

## Queer Trash

*Michael Foster and Richard Kamerman in Conversation with Charles Eppley*  
(February 23, 2023)

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**ABSTRACT** “Queer Politics & Positionalities in Sonic Art” series editor Charles Eppley speaks with Michael Foster and Richard Kamerman of Queer Trash, a curatorial platform based in New York City that features experimental art, music, and performance by LGBTQ2S+ artists. They discuss the concepts of queer sound and listening, methods of improvisation, queer identity and expression, tokenization and exploitation, DIY culture, and the limits of arts funding for queer sonic artists. **KEYWORDS** Queer Trash, improvised music, noise, free jazz, arts funding, neoliberalism, DIY culture

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Queer Trash started in 2015—or 2016 (depending on whom you ask). The group, based in New York City, organizes performances by queer artists and musicians. It is led by sound artists and musicians Richard Kamerman and Michael Foster, and was previously joined by artist and curator Eames Armstrong.<sup>1</sup> Typically, their programs showcase experimental music and sound art—often of the noisy and/or improvised variety. But they support work in all media and tone/timbre, including video and performance. They held a curatorial residency at Issue Project Room (Brooklyn) in 2018 and organized a program with the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 2019.<sup>2</sup> Over the past seven (or eight) years, the Queer Trash project has organized many programs, including performances by Joe McPhee, Sarah Hennies, Fire-Toolz, and Black Leather Jesus.

Their primary goal, as stated in this interview, is “to get queer audiences to see queer artists.” It isn’t always easy. As we discussed in this interview, that goal is complicated by the political reality and economy of arts funding—and the inequitable or difficult-to-attain distribution of resources, which are less likely to be given to queer artists. In response to the lack of queer spaces committed to experimental music and sound art, and only conditional support from larger organizations, Queer Trash is a platform for artists who operate outside of how “queer art” typically looks and sounds—and it tries to push against straight-led models of neoliberal acceptance that reward “palatable” identities and expressions over more complex portrayals of queer experience. Using sound—from harsh noise and free jazz to spoken word and performance art—Queer Trash models a politics of queer listening that resists the normalization of cis-hetero sonic expressions and values.

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**CHARLES EPPLEY:** When did you start Queer Trash? How has it evolved?

**RICHARD KAMERMAN:** We first started doing Queer Trash, or trying to figure out what Queer Trash was going to be as a project, in 2016.

**MICHAEL FOSTER:** It might have been late 2015? Something like that.

**RICHARD:** At that point it was just me and Michael. We asked ourselves: What would it mean to create a platform for queer artistic voices, you know, across media? The idea wasn't to do just like a noise or improvised music series, or limit the project to sound alone even. We wanted it to be interdisciplinary. There also wasn't a lot of importance placed on defining whether it was about booking queer artists, or showcasing artists making specifically queer work. I think both were entirely acceptable to our loose framework.

**MICHAEL:** Right. And I think one interesting factoid about this is that before we had met I was familiar a little bit with Richard's work, and then one day, probably in 2015, working at Meredith Monk's nonprofit—she's another queer artist. And there I was. We were both single at the time, and I was on Tinder, and it's kinda like the usual gamut of like, swipe left super quick, and then I see what's clearly Richard Kamerman, buried in a bunch of broken electronics. I only saw like one fucking noise musician, or one avant-garde musician anywhere, you know? You see the weirdo musician on Tinder and you have to swipe right. You have to because you're not gonna find a lot of them on this app. I felt that it was important to swipe right and start talking.

We found ourselves going to some kind of DIY noise show. It was clear that we were the only gay people there. It seemed weird to be the only queer people at the show, and we were just asking and thinking, "Why is this the case?" How are these spaces, and these kinds of aesthetics, being dictated and why don't they feel inviting to us and others on the spectrum of queerness?

**CHARLES:** Yeah, I think that points to the importance of the sociality of queer art spaces. It's not simply about making art or music from a queer perspective—or even about queerness specifically—but a recognition that there are barriers to queerness that exist. There are filters to queerness within larger communities of sound art that may prioritize straight and cisgender people.

**MICHAEL:** Right. But even within the few queer art spaces I can think of in New York, they don't actually include soundwork at all. When you go to a queer art space, whether that's a little bookstore, or a big gallery, when the question of sound and queerness comes into place, it often reveals itself more in the form of a literal narrative: a lesbian singer-songwriter, singing about her lesbian relationships, right? That use of narrative has minimal to zero interest for me. And so Queer Trash—or our other project, the New York Review of Cocksucking, specifically—usually doesn't fit in those spaces.

**MICHAEL:** In lieu of these spaces representing *queer sound* as something more than just an explicit declaration of, "I am a gay person, here's my experience," we can ask: How do these larger questions get addressed, and how can arts spaces actually accept that as a practice?

Even certain grants for queer art, when I apply to those as a sound person, or as a saxophonist, I feel like I'm really trying to explain it to them. I'm trying to show how this is legibly queer by whatever their standards might be. Sound is still something that's totally off the radar. Queer Art Mentorship is a great example. It's a residency program that's been around for a while. I've applied for many years but there's never been a sound mentor. I always get a really sweet personalized rejection when I apply. And then I wonder, wait a minute, there's very few sound people who even identify as queer. Even Meredith Monk, I don't see her work being considered within these terms at all. It's almost sexless. I find that interesting. Why is her queerness not seen as an essential aspect of her work?

**CHARLES:** You bring up a number of really interesting points. One is about funding models. When practicing as a sound artist, you have to do extra explaining. Sound is not properly in the visual arts. It's not even regarded as a type of performance sometimes. It's not legible, despite the fact that the term "sound art" is pushing 50 years old, right?

The other issue is that "queer art" is implied to be visual. This creates another barrier to funding. The queer sound artist has to explain why they're making sound, and work against preconceptions about what "queer art" encompasses. Artists who don't use sound may be more likely to get a residency or fellowship because their work is more legible.

Another point that you made is about our history. Where is our history of queer sound art? It's passed down by word of mouth primarily through the queer community. You're right. Monk isn't recognized as a queer artist. In fact, she's often footnoted or marginalized just on the basis of the work itself. There's this added context of queer identity and experience that's filtered or excluded—like it's too much to be a queer person and a sound artist—

**MICHAEL:** And a woman. They'd rather describe her as a, you know, a *female composer* rather than as a *queer female composer*. Both things are true. Why is one of these categories more privileged than the other? Do people just feel like it's, "Oh, I can't, it's too much"?

**RICHARD:** I think that womanhood seems more relatable. More people know what it means to be a woman in society than to know what it means to be a queer woman in society. Plenty of people don't even know what it means to be a woman.

**CHARLES:** The history of sound art prioritizes maleness, straightness, and whiteness. It prioritizes European and North American-ness—which is to say, coloniality. It prioritizes being cisgendered.

**RICHARD:** Do you think it prioritizes those things, or does it prioritize *not talking about them*—just assuming the status quo? In sound art, I perceive this de-emphasis on an artist's individuality. Talking about their humanity is frowned upon, because, you know, the sounds are meant to stand for themselves, as if in a void.

**CHARLES:** Which is to say, formalism?

**RICHARD:** But in a way that actively forced people to, and continues to force people to, present their work in a way that hides or de-emphasizes being queer.

- MICHAEL: Yes. I also think that in some ways that is not even just about being queer. People tend to avoid sex altogether.
- RICHARD: I could have ended that sentence just at “being.”
- MICHAEL: It’s an aversion to having a sexual drive to what you do as an artist. As a saxophonist, I have to put a reed in my mouth. Certain instruments are allowed to have this sexualized component: guitars, saxophones, drums, etc. The acknowledgment of sexuality in these particular instruments is where that discourse ends, though. Saxophonists, like, walk on bar tops—men lie on their backs while gyrating to a room full of screaming women. It implies a certain heterosexism.
- CHARLES: Well, he’s not playing the saxophone with a queer *embouchure* . . .
- MICHAEL: No. It’s a penetrative sound . . . but why is this acknowledgment of sexuality such a weird topic for arts institutions? Getting to queerness is difficult for people who can’t even say “sex” out loud.
- CHARLES: The music scholar Danielle Shlomit Sofer just published a book called *Sex Sounds: Vectors of Difference in Electronic Music*.<sup>3</sup> It examines why the history of electronic music avoids sex or sexuality—other than when it subliminally signals these heteronormative impulses.
- MICHAEL: Right.
- CHARLES: With projects like Queer Trash and the New York Review of Cocksucking— incredible name, by the way—you put sex right at the front of people’s minds. It’s not a soft queerness that supports neoliberal representation or tokenized inclusion. That sort of thing that arts funders may gravitate toward. I’d guess you have more success applying for grants as Queer Trash?
- RICHARD: Oh, yeah . . .
- MICHAEL: Yes. I just submitted an application a few days ago. I didn’t know if it was the kind of hip application where I could say “The New York Review of Cocksucking” or if it was a typical square arts application, where I just literally cannot say that name—ever. I can say “Queer Trash” because it ticks off a box on the application.
- RICHARD: It’s a more family friendly name.
- MICHAEL: I know! Both of our parents have been to Queer Trash events. My dad spent his 61st birthday sitting through a set by the noise band Black Leather Jesus, like, “What the fuck?” It was hilarious.
- CHARLES: He’s an ally!
- MICHAEL: Well, he has to be, I guess. He’s a nice guy, but . . .
- CHARLES: What other circumstances led to creating Queer Trash or the New York Review of Cocksucking?
- MICHAEL: Well, just for the record, the New York Review of Cocksucking came first.
- RICHARD: It was pretty much the same time. Officially we played gigs as the New York Review of Cocksucking before we organized a Queer Trash event.
- MICHAEL: Our first shows had varied environments. I think that kind of speaks more to the necessity that we felt.

RICHARD: Yeah. There are some venues I get to, or lineups we're on, and I think, "Wow, I really need to *queer* this space," while others I'm like, "Is it actually safe to push it?" Then there are shows where it's like, "Oh, we're just here among family."

MICHAEL: But realistically, most spaces where we play, no matter how heterosexual, the audience would never, ever claim to be—or even, you know, unconsciously be—queerphobic. At least in New York . . .

RICHARD: Yeah. That hasn't happened to me in New York.

MICHAEL: No. It happened to me in Indiana.

CHARLES: At the same time, it's not safe for everybody in New York. Not every queer person has the same passage through the city's spaces, systems, neighborhoods, networks, communities, etc.

RICHARD: No, no, it's really not safe for everybody.

MICHAEL: We're white cis men. It makes it easier because that has a close proximity to expectations of what queerness looks like in the neoliberal acceptance model. There is this presumption of white maleness. But what we do also seems legible, I think, because we were active before they let perverts like us into the room, right?

CHARLES: Or before they knew you were perverts . . .

MICHAEL: Right. This neoliberal acceptance of queer people doing sound is one thing. But I want to take that space back for queer people. I don't want to just be accepted. I'd rather find the right buttons to push.

Richard and I accidentally found ourselves pushing some amazing buttons at this small acoustic jazz bill we were on recently. In our performances, Richard will often read erotic texts. At this show, the story came from very antiquated gay porn, where issues of consent were—

RICHARD: Murky. Let's put it that way.

MICHAEL: Murky. The reactions were still some of my favorite that I've ever gotten. You could hear a pin drop. We played really quiet acoustic stuff, as opposed to some of our louder noise-oriented performances. I found that experience illuminating. Obviously, consent is good; non-consent is bad. But I think that this story, being told to a room full of straight people, made me feel like there was a little bubble around us as performers—and in terms of us being the only gay people there.

RICHARD: Right. This particular story in a modern lens is definitely, you know . . . it was questionable. But I think there's something about the interpersonal dynamics of the people in this story that still speaks to a contemporary queer audience. The story conveyed something that we understood differently than a straight audience.

MICHAEL: But honestly, even if this story hadn't been problematic by a modern lens, or really any lens, the fact that Richard was talking about somebody, presumably, butt fucking would have had the same effect on the audience, you know? I find that really strange.

RICHARD: I feel like our audiences don't have as hard a time when one of the guys in the sexual encounter is a werewolf, or when it's something about alien abduction and anal probing. The "slice of life" stories provoke a stronger response.

MICHAEL: Right. It could be dismissed as kitsch. But in all the stories that you choose, there's always a kind of queer tragedy. I guess maybe that aspect goes over the heads of some straight people.

CHARLES: Where do you find these stories? And what choices do you make about what to read, when to read it, and to whom you read? I'm also curious about these moments when you realize that there is a totally different modality of listening in the room. You make decisions about what sounds to play, but the audience's response affects your methods of performance. It's a bit of a feedback loop.

MICHAEL: When I read a room, I can feel a little bit of something to push up against, or try to poke a hole and deflate. That's exciting. I mean, even the question of performing in a "queer space" is . . . I don't even know, Richard, have we even performed in a "queer space"?

RICHARD: Not other than of our own making.

MICHAEL: Right. Exactly. We have performed in places that maybe gay people own or pay the rent.

CHARLES: We of course know that queer community is all about private ownership. Like a gay capitalist mindset. It's funny because, well, I should keep my mouth shut, I guess . . .

RICHARD: You get to edit this, so you know . . .

CHARLES: Well, in Cleveland there is a community development initiative that is working to recoup the loss of a historically gay neighborhood (named Hingetown) to gentrification. They basically are building a new LGBTQ neighborhood elsewhere in the city through a commercial revitalization program largely based around restaurants, bars, and gyms.<sup>4</sup>

RICHARD: Because that's how you build a queer neighborhood!

CHARLES: Right? These are spaces associated with a certain type of LGBTQ culture and community—

RICHARD: Affluent gay men.

CHARLES: Yeah. This vision of queer sociality is just totally aligned with this capitalist mindset of ownership and profit as a medium of community. Which is totally out of sync with anything I'm interested in, and I think out of sync with a large swath of queer history and culture, right? Maybe "queer" history is distinct from "LGBT" history in that sense.

In New York, you know, there are a lot of queer people, but there aren't a lot of queer spaces, and much less for, like, noise music. There's a queer rave scene in Brooklyn—like the Unter parties or the Dreamhouse (which used to be called Spectrum). That's a very different "dream house" than the one that's in Manhattan, by the way.<sup>5</sup> This points to why you had to create your own space, right? I want to come back to that, but, Richard, can you follow up with the question about the source material about your erotic stories?

RICHARD: Yeah. I read a lot of erotic fiction. The one we are talking about was from an issue of this old zine called *Straight to Hell* (which is actually also where the band

name came from). I have trawled through the Nifty Erotic Stories Archive, a website for sharing gay erotica. I think there was a gig where I read from John Preston's book *In Search of a Master* (1989).

MICHAEL: If you haven't, I'll bring my copy next time.

RICHARD: But there are also times when I'll bring a text that I think might be interesting to use. And in the room, at the show, I'll realize it's wrong. That it's a step too far for that particular audience. We played a show last year and I had a page bookmarked. It was this vivid description of a violent gay-bashing. Then we went on, and there was still daylight, there were children in the room, and I thought, "Maybe not." How often are there kids at the noise show?

MICHAEL: Yeah, that's the type of thing where someone decides to be a punisher and bring their fucking kids to the noise show.

CHARLES: It happens. We're sort of talking about this New York scene in particular. Do you consider Queer Trash, or the New York Review of Cocksucking, to be New York-specific projects? You mentioned touring. Could you talk about the relationship of your projects to other cities with active experimental music communities?

RICHARD: Our work is less connected to New York City as a nexus than it is to dirty DIY basements everywhere. That's the continuum that we exist in.

MICHAEL: I'll push back slightly on that. I think there are, you know . . . I mean, Richard, I just see you as a fellow yenta, you know? We are a couple of gay Jews from New York City who share a very similar cultural background. I think that is actually important.

RICHARD: Well, when are we doing our radical Jewish culture record on Tzadik?<sup>6</sup>

CHARLES: Richard, you see Queer Trash as part of this DIY noise basement scene, which is not bound to one city. It's a loose network of cities, houses, and people, typically straight people—

RICHARD: But surprisingly queer in places you least expect.

CHARLES: For sure—Pittsburgh has a large queer scene. The Review of Cocksucking kind of fits in that context (despite its name, which is a NYC-centric pun on *The New York Review of Books*). But you've also performed at the Museum of Modern Art. I feel like Queer Trash is closely involved in the New York art world in a way. There's a specific cultural infrastructure for arts funding from which you draw resources.

RICHARD: I would agree that we actively engage with that world. But in an ideal world, Queer Trash would function *as a resource* to our broader community and networks.

MICHAEL: You hit the nail on the head. It speaks to a larger issue. There are great things about partnering with larger organizations. The primary thing is that they have the money to make things happen. Issue Project Room and MoMA are really our only engagements with this "Greater New York City art world." For the most part, we play basements and shitholes just like everyone else.

But given the dearth of resources, we really should be more of a resource for queer people and queer music. But both of us work full-time jobs. It's really difficult. With regards to New York, the DIY spaces here (to the extent that they can exist) are mostly run by various kinds of queer people. The larger institutions are not, you know? Maybe I say this flippantly, but in this renewed post-Trumpian world for arts organizations, they got called out for their lack of diversity. So they book a queer person every now and then, and give them, you know, a \$300 check—rather than changing their infrastructure.

So on the one hand, Queer Trash, or occasionally New York Review of Cockucking, may partner with some organization that basically needs to outsource their queer curating. We're happy to be a part of it—and grateful for the resources. But why are a lot of these DIY spaces run, curated, and inhabited by queer people, and a lot of the other larger organizations that actually have the funding and structure to make things happen aren't (unless it's at the lowest possible tier of their structure in terms of employment)?

**CHARLES:** Definitely. If you look at who's working in a museum bookstore, as a program or curatorial assistant, art handler, or stage assistant, you likely will find a high level of queerness, in addition to other marginalized identities. How do you negotiate this reality?

**RICHARD:** I'm always glad to exploit these institutions for their resources when they're willing to make them available. But they make you do a lot of work to generally accomplish nothing. It makes my skin crawl.

**MICHAEL:** We ultimately want Queer Trash to get more queer people in a space to see weird, challenging, queer art. It's totally operating under the auspices of queer community-building. We want queer audiences to see queer artists. When we partner with larger organizations, I find the queer audience is much smaller.

**RICHARD:** It's a spectacle for their usual straight audience.

**MICHAEL:** Right. Here's the flipside of that coin: What if we tried to do a Queer Trash event at the Eagle?<sup>7</sup> I would love to play a show in a gay leather bar. We could probably get people out there. But would the people who regularly use that space want to see us? Do they want a bunch of straight people in their club? They'd be like, "Kill me, this is where we go to do what we want, to grab a beer in our jockstrap. Now suddenly a bunch of donors are here for some arts organization?" We have to find a balance. In terms of finding queer art spaces, it's hard to bridge this gap. When we perform at DIY spaces or punk houses, well, you know, what was the house we used to play at that was disgusting?

**RICHARD:** It was called "Heck."

**MICHAEL:** Heck was great! The audiences were probably queerer than at any of our other shows. We put a lot of fucking work into these shows. I spend most of my day fucking shaving reeds. But if you want to get proper compensation for your work, you have to go to an arts organization. And they haven't spent much time cultivating queer audiences.



CHARLES: Even if you were to propose something at a LGBTQ museum, it might be the right surface-level demographic, but you're not making the type of art that they typically present.

RICHARD: Yeah.

CHARLES: You'll find more support in DIY spaces, because they're investing in the community that you're building. You're not making money. You're losing money, probably. However, you're gaining a lot of other things.

MICHAEL: In terms of on-the-ground community building, yes. But when you're in a DIY space, sometimes there's a paywall around this larger discourse of sound, or music in general, such as what happens in academic journals or in museums. Queer art resides in hyper-underground space as well, and opposes what might actually interface with the larger organizations.

RICHARD: It's a kind of barrier to access.

MICHAEL: Right. There is also this weird classism within avant-garde, sound-art type communities where, you know, once they know that you're a cheap date, you're a cheap date forever . . .

CHARLES: Or you end up working for free. I see that a lot in the disability arts community. There is a similar lack of support, accentuated by this kind of representational tokenism. "Glad to have you here!" There's rarely a full budget for accessibility that actually lets disabled people participate. It can become *disability art for non-disabled people*, much like what you're describing as *queer art for straight people*.

MICHAEL: Mhm.

CHARLES: You'd do a lot of free work to grow Queer Trash in the future. Which is not to make it all about money in a capitalist sense, but rather to point out that this is a type of exploitation that stifles and limits what you might want to do.

RICHARD: It would be a full-time job to maintain the financial inflow that we'd need to be able to support others in ways that are truly needed. It's just beyond our capacities at this point in time.

MICHAEL: Yeah. But partnering with DIY spaces is often a breeze. You're speaking to people who get it. I don't need to wait until Pride Month to do a Queer Trash show or something.

CHARLES: You don't need a grant from Chase Bank?

MICHAEL: No! But, look, if Chase Bank wants to hand them out, I'll take one. People are becoming interested in queer music. The success of Sarah Hennies and Claire Rousay speaks to that and has been really great. It also helps the viability of what we do. There are also artists who have done this for years and don't get recognition, like Richard Ramirez with Black Leather Jesus, or Jacob Wick, and countless other people. Of course, there are artists where it's the opposite: Queerness isn't any part of the discourse around what they do or did. It's an invisible identity that has no worth, I guess.

**CHARLES:** I think of someone like Pauline Oliveros, this queer icon in sound art, who was pretty openly a lesbian. We can't ask Pauline about this—rest in peace—but you know, some artists make a point not to highlight queer identity as a part of their art practice. There are many motivations for that choice.<sup>8</sup>

**MICHAEL:** It's interesting to navigate that dynamic. With certain artists who may be of a certain age—or maybe it doesn't have to do much with age—you've heard whispers about this person or that person, whatever, being queer in some way. If we decide that it would be a great opportunity to have this person, who we feel or know is LGBTQ+, on a Queer Trash bill, we are not only asking them to play a show. We're asking them to put their whole work within the context of them being queer—and of making “queer art.”

**RICHARD:** Perhaps after so long of disconnecting their art from sexuality, it's just too uncomfortable?

**MICHAEL:** Yeah. But we approach it as we approach anybody, which is, you know, “Would you like to play this show? This is our series, here is what we do. Here's who you'd be performing with; if you're interested, let us know.” You need to make a big gay show of it. You can do whatever you want to do—it doesn't need to be the gayest thing ever.

**CHARLES:** You don't need to pull out a pocket full of glitter like Rip Taylor!

**RICHARD:** Right. You can keep your rainbow cape at home.

**MICHAEL:** For me, being gay and being a saxophonist, especially as a young person figuring out their queerness, it seemed like two completely separate entities. They didn't overlap whatsoever. I didn't know then what I know now, which is that apparently all jazz musicians are gay! But it would have made being queer seem more livable, or more possible, to have known these things earlier.

**CHARLES:** Is modeling queer identity a value of your projects?

**MICHAEL:** I hope so.

**RICHARD:** I'd like to believe so.

**MICHAEL:** If there's anything we do, we would like to let people know that it's possible to be queer. When I first heard music that was way too out there for me, I felt like it gave me permission to explore. In that same spirit, it's nice to let people know that, like, yes, you can definitely be gay and play free jazz or harsh noise.

**RICHARD:** And not just be gay, but make a point of ensuring that people know you are gay.

**MICHAEL:** Wear a fucking harness to this show! Why not? Fucking do it. Like, whatever brings that fucking energy to the room that otherwise is just so absent. We alluded to this earlier, trying to bring up this discussion of sexuality in music. Both of us are mostly interested in improvisation as our primary mode of music-making. I believe, specifically, that queerness and queer identity should play a huge role in how one thinks about how they relate to other people in a musical way. What dynamics you want to introduce into a situation, or to play with and trust, things like that. It's just kind of the bread-and-butter of how you should make music through improvising:

You ask these questions! It's weird to me that discussions about sex and sexuality are absent, because to me it informs so much of this music. I think about how to consider dynamics in music-making, power dynamics, you know? Oftentimes in the music that Richard and I make, one of us will make a conscious decision to overpower the other one. That's not bad improvising—it's navigating trust to make musical dynamics that otherwise would seem, I don't know, sonically illegal.

CHARLES: You're practicing a sort of "switch aesthetics."

MICHAEL: Yeah. I think I'm primarily a power-bottom improviser!

CHARLES: I mean, I think that's a good point to wind down on, so we can all make dinner. But, Richard, I've seen you perform countless times. I know that you come from *electroacoustic improvisation* (or "eai" for short).<sup>9</sup> That scene feels very straight in retrospect.

RICHARD: Quite.

CHARLES: It's about the sound, not the person, as you say. Yet one of the core elements of that whole genre, whatever it is or was, is the blending of one performer with another. Improvising intimately. There is an innate queerness to that, right? An openness or vulnerability—an ability to switch and blend in order to be a support for each other.

RICHARD: Especially in that notion of support. In that scene, we positioned ourselves in opposition to free jazz, which felt to us like everyone was always soloing at the same time. The *electroacoustic improvisation* side of things, we always tried to play backgrounds, you know? No one was ever soloing. We were all playing backgrounds together. I feel like that in and of itself is a kind of queer musical modality. But it was a very straight scene in terms of the community, which is interesting—

MICHAEL: And sometimes you want to grab someone by the ears and yell vulgarities at them.

CHARLES: Or read vintage gay erotica over lowercase music?

RICHARD: Exactly.

MICHAEL: Whatever penetrates deepest. ■

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CHARLES EPPLEY (they/he) is an assistant teaching professor of Interdisciplinary Art & Performance (IAP) at Arizona State University. They teach and research the intersections of sound, disability, and techno-material culture from an interdisciplinary art history and media studies perspective. They are currently working on a book on the politics of listening in postwar art, focusing on the sound artist Max Neuhaus (1939–2009). They previously held faculty positions in media studies and art history at the University of California at Riverside and Oberlin College, as well as research posts at the MIT Media Lab, Experiments in Art & Technology (E.A.T.) at Nokia Bell Labs, and the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science. Charles currently serves as a co-editor and research coordinator for the Mellon and Ford foundation–funded Proclaiming Disability Arts initiative at the Center for Disability Studies at New York University. They are also a member of the artist collectives Remote Access and Cybernetics Library, where they help to design participatory public programs on disability and digital culture.

#### NOTES

1. Listen to the three artists discuss their work with Queer Trash on the Fluid Exchange podcast. See "Queer Trash," Fluid Exchange, July 18, 2018, <https://fluidexchange.libsyn.com/fluid-exchange-queer-trash-bounce>.

2. The event was held as part of the Sunday Sessions programming at MoMA PS1 in Queens, NY.
3. See Danielle Shlomit Sofer, *Sex Sounds: Vectors of Difference in Electronic Music* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022).
4. See Erik Piepenburg, “In Cleveland, They’re Cooking Up a Gay Neighborhood from Scratch,” *New York Times*, October 28, 2022.
5. La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela’s famous *Dream House* sound and light installation can be found at 275 Church Street.
6. Free-jazz musician John Zorn founded the Tzadik record label in 1995 in New York City.
7. “The Eagle” refers to a long-time, international, and unofficial network of gay leather bars that has been active for several decades. Among the first was the Eagle in New York City, which opened as a gay leather bar in 1970.
8. For more on Pauline Oliveros and queerness in sound art, see Jules Gimbrone, “A Room Without Walls: Experimental Music and Queer Space,” *Ear Wave Event*, Issue 3 (Summer 2017), “<https://earwaveevent.org/article/a-room-without-walls-experimental-music-and-queer-space/>.”
9. Electroacoustic improvisation (“eai”) refers to an international subculture of experimental music from the late 1990s and 2000s that explored subtle, concentrated, and often quiet or barely discernible sounds to explore the aesthetics and methods of improvisation.