

Planning, executing, and reflecting on the exhibition
Discovery is Invention: artists and field recordings

Alex Keller

Curatorial Issues

Linda Montignani

Friday, May 6, 2005

St. Edward's University

INTRODUCTION

He did not want to compose another *Quixote* --which is easy-- but *the Quixote itself*.

Needless to say, he never contemplated a mechanical transcription of the original; he did not propose to copy it. His admirable intention was to produce a few pages which would coincide--word for word and line for line--with those of Miguel de Cervantes.

Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote, by Jorge Luis Borges (48-49)

A few months ago I was at the Houston Museum of Fine Art's Cartier show with my son and brother-in-law, both of whom are sharp and insightful pre-teenagers. When we saw some of Cartier's furniture, that used simple proportional relationships to create interesting forms, one of them said something to the effect of "Big deal. I could have designed that." Without disagreeing with them, I introduced the idea of John Cage and *4'33"* (his piece for four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence). I told them that I thought the difference between my choosing to write that piece and Cage having done it is that Cage grappled with ideas of silence and sound and their relationship for the better part of his long career.

Just as Cartier's furniture revealed his well-developed understanding of proportion, despite its simplicity, Cage's work reveals a well-developed sensibility about the use of silence in a creative context. Anecdotes about *4'33"* tend to anger people who are not familiar with Cage's work. The perceived problem is that composing with material that you have no control over (in Cage's case, the sounds that occur in a room while a pianist is silent) doesn't have the control aspect that a typical composer/creation does. In Jorge Luis Borges' story *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*, Menard decides to explore the relationship between creator and creation by taking on the task of writing – word for word, from his imagination – a duplicate of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, by becoming Cervantes as much as he is able. In the story, Menard's *Don Quixote* is seen as a genius anachronism, due to his will to take the drastic steps he saw necessary in order to create it. Like Cage's work, in *Pierre Menard* Borges opens up questions about what the act of creation is, and how that notion can complicate how a work is perceived as well as the relationship between the creator and creation.

In the spring of 2005, I curated an exhibition as a project for my Master of Liberal Arts degree from St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas. My intent was to exhibit a newer creative medium, phonography, in which the relationship between the artist and the material is as

unconventional as the Cagean idea of creation. Phonographers make field recordings and present them as art objects. I wanted to take this medium out of a musical context and put it in a gallery context, to explicitly discern the difference between the experience of listening to music and the experience of listening to something that is other than music. The exhibition, *Discovery is Invention*, took its title from an article by Isaac Sterling referring to the creative act of phonography as “discovery, not invention.” Just as photographers create art by ‘discovering’ light through capture, phonographers create art by capturing sound. Sterling asserted that the phonographer’s art object is something that is discovered; the title of the show claims that discovery is the same as creation.

I’m going to tell the story of the show, including how it fits into the development of my aesthetic, and look at what could have been done better, what worked well, and what I will never do again. I’ll use some of the reading I have been doing as well as interviews with curators and impresarios as a way to provide insight into what happened.

BACKGROUND

Since I was in high school, I've been interested in the creative possibilities of inexpensive sound-generating devices, and have had a love for recordings of unconventional music. My early experiments were with simple electronic music and guitar devices, rerouted and fed back through each other, and recorded on simple homemade four-track cassette recorders. An interest in recording technology led me to a six-week recording intensive course. After that, I began my BFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, focusing on sound art and art/technology.

As I learned more about the sound art medium and began to understand it as something that operated outside of the musical sphere, a lot of questions began popping up about the nature of the work and its presentation. At SAIC I participated in the ongoing *Waveforms: Currents in Sonic Art* series, in which recorded pieces were played back in a movie theater. The presentation was a close analogy to that of a musical performance, but there was no visual stimulus. I don't believe that asking an audience to experience a non-visual work in a conventionally visual setting is asking too much (and I don't really have a problem with asking too much of an audience) but it is asking a lot. I also was disinclined to present my work with video or film. The idea is not bad *per se*, but I felt that just randomly pairing a recorded piece with imagery subverted the intention of the piece, to occupy the whole of the listener's attention.

At the time I did a lot of research into the presentation of live electronic (all circuit-generated) and electro-acoustic (using real sound sources) sound works. The idea of presenting recorded works in a theater/musical context seemed more and more distasteful. John Cage's solution was to create such works in real-time; introducing a human element that audiences could see had immediate effect on the material presented. I've fortunately had the opportunity to perform some of Cage's work, including *Imaginary Landscapes #3*, scored for fourteen AM radios. More interesting to me was the idea of putting recorded works in an installation context, where the audience is put in the position of not-watching (as in, watching speakers instead of) the performer while experiencing the piece in a real space, as opposed to the context of 'listening to music on the stereo'. At the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels, some of the first electronic and electro-acoustic music was presented over four hundred speakers attached to the walls of the Phillips Pavilion. Le Corbusier designed the Phillips Pavilion with the assistance of Iannis

Xenakis, the composer/architect/mathematician. Xenakis' piece, *Concret P-H*, and *Le Poème Electronique* by Edgard Varèse were presented. Another great solution to the problem of presentation of sound art is broadcast. Paris' GRM studios created a lot of interesting sound pieces that were broadcast. Germany and Canada also have rich traditions of sound art for broadcast.

I ended up creating a few new pieces as a response to the idea of sound art in an installation context rather than that of a concert presentation. One, *Meat*, involved a dismantled Honeywell refrigerator-sized computer. I built it into a box with a seat, and eight speakers. The listener could step in, close the door, and be surrounded, in the dark, by sounds generated by my pulse, made into tape loops. One other pertinent piece was *Renew*, which was a tape cut-up made from readings about Chicago's architecture. I had that played back in a loop on a speaker at a bus stop in Wicker Park, a neighborhood that was undergoing serious gentrification issues at the time. My BFA thesis piece, *The light part is called lightning*, consisted of randomly selected cassette field recordings.

After a move to Seattle, I did end up performing live electronic sound art with Chris DeLaurenti as *rebreather* from 1999 to 2003. We worked with modified consumer electronics that were inherently unstable; the best performances involved us working furiously on stage to extract the tiniest sound from our malfunctioning equipment. I felt like that was a good solution to the problem of presenting live electronic sound works, where the absence of a performer's obvious interaction with his equipment/instruments can be distracting to the listener. Cage insisted that there must be theater: *rebreather's* retort was: you can see that this is all being created live, in real-time, with as much theatricality as if we were playing guitars.

While working with *rebreather*, the idea of presenting recorded sound in a non-musical context was making more sense to me. One piece, *You are not in*, was created from incoming answering machine message tapes I found in thrift stores. I designed a system that would play the pieces back over telephones; as a gallery installation, the piece consisted of six phones, any one of which had a fifteen-minute loop of someone's discarded messages.

Around the time of *rebreather's* inception I had an interesting conversation with Dale Lloyd in a Seattle café. Dale began describing an idea he had begun to work with, that of making field recordings and presenting them as compact discs, which he'd begun to refer to as

phonography. I'd worked with field recordings in a lot of my work but always as material to be manipulated for some other goal, usually processed with software or at least heavily edited.

I thought and thought about Dale's idea and had a very hard time resolving it aesthetically. The main question seemed to be: what is the relationship of the artist to the material? I also wondered (and still wonder) whether the audience perceives the recording as contextual or abstraction. At that point I wasn't able to accept such a passive relationship between the artist and his material, expecting an artist to have more to do with his material. I did join the phonography e-mail list, and participated in many discussions with other artists, and began to consider my own field recordings as art objects that stood alone.

The phonography e-mail list represented artists all over the world, but Seattle did seem to be a phonography Mecca of sorts. I began performing with a group of Seattle phonographers as *The Phonographer's Union* in 2002. We would typically begin by playing selections from our own works in turn, then carefully mixing our material together to create an illusory space in which the sound of a riot could be mixed with the hum of a refrigerator, or dripping water, or what-have-you. A phonographer from San Diego, Marcos Fernandes, joined us for one broadcast performance, and later released it as a CD on his record label, Accretions. We received a lot of positive press from many different magazines. One review said

...this collective of sound artists and field recording engineers, located on America's north west coast, more closely resemble a group of parlour mystics in their modes of operation. Imagine them standing in passionate silence, waiting to hear a world that only their willfully selective microphones can capture. Then picture them later gathered together in a studio, joining hands over laptops, CDs and MD players. There is something magnificently Victorian about the whole endeavour, the sense of being invited to participate in a strangely beneficial séance...

The resultant interplay between the various 'captures' displays an agreeable subtlety and sensitivity in its shifts of focus and range. Impossible to reduce to any kind of linear development or narrative, it reveals a bustling acoustic realm existing just outside our senses that deserves to be attended to. (Hollings 132)

A show I saw in Seattle had an impact on my ideas about public presentation of sound art. *Volume: Bed of Sound*, curated by experimental music impresario Elliott Sharp, consisted of

a sixty-foot long futon with approximately forty headphone and Minidisc rigs. Each rig was dedicated to one artist. The listener had a comfortable space in which to hear works publicly, in a context which works in a way that live presentation of taped pieces over speakers does not: over headphones. The listener is free to block out the real world in favor of the artist's sound world, and is conditioned to accept a headphone experience without visual stimulus (in a way that the listener is not conditioned to accept the presentation of sound art over speakers without visual stimulus).

I'd also begun to expand my role as presenter instead of just artist. A condition of winning a 2002 performing artists' award from the City of Seattle was that I had to set up a presentation of the surround-sound work I'd created. I figured that if I were to go to all the trouble of creating this complicated presentation, I should invite some other artists to use the facility. I did, which became the *SST: Surround Sound Transmissions* show, in which artists presented taped pieces over a six-channel surround system. The audience seemed to appreciate the extra nuance that six channels of sound added, and felt that it more than made up for the lack of a live performance. This experiment led to another couple of shows, *Threshold of hearing* and *Threshold of pain*, which attempted to solve the problem of presenting live electronic sound works by having the artist behind the audience in a darkened room. All three shows were successful in their own way, and a lot of effort went into their presentation, including proper promotion, programs, and documentation. I know a bit about those sorts of presentation issues but didn't feel quite as up to the task as I ought to have been, due to a lack of formal training or apprenticeship/experience in event/exhibit promotion and presentation.

DISCOVERY IS INVENTION

When I began my MLA at St. Edward's, I knew I wanted to focus on a curation project that would entail arranging for a proper exhibition in more of a gallery and less of a musical performance context. After several semesters of figuring out who could help me with that, the Fine Art department's Rick MacArthur helped me get connected with Linda Montignani, who was an appropriate candidate for me because of her experience in curating painting exhibitions.

The project I'd proposed was a public installation of phonographic works. It had become obvious to me that the show would have to be about phonography; it is the topic I was writing my thesis on and had been researching for a few years. My intention was to present a few works that showed different aspects of phonography, to create a comfortable listening environment in the way that the *Volume: Bed of Sound* show did, and to do everything right: proper promotion with good graphic design, proper documentation, full information available to the public. In order to facilitate this last goal, I had created a timeline to follow. Linda encouraged me to make it even more specific and follow it to the letter.

For the most part, I did follow it to the letter. One aspect of the project was arranging interviews with several local curators. Time considerations (which included a new full-time job, work on my thesis, work on the show, some medical issues, and family responsibilities) made this step nearly impossible; I did one interview over e-mail fairly easily but as of today am still playing telephone tag with the other two. All the press material (which included a formal press release as well as informal invitations via e-mail and postcard) did get out on time. The construction of the benches was an interesting wrinkle. I borrowed (reverse-engineered) a design from <http://superhappybunny.com/>, a Los Angeles-based design firm, for modular benches made from plywood. My woodworking skills (or lack thereof) led me to as a friend, John Krause, for assistance constructing them. Designing and installing the audio component was fairly painless as I have (obviously) done that a lot in the past.

I was fortunate to have found a student graphic designer, Matt Strimska, to work with me. His very economical, direct style complimented the economical, direct nature of the material. Matt did the basic design that ended up on the poster, flyer, postcards, website, and programs. Initially I intended to do a printed program, but since there was no central location from which to

distribute them, ended up doing a program that was affixed to each wall by the benches, along with an artist's statement.

The show went up on time, and despite the amount of press information I sent out, didn't receive a lot of fanfare in the local media. I did make the main local news sources, the Chronicle and Austin-American Statesman, and have received a lot of positive feedback from people who did see the show, but for the most part, didn't get much other media attention.

I had arranged two related events, in order to give the show a larger context. One was a presentation at St. Edward's MLA Symposium. I love talking about this sort of work and felt like I gave an engaging presentation, with only a few technical issues. For what it's worth, I ran out of time during the presentation. The other related event was a performance using field recordings at the Church of the Friendly Ghost, Austin's main sound art venue. The performance included Terry Horn (from Ft. Worth), Josh Ronsen, Josh Russell and myself. Despite almost being vacated by the Austin HAZMAT response team due to a broken gas main across the street (which I later found out scared off a lot of our audience), the performance went off well. My only regret was not having recorded the gas leak and ensuing chaos.

The remaining task is the compilation of documentation on the web site, discoveryisinvention.org. For the benefit of the artists in their own CVs and press, I will have the original recordings, a recording of the performance, all photographs, programs, and press materials available on the site. The shows I'd curated previously have all been documented but it took me a lot longer; I am resolved to have this wrapped up by the end of the semester.

REFLECTION

When I complete a big project my initial impulse is to take a big break from it and deal with the rest of my life that has inevitably been neglected. However, completing a project like this really requires a bit of reflection in order to better understand what worked, what didn't, and what to do differently in the future. Those questions apply to aesthetic issues as well as practical issues.

In a way, I separate aesthetics and administration too much. I begin a project like this with an aesthetic goal, resulting from years of brainstorming, reading, talking, and corresponding. In an interview with Regina Gleeson, Valerie Connor said

“Most curators (of contemporary art) would not - I would be quite sure - be paid to undertake self-directed periods of research 'out of the office' or outside the usual terms of a contract. This kind of on-going research - that should be so important doesn't get formally acknowledged as a rule, as part of what it is that a curator does or is for.”

(Gleeson)

It could also be said that if you are a curator (or artist) you do not do it for the money: you do it for the idea, the creation, the spectacle. You do it because art is what you think about, it is how you perceive the world and respond to it. In my case I am interested in experimenting with new solutions in the exhibition and contextualization of sound art. In particular, with regard to *Discovery is Invention*, I'm interested in phonography as a way to move the listener to other spaces, and looking at how we perceive our sound environment as a whole.

From the point at which a project's concept is worked out, curation is all administration: creating the graphic design and press, dealing with facilities, and interacting with the artists. This is all well and good, but nowhere near as interesting to me as the conceptual aspects of the exhibition, and they are usually resolved before I start planning anything practical. In an interview, Valerie Connor said of the curator's role

“While it's about facilitation it's much more active than that might suggest - more 'directional'. My job as a curator is about having an overview of all the factors that will impact on the production of a piece of work... It's figuring out the politics of complicity, taking a positive attitude to contingency in the pursuit of a project, understanding power

and how this knowledge is at the heart of 'culture'. It's about making sure that everyone involved in producing a piece of work or a show knows to what ends their effort is directed. It's collaborative: the belief it's anything else is a cod. It's about knowing what history is, what art is, what communication is.” (Gleeson)

Connor suggests that it is impossible to find the place in which the curator ceases being an administrator and becomes an artist.

I've been reading a bit about curating media art and one of the points that keeps coming up is that the line between artist and curator is often blurred. Regarding the 010101 show, focused on digital media and net.art at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, “The line here at SFMOMA has gotten very blurry between the editing, and the trafficking of content, and the production of the content. And we've taken on a lot of responsibilities in the wake of this on other shows as well in kind of participating in that process.” (Graham 11)

It's taking some time for me to wrap my brain around the idea of the curator being a participant as well as a facilitator. It is true that the coordination of graphic design, benches and electronics had some of the thrill of creation to it, and I suppose I did blur that line by choosing the benches as medium and reverse engineering them. So in a way I have made the curatorial tasks more like aesthetic tasks, but I didn't really mean to present that work as art objects. I intended to use the benches only as a framing device for the artists' work, but I think they might have functioned as part of the piece. Patrick Lichty says of this relationship

As experimentation continues, the difference between collaborative art, database collection/visualization, communal activity, and more traditional curatorial practices often becomes slim. As various artists and practitioners attempt to create focal points for the exposition of creative processes, these genres will likely intertwine in inseparable, yet discernable ways... (Lichty 3)

REFLECTION: Aesthetics

The exhibition is a large part of what I wanted to achieve at St. Edward's. My background is in fine arts but a large part of my activities as an artist has taken part in what an audience would perceive is music. *Discovery is Invention*, as well as a number of my other non-

performed works, can be seen with regard to music in two lights. Either the intention is to broaden the idea of what music is, or the intention is to present material in a non-musical context.

The grey area between music and sound art is a very important component in this equation. I'm comfortable with the inherent contradictions and problems. To me, it's more interesting to present work that blurs that boundary than to take a dogmatic position. It might be that it will be far easier to understand that conflict in retrospect than it is to see it now, just as Duchamp's ready-mades forecasted generations of found art and a recognition of the mass-manufactured object as an aesthetic object.

Regarding the difference between presenting time-based art and static art, Steve Barsotti said in an interview:

“...sculpture and painting are static and time based art is not by its very nature.

Juxtaposing things in time is very different than juxtaposing things in a space. Also, the live sequence of sound-producing somethings has a direct cultural relationship to the musical concert. This has an impact on cultural perception.”

It's an interesting problem that is dealt with differently in different venues, as Barsotti illustrates. In a concert setting, sound art takes on a more musical weight, and in a gallery setting, its relationship to the visual arts becomes more significant.

I'm satisfied with the show, aesthetically. The benches did not necessarily call attention to themselves, but then again they WERE furniture, both in the functional sense and in the sense of being simple, fixed, unobtrusive objects. I ended up liking the idea of the unfinished birch as material. I'd intended to varnish them, and actually had them on the newspaper with brushes out and the varnish open before I realized that they complemented the raw, untreated nature of the recordings. In this context, I'm not too interested in commenting specifically on the works themselves, but I do think all of the pieces were well done. The headphone experience is one that I like a lot. I think that the spectacle of an individual with headphones on is an image that people are very comfortable with, so the listener does not look extremely unusual, and I think the listener in general is comfortable sitting in a public place with headphones on. What interests me is the subversion of the headphone/listener relationship. Typically an iPod/Walkman listener is hearing music, putting themselves in a music video or cinematic

moment in which the listener is either director or actor. When listening to phonography over headphones in a public place, the listener is hearing another space, which pushes back the visual as the listener directs an abstract film, trying to imagine the image of the space in which the sound took place. This is especially the case in Dale Lloyd's piece, which was recorded with a binaural headset, giving the headphone listener a real sound-image of the space around him/her. In his book *Audio-Media* Michel Chion refers to that as visualized sound: both refer to a sound that is associated with a visual source. (Chion 71-72) R. Murray Schafer, in *The Tuning of the World*, refers to that detachment as *schizophonia*: psychological confusion between real and artificial sounds. Schafer suggests it is inherent to the modern psyche, due to the presence of audible recordings in our lives. (Schafer 90-91) While a phonographic recording refers to soundscape, and creates cues that we respond to as if it were our real sound environment, Schafer's concept of schizophonia suggests that we respond with confusion because our listening apparatus can't tell the difference. This creates an interesting paradox: listening to a field recording can serve to make us more aware of our soundscape but it also alienates us from actually interacting in it, making us confused as to what is real and what is artifice.

My working method, and the way I consider art, usually entails setting up a situation and following it to its logical conclusion: whatever that conclusion may be is the result of the project, and I (hope that I am able to) accept it as a legitimate result. In this case, *Discovery is Invention* is an aesthetic success. I portrayed three different perspectives of phonography, and found a new way in which it can be heard.

REFLECTION: Practice

Every time that I've curated a project I've been frightfully busy. I think that could be extended to accommodate the fact that I am always very busy. I manage to get everything done (which can include scaling back my expectations of what is to be done) but it's typically on a wing and a prayer. This problem concerns me; I don't believe that there is any point doing a project unless it will be done right. By 'done right' I mean that it should have good graphic design, proper promotion, and generally give the appearance of professionalism. I feel that I've lived up to this goal, but it usually requires a lot of sacrifice and compromise from the rest of my life, which is very problematic. It's very difficult to make this conclusion but I have to

acknowledge that I should make sure that I have proper time and resources allocated before I tackle a project like this again.

One of my weakest areas is that I under-budget the time that it will take to complete a component of a project.

I need to be better about recruiting help, because it's difficult to wear all hats. As a curator, I need to write all the copy myself, since my writing is my main voice in the curator/critic/audience relationship. Farming out the graphic design to Matt Strimska worked well, and I will likely try to do that in the future. I was supposed to have someone take care of the benches in an exchange of services but that did not work out, and I had to work with another friend to build them. That cost quite a bit of time, including a missed day at work. I did the web site, which is simple, but it would be nice to farm that out too. I design very simple web sites (specifically for accessibility to people with slow connections) but it would be nice to have someone else do a more interesting one. Rachel Koper of Austin's Gallery Lombardi said in an interview

"I use volunteer staff, and interns from UT and Texas State. I use private patrons when I need them, to host a fancy dinner or house an out of town artist. I get discounts on things from supportive businesses, like hotels, flowers, kegs, cases of wine, printing, and photographers."

and

"I look for interns who are reliable, self-motivated and can work from home. I'm not the best at graphic design, so occasionally I'll get someone for that. I hate using the tripod so photography and documentation help is desirable. Otherwise, I have assistants to help prep and paint the walls, some data entry, some drink serving."

Without an organization behind me it's difficult to marshal those types of resources; realistically, in the future, I should either work through another arts organization or scale back my expectations. Steve Barsotti's curatorial work occurred outside of a formal gallery, without the infrastructure for interns, but he said that

"Tod and I ran the show and delegated stuff to people who could help. Usually the sort of help was in running around getting stuff, designing things, stuffing envelopes and such."

Christopher DeLaurenti recruited help for similar projects; he said that

“Extra help with legwork, follow-up phone calls, schmoozing the press, and helping artists set-up would be most welcome.”

Trying to obtain external funding for a project like this is important. I paid for *Discovery is Invention* out of pocket. I spent about \$250 for printing, \$150 for wood, and \$100 for audio, which is not a small amount of money. It’s worth noting that one of the problems with sound art exhibits is that the projects are often unsalable. Projects that are salable still can have a hard time finding their market. Rachel Koper said

“Time Based Art requires subsidies to exist!... I've told plenty of video artists: nobody's going to buy your soundtrack CD, or your blurry film-still or a VHS tape of your installation room... If money matters to you, it should be treated like a movie or band performance, with a cover charge.”

Christopher DeLaurenti said that probably half of his projects received external funding. It’s interesting to think of ways that sound art can function as art objects that a visitor might be able to purchase, but my experience so far has been that audiences aren’t interested. Most artists I know spend their own money to create work. It is a solution, but far from an ideal one.

Several years ago I proposed a collective record label, which became known as Mimeograph to a group of artists whose work I liked. The intention of Mimeograph was to present ourselves as a group, but handle our own releases individually, and be as unofficial as possible, so that no one is burdened with administrative duties. I have been throwing around a similar idea with a few of my friends here that would be more focused on presenting events. Making such an organization legitimate and official is an interesting idea but one of which I am leery. While working on my BFA I interned at Experimental Sound Studio, a Chicago not-for-profit arts facility, whose director, Dawn Mallozzi, advised me never to start a not-for-profit as legal restrictions and the general availability of funding can make it more of an albatross than a facilitator. Gallery Lombardi’s Rachel Koper presents an interesting solution to the funding problem.

“Six months out of the year, I lease the space to artists, musicians and charities, \$1000 a week or \$400 a day. That way I advise them and help them be successful, but they pay for their own events. This is how I stay in business and stay experimental.”

Gallery Lombardi's solution is a relevant one, but requires a facility to begin with, and in order to obtain a facility, an organization has to have some sort of legitimate, official presence.

Benjamin Weil, curator at SFMOMA, said of the salability of media art

“...what is really important is to think about how to support that kind of research, and commissioning as being the only solution that we have right at this point. In other words, providing the infrastructure; giving money to artists to produce their work and possibly extending this to being able to put them in touch with people who can help them with technical problems that they can't necessarily solve on their own.” (Graham 82)

Regarding the use of gallery space for media art, Cliodhna Shaffrey said

“I am excited by trends in contemporary art practices and the kind of opportunities that artist are making for themselves - operating within the rifts, vaults, fissures of the 'real' world. My image of the contemporary artist is that of a wart - he / she / they who can attach themselves to all sorts of possibilities within the quotidian... What's positive about now is the plurality of approaches that can feed the imagination. Everything seems possible, the universe is ripe with suggestion and the gallery is only one destination for art.” (Gleeson)

Certainly, the gallery context presents problems to the display of media art. Shaffrey's point was that media art, in turn, can take advantage of exhibition contexts such as installation and site specificity that our conventional understanding of visual art can not.

I got the press out on time but didn't get as much mileage as I would have liked. It's not easy to get good press; sound art is notoriously difficult because calendar and arts editors are never sure to list it under music or fine arts. Most PR agents agree that 90% of the best press is done on the phone. I either need to get used to doing that or find someone else who is good at it. Rachel Koper describes Gallery Lombardi's promotion strategy as a combination of their web site, a listserv, blogging, and lots of telephone calls. It occurs to me now that an opening, especially one with wine, food and performances, would have been a good idea. However, it's not something I would have been able to coordinate myself. Steve Barsotti describes the promotion process as

“We called as many people as we could in the media and even tapped into people we knew (Corbett). We created mailers and borrowed mailing lists from friendly organizations. We made posters but really for our own amusement, posters on light poles is pointless for actually getting people for this (sort of work).”

My existing mailing lists are a mess. It’s always a hassle getting addresses for postcards properly formatted. I send out formal press releases to one e-mail group and informal invitations to another e-mail group, and making sure the right people are on each one is a hassle. I need to develop an easily updated database that keeps track of my e-mail/print/fax press/colleague/friend contacts. Barsotti’s idea of borrowing mailing lists from arts organizations is a useful one.

The bottom line is that, in order to make my projects more successful, I need to

- plan ahead further than I ever have
- budget generous amounts of time for each task
- delegate as many of the tasks as possible, and recruit more people to delegate them to
- keep on top of my contact lists

This is very easy to say but important to keep in mind if I am to take on any other project.

SUMMATION OF SUMMATION

“...the term curator covers so much. For example, somebody called a curator could work with a collection and their job would be to advocate for the purchase of a particular work. Or a curator might have the role of developing an institution by working with architects to improve a building for artists and audiences. Or a curator might edit pages in a magazine, assess funding proposals, run a commercial gallery...”

Grant Watson, interviewed by Regina Gleeson

Obviously getting this project done was a little thorny. A realistic view of the future tells me that projects like this will not get appreciably easier for me. Should I keep at it?

When I was working on my BFA I found myself, between school, work and an internship, working an eighty-hour week, and after several months, had a near-breakdown. Lou and Dawn Mallozzi, the directors of Experimental Sound Studio, gave me some tough, valuable advice:

“You’d better be involved in art because you like it; if you are miserable, fix it and don’t inflict it on everybody else. Don’t become a martyr to art. Have fun or get out.”

These are words I live by and always remember to enjoy what I do. I love grappling with the aesthetic issues, with creating a situation in which the audience has to figure out what is going on. I like revisiting new solutions to the same problems. I like the way that the same ideas keep popping up in my work, the questions about authorship, the complicated issues involved in performing sound art, the analysis of recursive processes. I make art and help other artists show their stuff because it is fascinating, and I am just as satisfied producing shows as I am creating work for them. That is why I keep doing it.

I feel that aesthetically *Discovery is Invention* was a success. I presented phonographic works in an inexpensive, novel way, advancing my understanding of sound art as well as creating a threshold for what I will do next. Practically, the show worked, but I’d have liked to have better press coverage. The bottom line is that in order to continue, I will have to be better at using what resources I have, to farm out more work to friends and colleagues.

Despite the hazards, I'm going to keep at it. I don't know what I'd be doing if I didn't continue to be involved with art, but I don't think I'd like it too much. Borges, of Pierre Menard, said that assuming the identity of Cervantes made him able to successfully create a few pages of *Don Quixote*, but at the cost of Menard's own identity. My intention is to keep participating in art, as artist and curator, without sapping my resources and becoming someone I am not; to stay sane, and creative, and productive.

Menard (perhaps without wanting to) has enriched, by means of a new technique, the halting and rudimentary art of reading: this new technique is that of the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution. This technique, whose applications are infinite, prompts us to go through the *Odyssey* as if it were posterior to the *Aeneid* and the book *Le jardin du Centaure* of Madame Henri Bachelier as if it were by Madame Henri Bachelier. This technique fills the most placid works with adventure. To attribute the *Imitatio Christi* to Louis Ferdinand Céline or to James Joyce, is this not a sufficient renovation of its tenuous spiritual indications?

Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote, by Jorge Luis Borges (54-55)

Discovery is Invention: Draft

Linda Montignani, advisor

Alex Keller

Borges, Jorge Luis. "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote." *Ficciones*. New York: Grove Press, 1962.

Graham, Beryl. "Curating New Media Art: SFMOMA and 010101." *University of Sunderland*, 2002.

Hollings, Ken. "The Phonographer's Union Live on Sonarchy Radio." *The Wire*. 244: June 2004.

Lichty, Patrick. "Reconfiguring the Museum: Electronic Media and Emergent Curatorial Models." *SWITCH*. February 2002.

Schafer, R. Murray. *The Tuning of the World (The Soundscape)*. New York: Knopf, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd.

Stainton, Catherine. "Voices and images: Making connections between identity and art" *Learning Research and Development Center, University of Pittsburgh Museum*. March 2001.

Sterling, Isaac. "What is phonography?" *Phonography.org*. Accessed February 1, 2005.
<<http://phonography.org/whatis.htm>.>

Appendix A: Interview with Rachel Koper, Director of Gallery Lombardi, Austin, Texas

How do you find artists for your projects? Do you set artist criteria before you decide whom you will show?

I find artists through actively viewing art at coffee shops, restaurants, museums, magazines, studio sales, galleries, through other artists' recommendations and the Internet. Yes I have criteria, many artists think they are the first to do something, but they are not "we put the art in party" at least once a year somebody thinks they thought of that for the first time ever. I look for craftsmanship, originality and consistency.

Do you select themes or artists first?

Both, sometimes I see a few artists work that I like and build a theme around their work, adding new folks to it. For example the "just been fired" ceramic show. This annual summer began with a smallish group of local potters, personal friends of mine. Now ceramic artists from all over Central Texas send me their slides hoping to get invited into the group. This show is an invitational, based on a media. Once or twice a year I do a juried theme show. Jurying is different than curating, you only deal with the slides entered by the deadline, usually your votes are averaged together. When I jury "Erotica" every 2 years, I choose my favorites out of the work submitted, sometimes this can be quite different than what I personally enjoy. I am occasionally surprised by excellent work I didn't know about, but overall the quality is not quite as high as it would be for a curated or invitational show. Artists like 'open entry' juried shows because they feel like it's democratic.

Does the work of a particular artist ever dictate the selection of a theme?

Yes, I met Matthew Rodriguez a graffiti artist. I asked him to co-curate a show with me, "the language of the railroad" in February of 2004. It turned out awesome.

What sort of agreements do your artists have to consent to?

I have no 'exclusives' with my artists. I take a 33% commission on all sales. Many galleries (DBerman for example) require exclusive Texas-wide representations and take 50%. I do a lot of referrals; I give architect clients artist's home phones for commission work. I only receive commissions from artwork I hold in my gallery or in my office, once it leaves my building that's it. The referral part is important, it builds trust and long-term relationships. I don't insure my artwork, I just have general liability, so it's important for artists to know and trust me to handle their work.

Are there some types of exhibitions that you know will be more successful than others when you begin your exhibition schedule?

Successful can mean various things to artists.

1. Money.
2. Press, publicity, or critical analysis.
3. Personal and or aesthetic growth as recognized by art world peers.

Graduate students typically make large scale, highly conceptual work that is very interesting but not for the home. It is intended to impress the university review board, not fit nicely above the sofa.

Video art is unsalable yet popular. Cow paintings sell very well.

How often do you take a chance on a new or untried idea?

Daily.

Do you think curation of media/time arts is substantially different from curation of plastic/visual arts?

Time Based Art requires subsidies to exist! You can charge a cover, like amoda.org at the bar; visitors pay to enter the environment or happening.

I've seen a few folks, like Murray McMillan former UT grad, try and sell framed photo-stills of past performances at his current per formative event. I think his aunt bought one, out of sympathy. His event was fun and well attended and free. He loses money all the time, as does Barna Kantor.

I've told plenty of video artists: nobody's going to buy your soundtrack CD, or your blurry film-still or a VHS tape of your installation room. If you think they will, you are on a fantasy planet. If money matters to you, it should be treated like a movie or band performance, with a cover charge.

I've watched plenty of short art films. Most of them suck. Film is very complicated and hard. People that are good at it move to LA.

Often when I show videos, I string together as many as I can on a DVD that loops throughout a four-hour night. The repetition is boring so I try to make a variety pack with humor in it. I hate boring, slow-torture videos. A lot of my friends work in music and film so I have high standards.

Have you found any solutions to the problem of presenting media/time arts in a gallery setting?

I barter various art services for the use of electronic equipment. I get it free and it's easy to use. I use interns to monitor the equipment during events.

I did one installation once that had: 5 PCs, 5 cameras, and 5 projectors all suspended from the ceiling with my friend Zack www.mine-control.com. It was a labor of love, we borrowed everything from supportive businesses and then just made it happen. He sells his programs for \$45,000 and doesn't need art money. He just wanted to show off for his friends. People came back looking for it, bringing the kids, etc. for weeks afterwards. Do to the borrowed equipment I never leave my video art up for more than a week at a time. It's easy for the public to miss the whole show.

What led you to curating exhibitions?

Ron Prince asked me if I would manage Gallery Lombardi in 2000. I met him when I was writing grants for the Artist's Coalition of Austin (now defunct).

Is it an extension of another career or a dimension of your career?

I am a painter. I've always wanted to be an artist; I majored in painting at drawing at the University of Michigan. I do show my own work at Gallery Lombardi and other galleries. In the last two years, I've been very active out in the community, so I've been doing more small-scale drawings and tiny bit of painting. Some folks don't know that I paint because I am also:

- Director of Gallery Lombardi
- I design websites and graphics.
- I write press releases and marketing materials for businesses.
- I write art criticism for the Chronicle, Glasstire, VoA San Antonio, the Art Lover's Guide, ArtLies, basically whoever calls me.
- I install art in homes and other galleries or business- basically as preparator.
- I hang art for Tambaleo and take a commission; also I do salon parties in people's homes, or for architects like Metrohomes.

To me it's all about having art on the brain, whether it's my own painting or someone else's.

How is your time divided on a project?

Randomly.

What resources do you need to handle a project?

I hate paperwork; I am an army of one. I use volunteer staff, and interns from UT and Texas State. I use private patrons when I need them, to host a fancy dinner or house an out of town artist. I get discounts on things from supportive businesses, like hotels, flowers, kegs, cases of wine, printing, and photographers.

How do you deal with promotion?

I use my website primarily, I have a listserv of 2,700 folks. I update it and run it myself, I blog on other sites. For the Texas Biennial I promoted the show heavily for 4 months prior to the event. I called writers and editors and pitched my show. The Statesman ran a full-page feature, the Chronicle ran a feature, and the San Antonio Chronicle ran a feature. KUT gave us a drive-time 5 o'clock free PSA, I was interviewed by News8 yesterday. There will be more reviews coming from Glasstire.com and ArtLies.

I have never paid for a print advertisement in five years.

Do you work alone? If not, what type of help do you need?

I look for interns who are reliable, self-motivated and can work from home. I'm not the best a graphic design, so occasionally I'll get someone for that. I hate using the tripod so photography and documentation help is desirable. Otherwise, I have assistants to help prep and paint the walls, some data entry, some drink serving.

How many of your projects are funded externally (fed/state/pvt foundations)?

I used to work with City of Austin Cultural Contracts. I found the entire process annoying, cloying and a waste of my time. They ask you to count the number of American Indians and disabled people who see your exhibits. I just don't care to fill out those lame forms. I know my work is community oriented; I don't want to explain why over and over and over.

Discovery is Invention: Draft

Linda Montignani, advisor

Alex Keller

How much of your process involves looking for funding?

Not much, I do it on a per show basis. I personally organize 4-6 shows a year. The gallery hosts many more than that. 6 months out of the year, I lease the space to artists, musicians and charities for \$1000/week or \$400/day. That way I advise them and help them be successful, but they pay for their own events. This is how I stay in business and stay experimental.

What sort of timeline do you need to curate an exhibition? How far in advance do you schedule exhibitions?

2 years to 4 months.

Appendix B: Interview with Steve Barsotti, sound artist, Seattle, Washington

How do you find artists for your projects? Do you set artist criteria before you decide whom you will show?

Subway ads. No, seriously. First two *In the Eye of the Ear (ITEOTE)* shows were try to find as wide a variety as possible. Everyone (that can cram into two full weekends) that is doing something else. (to steal directly from Philip) The third festival *ITEOTE* and *BONES* were heated conversation amongst groups of about five or six people. We put on the table people of interest and why and then debated until we had the limited slots filled. Those who "lost" debate usually satisfied with "they will make the next show or CD."

Do you select themes or artists first?

Not for *ITEOTE*. But for *BONES* we did. To be honest, I cannot remember what the first theme was. The CD had Lisa Kucharski, Bill Talsma and Petra Klusmeyer but damned if I remember the theme. I do remember talking about text-based work versus electronics versus instrumental.

Does the work of a particular artist ever dictate the selection of a theme?

Well, sure. We did start with names and then discuss how to potentially group them. Being in Chicago and just starting this project (*BONES*) we had no shortage of artists so the trick was to organize them in some coherent fashion. I think we felt like a CD had to have more of a cohesive idea than a festival. Festivals, by their nature, tend to be collections of various things where albums or CDs tend to be more cohesive. I remember specifically talking about how compilations were kinda of pointless as objects. There was nothing for a critic (for example) to latch on to.

What sort of agreements do your artists have to consent to?

Unspeakable acts of degradation and humiliation. (Come on, this is too easy.....) Nods, winks, and handshakes usually. Festivals were "you get yours after we are paid back." Tod and I made it quite clear that we were not into social work. We had no problem doing all of the work for these festivals but we could not be out money. The *BONES* CD operated more like a label might. We pay you in a batch of CDs, we recoup funds spent in duplication, and publicity and then we talk royalties.

Are there some types of exhibitions that you know will be more successful than others when you begin your exhibition schedule?

The fact that we get any one at all into the audience is a success.

How often do you take a chance on a new or untried idea?

Not in eight years.....

Do you think curation of media/time arts is substantially different from curation of plastic/visual arts?

Well I have never curated anything that sat still in time but yeah I do. There is definitely a difference in the space. First, and most obvious, sculpture and painting are static and time based art is not by its very nature. Juxtaposing things in time is very different than juxtaposing things in a space. Also, the live sequence of sound-producing somethings has a direct cultural relationship to the musical concert. This has an impact on cultural perception.

Have you found any solutions to the problem of presenting media/time arts in a gallery setting?

I went through a time of fucking hating the gallery and all it meant. Mostly it meant to me dry boring static work. (I had quite the chip on my shoulder) The solution to me was to hold this work in more appropriate venues, such as Polestar. Or just set up chairs in the gallery as we did at Artemesia in Chicago.

What led you to curating exhibitions?

Not seeing/hearing things that were out there. Wanting to do a panoramic presentation of the wide variety of things happening in Chicago that did not fit the mainstream.

Is it an extension of another career or a dimension of your career?

Geez.... Career? I have jobs but never thought of career. It is an extension of my work as an artist. If my own work is part commentary on a larger cultural whole then my selection of artists for an event is my own sense of organizing other peoples commentary.

How is your time divided on a project?

Define "project." If I use *ITEOTE* then most of the time is in planning. Plan for space, plan for dates, plan for artists, plan for promotion, plan for artist's needs, etc.

What resources do you need to handle a project?

Way more fucking time and energy then I usually have.

How do you deal with promotion?

Sigh.... We called as many people as we could in the media and even tapped into people we knew (Corbett). We created mailers and borrowed mailing lists from friendly organizations. We made posters but really for our own amusement, posters on light poles is pointless for actually getting people for this. I used to find out about punk shows on a couple of poles but people don't tend to look for this stuff there.

Do you work alone? If not, what type of help do you need?

Tod and I ran the show and delegated stuff to people who could help. Usually the sort of help was in running around getting stuff, designing things, stuffing envelopes and such.

How many of your projects are funded externally? \$ fed/state/pvt foundations?

Zip- nada, none.

How much of your process involves looking for funding?

Discovery is Invention: Draft

Linda Montignani, advisor

Alex Keller

I never did look for funding. Tod and I talked about doing that for the fourth festival but that never happened.

What sort of timeline do you need to curate an exhibition? How far in advance do you schedule exhibitions?

I think for the size of *ITEOTE* about 9-12 months from "okay, let's do this" to show time was about right.

Appendix C: Interview with Christopher DeLaurenti, sound artist, Seattle, Washington

How do you find artists for your projects? Do you set artist criteria before you decide whom you will show?

In the various festivals and multi-performer gigs I organized from Fall 1997 - Fall 2002, I strived for variety, skill, and risk; I did my best to co-mingle and double bill reliable performers with unknown newcomers.

Do you select themes or artists first?

Artists; themes should be secondary and all too often serve as curatorial cover for lesser-known artists. Presenters should be happy, capable and competent enough to present an artist in her or his own right.

Does the work of a particular artist ever dictate the selection of a theme?

Never.

What sort of agreements do your artists have to consent to?

I've organized every one of my gigs with a handshake. I expect artists to show up for the sound check, do the gig, and not fuck around.

Are there some types of exhibitions that you know will be more successful than others when you begin your exhibition schedule?

No. I have been surprised by the overwhelming or scant turnout at just about every festival or gig I have organized.

How often do you take a chance on a new or untried idea?

I prefer to take chances on performers and leave the ideas to them.

Do you think curation of media/time arts is substantially different from curation of plastic/visual arts?

Yes. Visual arts curators are usually woefully ignorant of music and sound art while most every composer, improviser, and sound artist I know has more than a passing familiarity with visual art and artists.

Have you found any solutions to the problem of presenting media/time arts in a gallery setting?

To quote Lama Kunga, "Let us all CONTINUE." The best solution is not to give up.

What led you to curating exhibitions?

I wanted to arrange gigs for musicians I wanted and needed to hear.

Is it an extension of another career or a dimension of your career?

Yes; I consider new music rabbling rousing an essential part of my musical education. Simple social contact with musicians can be tremendously educational; tidbits of talk from

Discovery is Invention: Draft
Linda Montignani, advisor
Alex Keller

brands of trombone slide oil to grounding cables add up to an enormous fund of practical knowledge.

How is your time divided on a project?

That I do not know.

What resources do you need to handle a project?

Money and a good venue.

How do you deal with promotion?

In the usual manner, with timely, well-written press releases, calling in favors to the local media if possible, passing out flyers, sending email, and postering.

Do you work alone? If not, what type of help do you need?

Sometimes. Extra help with legwork, follow-up phone calls, schmoozing the press, and helping artists set-up would be most welcome.

How many of your projects are funded externally... fed/state/pvt foundations?

About half.

How much of your process involves looking for funding?

Not much. If it comes through it's an extra bonus.

What sort of timeline do you need to curate an exhibition? How far in advance do you schedule exhibitions?

That depended on the scale and scope of the event; I put together multi-day, multi-performer festivals 6 months in advance. Single day gigs 2 months in advance.

Appendix D – Mimeograph charter

Mission Statement

Mimeograph is a collective organization designed to aid the release of the works of John Bain, Steve Barsotti, Christopher DeLaurenti, Phil Hendricks, Alex Keller, and Meri von Klein Smid. We are working together because as a group we stand a better chance in dealing with distributors and media outlets. The organization is structured so that each member is able to release and follow-up on his own projects with very minimal involvement of the other members.

General Terms of Membership

- Members will finance their own projects.
- Excluding voluntary arrangements, members can not be financially liable to the group. All proceeds from the sale of an individual's release go to the individual.
- Excluding voluntary arrangements, the group can not be financially liable to the members.
- The members meet on a quarterly basis to discuss upcoming releases, opportunities, plans, and changes to the charter.
- Any member wishing to leave the collective may do so at any time. At that time he should finalize any shared financial arrangements.
- The collective can be dissolved at any time by a majority vote. At that time all members should finalize any shared financial arrangements.
- New members must be accepted by a unanimous vote.
- Releases may be made in any medium the artist chooses.

Tasks

Certain responsibilities are handled by individual members, to use the strengths of the individual members as well as for the sake of consistency.

They are:

- WWW design.
- WWW maintenance.
- Graphic design.
- Distribution contact person.
- Bank.
- Local consignments.

All of these responsibilities are rotated regularly, with the exception of distribution contact person, which is a permanent position.

Anatomy of a Release

- Member pays for replication and graphic design of their own release.
- The packaging for the CD could have a Mimeograph logo/icon on it.
- The CD will use a sequential catalog number.

Discovery is Invention: Draft

Linda Montignani, advisor

Alex Keller

- Media release information such as one-sheets will be created from a common template.
- Promo copies can be sent to a shared media contact list.
- Any advertising costs can be shared by the individual members mentioned in the ad. Advertising would be created from a common template.
- Using a common HTML template, the information will be uploaded to the WWW store.
- Sales from the WWW store will go to the Bank, who will issue monthly disbursements to the members.