

**Sounds of a Pizzeria:
Analyzing Pandemic Soundscapes Through Ethnographic Conceptualism**

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1. Introduction

Once the pandemic hit, Sunnyside, Queens was a barren place. People were restricted to their houses, and ambulances went by several times per day. All of the restaurants were closed, even the larger chains. All of them, of course, except Uncle Jimmy's Pizzeria. The man known as Uncle Jimmy (nobody knows his real name, as everyone just calls the person who owns Uncle Jimmy's Uncle Jimmy) had stayed open during the pandemic, not for the sake of profit but to instate a "pay what you can" system for his food. He put a paper sign outside his window empathizing with those who are struggling, and worried about paying the bills later. This is all information that I gained from a conversation with Jimmy on the first Monday of my research, when he stopped by to check his mail on the one day of the week the pizzeria closes. I also talked with him about a wide range of topics, including how the sounds of the trains help him sleep, how he sometimes ends up making pizza for kids on Mondays anyways, and the movie *Smoke* featuring Harvey Keitel. He was not just the owner of the pizza shop, but my friend and neighbor throughout much of 2020 (as I was spending the fall semester back home due to issues surrounding COVID-19). But the conversation in relation to the pandemic is one that drew me into my field site, and confirmed that much of my reasoning for choosing to work there was valid.

On the corner of 49th Street and Skillman Avenue, there is a cluster of four restaurants. Uncle Jimmy's is one of them, located next to Sanger Hall, and across from The Alcove and P.J. Horgan's. All of these places had been successful pre-pandemic, but really came into their own upon their opening/reopening during it (around late May/early June of 2020). The Alcove opening up for takeout prompted dozens of residents of Sunnyside to come down, drink on the streets and be merry for the first time in months. I only wish that I settled on this project over the

summer of 2020, in order to capture the drastic change in the soundscape that came with this. P.J. Horgans and Sanger Hall were both some of the first restaurants to bring back some form of live music, and the latter was even able to put on a socially distant halloween drag show. In choosing this site, I was interested in questions of community as COVID-19 progressed: how do people gather, why do they gather, and what informs the soundscape that they contribute to?

2. Creating a Work of Ethnographic Conceptualism and Concrete Music

It goes without saying that the year 2020 has been an unprecedented one. Ravaged by a global pandemic, the ways in which people interact has become skewed greatly from what it once was: be that interactions with their environments or themselves. Attempting to get an education in such conditions has had its own set of challenges, but there is one thing that I am certainly grateful for: that I was given the opportunity to learn about anthropology and sound during a pandemic. The research that I conducted leading up to my final project in Anthropology of Sound and Listening could have easily been left as it was, but it begged for some expansion during such a specific time and place in history. In exploring how pandemic soundscapes are altered as well as how they affect people, I took components of both my musical and media-oriented studies to develop a work of ethnographic conceptualism.

I first learned of ethnographic conceptualism through the anthropologist Thomas R. Miller, who I am fortunate to know as a colleague of my parents. He drew the basis of his definition from Nikoli Ssorin-Chaikov, who states that “ethnographic conceptualism refers to anthropology as a method of conceptual art but also, conversely, to the use of conceptual art as an anthropological research tool. Ethnographic conceptualism is ethnography conducted as conceptual art” (5). While it seems simple on its face, “ethnography conducted as conceptual art” leaves plenty of space for interpretation. For example, when looking at so much of concept art, it

often takes place as part of an installation. The way that space functions as part of a piece of art is one that is often essential to the message being conveyed. I opted to format this work in a way most similar to the concrete music of the mid-20th century, trading the typical associations of ethnographic conceptualism for ease of accessibility during a time where physical spaces are less accessible.

Concrete music (or *music concrète* in French) is an experimental music composition technique pioneered by Pierre Schaeffer in the late 1940s that aims to make use of recorded sounds as raw material, all of which “may be modified in any way desired—played backward, cut short or extended, subjected to echo-chamber effects, varied in [pitch](#) and intensity, and so on” (Britannica). While I made use of similar techniques to Schaeffer in that I am manipulating found sounds and field recordings to create a work of music, there are certain problematic aspects within concrete music’s history which I also aimed to subvert. A critic of Schaeffer, Brian Kane, writes that “by positing the sound object as the ontological grounding of musical experience, Schaeffer commits himself to an ahistorical view about the nature of musical material. Of course, for Schaeffer, that is precisely the point; the sound object must be defined in a purely objective manner in order to ground subsequent research” (Kane, 37). In his concrete music, Schaeffer believed in separating the sound from its source, and composing with only the sound in mind. My aim was the opposite of this: instead of removing these sounds from their historical context, I made an effort to emphasize and exaggerate the history of these sounds, and what exactly they mean in relation to a greater cultural context. This does leave questions unanswered when it comes to the place of concrete music in an ethnographic sphere, especially when the listening experience takes place in a virtual space. How would something like concrete

music, conceptualized by one person, be worth studying ethnographically outside of spaces where people are actually interfacing with the art?

There are multiple facets of ethnographic conceptualism that contribute to its validity as a mode of research. Ssorin-Chaikov explains that “the link with conceptual art that ethnographic conceptualism proposes is precisely to highlight the extent to which contemporary art is itself analytics rather than aesthetics” (8). Concept art isn’t meant to be enjoyed superficially, but rather analyzed in a similar way that one would draw ethnographic observations from a particular place, soundscape, etc. Conversely, the study of anthropology often shies away from objective distinctions based on “hard facts,” instead embracing subjectivity between the ways different cultural elements are perceived by said cultures. The concept of anthropology being critical towards its own objectivism can be seen as an “ethnographic avant-garde,” which Ssorin-Chaikov states “highlights that instead of “whole” cultures of extreme difference, anthropology deals with fragments of and crisscrossing lines, borders and cultural flows” (9). Culture is never objective. Thus, looking at culture through the lens of concept art makes sense when thinking of the way these two modes of study work.

Linking this back to concrete music, transforming Schaeffer’s methods into something more resembling this sort of concept art is key. While Schaeffer is concerned with the analytics of sound and sound alone, exploring the connotations behind the sounds and techniques of concrete music allows us to learn more about the environment that produced said sounds. Ethnography is primarily concerned with people, and for this piece I chose to primarily highlight the sounds of people (be that talking/walking, car noises, pop music, etc). But it is important to put these sounds in context, as well as emphasize and exaggerate areas that would serve an ethnographic study. It may initially seem deceptive to call this piece concrete music at all, given

that it is much less interested in sound for the sake of sound than the pioneers of this genre (also given the fact that I utilize light virtual instruments to highlight elements of the piece). But both Schaeffer and Ssorin-Chaikov entertain the idea of music (or art in a general sense) as analytics, as opposed to self-expression. Both Schaeffer and I utilize similar composition techniques most often associated with concrete music, and even have a relatively similar outlook on the way this music should be consumed and interpreted. The main difference is what specific insight we aim to glean from our musical works, and how we do so.

Ssorin-Chaikov develops his idea of “anti-facts” as to shine a light on the purpose of looking at a subject through the lens of ethnographic conceptualism. He writes that “if [ethnographic conceptualism] constructs the reality that it studies...this means that it actually fabricates the unknown. I suggest treating this complexity and open-endedness not as “fact” but anti-fact. Anti-facts identify areas of the unknown, although they are not, or at least not yet, “new results”; and they contain precisely the kind of unexpected that is central to contemporary art” (16). The point of ethnographic conceptualism isn’t to necessarily define moments in history or even to convey a specific set of information. It is to use these “anti-facts” to create specific inferences that would not have been able to be made otherwise. So it is here where we find our end goal: identifying areas of the unknown through manipulation of soundscapes, and using that information to make specific inferences as to how COVID-19 has affected the soundscapes of Sunnyside and its people.

3. Arguments Against the Avant-Garde

Concept art (specifically of the post-modernist/avant-garde variety) has been a controversial topic since its inception. It has reached a point in public consciousness where it is simultaneously viewed as sterile and pretentious, academic yet devoid of any real substance.

Rasheed Araeen makes an argument against the effectiveness of the avant-garde and how concept art can effectively reinforce some of the worst offenses of “high art.” He asks: “can we explain [the brutality of the twentieth century] only by blaming a particular sociopolitical system while extricating ourselves as individuals from it by believing that we as avant-garde artists have been engaged in what would expose and confront the brutality of the system? Has this belief not been based on the naivety of an idea that has failed? It failed because it never achieved what it claimed it wanted to achieve: to liberate art from the bourgeois enclave and make it part of the collective everyday life of the people” (679-680).

As a counterargument, and utilizing Ssorin-Chaikov’s idea of ethnographic conceptualism, concept art can actually demonstrate the ways in which the brutality of the system that has killed hundreds of millions in the last century has been both subverted and uplifted as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In manipulating audio sources from common pandemic soundscapes and exaggerating them, one can construct a reality in which the unknown illuminates possibilities for moving forward during difficult moments in history. Criticism in this manner is not blind or theoretical, as constructed realities can be studied from the inside out in order to determine a proper path forward. Araeen’s criticism of the avant-garde is that, in effect, it does nothing. But ethnography commonly critiques objectivism, and is utilized in a variety of constructive manners capable of producing tangible change in mindset and action, such as policy decisions informed by ethnographic frameworks. Araeen claims that the avant-garde attempted to resolve the situation of art institutions producing and promoting self-centered individualism “by filling the gap between art and life,” but that this ultimately failed because “the artist’s nar-ego would not allow him or her to come down from its high intellectual pedestal and become part of everyday life” (680). Ethnography prides itself on becoming part of everyday life, and it’s

striking how much Araeen's view of the failings of concept art are reflective in the successes of ethnography. This is why I believe that ethnographic conceptualist sound art is justified and needed in our current climate, as well as why it can effectively fill said gap between art and life.

Sarah Butler's reflection on *Salle C*, an art installation at the Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery, also serves to emphasize the ways in which some concept art is becoming less performative, and more focused on highlighting the "real" through its emphasis on the unknown. This emphasis serves to essentially create a perspective in which the viewing of a subjective experience becomes more visceral, with certain elements intentionally highlighted to emphasize their "realness." Forced intimacy and considering oneself in the final product are both essential aspects of both ethnography and some concept art, leaving room to learn and grow from the subjectivity of generative processes. Butler writes that "we can only know the world through our perceptions of it: combining our culture, history and notions regarding the future to reveal as much about ourselves as my other. In this method of cultural inquiry, acknowledged and inescapable subjectivity provides evidence not only of the contexts and communities in which I interact, but also of my self as their product" (Butler). The place of one's self in ethnographic research contributes to this innate subjectivity, which can be further embraced as part of a greater subjective whole. Using my own self to inform the cultural context surrounding soundscapes in Sunnyside is something that I set out to do with this project, and also strengthens the case that ethnographic conceptualism is a valid mode of conducting critical research. The results of this were the production of a soundscape that is more "real," while also being more subjective. I was not a silent observer throughout all of my observations, but also interacted with and altered these soundscapes simply by the nature of my presence as a community member of Sunnyside. It

would be inauthentic to not acknowledge my own presence within this sonic world, as well as the subjectivities that come with it.

4. Impact of Radio and Defining the Soundscape

As the neighborhood of Sunnyside is a relatively smaller community located in the giant city of New York, it takes influence from both dense city soundscapes and more subdued suburban ones. According to Schaffer in *The Music of the Environment*, a hi-fi soundscape can be described as “one in which discrete sounds can be heard clearly because of the low ambient noise level,” while a lo-fi soundscape is one where “individual acoustic signals are obscured in an overdense population of sounds” (32, 2004). Generally speaking, during hours where they are open, these restaurants produce more lo-fi soundscapes. However, this isn’t always a result of oversaturation of different signals, but rather one specific one that raises the threshold which all other sounds must reach in order to be heard: the radio at Uncle Jimmy’s. While he has taken to playing more Christmas music as the season came around, for the most part there is no clear rhyme or reason to the music Jimmy plays. It can be anywhere from 2000s era pop music to classic rock. It is certainly not Muzak, designed to specifically court specific demographics into his shop. But it is also not entirely random, as the music Jimmy plays reflects his own preferences and values (as well as those of the people who work in his shop). The radio at Jimmy’s thus sits somewhere in the middle: not exactly curated, but selected with some thought attached to it.

The Alcove across the street also makes use of radio, filling up the soundscape further (albeit not to the same level of Jimmy’s). But its musical selection is often more intentional at any given moment. For example, you can hear The Alcove playing dance music while setting up for dinner service that sounds similar to the group LMFAO, mirroring Jimmy just playing what

he and his staff want to hear. However, after setting up, they curate music to serve their purposes. They often stick to a laid back, Latin feel that would draw more people in. You can just feel yourself wanting to sit down and get a drink there. Nobody was there, since it was so cold, but the music was almost telling you “hey, we have heat lamps here, you don’t need to get home so quickly.” Music for busier moments reflects a similar style, only more upbeat. The music always mirrors characteristics of the fun and casual Columbian-American restaurant.

Steven Feld’s basis of “echo-muse-ecology” is derived from R. Murray Schafer’s assertion that “people echo the soundscape in language and music” (2001). Feld’s study was centered around the Kaluli people of Bosavi, Papua New Guinea, specifically their ritualized vocal expression. He learned that these rituals mimicked the sound of the local birds of the Bosavi soundscape, prompting him to coin a new term based on ethnomusicology to properly describe this phenomenon of people echoing a natural soundscape. One could flip this idea on its head in more industrialized societies than Bosavi, and say that soundscapes reflect the actions and desires of people here. Especially since the majority of the sounds I recorded are man made, the soundscape is almost entirely derived from the music being played, and people’s responses to that music. Feld also describes what he calls acoustemology (acoustic epistemology) as “a sonic way of knowing place,” and uses this term to inform “how sonic sensibility is basic to experiential truth in the Bosavi forests” (2001). There is a cyclical nature to the soundscapes of both Sunnyside and Bosavi in that they continue to have an effect on the very things that contribute to them, as well as promoting experiential truth that feeds back into people’s interactions with their community. In other words, in discussing the questions of pandemic soundscapes and their relation to community, community members themselves create the soundscapes that bolster community in a smaller city neighborhood like this. They of course

don't start from scratch, but they put out into the world what they would like to see come back to them. The music being pumped outdoors is more heartfelt than Muzak, even in cases of places like The Alcove. Within Muzak, according to Sterne's analysis of the more homogenized and corporate Mall of America, "background music strives towards anonymity, and thus can be understood as the inverse of most industrially recorded and disseminated music" (30, 1997). The background music of these restaurants, often bleeding into itself and competing for auditory space like it would in a large mall, is distinctive and filled with personality. This is indicative of larger aspects of each restaurant: how the people in charge of the music choose it, who they choose to represent the restaurant and how those people foster genuine community outside of simple customer service.

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While reviewing my notes and recordings from my time spent sitting directly under the radio at the pizzeria, I knew that it had to be a large component of my piece. I chose to emphasize both Uncle Jimmy's ubiquitous rock radio as well as The Alcove's more downtempo tracks later in the evening. Developing concrete music from the music played on radio presents an obvious issue: the fact that there is already popular music present in the recording, and it is often the main focal point of the recording. This means that I would have to seek out areas of the recordings that I could change drastically, while still maintaining and highlighting some of the most important aspects.

Uncle Jimmy's radio, playing a consistent stream of classic rock, was the most forward recording that I captured when it comes to how much the music overwhelms the other ambient noise. I chose to manipulate the audio using a time-flex tool to draw out some of the more aggressive guitar lines of *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*. I layered sampled guitar riffs from the

beginning of the song on top of the distorted, stretched out original recording to add a chaotic fullness to this section. In just barely allowing the song to be recognizable, I aimed to highlight the power and affect that Uncle Jimmy's radio contains when played without many people around. There is certainly still a sense of emotional warmth that bleeds through, and you still feel like you could sit down there and be at peace listening to the music. But overall it is music for the intent of driving work, and again is not muzak in the traditional sense.

Another sound clip I chose to bring to the forefront was the radio host's introduction to David Bowie's *Young Americans*, stating its influence on "Philadelphia soul sound." David Bowie does take influence from soul and R&B on this song, but I chose to interpret this clip more broadly within the context of the piece. As the piece becomes just as distorted as the last, you hear the radio announcer echoing his sentiments. The "soul sound" he speaks of is reflected not just in the music, but in the smaller interactions peeking out from the soundscape. My neighbor Hilda opening the door, her light chatter with Jimmy emerging occasionally, the odd banging or rustling. These sounds are subtle and difficult to bring out from a recording where the radio is so present, but they are important to highlight as the greater part of the typical Jimmy's radio soundscape: very loud, while also being surprisingly warm and welcoming to all sorts of people. The sounds are human, and just as soulful as the music influenced by soul. That is why I found it necessary to sample the radio announcer in order to reflect the true nature of the soundscape.

Another way radio takes shape in this piece is in the more subtle dub/reggae sounds of The Alcove on a Monday night. In contrast to Jimmy's, this radio was far more calm and traditionally inviting. After the harsh wind of the afternoon had died down, there were very few people choosing to dine outdoors on this night. Thus, in contrast to the dense soundscape of the

piece up until that point, the Alcove radio was alluring and almost hypnotic. This is why I chose to slow down the recording, alongside reversing it in sections and layering it upon itself. Despite nobody wanting to go to dinner outside on a cold Monday night, the music outside enticed me. It was almost shocking in its peace after my previous recordings, and I wanted to capture that specific emotion in this piece. In contrast to this, I also chose to emphasize some of the noise of people passing by with laundry carts, as the clanging of metal stuck out to me as significant during this recording.

5. Lo-fi Soundscapes and Community

Something that I wanted to take a look at specifically in this field site is the shifting soundscapes created by people who pass by this street corner versus those who decide to commune at it. 49th Street is often a way for people to get from point A to point B, but it can also be a place where people commune, either going there with that intention or being stopped in passing. One prime example of this was my experience with my aforementioned neighbor, Hilda. I passed by her on the way out from my apartment, and she said she was going to take an Uber to the grocery store. After I settled at Jimmy's, she walked in and ordered a slice, telling me how it was a bad idea for her to go to the grocery store hungry. We talked for a long time about plans for Thanksgiving, amongst other things. She wasn't in a hurry to get out quickly, and Jimmy even joined us for a brief moment. It can be difficult to capture these specific moments of being drawn into a space for an extended period of time, but it is easier to arrive in the middle of such events and speculate. As I casually walked by the pizzeria one night, one of Jimmys' employees, Mike, was gathering with a few others outside of the shop. They weren't sitting and eating pizza, they were just socializing, in a seemingly impromptu way. This can be corroborated by the times outside of my intentional research that I have been stopped by someone eating at Jimmy's or

Sanger Hall, often staying to talk with them or just saying hello and continuing on my way. The weather towards the beginning of my research was too cold for people to stick around outside for long. But as it warmed up, people gathered and talked more and more. Even on the first recording of my research, the sound of passersby residents stopping to speak with Jimmy is noticeable over the sound of harsh wind.

Residents who were strictly passing by were often accompanied by something indicative of their end goal: a metal cart for picking up laundry, the dog they are walking, bags of groceries. But there is very rarely someone so set in their own goals that they lose the chance to be incorporated into the soundscape itself. This supports Arquette's assertion that a city "is not generated by the neat ontological division of container and contained: metaphorical space can supervene upon the physical divisions of the urban metropolis" (159, 2004). Here, the movement of restaurants from an exclusive indoor space to having the sidewalk go straight through them helps to further separate these clean divisions, as well as increase "metaphorical space" in the overlapping soundscapes shared by those passing by and those communing. The context of the pandemic almost brings greater validity to Arquette's argument.

Her critiques of Schafer's view on lo-fi versus hi-fi soundscapes are also highlighted by this research. According to Schafer, this corner would consist of almost entirely manmade sounds and be considered lo-fi. But according to Arquette, "amplitude and density level [in cities] change, sometimes radically, according to the time of day or the day of the week...each community has sets of sound markers which reinforce its own identity; each district has its own sonic profile, even if that profile is not a permanent feature" (162, 2004). A reductionist view would look at Jimmy's radio as a hindrance to the nuanced soundscape of Sunnyside, and that the lo-fi soundscape has little to offer. But taking a look at the sounds of the nighttime in contrast

with some of the more prominent music in other recordings we can see that the soundscape has the potential to change day by day. And even when the sounds of various restaurants are mingled, they are always distinctive to the community of Sunnyside. They create a sonic bustle that has been amplified by the pandemic, as well as the people and establishments that served as a beacon of hope during it.

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From the beginning of the piece, I sought to exaggerate the lo-fi city soundscape and its impact on residents of Sunnyside. I utilized the wind as its own character extensively throughout the beginning of the piece, distorting and compressing it to the point where it feels overwhelming at various levels. But I also made sure to leave space for the patches of dialogue that I managed to capture on that first day of research. When Jimmy came to the pizzeria on his day off and offered me some respite inside the shop, it truly felt as if the fierce winds had calmed. And as multiple groups of people walked up to Jimmy and struck up a conversation as he got the mail, I felt the cold lessen, my camping chair get a bit more comfortable, the noise clear away a bit. The beginning of the piece is one of the only places where I added more traditional music, some light synth pads and a distorted organ. This was implemented because I felt music in that moment, the same warmth that comes with Jimmy's radio even on the one day where there was supposed to be nobody there. The wind rises again later on, becoming almost unbearable, but is sucked away during key moments of genuine human connection. Wind has a variety of connotations associated with movement, especially in traditional medicine within several cultures. Ayurveda, the traditional Hindu system of medicine, views wind as one of the three humors that regulate the state of the body alongside bile and phlegm. It has a deep connection to what we know as the nervous system, and diseases such as epilepsy and rheumatism are considered wind diseases

caused by the blocking of passages where wind tends to travel in the body (Wujastyk). Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has a whole host of illnesses associated with wind depending on its quality: hot or cold wind, dry or humid wind, etc. Wind must be eliminated through acupuncture in order to treat a variety of diseases (Dashtdar, Kardi, & Shirazi). In both cultures, improper flow of wind is unhealthy and must be addressed. Where there is too much wind in the body, it must be expelled somehow. This connection to health supports the heavy emphasis placed on wind at the beginning of the piece, and the breaks in the wind.

Also present in the piece are Mike and his friends gathered outside Jimmy's. As the noise from the crowd grows and people start clapping to the beat of a song from the Alcove, I layer and distort the recording progressively until the cheering appears to surround the entire vicinity of the street. It certainly seemed like that was happening at the time. The moment happened towards the end of my research, when I was nearly finished, and felt like some sort of grand release in context. There had been moments like this before I even started my research, but within the narrative context of this piece of concept art it functions as a conclusion to COVID-19 soundscapes: people can still talk, gather, and be merry together on a weekend. And they can do so safely, in a way that may actually improve their health mentally. This is when the wind goes away, in both a literal and metaphorical sense. There is the same power that was felt during harsh winds, but this time it is optimistic. We are no longer at the whim of our environment here, we are contributing to it and its soundscape, which in turn makes us well.

The piece finishes with a section of audio that is mostly unedited - this is intentional as to preserve the nature of the soundscape. This is certainly up to interpretation, but the clip that I used for this outro felt so natural and calm to me. It felt like making edits beyond what I did would not serve the effect that these collections of sounds had on me at the time of recording.

COVID soundscapes have become far less sonically dense, even in cities (although this is changing as the pandemic progresses). People have been staying home when possible, and there is generally far less manmade sonic clutter. Birds in cities even have begun to chirp at lower frequencies, not having to work as hard to be heard over the harsh city noise. This clip could have easily been included at the beginning of the narrative of this piece. But it made more sense for me to position it as an epilogue of sorts. Lo-fi soundscapes can open up a different range of connections, and the ones that are accessible may be more highly valued. There can still be community bonds during a global pandemic, and they are in fact even more necessary now than ever. And in the context of those interactions, the silence can be acknowledged without such deep fear in our hearts.

6. Final Conclusions

So what can we take from this? How does reinterpreting the soundscape of Sunnyside through concept art help us to recognize the joys and pains of this community, possibly even uplifting the former? Solid community structures are a big piece of the puzzle here. Through my work in Sunnyside/Woodside Mutual Aid (SWMA), I have seen how residents of Sunnyside have come together during this historic moment in time to help each other. Jimmy's original policy regarding free pizza for those in need embodies the spirit of mutual aid. But even moving past that, simply knowing your neighbors as you pass them on the street can help a great deal in fostering a healthy community and healthy self. We are social creatures, as has been shown throughout countless cultures over many centuries. Most people living in the US during this pandemic can attest that isolation is not healthy for one's self and one's community. 2020 was a year of great turmoil for many, but also caused many of us to rethink the ways in which we operate socially. Now that we value social interactions more, value the outdoors more, and can

possibly restructure what “normal” looks like. I am hopeful for the ways in which we are becoming more aware of the oppressive structures behind “normalcy,” and can rebuild our communities based around that.

Jimmy often talks of the way things used to be, long before the pandemic. When it wasn't too cold, I would gather with a few musicians to play on the sidewalk on 49th street, and we called the band 49th Street to give a shout out to a place where we could make music safely. And people generally were happy to see it, not having seen live music in such a long time. When we went out to play, Jimmy talked about how things were back in his day. How people went out on the sidewalk and celebrated much more. If there can be a silver lining to this virus, perhaps we can learn to find how the development of these soundscapes help us to heal, and how being forced outside may not be the worst thing in the world.

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