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12 Nov. 1996
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Steina Vasulka
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Hi Steina,

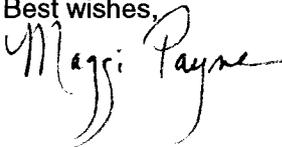
I'm sending along a standard VHS tape of three of my pieces, *Liquid Metal*, *Apparent Horizon* and *Airwaves (realities)*. These pieces, although very different from your works, have at their core the same aesthetic appreciation of detail and subject matter. I've known your work for many years, but it just struck me while experiencing your retrospective at the SF MOMA, how much we share these interests. I've not included some of my earlier works which are videomicrography of crystals growing in real time or of my work with Ed Tannenbaum, but just thought I'd send along this trilogy.

I apologize for the distortion in the audio. I don't have ready access to Betacam-SP and was making this dub for you from a Hi-8 dub with PCM audio (the AFM tracks were far worse) and was very upset to hear the distortion - particularly on the right track on *Apparent Horizon*. Since I do my composition on my Sonic Solutions DAW and take such great care with it, it's a bit painful to send this to you this way. I just don't have the time to go back to the studio to cut a dub by the time you'll be in the states, so I decided to send it along as is, with apologies. I'm looking forward to DVD! - or at least full 16 bit 44.1K digital audio (wish Sony would implement it) in consumer digital.

On another subject, I was wondering if you received my email announcement of a new position opening up in the Art Dept at Mills. I hope you will be interested - I would love to have you here. I've enclosed a rather "unofficial" announcement in case you did not receive it.

I really appreciate your agreeing to my sending you the tape. I know you're extremely busy at Steim and with your own work and exhibitions. Please let Woody know how much I also loved his works at the SF MOMA too. I love all the finely crafted mechanical equipment put to art purposes rather than military ones.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maggi Payne". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "M".

Program Notes - Maggi Payne

Liquid Metal (1994)

I took up canoeing in an effort to "experience nature" and to build up my upper body. I became fascinated with the water patterns visible at such a close-up range. The water had an intimate kind of beauty, very different from water viewed from a greater distance. I captured images for two years before finally sequencing them. It was only in the editing that I fully realized that water actually turns out to be rather colorless (the dictionary definition) - especially at close range and especially with the almost constant cloud cover we experienced. The video has no processing whatsoever.

The "nature" that I ended up experiencing in large part had to do with human nature. I would have loved to have paddled the California waterways hearing only the sounds of birds, water, etc., but instead much of the sound consisted of Harley Davidsons roaring down a canyon road adjacent to the river, helicopters, the Blue Angels, various prop planes, a train screeching harmonics as it went through turns in a canyon, remote-controlled model airplanes, cars driving over a bridge, jetskis and motorboats with and without waterskiers attached. The music is derived from those sounds, with only a few exceptions (seagulls, falls, wind and waves lapping against the shore).

I wanted to transform those undesirable "natural sounds" into sounds I would probably not mind hearing - or wouldn't mind hearing in my head while canoeing. I used convolving, phase vocoding, extensive layering and extreme equalizations to accomplish the transformations. Spatialization is a major concern in this piece.

Apparent Horizon (1996)

I started gathering the video images for *Apparent Horizon* six years prior to its completion. My original intent was to slowly reveal information in various landscapes by holding still on an image for several seconds, then zooming in or out or panning to reveal more detail, an unusual vista, rock formation, etc.. It occurred to me that it also might be interesting to see what might be "revealed" from an overhead view. Since it was impractical to rent airplanes for this purpose, I decided to incorporate NASA footage taken by the Space Shuttle and Apollo series astronauts. It is at times difficult to distinguish earth views from space from those taken on the earth's surface.

Many of the earthbound shots are of rather "alien" landscapes — those where I, as a human being, don't really fit in — I'm the alien here. In these often desolate places the only sounds one hears are wind, insects, a scant number of birds and animals and a rare rainstorm. I decided to take our constant human chatter and transpose it into sounds somewhat reminiscent of nature's sounds in the landscapes to which they are attached or to transform them into somewhat "otherworldly" sounds. This was an attempt to convey an aural impression of the sensations I have experienced while in these earthbound landscapes and those sensations I imagine the astronauts might experience while viewing the earth from space. Sound sources consisted of transmissions from/through space and were from Space Shuttle and Apollo missions, satellite transmissions, and shortwave radio broadcasts. Often I chose sections that were full of static and distortion — signals which were reaching unintelligibility. There are Morse Code "crickets" at Bryce Canyon and static "rain" at the Canyonlands. Processing includes heavy equalization, convolving, extreme sample rate conversions and time compression/expansion. This is the third

piece in a series of pieces which are based on transformations of human-made or generated sounds, the previous two being *Airwaves (realities)* and *Liquid Metal*.

AIRWAVES (realities), 1987, attempts to convey a sense of the vast differences in perspective which individuals have regarding what is collectively termed "reality." One of the most striking close-at-hand illustrations is the contrast in the lives of the desert dwellers of Nevada and the San Francisco Bay Area urbanites. The diverging viewpoints are partially due to differences in population density and ethnic make-up, with the extreme physical contrast of the barrenness of the desert versus the lushness of the Bay Area being a significant contributing factor.

AIRWAVES can be presented with a video which I shot of rather static desert landscapes of Nevada. The starkness of these scenes in contrast to the sometimes active, at other times lush texture of the music, is intended to further highlight the differences between the cultures.

There are only two unprocessed "natural" sounds in this piece: the very beginning of the cars passing by and the two airplanes which fly over. All of the other sounds are derived from television and radio broadcasts, both major sources of "unrealities". These materials, most of which are dialog, are highly processed, resulting in a complete disassociation from their origin.