

**PERSONAL HAVENS BEYOND THE HALL: THE
PSYCHOLOGY OF INTIMACY WITHIN THE ECOLOGY OF
EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC VENUES**

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate
Faculty of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
Major Subject: Architectural Science

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Troy, New York
May, 2011

ABSTRACT

Researchers from a variety of disciplines are beginning to pay more attention to the relationship between the built environment and cultural behavior. Performance spaces are particularly fertile spaces to explore this topic because of their inherent physical and socio-cultural concerns. Yet, the scientific literature on performance venues has limited its systematic purview to physical and psychophysical relationships; researchers in fields such as psychoacoustics have yet to critically examine cultural contexts which make certain psychophysical relationships salient. There has been a call to expand the role of these scientists beyond seekers of psychophysical correlations to appraisers of the cultural use of space (Blessner & Salter, 2007). But little will come of this call if only the physical environment can be studied systematically.

As a means to explore how psychoacoustics may be informed by the rigorous methods proffered by fields such as social psychology and anthropology, I have focused on the psychology of intimacy. This phenomenon is bound up in physical and socio-cultural determinants. A prized commodity in discourse about music venues, and a quality that has proven somewhat elusive to measure in the field of psychoacoustics, the study of intimacy has been shown to expose cultural values related to the use of space.

In this dissertation, the study of intimacy has been restricted to experimental music venues. Experimental musicians have been historically marginalized from the prestige of the concert hall, but as their music is becoming more widely disseminated, this (sub)culture is beginning to long for venues designed to support their music. As a result, experimental music participants are urgently engaged in considering how their performance rituals will be preserved beyond their present settings; and intimacy is one of the values that experimental music participants wish to preserve. Moreover, due to the diversity of the types of venues experimental musicians traverse (e.g., bars, yoga studios, warehouses, lofts, and apartments) they provide a rich resource for exploring the relationship between the built environment and cultural value.

This dissertation is divided into theoretical and measurement phases. I appealed to the field of ecological psychology to craft a meta-theoretical framework in order to study intimacy in a dynamic environment. My goal was not to suppress context as a classical psychoacoustic paradigm might. Another theoretical phase involved locating a solid theory of intimacy. I discovered that intimacy is best explained as psychological closeness afforded by self-disclosure and responsiveness which results in distinctive, unique interaction. My final theoretical endeavor was a review of literature on subcultures to determine how to assess the cultural context which has given experimental music impetus; a broader cultural context was also necessary to understand intimacy in relation to the current dissemination of experimental music. Moreover, subcultural theorists have devised measurement techniques that expose tacit values which often go unnoticed.

In the measurement portion of the dissertation, I devised methodologies which assessed acoustical and social affordances of intimacy across a range of contexts in an auditory exploration as well as an initial field study. Ultimately, I reviewed this data in the light of a broader data set which entailed more extensive elaborations on cultural value elicited through an extended field study. The methods in the measurement phases ranged from short and extended interviews to an interactive exploration in a virtual environment. Intimacy was evaluated within the control of the laboratory as well as through participant observation in various experimental music settings throughout the Greater Boston area and New York City (NYC).

I have culled methods from ecological psychology to anthropology to uncover the unique ways in which intimacy is valued in experimental music venues. In so doing, a more nuanced picture of intimacy has emerged. I have found, for example, that some of the previous correlates of intimacy advanced in the architectural acoustics literature are not requisites for intimacy in experimental music (or they only become salient in certain contexts). However, one of the broader aims of my study was to assess the way in which intimacy is valued beyond acoustics in experimental music venues. I found a homology between the value of intimacy and a unique performance practice that entails adapting sound and space to craft individually-tailored experiences.