Behind Closed Doors:
A Study of Solitary Music Making

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ABSTRACT

Automusication, the act of performing music by and for oneself, is an extraordinarily widespread musical phenomenon, yet it has never been given rigorous scholarly attention. The weight given to performance within the ethnomusicological community has created a bias toward the social and communal aspects of music at the expense of private or personal musical behaviors. Studies in every day musical experiences have begun to broach hitherto under-researched musical activities, but rarely has solitary music making been addressed in a scholarly forum. The primary intent of my research is to begin to construct an ethnography of solitary musical practitioners, specifically focusing on those I have classified as "automusicants." This research is situated alongside studies of listening habits and practicing as well as interdisciplinary literature pertaining to music cognition, perception, trance, solitude, and play. Three primary phases underpin this study:

1. A macroscopic view of automusication as a widespread practice, constructed through the assembly of large-scale data by way of web-based surveys.
2. A mid-level view of the role of automusication in the lives of numerous self-identified solitary music-makers.
3. A microscopic view analyzing the automusication of several informants through close dialectic feedback interviews and recording analysis

By blending a nuanced, in-depth look at informants' musical lives with large-scale survey data I assemble a basic conceptual framework for the analysis and discussion of automusication. The relationship between one's public and private musical lives is examined in depth, situating the practice of automusication within the broader context of one's musical identity.

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This thesis is dedicated to my father Dick, who opened my ears to a world of musical sounds and possibilities, to my mother Debra, who has unflaggingly pushed, supported, and encouraged me in all my musical endeavors, and my brother Hunter, who's musicianship, skill, and friendship inspire me every day.

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CHAPTER 1
STUDIES IN SOLITARY MUSIC-MAKING

An Introduction to Automusication

> The music of the High Atlas is fundamentally collective. This does not mean that individual music is excluded, but, since the collective takes precedence over the personal in the course of everyday life, collective music automatically holds a pre-eminent position over personal music in the conception and performance of music… When individual music does make an appearance, it is not ignored; but it is scarcely appreciated. The women are free to sing at their work when they wish, and the men are often prone to sing on the roads. *Such acts are of no consequence; they are aspects of life one tends to take for granted.*[1]

Above I quote from Bernard Lortat-Jacob's article "Community Music as an Obstacle to Professionalism: A Berber Example." The information conveyed in this passage is no doubt accurate, fair, and representative of the culture at hand, but the language Lortat-Jacob uses to dismiss the isolated music-making of lone individuals is endemic in ethnomusicology.[2] He has unwittingly raised issues about how the field of ethnomusicology has conventionally approached the study of music the world over. The ethnomusicological literature is littered with similar half-accounts and throwaway mentions of individuals making music by and for themselves, yet greater attention is rarely given to this behavior. What does it mean for an individual to play music by and for only himself or herself? How does a solitary environment affect an individual's musical production, particularly in contrast to that individual's behavior in a social or participatory environment?

Great weight is given to the terms "performance" and "community" within ethnomusicological discourse. The importance given to performance has created a bias

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[1] Bernard Lortat-Jacob, "Community Music as an Obstacle to Professionalism: A Berber

[2] It is unfair for me to single him out, it is simply par for the course that music-making of this kind is treated this way.

toward the social and communal aspects of music at the expense of private or personal musical behaviors; studies of specifically *solitary* musical practices are virtually absent from the ethnomusicological literature. It is undeniable that the music of solo artists has been studied by numerous scholars; however, the focus has always been on the music as created for performance and consumption, not on the act of playing alone.

In recent years scholars across the social sciences have been challenging the assertion Lortat-Jacob and others have made that "such acts are of no consequence," prying into the minutia of everyday life and studying those aspects of musical life that until then even ethnomusicologists had so often taken for granted. Studies of everyday musical experiences have begun to broach hitherto under-researched musical activities such as personal listening habits and practice routine, but rarely has solitary music-making as a form of personal expression or enjoyment been addressed in a scholarly forum. When something is taken for granted is it necessarily inconsequential? My most basic assertion throughout this work will be a resounding "no!" This is a study about music-making that is taken for granted, the same kind of individual music-making described above, a practice which I have termed "automusication."

The way in which individuals engage in making music solely for themselves is frequently a vital part of many of their musical and personal lives. The primary intent of my research project is to conduct a study of individuals who engage in solitary music-making, specifically focusing on those I have classified as "automusicants." I will begin by way of example: I am acquainted with a classical percussionist and avid performer of new music who recently posted on Facebook after he noticed an immense change in his own practicing habits since moving from renting a rehearsal space in a crowded, noisy facility in the heart

of a major city to his new spacious and sound isolated apartment in a less densely populated area. The fact he now knows that no one is listening to him play has not only changed *what* he plays but *how* he plays it. Now, away from external distractions, free from the anxiety of being overheard in a moment of imperfection, his playing is more confident, he takes more musical risks, and he feels free to play at a performance appropriate volume. This certainly seems like fertile ground for study. Automusication, most simply defined as the act of performing music by and for oneself, is an extraordinarily widespread musical phenomenon, yet due to the aforementioned biases within the ethnomusicological community as well as issues related to it (the ethnographic method in particular) has never been given rigorous scholarly attention. There is an obvious breakdown in participant-observation when one simply cannot observe the participant; in this case they are necessarily the only one involved! I have worked around this in several ways, most notably by using a series of dialogic feedback interviews: informants would get in the habit of recording themselves when playing alone, they would bring that recording to me, and we would listen to the recording together, talking through their actions.

My study of automusication stems directly from personal involvement with the behavior of interest. For as long as I can remember I've derived no small amount of personal satisfaction from simply playing music by myself for my own enjoyment. While I have my own philosophy on this practice it struck me that I had no idea about the way others might be doing similar things. Thinking that there must be some study of this behavior I began scouring the ethnomusicological literature and came up nearly empty-handed. Andrew Killick's article "Holicipation: Prolegomenon to an Ethnography of Solitary Music-Making" seemed to be the one source that dealt specifically with this kind of

personal musical experience; my own project is very much a response to his call for a study of solitary music-making and I owe him great debt for laying the groundwork for me.[3] Killick uses the term "holicipation" similarly to the way I use automusication: to refer to solitary musical performance done by and for oneself often for the purposes of personal enjoyment. Dissatisfied with certain aspects of the term holicipation, particularly its failure to immediately evoke a sense of music making (much less any discernible meaning to an outsider) I've branded my own term automusication, a discussion of which will follow shortly.[4] First it might be useful to give a sense of the depth and breadth of specific behaviors automusication can refer to, a definition by example perhaps. Consider the following: the college student who learns his favorite pop songs on guitar alone in his room; the professional trumpet player who practices for an upcoming gig; the self-identified "non-musician" who sings in the car or the shower; the banker with a drum set in the basement that gets played after a hard day at work; the 50-something who suddenly purchases a piano to play as a hobby; the aspiring songwriter who works on her band's material alone at a keyboard; the classically trained violinist who plays ukulele for fun. The above list is by no means all-inclusive or representative of the entire range of possibilities that exist, however it begins to give an idea of the myriad different ways automusication can manifest. This project therefore raises questions about musicianship and musical "status" that are often ignored in more traditional ethnomusicological approaches. Who is a

[3] Andrew Killick, "Holicipation: Prolegomenon to an Ethnography of Solitary Music-Making," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 15, no. 2 (November 1, 2006): 273–99, doi:10.2307/20184561.

[4] Holicipation is a genuinely interesting and useful word, and is perhaps even more conceptually meaningful than automusication. My reasons for distinguishing between the two and ultimately choosing to stick with automusication will be discussed shortly.

"musician?" By what specific criteria are individuals judged to be "musicians" or not? Are all of the people listed above musicians? If not why not?

A Consideration of the Terminology

The word "automusication" that I have proposed here is a term of my own invention, though not without academic precedent. My terminology draws from and situates itself in the language put forth by several important works on social music-making. In his seminal book *Music and Trance* Gilbert Rouget introduces the trichotomy of the "musician," the "musicant," and the "musicated" to articulate the different positions participants in various trance traditions have in relation to the music being performed during the ritual. The "musician" is exactly what you would expect: someone who plays music for others. However, Rouget states "placing ourselves in the position of the trance subject, who is thus either the 'addresser' or 'addressee' of the music, we shall say that in the first case he is a 'musicant' and in the second is 'musicated.'"[5] Furthermore, Rouget uses the term musicant in his discussions of shamanism, referring to the individual who is both producer and receiver of their own music, thereby aiding in the facilitation of their own trance. In short, the musicant "musicates" themselves, whereas the musicated must be provided music by others. To keep with Rouget's proposed language I've derived the noun "musication" and the verb "to musicate," which I define generally as "to impart or receive music," and those who make music for themselves, by themselves are therefore

[5]Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations between Music and Possession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 284.

automusicants.[6] My drawing from Rouget is no accident as there are meaningful conceptual relationships between automusication and trance, as well as important research and literature on trance that have bearing on automusication. To be clear, I am not proposing that automusication is a type of trance, merely that my work has found meaningful connections to the study of trance as both subjects deal with cognitive processes. This will be explored more fully in Chapter 4.

If one is to accept "musicate" as a verb that refers to musical production and reception, Christopher Small's term "musicking" should be addressed. I owe a considerable debt to Small's book *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* and the way it has shaped how I've conceptualized the totality of musical experience. Small introduces the word musicking in his book and uses it roughly the same way I treat musication though with important distinctions. He defines the verb "to music," from which he derives the gerund musicking as "to music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing" before extending this definition to include ticket takers, stagehands, roadies, and any other individuals who play some role in the performance experience.[7] I have chosen not to adopt his proposed use of the verb "to music" for several reasons. Firstly, I am not concerned at present with individuals who are not making music, such as the stagehands and concession venders Small suggests. Additionally, because of its commonly accepted usage as a noun, when music is not used as

[6] A cursory Google search for the word yields colloquial usage of the word loosely centered around two ways, the fairly straightforward portmanteau of "music" and "education," and the unexplained, yet rather poetic "to be extremely absorbed in music" which I've taken from the Urban Dictionary: http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Musicate

[7] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, 1st edition (Hanover: Wesleyan, 1998), 9.

a gerund the term loses its sense of motion and activity; I want to convey the sense of actively *doing* music. Additionally the appending of the prefix auto- (used here in its original meaning of "self") leaves significant room for misunderstanding (i.e. "automusic"), while musication allows for more elegant changes in part of speech than does just "music" (i.e. automusicking, automusicker, etc.).

Despite my study's roots in Andrew Killick's exploration of holication, I am dissatisfied with his term for a few reasons. Perhaps most importantly, meaning cannot be easily parsed out from its lexical components, making the term difficult to explain and introduce to new audiences.[8] Furthermore two subtle yet important distinctions between automusication and holication must be made clear. Most obviously, holication fails to imply an inherently musical activity and therefore should be qualified as "musical holication." Additionally, holication as Killick defines it stresses the totality of the experience as perceived by the individual who engages in the behavior. While this is perhaps one of the more interesting facets of solitary music-making, it fails to take into account in any serious way the fact that this behavior, like any behavior public or private, is embedded within a complex socio-cultural framework. It is precisely the way that solitary music-making interfaces with a greater social context that makes its study most relevant and meaningful to ethnomusicologists and others in the social sciences. Automusication serves to emphasize that the individual is acting by and for himself or herself while at the same time allows for the highly perceptual, flexible nature of solitude to be addressed. Whereas holication is solely fixated on the individual engaging in that behavior (they are quite literally the "whole" as Killick puts it), automusication allows for a discussion

[8] Killick has essentially created a portmanteau of "whole" (though dropping the 'w' as in "holistic") and "participation:" they are not a part, but the whole of the experience.

involving a number of significant factors such as an imagined audience, eavesdroppers and passersby, and even the act of recording the music.

At this point I feel I should address a particular issue straight away. While shopping around the term automusication, trying it out on friends and colleagues for opinion and feedback, I found that for many the "auto" prefix often immediately references "auto-erotic asphyxiation." Additionally the cadence and rhyme of the root "musication" often bring to mind "masturbation." I have even had some colleagues privately suggest that these connotations alone provide grounds to dispense entirely with the term. While I have found this to spawn giggles and tittering among academics more suited to a middle school health class, I welcome the comparison and see it should be addressed head-on. I by no means intend to assert that the practice of automusication is akin to "musical masturbation," however the two practices share one undeniable commonality: they often form an integral, important facet of a person's private life that is rarely shared with others, either in conversation or exhibition.

Constructing an Interdisciplinary Framework

Influential to my study have been a number of works in addition to Killick's writing on holicipation. The writings of Christopher Small,[9] Ruth Herbert,[10] Tia DeNora,[11] and the team of Susan D. Crafts, Daniel Cavicchi, and Charles Keil[12] together form a corpus of scholarly literature on the uses, meanings, and significance of music in everyday life. I have

[9] Small, *Musicking*.
[10] Ruth Herbert, *Everyday Music Listening: Absorption, Dissociation and Trancing* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011).
[11] Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[12] Susan D. Crafts, Daniel Cavicchi, and Charles Keil, *My Music* (Wesleyan University Press, 1993).

constructed my own study having drawn significantly from their various methodologies and theoretical approaches to the study of the role of music in peoples' lives. My approach also draws importantly from the work Harris Berger, particularly from his book *Stance: Ideas about Emotion, Style, and Meaning for the Study of Expressive Culture* and his application of phenomenological theory to musical ethnography.[13] It is from Berger that I derived the method of the dialogic feedback interview and how it might be implemented in accessing the phenomenological experience of others. By foregrounding their voice and experiences I hope to share in their lived experience. It is important that value judgments remain absent from the assessment of the subjects and their music – it is the perception of the individual automusicator that is of paramount concern. Their tastes, goals, and methods are entirely their own and must be examined in light of their own personal philosophies. Furthermore, an individual's actions, particularly when alone are best understood by how they themselves find their actions meaningful.

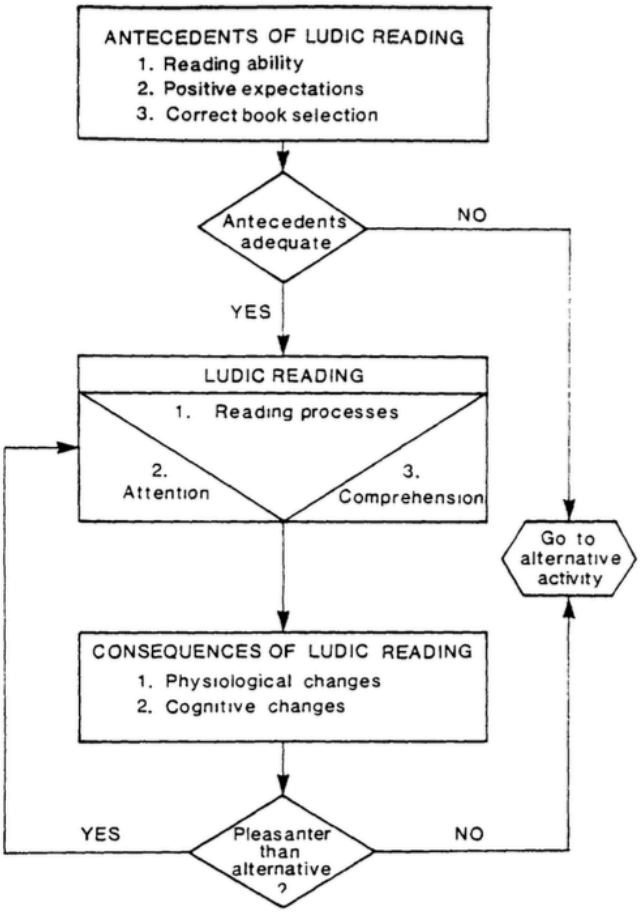
This project also has explicit interdisciplinary aims. Work from the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and cognitive science have been essential to beginning to understand the phenomenon of automusication. An unexpected wealth of material has come from the British Medical Journal's recurring articles about "Reading for Pleasure," each separately authored and about the author's individual experience. Perhaps a music journal of some kind could decide to start a similar practice! Particularly relevant work has been done in the field of psychology, specifically with regard to the study of reading for pleasure or "ludic reading" as discussed by Victor Nell. He has created a useful

[13] Harris M. Berger, *Stance: Ideas about Emotion, Style, and Meaning for the Study of Expressive Culture*, First Edition (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan, 2010).

flow chart that maps the basic process of ludic reading, presented in Figure 1.[14] Even to the casual observer it should be clear that there are certain similarities between the process of ludic reading and that of automusication. One aspect of both ludic reading and automusication that Nell's diagram clearly illustrates is the cyclical nature of the behavior; left unimpeded by outside influence, once the process has begun and until there is a physiological or cognitive change that causes the individual to abandon the activity the cycle repeats, feeding back on itself.

Figure 1

Flow Chart of the Antecedents and Consequences of Ludic Reading



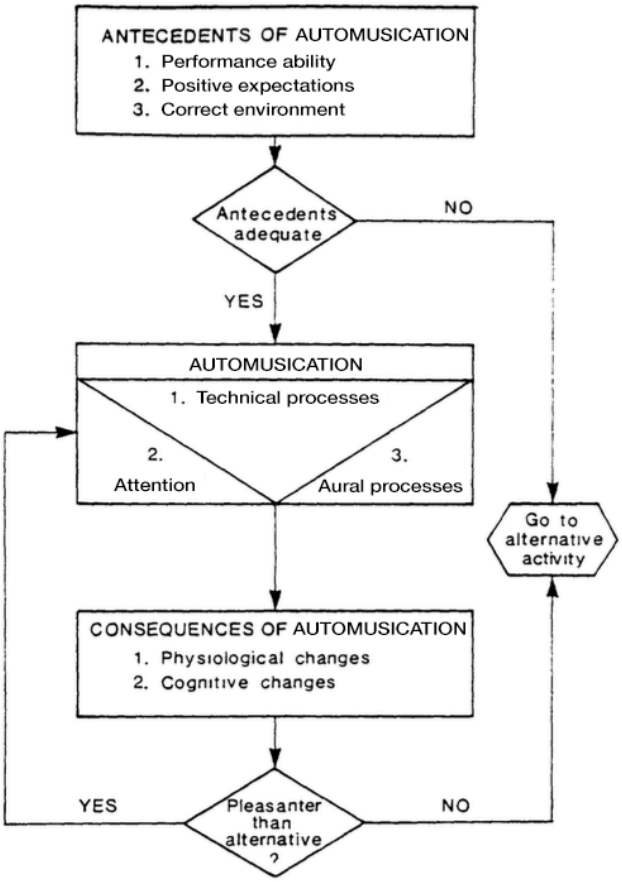
I argue that this occurs in automusication to an even greater extent than ludic reading as there are an increased number of physiological and cognitive components that go into the production and reception of musical material: the "text" of the music material is far more abstract and is only notated in certain cases, therefore involving a more creative cognitive process; the musician must mentally conceive the sound, physically make the make the sound, and aurally process the sound. I present the following amendments to Nell's chart for purposes of adapting it to understanding the process of

[14] Victor Nell, "The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure: Needs and Gratifications," *Reading Research Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 1988): 6–50, doi:10.2307/747903.

automusication in Figure 2. The diamond labeled "Pleasanter than alternative?" at the bottom of the flowchart is where the one of the primary differences between practice and automusication becomes clear. As anyone who has seriously undertaken the study of music performance knows practice is often a difficult, unpleasant task, yet a critical undertaking to accomplishing technical facility on their instrument/voice.

Figure 2

Proposed Flowchart for the Antecedents and Consequences of Automusication



Throughout my research into the phenomenon of solitary music-making I found that certain major assumptions I held about automusication from the outset (and were necessarily based on my own personal experience) are in fact much more complex than I ever assumed. For instance, I began with the assumption that what I consider "practice" (methodical repetition with the expressed aim of achieving both increased technical and musical faculty) and what I came to term automusication were essentially opposite ends of the spectrum of solitary music-making. However it has become clear that there is more overlap between the two concepts than I originally assumed. While this is not explicitly a study of practice per se, the act of practicing (at least as we understand it in the context of most Western

musical traditions) certainly falls under the umbrella of automusication.[15] In short, automusication and practice are not the same. Practice, however, is a very specific type of automusication. Since I have defined automusication as being music-making by and for oneself, what is widely considered "practice" is certainly a subset of automusicatory behavior. Additionally and somewhat perplexingly I've come to question the necessity of *solitude* to the process of automusication, something I still generally categorize as "solitary music-making." This will be examined in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

There are two additional individuals whose work I will draw from in important ways. The first is Judith Becker and her work at the intersection between ethnomusicology and music cognition. Because I am interested in solitary music making, traditional participant observation becomes an issue. This necessitates strategizing for ways to "get into the mind" of my informants as best I can, a difficult task at best. A discussion of my exact methodology will follow shortly. Judith Becker in *Deep Listeners* deftly navigates the uncertain terrain at the intersection of the neuro- and cognitive science approaches to the mind and the philosophical, anthropological approaches to the mind. She outlines three approaches to the senses of embodiment that are useful to draw upon:

> *1) The body as a physical structure in which emotion and cognition happen*
> *2) The body as the site of first-person, unique, inner life*
> *3) The body as involved with other bodies in the phenomenal world, that is, as being-in-the-world*[16]

I have tried to keep these three concepts in mind as I conduct my research. As my approach is essentially a phenomenological one, Becker nicely sums up her (and my) position:

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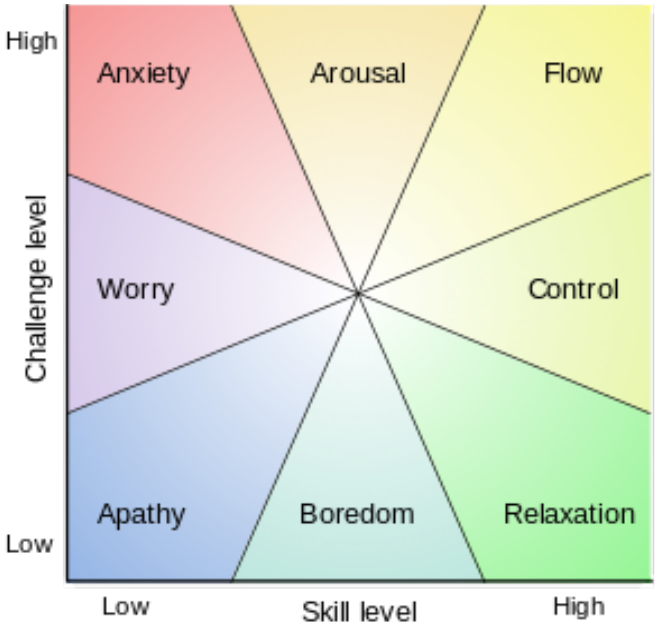
[15] See Chapter 2 for a more in-depth assessment of the interconnectivity of practice and automusication.
[16] Judith Becker, *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing*, PAP/COM edition (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004), 8.

"although scientific techniques for mind-study are developing, mind as full inner experience can only be fully known by the one who has one; mind is a first-person, phenomenological experience."[17] While I do not have access to a wealth of scientific data or the equipment and knowledge to conduct scientific experiments related to automusication, Becker's tripartite model of embodiment goes a long way towards justifying my phenomenological line of inquiry.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's pioneering work on the state of flow has been highly influential to my study as well. Flow is, most generally, a state of heightened focus wherein an individual is so completely absorbed in the task they are completing that they experience distortions in their perception of time, a diminished sense of self, and increased connection to the task at hand. It should be noted upfront that automusication should not be predicated on the intent of achieving a flow state, yet my research has shown that a state of flow is often produced by way of automusication. Figure 3 shows Csikszentmihalyi's original flow model.[18] Note the relationship between the states of arousal relative to the axes of skill and challenge. My basic assertion is that

Figure 3

Challenge vs. Skill – The Flow State



[17] Ibid., 9.
[18] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "The Concept of Flow," in *Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology* (Springer Netherlands, 2014), 239–63.

automusication as a sort of play behavior tends to gravitate toward the flow state. Because an individual who automusicates is left entirely to their own devices, the music they will typically play is of an appropriate level of difficulty to challenge them just enough to facilitate a state of flow, while in no way guaranteeing it.

Methodological Approaches to the Study of Automusication

Establishing a methodology for the research of automusication has been problematic, though not insurmountable. As a result my work is necessarily more ethnographic and phenomenological than based in scientific methodology and empirical data. It would be possible to expand the study of this behavior and resulting states from an explicitly scientific standpoint such as psychology or cognitive science, but this is beyond the scope of the current project.

My research was conducted in the Greater Boston area and online from January 2014 to January 2015 and has had several distinct yet overlapping phases:

(1) Online Survey: A 40-question survey distributed via social media across the world

(2) Interviews: Self-reporting of behavior by informants accompanied by interviews

(3) Case Studies: Series of close dialogic feedback interviews of select subjects

Online Survey

The purpose of the survey is threefold:

(1) To establish a pool of potential informants for closer research

(2) To gather large-scale data regarding the of self-reporting solitary music-makers

(3) To assess on a limited basis the general prevalence of private and/or solitary musical behavior

The survey entitled "A Survey of Solitary Music-Makers" was posted online via several social media outlets and garnered 178 responses with 77 of respondents electing to identify themselves, stating they would be open to further questioning. Respondents lived in 28 US states, four Canadian provinces, Vietnam, and the UK. The title of the survey likely facilitated a certain amount of self-selection on the part of potential respondents, yet as previously stated this does not invalidate the survey because I am not interested in assessing the presence of automusication in the general population. A more detailed analysis of the survey results will be presented in Chapter 2.[19]

Interviews

Throughout the course of this project I have conducted over 24 hours of recorded interviews with 21 individuals whose backgrounds, musical and otherwise, vary greatly. These informants were chosen in a variety of ways; some were acquaintances, some were referred to me by mutual acquaintances, while some of these individuals were selected based on their willingness to contribute, as indicated in the survey. In conducting the survey and interviews I have sought out individuals who might not necessarily fit our standard definition of "musician." That is to say, people who lack formal musical training as well as people whose only musical outlet might be humming along to the radio or singing in the shower. Oftentimes, individuals with whom I've spoken have been initially reserved or skeptical of my choice to talk with them about music-making. I faced a fair amount of

[19] See Appendix 1 for the complete survey; see Appendix 2 for the unabridged survey results.

deflection along the lines of "Well, I don't know why you'd want to talk to me, I'm not really much of a musician," yet these individuals are often those who engage with automusication in the most meaningful, regular ways. For years I have harbored suspicions that automusication is a widespread phenomenon, and the survey and interviews bears this out. While it is beyond the scope of the current study to assess exactly how prevalent this behavior is among the general population my findings indicate that there *is* undoubtedly widespread solitary music-making, the repercussions for which are potentially immense.

Case Studies

I have been working closely with three local musicians to create a set of case studies in automusication to be presented in Chapter 3. These individuals were all known to me to be automusicants and were chosen based on their willingness to cooperate, their relative proximity to my location, and because they all exhibit certain unique behaviors pertaining to solitary music-making. Each of the informants agreed to make recordings of their own automusication after which I engaged in a series of dialogic feedback interviews wherein the recorded material is reviewed between the two of us. There are similarities between my methodology here and the early research on flow carried out by Csikszentmihalyi in the 1960s, specifically is his method of photographing painters' progress as they work, followed by interviews with the painters about what is happening at each stage in their process.[20]

At this point after having spent much ink defending the practice of automusication as a valid area of study and potentially significant portion of an individual's musical life, I

[20] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: Psychology, Creativity, & Optimal Experience with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*, Into the Classroom, 2004.

should acknowledge that there are issues bound up in automusication that are complex, problematic, and not necessarily very good. As we will see in the following chapter despite the many who enjoy the act of automusication not everyone necessarily sings its praises, even those who engage with the behavior. Automusication is such an intensely personal, privatized behavior that it takes a wide variety of forms depending on the individual. Take Jeff for example, a self professed "monster-chops guitar player" who represents half of a successful prog-metal band. To him, the idea of playing music strictly for personal pleasure versus serious practice is more a bad habit than anything, "It's junk food," he says. "It's like eating Doritos, you know? It's really the difference between reading David Foster Wallace versus reading Stephen King… not that I like reading Stephen King…"

CHAPTER 2
TRENDS AMONG AUTOMUSICANTS

Survey Data and Trends

One cornerstone of my research for this project is a survey of my design that circulated online in the fall of 2014. While recognizing the shortcomings of relying on survey data in an ethnographic project, I consider the use of a survey in this case to be a necessary evil. Surveys are inherently reductive, leading, impersonal, and quantitative, all characteristics I generally strive to avoid. However, given the lack of substantive information available about the subject at hand I have found the survey results surprisingly useful. The reduction of these diverse and interesting people to mere numbers does great disservice to the myriad of individual personalities, behaviors, and practices; however, given the timeframe and scope of this project this reduction is necessary in order to examine any trends on a larger scale than a case-by-case basis. While this chapter deals largely with survey data, I will do my best to ground my findings in the voices of my informants, be they individuals I've interviewed or by way of their responses to the optional short answer questions at the conclusion of the online survey.

The survey, which can be found in its entirety in Appendix 1, has been carefully crafted to avoid the pitfalls for which they could be criticized. In designing the survey it was important to me to strike a balance between the following categories of questions:

1. Quantitative multiple-choice questions that allow for simple yet fair data collection facilitating easy analysis and data manipulation on the back end.

2. Multiple-choice questions whose answers allow for a certain amount of subjective interpretation on the part of the respondent (e.g. responses such as "often," "sometimes," "rarely," and "never" that allow for the individual to respond relative to their own behavior)
3. Short answer questions that allow for more descriptive, nuanced, ethnographic answers. The short answers were necessarily optional to ensure for maximum response/submission rate; 25 of 178 respondents elected not to answer half or more of these optional questions. Had these been obligatory it is unlikely these individuals would have completed the survey.

These types of questions utilized in tandem can present valuable information about informants that only hundreds of hours of interviews could produce. Furthermore when the survey responses are used in conjunction with follow-up interviews of survey respondents and other informants, a more nuanced picture begins to emerge. It should be stressed again that this survey was not intended to measure the prevalence of automusication within the general population, or even within a particular subset of that population, but simply to assess the sorts of behaviors and beliefs engaged in by individuals who self-identify as "solitary music-makers."

The age of participants ranged from 17 to 89 with an average age of about 36 and a mean age of 28. While the majority of US states are represented by at least one participant, the majority of individuals are from Massachusetts. This is not altogether surprising considering the network of friends and acquaintances that helped me disseminate the survey online. Of the 178 individuals who took the survey, only 10 individuals disagreed with or remained neutral on the statement "music is an important part of my life," with the

overwhelming majority of respondents strongly agreeing. A distribution of these findings is shown in Figure 4. The majority of respondents indicated that they are non-musicians, music enthusiasts, or casual musicians. This supports the basic finding that making music is a valued and meaningful activity, validating my initial hypothesis about music making being more widespread and accessible than it is often credited as being by musicians and music scholars who place the utmost importance on musical training and education. While the data presented in this table serves to show basic responses where real meaning can be derived from the survey is by analyzing each respondent's answers in relation to their other answers.

I have seen a number of trends arise from my fieldwork that I will discuss in detail throughout this chapter, though it is important to remember that while trends may exist the individualized nature of automusication nearly ensures that there will be numerous exceptions to each. This chapter will focus on four broad areas outlining the major themes and trends I have discovered through analysis of survey data and follow-up interviews with survey participants:

1. The use of the voice
2. The importance of location, especially the car
3. Using music to affect personal emotions
4. The complex relationships between practice, play, and skill

To conclude, various issues related to social anxieties will be explored, functioning to transition the exploration of automusication into the case studies in Chapter 3. Since the beginning of this project I have spoken with a number of people who seem to stigmatize automusication, whether as a behavior for only those who are afraid to play in front of

Survey Results for "A Survey of Solitary Music-Makers"

Questions	Least Experienced		⟷	Most Experienced		Least Experienced		⟷	Most Experienced		Average	Median	Standard Deviation
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5			
On a scale of 1-5 how musically experienced do you consider yourself?	15	23	49	56	35	8.4%	12.9%	27.5%	31.5%	19.7%	3.4	4	1.19
	Strongly Disagree		⟷	Strongly Agree		Strongly Disagree		⟷	Strongly Agree				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5			
I generally prefer to make music with other people.	15	24	54	59	26	8.4%	13.5%	30.3%	33.1%	14.6%	3.3	3	1.14
I consider the time I spend making music alone to be "practice."	37	41	47	34	19	20.8%	23.0%	26.4%	19.1%	10.7%	2.8	3	1.28
When making music alone my primary aim is to improve my abilities.	32	42	49	32	23	18.0%	23.6%	27.5%	18.0%	12.9%	2.8	3	1.28
A primary motivation for making music with others is social engagement.	13	30	41	56	38	7.3%	16.9%	23.0%	31.5%	21.3%	3.4	4	1.21
I will change the way I make music when I know that others are watching or listening.	18	16	24	75	45	10.1%	9.0%	13.5%	42.1%	25.3%	3.6	4	1.24
I am generally afraid of performing in front of others.	41	35	31	40	31	23.0%	19.7%	17.4%	22.5%	17.4%	2.9	3	1.43
I would usually be embarrassed for others to see or hear me when I am making music alone.	41	37	33	45	22	23.0%	20.8%	18.5%	25.3%	12.4%	2.8	3	1.36
How well I know someone impacts how comfortable I am with them hearing me make music.	12	25	31	64	46	6.7%	14.0%	17.4%	36.0%	25.8%	3.6	4	1.20
The types of music I make when alone differ from the types of music I make with others.	21	23	44	62	28	11.8%	12.9%	24.7%	34.8%	15.7%	3.3	4	1.22
When I make music alone it is usually because I lack the opportunity to make that kind of music with others.	46	52	32	33	15	25.8%	29.2%	18.0%	18.5%	8.4%	2.5	2	1.28
I often make music alone strictly for my own enjoyment	3	10	25	61	79	1.7%	5.6%	14.0%	34.3%	44.4%	4.1	4	0.97
Music is an important part of my life.	1	2	7	24	144	0.6%	1.1%	3.9%	13.5%	80.9%	4.7	5	0.64
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often				
Do you sing in the shower?	25	43	63	47		14.0%	24.2%	35.4%	26.4%			Sometimes	1.00
Do you sing in the car?	3	11	64	100		1.7%	6.2%	36.0%	56.2%			Often	0.69
If singing in the car or the shower, do you sing along with the radio?	12	21	68	76		6.7%	11.8%	38.2%	42.7%			Sometimes	0.89
Do you sing, hum, or whistle absent-mindedly?	2	20	67	89		1.1%	11.2%	37.6%	50.0%			Sometimes	0.73
Do you ever improvise?	10	35	59	74		5.6%	19.7%	33.1%	41.6%			Sometimes	0.91
Do you ever audio or video record yourself when making music alone?	64	51	36	27		36.0%	28.7%	20.2%	15.2%			Rarely	1.07
If so, do you ever share that recording with others?	85	46	25	17		47.8%	25.8%	14.0%	9.6%			Rarely	1.01

Figure 4

others, for those who have no friends, or for those with no developed musical skills with which to maintain a social musical life. While there can be no doubt that some people choose to make music alone for those reasons, I think that the survey results resoundingly dismiss the assumption that all automusicants do so. Answers to questions such as "I am generally afraid to play in front of others" cut widely across demographics and there is no suggestion that those who are afraid to play for others engage in automusication any more or less frequently than their more social counterparts. Furthermore, the ways in which people chose to automusicate vary widely and frequently deviate from what might be expected from an individual given their musical background. This said, there a trend that some kind of anxiety is often related to automusication in a number of cases.

I will present these trends by way of examples from a number of informants. My hope is that the voices of these unique individuals not only aid in illustrating my points about broader trends among automusicants, but will also serve to demonstrate the plurality of practices and meanings automusication assumes. Mary,[21] like the rest of those quoted in this chapter, is an individual who took the survey and indicated she would be willing to participate in follow-up interviews. She finds great release in singing, placing particular value in the lyrics. "I do find it cathartic to… just like sing these melodies that are intertwined with lyrics that are like such deep thoughts, but if you were to just say them to someone they're so simple most of the time. I don't know it's just like a release for my soul to just like say these things that are so true for me also." Not everyone is quite as reverent

[21] A pseudonym

as Mary, however. When asked why he sings along to the radio while painting in his studio Jeff opines, "It's just boring as fuck to be a fine artist, dude…"

The Power of the Voice

The primacy of the voice in the human musical experience cannot be understated.[23] Heather enjoys singing's spontaneity and immediacy: "It's very much an in-the-moment thing, I'm not worrying about the past, I'm not thinking about what I have to do this evening, I'm just singing." Not surprisingly, the vast majority of my informants use their voice to make music in one way or another yet few of these individuals consider themselves "vocalists" or "singers" in any performative way. Of the 178 survey participants 140 checked the box indicating that "singing or rapping" is a part of their musical life. In actuality I believe this number is rather low; when I followed up with survey participants in interviews and inquired more directly about the use of their voice about half of those interviewed who had not indicated they sing confirmed that they do in fact sing or rap on occasion, even if just along to the radio. As we will see vocal automusication ranges from the most casual music making to seeking serious personal and spiritual growth. Jana says of singing, "The idea that I could make any sound and everything was acceptable really helped unlock my love of music and singing."

For many the use of their voice for making music is restricted to the context of automusication for one reason or another. These reasons vary, but two themes emerge: embarrassment and permissibility. In direct contrast to playing an instrument, an

[23] The quintessential exploration of this is of course Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 504–10.

impersonal extension of the body, the voice holds special meaning and significance for many of my informants. Nevin, a classical, alt-country, and folk violist reports, "There's a little extra piece you can get from [singing] that you don't get when you have to use an external instrument." The voice is so highly personal, the quintessential expression of identity and self, that for some the pressures of sharing their singing voice are too much. Many informants relayed to me sentiments to the effect of "I don't have a good voice," "singing makes me embarrassed," or even "I hate my voice." These comments come from individuals across a wide range of levels of musical ability, from untrained musicians to professional instrumentalists. This is not a kind of performance anxiety but instead an unwillingness to share because their voice is not, in their estimation, "good enough." It is worth noting that none of the individuals I spoke to who rap shared this kind of embarrassment, hitting on a key distinction between singing and other vocalizations such as speaking, rapping, or humming.

This is elucidated particularly well by Molly, a viola professor. She is also self-conscious about her voice and chooses not to sing in public, although she will often sing along with the classical music she listens to in the car. Additionally, Molly uses a lot of singing in her practice to help realize the ideal musicality of the phrase while unencumbered by technical difficulties of her instrument. "I don't like to sing. I have a range of about five notes so, you know… and my voice is, I mean my speaking voice is pretty low but my singing voice is even lower and I just don't really like my voice. I feel like I have a weak voice so I don't like to sing, I don't like for other people to hear me sing." Although she is a professional violist and teacher at the collegiate level Molly struggles with performance anxiety related to playing viola in public, a situation she has come to cope

with through the use of beta-blockers, but this performance anxiety is not a significant factor in her decision not to sing in front of others. What is particularly interesting is that even despite her performance anxiety when playing viola, Molly is a strong, confident, and self-assured public speaker.

Similar to Molly, Clare faces no uncertain embarrassment of her own singing voice. Like many of my informants Clare leads several distinct musical lives; while her social musical life takes the form of producing various types of electronic music, playing hand percussion in drum circles, and DJing, Clare also automusicates by singing in the shower and singing while playing ukulele in her apartment. "I grew up singing in church a lot and really liked that but now really, really do not like to sing in public but still very much enjoy singing so it is a way to indulge that basically." Her case is one that serves to shed some light on the importance of the voice as a projection of identity. Clare is transgender and is self-conscious about use of her voice in public. She has had some vocal training to help feminize her voice and while this has helped to make her more comfortable with her own speaking voice she still doesn't like to sing in public because she is afraid of not passing.

> I guess it's worth mentioning I'm transgender and started transitioning about two years ago so that's a big part of my vocal anxiety stuff and why I don't like to sing in public. And that's something where it like, it turned me off from singing a lot even by myself, just not liking the sound of my voice when I sang – my singing voice is actually pretty deep…

Despite not singing in public Clare has become increasingly comfortable with her voice, even singing in front of her girlfriend on occasion. She very clearly articulates the ways in which the voice is tied to identity (gender or otherwise), which further differentiates singing from playing. "With the voice thing it's so tied into gender stuff and how people see you as a person and how they gender you, whereas the inability to play ukulele has nothing

to do with that so it's sort of like, 'okay well if you judge me for that that's fine, I don't claim to be a good ukulele player (laughs).'" This equation of voice and self, or vocal quality and self-worth, while amplified in Clare's case, is not uncommon for many of my informants.

Needless to say not everyone is anxious about people hearing their singing voice and choice to save singing for private becomes more an issue of time and place. James is a composer and jazz saxophonist who I've spoken with about the positive physical effects of vocalization. "The radio was stolen from my car a while ago 'cause… it's a whole story, but anyways I don't have a radio so I sing a lot when I'm driving because I have nothing else to do. I do a lot of Tuvan throat singing, you know the overtone stuff? I'll just do that, just for fun, because it sounds good to me. So I do that mostly to entertain myself while I'm driving." James enjoys the physical feeling once a harmonic has been "locked into;" the change in vibrations of his head, neck, and chest feels good. While primarily reserved for the privacy of the car, James has demonstrated this singing to his roommate and they have even sung together on longer car trips. However given how "strange" the sounds of overtone singing are to most people, this kind of singing remains a primarily private affair.

Unlike the other informants discussed thus far, Jana does a lot of singing with other people. She is currently part of a community of vocal improvisers and grew up in a Mennonite community where there was lots of singing, albeit only in group, church related settings. When Jana began singing with her current community of vocalists everything changed for her. "The improvising, it was with other people, but it changed my solo life as well because I would be walking down the street and I would just find myself humming more and I didn't feel like I had to be quiet all the time." Still, Jana reserves certain practices for private. "I am open and vulnerable with others, but I keep something private for myself

because I really want it to be about a musical connection with others." Like many other informants Jana highly values the social musical activities in her life, which in some ways makes their automusication rather significant.

The freedom of expression afforded by automusication is paramount to Jana who will often use it as a space to experiment with sounds before bringing those to a group setting. Additionally the social restrictions on things such as loudness are mitigated.

> When I'm all by myself and I know that nobody can hear me I feel a lot freer to explore kind of grittier textures you know like "oh, I'm interested in… Tibetan throat singing" but obviously if you don't know how to do that it sounds pretty ridiculous to try but when I'm all by myself I feel like I can explore like some kind of more full body sounds that are powerful and loud.

This is similar to the case of James discussed above, not just insofar as they are both engage in overtone singing but that their choice to reserve that singing for automusication is in large part due to its perceived impermissibility in social contexts. This mentality is certainly not limited to throat singing, but many individuals will deem a particular style of vocalization as "out-of-bounds" for a public or social setting.

Jana's automusication also serves as a way to achieve similar physical satisfaction to that of James. Although this is not the expressed purpose of her singing, the benefit is profound and in some ways deeply spiritual. While describing what can happen while experimenting vocally she echoes some of the sentiments James has about these positive physical benefits of vocalizing:

> I might get into some specific sounds that like might make me cry or make my eyes water because I've tapped into some part of my body that was maybe a little shut down. I really think that… it sounds really hippie-dippy or whatever but I feel like the vibrations that hit certain points will all of a sudden unlock something. That doesn't happen all the time, but when it does I know I haven't been singing enough.

Although this kind of experience has happened in the presence of others before Jana reports that it mostly happens when she is singing alone, in large part by design. “Those moments when I hit those chords inside myself, most of the time I’m just by myself and I don’t let people see that.” The idea that a part of one’s self can and should be kept private is perhaps a bit obvious, but it is important to recognize that for many people this extends to the ways they chose to make music. Jana is far from being alone in that regard!

While in some ways Jana’s profound experiences with vocal automusication, many of my informants engage in more casual yet still meaningful singing; Tom raps in his car, Mary sings show tunes at home, Larry[25] sings Whitney Houston in the shower, Heather plays ukulele and sings in her bedroom. Elizabeth is a classical saxophonist but enjoys singing along to pop music in private. “I think it makes me feel a little bit more involved with what’s going on musically when I can sing along to something. I think it makes it more enjoyable even if you’re just singing along to it randomly, that way you’re not just sitting back and enjoying but participating.” The idea that singing along provides a more meaningful engagement with music than simply listening is echoed by many of my informants.

Nevin an “alt-country,” classical, and folk violist describes singing along to Jesus Christ Superstar in the car as “I guess it’s a change to show-off for myself or something… For the stuff I know really well I find myself wishing that it was a “Music Minus One”[26] kind

[25] A pseudonym

[26] The brand name for a series of popular sheet music editions of single instrumental parts from famous classical works that come with a recording of the entire work without the one part provided by the sheet music (e.g. sheet music for the cello part to Schubert’s “Trout Quintet” with a partner CD that is a recording of every part except the cello part). Also often used to refer to the type of play-along format in general. See their website at

of thing so that I could do more of my own thing cause whoever else was singing would be out of the way." There are a number of ways that my informants conceive of themselves in relation to music to which they are singing along. While Nevin sees himself as functioning in place of the singer on the recording Melissa feeds off of and reacts to the other vocalist.

> Yeah I am trying to fit in with them. Again, I am a terrible, terrible singer and have probably never hit a note vocally in my life, but I try to emulate the singer's notes, usually their tone and emotion as well, mimic accents or odd pronunciations, I tend to be a bit more dramatic as well, add more emotional flourishes.

Melissa, a veterinarian with little musical training who enjoys singing for herself on occasion, finds that singing along with recordings opens up something of a fantasy space. This concept of fantasy is a major theme among my informants who automusicate, particularly among those who do so along with a recording. In Melissa's case, "If it is a song I like technical-wise, like if admire the singer, I might fantasize that I could sing that well." The diversity of ways individuals enter a fantasy space by automusicating is extraordinary, however the core function of the fantasy is typically to grant the individual skills, performance opportunities, or even identities that they are otherwise unable to access. Despite being a classically trained vocalist Mary mostly sings musical theater by herself, as well as some indie-pop such as Ingrid Michelson and Allie Moss. Mary will sometimes fantasize about performing that material in a low-key setting such as karaoke. The change of pace that these "lighter" musical styles provide to contrast the serious art music she spends most of her time studying, performing, and listening to. She typically sings alone in her car or apartment and enjoys finding and improvising harmonies along with music. Additionally the lyrics of these songs are of major importance to her. Both the abilities to

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http://www.musicminusone.com, or the jazz method book equivalent by Jamey Aebersold: http://www.jazzbooks.com/

improvise harmonies and to relate to and understand the lyrics are things that are not feasible with classical music.

Negotiating Location and Space

Mary's automusication is in part driven by the social constraints she feels govern the acceptability of singing around others, demonstrating in part how individuals use automusication to work around various societal pressures. "I guess it's like a time and place type thing. I work with a girl who will sing at work all the time and I don't really think it's appropriate I guess, to be belting it out at work." In contrast to the girl she works with in her office, Mary prefers to restrict her singing, whether practicing or simply for pleasure, to home. It is in this environment where she is the most comfortable and isolated, allowing her to sing more freely and without preoccupation.

> I practice when I know my upstairs neighbors aren't around because when I practice that's when the mistakes come out and I'm pretty self-conscious in that way and I try to make sure that there's no one around. And when I practice at school when I have to I put a scarf over the practice room window so that even if someone can hear me they don't know who it is.

There are clearly a few things that matter to Mary when she wants to sing alone: she needs a physical space unto herself, prefers aural isolation (though is willing to function without it if need be), and if not aurally isolated she needs visual isolation. I realize this example brings up issues about whether or not practice can or should be considered automusication, but this will be addressed later in this section.

As we will continue to see, the ways in which individuals conceive of their own private space varies significantly. Positions on the issue of what constitutes a solitary environment can be reduced to two major camps:

1. Those who require only a physical space unto themselves
2. Those who need both physical and aural isolation from others

There are obviously complexities to both cases with each subdivided into a number of more nuanced positions. For those who require only a separate physical space, which usually takes the form of a bedroom or practice room, there is also the issue of visual isolation. For example, James doesn't mind being seen when he is in a practice room. "I'm not the kind of guy that puts the jacket over the window in the door so that nobody can see me, I don't really care about that so much." About ⅔ of the informants I've discussed this with are like James and take no real umbrage at being seen while the remaining ⅓ are adamant that they be both visually and physically isolated. In the case of Mary above she certainly falls into the category of requiring both physical and visual isolation, at least in the absence of true aural isolation. It should be noted that many of those who don't mind being seen while playing alone have spent serious time in practice rooms although this is clearly by no means universal; any of us who have ever walked through the practice room hallways of a music school are surely familiar with the coats, hats, scarves, stray sheets of music, and even music stands that are used to cover the practice room windows. See the case studies presented in Chapter 3 for a more in-depth analysis of the ways those individuals conceive of solitude.

Furthermore, individuals who prefer to be in physical and aural isolation can be divided into different camps. Molly, much like Mary prefers to practice at home. "I would prefer to not be overheard while practicing and I actually do most of my practicing at home for that reason." However for many the condition of their aural isolation depends entirely

on the context of their greater environment. Molly describes a few different situations in which aural isolation may or may not matter as much to her.

> It depends who's overhearing me. I mean you know when you're in music school and you're practicing in a practice room like everybody can hear you and you sort of get use to that and you're not really aware that somebody is there. But one summer when I was doing my doctorate I was house-sitting for my viola professor and he came home for two days and it was really kind of unnerving to practice and know that he's my teacher and he can hear me practice.

Jana describes a similar situation when recording herself singing when she travels back to her old Mennonite community.

> I think it probably has a lot to do with just like my personality and the unique situation I grew up in… lots of siblings, wanting to be heard but not always having space, it's like it's nobody's fault. Most of my work has been done outside of – like living on my own and making new friends, reshaping who I was, and kind of claiming my voice for myself, but then when I go back into other kind of situations it's like this feeling of pressure a little bit… I was just trying to record at my family's house and I knew that no one could *really* hear me but they might just hear me a little bit and it was super frustrating, like I felt like I couldn't… like I don't know it was just really *wimpy* (laughs)!

Underlying this is the notion that presence of certain people within earshot can affect an individual's music making in important ways. Perhaps it is obvious that Jana would be more hesitant to sing around her family, away from whom she has cultivated her love of vocalizing, but the fact remains that for many of my informants these conceptions of space and isolation are extended to the potential presence of specific individuals. Yet Heather, on the other hand, has no concerns about particular individuals overhearing her; instead she is just happy to be isolated in general when playing ukulele in her apartment. "I'm comfortable, I'm alone, my landlords can't hear me through the wall (laughs), I have on occasion gone in the summer and played in a park but that's not really where my head's at, I'd rather be

by myself." Being overheard (or even the possibility or idea of being overheard) makes people self-conscious and uncomfortable enough that it actively detracts from the experience of automusication. If there is a lingering notion that someone might be eavesdropping many of my informants feel distracted enough that they cannot focus as completely on the musical sounds they are producing.

The aural isolation camp is particularly interesting because there are those for whom the physical aspect of isolation begins to break down. Melissa, who has told me "I almost never sing in front of others except under certain circumstances" describes those situations in which she might sing in the presence of others. "Drunk usually, or if I am in a large enough crowd where I feel like my voice won't be singled out as bad, or if everyone is messing around and not trying to sing well I feel more comfortable. I would never be the only one singing in front of another person or people." This raises some important questions as to what exactly constitutes automusication. Is singing along to the radio truly singing "by yourself?" Does the presence of other *sounds* necessarily invalidate claims that a particular instance of music making can be considered automusication? While I originally defined automusication briefly as "making music by and for oneself" I believe it is too easy to dismiss situations in which some combination of the physical, visual, or aural aspects of solitude are lacking as categorically not being automusication. For example while it is true that in the majority of cases the physical presence of others alters individual behavior and places individuals within an explicitly social context I believe there are exceptions. If you're in a crowd of other revelers singing lyrics along to a song at a concert can this be considered automusication? Surely the act of

singing in this context is not necessarily a performance for others, but how much does the presence of others and the addition of your voice to a collective sound matter to defining automusication? Is singing with others necessarily a participatory mode of singing even if the singer is so absorbed in their own experience that the presence of others is entirely inconsequential? The answer is unfortunately unsatisfying; it matters from case to case. For some I've spoken to there are particular moments in time, even in the presence of others, that all that individual's actions are done exclusively for themselves; certain states of mind allow an individual to tune out various aspects of their surroundings, including other people. This will be explored more fully in Chapter 4 in my discussions of flow and trance.

One related trend that emerges from my research is that some form of other noise is often helpful for individuals to feel a sense of security great enough to automusicate. The existence of a "curtain of sound" to hide behind or within helps individuals who are particularly self-conscious or shy. While one can still hear their own voice clearly this curtain of sound provides a sense of comfort by buffering the sound of their music making for real or imagined eavesdroppers. I hesitate to call it "background noise" because in cases like singing along to a record the sounds are very much in the foreground of one's mind, but instances of background noise aiding in automusication certainly exist; people tend to be most comfortable singing, for example, with the sound of running water in the shower and especially with the sound of road noise while driving in the car.

The car as a location for automusication, aside from making the "auto-" prefix considerably more confusing, is something that comes up over and over when talking to my informants. Similar to practice rooms clustered close together and crowded, noisy concerts,

the car allows individuals to hide in plain sight and sound. It is another example of the obfuscation of a single voice among many. The car's appeal as a locus for automusication is essentially twofold: the relative anonymity it provides by way of physical space, speed, and road noise, and the thoroughly engrained habit of listening to music in the car. With Molly the feeling of security provided by the car and its noise is not of particular concern. In line with this she is unabashedly skeptical of the practice of singing in the shower. "I don't sing in the shower. I've always found that to be such a weird thing – why would you sing in the shower?!" Therefore the convenience and habit of listening to music in the car is what appeals most to Molly. "A lot of times the only time I listen to music is in the car because I don't have time when I'm home, but if I'm in the car or I'm listening to music at home and it's something I know well often I will find myself singing along with it as long as nobody else is there." On the other hand there is Corey is an amateur guitarist who enjoys singing in the car specifically because of its anonymity. "I love driving and part of the reason is I can play music as loud as I want to and you know listen to whatever I want and I really- I can't listen to music in the car alone without either drumming along to it or singing it." Not only does the act of singing or drumming along to music in the car provide a kind of entertainment while driving which can otherwise become monotonous, but the freedom of musical choices it affords is essential. In Corey's case, he uses the opportunity of being alone in a car to actively listen to and engage with music that he might otherwise be embarrassed to reveal to others.

> I'm generally like an alternative rock and pop kind of guy. I mean I don't really like a lot of mainstream pop, you know, but like my guilty pleasure last week was I like burned a hole in my brain with the new Taylor Swift album [1989] which is awesome to sing along to. I feel really silly as a 27 year old man driving down the highway singing these Taylor Swift songs, like I didn't want anyone to look at my car and know that, you know… (laughs)

The idea that automusication allows individuals access to music they would otherwise be unable to engage with for one reason or another is a persistent trope. The reasons they might be unable to engage with the particular music of their choice obviously vary considerably based on their identity, social situation, musical abilities, and other factors. While Corey is simply embarrassed by the music he choses to engage with while in the car, Tom points to more serious racial issues that could arise from his engagement with rap should he chose to do so in public.

Tom thoughtfully describes his habits of rapping in the car, illustrating several different points about automusication: the convenience and security of singing music in the car, the ways in which the car functions as a private space even in a public area, and the freedom that private space affords him to explore musical material he would otherwise be unable to engage with. He says, "I rap a lot in the car – there was another time I was rapping Method Man and I was like next to a car with a black woman who caught me like doing that just kind of laughed." As he has clearly given this a lot of thought here is an extended section of one of our interviews where Tom eloquently describes his reasoning for restricting rapping his favorite songs to exclusively while he is alone.

> "Gimme The Loot" was the first rap song I really liked; it was how I learned I liked rap. I learned all the words to it and in college me and my friends would hang out and we would listen to "Gimme The Loot" sometimes and I would like rap the whole thing and they always thought it was kind of funny because like, I knew all that and I'm this nerdy white guy. One time my one friend brought one of his friends who was black who I didn't know and was like, "Dude! You've gotta do 'Gimme The Loot!'" and I was just like… "Uuuuuuhhhh *all* of it?..." There a weird racial thing happening there where the joke is that I'm a nerdy white dude performing a black gangster song which is just inherently funny, and it's funny in a way that's self-deprecating to me, because the real joke I think is I'm not "cool" or "real" in any kind of way that that music presents itself to be, so me knowing all the words is like a joke… If I'm just rapping alone in my car I genuinely don't think that's problematic. I think that I'm just engaging with music and I'm also

> acknowledging the fact that if I want to engage with this music that way I'm allowed to do it, but I need to do it in private. That's just for me. Don't show it to people because that's when it turns into a minstrel show… Even if I'm doing it really sincerely and I am – I'm not like "Oh ha-ha this is so funny," no, I just really like this song and this is how I roll when songs I like are on: I sing them! – but I think if you're performing that then it never won't be about the joke of a white nerd acting black which I think carries some pretty inherently problematic things.

Music as an Affective Tool

The use of music as an affective tool is another persistent theme among automusicants. While a number of my informants relate that they do not actively use music as a way to affect their mood, many of them do, either intentionally or incidentally. For example, Clare is a compulsive rhythmic tapper and always likes to be doing something active and rhythmic. She finds great satisfaction in externalizing that rhythmic drive she feels inside. "There's something really satisfying about that, you know just that tactile sensation of making sounds happen." Being able to express herself rhythmically is clearly pleasurable and can affect her mood in a positive way. For Corey, automusicating becomes alternately expressive and meditative. When singing, particularly a song with lyrics that are emotive or that he particularly connects to he tends to have a more emotional response. "A lot of times if I'm singing alone it's either like an empathetic experience, almost like if they were lines I was delivering in a movie, like I would try to connect them to what the person who's singing is feeling… It's definitely an active connection with it. Not necessarily a creative one but an imitative one, but not merely sonically, it's imitative emotionally as well." To contrast this, when he is just playing guitar his experience tends toward the meditative. "You know like, 'I haven't really picked this up in a while and I'd really like to do something just fun' or something to do to kind of take my mind off things, and those are

usually- if I can really get something interesting out of that those are the most rewarding personal musical experiences when I, I know it's kind of cliché, but kind of get lost in what I'm playing." Numerous informants report that there is often something meditative about automusication and they can lose track of time or clear their minds of everything else. As Corey puts it, "The whole meditative aspect of it is that I'm just thinking about [playing] and nothing else." This too will be addressed in Chapter 4 when I discuss flow and trance. Corey continues "I don't worry about how good it sounds, I don't worry about if it's cohesive or if it's like presentable to another person, but just you know if it sounds interesting to me and the sounds are either cathartic or they're somehow soothing. Those are pretty rewarding experiences when that happens." While many individuals agree with Corey that these experiences are truly rewarding, when this change in emotion happens incidentally, others actively seek out music as a way to alter their emotional state.

Such is the case with Mary who seeks out emotional release in the pop songs she finds meaningful. "I do find it cathartic to… just like sing these melodies that are intertwined with lyrics that are like such deep thoughts, but if you were to just say them to someone they're so simple most of the time. I don't know it's just like a release for my soul to just like say these things that are so true for me also." Somewhat along these lines Melissa points to the raw emotion of the songs she is singing as a way to affirm, reinforce, or alter her own emotions. "If it's something that is really emotional or has great lyrics that speak to me I feel that emotion more strongly." As an example of this in action she describes how she will use music that plays off her mood to help her feel a positive emotional release, even if she is feeling bad. "If I've had a bad day or I'm angry with someone I turn up the music pretty loud and scream along to something that feels raw and

emotional. I think that is partially a physical thing too, giving me something to scream about that feels productive and not just angry." These issues of emotion, which could be considered emotional imitation, emotional emulation, and emotional projection, shape the automusicant's subject position in relation to the musical material in interesting ways. For example, Heather describes the way she might conceive of her relationship to the artist she is singing along with.

> Heather: I don't really see myself with the artist or anything like that. I think it's almost like the artist doesn't exist and I am that person feeling those emotions and kind of getting at it that way. It's not like I imagine myself as Taylor Swift when I'm singing along to a Taylor Swift song or that I am the person feeling that emotion…
> RB: It's like Taylor Swift is *you*?
> Heather: Yes, exactly! (laughs)

This example is rather unique in its exact positioning of the automusicant and the recorded artist, however it is a good example to demonstrate the wide range of relationships with the recorded material that my informants have. Despite specifically trying to establish some trend about how automusicants conceive of themselves with relation to the sounds on a recording I kept finding each situation so unique that no trends have emerged.

The Spectrum of Abilities, Practice, and Play

An individual's technical abilities often play a large role in shaping the ways in which they chose to automusicate. This is not quite as obvious as one might think; it is easy to ignorantly dismiss automusication as playing something in private that is not good enough for others to hear. However, automusicants are quite often perfectly capable of performing the music they choose to make privately. This manifests in several ways:

1. Lacking access to a musical community that would allow for their skills to be matched with those of the other musicians, therefore feeling inadequate or too advanced for their collaborators.
2. Being so focused on the music they actively perform that playing another instrument/style serves as an outlet.
3. Feeling inadequate or embarrassed about their own playing and therefore keeping their music making private.
4. Wanting to engage with a musical community that, for whatever reason, they cannot interact with, such as an imagined community and famous or deceased musicians.

Individuals who enjoy singing but lack refined vocal quality or a developed range mostly represent the latter category. Typically some combination of the categories above manifests in the ways any given individual automusicates; for most of my informants automusication takes the form of multiple musical activities. See Corey, who enjoys singing in the car and playing the guitar casually. While he finds his singing embarrassing, Corey talks about how he wants to play guitar socially but has had trouble establishing or joining a group. “There’s always things in the works but nothing has really panned out.” He actively wants to play in groups yet the difficulties of arranging a group of like-minded, similarly skilled individuals has prevented that for a number of years. He isn’t playing with anyone at the moment “but I would love for that to happen.” We could consider Corey to be in the first category regarding his guitar playing, but in the third category regarding his singing.

In contrast to Corey’s case, Jeff is firmly in the second category: automusicating with a secondary musical instrument/style as an outlet for entertainment and relaxation. Jeff

does not automusicate very frequently however he does enjoy playing keyboard. "You know I really just like sitting down with a big-ass polyphonic synthesizer and dicking off." A key aspect of Jeff's automusication is that it exists in dialogue with his more highly technically proficient guitar playing. He allows himself the mental space to automusicate because his abilities to play the keyboard require less "upkeep" than his guitar chops.

> I'm kind of like a monster chops guitar player so my guitar playing is really technical you know like the whole Paul Gilbert shred thing, and I'm not a very competent keyboard player. I can get by but it's a matter of fun, you know? I can relax and listen to sounds when I'm playing the synthesizer and when I'm playing guitar I'm burning through some serious exercises to keep up some really kind of stupid technique shit.

Jeff elaborates on the ways experimenting with a synthesizer is an enjoyable undertaking. "Because I'm an amateur keyboard player I'm really just getting into- it's more of a playground for me. I know enough to really kind of enjoy it but I'm not like a technically accomplished piano player. So really exploring the palette of the instrument and kind of what I can do with that with melodies and chords and stuff like that." While he has the requisite competency to play (and not just aimlessly experiment with) the instrument Jeff is able to have a positive musical experience that differs from his guitar playing because there is no pressure to maintain his fairly basic skills.

In further contrast, Clare provides an example of an automusicant who represents all four categories outlined above. As has been mentioned before about Clare, she is an electronic music producer. She typically produces ambient and noise tracks, however has lately been more open to exploring various styles of EDM (electronic dance music). She has tried collaborating with others on music production, but has found it difficult to match technical competencies and artistic goals with others and therefore does her production work alone. To balance out her production work Clare has also taught herself to play the

ukulele by playing songs by Neutral Milk Hotel. She enjoys playing and singing covers of songs alone in her apartment. As discussed previously she avoids singing in front of other people whenever possible. Although she considers herself an adequate ukulele player, not fantastic but "good enough to get by," she doesn't feel the need to continue improving. As a secondary casual musical outlet she is comfortable with the skills she has; rather than continue to develop skills that would need much practice to maintain she is content to be "good enough."

While Clare is comfortable with her amateur abilities, it should be no surprise that many musicians seek to actively improve and maintain their technical faculties. In line with this, about 85% of survey respondents indicate that they do practice to improve their abilities. For some the act of practicing is unpleasant and tedious, and the alternative is simply "play." The concepts of practice and play are intimately entwined in the act of automusication. As discussed in the previous chapter practice can be considered a subset of automusication and in this way the concept of play is another subset. While many of my informants try to separate their practice and their play when automusicating, their degrees of success are highly variable. For most, practice and play exist on a fluid spectrum and in the case of any given "practice session" or instance of automusication will slide back and forth along it. However, of my informants with a classical music background about 60% report that they will occasionally play music just for pleasure, far lower than groups with different musical training. While many of them have alternative musical outlets, usually singing popular music, there are some who abstain entirely. On the other hand many of my informants who lack any formalized musical training will avoid practice entirely, only playing for pleasure whenever possible. In reality, most individuals I've encountered

maintain some balance of practice and play. For example, Larry, who we will meet in detail in the next chapter, firmly states that he does not play his viola for fun, yet while practicing he derives great pleasure from playing variations of scales.

A common theme among individuals who come to automusication from a place of play is that of exploration or experimentation. Clare's electronic music production comes out of a place of play and she even uses that term to describe it. "A lot of [my approach to producing] comes out of just *play* basically. I can just go in and play around with sounds and samples and synths and just find something that's interesting and then figure out a way to make that into something else, and then figure out what goes with that and expand on it." This is very similar to Tim, a case study from the next chapter who uses his guitar effect pedals to explore new and interesting sounds. Similarly, Jana sees her automusication as a form of play though perhaps even more explicitly so. "I'd say the primary way [I use music alone] is exploration, kind of an investigation. It's like a curious act. It's like seeing what I can come up with and what different sounds my muscles can make."

Then there are those who simply like to play, like Corey. He describes, hitting on the points made previously about practice and abilities. "It's not really any kind of structured thing, like I was never really very good so it's not like I exercise scales or anything like that. I mean I kind of go back to old soloing on like pentatonic scales you know, that are like fun to play around with." This kind of "noodling" is extraordinarily common, particularly among those who play guitar. Playing pentatonic solos on an instrument like the guitar is fairly easy to learn while at the same time being disproportionately sonically gratifying. Heather automusicates in a similar way; when she plays the ukulele in her bedroom she is open to learning new skills, though does not consider that practice necessarily.

> A lot of what I do on my ukulele is you know learning pop songs and just singing and playing. Stuff with simple chords: Taylor Swift, Bruno Mars, that kind of thing. I tend to look for music with simple chords and I kind of look at it as a learning opportunity, you know, if there's a song I want to play that has one new chord I'll go and learn that new chord or whatever. But I tend to just play what I like unless it's way too difficult and then I kind of put it on the shelf for later.

The practice of learning a new skill or technique on the fly because an individual wants to play a certain song or produce a specific musical idea is quite common. In fact the majority of individuals I've spoken with pick up most of their skills this way, one chord at a time. Indie-folk guitarist Sean echoes many of Heather's sentiments:

> I don't have a set practice routine of any sort. I mean sometimes I'll think of "oh I'm not good at fingerpicking so I'm going to learn a fingerpicking song" um, but yeah I don't have a rigorous routine, the thing I've put the most hardcore practice time into is probably actually the production aspect of things, trying to get that to sound a certain way... I don't really sit down and say "I'm going to practice, this is what I'm going to do."

It is important to recognize that despite maintaining that they don't practice, many of these individuals are still strengthening their musical abilities through automusication and play. It's likely that the strides they make forward are much smaller than if they would decide to practice religiously, but that kind of thing is not for everyone; as I've demonstrated previously some people are simply content with their skills.

To illustrate the opposite end of the spectrum Molly exclusively practices when playing viola. As a performer and teacher who deals exclusively in classical music, specifically new contemporary art music, she requires a great deal of focus when practicing. Her is how she explained her history with practicing and the resulting practice philosophies she developed:

> When I was 15 I got tendonitis and had to stop playing for a whole summer and the doctor who treated me who's like the best doctor for treating injured musicians in the world gave me a very strict regimen to coming back to

> practicing. I was allowed to practice two minutes a day, then four minutes a day, then six minutes a day, and with such a small amount of time you have to be incredibly efficient. And ever since then you never feel like you have enough time to practice and if I have time to practice I'm going to use it productively to get something done and for me, just playing for fun, I'm not getting anything done. I also feel like "playing for fun" is not actually fun for me, it's not enjoyable because it doesn't sound as good as something that I'm working on really polishing.

Jeff also pretty much only practices when playing the guitar, though he admittedly takes less of a hard line than Molly; even for him practice might turn into playing. "You've got to give yourself enough latitude to get into a creative spot. You kind of need to be disciplined to actually get the work done but at the same time when you're there you need to give yourself the latitude to just kind of explore something." He is of the mindset that there is a substantial amount of "work" that needs to be accomplished when practicing, but that it's important not to stifle the creative impulse when it arises. For Jeff the practicing stops as soon as the creativity begins. "It's usually more about sound stuff I'm just kind of like feeling out a groove and it's not practicing it's just playing there's a big difference between playing and practicing." The pattern demonstrated here of formalized practice gradually shifting into play is another common characteristic of automusication. Nevin takes a similar stance when playing viola. "When I play in private it generally is to practice although that often does lead into playing for fun. I can say I almost never open my case to play just for fun but most times when I practice I end up just improvising or taking out some music I haven't played in a while just to get reacquainted, not with any plans to perform it necessarily." One thing that is important to note here is the significance of playing something without the expressed intention to perform it in a specific setting. This could generally be considered another distinction between practice and play.

I conclude this section by spotlighting one more individual who straddles the gap between practice and play. When he is not composing, James plays saxophone in the concert band at his school and enjoys playing jazz piano when he is alone. Although he practices piano to improve his skills he says, "I just goof around on the piano all the time when I should be practicing, but I kind of mostly just mess around instead mostly with the jazz stuff cause it's easy to noodle with the jazz." Typically James practices about 30 to 40 minutes at a time but remains focused and engaged throughout in stark contrast to the "noodling" described above. It is after the true practicing is over that he begins to play for pleasure. "Usually while I'm doing the noodling it's on tunes that are either really easy or that I know really well like standards. Like "Take The A Train," that's my favorite because there are like five chords in that song and it's in C so I don't have to think a whole lot to sound really good." Despite his efforts to improve, it is significant that when James begins to play for pleasure he doesn't tend to play anything particularly difficult, instead sticking to familiar tunes with easy changes.

Managing Anxieties through Automusication

James never intends to perform any of the tunes he practices on piano. Not only does he have particularly bad performance anxiety, he also harbors a great disdain for those people who "play at parties" and in informal settings because he perceives it as self-indulgent and showy. As far as performance opportunities go, James only ever performs in band concerts in school, mostly because he has to for his degree. He relishes the relative anonymity the large band affords him so performance anxiety is mitigated. James is able to provide himself another "performance" outlet by automusicating. By playing piano by

himself James still gets the satisfaction of playing the music, though without the adverse pressures of a formal performance. Likewise, Mary speaks of the struggles of performance anxiety. "Alone is the best I ever sound. When I'm in front of an audience my technique digresses… I'm in the second year of my master's degree, and I still don't feel comfortable singing in front of people. My stage fright defines too much of my musical life." Mary, who sings primarily art song, takes to automusication to free herself from the crippling pressures she feels when performing in public. Because the demands on classical musicians are so high Mary is able to circumvent not only those demands but also her anxiety by singing pop and musical theater when she is alone. Molly on the other hand has performance anxiety about playing viola that starts to creep into her singing. "I have a limited range and it feels like there's a lot of breaks in there and it's like unstable and it feels like 'I'm a trained musician, I should be able to sing in tune without like having problems finding pitches,' it's not like I can't hear it, it's that I can't, you know, control my voice as I'd like when I sing." As we will continue to see in the following chapter performance anxiety is a very real issue for a lot of musicians, including Chris, one of my case studies. For individuals with performance anxiety automusication frequently provides a safe, stress-free environment for musical expression that these individuals cannot achieve through public performance.

CHAPTER 3
THREE CASE STUDIES IN AUTOMUSICATION

Meet the Automusicants

For the purposes of this chapter I will outline three case studies of automusication I've conducted with my informants Chris, Tim, and Larry. I've chosen to write about these individuals in particular for several reasons. Chris has continued to play piano exclusively in the Western classical tradition yet rarely performs for others; Tim abandoned his conservatory studies of the trombone in preference for heavy metal guitar; Larry is a trained classical violist who is taking a break from performing but likes to sing in the shower, particularly songs by his favorite artist: Whitney Houston. An added bonus is their shared background and training in Western classical music yet ultimately divergent musical paths and interests: These three individuals all exemplify different facets of what it is to automusicate and serve as useful examples of not only the diversity of automusication I've encountered, but ways in which seemingly disparate practices converge and ethnographic trends begin to emerge. I've spent time with all of them interviewing them about their musical backgrounds, habits, preferences, and behaviors, particularly as relates to automusication. It is clear that exactly how and why individuals choose to automusicate is extremely personal and individualized; to understand who they are as musicians and automusicants it is first necessary to get an idea of who they are as people and where they fit into a larger socio-musical context. Automusication serves these three subjects in several different ways: to mediate the social anxieties of performance in Chris' case, to allow for a sense of complete creativity in Tim's, and to allow for an otherwise impossible degree of personal freedom and expression in the case of Larry. Although these three

musicians come at automusication from different perspectives and with seemingly different goals there is clear overlap between the three in how they conceptualize the space they inhabit while automusicating and how that space fits into the larger social environment, yet the reasons they articulate for choosing to automusicate are different. What began to emerge throughout my study is a trend that indicates automusication may be a common way in which individuals negotiate a *stance-on-power*, to use Harris Berger's term.[27] A discussion of Berger's ideas about stance and the way those fit into my own study will follow the case studies.

Case Study I: Chris

"I hate performing so much."

I met Chris five months before he began working with me as an informant about his own automusication. In hindsight it seems no accident that our earliest conversations tended to center around one of his favorite pianists, Glenn Gould. While I too adore Gould, as I got to know Chris I sensed a particularly strong connection Chris feels to Gould not only musically but also personally. One of the reasons for this affinity is Gould's and Chris' mutual adoration of the piano music of J.S. Bach. "I almost exclusively play Bach currently (laughs). Actually yeah – well no – *almost* exclusively. I don't know, I feel like I'm very much in touch with Bach." The desire to connect with a composer and actively engage with their repertoire is something very important to Chris as a musician. In his own words there's "a certain intimacy with the composer and with the piece that I don't think you can get in any other way than hands-on, just playing it."

[27] Berger, *Stance*.

Chris is a pianist trained in the Western classical music tradition and was a graduate student in composition at the time of our interviews. He began his piano studies at age seven and despite eventually placing a primary musical and academic focus on composition, Chris has remained active as a pianist. As a composer, Chris speaks about the difficulties of grappling with the inevitable way one must situate oneself and his works within the entire classical music canon. The importance of this ongoing tradition of "the work" and "repertoire" is paramount to understanding the meanings Chris derives from music. The act of playing music serves for him as a way to meaningfully, yet temporarily, insert himself into, and experience, that continued musical tradition and interact with important historical and aesthetic works of art.

Gould still comes up frequently between us. One thing I've learned through our conversations is that Chris' idolization of Gould is no accident; in 1964, at the age of 32 and the height of his concert career, Gould withdrew from public performance for the rest of his life. In a way, Chris senses a kindred spirit in Gould, as his own thoughts about performing in a traditional concert-hall setting are largely negative as well; to think a concert pianist could abandon the stage and maintain a successful career is an idea he admires very much.

The reason for Chris' self-professed hate of performance stems primarily from the one-shot finality of playing live. The pressure to perform in accordance to the standards of the Western classical music tradition is felt acutely. Between the conventions of performing piano repertoire from memory, the spotlight felt and the high standards of musicality, there is a weight of expectation on Chris' shoulders that becomes hard to bear. "I'm completely incapable of playing my best in a performance. The only time, in a very literal sense, that I can play up to my standard is when I'm completely by myself… I literally can't play well

unless it's just me." For Chris the public performance exists as an inevitability, an unavoidable expectation, which as a pianist he is obligated to satisfy. Yet the idea of having only one chance to do everything perfectly is simply too distracting for Chris to feel as though he can give an effective performance. Put simply, Chris hates to perform publicly, yet continues to.

The undercurrent to all this is that despite not wanting to perform he still prepares and practices as though he will. There is an urge to play music as a personally fulfilling experience, however one that Chris has acknowledged he cannot achieve through performance. "In an ideal world I would be able go on a stage and play in front of an audience the way that I would want to…the way that I could if I were by myself. I would want to do that, I have the desire to share my interpretations… It's kind of depressing actually because I'll finish playing that piece really well just by myself, and I'll think 'I could never do that in front of people.'" While on the one hand he accepts the reality of performance as the expected outcome of his long hours of practice, Chris focuses on the time he spends alone with a piano as his primary outlet for musical expression. What may initially seem like a fairly straightforward case of performance anxiety begins to take on an interesting character when considering his views on private practice and playing.

In essence Chris draws no line between automusication and practice. This is at least in part because Chris only automusicates during practice sessions, wherein the motivations behind his playing are to learn, improve, and refine his playing of a piece. His practice sessions seem to naturally progress (or digress) from the focused and rigorous rehearsal of passages, work with a metronome, and repetitious technical exercises, to as he puts it, "just running things." Chris explains this habit as simply "bad practice" that can ultimately affect

the preparation of the work. By playing works at speed regularly without the necessary attention to perfecting and maintaining the technical faculty required to do so, the quality of performance will deteriorate over time. Despite labeling the tendency to play in such a way as "bad practice," it is while running pieces that Chris derives the most meaningful musical experiences, something he finds only accomplishable in private. Yet even while considering his own automusication a form of bad practice Chris paraphrases Gould, saying "you play the piano with your mind and not your hands. If that holds true- and I think it does honestly- if I'm playing it with my mind then the mistakes that my hands make don't really factor in, when I'm just playing for myself. I'm creating this rendering of the piece and if a little note slip happens in the external conception it doesn't really have an impact on the internal conception." Chris declines to distinguish between practice and automusication, though to me it is clear that while bound together in the same routine the acts of practicing and automusicating are two related yet definitely different things. Although I've come to realize that perhaps the two are not quite as disparate as I once thought, and in fact have a fair amount of overlap "in practice," it is clear that the focus and intent of an individual is decidedly different when playing for pleasure than when playing to refine their skills.

Case Study II: Tim

"I kind of get lost in my sounds."

We're sitting at the dining room table in Tim's apartment as he shows me a Jacob's Ladder that he has just built from spare HVAC parts he brought home from work. I watch in a mixture of terror and genuine amusement as arcs of electricity climb repeatedly between the device's two antennae. It is surprisingly loud. His dog Bailey, a springer spaniel who like

Tim seems to possess an inexhaustible supply of energy and enthusiasm, rushes back and forth between us, his nails clicking and clacking franticly on the hardwood floor. Tim is used to it and mostly ignores his dog's pleas for affection, but I find it hard to resist engaging as Bailey shoves his snout under my forearm again and again. I'm not entirely convinced I'm not about to be electrocuted and perhaps the dog allows me a small amount of escapism from the moment. Positioned against the far wall is a five-octave marimba belonging to Tim's roommate Andre, a classically trained percussionist who is currently out of town auditioning for an orchestral gig in the Midwest. Just over my left shoulder is a drum set tucked into the corner of the room. Both Tim and Bailey's excitement seems to be reaching a fever pitch, and while I haven't yet asked to whom it belongs, I have the feeling it's only a matter of time before the drums are demonstrated upon. Over the sound of the dog, the electrical zapping from the jerry-rigged device, and Tim's boisterous laughter, the third occupant of the flat, Pat, can be heard listening to loud ska music in his room just off the adjoining living room.

Tim is a recently licensed HVAC technician, though I'm at his house to talk about his musical habits, not the new boiler he installed that day and is explaining to me in painful detail. Tim studied trombone at Boston Conservatory for two years in the early 2000s before withdrawing due to "differences with the administration." His first instrument, however, was the electric guitar, and on this visit I've made to interview him I cannot avoid being shown his latest instrument yet again (a black Dean Razorback "Dimebag Darrell" signature model) for what is probably the fourth time. Though he identifies most strongly as an instrumentalist (and at this point more a guitarist than a trombone player), Tim is a consummate showman and never turns down an opportunity to sing some karaoke. His

various musical personae always seem to be equally as voluminous and gregarious as his personality.

In stark contrast to individuals such as Chris, Tim leads a perfectly fulfilling social musical life. One of his current favorite musical activities is performing live on electric guitar with his self-described "progressive post-metal" band Heliotropic. Tim serves as one of the band's two guitarists and remains largely in the background of the group's sound. Where Chris prefers automusication to performance for an audience because of issues relating to performance anxiety, Tim engages in automusication as a means to further develop his technical prowess, compositional processes, and sonic identity, both within and without the band. Here the relationship between "practice" and "automusication" continues to blur.

Tim describes his automusicatory behavior as a phase of his practice sessions, typically situated somewhere in the latter third of his practice. As he describes it, his practice sessions usually begin by working on existing material he plays with the band before moving on to a more experimental phase. During the experimental phase Tim will typically first work on generating new material for the band and improvising with musical ideas which have been germinating for some time. At some point during that phase Tim acknowledges a moment at which he kind of "gets lost" in experimenting with sounds and musical fragments. These ideas are more fragile and less fully formed than those he intends to bring to the band, but provide an important forum for the development of his ever-evolving tone and overall sound.

Flow theory and its relationship to automusication will be explored in detail in Chapter 4, however it will be useful to draw on it briefly here. Figure 5 shows

Csikszentmihalyi's Challenge/Skill graph as presented in Chapter 1 with three points overlaid. The points represent the three primary components to Tim's practice sessions that I have represented as (1) Rehearsal, (2) Composition, (3) Experimentation.[28] The trend from rigorous technical work focused on minute detail (very challenging, actively using underdeveloped skills, pushing a player to their limits) toward a more fluid, holistic and interpretive way of playing (utilizing "automatic" skills mastered through practice, intuitive creativity, exact level of challenge up to performer) is apparent and reflected in the slight leveling off between plots (2) and (3). In a most general sense, a shift from an aroused to a flow musicality can be seen in Chris's practice as well.

Unlike Chris, Tim typically records his practice sessions with the intent of sending his band members the new compositional fragments he develops during the middle phase of his practice. What is of most interest to me, however, is the time spent experimenting that follows the explicitly generative, compositional intent of the middle phase. It is during this stage that Tim is truly playing both by and for only himself; there is never any intention to share this material with anyone, nor is there a more dominant motivation than making music for pleasure. To illustrate the kind of experimentation that occurs during his practice I have transcribed a brief melodic fragment in Figure 6 that Tim utilized as a springboard during this phase. Upon reflection about the session he recorded for me, he was surprised at the length of time he spent on the idea I've transcribed below, giving further credence to his claims of actually "getting lost" in his own sounds.

[28] This reflects Tim's current behavior, specifically regarding his guitar playing. When we discussed his time at Boston Conservatory he described his practice sessions as generally "three quarters practicing and a quarter probably noodling around and being an asshole."

Figure 5

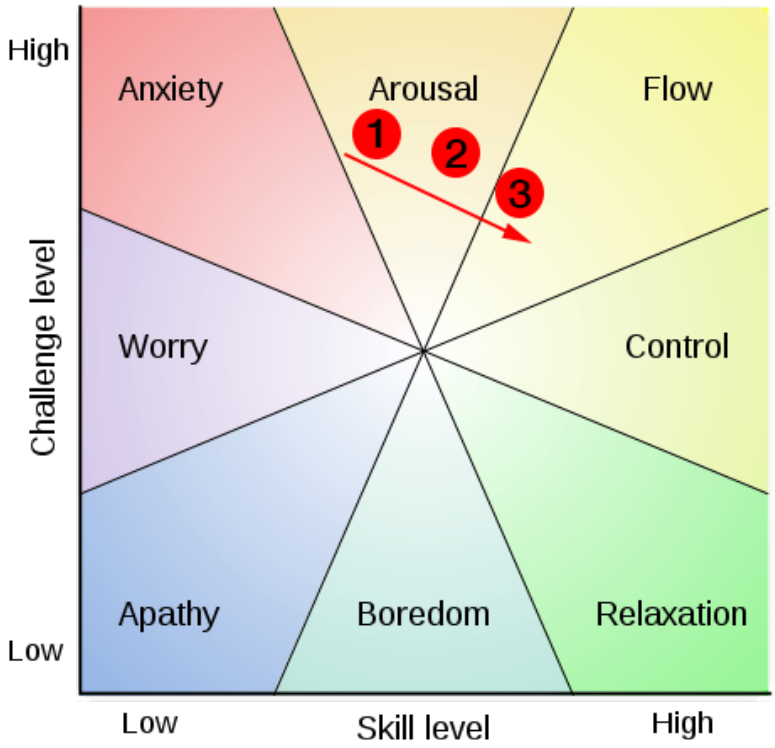


Figure 7

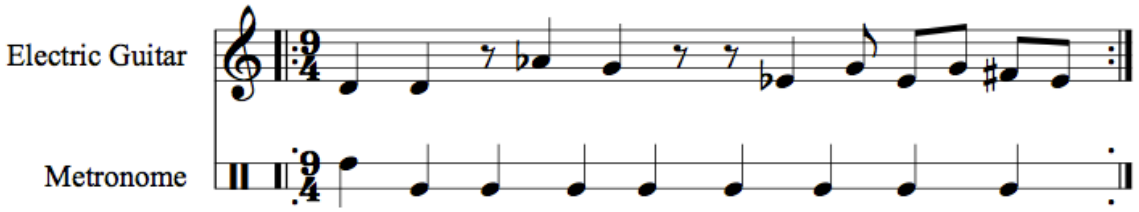
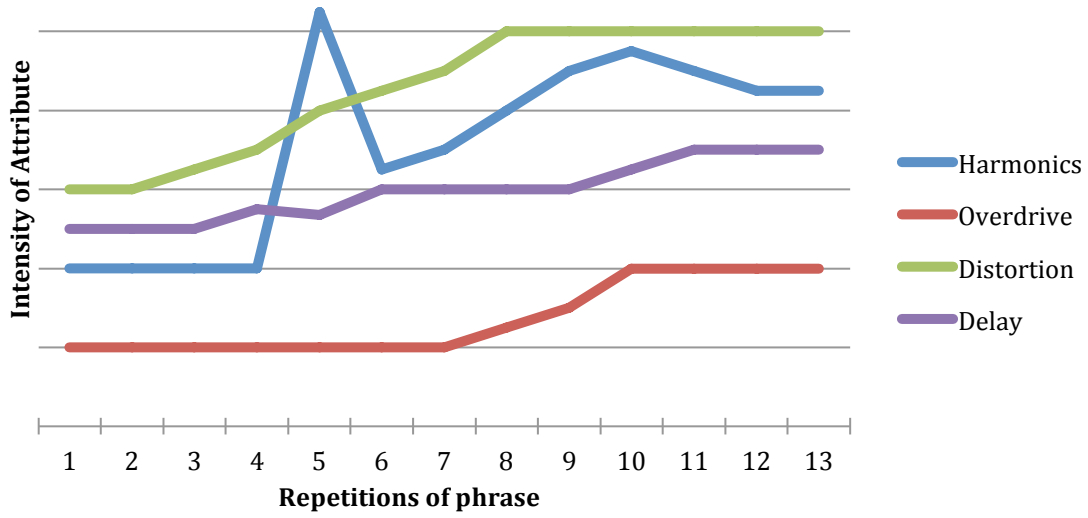


Figure 6



This single phrase is played repeatedly thirteen times with minimal melodic variance. As the phrase is repeated, Tim begins to make timbral changes through both his playing technique and his effects processing pedals. The changes have been graphically represented above in Figure 7 on a 6-point scale corresponding to the position of the knobs on his effects pedals (0 is turned all the way down, 6 is all the way up). Subtle shifts occur in the intensity of the distortion and overdrive pedals he utilizes, as well as the delay effect. Their similar yet independent slowly upward sloping trends indicate a fine tuning of the overall sonic texture, however the most striking change occurs in the dominant harmonic partials heard. It is clear that as he plays, Tim is searching for the right balance of harmonics without any given one being too prominently featured.

It is strictly this kind of experimentation that Tim prefers to engage in while in a solitary environment. He considers himself comfortable, or at home even, playing in front of others, though the material he presents must have been prepared through practice; he'll even rehearse singing a song before he debuts it at karaoke. However, when experimenting with his aural identity, as depicted above, he intentionally ensures he is in his own space.

Case Study III: Larry

"I guess the word is 'freedom!'"

"Is this room ok?" Larry asked me, visibly nervous about our impending interview. "Absolutely! Don't worry, I won't be *too* hard on you," I said, trying to lighten the mood. It seemed to work, at least momentarily, as Larry cracked a smile and we settled into a dingy windowless practice room. Larry, ever considerate, knew I frequently pass by the conservatory where he works and to save me a trip across the city he suggested we meet there one day on his lunch break. It was early September and even though the semester

was yet to begin in earnest and it would have been an off-peak hour for practicing anyway, it was immediately clear that the room I had OK'd might not have been the best choice. Already there was a bustling of activity in the corridors; our room was flanked on one side by a horn player doing long tones and on the other a pianist running scales, and since having taken up in our room mere minutes ago already the shapes of several disappointed faces appeared in the door window hoping to find the room unoccupied. Inside the room itself the ceiling was far taller than I imagined from the outside. Our voices seemed to reverberate off its stark white walls, as harsh on our ears as the overhead fluorescent light on our eyes. Maybe I was just a little nervous too.

We laughed together about the room bringing back some less-than-stellar practice room memories of years gone by. Although my conservatory-style training concluded more recently, some 25 years ago Larry was enrolled at the very same school where he now works; chances are he has practiced in this very room. He shuffled nervously in his seat, unsure of where to look, where to put his hands or whether to cross his legs. Thinking it might help put him at ease I tried to start out slow and lob Larry some softballs, asking about his youth, where he grew up, how he got started in music.

Larry vividly remembers watching an episode of Sesame Street when he was about 5 years old and living with his grandmother where there were two characters that were playing violins. He was captivated immediately and as soon as he was allowed to play an instrument in the school orchestra he jumped at the opportunity. After hearing demonstrations of the instruments he knew immediately what he wanted to play. "Violin's too squeaky, cello's too deep, bass was too boring… that was my intellect at the time (laughs). But viola, however, mmmm! Wow! It's not small, the sound is bigger, it's not

boring like the cello and it's not huge like the bass. Just right!" That was 32 years ago. He gradually got more serious about playing music throughout high school before coming to Boston to study music in college.

Larry suddenly stopped playing viola almost entirely about three years ago. While he still practices sometimes he is no longer playing in any orchestras nor is he performing in public. "I'm just giving myself a break – to replenish. I have to figure out why I lost my passion for it." A combination of stress, the pressures of obligation, and a bad mix of personalities became too much and he decided it was time to step away for a while. He found he no longer had the passion for playing that once consumed him; rather than suffer through it he decided to allow himself some space. However he is hopeful. "I *do* want to play again. I do want to go back to practicing but it has to be when *I* wanna go to practice, I wanna perform with *who* I wanna perform with, and I don't wanna perform a lot. I wanna do *just* enough performance and find that one performance that pulls at your heart strings." When it comes to playing viola Larry now only feels satisfied by performance when he truly feels passionate about whatever project he is involved with.

In the middle of his break Larry took up playing again briefly, but only to prepare for and perform at his grandfather's funeral. It was the first time he had played in months and the last time for months after. He chose the hymn "Blessed Assurance" for which he mentally composed his own arrangement. This marks the one time he has performed a non-classical music in public. Since then he has been practicing more, but is still yet to seek performance opportunities. Instead he is contented teaching privately and with being a coach for a Boston youth music group.

When I have asked Larry about his practice routine he tends to describe things in the minutest detail, outlining every step he may or may not take and exactly how this fits with his practice philosophy. Like many conservatory trained classical players I've spoken to he adamantly abstains from playing classical music "for fun." This said, he takes immense pleasure in playing scales (his favorite is E^{b} major). "I can do whatever the heck I want to do with it!... I feel a lot of freedom." While he firmly denies any accusations of "improvisation," the freedom he feels playing scales manifests in the spontaneous variation of rhythms, meter, articulation, phrasing, and even mode. "The only thing I hate about scales is that you can't *perform* them! Oh my goodness I'd be golden if I could perform scales!"

Much like Chris, Larry doesn't mind people watching or listening when he practices. In fact sometimes when he is actually truly alone he imagines an audience. He says knowing someone could be watching or listening helps give him extra motivation to perfect whatever he is practicing. Yet there are times when Larry prefers to be well out of earshot and in complete isolation. Sometimes he hums or sings absent-mindedly when cleaning his apartment or doing chores, but what he really loves to do is sing in the shower. Singing elsewhere just isn't as pleasing to him as when he is in the privacy of the bathroom. He says it gives him a feeling of safety and he loves the acoustics, likening it to a concert hall. It also allows him to be expressive in ways he otherwise is unable. "You're singing – no matter what, no matter how well you sing – you're singing. It's like expressing a part of yourself that you don't get to express all the time." Larry relishes the connectedness of the voice with the body, "as opposed to an instrument you have to take out of a case." The natural

physiological affect of singing is something he finds pleasing and different from the more "unnatural" act of eliciting sound from his viola.

When Larry sings he likes to sing things that are expressly not classical, "I already play that… I may not play for myself but I can sing for myself!... It's another way of doing music and seeing it from a different angle." So when singing he occasionally picks some old R&B and gospel favorites, but as he puts it "really mostly Whitney Houston because I like her stuff. I like how she's a very musical artist – very musical – she was very musical, very passionate, and I relate to what she did musically." Larry's shower singing is an exercise in freedom. He is able to sing whatever he wants how ever he wants it. "In the shower it really gives me the chance to really be free, you know? No one hears me, I live by myself, I can sing whatever I wanna sing!" As discussed in Chapter 2 a major trend among automusicators is the leading of a "musical double-life." Like Tim's push away from trombone playing, Larry's private musical life seems to be pushing back against his viola playing. These are two contrasting, complementary facets of an individual's life. What makes learning about individuals like Larry so important is that without this kind of study we cannot truly begin to understand the totality of an individual's musical experience and influences.

When Larry sings Whitney, he sings it resoundingly like Larry. At times he will imitate her voice or her stylistic choices, but it is quite clear that his primary goal is to be himself. Larry struggled growing up in the southern US as both a minority and as a young gay man closeted from his family and friends. Even after moving to Boston and coming out locally he still feels constrained by societal pressures that force him to hide a part of who he is. In one of the few specific discussions of explicitly private music I have been able to

locate, Moshe Morad writes about similar phenomenon he dubs the "kitchen bolero" in his book *Fiesta de diez pesos: Music and Gay Identity in Special Period Cuba*. Morad describes the gay Cuban appropriation of the bolero, and he writes that amid the chaos of life in central Havana his informant:

> … finally enters his own private space, an inner, emotional space conjured up by the melancholic sounds of bolero. He calls it "kitchen bolero," and sees it as his personal brand of therapy. I have adopted his term kitchen bolero to describe this particular musical space – the bolero listened to, mimed, and sung by individuals in the privacy of their homes, transferring them to a world of deep emotion and fantasy.[29]

The important distinction to make here is that with Larry there is no recording present, he is not miming or singing along, but is actively creating the music he wants to hear. There is a depth to the connection he feels to the music at that point, a connectedness to Whitney Houston that is otherwise unachievable. The fact that Larry is gay and Morad's study centers around gay culture is purely coincidental and I do not intend to imply that this kind of behavior is a homosexual phenomenon. On the contrary, automusication is used by approximately 35% of all my subjects as a personal fantasy space wherein they feel that can express a part of their personality that rarely gets to shine.

On Solitude and Stance

Through conducting this study, and as exemplified in the three case studies above, I have come to realize that how and when one conceives of solitude can vary widely, often having to do primarily with that individual's perception of aloneness. In Tim and Chris' cases, having a physical space unto themselves supersedes any need for visual or aural

[29] Moshe Morad, *Fiesta de Diez Pesos: Music and Gay Identity in Special Period Cuba* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2015), 191.

isolation. Their concepts of solitariness are fluid and flexible, having to do more with their headspace than "true" isolation. Whether Tim might be overheard experimenting is beyond the point, the fact that he physically separates himself by closing the door to his room and mentally focuses inward creates a sense of solitariness that is enough. For Chris the practice room becomes like hiding in plain sight. He is a face in a crowd, not trying to hide his own existence but anonymous among a sea of others. The hallways around the practice rooms are full of sound bleed from the other rooms and the cacophony of noise allows him a background to blend into. Larry on the other hand is acutely aware of the potential presence of others even if physically isolated from them. This is reflected in his approach to practice where he enjoys the motivation of knowing others are listening, and also in his feelings of security and privacy while in the shower at home.

In Chris' case, the physical shift from a public space to a private one away from other people, in this case a practice room, precipitates a mental shift away from a preoccupation with expectations of "performance" to a freedom to interpret musically the work at hand. Chris relays that playing alone is "the only time I can concentrate on the music itself rather than not making mistakes or these many destructive and anti-musical thoughts that are part of performing. It's pretty much the only time where I can interpret the music, in a sense of 'How do I want to shape this line?' 'What do I want to accent in this passage?' 'What do I want to bring out here?' That kind of thing." It is clear that Chris' actions are actively shaped by his own preconceptions of the audience's expectations of him. The freedom from judgment that the practice room affords him allows a forum for unbounded musicality and a way in which to liberate both the music and his mind from the constraints of mistakes and technical errors. An extremely adept musician, the conscious decision Chris

makes to play alone cannot simply be dismissed as an excuse to play lazily or sloppily. The musical standards of excellence he sets for himself remain the same; it is the comfort in knowing that the consequences for not necessarily meeting those standards are nearly obliterated.

Despite expressing outwardly a different path to automusication from Chris, Tim's case shows remarkable similarities. Their training and upbringing in the Western classical music tradition are similar and have fostered similarly rigorous practice methods and musical standards. Additionally, Tim is able to achieve a level of comfort and security when practicing in his bedroom that parallels Chris' in a practice room. Their physical separation from others facilitates a feeling of solitude, enough so that their lack of aural isolation and any incidental overhearing of their playing becomes irrelevant. While Larry's practice ethic and philosophies are undoubtedly similar to Tim's and Chris's, the way in which he practices and automusicates are decidedly different. When automusicating Larry is definitely concerned with the possibility he may be overheard. In these cases automusication essentially becomes an issue of control. Chris is able to not only dominate the immediate space he occupies both physically and aurally, but to take control of the music in a highly personal and sometimes experimental way. The lack of artistic control Tim feels when performing with his band contributes significantly to his experimental and improvisatory automusication. He too is able to dominate his immediate surroundings and the musical ideas he develops. When singing in the shower Larry is asserting total control over his acoustic environment, his musical material, and most importantly his own identity. As the sole arbiters of judgment of their "performances" while automusicating, Chris, Tim, and Larry hold themselves to the same high standards of musicality they would while in the

presence of others, but are able to access aspects of their musical selves that a social musical setting renders unattainable.

As mentioned previously, Harris Berger's work on stance and phenomenological approaches to musical ethnography are of great interest to me and have definite implications for my work. Berger, drawing from Samuel Todes' work on embodiment, discusses a type of stance he calls "stance-on-power" that I see as adding to my abovementioned thoughts on automusication as "control."[30] In its most concise form, Berger defines stance-on-power as "one's relationship to one's action as it takes place in a field of power-relations."[31] As examples of stance-on-power in a performance setting Berger points to stage fright and stage presence as opposite ends of the spectrum.[32] While it might initially seem obvious that Chris has stage fright and Tim has stage presence this is a gross oversimplification. It is true that both of those individuals have those respective characteristics; however they do not necessarily have the same stances-on-power when it comes to automusication. While Chris's automusication operates in direct dialectic with his stage fright, Tim's automusication takes a stand against the stance-on-power he feels between he and his band mates. In Larry's case his stance-on-power in relation to White Southern culture as repressed and fearful manifests in a strong, impassioned private rebellion wherein he can assert his identity however he so choses.

In short automusication allows individuals the space to strategically subvert their own "default" or normalized stance-on-power, thereby asserting control not only over whatever power structures they have found themselves bound up in but also over

[30] Berger, *Stance*, 114.
[31] Ibid., 115.
[32] Ibid., 119.

themselves. Chris' automusication serves to counteract his typical stance-on-power, that is a fearful relationship to the external world, by intentionally subverting the power structures of live performance, while Tim's automusication has little to do with the stance-on-power that he has when performing live. Instead, Tim's automusication counteracts the subservient stance-on-power he holds relative to his band-mates. Larry's shower singing actively avoids potentially dangerous confrontation while allowing him to remain empowered and strong.

CHAPTER 4
THEORIZING AUTOMUSICATION

Interdisciplinary Inquiries

Jeff sums up the sentiments of many of my informants: "Cause it's literally- it *is* play, you know? The word 'play' is really good for that because is play. You're literally playful." The word play has come up again and again in the interviews I've conducted, to the point that cannot be ignored. To truly study the practice of automusication one must cross disciplinary boundaries. While this study has been largely ethnomusicological in its philosophy and methodology I would be remiss to not consider the work being done in other fields. This chapter will assess automusication in light of several more established areas of study – play, flow, and trance – before attempting to reconcile their various approaches into a unique analytical tool for the study of automusication. All three of these fields are necessarily grounded in interdisciplinarity, often combining approaches from psychology, ethnography, anthropology, cognitive science, and neuroscience. As the previous chapters should demonstrate automusication is an important, meaningful aspect of many people's lives. How might we better understand this practice in light of the work done in other fields? Stance is perhaps the most useful tool for analyzing how and why people use automusication in their lives, but important questions still remain. While Chapter 3 demonstrates the effectiveness of stance as a tool for analyzing a specific individuals' automusication, what else can we learn about automusication from other disciplines? Are there limits to an ethnographic approach to the study of automusication? How might we better understand what happens to individuals when they are automusicating? Can we understand automusication as a subset or related activity to

"play?" Is automusication an activity that regularly induces a flow state? Can automusicants fall into trance?

Automusication as Play and Leisure

Of the three subjects of study I will examine in this chapter play is certainly the most represented by my informants, at least in the exact language they use, and therefore makes an obvious starting point. The concept of play might seem simple enough and I doubt that there are readers who don't understand on some basic level what play is; we all play in some way or another, it is an experience with which we are all familiar. But how do scholars define play? This is an oddly complicated question, one that scholars have actually been increasingly wary of answering. Much in the same way that I cannot generalize about automusication the diverse ways in which play manifests. Notable recent works by Stuart Brown[33] and Miguel Sicart[34] both avoid easily defining the term, instead carefully describing each of its various facets, with their respective norms and exceptions. While I appreciate their sensitivity to the highly individualized nature of play and the diversity of ways play manifests in human (and animal) life their apparent refusal to concisely define their subject of study makes my job rather difficult. My essential question is: is automusication a form of play?

Most studies of play have three general shortcomings when considered in light of automusication. Firstly, the majority of these studies focus exclusively on children, usually

[33] Stuart L. Brown, *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* (New York: Avery, 2009).
[34] Miguel Sicart, *Play Matters*, Playful Thinking (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2014).

playing socially.[35] The aims and approaches of a given work on play vary widely and have unfortunately been skewed largely toward the behavior of infants and children, often with a developmental bent. In recent years this has been changing, however the misconception that "children play, adults work" has apparently been hard to shake.[36] Secondly, until recently the concepts of work and play have been held in opposition, locked in a binary that seemingly disallows play from being highly constructive and work from being pleasurable.[37] Thirdly, music is almost never discussed and when it is it's often lumped into the category of "art" with which play is frequently contrasted.[38] The field of leisure studies brings some helpful perspective regarding this. Leisure, like play, is typically defined in a broad sense as something that an individual is not obligated to do, but they derive much satisfaction from doing so nevertheless.[39] Much of the most valuable work done in leisure studies has been done either directly by Robert Stebbins or in reaction to his work. Stebbins proposes that leisure activity can be sorted into either casual leisure or serious leisure. Participants in serious leisure can further be divided into amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers.[40] Stebbins' apparent fondness for discreet categories is a major drawback to his work, and others who have studied leisure have challenged these, yet they are helpful nonetheless. If casual and serious leisure exist on a spectrum, automusication would exist

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[35] Csikszentmihalyi, "The Concept of Flow," 240.
[36] Brian Sutton-Smith and Anthony D. Pellegrini, eds., *The Future of Play Theory: A Multidisciplinary Inquiry into the Contributions of Brian Sutton-Smith*, SUNY Series, Children's Play in Society (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 53.
[37] Brown, *Play*, 142.
[38] Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 133.
[39] Robert A Stebbins, *Serious Leisure: A Perspective for Our Time* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2007).
[40] Robert A. Stebbins, *Amateurs, Professionals, and Serious Leisure* (Montreal ; London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 18.

all across it and even the actions of a single individual could swing widely from being casual to serious.

Crucial to the understanding of play and leisure is how an individual derives some sense of pleasure, enjoyment, or satisfaction from the task. While I imagine most of us immediately associate the word play with "fun," it should be noted that this is not necessarily the best way to conceive of play.

> …Play is not necessarily fun. It is pleasurable, but the pleasures it creates are not always submissive to enjoyment, happiness, or positive traits. Play can be pleasurable when it hurts, offends, challenges us and teases us, and even when we are not playing. Let's not talk about play as fun but as pleasurable, opening us to the immense variations of pleasure in this world.[41]

To consider automusication a true form of play is to do violence to the idea that automusication can be hard work, goal oriented, and even unpleasant at times. However, if one is to accept a broader definition of play I think it is safe to say that automusication frequently is a form of play. Even a rigorous practice routine can incorporate elements of play, just as what we consider "work" can be playful. It is no coincidence that the literature from the fields of leisure, play, and flow reference one another as the three are often entwined. Automusication seems similarly positioned at the crossroads of these three overlapping fields.

Automusication as Flow

A prominent theme among my informants' experiences automusicating was the rapid passage of time. This is closely related to both play and flow.

> Play provides freedom from time. When we are fully engaged in play, we lose a sense of the passage of time. We also experience diminished consciousness

[41] Sicart, *Play Matters*, 3.

> of self. We stop worrying about whether we look good or awkward, smart or stupid. We stop thinking about the fact that we are thinking. In imaginative play, we can even be a different self. We are fully in the moment, in the zone. We are experiencing what the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow."[42]

I have already introduced the basic concept of flow, however it should be examined more closely here. A core aspect of Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow is that of motivation. Automusication is perhaps best understood in terms of motivation, or what Csikszentmihalyi terms telic and autotelic experiences. How an individual is motivated to do any given task is an essential part of who that person is. Motivation can be described in terms of two basic types: telic and autotelic. "Flow research and theory had their origin in a desire to understand this phenomenon of intrinsically motivated, or autotelic, activity: activity rewarding in and of itself (auto = self, telos = goal), quite apart from its end product or any extrinsic good that might result from the activity."[43] A telic activity is therefore one that is extrinsically motivated. However, these two types of motivation are more closely related than this binary leads one to believe. Take homework for example: a student might hurriedly finish their homework right before class in order to simply meet the obligation of completing the assignment and not get a zero (telic), or they may take the necessary time the night before to carefully complete the assignment in order to get a good grade (autotelic). In both cases the student is prompted by an external source to complete the assignment, and they both complete the assignment of their own accord. The difference lies in the motivation behind the completion of the assignment; one student is merely fulfilling an obligation for fear of failure, while the other seeks to achieve at a high level so he or she might learn and better him or herself.

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[42] Brown, *Play*, 17.
[43] Csikszentmihalyi, "The Concept of Flow," 240.

Flow is generally considered to come from an autotelic place; one must be independently motivated enough to engage in a given activity with the focus and care that flow requires. In the case of automusication, I think it is fair to say that automusication is generally an autotelic activity. For individuals who play for pleasure or fun this is clearly true, but when we consider "practice" things become murkier. A musician could practice simply because their teacher told them to work on this etude or that exercise and they do so to avoid another lecture extolling the merits of practicing, or they might practice because they are constantly seeking ways to improve their abilities. Flow's relationship to practice and playing for pleasure is an interesting one; those who practice, while arguably more focused or driven than their pleasure-seeking counterparts, are in my observations less likely to attain a state of flow. The loss of self and complete immersion required for flow are in some ways counter to the continuous objective, critical listening and critiquing that must occur while practicing.

As Csikszentmihalyi conceives of it, flow has predictable precedents and antecedents which are outlined below.

Conditions for flow:

- Perceived challenges, or opportunities for action, that stretch (neither over- matching nor underutilizing) existing skills; a sense that one is engaging challenges at a level appropriate to one's capacities
- Clear proximal goals and immediate feedback about the progress that is being made.[44]

Results of flow:

- Intense and focused concentration on what one is doing in the present moment

[44] Ibid.

- Merging of action and awareness
- Loss of reflective self-consciousness (i.e., loss of awareness of oneself as a social actor)
- A sense that one can control one's actions; that is, a sense that one can in principle deal with the situation because one knows how to respond to whatever happens next
- Distortion of temporal experience (typically, a sense that time has passed faster than normal)
- Experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding, such that often the end goal is just an excuse for the process.[45]

There are a number of similarities between the conditions and results of flow above and the flowchart for ludic reading discussed in Chapter 1. Furthermore there are obvious connections to play here as well. Automusication fits right in, though again, not all the time. Although most of my informants expressed some aspect of the results of flow outlined above, it is difficult to say if they were actually experiencing a strong sense of flow, at least in all the ways that Csikszentmihalyi defines it. Despite this Jana perfectly describes the feeling of temporal distortion Csikszentmihalyi describes, making a convincing case for a state of flow: "If I'm really into it I could sing and think it was 10 minutes but it could really be an hour or something like that."

Despite the clear contributions to the study of automusication that Csikszentmihalyi has made, his research still leaves much to be desired; unfortunately those in the field of music are left to speculate the way in which playing music may or may not facilitate a state of flow. Given the varied research subjects, studies of flow have dealt with it is surprising that I have been unable to locate any dealing with musicians in a serious way. Csikszentmihalyi has conducted studies that incorporate music in some ways, and while he

[45] Ibid.

cites the experience of making music as a possible example of flow this is never supported by any studies. One study that includes music is about happiness levels among American and Italian teenagers based on the activities they engage in. While his studies about flow and happiness are interesting and influential to this study, the things Csikszentmihalyi's studies actually show us about music are insignificant and irrelevant. For example, measuring the result "music" (primarily "passive listening" in his studies) has on happiness is hardly applicable directly to the study of automusication, my study takes no stock in how happy an individual feels from automusication – as musicians I think it is most likely second nature that music can affect people in all manner of ways and that the primary goal of automusication is not necessarily to make oneself happier. All this said, the possibility to conduct a study of flow among automusicants is ripe for the picking.

Automusication and Trance

Studies in trance and altered states of consciousness may provide a useful lens through which automusication can be considered. To be perfectly clear from the start, I do not think that automusication is, or necessarily precipitates, trance. However, the experiences described by many of my informants align with some of the characteristics of what is called "low-arousal trance," which I believe warrants further investigation and might allow for a more nuanced understanding of automusication's relationship to flow.[46] Judith Becker's book *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing*[47] along with Ruth

[46] Herbert, *Everyday Music Listening*.
[47] Judith O. Becker, *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

Herbert's book *Everyday Music Listening: Absorption, Dissociation and Trancing*[48] have together sparked my interest in low-arousal trance and should be considered required reading for those interested in continuing the study of automusication. The concept of trance is often stigmatized in Western societies and it is therefore likely that cases of low-arousal trance may go unnoticed or remain underreported. This may be because individuals are hesitant to label their state as "trance" or perhaps are even simply unfamiliar with the use of the term. Yet ethnographic evidence of low-arousal trance exists, and is perhaps best epitomized in Herbert's summary of her own research findings:

> Evidence from the studies indicated that, in common with strong experiences of music, everyday experiences featured changes in attentional focus, arousal, sensory awareness, experience of time, thought processes and sense of self. In particular, participants often appeared to experience subtle, premeditated or spontaneous shifts of consciousness from a baseline state, which they often described as 'hypnotic' or 'trance-like'… Experiences were marked by the prevalence of the processes of absorption (effortless involvement) and dissociation (detachment), both of which are regarded as central to the phenomenon of trance in hypnotherapeutic literature.[49]

The similarities with flow should be immediately apparent which raises important questions. Are flow and low-arousal trance the same thing? Can low-arousal trance result from play? Where does automusication fit into all this? It should be noted that the strict emphasis of Herbert's study on music listening restricts the subjects to, in Rouget's terms, being musicated without the possibility for being their own musicant, unless you were to count "playing the radio."[50] In the available ethnomusicological literature explicitly about music and trance the most common example of trance that could be considered low-

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[48] Herbert, *Everyday Music Listening*.
[49] Ruth Herbert, "Reconsidering Music and Trance: Cross-Cultural Differences and Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 20, no. 2 (2011): 213, doi:10.1080/17411912.2011.592402.
[50] As I described in Chapter 1 the very term automusication, while a neologism of my own invention, traces its ancestry back to Gilbert Rouget's term "musicant."

arousal is found in shamanism. Shamanism, broadly defined, is a healing tradition in which a shaman, the healer, goes into trance to begin a journey into the spirit world with the expressed purpose of healing a patient. Shamanic trance is generally, though not always, conducted; the shaman acts as musicant, precipitating their own trance. It is clearly far to simplistic to consider automusicants modern secular shamans; however, the similarities of playing music for yourself makes the comparison tempting.

To further complicate the discussion, low-arousal trance may have some important connections to dissociative and absorptive states. Dissociative states such as those utilized by athletes to counter the effects of pain or fatigue may have some important similarities to trance. It is beyond the point to question whether or not a dissociative state is a low-arousal trance or vice versa as it is nearly impossible to make such a broad generalization. However, as scientists continue to acquire empirical data about the brain and its function while operating across a range of states of consciousness it may be possible to notice similarities (or not) that exist between them. In contrast to altered states of consciousness classified as high-arousal trances such as those attained in possession trance rituals, low-arousal trance has been significantly under-studied. Significant developments in scientific and medical technologies over the last fifty years in particular have allowed researchers previously unattainable, objective access to the inner workings of the brain that have the potential to yield empirical data about low-arousal trance. The fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imager) and EEG (electroencephalograph) have proven particularly influential in the work of psychologists and neuroscientists as they struggle to understand just how the mind functions. As a result, the possibility for scientifically studying altered states of consciousness has arisen. The role of music in attaining a trance state, however, has

heretofore been the domain of ethnomusicologists and anthropologists and has for myriad reasons eluded rigorous scientific assessment. As Herbert explains,

> Ethnographic studies have focused on a variety of cultural contexts, beliefs and associated behaviours, primarily considering trance as situated; whereas the emphasis in hypnosis studies, for example, has been on isolating neurological correlates of the state itself, regardless of context, in order to offer a psychological explanation of trance.[51]

At the intersection of neuroscience, psychology, and ethnography lays an approach to the study of low-arousal trance. These states, while acknowledged by some ethnomusicologists, have often been overlooked or dismissed by others when considering the scope of trance behavior. Because of its nature, low-arousal trance is hard to observe without relying on self-reporting by trancers, and its nature can be fleeting and hard to verify. These similarities to automusication are obvious. Strictly scientific, empirical studies that seek to explain a state of trance drift into territory that can be difficult for ethnomusicologists to accept. A strictly neurological, laboratory-based approach that lacks any contextualization can fail importantly to account for significant socio-cultural influences on the research subject's ability to attain the state in question. Automusication, on the other hand, might be a more viable subject of these scientific studies. Depending on the type of activities the automusicant engages in and where they engage with them (if that even matters to them) I could envision such studies working rather well. Additionally, given automusicants' varied perceptions of solitude, issues of observation could potentially be mitigated by simply isolating the individual aurally for an appropriate length of time.

Gilbert Rouget takes great pains to articulate the differences he sees between the terms "trance" and "ecstasy." In the opening chapter of his book *Music and Trance: A Theory*

[51] Herbert, "Reconsidering Music and Trance," 203.

on the Relations between Music and Possession, he clearly delineates the two, shown here in Figure 8.[52]

Figure 8

Ecstasy	Trance
immobility	movement
silence	noise
solitude	in company
no crisis	crisis
sensory deprivation	sensory overstimulation
recollection	amnesia
hallucinations	no hallucinations

The binaries Rouget outlines here are interesting though not altogether helpful when considered in terms of automusication. The way he has defined ecstasy is more clearly aligned with automusication, yet most of my informants would balk at the thought of calling their state of mind while automusicating anything close to ecstasy. Instead, Roland Fischer's "Cartography of Ecstatic and Meditative States" as diagramed in Figure 9 is far more useful when considering automusication, and it is possible to locate the general areas of his map where Csikszentmihalyi's work on focus and arousal can be overlaid.[53]

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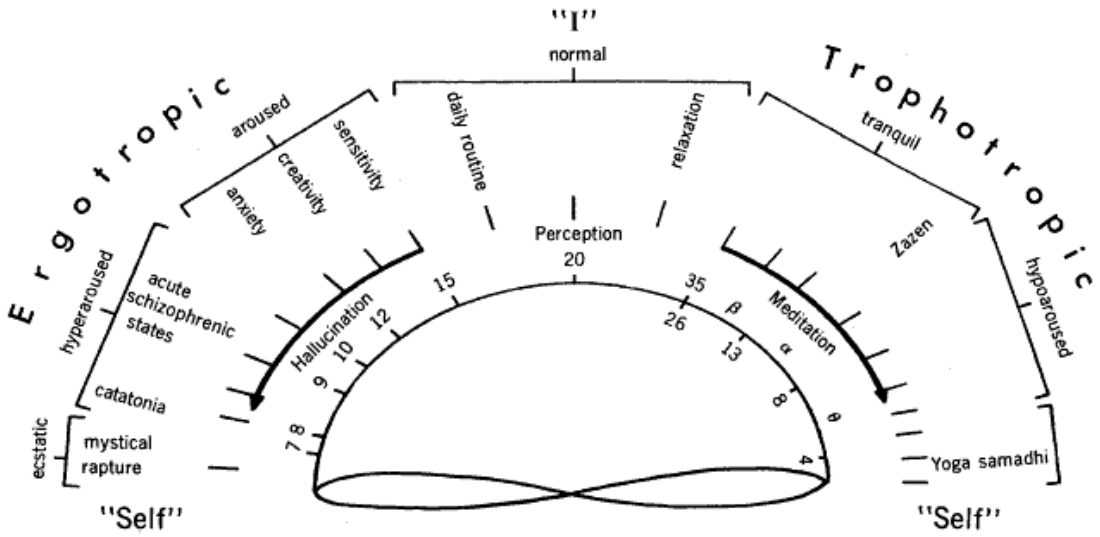
[52] Rouget, *Music and Trance*, 11.

[53] In Fischer's explanation of this diagram he states: "Varieties of conscious states mapped on a perception-hallucination continuum of increasing ergotropic arousal (left) and a perception-meditation continuum of increasing trophotropic arousal (right). These levels of hyper- and hypoarousal are interpreted by man as normal, creative, psychotic, and ecstatic states (left) and Zazen and samadhi (right). The loop connecting ecstasy and samadhi represents the rebound from ecstasy to samadhi, which is observed in response to intense ergotropic excitation. The numbers 35 to 7 on the perception-hallucination continuum are Goldstein's coefficient of variation (46), specifying the decrease in variability of the EEG amplitude with increasing ergotropic arousal. The numbers 26 to 4 on the perception-meditation continuum, on the other hand, refer to those beta, alpha, and theta EEG waves (measured in hertz) that predominate during, but are not specific to, these states."

Figure 9



Looking back to the flow diagram of challenge vs. skill, the wheel of levels of arousal that forms around the center point could potentially be unfurled and overlaid with this cartography. Even some of the language is similar, with anxiety and relaxation representing opposing states in each map. I believe that flow could be conceived of existing on the fringes of the middle section of the map labeled "I"/normal. In the intermediate stage between the area considered "normal" and those to either side of it labeled "aroused" and "tranquil" lies the sweet-spot for flow.

The work of scholars such as Tia DeNora shows clear evidence that music can play a definite role in altering one's sense of being in the world, often used intentionally or otherwise as a technology of sorts to affect one's emotions. Often times these changes

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Roland Fischer, "A Cartography of the Ecstatic and Meditative States," *Science*, New Series, 174, no. 4012 (November 26, 1971): 897–904.

accompany a shift in consciousness, one consistent with the idea of a low-arousal trance.[54] The question we must ask is whether or not an automusicant can use this technology to the same extent as a mere passive listener. Given the discussions I've had with automusicants I would have to say I think this is very possible. Much of Becker's work revolves around the centrality of emotion to trance states. In *Deep Listeners* she draws attention to the correlation between sadness and high-arousal, ergotropic states and between happiness and low-arousal, trophotropic states.[55] What does this mean for automusication? Based on my observations I would have to say that there seems to be no correlation between those involved in automusication that could be considered high-arousal and feelings of sadness. If anything, an individual such as Jana who has been brought to tears by automusicating operates decidedly at the lower end of the arousal spectrum. This may suggest there is little link between trance and automusication, however there is so little concrete evidence more research is required.

Scientific studies of music's ability to help make significant changes in music therapy patients' brain states during therapy, as well as the importance of the therapist/patient relationship, have been published by Hess and Rittner[56] as well as Haerlin.[57] Definite parallels exist between music therapy and other more studied forms of trance. One that is immediately apparent is the way in which music is selected for use in a therapy session. As mentioned above, the music must be something that resonates strongly

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[54] Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 48–51.
[55] Becker, *Deep Listeners*, 2004, 53.
[56] Hans H. Decker-Voigt, Paolo J. Knill, and Eckhard Weymann, *Lexikon Musiktherapie* (Göttingen ; Seattle: Hogrefe, 1996).
[57] Peter Haerlin, "Bewußtseinsverändernde Klanginstrumente in Der Psychotherapie," *Psychotherapeut* 43, no. 4 (January 1, 1998): 238–43.

with the patient, which could be seen as the low-arousal equivalent of the "one song" that speaks to patient a in a high-arousal trance tradition such as *Tarantism* or *Stambeli* that triggers the onset of the trance crisis. The issue of crisis, however, is one of many factors that set low-arousal and high-arousal trance apart from one another. Whereas the onset of a high-arousal trance is typically precipitated by a crisis, low-arousal trance seemingly lacks a definite moment where trance can be said to begin. If we throw automusication into the mix here I wonder if there is an analogue between the above mentioned triggers and the song that comes over the car radio, suddenly prompting an individual to sing.

A Proposed Analytical Tool

In an effort to synthesize the common ground that comes out of examining play, leisure, flow, and trance, in light of what we now know about automusication, I have devised a system by which individuals' unique approaches to automusication can be mapped, analyzed, and compared. This method is far from perfect, but represents a first step toward a systematic analysis of automusication. There are six criteria, each ranked on a scale from 0-5 with zero being the least, five being the most. Based on interview and survey data, combined with my resulting familiarity with the given informant I have constructed, I will rank an individual from most to least involvement with each criterion, and map the results onto a radar chart. These radar charts create unique polygons representative of an individual's general habits and behaviors that are intentionally impressionistic and imprecise yet allow for quick comparison between individuals and the assessment of general trends. Obviously these charts can only tell so much about an individual and convey a limited amount if information, however if carefully constructed

these charts can function as a fingerprint of sorts, the shape of an individual's solitary musical world as it were.

The six criteria I have selected are as follows:

- Pleasure: The approximate measurement of enjoyment, happiness, fun, and/or satisfaction that an individual receives from automusicating. This is best judged in contrast to their relative levels of pleasure when playing music in other contexts, and when engaging in other pleasurable activities.
- Absorption: The approximate measure of focus an individual has while automusicating. Factors to consider relate closely to flow, such as concentration, temporal distortion, and loss of self-awareness.
- Investment: The approximate measure of personal identification and investment with the activity at hand. Essentially rates how important the individual feels the activity is to them, taking into account the level of physical, mental, and emotional effort expelled while engaging with the music.
- Arousal: The approximate measurement of the automusicant's state of energy. Refer to Fischer's "Cartography of Ecstatic and Meditative States:" consider the right-most edge of "tranquil" (Zazen) to be a 0 and the left-most edge of "aroused" (anxiety) to be a 5.
- Improvisation: The approximate measurement of the degree to which the musical material is spontaneously improvised, altered, or embellished. Considers the specific musical material played
- Formalization: The approximate measurement of the degree to which the structure of the activity of music making has been preconceived or repeated in the past. It

should consider how habitual the general behavior is, rather than how formalized the music itself may or may not be.

These terms have each been chosen carefully to embody aspects of play, leisure, flow, trance, and music-making, the while outwardly eschewing obvious preference for a particular field. By doing so I am able to tap into the unifying characteristics that reach across each field and create a unique tool for the study of automusication. Before performing some analyses of the automusicants examined throughout this project I will present an analysis of my own automusication. Who better to begin with than myself? I do this not out of narcissism or to brag (I think you'll see there is not much to brag about!), but I feel it is only fair; after asking hundreds of people, the vast majority of whom were total strangers, to reveal to me their most private musical habits, I feel it is only right to reciprocate in good faith.

First, the type of automusication must be clarified. As we well know, individual practices vary widely, but even the same individual approaches automusication differently depending on the context. For example, I approach singing in the car far differently than when I practice the saxophone, which is then different from how I play the oud for fun. For the purposes of this exercise I will be analyzing my oud playing for fun.

- Pleasure: 3 – While I find playing the oud quite enjoyable, I am not particularly proficient and can sometimes get hung up on my mistakes.
- Absorption: 4 – Due to my relatively amateur abilities I am forced to concentrate fairly intensely while playing to ensure I execute properly. I do not consider myself to achieve a state of flow very often, although this has certainly happened, particularly while playing music that is well suited to my technical faculties.

- Investment: 2 – In short, and while I might concentrate hard, I am not particularly driven to improve and don't put much stock in my. While I really enjoy playing the oud if for some reason I could never play it again I would not be heartbroken.
- Arousal: 3 – I very much retain the same sense of self I carry with me elsewhere and am neither particularly tranquil nor aroused. This feels like my "baseline."
- Improvisation: 1 – Because I am still learning and struggle with various technical elements of playing the instrument I tend to play things the same way more often than not. I will occasionally attempt an improvised solo, however these are usually quickly aborted in favor of playing a composed song.
- Formalization: 2 – While I typically play pieces from the same pool of songs, I will mix things up considerably from session to session. Sometimes I will simply run through material, other times I will work half-heartedly on working out some technique. I have no standardized routine or regimen, order of playing pieces, or any plans on constructing such a practice.

In Figures 10-13 I have presented the radar chart for my own automusication, alongside the charts for Chris, Tim, and Larry from Chapter 3. One must be careful not to equate area with degree of automusication, particularly when comparing two individuals, as seen in Figures 14-15. However, I believe that this could be a successful method for establishing individual habits with automusication. It is also possible for one to construct multiple radar charts for the same individual to represent multiple approaches to automusication depending on the context. If enough of these are developed for serious comparisons to take place we may be one step closer to discovering important trends in automusication.

Figure 10

Ryland
"Playing the Oud for Fun"

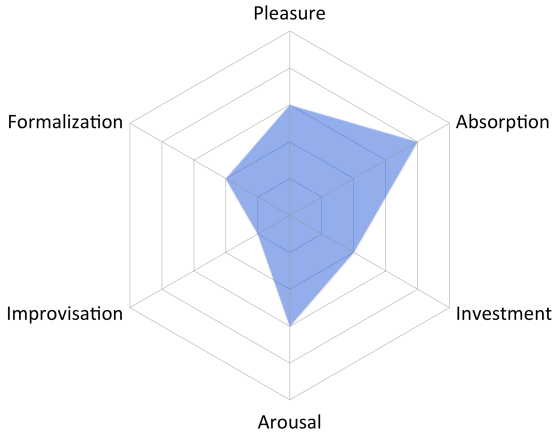


Figure 11

Chris
"Playing Bach on the Piano"

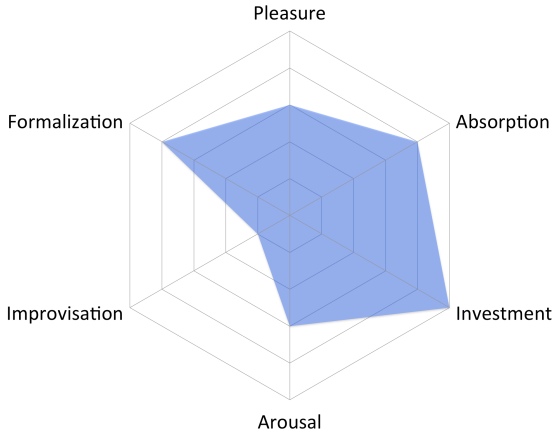


Figure 12

Tim
"Messing Around with the Guitar"

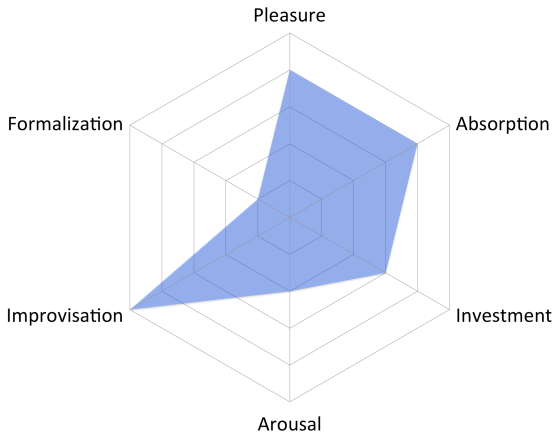


Figure 13

Larry
"Practicing Viola"

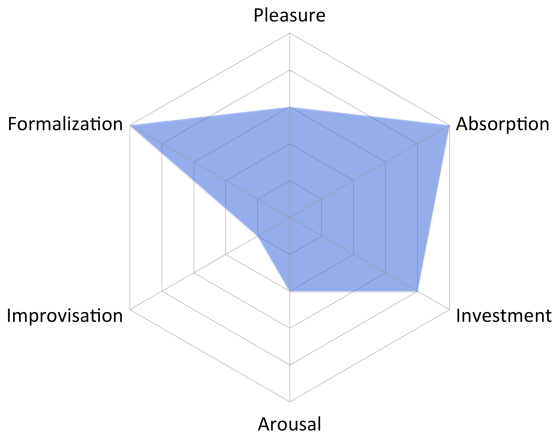


Figure 14

Ryland & Larry:
Comparison of Automusication

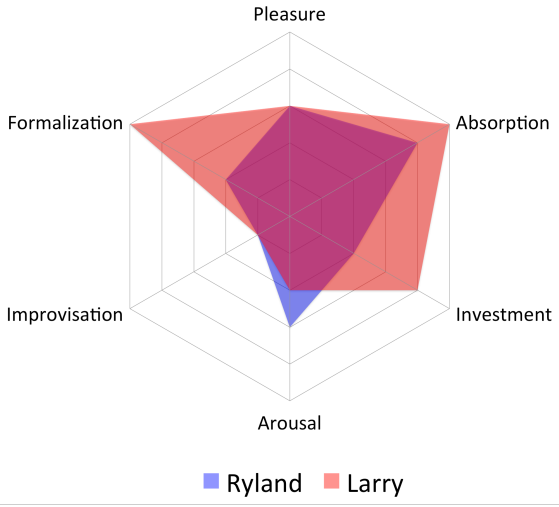
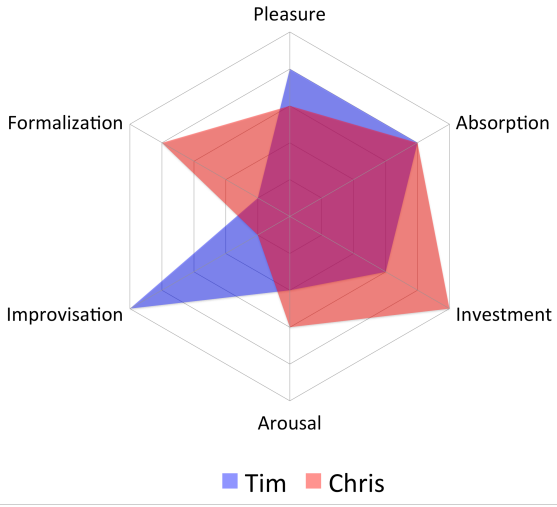


Figure 15

Tim & Chris:
Comparison of Automusication



New Directions

If nothing else, my goal throughout this work has been threefold: to justify the study of solitary music making, to demonstrate the diversity of valid forms of personal musical expression, and to give voice to the music makers among us who are marginalized by the conventional wisdom that music that is social and participatory is the most valuable and suited to academic study. While not a perfect project by any means, I like to think that by drawing attention to automusication as an important and relevant field of study, I have in some ways done enough. That said there is no shortage of future work that could be done to expand on my meager volume, and I hope that others continue where I have left off.

The logistics of the current project did not allow for as much actual musical observation as I had hoped, although the groundwork I've laid certainly works at least as far as a proof-of-concept for further studies in solitary music making and automusication. Given how prevalent the practice of singing along with recorded material, whether it be while listening to an iPod with headphones, listening to the radio in the car, or playing CDs at home through a stereo or computer, a specific study of this behavior seems as though it would be particularly fruitful. This approach could potentially be most impactful if coupled with a study based in either neuroscience or cognitive science so that it might be possible to begin to understand the ways in which the brain reacts and processes the musical information that both heard and produced.

The relationship between automusication and performative music making also requires further investigation. I am aware of some work being done on solo musicians using loopers in live performance and coincidentally, one individual I have interviewed

spoke with me about just that.[58] Nevin uses a loop pedal to construct layered musical textures in real time by himself that allows him to compose material without strong knowledge of music theory.

> I've never actually written a song, partly because I don't have the theory background, so the looper allows me to, aside from printed pieces specifically for solo viola, it's kind of the first outlet I've had to really be my own band and it allows me to build a song without having to communicate the theory behind it to others which I don't really have the language for which I think might surprise a lot of people when they know what level I play at.

While his stated reasons for using the looper are based in a perceived inability to communicate music theory adequately enough to lead a group through a song he has written, the ways in which solo looping performances in general function as a public exhibition of a private creation bears some resemblance to automusication. Many looped compositions are composed in bedrooms and studios and even when performed for others the performance is an essentially solitary act. The question of whether the performer is so engrossed in the creation of his or her own musical material that the audience is entirely disregarded could be asked. These performances are often virtuosic in their own right and require an immense amount of technical skill, coordination, and therefore focus. Although his playing is done without the aid of a looper, the similarities that Colin Stetson's saxophone playing has to a loop-based composition are clear. His playing might be an example of this sort of hyper-focused, internally performance that would require further research to flesh out its relationship to automusication.[59]

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[58] The one person I am certain is working on researching loops is Tufts professor Joseph Auner. The majority of the information that follows about loopers is credited to him.
[59] For an example of this see Stetson performing his piece "Judges" at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9YJM2GCvk8

As I suggested previously perhaps another direction for further work might involve a serious reexamination of the way we use the term "musician." The way in which we restrict our definition of a musician to include only those with extensive musical training and virtuosic technique (and likewise how we mythologize the talents of so-called folk musicians, as if their abilities are God-given without the need for practice) is potentially a factor that drives so many individuals to keep their musical sounds, talents, and aspirations to themselves. To recall the example of the Berber village that opened Chapter 1, in a society where music is most appreciated as a fundamentally social and participatory practice, where the lines between amateur and professional are blurred and the voices of all are welcome to be heard, automusication is a fact of life. However, it would appear to serve a different function that I have seen in my research. Although I can only speculate as to the reasons the individuals of that particular community chose to sing while working alone, I gather that their need to subvert societal pressures to be "good enough" to perform for others is somewhat less than the individuals I have worked with throughout the course of this study. Our society tends to delineate rather starkly the perceived divide between "musicians" and "non-musicians" which I believe contributes to the stance-on-power that many automusicants take.

Furthermore, studies that assess automusication in a more global context would be particularly welcome. There is no shortage of cross-cultural work that could be done with automusication as I suspect that, much like music itself, automusication is a behavior that transcends social and cultural boundaries. I will close by way of another anecdote. When I first began my thesis research I was discussing my fledgling ideas with a close friend who had recently returned from visiting some national parks in Madagascar. He immediately

remarked about the prevalence of singing among lone men he encountered while traveling through rural areas; it seemed like everyone he passed was singing to themselves. The individuals he encountered did not seem particularly adverse to him eavesdropping and would frequently continue singing even when aware of his presence, but the fact that they were singing to themselves in the first place is intriguing. I could not speculate about the meanings of this particular kind of automusication in that particular socio-cultural setting, however this certainly seems like fertile ground for further study.

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