Chapter 12: The Resonance Is the Composer: Students Soundwriting Together

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4. "Refrain" by Ivan Jones

Ivan Jones's primary soundwriting concern—to take a broader look at DAWs in his writing practices—took different shapes through numerous takes throughout the semester. Ivan's aim was to capture the ambient dynamics or our compositional scene by sampling fragments of the rhythmic turn-taking happening in our in-class workshops. Ivan is an Ableton Live adept—he deftly creates samples and switches sounds in this DAW. Most agree that of the most commonly used DAWs (Pro Tools, Logic, and Ableton), Ableton is preferred by DJs and hip-hop artists. In his soundwriting itinerary, Ivan sought to build on our in-class read-aloud practice of using metronomes (sparked by Alex Quinto, who brought an analog metronome to class). Ivan enjoys challenging time signatures, and throughout the semester he would place snippets of workshop conversations onto Nancarrow-esque time-signatures with the aim of creating musical refrains.

In his final version of the anthem process, "Refrain," Ivan stacked three guitar tracks, marked transitions with reverse-reverberated gongs (a trick we had discussed in the context of comparing analog and digital techniques for this trope), leveraged Ableton's sampling/soundswitching affordances to create percussion (handclaps, 808 bass-drops, high hats), a bassline, and a refrain built out of various utterances and exclamations he recorded during a workshop. The following three phrases are repeated throughout and treated by various effects that add stutters and melismas to the front and back end of the phrases, which were sampled from a class discussion: "Hello everybody!", "We're good, we're good," and "I was joking!"

As you listen to what follows, we'd like for you to notice how even musically experienced students can benefit from simple soundwriting exercises, like this student who created a refrain with just seemingly throwaway phrases.

Transcript

[*What sounds like an instrumental hip hop track begins: mellow chords on a keyboard with handclaps behind it, which grows to include bass and a more complex beat. Music slows down as we hear the following.*]

Male voice: Hello everybody! . . . body! [*The same words are manipulated multiple times as the music continues, mixed with the same voice saying, "We're good, we're good," a female voice saying, "Ahh," and incomprehensible other sentences and phrases.*]

[*The words pause while a keyboard plays a friendly solo over the continuing, escalating music. Then the music mellows down again for more of the manipulated words, led most often by "Hello everybody!" The music then ramps back up before ending.*]