi—after years of suffering at the hands of a left-brained modern dance world marked by spectacular performance and bodily injury. Born in the early 1940s in China, Huang moved to California at the age of seventeen to study architecture at the University of California, Los Angeles. Intent on becoming a professional dancer, in the early 1960s he joined a festival in Becket, Massachusetts, called Jacob’s Pillow run by choreographers Lotte Goslar and Ted

<sup>49</sup> See Loukes, “Elaine Summers”; and Wooster, “Elaine Summers.” See also the discussion of slow movement and note 76 below.

<sup>50</sup> DeGaetani discusses Summers’s influence on her pedagogy in Jan DeGaetani, interview by Robert S. Clark, “Jan DeGaetani: Disciplined Freedom Gives One of Our Busiest Recording Stars the Time to Be Wife, Mother, and Teacher as Well,” *Stereo Review*, September 31, 1973, 77–78. See also Kapusta, “Self-Actualization of John Adams,” 320–21.

<sup>51</sup> Testimonies conflict regarding the exact date of Oliveros and Summers’s first meeting. See Wooster, “Elaine Summers,” 69; O’Brien, “Listening as Activism”; Elaine Summers, by Joan Arnold, “Interview with Elaine Summers,” recorded on June 7, 9, 21, and 23, 2010, at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts as part of the Dance Oral History Project, now held at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, \*MGZTL 4–2626 [sound disc]; and Elaine Summers and Pauline Oliveros, interview by Juliette Mapp, “Danspace Project at New Museum Presents a Conversation with Elaine Summers,” March 20, 2010, <https://archive.newmuseum.org/sounds/7649>.

<sup>52</sup> Summers and Oliveros, interview by Mapp.

<sup>53</sup> On Huang and Oliveros, see O’Brien, “Experimentalisms of the Self,” 156–67; O’Brien, “Listening as Activism”; and Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 157.

Shawn.<sup>54</sup> Huang was particularly struck—and, it would seem, stricken—by Shawn’s forceful choreography. “I am recovering from the last two weeks—the anxiety, tension, joy, pain (muscles), excitement, peace, love, and tears,” Huang wrote to Shawn in 1962 after a performance of Shawn’s *Kinetic Molpai* (1935), a heroic tale of physical struggle and apotheosis.<sup>55</sup>

At first the pain offered its own pleasures. Huang told Shawn that the experience had opened him up to “the beautiful feeling of knowing that I am very much a part of this wonderful world of the love for dance.”<sup>56</sup> But soon his fleeting joy and peace were no match for his anxiety and tears. Echoing Summers’s distress over her oppressed body, Huang later said of this part of his career:

I just wanted to achieve, achieve, achieve. . . . I became a performer with a lot of grinding and pushing, trying to match that standard of what I thought a concert artist-dancer was supposed to be. I practiced ten hours a day until my body felt exhausted. I had knee problems, hip problems, and ankle problems, like most dancers in this country. I kept saying to myself that if I work this hard, I must be getting better. I bit my tongue and said, “This is part of the game, you know. Nobody understands how we artists suffer.”<sup>57</sup>

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Huang, Summers might have said, had succumbed to “the demon.” In the parlance of the 1970s, we could say that obsessed with achievement, Huang and his process-oriented left brain refused to listen to what his intuitive body wanted to do. Huang’s body too was in revolt.

Liberation came in the form of a 1966 Ford Foundation grant to study Chinese dance in China and Taiwan. Huang returned a year later with an entirely new approach to movement inspired by his study of tai chi while abroad. Thanks in part to a serendipitous meeting with the Daoism enthusiast and countercultural guru Alan Watts in California, Huang soon found himself teaching an expressly somatic version of tai chi at the Esalen Institute, where his colleagues included numerous somatics advocates, from Summers’s former teacher Selver to Hanna himself.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Michael Robertson, “What T’ai Chi Is Doing for Dance,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1980.

<sup>55</sup> Al Huang to Ted Shawn, 1962, (S) \*MGZMC-Res. 31, Folder 1, Ted Shawn Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. On *Kinetic Molpai*, see Debra Craine and Judith Mackrell, “*Kinetic Molpai*,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>56</sup> Al Huang to Ted Shawn, 1962.

<sup>57</sup> Huang, quoted in Robertson, “What T’ai Chi Is Doing for Dance.”

<sup>58</sup> See Al Chung-liang Huang, “Once Again: A New Beginning,” afterword to *Tao: The Watercourse Way*, by Alan Watts and Al Chung-liang Huang (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 126.

Now ensconced within the somatics movement, Huang would use intuitive tai chi to exorcise the demons of modern dance and Western culture writ large. The first step, Huang explained to students in 1973, was to let go of the thinking self: “In our Western society so much is in the head, so much is in talking and thinking about things, that we can analyze everything to pieces and it’s still distant from us, still not really understood.”<sup>59</sup> Like Summers, Huang showed students how to experience bodily motion uninhibited by the temptation to talk, think, and control.<sup>60</sup> In a 1980 interview, Huang contrasted his own practice with the process-oriented dance manuals popularized by Arthur Murray in the 1950s, replete with diagrams, numbers, arrows, and step-by-step instructions.<sup>61</sup> Huang, by contrast, taught his tai chi students to let go of preordained goals and allow their bodies to perform as they will. “We’re just doing the motions . . . for a long, long, time,” Huang explained to students in a 1975 Esalen workshop captured on video: “You don’t have to think what comes next.”<sup>62</sup> Through tai chi movement, Huang taught students how to shake off their rational tendencies and discover a more intuitive experience of self as soma.

This was the lesson Huang would pass on to Oliveros. In the summer of 1970, Huang invited Oliveros and the ♀ Ensemble to accompany a dance workshop he was leading at the Kairos Institute, an Esalen-style countercultural center in Rancho Santa Fe, California.<sup>63</sup> There, archival documents suggest, Oliveros and the ♀ Ensemble performed a piece entitled *Music for Tai Chi*, a collaboration that would fundamentally shape the *Sonic Meditations*.<sup>64</sup> Oliveros would later downplay Huang’s influence.<sup>65</sup> A 1971 description of the *Sonic Meditations*,

<sup>59</sup> Al Chung-liang Huang, *Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain: The Essence of T'ai Chi* (Moab, UT: Real People Press, 1973), 13.

<sup>60</sup> Huang, *Essence of T'ai Chi*, 34.

<sup>61</sup> Robertson, “What T'ai Chi Is Doing For Dance.”

<sup>62</sup> Al Chung-liang Huang, “Tai Chi,” archival film of workshop dated January 1, 1975, Esalen Institute archives, Big Sur, California.

<sup>63</sup> For more on the origins of the *Sonic Meditations* and Oliveros’s collaboration with Huang, see O’Brien, “Listening as Activism”; and O’Brien, “Experimentalisms of the Self,” 156–67.

<sup>64</sup> A circa 1972 “career narrative” in the Oliveros archives describes the following: “*Music for Tai Chi*—Improvisation instructions for accordion, strings, winds, percussion and voices. Requested by Al Chung Liang Huang for the Kairos Festival of Arts. First Performance Rancho Santa Fe, Calif., Aug. 22, 1970.” Oliveros, “Career narrative,” MSS 102, Box 29, Folder 9, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, UCSD. See also O’Brien, “Experimentalisms of the Self,” 165–66; and Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 92, 157.

<sup>65</sup> Oliveros minimizes her work with Huang in an interview with Mockus. See Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 157. In another interview in 2003, Oliveros claimed that the *Sonic Meditations* first came about in 1969, during a course at UCSD entitled “The Nature of Music.” In that interview, she only mentions tai chi and kinetic awareness as an afterthought. See Tinkle, “The Expanding Universal”; and Alan Baker, “An Interview with Pauline Oliveros,” *American Mavericks*, American Public Media, January 2003, <https://web.archive.org/web/>

however, makes the connection to tai chi plain: “The sound material of *Sonic Meditations* has been influenced by the philosophy and practice of tai chi chuan in collaboration with the members of the ♀ Ensemble and dancer-tai chi master Ai Huang.”<sup>66</sup> Similarly, an early 1970s brochure for the ♀ Ensemble shows that the group’s “meditative” approach emerged directly from its collaboration with Huang: “flowing according to T’ai Chi principles . . . Ai was teaching.”<sup>67</sup>

As O’Brien argues, the *Sonic Meditations* were as much body awareness exercises as they were musical works. In them Oliveros challenged musical experimentalism as usually understood: “In these works, experiments were not conducted on the music; the music was an experiment on the self.”<sup>68</sup> But the significance of Oliveros’s somatic musical works goes beyond the history of experimentalism. They legitimized a somatic approach to music that would resonate among composers, performers, and scholars across musical fields for decades to come.

Throughout the *Sonic Meditations*, we find Oliveros teaching musicians how to transform music-making into a right-brained, intuitive experience. Take, for example, the first of the *Sonic Meditations*, “Teach Yourself to Fly.”<sup>69</sup> The final version, published in 1974, consists of the following instructions:

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Any number of persons sit in a circle facing the center. Illuminate the space with dim blue light. Begin by simply observing your own breathing. Always be an observer. Gradually allow your breathing to become audible. Then gradually introduce your voice. Allow your vocal cords to vibrate in any mode which occurs naturally. Allow the intensity to increase very slowly. Continue as long as possible naturally, and until all others are quiet, always observing your own breath cycle.

Variation: Translate voice to an instrument.<sup>70</sup>

Even the initial call to observe one’s breathing set participants on the path to the soma. It was an approach Oliveros likely learned from Huang, who began his own classes in the same way. The point of this exercise was

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<sup>66</sup> Pauline Oliveros, *Partial Performance Log and Activities*, MSS 102, Box 29, Folder 6, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, UCSD.

<sup>67</sup> Oliveros, brochure for the ♀ Ensemble, MSS 102, Box 12, Folder 1, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, UCSD.

<sup>68</sup> See O’Brien, “Listening as Activism.”

<sup>69</sup> For a related interpretation of “Teach Yourself to Fly,” see O’Brien, “Listening as Activism”; and O’Brien, “Experimentalisms of the Self,” 161–63, 176, 182–88.

<sup>70</sup> Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (1974). Reproduced with permission from M.o.M, Inc. and The Pauline Oliveros Trust.



for participants to realize that their bodies were already working intuitively, without any interference from the so-called left brain. The process of breathing was something the body knew how to do on its own, Huang suggested. Students of tai chi or sonic meditation were not to seek to control this process. “You just follow it, and go with it,” Huang explained.<sup>71</sup> Or as Oliveros wrote, participants were to “begin by simply observing” it and maintain this observer’s stance throughout (“always be an observer”). Observing the body breathe of its own accord, a key technique that Oliveros would use across the *Sonic Meditations*, introduced performers to their intuitive bodies.<sup>72</sup>

In “Teach Yourself to Fly,” performers then expand this initial somatic experience into the realm of music-making as they slowly and intuitively “allow” their voices to sound. Here Oliveros seems to adapt the technique of using slow movement to disarm the thinking self, familiar from both Huang’s and Summers’s teaching.<sup>73</sup> Huang encouraged students to “reach a level of speed that is like slow motion, in which everything is just happening,” while Summers, as we have seen, taught kinetic awareness practitioners to move as slowly as possible in order to banish the dancer’s demon and do what the body wants to do.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, when Oliveros instructed performers of “Teach Yourself to Fly” to continue for “as long as possible,” she probably had in mind similar instructions from Huang, who encouraged workshop participants to practice tai chi movements “for a long, long time.” Oliveros was training musicians in an intuitive, bodily mode of music-making in which “you don’t have to think what comes next.”<sup>75</sup> In other words, Oliveros was training the ♀ Ensemble to make the music of the soma.

The rest of the *Sonic Meditations* propose various other approaches to integrating somatic ideas and techniques with music-making. In the seventh of the set, “Removing the Demon,” Oliveros seems to pay homage to Summers both in the titular reference to “the demon” and in the meditation’s instructions. There, as in others of the *Sonic Meditations*, participants again perform musical tasks “as slow as possible.”<sup>76</sup> To take

<sup>71</sup> Huang, *Essence of T'ai Chi*, 22.

<sup>72</sup> In the original 1971 publication of the *Sonic Meditations*, Oliveros explicitly instructs participants to observe their breathing in meditations I, II, VI, VIII, IX, and X. When Oliveros expanded the set in 1974, she indicated for meditations XII–XXV (that is, for the entirety of the new meditations) that “all of these Sonic Meditations are intended to begin with observation of the breath cycle.” See Oliveros, “*Sonic Meditations*” (2011); and Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (1974).

<sup>73</sup> On Oliveros, tai chi, kinetic awareness, and slow movement, see O’Brien, “Experimentalisms of the Self,” 153, 161–62, 165.

<sup>74</sup> Huang, *Essence of T'ai Chi*, 20

<sup>75</sup> Huang, “Tai Chi,” archival film (see note 62 above).

<sup>76</sup> Oliveros, “*Sonic Meditations*” (2011), 344. Elsewhere, Oliveros suggests performers perform musical tasks at a nearly “imperceptible” rate (343).

another example, in a part of the sixth meditation subtitled “Have you ever heard the sound of an iceberg melting?”, Oliveros instructs participants to listen to a recording of white noise increasing in volume at a glacial pace. In a variation of the meditation, Oliveros further suggests that “if multiple speakers are used . . . , one or two persons . . . could perform . . . Tai Chi in front of the speakers . . . thus creating sound shadows.”<sup>77</sup> Here again, somatic practice—in this case, actual tai chi movements—becomes the basis for musical production and reception.

Several of the *Sonic Meditations* move beyond Huang and Summers to include other popular “intuitive” practices. In meditations III and IV, for instance, Oliveros instructs participants to transmit sounds to one another via ESP. Although ESP may not sound particularly like a bodily practice, many at the time understood telepathy as yet another potential aspect of nonrational experience.<sup>78</sup> To take just one example of another musician who understood ESP in somatic terms, George Rochberg argued in 1973 that “rational power . . . is only one part of the mind,” and that humans ought to learn what lay beyond that rational power: namely, “intuition” and “ESP in its many facets.”<sup>79</sup> When Oliveros directed musicians to make music with ESP, she was teaching them yet another technique for accessing their so-called right brains.

She did this in other, more recognizably somatic ways as well. In the introduction to the original 1971 publication of the *Sonic Meditations* in *Source* magazine, Oliveros recommended that groups perform the works in the context of “non-verbal meetings.”<sup>80</sup> Archival evidence suggests, moreover, that Oliveros based this recommendation on practical experience. During the time she worked with the ♀ Ensemble to develop the *Sonic Meditations*, Oliveros put the ensemble through six weeks of such nonverbal meetings, where, presumably, speaking was not allowed (see fig. 2, and note the caps and underlining; note also that the meeting begins with a round of kinetic awareness).<sup>81</sup> And when Oliveros organized a multiweek “Meditation Project” at UCSD, “silence” during the

<sup>77</sup> Oliveros, “*Sonic Meditations*” (2011), 343–44.

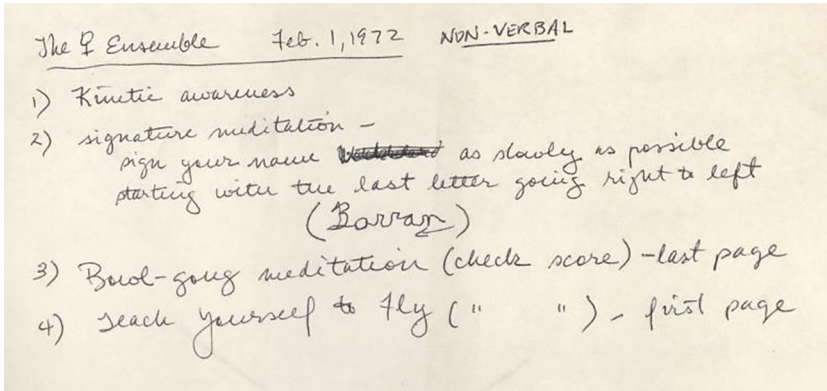
<sup>78</sup> In the 1970s ESP was taken very seriously indeed—not only at places like Esalen but even by organizations like NASA and the KGB. See Kripal, *Esalen*, 318–19, 340–41. Esalen cofounder Michael Murphy and psychologist Rhea A. White devoted several pages to the topic in their 1978 book on athletics, mysticism, and the mind-body connection. See Michael Murphy and Rhea A. White, *The Psychic Side of Sports* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978), 51–64.

<sup>79</sup> George Rochberg, “The Fantastic and the Logical,” in *The Aesthetics of Survival: A Composer’s View of Twentieth-Century Music*, rev. ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 208, 212.

<sup>80</sup> Oliveros, “*Sonic Meditations*” (2011), 342. See also O’Brien, “Listening as Activism”; and Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 40–42.

<sup>81</sup> On kinetic awareness in relation to the *Sonic Meditations* and the activities of the ♀ Ensemble, see O’Brien, “Experimentalisms of the Self,” 153–54, 162–63.

FIGURE 2. Instructions for ♀ Ensemble meeting, February 1, 1972. “Kinetic Awareness” followed by meditations. MSS 102, Box 12, Folder 3, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, UCSD. Reproduced with permission.



sessions and agreement not to talk about the project was once again imposed on participants.<sup>82</sup>

To be sure, the *Sonic Meditations* were not designed to stimulate the so-called right brain exclusively. Oliveros herself kept notes describing her experiences and encouraged others to do so.<sup>83</sup> And though Oliveros instructed participants to practice sonic meditation in a nonverbal setting, performances sometimes included group discussion.<sup>84</sup> What is more, many of the *Sonic Meditations* involve words. For instance, at one point in “Removing the Demon,” participants are instructed to “shout a pre-meditated word.”<sup>85</sup> Others, like “Environmental Dialogue,” require such seemingly left-brained activities as setting up a microphone for a field recording.<sup>86</sup>

The point of somatic practices was not to eliminate the left brain from human experience (few at the time imagined such a thing to be possible or desirable). Rather, as Ornstein put it, the goal was instead to

<sup>82</sup> Oliveros did ask participants to keep a diary, which she evidently did not consider equivalent to “verbal” behaviors like talking. Pauline Oliveros, *Meditation Project for Winter Quarter*, MSS 102, Box 11, Folder 5, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, UCSD. For excerpts from some of Oliveros’s sonic meditation notes, see Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 41–42; and O’Brien, “Experimentalisms of the Self,” 162.

<sup>83</sup> See note 82 above.

<sup>84</sup> O’Brien, “Listening as Activism.”

<sup>85</sup> Oliveros, “*Sonic Meditations*” (2011), 344.

<sup>86</sup> Oliveros, “*Sonic Meditations*” (2011), 344–45.

“redress the balance, to begin to integrate the rational and intuitive approaches to knowing.”<sup>87</sup> In a culture supposedly dominated by the left brain, to redress the balance necessarily meant privileging intuitive experience without pretending that rationality could or should be done away with entirely. Such balancing was a goal that Oliveros shared. Echoing Ornstein, Oliveros suggested in 1972 that in an ideal musical experience the “process which is characterized as analytical, linear or sequential, is balanced with the process which is characterized as synthetic, non-linear or holistic.”<sup>88</sup> By privileging somatic experience without excluding the rational mind, the *Sonic Meditations* trained participants to achieve that balance.

In “One Word,” for example, from the second set of *Sonic Meditations* first published in 1974, participants seem to transition from left- to right-brained activity over the course of the exercise. They begin by hearing a chosen word internally, then “slowly and gradually begin to voice this word by allowing each tiny part of it to sound extremely prolonged.”<sup>89</sup> As we might expect, they then “repeat for a long time.” In this exercise performers begin in the realm of the verbal left brain, repeating a familiar word. As the meditation progresses, participants transition into the realm of the nonverbal right brain. They slowly “allow” themselves to let go of the word as such and transform each component sound into an intuitive musical gesture. With every repetition, they complete a cycle from left- to right-brained musicality. In all these ways, the *Sonic Meditations* worked toward the broader goal of the somatics movement: not to squash the left brain but to legitimize the right; not to deny the speaking self but to legitimize the soma.

Scholars have explained Oliveros’s bodily turn in a number of ways. They point to her despondence in the face of political unrest—especially that caused by the Vietnam War—or position her work as an outgrowth of her feminist and lesbian identity.<sup>90</sup> We need to revise both of these perspectives. While Oliveros was clearly shaken by recent political events, evidence suggests that she developed the *Sonic Meditations* just as much in reaction to her own experimental musical culture and its seeming overreliance on rationality and analysis. Around the time she developed the *Sonic Meditations*, Oliveros began to critique the left-brained rationality of her experimental music scene with the zeal of a convert. “Analysis: . . . am I always criticizing, taking apart sounds to see how they work, examining

<sup>87</sup> Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness*, 28.

<sup>88</sup> Pauline Oliveros, “Divisions Underground,” in *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963–80* (Baltimore: Smith, 1984), 97–111, at 106.

<sup>89</sup> Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (1974).

<sup>90</sup> See O’Brien, “Listening as Activism”; Mockus, *Sounding Out*, esp. 39–40; and Von Gunden, *Music of Pauline Oliveros*, 87.

relationships as they happen, trying to understand and compare with past experiences?" she chastised herself in a 1973 essay.<sup>91</sup> Elsewhere, Oliveros peppered her essays and instructions for performance with references to the deleterious effects of talk, that characteristic activity of the supposedly verbal left brain. "A day spent not speaking," she wrote in 1972. "This helps me to reach a more creative level: past the verbal barrage, the verbal castle, the verbal fence."<sup>92</sup> "The nervous or neurotic individual intellectualizes and verbalizes constantly," she again reminded herself in 1973, quoting the humanistic psychologist Olive L. Brown.<sup>93</sup>

By the early 1970s Oliveros had diagnosed the desire to verbalize and analyze as a symptom of a broader crisis in experimental music. As Oliveros wrote in 1973, her experimental musical scene now "seemed to be a nervous, frantic music world, full of hasty rehearsals and constantly noodling performers with up-tight vibrations."<sup>94</sup> Perhaps Oliveros had Andy Warhol's 1966 "Up-Tight" in mind, a sometimes overwhelmingly cacophonous series of performances which, as Branden Joseph has suggested, aimed to raise its listeners' political consciousness by literally making them uptight.<sup>95</sup> But Oliveros may well have been thinking of any number of musicians whose aesthetic threatened to harm audience and performer, from Dick Higgins's "danger music" to the violence Nam June Paik, La Monte Young, and others perpetrated on their instruments.<sup>96</sup> Or she may have been thinking of her 1960s experiments in improvisation at the San Francisco Tape Music Center.<sup>97</sup> Whatever the case may be, we cannot understand Oliveros's turn toward a new, self-consciously "meditative" aesthetic in the early 1970s without the newly popularized discourse of anti-analytical, nonverbal practices and the idealization of the right brain.

By 1973, her suspicion of the "up-tight" (which is to say, left-brained) musical avant-garde had become so intense that she began to associate it with death itself. In a 1973 reflection on a concert dedicated to the "music of the sixties," she called out not only the "fiendish" technical demands of composer Iannis Xenakis (observing pianist Yuji Takahashi performing "with taped fingers to support his Olympian playing"), but also the "busy," "tensely engaged" performance of "complex spectra" in

<sup>91</sup> Oliveros, "Divisions Underground," 101.

<sup>92</sup> Pauline Oliveros, "Five Scenes," in *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963–80* (Baltimore: Smith, 1984), 75–83, at 75.

<sup>93</sup> Oliveros, "Divisions Underground," 102.

<sup>94</sup> Oliveros, "On Sonic Meditation," 148.

<sup>95</sup> Branden W. Joseph, "My Mind Split Open": Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable," *Grey Room* 8 (2002): 80–107, at 87–89.

<sup>96</sup> See Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Late Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 88–97.

<sup>97</sup> See Bernstein, introduction to *Tape Music Center*, 11.

a string quartet by Michael von Biel.<sup>98</sup> “MUSIC OF THE SIXTIES,” she wrote insistently at the essay’s close: “EARLY DEATH.”<sup>99</sup> If analytical experimentalism had taken its toll on Oliveros, somatic practices like sonic meditation would provide the antidote.

### *Somatic Feminism*

The *Sonic Meditations* intervened not only against an overly rational musical culture but against patriarchy, albeit differently from the way scholars usually assume. Although scholars often compare the *Sonic Meditations* to contemporary radical feminist practices, such comparisons fail to account for the somatic orientation of these works. Take, for example, the analogy scholars often draw between the *Sonic Meditations* and feminist consciousness-raising. In consciousness-raising, participants discussed, analyzed, and debated the place of women in society in order to attain higher levels of understanding and dedication to their cause. Not only was consciousness-raising a principally verbal and therefore evidently left-brained activity (from the perspective of somatics practitioners), but radical feminists of the late 1960s developed the practice of consciousness-raising based on a model of political activism that some somatics advocates questioned. According to Pamela Allen’s 1970 guide, for instance, consciousness-raising meetings afforded discussants the opportunity to work through their experiences of oppression together, recognize “the totality of the nature of our condition,” and work toward a “synthesis” of their collective experiences that would point the way toward future action.<sup>100</sup> By “elaborating . . . and repeating the analysis,” as the feminist writer and activist Vivian Gornick remembered years later, consciousness-raisers discovered “the joy of revolutionary politics.”<sup>101</sup>

Such seemingly left-brained revolutionary politics were a far cry from the somatic experience of performing the *Sonic Meditations* with Oliveros and the ♀ Ensemble. The ideal consciousness-raising meeting stimulated exhilarating discussion, while the ideal meeting of the ♀ Ensemble was “non-verbal.” Participants in consciousness-raising groups tried to understand and compare past experiences of oppression. They used these comparisons to analyze the relationship between individual experiences of marginalization and larger social structures. But as we have seen,

<sup>98</sup> Pauline Oliveros, “Many Strands,” in *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963–80* (Baltimore: Smith, 1984), 84–96, at 93–95.

<sup>99</sup> Oliveros, “Many Strands,” 96 (caps typeface in the original).

<sup>100</sup> Pamela Allen, *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women’s Liberation* (New York: Times Change Press, 1970), 29.

<sup>101</sup> Vivian Gornick, “Who Says We Haven’t Made a Revolution?: A Feminist Takes Stock,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 15, 1990.

around the time she was developing the *Sonic Meditations*, Oliveros felt the musical experience was no time for “analysis,” no place to be “always criticizing” or “examining relationships,” and no space for “trying to understand and compare with past experiences.” ♀ Ensemble meetings did sometimes involve discussion, as O’Brien notes, but all evidence contradicts the notion that consciousness-raising and sonic meditation were analogous.<sup>102</sup> Despite superficial similarities, sonic meditation and consciousness-raising were very different practices.

To say this, however, is hardly to claim that Oliveros was not a feminist or that the *Sonic Meditations* were apolitical. Instead, I argue that Oliveros practiced an alternative, somatic feminism. Oliveros clearly identified her work with the feminist cause: indeed, as previously mentioned, she founded the ♀ Ensemble expressly “to explore the potentials of concentrated female creative activity, something which has never been fully explored nor realized.”<sup>103</sup> And she later explicitly linked the founding of the ensemble to the women’s liberation movement.<sup>104</sup> As she wrote in the 1971 introduction to the *Sonic Meditations*, the work was dedicated to “the elevation and equalization of the feminine principle along with the masculine principle.”<sup>105</sup> But elevating the feminine principle, at least in the context of the *Sonic Meditations*, was not so much a matter of challenging patriarchal social structures, even if such a challenge was implicit in the work. Rather, elevating the feminine principle was about challenging musicians—and by extension, society as a whole—to embrace a new form of intuitive creative practice.

The “feminine principle” that Oliveros sought to elevate and equalize was none other than intuition—the very principle at the heart of the somatics movement.<sup>106</sup> As Oliveros explained in a 1973 essay on “The Contribution of Women Composers,” while analytical activity was coded masculine in the West, intuition was coded feminine.<sup>107</sup> Like so many other somatics advocates of the time, Oliveros diagnosed the West with a debilitating dependence on the left brain. “Western Society seems to value most highly, not only its results, but the active analytical mode itself,” she argued. But to this standard somatic argument Oliveros added a feminist twist, arguing that “oppression of women has also meant devaluation of intuition, which is culturally assigned to women’s

<sup>102</sup> O’Brien, “Listening as Activism.”

<sup>103</sup> Oliveros, Brochure for the ♀ Ensemble (see note 8 above).

<sup>104</sup> See O’Brien, “Listening as Activism.”

<sup>105</sup> Oliveros, “*Sonic Meditations*” (2011), 342.

<sup>106</sup> For another perspective on Oliveros and the links between intuition and the feminine, see Taylor, *Global Pop*, 99–112.

<sup>107</sup> Pauline Oliveros, “The Contribution of Women Composers,” in *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963–80* (Baltimore: Smith, 1984), 132–37. This essay is not dated in the collection; Oliveros’s archives at UCSD date it to 1973.

roles.”<sup>108</sup> This may well explain Oliveros’s claim in the 1971 introduction to the *Sonic Meditations* that “the feminine principle is subjugated in both women and men.”<sup>109</sup> Through works like the *Sonic Meditations*, it was not just women Oliveros wanted to liberate, but intuition. To be sure, Oliveros engaged in plenty of “left-brained” consciousness-raising alongside her “right-brained” musical meditation work, even penning an op-ed for the *New York Times* calling out misogyny in the music business.<sup>110</sup> But when it came to sonic meditation, Oliveros took her cue from Hanna and Reich. She would resist oppression not with traditional politics or verbal reasoning but with the music of the soma.

Legitimizing the intuitive body was the primary goal of what I would call Oliveros’s somatic feminism. Oliveros suggested that simply by teaching people to experience the intuition of the music-making body, she could achieve liberation—liberation from the overbearing rationality somatics advocates and others blamed for society’s ills. In this she was blunt, writing in 1973 that “the recognition and re-evaluation of the intuitive mode as being equal to and as essential as the analytical mode” constituted “the primary meaning of the liberation movement in the world today.”<sup>111</sup> Oliveros repeated this claim in another 1973 essay, this time making direct reference to Ornstein and his notion of the right and left brain. “When the two hemispheres are perfectly synchronized and one can focus either mode at will,” Oliveros argued, “duality vanishes and—*voilà!*—liberation!”<sup>112</sup> Oliveros’s *Sonic Meditations* is an instruction manual for achieving this specific kind of liberation. Analogous to other feminist handbooks of the time, the composition is a guide for practicing somatic feminism.

Oliveros was far from the only woman to explore the feminist potential of somatic practice or to publish handbooks dedicated to the same. For example, we might compare Oliveros’s approach in the *Sonic Meditations* with the work of the Bay Area author and social reformer Anne Kent Rush. In *Getting Clear: Body Work for Women* (1973), Rush suggested women meet in groups to practice not only discussion-based consciousness-raising but also a host of somatic practices: “body

<sup>108</sup> Oliveros, “Contribution of Women,” 134, 135–36.

<sup>109</sup> Oliveros, “*Sonic Meditations*” (2011), 342.

<sup>110</sup> Pauline Oliveros, “And Don’t Call Them ‘Lady’ Composers,” in *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963–80* (Baltimore: Smith, 1984), 47–51. See also the letter to “L.” dated March 14, 1974, published as part of “Rags and Patches,” in *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963–80* (Baltimore: Smith, 1984), 112–29, at 116.

<sup>111</sup> Oliveros, “Contribution of Women,” 135.

<sup>112</sup> Oliveros, “Divisions Underground,” 107.



work’—massage, sensitivity, movement, breathing.”<sup>113</sup> Like Oliveros, Rush came to somatic practices via a teacher from Esalen who taught her the institute’s famous massage technique and inspired her to pursue other forms of bodywork. Not only did Rush understand the aware, active body to be the true seat of the self, but like Oliveros, she also maintained that women could not be truly liberated without learning to experience themselves as soma. Intuitive practices like bodywork were important, according to Rush, because “when you are in your body and can feel yourself in your body, you can experience yourself as a woman. . . . The body is our utmost reality.” Echoing Oliveros, Rush claimed that “recognizing and accepting myself, my body, as unique and valuable” amounted to “one of the great human contributions of the women’s movement.” More radically still, Rush suggested that somatic liberation was perhaps more important than social liberation as conceived by many contemporary feminists. “Power is not just whether I have a certain job or legal right. That does not necessarily give me power. . . . What affects me most and what I see affecting others most are inner feelings and resources.” Oliveros may not have gone so far. Still, it is clear that for Oliveros, teaching women to make music intuitively was a political end in itself, even the “primary meaning of the liberation movement in the world today.”

Somatic feminist liberation did not mean, primarily, transformation of social structure, although according to revolutionaries like Reich, when enough people joined the anti-analytical revolution, structural change was inevitable. In the immediate term, somatic feminist liberation was just that: somatic. Consciousness-raising in the public sphere had its place, but somatic practice promised what Oliveros evidently considered a higher freedom: the liberation of the intuitive body. How to realize “the primary meaning of the liberation movement in the world today”? Return to the body. Hop the “verbal fence.” Teach yourself to fly.

Years later an interviewer pressed Oliveros on what to expect in such a liberated world. “How will we know if we ever get there?” the interviewer asked. Oliveros’s response was telling: “We’ll feel it.”<sup>114</sup>

When Oliveros developed her somatic musical practice, she helped lay the groundwork for an entire movement dedicated to legitimizing the intuitive body as a source of musical knowledge. Across the 1970s and beyond, numerous other pedagogues, composers, and performers would

<sup>113</sup> Anne Kent Rush, *Getting Clear: Body Work for Women* (New York: Random House, 1973), 124. The quotations in the remainder of this paragraph are from pp. 28, 118, and 13. On Rush, see Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 86–87, 217–19.

<sup>114</sup> Jennifer Kelly, *In Her Own Words: Conversations with Composers in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 157.

also seek a remedy for their overly rational musical culture in intuitive, somatic musical practices.<sup>115</sup> Today, many young musicians study Alexander Technique at conservatories and music training programs across the country, but it was only in the 1960s and '70s that figures like Oliveros began to popularize this somatic technique among musicians.<sup>116</sup> And the discourse and practice of somatics eventually came to influence not only music-making but music scholarship.

### *Somatic Musicology*

As she was developing the *Sonic Meditations*, Oliveros wrote to herself, "Am I talking to myself? Do I think music? . . . Where is my body? . . . (What are we doing in our Universities?)"<sup>117</sup> Soon, music scholars would ask themselves the same questions. By the early 1990s it was apparent that music studies, in Suzanne Cusick's words, had a "mind/body problem."<sup>118</sup> And not unlike Oliveros, a new generation of music scholars would address it by transforming music scholarship not only into a feminist, queer-identified practice but into a somatic discipline—one that sought to counter an overly rational, analytical musical culture by legitimizing the intuitive, music-making body. Ultimately, I propose that we see Oliveros not only as a somatic feminist but as an antecedent of a new, somatic approach to music studies that remains influential today.

Scholars usually explain the musicological embrace of the body as one consequence of the discipline's espousal of humanistic research beyond musicology. In this view, it is feminist theory, post-structuralist philosophy, and gender and sexuality studies that are usually credited, to borrow Susan McClary's words, with "the legitimation of bodies . . . in musicological discourse."<sup>119</sup> No one can deny the influence of feminist and critical theory on the new musicology. Indeed, in her 1994 call for scholars to develop an "embodied music theory," Cusick relied on the likes of Judith Butler, Roland Barthes, Donna Haraway, and Joan Wallach Scott.<sup>120</sup> If we want to fully understand this musicological movement, however, we also need to acknowledge the parallels between Oliveros, her somatic feminism, and the musicological embrace of the music-making body. When we view our discipline within the history of US musical culture, we can recognize Oliveros's somatic music and the

<sup>115</sup> See notes 3 and 50 above.

<sup>116</sup> Oliveros praises Alexander Technique in her essay "Many Strands," 88.

<sup>117</sup> Oliveros, "Divisions Underground," 102.

<sup>118</sup> Suzanne G. Cusick, "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem," *Perspectives of New Music* 32 (1994): 8–27.

<sup>119</sup> McClary, "Feminine Endings in Retrospect," xvii.

<sup>120</sup> Cusick, "Feminist Theory, Music Theory," 20, 14, 26n15, 8, and 16.

“embodied” wing of the new musicology as part of a broader movement within the performing arts to legitimize the soma.

Since the early 1990s, scholars of music and the body have often relied on somatic ideas, particularly the notion that an overbearing rationality could be rectified by legitimizing the intuitive, performing body. For instance, when Cusick issued her call for a new “embodied music theory” (in the influential essay on the “mind/body problem” cited above) she lamented that analysis dominated university music studies.<sup>121</sup> Echoing Oliveros’s critique of verbal reasoning, Cusick diagnosed her own musical culture’s debilitating reliance on a “preoccupation with the text-like nature of music, that is, with the grammar and syntax of pitches and durations.”<sup>122</sup> The questions that Oliveros had posed—“Do I think music? . . . Where is my body? . . . (What are we doing in our Universities?)”—may well have been Cusick’s. Though she may not have gone so far as to label her musicological self a “phony,” Cusick did describe her scholarly persona as “profoundly unmusical,” inauthentic to her life as a performer.<sup>123</sup> Cusick did not cite split-brain research, but in light of her analysis, one could easily imagine a new musicological version of Simon’s *Left Right Brain* redrawn with the dictionary definition of the verb “to dance” replaced with a scholarly article dissecting a canonical work, and in place of Degas’s ballerinas, a musical performer—even Cusick herself—bringing that work to life. What Cusick called musicology’s mind/body problem seems to have been, more specifically, an analyzing mind/music-making body problem.

To solve it, Cusick turned to the kind of bodily experience we have learned to call somatic. According to Cusick, analytical approaches to music studies were incomplete because they ignored the inherently bodily mode of experience that characterized the act of musical performance; performing music, however, transformed the analytical self into a nonthinking self, where the act of performance became “entirely coterminous with who you are.”<sup>124</sup> As Cusick explained in a 1993 essay first published in the celebrated new-musicological collection *Queering the Pitch*, she wanted musicians to step back from “analytical or cultural-historical interrogation,” to “restore a primal reception of music through a listening strategy of extreme attentiveness . . . rather than analysis.”<sup>125</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Cusick, “Feminist Theory, Music Theory,” 20.

<sup>122</sup> Cusick, “Feminist Theory, Music Theory,” 13.

<sup>123</sup> Cusick, “Feminist Theory, Music Theory,” 9.

<sup>124</sup> Cusick, “Feminist Theory, Music Theory,” 18.

<sup>125</sup> Suzanne G. Cusick, “On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight,” in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2nd ed., ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2013), 67–84, at 76.

In these founding documents of the new musicology, Cusick called on music scholars to experience music in somatic terms.

To be sure, Cusick described her anti-analytical intervention as a form of lesbian feminism. But like Oliveros before her, Cusick articulated her feminist, queer-identified approach to music through the discourse of somatics. Like Oliveros, Cusick underscored the long-standing cultural associations between the body and the feminine: “Metaphorically, when music theorists and musicologists ignore the bodies whose performative acts constitute the thing called music, we ignore the feminine.”<sup>126</sup> For Cusick as for Oliveros, elevating the feminine meant legitimizing the anti-analytical performing body. And again like Oliveros before her, Cusick recognized her lesbian identity and her somatic approach to music as inherently intertwined, linking her “lesbian relationship with music” to her resistance to the analytical strategies of musicology as usual.<sup>127</sup> For Cusick, it seems, reforming musicology required legitimizing the soma.

Cusick is just one example in a generation of new musicological scholars whose work has resonated with Oliveros’s somatic discourse of music. Elisabeth Le Guin has also worked to legitimize embodied musical experience, particularly in her book *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology*. Le Guin argued that by performing Boccherini’s music, she could inhabit Boccherini’s body, thus gaining access to a kind of somatic archive of musical knowledge.<sup>128</sup> Perhaps the clearest example of somatic discourse in music scholarship has appeared in Carolyn Abbate’s still controversial article “Music: Drastic or Gnostic?.” Building on Cusick’s work, Abbate critiqued the “verbally mediated reasoning” customary in academic music departments. Echoing somatic discourse, she juxtaposed this rational “category of knowledge” with one unique to the “physicality” of the performing body.<sup>129</sup> She called this latter, non-rational category of knowledge “drastic,” but could just have accurately called it somatic. Abbate claimed that while musicologists privilege the rational mode, the experience of “real music” is inherently nonverbal and bodily. Indeed, Abbate suggested that “fixing upon live performances . . . might even mean falling silent,” adding, Oliveros-like, that “loquacity is . . . [the] professional deformation” of academe. Abbate hoped musicology would hop the verbal fence, as Oliveros might have put it, and on the other side arrive at the soma—the performing body liberated from what somatics practitioners might have called left-

<sup>126</sup> Cusick, “Feminist Theory, Music Theory,” 16.

<sup>127</sup> Cusick, “Lesbian Relationship with Music.”

<sup>128</sup> Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 24.

<sup>129</sup> Carolyn Abbate, “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 505–36, at 510. The quotations in the rest of this paragraph are from pp. 506 and 510.

brained, analytical encumbrances. A yet more direct call for a somatic musicology has come from another new-musicological scholar, Fred Maus, who has argued for a “somaesthetics of music.” In this future field, Maus suggests, scholars would apply to musical analysis Richard Shusterman’s concept of somaesthetics, a form of philosophical inquiry that integrates “disciplines of somatic education such as the Feldenkrais Method, Alexander Technique, yoga, t’ai chi and so on.”<sup>130</sup> It may come as little surprise that Maus (like Le Guin) was an early champion of Oliveros’s work.<sup>131</sup> With his article, Maus issued only the latest salvo in a decades-long bodily revolt reaching back to Oliveros and other leaders of the somatics movement.

Few scholars who invoke somatic ideas cite bodywork practices, let alone split-brain research. Indeed, such musicologists have been far more likely to cite Butler or Michel Foucault than Hanna, Huang, Ornstein, or Oliveros. Yet even as they applied critical theory to music, they also drew heavily on their personal experience as performers. From their descriptions of that experience, it seems they often understood musical performance as a somatic experience.

We should understand somatic orientation as a product of its time. When somatic practices achieved wider popularity in the 1980s, corporations soon began to borrow somatic discourse to market their products. The most famous example is the sports company Nike and its 1988 slogan “Just Do It,” a phrase that, over the years, has sold anti-analytical bodily experience to the tune of billions of dollars.<sup>132</sup> Much new-musicological description of performance echoes this anti-analytical somatic sensibility. Abbate, quoting Lydia Goehr, suggested that she too understood performance as the “expression of spontaneity, immediacy, and freedom, of feeling and breathing, of conviction and commitment,” a near encapsulation of the somatic credo (and Nike’s mantra).<sup>133</sup> Like Abbate, Cusick insisted that music is “*something you do*.” We might even say something you just do, for as Cusick went on to explain, it is a fully absorbing bodily experience, “something *you do* which is, while you’re doing it, entirely coterminous with who you are.”<sup>134</sup> For these new musicologists, it seems, “real” musical experience was somatic experience.

<sup>130</sup> Fred Everett Maus, “Somaesthetics of Music,” *Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education* 9 (2010): 9–25, at 12.

<sup>131</sup> See Oliveros and Maus, “A Conversation about Feminism”; and Elisabeth Le Guin, “Uneasy Listening,” *Repercussions* 3 (1994): 5–19.

<sup>132</sup> On Nike’s slogan in relation to bodywork, see Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 241–42.

<sup>133</sup> Quoted in Abbate, “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?,” 509.

<sup>134</sup> Cusick, “Feminist Theory, Music Theory,” 18 (italics in the original).

From a broader historical perspective, we should not find this surprising. Oliveros and other somatics advocates spent the 1970s and beyond working to normalize so-called right-brained musical practices in the university and the conservatory. Le Guin was among the first generation of conservatory students to be trained in somatic approaches to music. Archival film held at the Esalen Institute shows Le Guin in the mid-1970s participating as a young cellist in a workshop in the somatic practice called Aston Patterning at the San Francisco Conservatory.<sup>135</sup> The somatic seventies truly were revolutionary, and we can understand the new musicology and its aftershocks as part of this broader cultural upheaval.

While there is just cause to celebrate the achievements of Oliveros and embodied musicology, the history of the somatics movement challenges us to reassess the role of somatic discourse in musicology today. I want to be clear: no one is proposing a return to the bad old days when “left-brained” analysis was the rule and “body” a dirty word. But if we still find Oliveros’s somatic musical practices liberating, we need to ask why. Scientists need not govern our views, but it is worth noting that today many dismiss split-brain theory as overly simplistic.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, many readers might wonder whether, in the realm of politics, at least, it is rationality that now needs defending. Added to this is the more familiar but no less troubling problem of cultural appropriation baked into the early somatics movement and Oliveros’s involvement in it.<sup>137</sup> Conversion may be a better word than appropriation here, especially considering the culture of religious syncretism in which many somatics advocates participated.<sup>138</sup> However we choose to interpret it, we need to consider how the origins of somatic approaches to music should inform how we apply them today. And then there is the question of political struggle and liberation. In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, many organizations dedicated to somatic practices have voiced support for the cause.<sup>139</sup> Whether activists will reforge the once essential connection between somatic practices and political liberation, and what role musicologists might play in such

<sup>135</sup> See “Aston Patterning at the San Francisco Conservatory,” archival film dated January 1, 1977, Esalen Institute archives.

<sup>136</sup> On the “unsubstantiated and overstated” claims of “right-brain advocates from the 1970s,” see Staub, “Politics of Split-Brain Research,” 267–69.

<sup>137</sup> Taylor broaches some of these questions in his discussion of Oliveros; see Taylor, *Global Pop*, 99–112.

<sup>138</sup> See Kripal, *Esalen*.

<sup>139</sup> See, for example, the statement on racial justice issued by the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health in June 2020. Barbara Vacarr, “Accountability and Action: Kripalu and Black Lives Matter,” June 5, 2020, <https://kripalu.org/resources/accountability-and-action-kripalu-and-black-lives-matter>.

a movement, remains to be seen. One thing seems certain: Oliveros's work promises to serve as "a practice for reconciling interpersonal consonance with individual difference," as a *New York Times* critic wrote of a spring 2020 massive online performance of Oliveros's *Tuning Meditation* (1971).<sup>140</sup>

In *Bodies in Revolt*, Thomas Hanna made a bold prediction, one that in US musical culture would prove true: "The brave new world to be explored by the twenty-first century is the immense labyrinth of the soma. . . . And we of the latter third of the twentieth century have been appointed discoverers and early cartographers of this somatic continent."<sup>141</sup> Oliveros and the new musicologists numbered among those early cartographers. As we continue to engage with Oliveros's work, and as we debate the mind/body problem in musicology and our world, let us become more critical cartographers ourselves.

### ABSTRACT

This article examines the connections between experimental composer Pauline Oliveros, the US somatics movement, and the new musicology. While scholars tend to position Oliveros's work within the familiar framework of women's liberation and queer activism, we should instead understand Oliveros as a somatic feminist for whom somatic practice was synonymous with women's liberation. Oliveros helped instigate an influential movement to integrate somatic discourse and practice into US musical culture—including music scholarship. Scholars of the so-called new musicology concerned with issues of embodiment also applied somatic concepts in their work. Oliveros and the new musicology share a history rooted in US popular culture of the 1970s. Across this period and beyond, US composers, performers, and scholars alike worked within and alongside the somatics movement to legitimize the performing body as a source of musical knowledge.

Keywords: Pauline Oliveros, somatics, *Sonic Meditations*, new musicology, body, embodiment

<sup>140</sup> Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim, "Join a Musical Meditation Bringing Together Hundreds Worldwide," *New York Times*, April 3, 2020.

<sup>141</sup> Hanna, *Bodies in Revolt*, 37.