

The Joy Project - ELECTRONIC COTTAGE

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Menu



The Joy Project

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15 Comments



For the past year I have embarked on a project of joy, a series of interviews with artist extraordinaire and Electronic Cottage founder, Hal McGee. Hal shares with us, honestly with great humor and insight, his thoughts and influences on his extensive and prolific work in audio assemblages which one could argue are an art genre unto themselves.

What is your memory of the first time that you discovered a tape recorder?

In the 1970s, as a teenager, I enjoyed watching *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* every week. I remember recording episodes of the show on a shoebox-style cassette recorder, the type that was used to record school lectures. I then transcribed the episodes, hand-printing the teleplays on sheets of lined notebook paper. I did this so that I could study how teleplays were structured, and to get ideas on how to write my own TV scripts. I was a member of the Drama Department at my high school, and my first year at Indiana University I studied Radio and Television Broadcasting. I seriously thought at that time that I would go into radio and TV broadcasting.

You have described your assemblages as being audio folk art. What does that mean?

It means that my art and my life are the same thing: one thing can't be divided out from the other. My art is well-integrated into my daily life and is inextricably intertwined with it. Everything that anyone needs to know about my life can be heard in my audio assemblages. The assemblages are audio-picture records of my life in Gainesville, Florida in the early decades of the 2000s. They are not linear or chronological diaries along the lines of "I did this and then I did that". By closely listening to my assemblages and really immersing oneself in them, being inside them, the listener can feel something of what it's like to be me. In a sense the assemblages are environments or Hal-happenings, Hal-events. My audio assemblages are my gifts to the world. I am inviting the listener to spend time with me. My dictaphones are banjos and guitars and flutes!

How did you devise your method of doing audio assemblages?

First of all, I would like to talk about the difference between my audio collages and my audio assemblages.

The simplest definition of a Hal Assemblage is this: it consists of one or more collages heard simultaneously. There is a "vertical" aspect to the listening experience and structure of the work that is lacking in what I consider a Hal Collage.

Hal Collages are horizontal: They unfold over time, one thing after another. Seemingly random elements in the collage repeat, refer and contrast, and are juxtaposed backwards and forwards in Time to other elements in the collage.

Since a Hal Assemblage consists of at least two collages heard simultaneously (stacked and layered), an assemblage can be experienced horizontally and vertically. So, you are listening to two or three or four streams of sounds happening simultaneously AS they move forward.

The Man With The Tape Recorder, for example, is a Hal Collage. *October* is clearly a Hal Assemblage.

The lines between the two are blurry, to be honest.

I did not actually start using the word "assemblage" to describe my recorded works until *Twelvember*, which was issued in January 2018. Prior to that I used terms like "multi-layered collages" and "4-track cassette collages".

From 1992 to 1995 I did not record any audio art or music. I pretty much abandoned those pursuits for three years. Of course that break from music-making didn't last forever! When I resumed my music-making activities I bought a used Yamaha DX-7 synth at Lipham Music shop in Gainesville, which I hated and sold after making one album, *B12*. I also bought a Fostex XR-5 4-track cassette recorder at Lipham, and for the life of me I could not figure out how to record with it properly. The Operation Manual didn't explain things very well, and operation of the 4-track was way too complicated. The problem was that as I recorded each new track I couldn't figure out how to listen to the tracks that I had previously recorded. Example: if I recorded on Track 4 I couldn't hear what was on Tracks 1, 2, and 3. When I did a mixdown I could hear all four, so that was good. I therefore adapted to the limitations of my abilities to

properly operate the recorder and I adopted a method of adding sounds in a “blind” way. As I was recording Track 2 I couldn’t react to and play along with what I had recorded on Track 1. I had to add sounds to Tracks 2, 3, and 4 in an arbitrary, chance and intuitive way. I kind of knew what I had recorded on the previous tracks and could match the general tone and character, but I could not create coordinated songs or 4-track compositions like I had in the 1980s and early 90s. When I did the mixdowns I was mixing together four tracks of pre-recorded sounds that were related but not directly correlated or coordinated. This lent a random and chance feeling to the mixes. It felt like there were four collages blended together to make a big, thick simultaneously juxtaposed multi-layered collage. As I was doing the mixes I was in a sense an audience to the results. The results were not predictable. They were wild and hairy and went in several different directions at once.

Sometimes people are aware that you are recording them and other times they do not. How do you strike a balance between the two? (This comes up in one of a kind tape for everybody).

It probably goes without saying that people will be less spontaneous if they know that I am recording them. Spontaneity is not always what I am looking for!

I assume that all of my closest music and art friends know that I carry a dictaphone with me everywhere I go, and that I might record anything at any time.

Before each of my Apartment Music shows I make it known to the attendees that I might record miscellaneous conversations and other sounds before and after performances.

Lumen K told me that he takes it as a given that any part of our conversations might be recorded. He knows me well! If a friend says something embarrassing or compromising when the recorder is on, I delete the file. I try to be the model of discretion!

Another thing that I need to make clear is that I do not record everything. I am very selective. Sometimes I just don’t feel like turning on the recorder, and other times I forget.

If Lumen K and I are at lunch or at my apartment and we are talking about sensitive personal topics, I do not turn on the recorder.

If he says something interesting I might ask him to repeat it with the intention that I will record it. I often record stories that he tells or philosophical thoughts or bits of history.

When I record conversations at the bus stop or other places out in public, such stores and shops, I figure that those people are so far outside my world that they will never even know that I recorded them, nor will they conceive or understand the possible use that I will make of those recordings. The Scooby Doo Fan (in The Secret Life Of Hal McGee) had absolutely no idea what a video camera was and what home movies were or anything like that, even after I explained it to her.

My mom and dad know I record them. In fact, my mom goes right along with it and tells her stories. I have told her that I make recordings to document the lives and stories of the people I know. In a way I am trying to preserve memories of people, through recorded evidence and artifacts. In other words, I feel that I am doing honor to my recorded subject-people. But I do try to be respectful.

I had an excellent example when I took a walk downtown earlier this year. I was snapping photos with my iPhone, and I took one as a young college age kid walked toward me. He got a very unhappy look on his face and said to me "Did you just take a photo of me?!" I LIED and assured him that I was taking a photo of the building behind him. He still looked unhappy. I then said "Don't worry about it. I'm a professional photographer!" ... and kept on walking, quickly! Hahahahahahaha! Immediately after I was out of rock-throwing distance I deleted the photo from my iPhone.

If a total stranger took a photo of me I wouldn't freak out at all. I might ask them if it turned out okay. If not, I could pose in a candid way for a re-take. But I am such a ham... AND ... I have NOTHING to hide! I take it as a given that people want to photograph me. It shows their good taste.

Whether they know I'm recording them or not, I look at my recordings of people talking as raw audio materials. I'm not looking to pry into people's private lives and cause them embarrassment.

My co-workers know that I have a recorder with me at all times. And you've heard them clowning around with me on the recordings. Are those recordings candid? Are the ones with you and Lumen K candid? Are they "real"? Are recordings where the subject knows they are being recorded better considered as performances? When I record people that I don't know, strangers, my feelings about and tactics and ethical outlook are all different.

How do the musical portions of your assemblages come about?

The musical portions of my assemblages come about because music is as much a part of daily life as anything else. Music happens! Pre-recorded music "happens" all around us every day. There is no escaping it. Pre-recorded music is constantly playing in the background in restaurants and shops. We hear it blasting and thumping from passing cars. We hear it wafting from open doorways in our neighborhoods. It seems like most people are contented to listen to music that other people have made. To me this music is incidental and part of our daily environment, like the smell of garbage, dog shit, newly-mown lawns, wildflowers blooming, automobile exhaust, and underarm odor.

While collecting sounds for my assemblages I try my best to avoid recording incidental pre-recorded music. Generally I find incidental pre-recorded to be annoying and a nuisance.

Instead I prefer to generate music of my own for my assemblages. In other words, if there MUST be so-called music in my assemblages, by Godzilla (!) I am going to make it myself!

It is easy to do because of pocket synths like the hardware Korg Monotron series, plus I have Minimoog Model Synthesizer, Noisemusick, and KQ Unotone software synthesizers on my iPhone. Plus at home in my apartment my trusty, reliable 2-string pink dumpster guitar is always ready if I want to make plink-plonk-ploong sounds on it.

Yes, I know that insisting on making my own sounds and my own music is hopelessly

old-fashioned and “modernist”!

I guess this is as good a place as any to tell the readers one of my personal mottos or creeds: “I use post-modernist methods to achieve (what are probably in actuality) modernist ends”.



When working on your assemblages do you feel like you are on a quest to find interesting sounds and phrases? Or is it more like a journey of discovery?

I definitely feel like I am on a journey of discovery! Whether a sound or phrase is interesting or not depends on its context, on how it is combined with other sounds, and the associations that those stimulate in the listener's mind.

It is true that I am always looking and listening for interesting sounds, phrases and sights, but I am not on a quest for them. I simply go about my daily life, doing the things I normally do, and I open myself up to what is happening around me. I look and listen for unique perspectives and variations on the mundane and seemingly banal details of my everyday life. I look and listen for something special in nothing special.

I walk by the same objects every day as I am walking my dog, going to and from my job, at my job in the hospital, inside my apartment, and at shops and restaurants. I discover something new every time that I remember to pay attention. Things are constantly changing, it goes without saying.

What is more important as far as my art goes, are the changes that happen in me. I walk by a tree every day. One day I notice that the sunlight falls on that tree a certain way and I notice something about the tree that I hadn't noticed before. A crow perched on one of the branches of the tree calls out. I have re-discovered the tree, the crow, and me.

When we listen to a dictaphone assemblage audio track do you think we are in the past or by the act of listening we are in the present?

The short answer is that we are always living in one continuous eternal now. When we listen to one of my dictaphone assemblages, the past, present, and future are meaningless. My assemblages are circular, are continually looping back on themselves and within themselves. In many ways my assemblages are one continuous work divided up into monthly serial installments. This means that the listener will experience repetitions over the course of listening to numerous assemblages of mine, repetitions with minute shades of differences, the same yet totally different, based on the contexts of what sounds are combined together.



This is a philosophical question: Do you think that there is any difference between fact and opinion when doing your assemblages?

To begin with, all art is a lie. In any work of art there is no truth, factual, or otherwise. My assemblages are not reportage in the sense of me trying to present verifiable data from my daily life. Even news reports on websites and TV news programs are not absolute truth, but versions and interpretations of events.

In my assemblages I am, however, trying to convey something of my experiences in my daily life. I collect seemingly random images and sounds from my daily life. I jumble and heap them together. Then I set in motion automatic random-chance processes that arrange the images and sounds in particular and perhaps unexpected patterns.

Within the assemblages themselves the listener will hear me talking about various subjects. Sometimes these bits of talking are me reflecting or recollecting events that have happened in my daily life or my interpretations of them. As we all know, memory

is imperfect, and we all rewrite events into our own personal narratives which support our constructed senses of self. These are of course fictions.

Other times when you hear my voice my intention may or may not be to convey any thoughts or meanings other than the pure sounds of words and language as sound elements themselves. Who am I to say what the listener might hear or perceive?

As always, I rely on the listener and viewer *to make sense of it*. Other than during the mixdown I rarely listen to my own assemblages. Once I publish my assemblages online on [Bandcamp](#) or on CD-R they gain their true lives. They gain life and any possible meanings when somebody listens.

I might very well state or present opinions on various subjects during the course of accumulating raw data recordings during the course of a month. Once the data is arranged into layered assemblages any such opinions or so-called statements of fact that I may have made into a dictaphone become something(s) else.

How do you avoid the temptation to use effects on your recordings and keep your “voice” pure and in tune with the art?

I am never tempted to add effects to my assemblage recordings.

First of all, I think that effects are cheap and a crutch and they are over-used in the experimental and noise fields.

Second, I think that effects create a distance between the listener and my recordings and I want to avoid that at all costs. I want my listeners to be involved and engaged in the act of listening to my assemblages. I have often talked about the importance of active listening, that the listener completes the audiowork through the act of listening.

Third, the raw audio materials of which my assemblages consist are snippings and recorded data and artifacts of my daily life and experience. I want these moments to be presented in their original recorded states. It is through the random chance combinations and layerings of these sounds of my daily life that my audio art comes to life. Adding effects such as reverb or delay would alter the sounds in such a way that the sounds would become locked or frozen into time-frame colorings or alterations, thus robbing the listener of the opportunities to create their own time-frame references. Elsewhere you have asked: Is it past? Is it present? Is it future? Those kinds of reckonings and associations occur when the listener listens.

Do you ever get tempted to adopt a persona when doing your assemblages?

Other than me, myself, whatever and whoever my constructed senses of self tell me that I am? No.

I am not a storyteller. In my voices in my assemblages I rarely take on the role of a person or character other than aspects of my personality, whether that be my conscious selves or dream selves. You might hear me do voices that sound like a Monty Python character or [Jiblit Dupree](#) or a person I encountered in my daily life, but these people are in my life. By recording them or my impressions of them I have taken them inside the assemblages, and they are now parts of those worlds.

How do you decide when to press the record button and when to press the stop button on the recorder? Are any of the assemblages edited in any way?

Generally I do not edit the assemblages once they have been constructed. I try to remain true to the way that the mix assembles itself. I usually do not edit the assemblages except for choosing points at which to break up the complete assemblage into parts. I also lower the overall volume of an assemblage if it bumps up against 0 dB too frequently.

I usually gather and collect raw audio materials for each dictaphone assemblage during the course of a calendar month, such as from July 1st through July 31st. Sometimes, if I get off schedule, I will designate another time period. An example would be July 16th through August 15th.

For my assemblage titled *battery operated*, I recorded the raw materials from Thanksgiving Day through New Year's Day. This is because I was originally going to call the album "Happy Halidays". In any case, I usually specify a particular time period during which I will scavenge, pack-rat, and gather up audio junk, trash, miscellanea, incidentalisms, and raw data that I encounter during my daily life during the specified time period.

You ask how I decide when to press the Record button and when to press the Stop button on the recorder. There is no simple answer to that question. It depends on my mood, what is going on around me, which way the wind is blowing, my concentration and preoccupation levels, and various other factors. I obviously do NOT record everything. That would be boring and pointless. How DO I decide what to record for raw sound materials for an assemblage I'm working on? I feel it. It is intuitive. I TRY to always be aware and listen closely to all of the sounds around me. Of course I can't remember to listen closely all of the time. Sometimes I need to remind myself to listen and to look closely. At times like that I need to concentrate, to focus my attention on my environment -- to shut off the chatter in my brain -- and remember to listen. It is a form of meditation, I suppose. I feel like when I am able to empty myself and turn off my internal dialogue, that is when I can listen and listen closely. At those moments I remember to pull my dictaphone out of my pants pocket, and place my thumb on the RECORD button, ready to record sounds that I find interesting. About 40 years ago, during the time when I was reading Carlos Castaneda's books, I would practice turning off my internal dialogue. It is hard to do! We talk to ourselves constantly and endlessly in our minds. There are exercises for turning off the internal dialogue, such as curling one's fingers as one walks: one's attention is turned toward that task and away from the brain-chatter and -clutter that preoccupies us.

I am naturally attracted to the sounds of engines, motors, and machines, helicopters, airplanes, public transportation, garbage trucks, car horns and other traffic sounds, alarms, bells, clocks ticking, lawnmowers, construction equipment, telephones ringing, air vents and air conditioning units, fan belts, blowers, elevators, my vacuum cleaner, my electric toothbrush, my dishwashing machine, trash compactors. I guess that these machine sounds appeal to the *industrialist* in me!

August Occasions



August
2019

dictaphone assemblage audio folk art

These are sounds that most people ignore, hate, and try to avoid. A lot of people would classify these sounds as *noise pollution*. Not me! The kind of people who DO classify these sounds as pollution probably complain that the sounds are not part of the Natural World, and that sounds of the Natural World are somehow preferable. The essential point that these people ignore is that Human Beings are a part of the Natural World. We are not separate from it. We are in it and of it, and our inventions and machines are also therefore part of the Natural World.

There seems to be a tendency in The West for people to deny that we are part of Nature. There is also a tendency in The West to deny that Nature and God are the same. And third, people like to believe that people are separate from God. So we don't belong in The World but we are separate from God! Why is there this anti-human impulse?! I am thankful that I am not religious! ... or one of those people who say that they prefer Nature to People.

I try my best to avoid recording pre-recorded music. I might TRY not to record pre-recorded music with my dictaphone, but as I've mentioned before, this is nearly

impossible because music is everywhere -- in restaurants, stores, automobiles, etc. I am not saying that I think that there is anything *wrong* with pre-recorded music per se, other than the fact that I find most of it to be excruciatingly boring. And, by Godzilla! ... I can record my own sounds!

Let me make that plain: all sounds are equally valid as sound sources for audio art, but not all sounds are equally as interesting -- that is purely subjective!

Sounds of Nature, Human and Machine sounds, and musical sounds are all part of the big grab bag of sounds available to me as a sound assemblage artist. Any editing that I might do comes before I do the mixdown of sounds at the end of the month. It is all about the choices that I make. What sounds do I find interesting when I remember to listen?

I do not necessarily prefer the singing of a mockingbird to the siren of an ambulance. Both are amusing and annoying in their own ways.

I do not necessarily prefer the sound of thunder to the sound of a helicopter. Both are very loud and both are awe-inspiring in different ways.

Do I prefer the sound of a soulful rendition of Whitney Houston's song "Saving All My Love For You" sung by a registered sex offender at the bus stop to the sound of my dog barking incessantly in a shrill voice? Not necessarily. Both are irritatingly funny in their own ways, and both can inspire fear in the hearts of men, women, children, and beasts.

How do I decide when to push the Record button, and when to push the Stop button? I listen closely to the rhythms, patterns, phases, and cycles of common sounds in my everyday life.

The mockingbird cycles through a medley of Greatest Hits of Birds in the region as it sings in the top of a tree.

When I am out walking my dog I might press Record as soon as I hear the sound of a helicopter approaching from the west, and press the Stop when it disappears from sight as it passes the treeline to the east.

A refrigerator or ice machine goes through a regular cooling cycle determined by its settings.

I see a flash of lightning and I know that there will be the sound of thunder a few seconds later.

I am NOT a sample artist or remix artist. I do not add effects and remixing techniques to the sounds that go into my assemblages. They are interesting enough -- or boring enough -- without adding effects, and I try to treat the raw sounds as found objects that I reconfigure and recombine in new ways, or at least in ways different from their original contexts.

With both machine sounds and Nature sounds, there are two general classes - sounds that occur in spite of me or without my intervention or influence, and sounds that occur as a result of my presence and actions. And in my daily life there is a mix of

both!

I am fortunate to live in a suburban area. Especially here in Florida suburbs are always on the fringe or border between civilization and wilderness



So, over the course of a month I accumulate sounds on my four dictaphones. I record whenever it strikes me to do so, whenever sounds reach my ears that pique my interest. At the end of the month I plug the four dictaphones into a mixer connected to Audacity, and then I engage the Playback in random/shuffle mode on all four machines. How the sounds will combine, layer, and inter-relate I will not know until the assemblage assembles itself.

Do you think that your assemblages are part of a larger discourse of what it means to be living in a certain place and time. (The personal is political...)

Yes, of course I do, but I do not find it desirable to explain what my assemblages mean. Their meanings can be found in how they sound, the sounds you hear. In the

assemblages I provide personal data from my daily life in certain places and times, arrayed in various ways. Your engagement with the assemblages as a listener determines their meanings, if and what they are. There is also a strong possibility that they can just be experienced as moving, fluid artforms. The listener hears words along with other sounds, but the meanings of those particular words are not necessarily the meanings, if there are any, of the assemblages.

I have said it before, and it bears repeating: My assemblages and movies are me, but I am not them. Everything that you the listener need to know about me can be experienced in the assemblages. The assemblages consist of transparent overlays, but images within the layers obscure and modify our perceptions of the contents of the layers. The assemblages reveal everything and nothing.

You read from and quote all kinds of literature and written materials (books, pamphlets, signs, emails, etc.) in your assemblages. Do you make any kind of distinction with these texts or is it all part of the “stew”?

I love words! I always have. I possess a natural feeling and affinity for them. I have a nearly perfect photographic memory when it comes to the spellings of words. Misspellings in printed texts jump out at me. I spot them without even trying -- I just see them! ... in everybody else's texts except my own!

I have often said, and still at least halfway believe, that my assemblages are closer to a form of literature than to music.

I am endlessly amazed and amused at all of the subtle differences in meaning that words can have, depending on context, other words in close proximity, and how they are said... how they are spoken. I can discern and vocalize minute shades, colorings, and inflections in the sounds of words.

I have always been good at acting out voices and imitating dialects, speech patterns, and slang of other people in my daily life as well as TV shows and movies.

In my assemblages I will repeat a word or series of words, putting emphasis on different words or parts of words, seeking out hidden treasures within and between the words. How does the meaning and the intention of a sentence change based on how I speak it? I love language mistakes, mispronunciations, slips of the tongue, malapropisms, anagrams, etc. And I am very good at coining new words!

Like I have talked about elsewhere, this is about observing the phenomena of words and their sounds and meanings, paying a particular kind of attention, and seeing, speaking, hearing what I can squeeze out of words. I like to combine words with other words even if they don't seem to go together to see what surprises pop out! Once again it is about fun and creating joy! I am not one of these people who desire to destroy words and language. I do think that it is loads of sadistic fun to torture words and see what secrets they confess!

During the course of gathering materials for an assemblage I am constantly scanning for words that seem like they might go well with other words. I am especially drawn to combinations of words which could be interpreted in numerous ways. I love innuendo! I look at spam emails, text messages, advertisements, signs on walls, scraps of paper

I find, bulletin board messages, slogans, jargon, fortune cookie messages, pop culture clichés, etc., and if something strikes me as funny or ambiguous I will record words or phrases onto one of my dictaphones. On the occasions when I do remember my dreams I will try to recount the story of the dream to the best of my ability, knowing that my recollection will be incomplete, imperfect.

So, in a way, you are right that words from books, pamphlets, signs, etc., are just elements like anything else in my assemblages. But also like I have said elsewhere, I don't record every word I see all day long. I make choices! I look for potentials within the words that I see. It is my fondest wish and hope that listeners and I will discover new correlations and connections between sounds within my assemblages.



Are there words or phrases that you find yourself coming back to time and again? Words or phrases that have special meaning? You may not even say them into the dictaphone but you are thinking them?

Yes, there are definitely words and phrases that I find myself coming back to time and again!

“Hello”

“Good morning”

“Good afternoon”

“Have a good day”

“Stanley, stop barking!”

“Stanley, shut the hell up!”

“Stanley, don’t eat off of the ground!”

“It’s time for a nap”

“CoffeEEEE”

“Stanley, treeeat!”

“What the hell is that?!”

“What IS that smell?!”

“I am well-traveled in my neighborhood”

In response to one of my previous questions, you said something to the effect of “Music is annoying because it is everywhere. One can’t escape it.” That’s true. It is like certain smells. Do you ever get the feeling that sounds are like smells or that certain smells are like sounds?

I do not recall having ever experienced synesthesia of the sounds = smells variety. I have experienced the sounds = colors/light variety, 40 years ago during an LSD trip.

I do think that in the realm of the imagination ANYTHING is possible. One of the positive things that I have retained from my acid experiences is the ability to see and hear and smell beyond borders and categories. In my audio assemblages I am striving to create experiences that approach the same territory as LSD Land. I will address that later, in more detail.

For now I will say that sounds, and particular combinations of composted, heaped-up sounds, can present to the mind of the attentive listener a feeling or sensation of putrefaction, rot, decay, and mold... of farts... shit, piss, and other body odors... and garbage dumpsters baking in the Florida sun. But this is not for me to say, because each person’s experience is different. It is not hard to imagine because we already use terms to describe music as being “funky”, or “stanky”...

Are there sounds that appeal to you more than others?

In my assemblages there are two basic kinds of sounds that I record: Intentional sounds and sounds that happen in spite of myself.

Examples of intentional sounds are:

Recordings that I make of me speaking texts and diaristic thoughts.

Conversations with friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers. Sounds of me and my friends playing instruments.

My use of implements and household and workplace machinery, such as dishwasher, electric toothbrush, electric shaver, vacuum cleaner, that kind of thing. Frying, boiling, and cooking sounds.

Toilets and urinals flushing. Water running down drains and garbage disposals.

I have written at length already about these kinds of sounds, their roles, functions.

Much of what I record falls into the category of sounds that happen in spite of me or without direct involvement or intervention by me. What I mean is that these are sounds that happen in my world that have nothing directly to do with me. These sounds are made by other humans, animals, machines, and weather, atmospheric conditions.



I love lists, so here we go:

Raindrops falling into a puddle or pool, and water drops falling in irregular patterns in a downspout.

The sounds of birds: Crows and mockingbirds have made many appearances in my assemblages. There are also owls in my neighborhood, but I don't hear them on a regular basis, and I have never been able to record them with anything approaching success.

Frogs croaking in the drainage ditches after a good rainstorm.

You'd never guess it, but I love to record the sounds of dogs barking: one dog in particular who shall go nameless because he is featured and in fact co-stars in every assemblage of mine.

I love the sounds of sirens from police cars, ambulances, and fire trucks. Also car horns! Car alarms, which are incredibly annoying. Beeping alarm signals when garbage dumpster trucks are backing up. Beeping patterns as buses kneel and as they deploy wheelchair lifts. In general, all public transportation sounds.

Automobiles passing over a traffic count meter.

Public address systems, fire alert announcements and alarm signals.

The sounds of wind blowing in trees, thunder, rain falling.

People talking and conversations overheard in which I am not participating.

The skies over my neighborhood are regular pathways of airplanes and helicopters — police, emergency, military, and commercial and private aircraft.

In your assemblages one can clearly hear you enunciate your words. How important is diction in your work?

Words are very important to me. I love them. Ever since I was very young I have felt a natural affinity for them. I have an almost perfect photographic memory of the way that words are spelled. I can look at a page of text and my eyes instantly find spelling and typographical mistakes. One possible lost opportunity as a career course that I probably should have pursued was being a proofreader or editor. I can see everyone else's mistakes, but never my own. I guess because I (mistakenly) assume that I am of course always correct!

When recording spoken words for my assemblages I make a concerted effort to speak slowly and distinctly. There are three reasons for this:

The first is that I want my listeners to understand what I am saying! Many of my listeners are people whose primary language is not English. It is my hope that by speaking slowly and distinctly they might have a better chance of understanding what I am saying.

Second, by speaking slowly and distinctly I am leaving spaces between the words, spaces for the listener's imagination. Words are ripe and bursting with possibilities for meaning. I like to give the listener time to think and reflect on the words and to dream along with me as I talk. David Lynch calls this kind of thing "leaving room to dream". I have watched the special behind the scenes featurettes of Twin Peaks and I always pay special attention to the ways in which he directs the actors. He always encourages them to take their time and to say the words as slowly as possible, even if it seems awkward or somewhat painful to do so. I also like the parts where the actors are rehearsing their lines and Lynch corrects their inflections and emphases on certain

syllables of words. These subtle adjustments make big differences in the meanings of the sentences.

Thirdly, by drawing the listeners in to concentrate on the words, I am inviting them to listen actively as a participant. My words might set off a chain of word-streams in their own minds.

I try to choose my words carefully. The words that one chooses and the order in which one utters them create pathways to different possibilities, different realities that can fraction off and become their own stories. I have always loved the opening monologue by the character that Richard Linklater plays in his film *Slacker*, "Should Have Stayed at the Bus Station". He thinks out loud about what would have happened if he had made different choices. If instead of taking a cab ride home he had hung around the bus station maybe a beautiful woman would have offered him a ride and they would have gone back to her place... I like his idea that when we dream we are seeing glimpses into other realities that could have happened, that we see ourselves in these alternative realities that could have happened IF we had made different choices.

This is why at every moment the choices that we make, whether to turn left or turn right, to look up or down, whether to listen and pay attention and actually see what is going on around us enough that when something unexpected happens, an "accident", something that we didn't intend... Do we welcome it as an opportunity, a chance to take a course different than what we had originally planned? I find myself in this situation almost every day, and at those moments I consider myself fortunate.

I like to think about each word as I say it. Often in my assemblages you will hear me repeat a word or a phrase with a different emphasis or inflection. The sentence changes by repeating it ("repetition is a form of change" - thank you, *Oblique Strategies!*), because intentionally or unintentionally I won't say it exactly the same way each time. Also, repetition leads to the possibilities of mistakes or accidents. Any good experimentalist who is worth their salt knows that there is no such thing as a mistake. And every improviser knows that if one makes a mistake while improvising, repeat it and then it seems intentional. To quote Bob Dylan out of context, "There's no success like failure"! It is at the moments of failure that the words start to crack open like eggs and spill their secrets.

I have seen in some descriptions of your earlier work the term dictaphonia. What is dictaphonia?

Dictaphonia is an audio art form based on the use of dictaphones and their unique characteristics: notably low fidelity and a compressed frequency response range.

Voice recorders were originally developed and manufactured by Olympus, Sony and other corporations for the utilitarian purposes of recording personal notes and dictation. Voice recorders have been used by stenographers, administrative assistants, doctors and other professionals as an office tool, as an electronic memo pad and transcription tool.

Voice recorders, and specifically microcassette recorders, were developed to emphasize and enhance the characteristics of spoken words. The typical frequency range of microcassette, from 400 Hz to about 4000 Hz, is, not surprisingly, and of course quite by design, more or less the frequency range of the spoken human voice.

This makes microcassette unsuitable for recording music because musical instruments and the singing human voice can create sounds lower and higher than the narrow range of microcassette.

For a couple of years in the early 1980s Olympus sold stereo microcassette machines and supposedly high fidelity Metal formulation tapes. I have seen commercially released albums on microcassette from that era, mostly Classical stuff such as *The Planets* and some Beethoven. I have also seen boomboxes from the 1980s with built-in stereo-recording microcassette recorders. But the stereo microcassette was short-lived because the sound quality was still primitive. I have also seen handheld transistor radio and microcassette combos, kind of like cassette and radio handhelds.

I was not the first to use microcassette as an experimental audio art tool. If you look on Discogs you can find albums released on microcassette.

Nor was I the first person to create compilations of experimental sound art recorded on microcassette. Credit for that goes to Justin Waters of the Sounds From The Pocket label, with his Microcassettor compilations.

I first used microcassette on the track with Dimthingshine, “Dead Murderers Kill”, on my *Miami Noise* album. And I didn’t own the microcassette recorder we used; it was Dimthingshine’s.

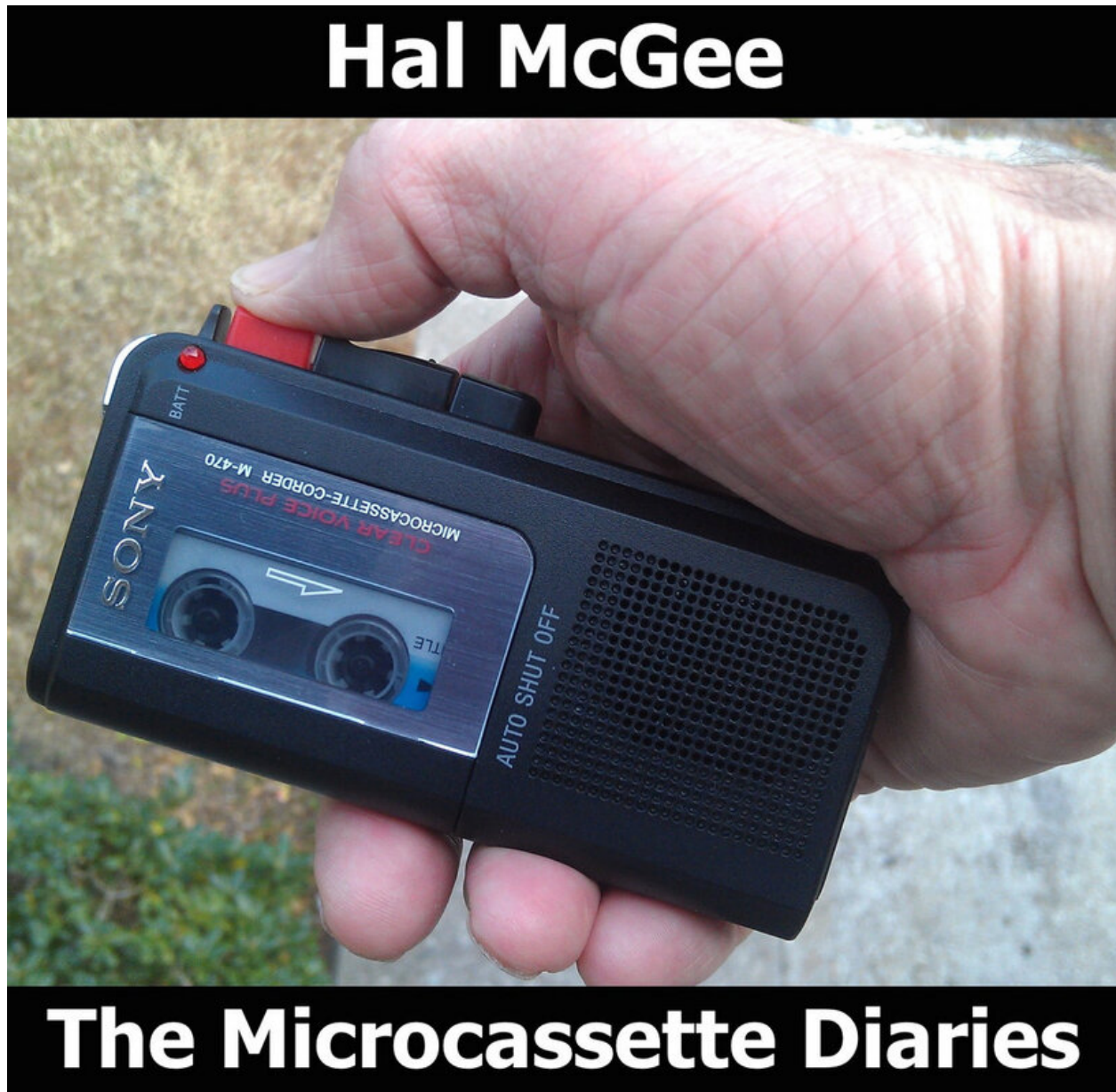
It wasn’t until I met Andrew Chadwick in 2006 that I first encountered an artist using microcassette as a regular feature of experimental noise art. After seeing Andrew use microcassettes in several of his Ironing performances, I decided to acquire my own recorder. Andrew often played back microcassette tapes at a lower tape speed than the original recordings, and he’d get these really spacy funky slowed-down bass bits that were an element in his thrift store battery of tape players and turntables. For me I loved microcassette recorders because they were highly portable. I could easily carry a recorder in my pocket and hold it in my hand, often concealed in my palm. This enabled me to use microcassette recorders to interact with and document occurrences and moments of my daily life and reconfigure, re-combine and re-mix the sounds of my life. And because of its compressed in-your-face sound microcassette seemed very personal, very immediate, very now. There is of course an element of irony in using microcassette to make music because it sounds like shit.

To me this meant thumbing my nose at good taste and opting instead for unique, idiosyncratic personal expression. In dictaphonia there is a kind of “punk” aesthetic of accentuating and valuing essences and personal expressions over slickness and good sound quality.

Microcassette is even more primitive-sounding than standard cassette. The sound quality is rougher and trashier. There is a lot of background noise. So this limits the artist’s choices. It draws a frame or boundary around what is possible, what can be done. It strips away pretenses and the artist is forced to work within constraints, which stimulate a weird freedom. Everything you do with microcassette is reduced down to pushing the record and stop buttons. It is then about making choices of what to record and what not to record. Dictaphonia is a minimalistic art form in which less is more. Artists always work within limitations of some sort any way, so Dictaphonia is about choosing to work with less in an effort to find a “real” experience that isn’t actually

“real” at all. A microcassette recording is lacking parts of the sound of the actual events that were recorded. What we end up with is something near and dear to my artistic heart: re-making the world in a version that we prefer or desire.

Although it is somewhat dated here is [Hal McGee's Microcassette Manifesto](#).



The spirit of the concept of Dictaphonia is very similar to audio artists creating music with cheap consumer grade electric instruments (tablehooters), circuit bending, hacking, plunderphonics, turntablism, broken music, found art collage, and cassettes, etc. It is all about artists using humble, cast-off, disused technology in unexpected and novel ways, re-purposing and re-imagining consumer products as art-making tools and weapons. Subverting The System and creating new realities.

Soon a microcassette recorder became my daily companion everywhere I went. **How did you make the decision to switch from tape to digital?**

I kept on using analog tape recorders for as long as I could. Eventually all of my

portable pocket sized microcassette recorders broke. Manufacturers stopped making new recorders and tapes.

In the last several years of my microcassette days, I always used Sony M-470 recorders because they had the best sound quality and widest frequency range of any microcassette recorder, 300-4000 Hz. Most microcassette recorders have a frequency range of 400-4000 Hz. This narrow frequency range is what gives microcassette its punchy, compressed sound that is so appealing. The M-470 spoiled me, and after a while I never used other brands and models. At the end I was buying them on eBay, reconditioned, for more than \$100 each!

Also, though, I grew tired of the narrow frequency range of microcassette. I found myself growing irritated and restless that I was not able to record low and high sounds that fell below the 300-4000 Hz.

I sought out alternatives! In 2012 I tried using an Olympus DP-10 digital recorder, but I was unhappy with it. The sound quality was not good and it was not easy to use. It was a flash recorder, and the sound was too low-fidelity even for my tastes. So I just kept on using my trusty Sony M-470s!

I even tried making recordings using the voice recorder app on my cell phone but those recordings sounded like shit.

In August 2017 I bought my first Sony ICD-PX470 stereo digital dictaphone. Finally I found a digital replacement that was as easy to use, or almost as easy, as my beloved M-470 microcassette recorder! Note the similar model number! I first used a ICD-PX470, along with a M-470 on my *Septirmagerd* album, recorded in September 2017. As you know, the ICD-PX470 has great sound quality and it only costs about \$50! It records WAV files with a frequency response range of 50 Hz-20,000 Hz, so in theory it can record any sound that humans can hear. Its built-in stereo microphones are remarkably sensitive, and are capable of picking up bird calls, distant airplanes and raindrops.

On *Six Days In October*, the album after *Septirmagerd*, I transferred the digital recordings from my PX-470 onto 4-track cassettes in order to “maintain the warmth of analog sound” — in other words, to maintain the distortion and crusty lo-finesse of tape.

For the *Yesvember* album (recorded in November 2017) I used two M-470 microcassette recorders and two PX-470 digital recorders and mixed the sounds from the four recorders directly into Audacity.

I liked the PX-470 so much that eventually I bought three more of them. By the time of my *this is what 60 sounds like* album, recorded in January 2018, I was using all four PX-470s and one M-470.

The last album on which I used microcassette was *microcassettera*, a collaboration with Chris Phinney, issued in August 2018.

Since then I have exclusively used PX-470 and I won't use anything else. I always have four on hand. I have bought six of them: I broke one by dropping it too many times and I lost another one!

Update: I bought a refurbished Sony M-470 microcassette recorder and used it on my *September 2020 Report* album.

Recently I have been considering ways in which I can abandon using the PX-470s. I love their sound quality, portability, and ease of use, but I would prefer not having to carry one of them in one of my pockets at all times in addition to my iPhone XR. I would prefer to just use one device, if I can figure out a way. I always carry my iPhone with me everywhere I go any way, even when I forget on occasion to bring a PX-470. One of the problems with this idea or ideal is that I can't hook up four iPhones and continuously play back audio files into Audacity. The voice recorder on the iPhone still is not good enough. In order to use my iPhone as my primary audio recorder I need to figure out ways to use the iPhone's Hi Def video recorder for that purpose.

For one thing, the iPhone XR has five built-in microphones and when I shoot video with it the audio can be extracted from the video recording using the iMovie app on my desktop computer.

Who knows? Someday I might abandon doing separate audio recordings and just make video -collages or -assemblages! My recent explorations of the photo slideshows which accompany my dictaphone audio assemblages are a transitional step toward something different — perhaps toward audiovisual presentations as my primary artistic output.

Do you think that there is a grand narrative in your assemblages?

Yes and no.

Yes, because I have often said that all of my personal recorded works are actually one continuous work. People sometimes express that they don't know where or how to start listening to my audioworks, in effect complaining that there is too much and that they are overwhelmed by it. My standard reply is: "start anywhere". Pick any spot or place in any of my recorded works as a starting place and just start listening. It does not matter how much or how little one listens to, whether it be a few seconds, several minutes, or a few hours. Anywhere and anywhen you listen you will hear my audio art. You will hear me in my audio art. Everything that anybody needs to know about me can be heard in my audio assemblages. They are me but I am not them.

I haven't talked about this much yet, but my assemblages are very much like abstract expressionist field-paintings. Embedded in the interlaced and overlaid strands and rivulets of color and sensations there are bits and bobs and nuggets and fragments and shards and thoughts and sounds of my daily life and experiences. From edge to edge and from end to end there is an "alloverness". No moment is more significant or important than any other. The quieter spots, when they happen, are just as meaningful as the louder more cluttered parts. Density of "meanings", such as they are, aren't intentionally/by-design any heavier in any one place or time within the assemblages.

No, in the sense that I am not telling a story. I'm not telling a unified, coherent, cohesive, or linear narrative. So listening to one of my assemblages is not like listening to an audiobook. You'll find lots of stuff to listen to or lots of stuff to ignore, and it all exists as a forest waiting for the listener to wander through it and bring it to life. Without the listener a tree in the forest doesn't make a sound. None of the trees or the woodland creatures do. They don't exist until you direct your attention to them.



Growing up in the 60's and '70's, one couldn't help but have been influenced by the pop and rock music of those decades. Who or what recording artists do you think could have influenced you from that time?

My answer to this question could easily stretch to 50 pages or more so I will limit my answer to four pop and rock artists of the 1960s and 70s who influenced or inspired me more than any others: The Beatles, David Bowie, Brian Eno, and Bob Dylan.

The Beatles were a dividing point in musical history. Every piece of music in the Western World made by anyone since they first became popular in about 1964 has always been in reference to, inspired by, in contrast to, in opposition to, and in the shadow of The Beatles. I think there is simply no way of denying it. And I am not talking only about Pop and Rock music. Since the late 1960s Classical, Progressive, Punk, Post Punk, Hardcore, Country, Soul, R & B, Hip Hop, Rap, Reggae, Noise, etc. are all under the influence for good, bad, or in reaction to, of and by The Beatles. The Beatles changed everything.

People smarter and more knowledgeable than me have amply demonstrated that The Beatles changed not only music but Western Civilization.

The Beatles always relentlessly and restlessly pursued advances and innovations in their sound, pushing themselves to try new things and never afraid to borrow ideas, and this was never more true than during their psychedelic period, from *Rubber Soul* through *Magical Mystery Tour*. They busted down barriers and categories and experimented with different genres: from folk-rock, Indian and drone music, children's music and secret agent/spy soundtrack music, Stax and Motown Soul, Classical to musique concrète, to proto-punk and Noise.

In their more advanced works they revealed hidden dimensions of time and space embedded within simple objects and memories. Their ability to create mind-pictures through sounds is what is most important to me. Their most forward thinking and visionary works were studio creations. With the help of George Martin they used the technology of the recording studio to create hitherto unknown perspectives and soundscapes.

I would like to mention five songs in particular by The Beatles, which are good examples of songs by them that might have inspired my aesthetic in general and my assemblages in specific.

"Revolution 9" is the most obvious example, as it consists of seemingly random bits and pieces of recorded detritus, almost literally swept up off the floor, and stuck together into a collage that challenges the listener's mind to make sense of it.

"Penny Lane" and "Strawberry Fields Forever" through lyrical constructions, imaginative use of instruments, and tape effects, conjure up times, places, memories and states of mind, in kaleidoscopic mind-pictures. Similarly, "Tomorrow Never Knows" and "I Am The Walrus" use tape manipulations, tape loops, and radical instrumentation to create alternative states of mind or glimpses into other realities behind our everyday consensus reality.

The Beatles were building or riffing on and even acknowledged the earlier tape collage and musique concrète explorations of Cage, Stockhausen, and I'm also thinking of other composers like Edgard Varèse (*Poème électronique*) and Pierre Schaeffer.

Brian Eno is of course important to me because he famously said that he was a non-musician whose favorite instrument was the studio. He was an artist who used the recording environment to paint sound pictures that were highly evocative of moods, times, spaces, and mental states. I have never been a technically proficient musician, but I have recorded hundreds of albums of audio art and music.

From David Bowie I get his chameleon-like traits: that he would take on certain roles or approaches to soundmaking through the long course of his career, never allowing himself to be trapped into doing one thing. He was constantly shifting and morphing into something new, into new versions of himself. I think the same can be said of Neil Young.

Bob Dylan's mid-60s period of the three albums from 1965 and 1966, *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited*, and *Blonde On Blonde* have spent hundreds of hours on my record players and compact disc players over the last forty years. Many of those songs get up into the five to eight minute range, with some longer, including side-long songs. In a way these songs are poems set to music, and they tell stories, but the stories they tell are not necessarily linear. A lot of it is about the words conjuring mind imagery, and the words are open to multiple interpretations. I think that with a lot of these mid-60s Dylan lyrics he was not really interested in conveying specific messages (because he was trying to overcome the burden of being a

“Message Singer”), but he often used the words in various combinations based on how they sounded together. His songs have been open to as many different interpretations as there are listeners, and I admire that.

Long-form psychedelic improvisational music has definitely been an inspiration for my assemblages. I am thinking about artists like The Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, Cream, Can, and numerous others in the 60s who would start with a kernel of an idea, a simple song or riff, and take the listener on an extended sonic journey through the imagination, bending time and space, going to unexpected places. I think that it is really all about adventures for the mind.

Each listener hears it differently, experiences it differently, and travels to different places in their minds. It’s about opening up new circuit pathways in the brain. It’s about expanding possibilities, explorations through inner space. The Grateful Dead have openly acknowledged that their fans (Dead Heads) are partners in the creation of their improvisational music. I have said the same thing about my listeners numerous times in our discussions.



Also, I think that Progressive Rock bands such as Genesis, Yes, and Emerson, Lake & Palmer had a big impact on my appreciation for long form mindscapes. I'm thinking specifically of albums like Pictures at an Exhibition, Yessongs, and Genesis Live. I listened to these albums for hours on end when I was a teenager. I would also like to mention two concept albums by Jethro Tull: Thick As A Brick and Minstrel In The Gallery.

Some of the extended suites and more conceptual pieces by Chicago on their first four albums were a big part of my listening in my teen years. Their first album, Chicago Transit Authority contained lengthy, convoluted, highly intricate pieces in the five to eight minute range, and the fourth side was one conceptual 20-minute piece. Chicago at Carnegie Hall is not highly regarded now, but I would be lying if I said that I did not listen to that massive 4-LP set numerous times from start to finish. The Velvet Underground and some of the so-called Krautrock bands are another source of inspiration that I can cite. The first two albums by The Velvets are at the top of the list! The Velvet Underground & Nico has three tracks in the five to eight minute range, and White Light/White Heat has the eight-minute song "The Gift", and "Sister Ray" clocks in at 17 minutes. But also I cannot overlook Can! Monster Movie, Ege Bamyasi, and Tago Mago are loaded with long, involved and complex explorations, many of which last for entire LP sides. And of course I must mention Autobahn by Kraftwerk.

I do want to say, though, that I have listened to numerous pieces of music that are fairly short, under five minutes, that seem to last much longer. How we experience Time when we listen to music and audio art is bendable, changeable, malleable. Music is an art which is durational, it unfolds across Time, and it has the ability to help us travel to times and places which exist only in our minds. We can go places in our minds that we cannot go in "reality".

A lot of space rock bands are very good at taking us to odd spaces, places and times that we can only imagine. Hawkwind is an excellent example. Inspired by Space Exploration AND psychedelic drugs, space rockers take us to the farthest reaches of Inner Space.

While we are on the topics of Space Rock and Free Improv, it's also good to mention more modern bands like Viktimized Karcass, Alien Planetscapes, and I will plug the synthesizer improv albums that Chris Phinney and I have done together.

I also want to mention bands like The Who and The Kinks who produced concept albums: collections of songs with an overarching theme or even storyline that tied them all together. I am thinking especially of Quadrophenia by The Who, which I listened to intensively as a teenager. Pictures at an Exhibition by ELP should be mentioned here, as well as The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway by Genesis.

You have a lot of humor in your assemblages. Do you think jokes make the day go by faster or that life is a fucking joke so why not laugh at it?

Life is shit. Life is a cruel joke and the joke is on us. We are born into bodies, and we are destined to die with no escape except Death. No one else can feel what we feel and experience Life the way that we do, inside our Minds. Each of us is totally alone in a meaningless, empty Universe.

I choose to laugh in the Face of The Abyss!
My motto is: "It is better to laugh than to cry."



I am naturally a melancholic person. It is easy for me to give in to depression, despair and hopelessness. I have always been a loner.

From a young age I have always felt *different* from other people. I have always felt like I am on the outside looking in to where all of the happy, with-it, popular, cool, hip, and “together” people are. And I prefer it that way! That is right: I prefer to be alone or maybe I should say that I prefer my own company over that of other people, to think my own thoughts in peace, without having to behave in such a way as to “play the game” and ingratiate myself to other people. Choosing to live this way, in solitude, of course is paid for with a price: loneliness. It is a price that I am willing to pay.

Why do I prefer to be alone? Maybe because I was the oldest child in my family. For the first two and a half years of my life I was the only child. First children and only children feel that they are the Center of The Universe. Damn right! I am the Center of The Universe! We generally accept that The Universe as we know it is Infinite and Boundless. If this is so then any point and any individual is indeed the center.

I accept that Life itself is Meaningless, and this idea creates a potentially open-ended freedom. My life has the meaning that I choose to give it, nothing more and nothing less. This freedom makes me giddy and happy and joyous.

To fill the Void at the center of my life I choose to make Art -- to fill the world and The Universe with my thoughts, my brain, my emotions, my sensations, my experiences in living my daily life.

My dictaphone assemblages are filled with laughter, chuckling, bad jokes, puns, fooling around, saying silly stuff, me interacting with and playing with my dog, racket from electric soundmaking gear and instruments, and all of the sounds of my daily life.

Every dictaphone assemblage is a joy project! As an artist I choose to load the world up with the joy that I feel in being alive. I hate Death, and I am trying my best to avoid it and forestall it. In my view, Death is a form of failure. I want to live as long as I can and keep on making Art for as long as I can, to pour my life and art into the world for as long as possible.

I create my assemblages in order to bring as much happiness and joy into the lives and ears and minds of my listeners as possible. I *could* choose Despair. I have spent plenty of time in my life sitting around feeling sorry for myself, and doing nothing. That approach got me nowhere. There was only one other choice: to make Art and to make it every day with a relentless passion and drive. And I hope to inspire my closest friends to try to create Art every day.

I cannot change the world and what goes on in it in any truly meaningful way except through my Art. I cannot affect World Politics, starvation and endless wars. There are enough people who choose to be concerned with these things.

Some people are political activists: I am an art activist!

People love to complain and complain about everything, endlessly. It seems that that is what most people use the Internet for -- to complain! Not me! Pointless negativity is a dead-end street that ends in Death.

I have three or four or five very good friends in this World. I create my Art for them, and that is enough. I like to joke that I have an audience of 12. It is maybe a little more than that! -- hahahaha! But it doesn't matter how many people listen to and like what I do and actually truly listen and look. It is enough that those three or four or five very good friends actually truly listen and look, and whoever else chooses to enjoy my dictaphone assemblage art. I do it for them. I do it for whoever will listen.

To those people who will listen I give my love and joy, and I hope that they find reasons to laugh out loud, and to be amazed and surprised at what they hear as they listen.

I have said it elsewhere, and I will say it again: My dictaphone assemblages are my way of sharing my daily life. If you choose to listen you can spend an hour or two hanging out with me, listening and interacting, and laughing along with me at the absurdity of existence.



There is the shape and aesthetic of the audio assemblage recordings and then there are the messages and musings contained within them. What has been the influence of the great American Transcendentalist thinkers and writers, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson on your assemblages and your life? “Bohemian with a Good Credit Rating” from 59 Year Old Kid with a Tape Recorder springs to mind here for instance.

I cannot claim to have a thorough understanding of American Transcendentalism, only a mish-mash of bits and pieces. Like anything else of a philosophical or artistic nature that I study for inspiration, I take what I can use, and ignore the rest.

I have read *Walden* by Thoreau probably five or six times since the late 1970s. I get the idea that for a lot of people *Walden* is all about “getting back to Nature”! For me it is about individualism. For me it is about deciding what is important to me as an individual, and then eliminating clutter and distractions that get in the way of what is most important.

I decided a long time ago, nearly 40 years ago, that I wanted to devote my life to being an artist. In order to make that happen I reduced my life to what I considered essentials. What follows is a description of my personal economy.

I decided that for me Art was more important than having a family, so in early 1982 I got a vasectomy. I have never regretted it! A vasectomy was a definitive way to eliminate unwanted pregnancies which would have prevented me from living my life as an artist the way that I wanted to.

It has always seemed to me that having an automobile is a big financial burden. Decades ago I asked myself if I wanted to spend a lot of money on buying cars, insurance, licenses, and repairs, or if I would prefer to spend that money on art and music supplies. I have owned only one automobile in my life. It was a sky blue 1962 Pontiac Tempest which I bought from a friend for \$200 in about 1980. It lasted about two months before it burned up.

I rely on the Gainesville city bus system for my basic transportation needs, and have done so since I moved to Gainesville in 1991. I ride the bus for free because I am a hospital employee! I borrow my brother's car twice a week for grocery shopping and miscellaneous errands.

I have never wanted a serious career. Oh, for a time back in my teen years I contemplated going into Radio and TV broadcasting. I was too restless to stick with any one course of study. I chose instead to work at jobs. It seems to me that a lot of people who have careers spend a good deal of their mental energy on that career. Not me! I want to spend that mental energy on Art. So I have always chosen jobs that are below my ability level, so that I can do the job and still have lots of brain-space left for Art. When I clock out at the end of the work day, I can forget about my job until the next work day. And I have usually had jobs in food service, which require a certain kind of intelligence and leave me plenty of brain time and room to create Art and think Art thoughts all day long.

I have stayed at the same job at a hospital for 28 years now. I make about \$40,000 per year before taxes and other deductions. I pay just a few dollars a month through payroll deduction on life and health insurance and retirement funds.

My rent is \$785 per month. I have lived in the same apartment for 11 years and in the same apartment complex for 28 years. The two bedroom apartment I share with my brother and dog is modest at best, and a little bit rundown, but I don't spend an arm and a leg on rent each month.

I have chosen to live in apartments for most of my adult life because I do not want to be committed to and burdened by the expenses of owning a house and property. A lot of people I know prefer owning and living in their own homes. That is fine for them but not for me. I do not have to pay property taxes and I do not have the expenses of repairs and upkeep on a house. When the air conditioner in my apartment needs to be fixed I place a work order with the apartment complex management and they fix it. When the plumbing needs to be repaired, the management fixes it. They hire someone to mow the lawn and do maintenance on the grounds and laundry facilities. I do not own a hammer or a screwdriver and I have no mechanical skills or aptitude, so

living in an apartment suits me quite well.

My electricity bill is about \$100 a month during the Winter and other cool months, and about \$175 per month during the hot months. My Internet bill is about \$100 per month. My brother pays for a third of all expenses, so that helps a lot. And I pay a total \$160 for smartphone service and car insurance (for the occasions when I do drive).

After the above expenses I have a good amount of money each month for food and clothing and other necessities. And I have plenty of money to buy gear and art supplies as needed.

I realized a long time ago that I was not suited for the starving artist routine! I need to have stability: a roof over my head, a bed to sleep in at night, and food on my table. I make just enough money to maintain stability and therefore independence. I don't waste time worrying about where my next meal is going to come from or how I am going to pay my bills. I have just enough to pay for everything without being preoccupied with making money for the sake of it.

I don't have expensive habits or tastes. I don't buy jewelry. You will never see me wearing any, not even a wristwatch. No car. No wife and kids. My wardrobe consists of several pairs of identical black cargo pants and numerous t-shirts of various designs, plus several pairs of identical short-sleeved Dickies work shirts, and five or six long-sleeve shirts, and one coat for cold weather. I wear ankle-height hiking boots at work or at home, one pair for work and going out in public, and an older pair for walking the dog through mud, grass, and dirt.

I stopped drinking alcohol and smoking anything more than 10 years ago. In the past these things slowed me down and got in the way of what was most important to me. Plus, I have avoided the expenses of smokables and drinkables. That can be a bottomless pit. While we are on the topic of empty habits, I want to say that I do not drink carbonated beverages, pop and sodas. They are not good for one's health and they are totally empty of nutritional value. They are nothing more than a product designed for you to consume without any benefit -- kind of like television, but that is a different topic.

The only habit that I have left is coffee and I maintain that at three cups per day, so that's about \$6 per day.

The most expensive habit or lifestyle choice I have is my dog: \$50 per month for his healthcare, \$50 per month for his food, and about \$60 per month for his grooming salon appointments. Stanley is totally worth it! He is a great watch dog with super sensitive hearing. This is important now that my hearing is not as good as it used to be! Plus I get a lot of exercise taking him on several daily walks. I usually let him lead the way and we will wander along familiar paths through the neighborhood... him seeking out smells, me seeking out things to record with my iPhone's camera and my dictaphones. Having a dog encourages me to pay attention to the world at my feet... to see little things that most of us ignore. My neighborhood is exotic in its own ways! Stanley and I are well-traveled in our neighborhood. And in general, Stanley is a lot of fun. He is a loudmouth and very opinionated and he tells me, my brother, and the neighbors what he thinks! You can hear him on every audio recording I make and see him in a high percentage of the photos I take.



It costs me roughly \$3,000 a year to have a dog, but that's one whole hell of a lot cheaper than having a human child. And even though Stanley DOES require a lot of attention, he still is not as time-, brain-, and money-consuming as a kid.

I have lived alone, meaning without a significant other, since 1988. I haven't even had any serious girlfriends since then. Oh, there have been a few since then: a fling with a married woman 28 years ago, and two other women I later found out preferred the company of other women. Generally I just can't be bothered, to be honest. I am not dead yet, and that situation might change in the future -- who knows one way or another?! I was once married for seven years, and I don't really need to do that again. I found out that I really do just prefer my own company. I need to be able to think my own thoughts.

Yes, I am selfish and that is my choice. I am living the life that I want. I have arranged the conditions of my life in such a way that I am able to do the things that are most important to me -- create audio and photographic art -- with the fewest distractions possible. I don't need more money than I have. Sure I get lonely, but I would rather be a little lonely than have to deal with a bunch of clutter and crap constantly.

It is important to me that I be as self-reliant as possible, as independent as possible. Basically I just need to pay my bills, pay my credit card monthly payments (I am a bohemian with an excellent credit rating), go to my job and put in my time and go home, go to regular doctor checkups, take care of my dog, and spend time with my parents and help them in any way that I can. Other than those responsibilities, my

time and my life and my thoughts are my own. And I like it that way.

All of the time and energy and brain-space that I might have devoted to things such as career, spouse, and family I am instead able to devote to the research, development, contemplation, incubation, gathering of materials and ideas, and creation of artistic works. Instead of filling the void up with all of that other stuff, I choose to fill up the void of my life with Art. I wouldn't have it any other way.

In interviews you've mentioned the influence of William Burroughs and Brion Gysin and their work with tape recorders and cut-ups particularly in relation to your *Man with a Tape Recorder* album. What about the Dadaists and specifically Kurt Schwitters?

It is my view that Burroughs and Gysin were using cut-ups and tape recorders to disrupt or cut through Language as a Tool of Control.



For me — Using audio recorders to make cut-ups and fold-ins is like cracking open eggs or a smashed-open cantaloupe rotting in the parking lot to see what is inside the words and the associations between sounds, ideas and words; the juxtapositions hopefully break open the timelines and let us see and hear that this and that and that other thing over there and all of that stuff over THERE ... are there hidden meanings? Whatever meanings there are are waiting for you to discover what they are... if any.

And really, it's a joy-project, trying to reveal the joys in day to day living that are there if we stop feeling sorry for ourselves and just listen, just pay attention. And laughter at odd combinations of words and word sounds. Remember: "I can get it off but I can't get it back on". And "Fear is the darkroom in which negatives are developed".

I owe a debt of inspiration to Kurt Schwitters because he employed the disused and discarded artifacts of daily existence and revived them, gave them new life and new possible meanings, by combining and reconfiguring them in unexpected and highly artful ways.

German Dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck identified four significant discoveries or pillars of Dadaist anti-art: Simultaneity, Juxtaposition, Collage, and Bruitism [Noise Music], which when employed together create a new kind of multimedia, multi-layered time-busting art form.



In this Marcel Janco painting of a performance at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916 we see a representation of these ideas. The audience itself is just as raucous and crazy as what is happening on stage. We get the idea of many different sounds going on at one time. Hugo Ball pounding on the piano. The Dadaists onstage simultaneously declaiming poems in three or four different languages. The audience members drunkenly shouting and throwing objects at the performers. Huelsenbeck might be beating his big drum. Emmy Hennings might be singing a cabaret song. Sounds leak in from the street. Some of the performers don African-inspired masks and dance in a bizarre off-kilter fashion. Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber geometric collages and perhaps some Expressionist and Cubist paintings hang on the walls. One huge cacophony or riot of sounds and sights.

My dictaphone audio assemblages consist of two or more (but usually four) audio collages of sounds of my daily life — sounds that are usually considered inconsequential and are usually ignored [noises] — streaming/flowing and intermixed simultaneously, with the parts juxtaposed not only sequentially backwards and onwards in time, but also above and below.

There are no definitive meanings or associations that can be attached to an interpretation of what is present in the raw sounds themselves. Any possible meanings in my dictaphone assemblages are not explicitly planned or designed by me because I employ random/chance procedures to construct the assemblages.

Meanings as such are perceived by and dependent on the individual listener and they arise by fortuitous happenstance — what could be considered pure dumb luck! These meanings, such as they are, are created in the moments in which someone listens, based on the listener's perceptions of the ways that the sounds interconnect, conflict, and contrast into and across time. They do and they do not *mean* anything, or any one thing.

One of the parts of my *September* assemblage album is titled “nothing exists until it is recorded”. In a big sense my assemblages are created by the listener — they do not exist until the listener listens. By directing their attention to the sounds of the assemblage the listener creates the assemblage.

Listeners have reported that they hear different things in my assemblages each time that they listen. During different listening sessions they hear different things. Some things stand out more. Or they hear the combinations of sounds in ways they did not experience previously. So, clearly, the ways that the listener listens creates new experiences each time. Maybe during one listening session the listener cleans their room and does other household chores such as cleaning their dishes or doing the laundry. The sounds of those other activities blend with the sounds of the recorded assemblage or mask those assemblage sounds in particular ways so that different parts rise up out of the assemblage and reach the perceptive apparatus of the listener.

Some listeners have reported strange experiences from the voices in my assemblages. Some have even reported hearing the assemblage voices in their dreams. Me talking to them! But what am I saying? I am saying what they remember. As they are listening they might not be able to hear all of the words that are there present in the recording because other sounds in the assemblage mask some of the words. What message leaks out or through?

Do you think, like Burroughs, that recordings have special powers?

I am a skeptic when it comes to paranormal phenomena. I believe that they do not exist outside of us. Instead they exist inside of us. UFOs, angels, ghosts, demons, spirits, gods, communication with the dead, Heaven, Hell, etc. all exist within us and are projections of our minds. Over time we have come to understand that these things do not exist in reality, outside of us. In the distant past this was not always apparent. These things can seem real and palpable!

David Lynch has said that all of the things we dream are inside of us already. I rarely

remember my sleeping dreams, but perhaps this is because I do all of my dreaming while I am awake.

Do recordings have special or even magical powers? It depends on how one looks at it. Cut-ups and collages of recorded materials can change the way that we perceive Time. Does Time exist outside of our minds? I doubt it. If it does, it is meaningless outside of our minds. Time can be measured with rotations of our planet and its revolutions around the Sun.

The only sense of Time that matters to me is the Now, while I am alive. Death will be an end, surely, for me and my consciousness of existence and self. That is why I am striving to live and exist for as long as possible. When the light goes out in my mind I will have no guarantee that there is anything beyond that. To me it is pointless to even consider it, and it is not worth considering. Lives of other people, beings and The Universe will continue after I am gone, but why would I give a shit about that?

Cut-ups, collages, assemblages, films, and music unfold and live/exist across Time. There is the famous line in Richard Linklater's film *Slacker* that Film is actually Photography at 24 frames per second. Each of those frames is a still photograph, a recording of a discrete moment in Time. Our brains experience them as continuous movement. Those frames can be individually colored and manipulated ... those segments of Time can be scrambled, moved around, layered...

When we hear several layers moving and unfolding as we listen to one of my assemblages, what happens in our Minds? The individual recordings of a few seconds here and there that make up my assemblages come from different nodes or points in chronological Time. Our minds try to make sense of it as we listen, and we try to shape and rearrange it into patterns resembling what we recognize as linear Time.

Is the past really actually existing in the present moment? Is it possible to perceive future events? I think that the Past and The Future don't exist. We just exist in one continuous Now. No, I can't relive an event in 1976, and I do not want to. The only thing that matters to me is here and now.

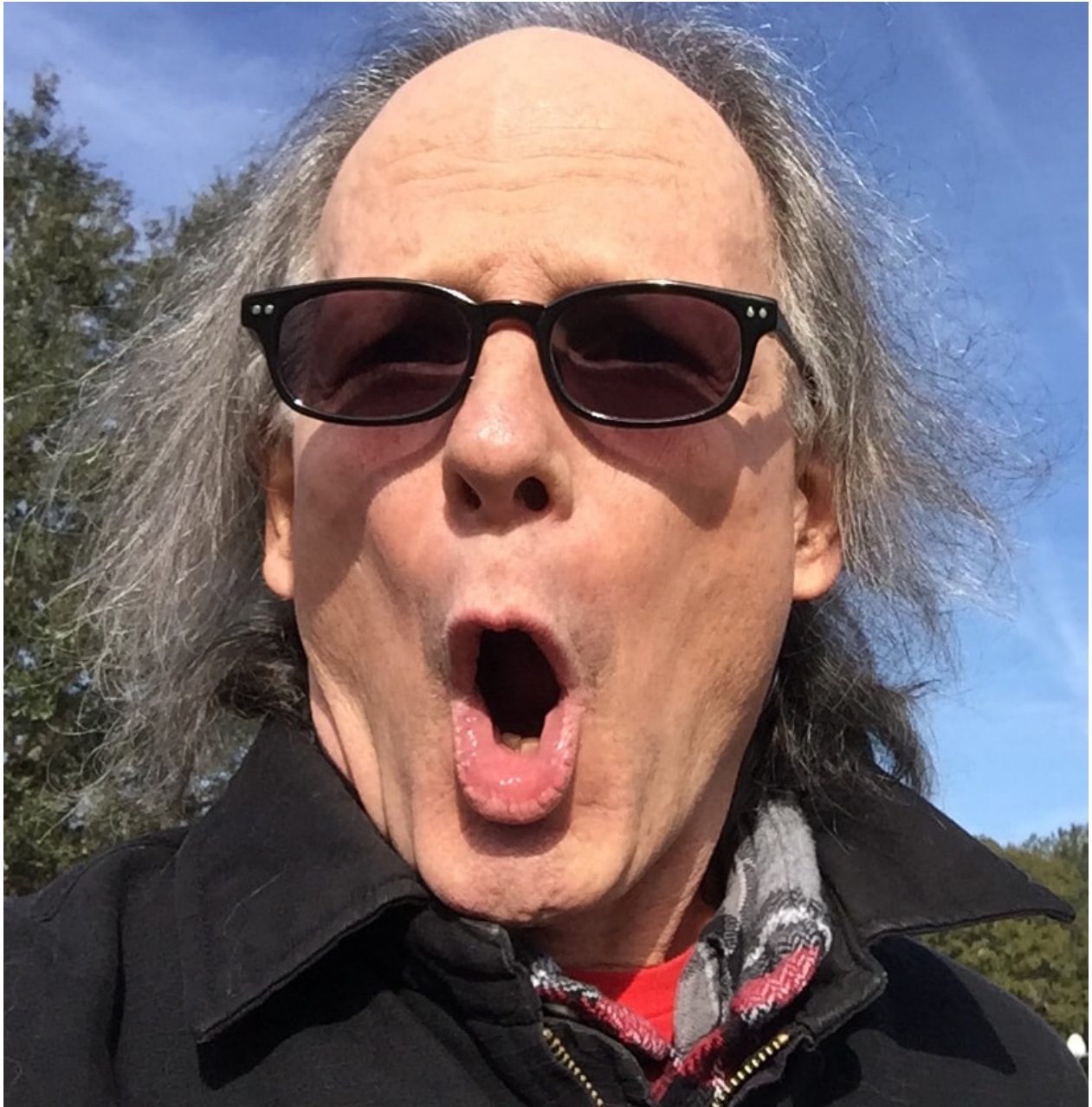
I love recordings because they serve as raw data, as artifacts and evidence that something(s) occurred. Recordings are not the events or moments themselves, as we experienced them.

Recordings are a form of memory. Memories are subjective and selective any way, right? When we hear songs, melodies, view old home movies and photos, and listen to recordings of voices and other sounds, our minds start to free associate. We open up old circuit pathways in our brains. We get glimpses into words, people and events that we did not know that we had forgotten. We make connections between things and thoughts that came before and we start to see patterns in the Past that perhaps had never occurred to us before.

My feeling is that déjà vu is our minds remembering stuff that we had forgotten ... old memories re-awakened by free-associations stimulated by events that are happening to us now.

Does concrete poetry hold any attraction for you? Has it been an influence?

I do not spend a lot of time looking at concrete poetry. I admire the spirit of it and I draw a lot of inspiration from it. I am very interested in the ways that printed words look on a page or on a screen. If nothing else, concrete poetry emphasizes the plasticity of words as images. Inevitably, when I see concrete poetry I want to hear it. I have told John M. Bennett that when I see his poems I always imagine his voice speaking it in my head. A lot of my wordplay in my assemblages is based on a similar sense of rearranging words on the audio page or screen. Brion Gysin's permutation poems and John Cage's "reading through" poems figure large in these explorations of mine. It's only when I hear those artists speaking their poems that the poems come to life. I never really "got" the writings of William S. Burroughs until I heard him read from his books. It was then that I understood the underlying rhythms in his writing. Hearing his voice reading the words opened up the mind-scenes in my head that on the static page had seemed interesting but hadn't really moved me in any significant way. For me personally, I have little to no interest in poetry in general. Life is poetry enough, certainly. We don't need poetry on top of poetry. If we must have poetry, poetry needs to be heard to truly bring it to life through the voice of the poet. My use of spoken texts and mis-speaking, misreading texts aloud, repeating phrases with different emphases on different syllables — all of this is a form of spoken comedy. Those poor little phonemes! They are so used and abused!



Are there films that have inspired your assemblages?

The Dadaist films of Hans Richter (such as *Rhythmus 21*) and Viking Eggeling (*Symphonie diagonale*), certainly. Surrealist Films by Man Ray, such as *Le Retour à la Raison*. *Un Chien Andalou* by Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel. Also, *L'Age D'Or* and all of Buñuel's films from about 1960 onwards, but especially *The Phantom Of Liberty*. It seems to me that Richard Linklater's *Slacker* is very similar in structure to *The Phantom Of Liberty*. I love these two films because of their collage-like flow of events: one event leads to another, which leads to another, endlessly in a stream, but the events may or may not be related to each other.

Definitely *Twin Peaks* by David Lynch. I admire *Twin Peaks* not only for its offbeat humor, but because it is a great example of American Surrealism. Lynch loves to fold Time, and to make it circle back on itself. I also love how in Lynch's work everyday people and their daily actions and the objects they encounter can lead us into unexpected or curious states of mind and situations.

In Buñuel, *Slacker*, and *Twin Peaks* we experience mysteries embedded in mundane, everyday objects and actions.

This harkens back to Thoreau and transcendentalism ... that the Natural World is perhaps the outward manifestation of deeper inner realities.

It is the odd and seemingly incongruous combinations of and connections between objects, events, and happenings which stimulate the viewer “to make sense of it”, which welcome the viewer to create associations and discover patterns in the chaos.

More than any other film artist, I would have to say that Jonas Mekas has inspired my most recent audio assemblages. His *Walden (Diaries, Notes, and Sketches)* is a poetic masterwork which he created by capturing glimpses and snippets of everyday life, more or less accumulating bits of film while he was living his life, and then presented these raw artifacts in a rough and tumble stream of images. Strangely, though, I am forced to admit that I only discovered Mekas’s work within the last year. His work seems like a confirmation of what the development of my approach has been all along! But more so, works like *Walden* seem to point toward what I am hoping to develop in the future.

How do you come up with the titles for your assemblages?

The titles of my assemblages often come from the time period in which the raw materials are gathered and accumulated.

Twelvember was recorded during the month of December 2017. It is a joke title. December is a misnomer. It is the 12th month of the year, but it still bears the name it had when it was the 10th month. I pay attention to small details in daily life like that, stuff that almost all of us take for granted. How many Decembers have we all lived through, and how many of us have considered the origin of its name, and why do we keep calling it that when it clearly isn’t December any more?! October should be December, Godzilladammit! December should be called something like Duodecember. Things and what we call them have resonances. I love the sounds of words and I like to play with them. The word we give for the twelfth month of the year, December, doesn’t mean what we think it does but we invest that time of year with all kinds of meanings and rituals. According to Wikipedia:

“December got its name from the Latin word *decem* (meaning ten) because it was originally the tenth month of the year in the calendar of Romulus c. 750 bc which began in March. The winter days following December were not included as part of any month. Later, the months of January and February were created out of the monthless period and added to the beginning of the calendar, but December retained its name.”

The title for *October* tells us that it was recorded in October and November, it kinda sorta straddles the two months. I got that title from *Winnie The Pooh*. Other assemblage titles are riffs on cultural clichés, taglines, and slogans.

The title of *this is what 60 sounds like* comes from the silly thing that people do on social media where they post a buff and sexy-hot photo of themselves with the caption “this is what [insert person’s age] looks like.” I guess they are boasting that they look damn good for their age! The album was recorded during the month of January 2017, when I turned 60. There is a big photo of my smiling face on the cover. The art of my

dictaphone assemblages is primarily sound-based, so I was trying to say that this is what my life at 60 sounds like and isn't it fun and exciting in its own ways?!

Mr. McGee's Neighborhood is of course a riff on Mister Rogers, and up close and personal is a riff on a news broadcast tagline or slogan. For me it is about claiming these things for my own, de-commodifying them and making them personal. And it is humorous and meant to be funny and catchy and memorable. The title up close and personal is meant to clue the potential listener to what it is they will be hearing. When they listen they will hear me. They will be with me. They are going to spend time with me. The title tells the listener that when you listen to this you will hear what my life and my experience in living my daily life is like, presented in an artistic fashion, you know? It's not a literal recording of this happened and then this happened and then that happened, but it is rather an environment, a collection of happenings and moments, just waiting for you to discover in the ways that you want.

And really, that's what Hal Assemblages are all about. The listener hangs out with me for an hour or an hour and a half. I tell jokes. I make puns. I share my thoughts on various and sundry topics. You hear me riding the bus. Interacting with co-workers. Ordering food in restaurants. You go with me to the grocery store and help me remember to look at my shopping list so that I won't forget anything. Lists of things are very important! I walk my dog. You hear him bark and bark and bark. You hear the birds and airplanes and traffic sounds and helicopters and neighbors as we walk. You go to the bathroom with me. We read signs and pick up stuff off of the ground and look at it. From time to time you hear me noodle around on synthesizers and the two-string pink dumpster guitar. It's a big mish-mash grab-bag scrap-heap of fun and boredom and kicks and the mundane. Kind of like life with Hal!

Other titles are derived from a loose theme that I explore during the time period that I record the raw materials. An example is Home For The Hellidays, which is also a cultural riff.

Other assemblage titles come from the material itself or describe a trait of the assemblage or a method employed in its creation.

An example would be between coincidence and augury. This title kind of comments on how the chance methods I employ to create assemblages often crossover into divination. I like to insist, as you have noticed, that no concrete meanings are intended or planned in the construction of my assemblages, that the assemblages are constructions of raw sonic materials that construct themselves based on automated randomness. And yet, there is often a weird sense that it does mean something because of our perceptions of the combinations of sounds. Is it the human mind demonstrating its propensity to look for and find patterns in chaos, or is the mind discovering or uncovering something that is there in the assemblage waiting to be revealed?

In part of your response to the question, "How do you come up with titles for your assemblages?", you mention that "things and what we call them have resonances." Why do you think that these resonances are so powerful?

Once again I attribute this to the free-associative powers of the human mind. I'm a big believer in this and I think that it is what sets us apart from most other animals on the planet. I am fascinated with words, their meanings, and their sounds. In a playful way I like to vocalize words out loud into the recorder. By repeating words and phrases and changing the emphases on inflections, and playing around with what syllables are accented, diction, enunciation, and pronunciations I am attempting to give new life to

the words by setting up different relationships between words and phrases, comparing and contrasting. Repetitions of word phrases also allow opportunities for ‘mistakes’, glitches, mispronunciations, and these kinds of ‘negatives’ often give birth to new ideas and associations. Language is a Pandora’s box and a can of worms that I DO INDEED want to open up. I love to batter phonemes into submission, whipping them up into a frothy foamy bubbling stew.

When we talk we usually rush through the words without really taking the time to enjoy and savor them.

I like to roll them around on my tongue like a fine wine, gargle, and swish and rinse, and spit and bite the words, often OVER-enunciating... Looking for rhythmic patterns in how I say the words and seeking out what those reveal. Yes, for me it’s all about peering into the insides of words, and the fun discoveries I can make there.

There are musical passages in your assemblages— those that happen to be playing in the background when you are out and about and then those you play yourself on your synths and two-string pink dumpster guitar. Where did you find that wonderful instrument? What part do you think the musical passages in your assemblages serve? On *One Week in the Life of a Microcassette* you discuss why you don’t really play the guitar. Your explanation is like a master class on guitar playing as I think in order for guitar players to stay interesting they have to keep “unlearning” as they go along. Do you have good advice for keyboard players like this as well?

My personal golden rule for choosing a musical or noise instrument is this:

Is it more difficult than operating a tape recorder?

If so, then it is not for me.

I have always wanted to be a guitar player, but Nature intervened very early in this matter

I cannot tap the top off my head with one hand, up and down

and rub my abdomen in circles with the other hand simultaneously

So I suppose that means that me and guitars are not a good match

The ideal instrument for me has knobs, buttons, sliders, and switches

I do not own a screwdriver or even a hammer

I have a love/hate relationship with music in general. In the past I listened to a lot of music. These days I rarely listen to music for pleasure. There is too much music and too many people making music.

Music is annoying because it is everywhere. One can’t escape it. One of my YouTube videos got flagged for a copyright claim. It is one of my one-minute “micro adventures” videos from several years ago. In the “micro adventure 65” video I am ordering food at a Mexican restaurant that used to be across 20th Avenue from my apartment complex. YouTube’s copyright violation software detected the music that was being played on the sound system of the restaurant: <https://youtu.be/Hf7TeQM6bPM> The copyright holder, Joey Music, did not require that my video be removed. I can assure you that it was not my intention to record that song.

I know that just about anybody who reads this is going to wonder what the hell I’m making a big deal about, but I want to say this: Music is unnecessary. It seems like a highly artificial construct, of course, based on formulas and routines. Even music that is considered “weird” or “unusual” is still just music.

Life is music enough without making more music. Most of us can agree that music is organized-sound. That's all it is. In the same way that, to paraphrase you, Life is poetry enough. We don't need poetry on top of poetry. And there's a now famous and quite accurate mail art slogan: Life is Art Enough.

Sure, according to my definition, my dictaphone assemblages qualify as music because they are organized-sound. So, in a way, I am nitpicking, to be sure, and being a total hypocrite.

I always say that I strive to make my art as close to my life as possible: to make them one and the same and one in the same, differing only in name.

I do play musical instruments in my assemblages, or, rather, there are recordings of me playing music within my assemblages. Other instances of music within my assemblages are recordings that I make of music that occurs in my environment during the course of my daily life. These are recordings of music that occur without my involvement or intervention. In the context of my assemblages these are what I call "musicalisms". They are really nothing more than recorded material, just like the sounds of people conversing, squeaky doors, or my dog barking.

I do play music for the purpose of recording it to add it to my assemblages. If I am going to bother to play a musical instrument it needs to be as simple and straightforward as possible, because I want immediacy and to be in the moment. If I need to be concerned with how the instrument is played then *that* is interfering with my ability to be in the moment. And really, my assemblages are just collections of moments.

To be fair, I include music in my assemblages because music, no matter my attitudes about it, is a part of life!

My favorite musical instruments are Korg Monotron synthesizers, circuit bent Casio SK-1, and my beloved two-string pink dumpster guitar.

One day a few years ago when Stanley and I were walking around the apartment complex I came upon a pink wooden First Act brand acoustic guitar with only two strings, leaning against a garbage dumpster! I immediately knew that this instrument was meant for me and was waiting for me to discover it. The two strings are not properly strung. Whoever rigged up the strings did not know what they were doing, obviously. I don't play it every day, but every once in a while I will see it out of the corner of my eye and will scoop it up and start plunking away, with a dictaphone in record mode. It is simple and responsive. I don't need to think about it. I can just make sounds quickly, easily, and immediately. The only drawback of the two-string pink dumpster guitar is that it has one string too many!

In some ways I think of the two-string pink dumpster guitar as a found musical art object. I am not tempted to re-string it or change it in any way.

Several years ago I collected and played one-string diddley bows and canjos. Remind me to show you these instruments when you are here for your next visit.

I have bought and tried out dozens of musical instruments and electric gadgets over the years, and I am almost always disappointed! It seems like most instruments I try either don't do what I want them to do or they do too much or require too much.

I have played a lot of synthesizers over the years and I hate synths which have too many features ... features that I will never use. I want every knob, switch and slider to do something that I am interested in doing. I usually don't use sequencers and arpeggiators or drum machines.

I hate digital synths with hidden menus. I want every function to be accessible from the control panel in front of me. I gotta have that tactile immediacy!

I also don't want to be bothered with modular synths and ones that require patch cords. I know that a lot of people like that kind of stuff, but not me. To me that seems more like a science project than it does an instrument. It has been my experience that many or most modular synth enthusiasts rarely create much actual music. They are too busy nerding-out about jacks and plugs and sockets and cables and modules. But that is neither here nor there. If people enjoy that, fine. But not me.

I play synthesizers in a very intuitive way. I can feel the wave shapes changing as I tweak and turn knobs. If I have to think about what I am doing it ruins the experience for me. "Oh, wait, I gotta patch this doo-hickey into that doo-flop ... and uh, lemme scroll through this patch menu until I find the preset I want..." No thanks.

To me the perfect synthesizer is the Korg Monotron and its siblings the Monotron Duo and Monotron Delay. In my opinion it is the greatest synth ever created! It does just enough and not too much and it sounds great, all for only \$50. And it is a synth that I can fit in my pocket! That's one of my ideals: to be able to carry my music-makers and sound-generators and recorders in my pants and shirt pockets. Portability is paramount because I want to be able to be out and about in my neighborhood, playing a palm-sized synth through a belt-clip speaker, amongst the street sounds and sounds of my neighborhood. Do you see what I mean? If I am going to be playing an instrument I want it to be a part of the world outside as I go through my daily life, walking my dog, waiting on a bus, etc.

Recently I have been using the KQ Unotone iPhone synth, which is an emulation of the three Monotron models, plus a Deluxe version which combines all three. I have stopped using the Monotrons because the Unotone does the same things, and it reduces the amount of stuff I need to carry with me. The Unotone has features that the original Monotrons don't, such as a latch/hold button that allows me to let the synth to drone and I can therefore use both hands to twiddle the knobs.



My other favorite instrument is the circuit bent Casio SK-1 that I bought on eBay about 15 years ago. This rugged and gnarly beast has served me well. I love it so much because I never know what is going to happen when I turn it on. It seems to have a mind and life of its own. From one time to the next it will behave differently, depending on numerous factors. When I turn it on and start pressing keys and flipping switches it feels like a true adventure. It feels like the instrument is an equal partner in the creation of sounds. And I have a feeling that I am interacting with a found sound art object. It does *something* when I flip a switch or press my fingers on a contact ball, but I don't know necessarily what it's going to do, so I need to remain open-minded and willing to follow what it is doing and shape the sounds as it self-composes and runs through machine-generated routines. This adds a distinct element of random chance sound generation to my assemblage compositions, and adds to the overall feeling of unpredictability of the assemblage... like, where the hell is this thing going?!

Do you feel like you live inside sound?

Well now, that DOES seem like something I would say, and probably have! In actuality, no, but I am hypersensitive to the sound world around me.

While listening to my assemblages I feel like I am immersed in a sound world, and I hope that the listeners will feel that too. I also hope that the listeners can play my assemblages while they go about doing household chores. They are as ignorable as they are immersive.

In 2007 I experienced the onset of hearing loss, and ever since then I have been even more aware of the way things sound. Since then I listen more closely, with greater concentration, to the world around me.

Do you think your assemblages are psychedelic?

Yes, absolutely. I have talked elsewhere about the inspirations behind and aims of the psychedelic characteristics of my assemblages. In my early 20s I took LSD 13 times. That was enough, and was almost too much. I cannot recommend it to anyone, because it is potentially dangerous. Once you take LSD, your brain is never the same. You are never the same as you were before, and there's never any going back. You are forever changed.

For me it was a good thing in the long run because it enhanced my creativity. It enhanced my creativity because it showed me the ways to blast down categories and limitations in my creative thinking. It enhanced my creative thinking because it showed me the interconnectedness of all things, the unity of all matter. Every particle is one in the same and of the whole. LSD is a shortcut, a powerful shortcut. Drugs are like machines: they help us accomplish things with less effort. LSD is a drug that shows you what you need to know about Life, Reality, the Universe, the nature of all things. It's like turning on a movie in your brain that shows you what everything is all about. It doesn't tell you: it shows you!

Take a pill: see the Universe. Great, but it's not practical. LSD is a drug that can make living in the day to day world very difficult if you sustain use of it. My strategy was and is: Okay, I took it with the intention to LEARN. Once I learned it, and learned it, and attended Universe-Brain-Class 13 times... okay okay... I don't need to do it anymore. I understand. Now, with my feet firmly on the ground and my head in the Universe, I go through my daily life and savor it for its wonders. Feet on the ground, head in the clouds!

My assemblages can be thought of as psychedelic trips without the drugs. All of the joy and outrageous laughter at the smallest silly things! All of the kicks, all of the joy joy joy of feeling inter- and intra- connected with everything. You are welcome to enjoy them as you see and hear fit.

Going back to *Mister McGee's Neighborhood*, the assemblage begins with an extremely informative dissertation on lovebugs, particularly their presence in Florida. Is Florida a major inspiration for your assemblages? It is a very unique place and your home.

In "lovebugs and cowlicks", the first assemblage on *Mr. McGee's Neighborhood*, I indulge one of my big passions, which is reading from the dictionary (the other is making lists). When I was a kid I read the *World Book Encyclopedia* from beginning to end. My parents bought our set of encyclopedias from Curley Myers, who was going door to door selling them. Harlow Hickenlooper hosted The Three Stooges TV show every Saturday morning on TV, and Curley was his sidekick. I remember being thrilled seeing Curley when I opened our front door, lugging samples of the encyclopedia, and he was wearing his cowboy hat just like on the show.

One morning in September of 2018 as I was walking with my dog Stanley in one of the parking lots at the LivApartments complex where I live I took note of hundreds of dead smooshed lovebugs on the windshields and fronts of the cars. Plus they were flying around about us, copulating. Lovebugs swarm twice a year in Florida, in May and September and they are a bit of a nuisance. It's my understanding that they like to swarm over highways because automobile fumes smell like the rotten vegetation that they call home.

I didn't really know that much about them so I pulled my iPhone out of my pocket, and recorded myself reading aloud from the Wikipedia article about lovebugs. I have done

this quite a lot over the years. I am continually trying to educate myself - with Hal learning never stops! So, as part of the overall experience of my assemblages I share with the listener what I am curious enough about to want to learn more about by reading about the subject in the encyclopedia.

In many ways I think of the encyclopedia and dictionary as being oracle tools. I have often used both over the decades to find answers to artistic dilemmas, puzzles, and questions, in much the same way that people use Eno's *Oblique Strategies* to guide them. Many times when I need a title for a piece of music or audio art I will open a dictionary or encyclopedia to a random page and plop down my finger onto the page without looking, in an effort to find words and phrases that might be helpful in my quest. I have found lots of song and collage titles this way over the years.

Since lovebugs are a regularly recurring feature of life in Florida I decided to find out more about them, and then share with the listeners what I found out. It is really as simple as that. How that data correlates with the other stuff that one hears while listening to that assemblage is up to each listener. Me personally, I think it came off as kind of sick and demented in its own way. I also get disgusted every year in February when the pine trees drop tons and tons of yellow pollen all over everything, just randomly having sex with everything. The pine trees in Gainesville have no shame, just like the lovebugs.

It's all just part of coming along with me and sharing the adventures in my assemblages. Mr. McGee's Neighborhood is a place where all listeners are welcome. It's a safe place, away from harm and away from the cares of the outside world, filled to the brim with the simple joys of my life piled high on top of each other... just like those huge breakfasts at Metro Diner, and just like those garbage dumpsters full of trash rotting in the hot Florida sun.

I don't know if Florida is any more exciting than any place else. I don't take part in the tourist aspects of Florida, and I NEVER go to the beach. I don't engage in the more stereotypical aspects of Florida. Once again it's all about paying attention to the seemingly mundane details of daily life around me, focusing my attention to what's going on around me in my own exotic neighborhood.

I don't especially enjoy spending a lot of time in the Sun in the hot Florida months. I love the quality of the soft, indirect light in the Winter here in North Central Florida. I relish dreary, rainy, gloomy days, because it gives my brain room to create its own space...

Where I live there is a lot of oak and pine trees, Spanish moss draped on the limbs, lots of wildflowers, and lots of trash on the sidewalks, parking lots, and lawns.

And speaking of lovebugs and John Cage, do you think that your assemblages can function as lectures or audio essays? Your assemblage album entitled *I Have A Theory* springs to mind right now...

Near the beginning of the third dictaphone assemblage on the *I Have A Theory* album, "What's Going On In Hal's Head", mixed with the sounds of circuit bent Casio SK-1 and other stuff, I tell the listener of a theory of mine:

"It's a bummer. I'm here at work and it's 1:08 in the afternoon. Since about mid-morning my feet have felt wet. And normally I might think, and you might think, that my feet are just sweaty and hot inside my work boots or work shoes or whatever you want to call them, because the weather is a lot hotter here in Gainesville than it was even a couple of weeks ago. But I think in this case it might be because when I went to the men's room about mid-morning I think I wasn't paying attention, and instead of pissing into the urinal I may have pissed on my shoes because my uh device was not

properly pointed toward the receptacle, if you know what I mean”.

Woven into the fabric of this explanation of my theory I tell the listener that “I have a theory but I’m not going to tell you what it is!”

Ha!

I go on to confess to the listener that “I am not interested in re-mixing or collating existing media produced by other people. My dictaphone art consists almost completely of material that I generate and record myself. The last thing that I am is a “remix artist”.

In answer to your question, the simplest most straightforward answer I can give is that the assemblages themselves are the essays or lectures of and about themselves. Not just the words, but the very structures of them contain any meanings that I could possibly offer.

I like to think of the dictaphone assemblages as laboratory experiments, or perhaps a bubbling witch’s cauldron and I’m brewing up a potion:

“A little bit of this and a little bit of that, etc... Let’s see what happens!”

Also, I like to think of myself as operating in the great tradition of American explorers, inventors, experimenters, pirates, renegades, free spirits, innovators, bricoleurs, and tinkerers and putterers.

People from all over Planet Earth were drawn to discover and explore what we call America out of a desire to create their own reality, to find a place that they could call their own, where they could dream big dreams. We have heard and read of the legends of the wide open spaces of the Old West, where people could choose to associate with whom they chose, or to live in solitude. Those opportunities are now long gone.

We need places in the imagination where we can go to feel those feelings and fulfill those desires of discovery and exploration and rugged individualism.

Art spaces are our only modern-day wide open spaces. Art spaces are the only places where our imaginations can truly run wild and free.

My assemblages are art spaces, places, environments, and happenings where the listener can join me and spend some time with me in a world I have created out of my imagination.

Interpenetration, as I understand John Cage’s explanation, is that once we realize that each thing and each being is at the center of the Universe, and that each and every being is the most honored one of all in the Universe, we then understand that all of these most honored things and beings in the Universe are moving out in all directions penetrating and being penetrated by every other being and thing in the Universe, whatever the time or whatever the space. Is this a concept that you can relate to in your assemblages?

Your question is my answer to your question, because I understand that once we realize that each thing and each being is at the center of the Universe, and that each and every being is the most honored one of all in the Universe, we then understand that all of these most honored things and beings in the Universe are moving out in all directions penetrating and being penetrated by every other being and thing in the Universe, whatever the time or whatever the space. This is a concept that I can relate to in my assemblages because the listener understands that they and the assemblage are the same, because the listener realizes that each thing and each being is at the center of the Universe, and that each and every being is the most honored one of all in the Universe, and the listener understands that all of these most honored things and

beings in the Universe are moving out in all directions penetrating and being penetrated by every other being and thing in the Universe, whatever the time or whatever the space. This is a concept that the listener can relate to in my assemblages, because they are the observer and the observed, observing that which becomes them and me and you and us and the Universe. I do not want to dictate how and in what ways people should or could or might experience my assemblages.

A person who listens to one of my assemblages does not need to be aware of or agree or believe in the concept of interpenetration! I am not even sure that I do! The concept or theory reads well, and SEEMS to make some kind of sense. I do think that my assemblages exemplify these ideas, that, simply, all things are interconnected, and that all things affect each other. A listener COULD choose to perceive themselves as being or living inside of an example of interpenetration as they listen to one of my assemblages.

Or, if we do not buy that idea, it is simpler to say that a person who listens to one of my assemblages can experience a piece of sound art that combines, layers, and mixes together many different times, places, and spaces. Do these times, places, and spaces affect each other? Or is the assemblage pure sensation?

My assemblages are experiences that I am offering to the listener. It COULD be just as simple as that! Spend some time with Ha! Come along with me on my daily adventures! Let's have some fun. Come along with me as I work at my job, eat meals, walk my dog, share my thoughts with you, engage in conversations with friends, family, and neighbors... Sit next to me as I plunk on my two-string pink dumpster guitar or noodle on my KQ Unotone synthesizer. And many of those things are happening at the same time as we listen together and experience one of my assemblages.

What do I, you, we, they, THINK ABOUT while listening to one of my assemblages, if anything?

I feel that my assemblages CAN be experienced on a totally textural basis, much like a sculpture or other piece of physical art, except that they exist in, operate, and unfold in Time... similar to film art and music.

Yes! Godzilla Forbid! The listener could experience my assemblages as MUSIC. It is best that the listener draws their own conclusions, understands and FEELS the assemblages in whatever ways that they might.

How do you maintain your confidence in chance and your faith in the random?

I always maintain my confidence in chance and my faith in the random because when I concentrate on and open myself up to those things life is more exciting!

As I write this response I am at my job at the hospital. This morning while doing my usual work tasks I pondered how to answer this question in ways that I have not done before.

I usually start making deliveries of products at about 12:10 PM. Today I left a couple of minutes later than I usually do because I was preoccupied with thinking of my reply to this question. I was on the elevator coming back down to the Ground Floor where my office is, when the elevator stopped and got stuck between the 1st and 2nd Floors. There were six other people on the elevator at the time. I calmly pushed the Elevator Emergency Help button, and a few seconds later the response team answered and

assured all of us that they would arrive soon to help us.

While we were waiting as patiently as we could, one of the people on the elevator began to recite out loud a lengthy, convoluted story in an effort to quell their own anxiety. Fortunately I had my trusty ICD PX-470 stereo digital dictaphone in my pocket and recorded the telling of her story. I captured on the recorder a unique set of moments.

If I had left my office at the usual time of 12:10 I probably would not have had the opportunity to make this recording. It is almost as if the question and my consideration of my answer caused this occurrence to happen. I'm not saying that it caused the elevator to get stuck! Rather I am suggesting that the question guided me to be in just the right place at the right time to get a great recording.

What is the function of the videos and slideshows that accompany the assemblages you have done the past several years? Are they the collage vs. the assemblage?

When I am out and about doing the usual things that I do in my daily life I see all kinds of interesting stuff: stuff that maybe we usually don't notice because we are too busy thinking about where we are going and what we are going to do when we get there, instead of thinking about where we are at the moment. Over the years I have trained myself not only to listen carefully to the world, but to look at it and within it as well. I have said it elsewhere and I have said it often, that the day to day world around us, the same old boring humdrum day to day world of our existences is filled with glorious details that are worthy of our attention, if we will only take the time to listen and look. It takes hard work to train the mind to turn off the chatter in our brains long enough to see and to hear what is going on around us. To hear we must direct our attention to listen, and to see we must direct our attention to look. My neighborhood is as exotic as any location on Earth.

I carry my iPhone XR with me everywhere I go, in the same way that I carry an ICD PX-470 stereo digital dictaphone with me wherever I go. They are both there with me in my pockets wherever I go and whatever I do.

I am able to take good quality photos and videos with my iPhone, so I figure why not add that stuff on as yet another layer of data for the assemblage listener to experience along with the sounds?

That is really the easiest answer to your question. The photos and videos are really just another layer in the assemblage! That's really all there is to it. It's one more layer of sensations and sensory data for the assemblage participant to cross-correlate and free associate connections between the other layers.

At this point, now that we have added on video and photos, we probably need to start talking about the people who choose to experience the assemblages as participants. Participants in the same way that we talk about people participating in a 1960s era Happening: Simultaneously juxtaposed multiple events occurring, with indeterminate relationships or meanings (if any).

Experienced separately, yes, I suppose you could say that the slideshow video things that accompany the audio assemblages are collages by themselves.

Experience along with the audio, however, they are a layer of the assemblage.

Something strange started happening a few months ago. I created the photos + video

clips slideshow movie conglomerations, and then created an audio assemblage of the same length as the movie. I then added the audio assemblage to the movie, and then I exported the audio from the movie to create a new audio assemblage. Uh, so what the hell is that then?

Collaboration is one of your four pillars of DIY Home Taper Community Aesthetic. Do you approach your collaborative assemblages with others differently than when you collaborate with yourself as you wittily put it in the title of collaboration with myself?

Good question! I do not approach my collaborative assemblages with others differently than when I collaborate with myself, but I probably should! I think I talked about this elsewhere in our interview project, but I am really just not interested in creating audio art in any form other than dictaphone assemblages. It is a form of laziness, but also it is the only form in which I feel comfortable and desire to work. It suits my temperament and my lifestyle (such as it is). My methods for creating the dictaphone assemblages are so idiosyncratic and so personal and so me that if my collaborative partner is not attuned to that aesthetic and that approach and ways of doing things, it can end up being a real mess. My collaborative dictaphone assemblages with Rafael González, *April Investigations* and *February 2020 Report*, have been big successes because Rafael is attuned to my methods, my ideas, and the frameworks upon which the assemblages are constructed.

The recent Electronic Cottage project, *Sounds and Looks Like Life*, was a real challenge of the audio assemblage format because I invited 45 artists to contribute materials. In many ways I think it was a big success, but also a little bit on the messy side (not that that is a bad thing in this case!). The 45 contributors really got into the spirit of the project and showed a great deal of enthusiasm. They sent hundreds upon hundreds of short audio recordings of sounds of their daily lives in their various locations on Planet Earth, and I mixed them together using my usual purposefully haphazard chance methods.

The first raw mix version of Sounds and Looks Like Life was well-loved and admired by many of the contributors. For me personally it was a bit too thick and clotted and repetitive, and I wasn't satisfied with it.

I removed some of the materials from the big scrap heap of raw recordings and made a new mix that wasn't as thick and turgid and that moved at a quicker pace. This new mix I called sounds and looks like life director's mix, and I was much happier with the results. I consider it to be the definitive version of SaLLL.

I am surprised that the project turned out as well as it did because there was a big risk of failure due to so many different people being involved.

How do you navigate being your own person/artist and working collaboratively?

In the future I will probably limit collaborations to in-person.

My methods of recording and constructing my assemblages are so individualistic and so idiosyncratic that unless a collaborative partner is on the same page and is employing the same methods as me it just does not work very well. My assemblages are very personal, very much ME. They ARE me. If you want to know anything about me, who and what I am, it's all there in my assemblages. Listening to an assemblage of mine is like living with Hal. I have often said that listening to my assemblages is like spending time in the same space with me, spending an hour with Hal. Unfortunately, with some of my collaborations the sounds that my collaborators

have contributed have obscured and in some cases obliterated the interplay of the recorded dictaphone snippets in my contributions to the collab. This makes me unhappy. If a collab hasn't worked very well I place the "blame" squarely with me, because to be quite honest I am quite simply not interested in working in any other way than the ways in which I collect sounds and construct assemblages with them. I have little interest in creating music based on musical instruments such as keyboards and synthesizers via the Internet or mail (like in the old days). For me the only way I want to do that kind of thing is to be in the same room with my collaborative partner so that we can both feel the intuitive improvisational vibe.

You were born at the end of the 1950's and came of age right at the beginning of the 1980's. Which decade do you think shaped you the most to be who you are today in 2020?

I live a charmed life. Through a combination of history, chance, luck, and choices, at the age of 62 I feel very fortunate to be who, where and when I am.

I was born in Bloomington, Indiana in 1958, in Southern Indiana toward the end of the era that is commonly called the Baby Boom.

Hal McGee **Junely**

everyday sounds **dream diaries**

tablehooters **spoken words**
synth
electronics

recorded **featuring**
June 7 **Stanley**
through **Trevor**
July 5 **and Leslie**
2019

with
four
Sony
ICD-PX470
stereo
digital
dictaphones

dictaphone assemblage audio folk art

JUL • 62

Indiana is generally considered a Northern state, but the lower two-thirds of the state lies within a roughly 500-mile wide swath straddling the Ohio River, that according to author Colin Woodard should more appropriately be called Greater Appalachia. Greater Appalachia stretches from New Jersey and the Carolinas, through western Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, the lower parts of Ohio, the Hoosier state, and Illinois, on into Missouri and then dips southward to northern Texas. This region was settled by hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Northern Ireland, Lowland Scotland and northern England who came to the New World in mass migrations in the 1700s. These hearty, clannish, trouble-making, violent, restless, crass, and rebellious folk clashed with each other, the established Eastern Seaboard folk, aristocracy, centralized governments, and anyone else who impinged on their liberty and freedom. Having known little else but hunger, endless wars, and betrayals in their homelands, these Scots-Irish "hillbillies" were deeply distrustful of elites, privileged upper classes, and all authorities, and basically they hated anyone who told them what to do.

My great great grandfather, Richard McGee, migrated from New Jersey to southern

Indiana, settling on the Ohio River near present-day towns of Tell City and Cannelton in the early to mid 1800s. He fathered 14 children, the last of whom was the only male child, born to his second wife, who had come from Eastern Tennessee. Richard moved on to Illinois, where he possessed a farm and handsome fortune. Richard's descendants were drawn back to Southern Indiana, and many settled there permanently.

My mother's families, Boruff and Reynolds, came to America in the 1700s from Germany and Ireland, and by the mid-1840s or so were well-established in Southern Indiana. From what I have read, the Boruffs were fairly rich landowners in Bloomington, Indiana for several decades. A dissolute head of the family gambled away the family fortune in the 1870s, and the Boruffs after that lived more humble and often rural existences.

One of Richard McGee's grandsons, William Marlowe McGee, had a scandalous relationship with a 16-year old girl named Nelly Jones, and in 1936 she gave birth to my father, Harold.

My mom, JoAn (born in 1937), and my dad both were children during the Great Depression and experienced wartime conditions during World War II. Both of them grew up in what today would be considered poverty, made all the more difficult by mental illness and alcoholism among their parents.



Both of my parents aspired to better things! After they got married in 1956 they both worked at the RCA factory in Bloomington, assembling televisions on an assembly line. My dad took architecture classes at Indiana University and through hard work and diligent home-study acquired work as an architect. In 1960, after my sister Terresa was born, the family moved to Lafayette in Northern Indiana, where my dad got a job at National Homes, a corporation that constructed prefabricated houses. My brother Mark was born in Lafayette in 1961.

My dad was a self-made man in every sense. As a kid he had learned to be resourceful, focused, and serious due to a difficult family situation, in which one or both parents were often gone from home for varying periods of time. He had to raise his four younger siblings and make sure that they were fed, often relying on government-provided food goods.

It is interesting to note that my dad was never eligible for military service. He was a child during WWII; a teenager during the Korean War; and because he was the sole supporter of a wife and three kids, he was not called up to serve in the war in Vietnam. Lucky for him! He served in the Coast Guard Reserve in his early 20s, and peeled a lot of potatoes.

I too never faced the possibility of being drafted to serve in the military. Good for me! I never had to register for the draft! After the end of the War in Vietnam, there was a short period of time during which young men who turned 18 were not required to register for the draft. According to the [Selective Service System website](#): Men born from March 29, 1957 through December 31, 1959, were not required to register with the Selective Service System because the registration program was suspended when they would have reached age 18. The requirement to register with Selective Service was reinstated in 1980, but only for men born January 1, 1960, or later.

Throughout my life I have always seemed to be in-between.

In high school it seemed like my best friends were always the youngest kids in their families, and I was the oldest. Many of my best friends' dads served in World War II or the Korean War.

I was too young to be a hippie, and by the time that Punk Rock filtered through to the Midwest it was already dead. When I did find out about Punk to me it consisted almost totally of The Sex Pistols.

Politics has never been important to me and I have never been motivated to get involved in social causes. In almost every Presidential election since I turned 18 I have voted for the Third Party candidate. Throughout my life I have often said that Politics doesn't matter, that it doesn't solve or really change anything. And since the 1980s I have felt like it didn't matter who was President or "who was in charge in Washington, D.C." because my life has gotten steadily better. I have had the same job for 28 years, and my financial stability and sense of material well-being has increased regardless of who is in office. I generally am of the opinion that arguing about Politics is pointless and I will think about it when I step into the voting booth once every four years. I feel that we hire politicians to do a job and almost everything eventually works out through the give-and-take and negotiations between the two dominant political parties in this country.

Up until recently I have always considered myself to be a member of the Baby Boom Generation, but for some reason that label never quite seemed to fit. I recently found out about a new designation, Generation Jones, which seems to fit me perfectly, and is defined by Wikipedia as:

Generation Jones is the social cohort of the latter half of the baby boomers to the first years of Generation X. The term was first coined by the cultural commentator Jonathan Pontell, who identified the cohort as those born from 1954 to 1965 in the U.S. who came of age during the oil crisis, stagflation, and the Carter presidency, rather than during the 1960s, but slightly before Gen X. Other sources place the starting point at 1956 or 1957. Unlike boomers, most of Generation Jones did not grow up with World War II veterans as fathers, and for them there was no compulsory military service and no defining political cause, as opposition to United States involvement in the Vietnam War had been for the older boomers. Also, by 1955, a majority of U.S. households had at least one television set, and so unlike boomers born in the 1940s, many members of Generation Jones have never lived a world without television – similar to how many members of Generation Z (1997–2012) have never lived in a world without personal computers or the internet, which a majority of U.S. households had by 2000 and 2001 respectively. Unlike Generation X (1965–1980), Generation Jones was born before most of the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s and '70s.

It is interesting to note that many of the people who were involved in the Cassette Culture scene of the 1980s were born in the Generation Jones time of the late 1950s through mid-60s.

I guess you could say that I kind of came of age in the mid to late 1970s. This is when music really became important to me. As a kid I had been aware of The Beatles, but didn't start collecting their records until the mid-70s. The same with Bob Dylan and other notable pop and rock performers of the 1960s.

The first band I was ever a member of was called Medusa. My brother was the drummer and two guys we knew were the guitarists. I was the vocalist. We did one original song titled "I'm So Bored", which we considered to be a cross between Alice Cooper and The Sex Pistols!

In the late 1960s Indiana University was a hot spot of Radicalism and anti-war protests and all of that stuff. By the time I went to school there from 1976 to '79 it was known as "The Party Capital of America". Lots of pot and other drugs, lots of drinking and wild parties. It was all very hedonistic and all about kicks and pleasure-seeking. There were lots of cool record stores and bookstores still. But any sense of idealism was gone by then and nobody really talked about the need for social change. By that time there was kind of a backlash against the Hippies and the 60s. None of the Middle Class Midwestern kids I went to college with actually gave a damn about Politics, social changes or making things better.

Around 1979 or so I started discovering "alternatives": Bowie, Talking Heads, Eno, artists who were stretching the forms of rock music and adding in elements of electronic music and experimentalism.

It wasn't until 1981, when I was 23, that I found out anything about really weird music. My taste in music before that was a mix of Classic Rock, some Soft Rock, and Post-punk type stuff.

I have always been a Late Bloomer! Throughout my life I have always found out about cool stuff long after it originally happened.

I feel like I have always been in “my own zone”, outside of trends, cliques, elites, and movements. I’ve always been hyper-critical of “herd mentality” (TV is a brainwashing tool of the Status Quo), resistant to authority figures and Big Government, as well as suspicious of being in groups and movements and communalism. I guess this might explain the solitary, highly personal nature of my art.

While I might have used the term “noise” to describe the audio art I do, I have never considered myself to be a Noise Artist (or Anti-Artist). I can recall a time before Noise with an uppercase N started being used to describe artists like Merzbow and his progeny, before 1986 or so. I have many friends in the Noise scene who are much younger than me, and I retain many friends from the old Hometaper Cassette Culture days of the 1980s and 1990s.

In part of your response to the question about your use of quoting from texts, you mention that you “still at least halfway believe that my assemblages are closer to a form of literature than to music.” It is meaningful that you have chosen audio over the written word to express yourself in the assemblages. What keeps you engaged with audio— even still now? Is it the performative aspect? Art as action?

I still continue to think of myself primarily as an audio artist. I feel most at home, most natural, in that role for myself. Carrying a dictaphone with me in my pocket wherever I go allows me to document and collect sounds of my everyday life, as well as offer words spoken into the dictaphone when I feel compelled to do so. Those words that I do choose to speak into the dictaphone live a much fuller, broader, more exciting existence than they would on a static page.

I have a very distinctive voice and the listener can gain a lot of clues and levels of data within the sound of my voice itself. My voice is my favorite instrument. The listener can pay attention to the meanings of and connections between the words and/or enjoy the pure sounds of the words as part of the audio streams they are hearing and decoding.

My voice in my dictaphone assemblages makes it all sound like me. I have said it elsewhere, and I will say it again here for emphasis: everything that anyone needs to know about me can be found in my assemblages. They ARE me. I am not them, but they are me. Figure that one out!

ORIGINALITY IS OVERRATED! There are only so many different stories that can be told any way, and the parts of them are interchangeable. What then matters is the ways in which those stories are told. The same holds true for my assemblages. They are not especially original. I've borrowed bits and pieces from my 'authoritative sources', and many other artists have done the same kinds of things and done it better. But nobody tells it and does it the way that I do.

I like to pride myself on the fact that my stuff sounds like nobody else -- it's instantly recognizable as being by me -- and that it sounds like me! This is why I prefer to speak and record my words, rather than print them on a page. They are alive and

electric! Electric media such as movies and recorded music-sound art will always win over printed books and old media. I have an awful confession to make: I find it very hard these days to read print books! I keep falling asleep as I read them! I have lost all feeling for flat, horizontal media. But give me the Kindle version, on a screen, on a VERTICAL screen, and to me it's like viewing a movie.

Back in the 1970s, when I was in college, I read all of William Burroughs's books. But I didn't really "get it" until I saw him do live readings from his books and perform the words. It was then that I picked up on the rhythm of his writing, his distinctive phrasing and cadences. Afterwards when I read his books I could hear his voice in my head and imagine how he would read the words aloud and what I was reading on the printed page made a lot more sense.

In recent months I have increasingly added a visual aspect to my monthly diaristic productions by taking hundreds of photos and short video clips and collaging them together into one continuous visual stream. I think of these slideshow movies as optional accompaniments to my dictaphone assemblages. They have not replaced or superseded the dictaphone assemblages. I want to make that clear! They are just one more level of data to add to the three or four levels that one hears in the dictaphone assemblages. It is like it is one more level or layer of imagery that the listener can compare and contrast to the other layers that are happening in the audio field. How does this image on my computer screen relate to the sounds that I am hearing right now? It gives the listener-viewer another stream of flow of consciousness data to interpret and connect with the other streams that they hear-see see-hear.

My dictaphone assemblages are audio-movies!
They are how I tell stories to the extent that I do tell stories in whatever sense that I do.

In the last year or so these audio-movies have come with an optional visual picture-track accompaniment. One CAN ignore the visual slideshow movies and just listen to the dictaphone audio assemblages. In recent months I have started offering the slideshow-movies paired with the dictaphone assemblages.

Starting with the ***February 2020 Report*** album I have started including the audio from the video-clips within the dictaphone assemblages. The audio that you hear on the first track on the **February 2020 Report** audio album on Bandcamp was extracted from the *FebRafaHaluary* movie. In other words, I did an audio assemblage mix of the dictaphone recordings that Rafael and I collected, tacked the audio onto the slideshow-movie that we made, which included video clips of street musicians, etc., and then exported a WAV file of the audio from the movie and it became the audio assemblage that I used on the **February 2020 Report** album that you can listen to and download on Bandcamp.

The main thrust of what I am doing is still audio art! I have not yet advanced far enough as a movie-maker that I am able to reach the levels of density and complexity with the visual-movies as I am able to achieve with my audio-movies!

Dylan Houser and Trevor Luke

Does the multi-dictaphone approach of your assemblages reflect how you absorb information and engage with the world?

William Burroughs wrote about how when you are reading down a column in a newspaper your mind is aware of what the words say in the other two or three columns on the page. Part of your mind is focused on what you are reading, but your mind is also processing the peripheral information contained in the other columns. I assume that, true to its usual behaviors, the mind analyzes that information and compares and correlates it not only to what you are reading in the first column, but to all of the other columns, both vertically and horizontally. We know more than we think we know and are aware of more than we think.

This morning at about 9:45 I was pondering my answer to this question as I stood looking out the window of my kitchen. I gazed out the vertically-divided window, my eyes crossed slightly, and the two halves became slightly superimposed. I crunched on Zapp's New Orleans Kettle Style Voodoo Potato Chips, which I periodically washed down with sips of cold water from a 17-ounce Duralex Made-in-France glass tumbler. To my right the refrigerator hummed through its cooling cycle. Above and behind me the air conditioning duct blew cold air onto the back of my neck. I noticed a spot of grease on the kitchen countertop from the preparation of this morning's breakfast. As I gazed out the window a black dog entered my field of view, followed a few seconds later by its master, dressed in black following behind at the end of a leash.

Is there something that you would like to record and include in your assemblages but haven't been able to? Something that you would look forward to recording in the future.

I do not know if there is something that I would like to record and include in my assemblages but haven't been able to, because I have not yet heard and recorded whatever that something might be. I record the sounds that interest me that occur within my daily life. I am not interested in recording sounds that exist outside of my daily life. I have no need to record sounds other than those that happen to occur. I might want to record new sounds, and if so, I make efforts to put myself into situations in which the potential for new previously unheard-and-recorded-by-me sounds might occur. For example, in the future I might travel to places other than Gainesville. While on the way to and at those other places I will record the sounds that interest me that occur within my daily life in those places.

I do not desire to go out actively seeking sounds for the sake of finding *new* ones. I don't care about novelty and originality for their sake. Rather, wherever and whenever I find myself in the Universe I listen to the sounds around me, direct my attention to them and make choices of what and what not to record. I do record the sounds of me interacting with the world around me, but I do not go out of my way and make special efforts to go looking for sounds. I am one node in a universal web of consciousness and being. Me being me and who I am as I create myself each day my perspective from my nodal position in the Universe in and of itself is unique and *different* from your position. I do not need to travel to exotic locales to seek out new sounds, new life and new civilizations! Instead I boldly go where this man has gone before, over the same pathways day after day, and I listen and I record.

Back in the late 1990s when I did a lot of splatter and dripped/poured paintings, each time that I made the decision to make a new painting I usually did so with no preconceived notions or ideas. I allowed the painting itself to determine the course that I took. A blank, empty canvas in front of me. I load a brush or other instrument

with wet, dripping paint. I turn aside my attention somewhat and almost don't look at the canvas, but fling the paint onto the surface. I then stop and observe the pattern of paint on the canvas. What does this pattern suggest to me as my next course of action? I never touch the canvas itself but I am always above or to the side of it. The velocity and viscosity of the paint to a great degree determine what happens. Sure, I am flinging the paint and I make certain choices with my body, but I am not trying to create an image other than the image that appears before me as it happens to occur. I keep reacting to my previous reactions and observing the pattern-making that happens and reacting to those shapes and anomalies and weird things that happen that I couldn't possibly have foreseen before that first fling or drip or paint onto the canvas. I did not originate these ways of thinking about painting. Obvious examples come to mind. But it is an important philosophical viewpoint for me to expect the unexpected, and live in it and with it, and live and breathe. Living that way, even in a small neighborhood or range of activity, to me is thrilling.

Me loading a bunch of raw audio materials onto three or four dictaphones, setting the dictaphones to random/shuffle playback and then letting a mix *happen* ... for me this is the only way to live and create.

15 Comments

Chris Phinney

11/17/2020 19:15:17

This was & is a great read, Leslie excellent job! Great questions & answers Hal, a lot of assemblage material I have listened in some of your answers. Very cool I was back into the assemblage. In short & to the point VERY VERY nice & I of course await the next visit with you, via the assemblage. Long live the assemblage & Audio Folk Art which is the assemblage inside the art of the Audio assemblage Folk :-)

Reply

Hal McGee

11/18/2020 07:37:28

Chris, thank you very much for your thoughtful reply. I am happy that you enjoyed reading the interview. We worked on it for about a year!

Reply

Dylan Houser

11/17/2020 20:08:25

This was a very fascinating read. I definitely recognize a few of those passages, in the form of spoken word, in Hal's audio assemblages...!

Reply

Hal McGee

11/18/2020 07:38:43

Dylan, thanks for the close reading of The Joy Project interview. You are quite right that many of the passages in this interview ended up in spoken form in some of my dictaphone assemblages.

Reply
gen ken

11/17/2020 23:28:57

Thanks for the tour inside your head Hal! A whole world going on in there. Great interview!

Reply
Hal McGee

11/18/2020 07:40:10

Ken, thanks for reading The Joy Project interview. Leslie and I worked on it for about a year and we put a lot of brain energy into it! I appreciate you taking the time to read this lengthy piece!

Reply
Lucy

11/18/2020 09:55:58

Wow this is quite the tapestry. I read all of it but I have only two succinct comments:

I was surprised to learn you don't have a secret jewelry collection.

Voodoo chips are the best chips

Reply
Leslie Singer

11/18/2020 11:08:13

Lucy, yes and yes!!!

Reply
Hal McGee

11/18/2020 13:05:20

If you knew about my jewelry collection, it would not be secret.

When the chips are down, Voodoo is the best.

Reply
Jerry Kranitz

11/18/2020 14:28:42

This has got to be THE definitive Hal McGee interview!! Bravo and Kudos to Leslie for all the great questions and to Hal for letting rip on the responses. I read it in bits throughout the day.

Hal-happenings... I like that. I'll use that from now on instead of Day In The Life Of Hal recordings.

I agree that Hal's recordings are PSYCHEDELIC!!!!

MTM forever!!!

Reply

[Richard Franecki link](#)

11/18/2020 18:48:29

Holy shit..quite an interview! We've been in touch for well over thirty years, but I never knew much about you...!! We have much in common, but differ also in many ways. I'm two years older than you. Keep at it, my friend!!! Stay well!!!

R. Franecki.....

*I still do consume alcoholbeverage of choice these days.....Absinthe w/club soda an American innovation!!!

Reply

Juan Angel Italiano

11/19/2020 08:22:01

A true journey through the recesses of Hal's head.

To read in fragments, to read and to read the same thing again, which will say something different.

Reading the interview requires a performative reader.

Great job.

Reply

Rafael González

11/19/2020 09:47:10

Historical and fundamental interview to understand Hal's art of dictaphony. I have learned a lot and I have understood it much better. Thank you very much for this great publication.

Reply

[Charlie Kramer link](#)

11/19/2020 18:32:39

Hal, Leslie, amazing interview--Hal I love all your insights and thoughts about sound, existence, art. I feel very fortunate to be part of the Electronic Cottage community. Going to go back and listen to some more of your collages and assemblages! Charlie

Reply

Evan Cantor

11/21/2020 14:44:41

What they said... wow... amazing... so much information! So much revealed. So much philosophy to agree with and disagree with and roll around in your head. Makes me wonder...but what it is I wonder I'm not entirely sure.

Reply

Leave a Reply.

ELECTRONIC COTTAGE is an international magazine where independent artists, musicians, writers and freethinkers share in-depth articles, essays, interviews, tech and gear reviews and tutorials, and much more.

EC draws inspiration from the Cassette Culture Revolution of the 1980s, 90s and beyond; Mail Art, Small Press and Zines, Dada, Fluxus, Punk Rock, Hacking, Circuit Bending, Anarchy, and Noise.

EC values inclusion, democracy, experimentation, independence and freedom of thought and expression, open-minded exchange, and Community.

The Electronic Cottage website is primarily an online magazine for the publication of lengthy and in-depth articles, essays, and interviews.

For those of you who use Facebook I have created an [Electronic Cottage Group](#), which is a casual social gathering place of the EC Community, where EC people can meet, share artwork and news of current projects and releases.

The website and this EC Facebook Group are two separate but connected entities of the greater EC Community.