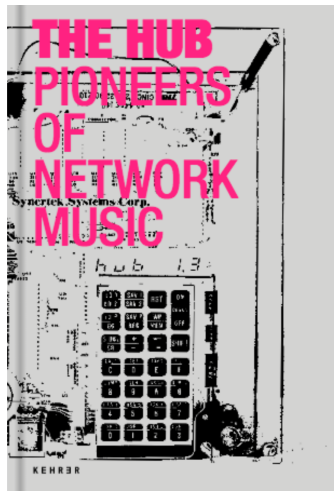


## THE HUB – PIONEERS OF NETWORK MUSIC

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### WHEN DID I STOP NOT LIKING THE HUB?

Laetitia Sonami

There is no special date when I realized how essential The Hub was. It was more akin to recognizing a shape thru the fog, or getting to know a wild animal... It takes time sometimes to hear (how could I not hear then?)

Here six (white) men untethered by matter and worldly concerns of virtuosity (assuming the classical idea of virtuosity as embodied), let alone mere expressivity, were connected to each other and the gods with a secret language not accessible to mere mortals, winks here, winks there... this was my battlefield.

What about the music you say? I will get to it, but in the eighties, some of us grappled with the transition from analog to digital media. Gestures, expressivity, embodiment, let alone the connection to space and audience, were of concern. How to convey causality, how to “connect” even if our presence, voice and gestures were cryptic?

The Hub continued the ensemble music tradition, where corporeality had been slowly relinquished to “popular” music, cerebral and untarnished by moving bodies. Sitting at their computers, their communication was taking place in a linguistic space.

Would it have been different if I saw them sweating while typing, ecstatically pressing the letter A—it would have been terribly disappointing. We all witnessed the bending over in pain of the performer-typist (I do admit though being enthralled by some laptop performances such as from Helmut Schäfer in Beijing, which ended up with his laptop flying off stage, unplugging all audio).

Would it have been different if they dressed up? John Bischoff mentioned that he once wondered about it and put on a tie but was told he looked like an office worker. With or without ties, it was easy to associate them with stockbrokers intently staring at their screens.

What about visual renderings? The attempts at displaying their messages ended up being a distraction, a reductive proposition. Such theatre or artifices would have been out of place in The Hub.

Would it have been different if I was witnessing six women? Let's imagine Laurie Spiegel, Frankie Mann and four clones? Some of us are simple that way. I probably would have been more intrigued and challenged. Mirror neurons triggered, I would have felt part of it... it would not have made the music better or worse, it would have allowed some connection in the mostly male landscape of "experimental art music" of the time. Is identification necessary for appreciation, you may ask. This would be a very reductive proposition, but as a female performer, I could not dissociate the social and cultural contexts from the "music itself".

As the history of electronic music gets drawn, it is necessary to understand the values at play and how these defined the gross traits of its performative manifestation. Values mostly drawn by institutions which were the depository of equipment and research and which established how "meaningful" the music was, thus relegating to the background other expressions such as the immersive architectural performances of Maryanne Amacher, Eliane Radigue, Maggi Payne, the ambiguous electronic performances of Paul DeMarinis or Jim Pomeroy, or Michel Waisvisz's expressive gestural performances.

The Hub did not need access, they could build their own systems, most of us did not know how. The Hub did not have to acknowledge an audience, they were conversing amongst themselves and we were witnesses not participants.

I am not holding The Hub responsible for the exclusion I experienced at the time. Its members are an exceptional gathering of musicians, hackers, instrument builders, improvisers and thinkers. I am trying to understand what was behind my reluctance to acknowledge their importance, and to "hear" their music.

In the last ten years or so, the landscape changed. I let go of my angst for "meaningful" performative gestures. Contours between genres and practices softened, access widened and allowed for more diversity. The recognition that experimentalism was not limited to one particular form but had taken place concurrently in other genres and countries grew. There was not just one club. The canon widened and freed of my prejudices, I (re) discovered the Hub.

The theatre still remains quaint, but the lack of artifices appears now so refreshing. There is no veneer to contextualize or interpret the work, just the music.

With the now predominance of pre-chewed software creating deep musical ruts, listening to the Hub is exhilarating, the music demented and punk. For me, the Hub is deeply American, and more specifically Californian: playful, ironic, subversive, irreverent, unbridled, raunchy, home grown and unapologetic.

The apparently endless resources we currently have in the digital-analog market, with infinite number of modules, buttons and increasing CPUs, defining the "instrument" is an often-neglected proposition. By instrument I mean a system with rules and elastic boundaries which become audible as they are extended and subverted. Each composition played by The Hub is an instrument. Crystalline structures resulting from each player's or each piece's set of rules appear when one listens. The machine

speaks, its boundaries constantly redistributed, become “palpable”. Code becomes a skin, etched and stretched, and oddly sensual.

As AI spreads in musical systems, with intent and adaptation at its core, listening to The Hub is liberating. There is no message and no place to go. There is no future, there is just *now*.