

1.

This collection of piece resides in the border between categories – syntax, semantics, (il)logical association – they are cases of not necessarily *what* relates but *how* do they relate. Now, even the idea of a “thing” is up for grabs – often in these pieces, specific objects are not specified, merely their containers and their behaviors. I’m reminded strongly of Hans Ulrich Obrist’s curatorial catalog endeavor [do it](#) (a DIY manual comprised of gallery pieces to be enacted on site with whatever materials at hand), of Rirkrit Taravanija’s quixotically quotidian [untitled \(free/still\)](#), Alison Knowles’s related historic precedent [Make a Salad](#), Sol Lewitt’s [Wall Drawings](#), Felix Gonzalez-Torres elegiac [untitled \(portrait of ross in l.a.\)](#), the list could go on much further – this program and these artworks specify the “where” without the “what”, the “why” without the “when”, the “when” without the “what”. What’s key here is *how*, and how it relates to who, what, where, when, and why. If you’d like to pull object-oriented ontology into the picture, there could be an interesting discussion opened about the shared space of these sound-objects and word-objects and human-objects and place-objects, etc. etc...

Focusing on the how is also a focus on the limit – the liminal space between objects; the interstice. Both Luke Nickel’s and Jessie Marino’s pieces overtly explore and mine the potential for content/meaning/creativity within this slippery interstitial zone – whether in the cracks of the widely acquitted epitome of Western Art Music, or a [YouTube photo montage](#) of a (un?)popular movie star uploaded by a completely unrelated third party username. Imposing additive or subtractive compositional efforts on top of the spoken episodes of a Mozart string quartet or a series of kitsch PowerPoint fades can yield a special type of indeterminacy (of content, form, meaning) chance or algorithmic procedures may not be able to obtain. The art reaches outward – it selectively imposes its own loose structure on to other objects, reconfiguring our cognitive and perceptual relationship to these informational artifacts.

In these examples, signifier and signified are less of a priority than their malleable *relationship* to the sign, quite similar to, say, the siphoned-off prose of Ben Marcus’s *The Age of Wire and String*. For James Saunders’s *things to do*, logical association is preserved: a the pronounced word “noise” will correspond to a noisy sound and “pitch” will correspond to a pitched sound. However, even those categories remain subjective to each performer’s differences of what constitutes the domains of noise and pitch. Peter Ablinger’s inclusion of subjective appraisals of one’s own auditory environment, deciding whether the performer’s pitch is higher or lower than preceding, invites someone with less pitch discrepancy to confront and even embrace “error” while assigning and labeling informational stimuli. Roughly paraphrasing something composer and playwright Rick Burkhardt mentioned in a lecture at Northwestern University: these works embrace the unpredictability of “the state where pure information has not yet become cognitive meaning”. In total, these experiments preserve a obvious ontological truth about their categorized sounds, that the act of saying or typing the word sound also generates a wholly independent sound of its own.

2.

(Musical) performance allows an interesting set of relationships to form during a given time-based realization – inter-subjective behaviors. While these pieces are still somewhat demarcated as self-contained “works”, sealed off from the beholder’s voluntary interaction, they all creatively toy with how we as the performers interact with one another, with the exception of an audience subsidy clause within David Pocknee’s [economics](#). The situation is akin to the experiments of relational aesthetics enacted upon a displayed group of aesthetically cordoned-off bodies, a control group if you may. You, as an live or virtual audience member, watch/listen/perceive/experience a subset of persons read scores, text, shapes, what have you, but what you may be perceiving is the effects of these stimuli shaping the subjects’ interactions and discourse *on display*. It’s one thing that group performance in front of an audience of bodies can uniquely facilitate: the micro- and macro-governing of collections of persons for the vicarious beholding experience of other persons. But this line between the two groups, one active and one passive, is not dependent on a music degree from a conservatory, an willing exchange of monetary capital, or a flat wooden construction raised approximately 6-12 inches higher off the ground.

It’s really, fundamentally no different than standard practice chamber music – except if the string quartet you are listening to were comprised of (almost) completely arbitrary sounds but with all the trappings of classical music paraphernalia, or as in the case of Luke Nickel’s piece, the snippets of dialogue exchanged between string quartet members during their privatized ritual of rehearsal...

I find the beauty of these objective and systematic works is situated in the cracks of their structures. The artists delve into the messy subjective domains between people/objects/things and thus open up further regions of instability, creativity, and humor even in the in between zones of their realizations. I feel like I can say more words about these pieces than the amount of words they contain, but isn’t that also the amazing thing about text scores? The situation is less about the tautological argument of “allowing sounds be themselves” – it’s about allowing sounds the option to be something other than themselves; all while allowing those persons making the sounds to have some degree of agency in which they occur or what the sounds could be. As this collection of works (hopefully) posits, this sign is often more interesting when the relationship between signifier and signified is not precisely 1:1.

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[james saunders](#) - *everybody do this*  
[matt shlomowitz](#) = *letter piece no. 1*  
[peter ablinger](#) - *instrument & voice*  
[jessie marino](#) - *AUTOPROCESS : resolve : dissolve*  
[david pocknee](#) - *economics*  
[luke nickel](#) - *string quartet no. 1*  
james saunders - *i decide what it is i must do*