

# Isolation: Analogies between Stuart Saunders Smith and the Transcendentalists

## Isolamento: Analogias entre Stuart Saunders Smith e os Transcendentalistas

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### SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE

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**ABSTRACT:** The life and work of North American composer Stuart Saunders Smith (1948) have shown features reminiscent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophical movement known as New England Transcendentalism. Here I discuss how ideas divulged by Transcendentalism and transcendentalist philosophies, in particular oneness, freethinking, anti-materialism, anti-technologism, and silence reflect in Smith's life stances and compositional process. Based on a belief that oneness binds all living beings via a universal soul, Smith seeks to symbolically unify composer, performer, and audience through the use of silence and a compositional technique called co-existence. In turn, anti-materialism and anti-technologism manifest musically in his frugal use of instrumentation, and in his refusal to write for electronics while evoking naturalistic themes, respectively.

**KEYWORDS:** Stuart Saunders Smith; Transcendentalism; Freethinking; Oneness; Silence; Anti-materialism; Anti-technologism.

**RESUMO:** A vida e obra do compositor norte-americano Stuart Saunders Smith (1948) apresentam características que lembram o movimento filosófico do século XIX conhecido como Transcendentalismo da Nova Inglaterra. Aqui discuto como as ideias disseminadas pelo transcendentalismo e pelas filosofias transcendentalistas, em particular a unidade, o livre pensamento, o antimaterialismo, o antitecnologismo e o silêncio, refletem nas posturas de vida e no processo composicional de Smith. Baseado na crença de que uma alma universal une todos os seres vivos, Smith procura unificar simbolicamente compositor, intérprete e público através do uso do silêncio e de uma técnica composicional chamada coexistência. Por sua vez, em sua música o antimaterialismo e o antitecnologismo manifestam-se respectivamente no uso frugal da instrumentação e na sua recusa em escrever para a eletrônica enquanto evoca temáticas naturalistas.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Stuart Saunders Smith; Transcendentalismo; Livre pensamento; Unidade; Silêncio; Antimaterialismo; Antitecnologismo.



## 1. The material was pure, and his art was pure; how could the result be other than wonderful? (Henry David Thoreau)

If I were to summarize Henry David Thoreau's classic *Walden* in a single sentence, I could say, not without the fear of sounding trite: one can only live to become a better version of oneself, but not to become someone else. Thoreau is considered a pillar figure in the philosophical and literary movement known as New England Transcendentalism, which officially started with the foundation of the Transcendental Club in 1836 in Concord, MA, by his mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson and others. The Transcendentalists' initial literary influence was German philosopher Immanuel Kant and his idea that human knowledge was innate. In the particular case of the New Englanders, innate knowledge—a kind of "perception of Truth with a capital T" (Buell 2006, xix-xx)—was a consequence of their belief that all lives were divine and bonded through a kind of universal soul, a condition frequently referred to as oneness<sup>1</sup>. However, despite this bond, men's divine condition implied that each individual should be a freethinker and free agent, to live up to this condition of divinity. Emerson's essays *The Over-Soul* and *Self-Reliance* show respectively these two essential aspects of Transcendentalist thinking: bondage and freedom. While *The Over-Soul* set a bridge between New England Transcendentalism and the "religious transcendentalism of Judeo-Christian faiths" (Berman 1994, 15), *Self-Reliance* emphasized that freethinking was an essential condition for the Americans to set free from Eurocentric culture. But Thoreau went beyond Emerson: during his experiment at the Walden Pond, which originated his classic book, *Walden*, he testified that the practice, more than the theory, of freethinking and agency led to self-development. In other words, by putting Emerson's theories into practice, Thoreau became a better version of himself.

Throughout my academic research, I have contended that another New Englander, composer Stuart Saunders Smith (b. 1948) has inherited many of the values of the Transcendentalists (Lacerda 2018, 2). Born in Portland (Maine) 86 years after Thoreau's death, Smith trained as an all-around drummer and percussionist from the age of 6. From this early age, his teacher Charles Newcomb encouraged him to improvise and compose music (Smith 2008a). His interest in improvisation developed in his teenage years when he performed with free jazz combos. In 1972 he earned a Master's Degree in Percussion Performance from the Hartt School of Music, studying with Alexander Lepak, and a Doctoral degree in Composition from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, studying with Salvatore Martirano, Herbert Brün, and Ben Johnston. After his studies, Smith went on to teach at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) from 1975 until 2011, when he retired and moved to rural Vermont. Throughout his entire academic career and now as a retired professor, Smith has been a prolific composer for a wide range of instruments, but with special emphasis on percussion. His output for the solo vibraphone is particularly vast and includes the *Links Series*, which Steven Schick has compared to entries in a journal, like a journal Thoreau kept while in Walden (Schick 2009, 5). But the parallels between Smith and Thoreau go beyond *Links* and the journals. In fact, such parallels tend to orbit around both men's strive for freethinking, agency, and what Smith frequently calls "self-actualization" (Smith 2013a, n.p.). Like Thoreau, Smith looks for self-development by questioning society's very idea of progress, by practicing an alternative, solitary, lifestyle, and by composing music that reflects this lifestyle.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms "universal soul," "oneness," and "Over-soul" will be used interchangeably.

For Smith and Thoreau (and in fact for Emerson, as well), self-development was a corollary to the practice of solitude. From isolation, they developed independent thinking, anti-materialistic and anti-technological values, and their very creed on a universal soul. In this paper I will discuss each of these principles and how they reflect in Smith's music, after providing a brief overview on some of the Transcendentalist principles set by Emerson and Thoreau and on how these principles dialogue with the lifestyle of Smith and his wife, the publisher Sylvia Smith. To find such references, I compared Smith's biography and stances (political, spiritual, and artistic) with Transcendentalist texts such as *Self-Reliance*, *Walden*, and others. Other overlaps between Smith and transcendental philosophies<sup>2</sup> will be introduced through a discussion of Smith's religious beliefs as a Quaker, particularly how silence and freethinking connect via the Quaker concept of Inner Light.

Throughout this exploration, I found it impossible to completely dissociate my scholarship with my acquaintance with the composer. Because our friendship has allowed us to discuss these hypotheses in person, over the telephone, and mail, these hypotheses have become second nature to my understanding of his music. This essay narrates/documents my search for evidence of Transcendentalist thought within Smith's music and literature—often already known through dialogue and intuition, in a manner akin to that of the Transcendentalist creed of a universal soul.

## 2. Living a composed life: isolation, self-reliance, and thought autonomy

### 2.1 Emerson

Prior to discussing the far-reaching parallels between Thoreau and Smith, it is important to address a few words in his mentor Emerson's essay *Self-Reliance*, seminal in setting the stage for the Transcendental movement's ideas on autonomy. In *Self-Reliance*, human beings were entitled to individually shape their knowledge through personal experience rather than "the adopted talent of another:"

Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another, you have only an extemporaneous, half possession. That which each can do best, none but his Maker can teach him. No man yet knows what it is, nor can, till that or can till that person has exhibited it. Where is the master who could have taught Shakspeare [sic]? Where is the master who could have instructed Franklin, or Washington, or Bacon, or Newton? Every great man is a unique. The Scipionism of Scipio is precisely that part he could not borrow. Shakspeare will never be made by the study of Shakspeare (Emerson 1989, 278-279).

The practice of isolation was for Emerson a necessary means in the development of independent thinking, as life in society tends to generate "conformity"—a view that would be later put into practice by Thoreau when he isolated himself in Walden Pond. Being self-reliant is for Emerson, antithetical to society's fostering of conformity:

Society everywhere is in a conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in

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<sup>2</sup> As referred to the New England movement, the terms "Transcendentalism" or "Transcendentalist," will be capitalized. When referring to philosophical tendencies in general, a lower-case "t" will be applied.

most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs (Emerson 1989, 261).

Emerson believed that isolation also had spiritual implications. In his usual mystically charged discourse, solitude was both a path for self-reliance and an expression of the Over-Soul, as it contributed to an elevated awareness of the universal spirit: "All men have my blood, and I have all men's. Not for that will I adopt their petulance or folly, even to the extent of being ashamed of it. But your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation." (Emerson 1989, 273). Emerson implied that isolation, which must be "spiritual," provides access to a supposed divinity present in everyone's souls. Due to the spiritual elevation that isolation brought, Emerson showed a preference for silence in the church: "I like the silent church before the service begins, better than any preaching." (Emerson 1989, 272). Here, he makes a clear reference to Quakerism, a religion that is particularly associated with New England, because the Quaker concept of Inner Light implies that silence leads to the divine. Being a Quaker, Smith also sees religious connections in the practice of silence and isolation; in both Emerson as a scholar and Smith as an artist, isolation is a gateway to their inner world. I will further discuss the convergences of Transcendentalism and Quakerism and their reflection on Smith's life and work in sections 2.4 and 3.3, respectively.

## 2.2 Thoreau

On July 4, 1845 Thoreau moved to the vicinities the Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts, with the goal of isolating himself while relying on scarce means of living. During the two-plus years that this experiment lasted, Thoreau avidly kept journal entries that would later take the form of his book *Walden*. Throughout *Walden*, Thoreau often reports situations that taught him about freethinking metaphorically and in practice. Occasionally getting lost during his walks through the forest around Walden, Thoreau understood this challenge as analogue to the exercising of freethinking, that is, "getting lost" meant moving away from the values imposed by society and experiencing novelty. Even when he was already familiar with the paths through the woods, he could get lost during the winter at night if the paths were covered with snow. He faced this experience as an allegory for self-actualization: "Every man has to learn the points of compass again as often as he awakes, whether from sleep or any abstraction. Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations." (Thoreau 2006, 186-187). Thoreau's message to the reader is key for understanding Smith's idea of the function of art: art that ditches the common sense invites one to get lost, which in turn enables one to intuitively find one's true self. Thoreau's notion of "getting lost" relates to the basic motivations of his experiment of living in the woods, "lost" from society (even if not completely alienated from it).

Getting lost presupposes a solitude Thoreau considered indispensable for personal growth, estranged from society's common sense and materialistic impositions. Living alone at Walden, he discovered that isolation was an essential condition for his self-actualization. *Walden* has an entire chapter dedicated to addressing solitude, in which Thoreau often criticizes North America's social life for suffocating individuality: "Society is commonly too cheap. We meet at very short intervals, not having had time to acquire any new value for each other. We meet at meals three times a day, and give each other a new taste of that old musty cheese that we are" (Thoreau 2006, 147). Solitude, even when it does not incur in complete isolation, is essential for anyone who seeks to contribute intellectually to society, as Thoreau adds: "A man thinking or working is always alone, let him be where he will. Solitude is not measured by the miles of space that intervene between a man and his fellows. The really diligent student in one of the crowded hives of Cambridge College is as

solitary as a dervish in the desert" (Thoreau 2006, 146). With such a statement, Thoreau implies that isolation is a truer expression of life in society—as it may originate relevant social contributions, for instance—than companionship, which often suppresses individualized thinking and emphasizes common sense.

### 2.3 The Smiths

Like in Thoreau's loss experience, Smith believes that every artist has to find his own true self, so they are able to "compose themselves" as humans: "We collectively share our ways, so when I talk about composing, I am not talking just about composing music, I am talking about composing one's life and finding your way, precisely to be socially conscious, as well as to be a deeply rooted life—rooted in what is real" (Smith 2013a, n.p.). Therefore, to be rooted in reality is to lead a life grounded on autonomous thinking. Being a Christian, Smith finds a direct correspondence of Thoreau's hypothesis with his own Christian faith: "This is precisely what Jesus said: You must lose yourself to find yourself." According to Smith, composing is about sitting every day and not being afraid of getting lost: "When you are lost, you have to be self-reliant and find your way. That is what composing is about. Trying to get lost, so that you can find a new path in the woods to arrive home. My fundamental message is: The composer must get lost" (Smith 2013a, n.p.). The expression "getting lost" can be interpreted as the artistic duty of experiencing novelty and moving away from common sense. In his view, this is the unavoidable condition for contributing to society and inspiring the audience for self-actualization.

Smith's rhetoric also traces back to Emerson, the Emersonian "self-reliance" is a quality intrinsic to autonomous thinking—the latter being here understood as the capacity to freely exercise self-actualization. Put in simple terms, Smith believes that the self-reliant artist shapes his own intellect and character by thinking autonomously. "Self-reliance" is, therefore, the "courage" to "compose" oneself by building personal experience while eschewing external conditioning. The writing excerpt below shows how Smith overlaps "self-reliance" and "self-actualization," utilizing an unusual poetic fashion:

being open  
to be composed,  
conditioned to the off, beat, or,  
have courage is born  
not learned (Smith 2013b, n.p.).<sup>3</sup>

Sylvia Smith—Smith's wife, frequent collaborator, music publisher, scholar, and performer—shares a view similar to her husband's. Like the composer, Sylvia has lived a life guided by freedom of thought and agency, and she has used the idea of "composing oneself" to address the importance of autonomous thinking. Led by the pursuit of personal beliefs rather than status or commercial success, she says:

In high school I was particularly moved by the writings of Thoreau. He offered solutions to a lot of contemporary problems, then and now. He also composed his life. I have always tried to lead a composed life—thinking things through, not giving in to the taste industries, not acting out the scenarios shown to us on television, thinking outside the box, and in

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<sup>3</sup> Smith wrote this letter in response to questions sent by the author. He wrote the answers in poem-like form.

music, having another idea—a personal idea—about how it should sound (Smith 2008b, n.p.).

Living a “composed life,” Sylvia Smith has succeeded as a publisher exclusively of the music in which she believes—composers of the caliber of Smith, Robert Ashley, Milton Babbitt, Herbert Brün, John Cage, Robert Erickson, Ben Johnston, Pauline Oliverios, Christian Wolff, and many others. She has thus chosen not to yield to commercialism. Stuart Saunders Smith himself compared living a composed life to the premise of making conscious life choices: “You have to, in this world, compose your life. Look at all the elements, like what you eat. For instance, I am a Vegan because it seems to me that it is a healthier way to eat, as well as the least damaging to the environment. You need to figure how much technology you want in your life. I don’t have a cellphone; I don’t have a computer” (Smith 2013a, n.p.).

The couple’s stances are reminiscent of Transcendentalist stances that have consequently reflected in Smith’s music compositions and writings on music, particularly the ideas of simplicity (anti-materialism), isolation, anti-technologism, and his emphasis on silence. Refusing to yield to common sense and to societal precepts, Smith takes leads his compositional process with profound guidance of the aforementioned ideas.

Smith is as conscious of the necessity for isolation as a means for self-actualization as Thoreau was and believes it guarantees an independent compositional process. He states that his aesthetical value of composing music avoids the common sense that was ingrained during his childhood, through isolation. His familial background, which motivated critical thinking, allowed him “to build the foundation of individualization.” Alongside his familial background, isolation allowed him to develop his own political choices and social awareness: “The best way to become a communist is through self-actualization. By defining the self and composing the self you are more able to help others, and more receptive to them helping you” (Smith 2013a, n.p.). Although Thoreau could have been accused of individualism because his experiment was a private endeavor, to isolate himself from a society that was pursuing an immoral path was indispensable to him to think and write autonomously. Similarly, Smith’s solitude has allowed him to think and compose independently and to eschew the materialistic values prescribed by society.

At the young age of fourteen, a time when Smith already composed music, he states to have “felt isolated in crowds:”

I felt isolated in crowds  
 the loneliest place was in school which I  
 cared little about, because I wished  
 From the beginning of self emancipation  
 to learn on my own—groups kill—  
 the lone person grows (Smith 2013c, n.p.)

The emancipation allowed by solitude was a fundamental condition for Smith to develop an idiosyncratic musical style that he understood as a contribution to society, a fundamental premise of his artistic views. If individual freedom is Smith’s parameter for being socially relevant, he believes that too much social interaction damages one’s capability to contribute to society. Smith mentions other composers to demonstrate this notion. According to Smith, John Cage stated that “Conlon Nancarrow did not pay attention to anybody else’s music except Conlon Nancarrow’s music,” implying that this was the reason for Nancarrow’s relevance, “and that Henry Cowell’s music was truly great when Henry didn’t care about other

people's music. Solitude allows you to grow your own garden and make sure that it is your own seed. That is the problem with the composers in New York. They are too close together, and they cross each other's paths so many times, that is hard for them to be themselves" (Smith 2013a, n.p.). Thus, a composer's isolation allows him to develop a musical language extraneous to the beaten path of success so that the only parameter for success becomes to "be himself."

Finally, Smith's necessity of solitude as a means to develop distinctive art also manifests in his avoidance of technology, specifically communication technology. He believes that by overemphasizing new forms of communication, society puts obstacles for self-development: "I think too much technological gear is in the way of self-development because you are always connecting with other people, and doing this and that, and you have very little time for solitude and to silence." In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Thoreau already showed a concern with the likely superfluity in communication technology: "We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate" (Thoreau 2006, 55). Reinforcing the idea of how superfluous communication technology may get, Smith interjects: "Look at this thing called Twitter and Facebook: 'I just had dinner today. I had gravy on my meat.' Who cares?" (Smith 2013a, n.p.).

## 2.4 Quakerism as religious transcendentalism

As a Quaker, Smith's pro-silence and anti-technological stance can be in great part explained in his religious beliefs. Quakerism is a form of religious transcendentalism that justifies in the divine some of the phenomena seen by transcendental philosophies—including the American Transcendentalist movement—as natural. According to historian Art Berman, transcendental philosophy, as developed by 18<sup>th</sup> century German Philosopher Immanuel Kant, was a "natural" version of what he called "religious transcendentalism" of Judeo-Christian faiths since the 5<sup>th</sup> century (Berman 1994, 15).

Founded in Britain, Quakerism is a Christian religion that flourished in America with a model of religious transcendentalism—in particular through its concept of Inner Light. Participants often remain in silence throughout Quaker worship meetings, so as to allow for the flourishing of one's Inner Light. For Quakers, each person possesses an Inner Light that may manifest itself through the practice of silence, as God's message in the worship meeting—an after-silence expression of freethinking and oneness in religious terms. Thus, this kind of "divine enlightenment" is equivalent to Berman's idea of "intuitive modes of knowing" and, therefore, also parallels Kant's notion that knowledge is innate, and not only acquired. However, Quaker Inner Light is expressly a manifestation of the Holy Spirit present in each human being, while the Transcendentalist innate knowledge is "a natural endowment of the human mind" (Frothingham 1876, 115). Though both approaches feature an emphasis on the metaphysical, there is a religious emphasis on the Quaker side and a naturalistic approach on the Transcendentalist side. Berman's discussion of Kant helps us understand Transcendentalism's transformation of the religious to the natural world (see Berman 1994, 15).

Despite the difference in focus (religious or naturalistic), both Quakerism and Transcendentalism featured a fondness for freethinking, individual freedom, and plurality of people, actions, and ideas. Not surprisingly, this dual background of Quakerism and Transcendentalism has been important as a philosophical basis for Smith. Although Quakerism's direct influence on Smith's work is beyond the scope of this research, the acknowledgment of religious transcendentalism and its strong presence in Quaker faith sheds light on the

dialogue between Smith's creative process and transcendental philosophies. For Smith, both faith and the arts are catalysts of spiritual transcendence, although they do not replace one another.

In this respect, Smith's attitude seems to differ from both the 19<sup>th</sup> century Transcendentalist music critic John Sullivan Dwight, as well as the artists of the early modernist era, who understood art as an alternative to religious faith (Berman 1994, 33). Dwight saw music as a potential tool for "naturalizing" religion: "Music stands for the highest outward symbol of what is most deep and holy, and most remotely to be realized in the soul of man" (Dwight 1841, 265 apud Lowens 1957, 77). Therefore, as Irving Lowens has pointed out, music's purpose was "to hallow pleasure, and to naturalize religion" (Lowens 1957, 77). Dwight even envisioned a substitution of the Psalm Tunes of New England for the Beethoven Symphonies (Lowens 1957, 78). A few decades later in the early modernist period, comparisons between the arts and the sacred were no longer needed. According to Berman, art itself became transcendence and was discussed in terms that made it equivalent to spiritual transcendence. Berman says that even if the term "spirit" is evoked, it is used as a metaphor for "imagination" (Berman 1994, 33), which was not the case for Dwight. For Smith, however, although music is used as a symbol for spiritual connection, it neither substitutes faith (as for Dwight), nor does it invalidate it (as for the modernists). Rather, both music and religion represent spiritual transcendence.

Finally, regardless of the overlaps, both Transcendentalist and Quakerism thrived in 19<sup>th</sup> century New England because it was an auspicious environment for philosophies that sought to transcend the boundaries of empiricism (Berman 1994, 15). It is important to recognize that this dual background of Quakerism and Transcendentalism has been profoundly important as a philosophical basis for Smith's life and work.

### 3. Transcendentalist values reflected in Smith's work

#### 3.1 Anti-materialism

Because of its natural avoidance of materialistic values, the practice of solitude allows for free intellectual exercise and removes from Smith's compositional process any longing for success. Consequently, his music also often reflects material simplicity<sup>4</sup>. In his *Essays Before a Sonata*, North American composer Charles Ives also discusses how materialism is antithetical to artistic freedom. Speaking through Thoreau's "voice," one could say, has written that "the complexity of Nature teaches freedom," whereas "the complexity of materialism... teaches slavery" (Ives 1962, 139). In fact, Thoreau advocates for material simplicity but not for intellectual simplicity. Ives's Thoreauvian statement is particularly of interest when paired with Emerson's idea that nature is a reflection of the creative mind—a "controlling" attitude towards nature, as opposed to Thoreau's "coexisting" spectator-like attitude, according to Christopher Shultis (2013, xviii). In Ives and Emerson, complexity in intellect and creative effort is akin to the complexity of nature. In turn, Ives's statement implies that nature teaches us that a disregard for materialistic success leads to creative freedom. Both of these aspects connecting nature and the human mind are reflected in Smith's music: his preference for utilizing instrumental scarcity, while applying rich (complex, abundant) musical content. In other words, Smith's music reflects both at once Emerson's complexity and Thoreau's frugality (i.e., anti-materialism and disdain for success).

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<sup>4</sup> This simplicity refers to limitation of economic resources (instrumentation, for instance). Not to be confused with simplicity of music material.



Smith lets nature “teach” him musical freedom and thus achieves complexity. He allows the “sound intelligence” to inform and “compose” himself as an artist, but he also lets his inner listening filter the “sound-imprints” that are going to become part of his experience:

I aspire to be a witnessing transcriber to a music which makes itself in the medium of listening. A listening that transcends self by consciously letting patterns emerge out of the sound's demand to take their own shape.

Obviously I am not talking about chance music or serial music. Chance music and serialism mechanically push sounds around, ignoring sound's intelligence manifested in the imprinted corporeal human inner ear to attain a so-called unconditioned music. Actually, such music is either without condition or merely conditioned. Serialism and chance treat sound as material outside the body-literally disembodied music. In each case the individual's corporeal sound-imprint is ignored (Smith 1994a, 215).

This two-way process of composition eschews the materialism of instrumental and timbral surplus because Smith's anti-materialistic nature filters those sentiments out. Borrowing Ives's aphorism once again, the complexity of nature “teaches freedom” to Smith, because it ignites the compositional process just described. On the other hand, the complexity of materialism “teaches slavery,” because it bounds the composer to compositional trends or the longing for success.

*Walden* is essentially Thoreau's call for anti-materialism and showing-by-example through an experiment that sought to testify that society's materialistic values were harmful to self-development. Therefore, Thoreau hoped that his experience at Walden Pond served as inspiration for society to eschew over-abundance, for instance, in farming:

Still we live meanly, like ants; though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed into men; like pygmies we fight with cranes; it is error upon error, and clout upon clout, and our best virtue has for its occasion a superfluous and evitable wretchedness. Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb nail (Thoreau 2006, 97-98).

For Smith, eschewing over-abundance in instrumentation is a testament to both his pacifist and anti-capitalist beliefs as well as his faith. “Inequality leads to violence and leads to envy” (Smith 2013a, n.p.). Similarly, Thoreau was “convinced, that if all men were to live as simply as I then did, thieving and robbery would be unknown. These take place only in communities where some have got more than is sufficient while others have not enough.” (Thoreau 2006, 188). Because Smith's social values are inevitably transferred to his art, his moral concern for simplicity has informed his choices of medium and instrumentation.

An important example of Smith's use of the medium to convey simplicity is found in his works he labels as “mini-operas,” which require a solo instrumentalist to act and perform concomitantly. In an interview published in John Welsh's book *The Music of Stuart Saunders Smith* (Welsh 1995, 322), Smith stated that: “obscene that we have institutions like the Metropolitan Opera spending millions on productions while

homeless people sleep outside, cold in winter. It is like fiddling while Rome burns". His mini-opera, *Songs I-IX* (Smith 1984a), calls for a soloist acting and playing household objects (such as glass jars, frying pans, wooden bowls, etc.) contrasting with the social alienation of expensive opera productions. With *Songs I-IX*, Smith says he wanted to write "everything a traditional opera is not: poverty stricken (it uses junk you can find in any flea market), short (ten minutes), no plot, no conventional singing and no expensive costumes" (Smith 1995, 322). Figure 1 shows the anti-materialism present in *Songs I-IX*. Smith asks for the performer to utilize objects like the aforementioned as instruments:

Legend for Song VII

- Rapid scraping of frying pan with steak knives
- One scrape with steak knife for the duration of this elongated note-head
- Scrape down with the ridges of the steak knife. Do quickly. (Also found in Song IX)
- For non-scraped notes, simply strike on rim with metal part of steak knife. (Also found in Songs VII & IX)
- Play bowl with wooden part of steak knives. (Also found in Song VII)

**Song VII**

Descriptive, quasi-cursing voice

4 Glass Jars (high/low), Frying pan, Wooden bowl

grrrah! Separately disquieted  
An aroused anti-signed nefariousing whippersnapper,  
noxiously ne're-do-welled. A burned out nada rubbin in a hole

A nillish goose egg scattered  
Zzzzzilchingly vacuous  
Yet possessed.

INTERLUDE 5  
Metal Container

**Song VIII**

As a curse

Jar cover, Cymbal, Ratchet, Wooden bowl, Metal container

A shorn wracked demarked ruinate grr (short growl)  
Its pregnant great stuffed gun  
Muck a muck whacking gravid grrraah! (growl)

**Song IX**

INTERLUDE 6  
Metal Container

Relaxed, very lyrical

4 Glass Jars (high/low), Wooden bowl, Broken glass maraca

Chillsome  
Lucidity

Proffer kudo  
explused at incessants on a quashed scope to minify whilom enjoin  
Smack dab and with allusion that unfocus intermittant taboos whelmed and stood still.

ma (falsetto-match pitch with jar #4)

\*Ossia improvise on jars in direct conjunction with words—similar to what is already written.

Figure 1 – *Songs I-IX*, last page, by Stuart Saunders Smith (Copyright Sonic Art Editions)

Source: Used by permission of Smith Publications, Sharon, VT 05065 USA

Simplicity, as reflected in Smith's nonmaterialistic attitude, frequently directs his instrumental choices as he seeks to do "more with less," shunning the materialism of concerts that feature "tons of drums on the stage." Referring critically to a percussion concert he attended, Smith says: "The amount of material that they had was ridiculous. They had over-abundance." (Smith 2013a, n.p.). He calls, rather, for a "percussion ecology" in which composers and performers are motivated to take advantage of the timbral characteristics of single instruments—his concert-long pieces for solo vibraphone attest to this belief—or small set-ups instead of seeking this variety in large amounts of instruments:

The future of the development of percussion literature, both solo literature and percussion ensemble literature, is in doing more with less..., our concerts should utilize fewer instruments, and smaller set-ups. An evening of snare drum solos. An evening of triangle, woodblock and cymbal chamber music. An evening of unaccompanied vibraphone. An evening of solo drumset (Smith 1994b, 62).

Smith has written for most of the mediums he mentions above, including a vast solo vibraphone output<sup>5</sup>, a suite of three pieces for solo drumset—*Blue Too* (1983), *Brush* (2001), and *Two Lights* (2002)—, and his triangle trio *Angels*. In his music for solo vibraphone and solo drumset, Smith does not attend to the exploration of extended techniques and almost never sees the necessity of searching for uncommon timbres. Rather, variety comes through the singularity of the moment in which each piece is written, as well as its purely rhythmic and melodic outcomes. Paraphrasing Smith, his music reflects experience in a frame. This music is imminently a result of what his inner listening “tells” him in the moment, with no space for pre-compositional devices. Because experience is always unique, his music never repeats itself from piece to piece, like ocean waves or fingerprints. Each of his vibraphone pieces, for instance, may be understood as one of Thoreau’s journal entries not only “documenting a personal spiritual quest” (Schick 2009, 5), but also documenting (framing) moments in his inner listening. The spiritual quest that Schick discusses can be understood as a perennial realization that divinity is found in each individual as part of a universal soul. In this relationship of the inner and outer world, intuition distills perception and forms the experience Smith frames in each of his pieces, as previously explained. Therefore, the superficial similarity of his vibraphone pieces, which has to be attributed to his consistent musical language, is actually a consequence of both this fundamental Transcendentalist idea and of his anti-materialism.

Moreover, Smith’s limitation of instruments can be seen as a consequence of his thought autonomy, due to his refusal to yield to contemporary classical music tendencies, such as the exploration of unusual timbres. Referring to Smith’s avoidance of instrumental surplus, Schick has affirmed that the composer’s attitude implies a denial of a dogma in concert percussion music: “that its growth was fueled almost solely by a search for new sounds” (Schick 2009, 5).

Although instrumental and timbral simplicities are both ingenious signs of Smith’s autonomy, this simplicity may never be confused with musical simplicity: “We do not have to look for role models. Third world percussionists have been doing more with less for centuries. A wealth of material does not lead to a music of wealth.” (Smith 1994b, 63). To put into Charles Ives’s words the ethos is in the “substance” of the material and not in the “manner” with which it is presented (Ives 1962, 120). The depth and singularity of *Songs I-IX* and any of Smith’s pieces reside in the complexity of sounds captured in Smith’s framed experience, not in the superficiality of sumptuous setups. Aphoristically, one could say Smith’s complexity dwells in musical material and not in materialism.

In pieces such as *When Music is Missing, Music Sings* (a duet for percussionists performing found objects), Smith symbolically defies the frequent over-abundance of contemporary chamber music and its contrasting not uncommon intellectual superficiality. *When Music is Missing, Music Sings* is a co-existence piece, which means that the players should perform their parts as soloists without attempting to interact to each other. By calling for found objects, the piece is a shout against material slavery, whereas its complex rhythmic vocabulary and its co-existential language “teach freedom” (to borrow Ives’s words once again) through rhythmic complexity. The two percussion parts—rhythmically intricate, timbrally diverse, and performed soloistically—teach us that Transcendentalist oneness resides in the diversity of individualities.

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<sup>5</sup> Including *One for Syl* (1970), *The Links Series of Vibraphone Essays* (1974-75), *Links No.4 (Monk)* (1982), *Links No. 7 (New England Night Weave)* (1989), *Plenty* (2004), *The Lines of Ageing* (2007), *They Looked like Strangers* (2010), *New England* (2011), *The Starving Month* (2012), among many others.

Although not an emphasis in his work, Smith does sporadically attend to the exploration of extended techniques, but only when in service of instrumental simplicity. *Angels* (Smith 2007), another co-existence chamber piece, is an example in which a single category of instruments is explored maximally. In this percussion trio, each performer plays a set of three triangles and explores the timbral palette these instruments offer in three different ways. In the first movement, the triangles are set on muffling towels, which makes their sound decay quickly. In the second movement, performers hold the triangles while varying their timbres and pitches by submerging them into water buckets at different speeds, as indicated on the score. The action of striking and dunking the triangles in and out of the water in different ways produces timbral changes and pitch glissandi. In the third movement, the instruments are finally hung in the more traditional manner, although performers vary their timbres playing with different kinds of implements, including beaters built out of wire coat hangers. Figure 2 shows an excerpt of the piece's second moment. It shows how Smith explores the unusual timbral capacity of the triangles by asking the performers to dip them into a bucket of water in various ways (for instance, down, up, continuously, and rapidly on the surface):

### Movement II – Players 1 2 3

Player 2 solo

Trio

#### Notation for Movement II:

If there are no arrows before, or wavy lines after a note-head, strike the triangle while it is suspended in the water.

↑ = move the triangle up in the water per duration, after striking it.

↓ = move the triangle down in the water per duration, after striking it.

↓↑ = make the triangle glissando rapidly down and up once per duration.

~~~~ = after a note means to dip the triangle up and down continuously; the triangle is about 1/3 to 1/2 of its height in the water.

~~~~ = after a note means to play the triangle just above the water (not touching the water), dipping it onto the surface of the water up and down, going from just out of the water to the surface of the water.

⌋ = 0" – 3" pause within an event.

⌋⌋ = 0" – 5" pause between events.

Figure 2 – *Angels*, second movement, by Stuart Saunders Smith (Copyright Sonic Art Editions)

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*In Angels*, the exploration of extended techniques is not intended to emphasize "manner" over "substance;" rather, by utilizing a single type of instrument, the piece reveals an anti-materialism akin to that of *Songs I-IX*. *Angels* attends to Thoreauvian ideas because it shuns material surplus while praising the complex unity formed by three rhythmically intricate individual parts: it is simple in its resources and complex in its outcomes. By applying this "more with less principle," Smith hopes that pieces like *Angels* instill a spiritual, intellectual, and musical enrichment with the use of simple and few instruments: "The more with less principle leads to the spiritual/physical development of the percussionist's touch and musicality, not the

frantic acquisition and search for different and more percussion instruments." (Smith 1994b, 63). Pieces like *Angels* and *Songs I-IX* are Smith's statement against society's "unspiritual" consumerism, as the only enrichment his music seeks to inspire is that of the spirit. Conversely, "Percussion materialism is as spiritually bankrupt as rampant societal materialism" (Smith 1994b, 63).

### 3.2 Anti-technologism

Smith sees his use of irregular rhythms and complex polyrhythms—an essential part of his compositional identity—as a symbol of his distaste for technology and an endeavor to symbolize natural processes in his music<sup>6</sup>. As Smith and Goldstein (1998, 187) stated, "Smith is continually pushing the boundaries of rhythmic complexity, creating a highly personal rhythmic terrain—a synthesis of such fields as jazz, speech patterns, and nature." In fact, speech is in itself a natural process, and Smith states that the free rhythmic vocabulary of jazz resembles speech (Smith 2005, 58). But what is of interest here is the connection between his use of complex rhythms to the irregular rhythms in nature. Smith believes that rather than featuring perfect periodicity, the rhythms of nature are "organic" and not periodical: "Nature is organically predisposed to what is called irrational rhythms. That is the organic nature that music should try to emulate... The assembly line forces a human being at the assembly line to be nothing more than a robot" (Smith 2013a, n.p.). Therefore, Smith applies non-periodic rhythms with the intention to evade industrial-like rhythms in favor of an emphasis on organic or speech-like rhythms. Nature does "not repeat sixteenth notes," whereas industrial assembly lines recall the periodicity of drumbeats in minimalist, pop, and other kinds of music Smith considers "affirmational," i.e., music that merely reinstates what is already ingrained in the common sense (Smith 1984b, 280-281). Paraphrasing Smith, industrialization promotes the supremacy of automated behavior over free agency.

Figure 3 shows an excerpt of *...And Points North*, scored for solo speaking percussionist playing small instruments and found objects. The piece illustrates how Smith relates a naturalistic theme with his use of non-periodic rhythms and free rhythmic writing following the rhythms of the voice. In the program notes to the piece, Smith (1992) states he is inspired by the forests of Maine and further North, and "is about a heart in search of the spirit of the North."

Freethinking is for both Smith and Thoreau, central to their questioning of technological development and the depletion of nature that it causes. The uncritical acceptance of industrialization, on the other hand, synthesizes modern society's tendency for alienation, as Thoreau pointed out: "Men think that it is essential that the Nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour, without a doubt, whether they do or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain" (Thoreau 2006, 98-99). "Thoreau," Smith says, "was very critical of accepting... what technological change comes along, just accepting it. So, Thoreau is looking at the telegraph, 'is that something useful or not?' Maybe it was useful and Thoreau was wrong, but it does not really matter. The important thing was to look at it critically, not just to accept it. Time and time again Thoreau asked fundamentally radical questions" (Smith 2013a, n.p.). Therefore, for Smith, the questioning of technological advancements is also an exercise of thought autonomy. Smith assesses the quality of the output of composers of electronic music by questioning whether the capital spent on it is worthwhile or not: "I see all these fancy computers popping

<sup>6</sup> Amongst other motivations, noticeably the denial of war impetuses symbolized by the use of regular rhythms (akin to military marching).

up everywhere. Millions are spent on them but to what end? Too much computer composition seems like 'paint by numbers.' Does the quality of current computer art warrant the money, time and resources spent on it?" (Smith 1995, 322). Refusing to write for electronics, Smith would obviously answer this rhetorical question negatively. Both abjuring electronic music (by writing exclusively acoustic music) and eschewing the use of industrial-like rhythms are matters of refusing to submit to common sense.

Figure 3 – ... *And Points North*, Movement I (second page), by Stuart Saunders Smith (Copyright Sonic Art Editions)  
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Smith's focus on questioning technology, rather than merely antagonizing it—"The important thing was to look at it critically, not just to accept"—explains the apparent contradiction between his anti-technologism and his writing for the vibraphone. Although it takes a large industrial network to produce musical instruments like the vibraphone, the vibraphone has become part of who Smith is, since his youth years as a free jazz percussionist. The vibraphone has, therefore, left sound "imprints" in his inner listening<sup>7</sup>. When Smith writes for the vibraphone, he "speaks from within," to quote Emerson (1989, 395), or from his own filtered experience. By exclusively writing non-periodic acoustic music, Smith makes a statement: his music is a contribution to society because it reflects a denial of its pull towards industrialization. As an acoustic instrument, the vibraphone is also part of this context.

But Smith's refusal to write for electronics is also an attitude of placing the performance act in the forefront of the sound experience. He understands human touch as necessary to experiencing sound, as music is not a mere phenomenon. This perspective aligns to the core Emersonian idea of human precedence over natural phenomena—"dualism"—rather than to open-endedness:

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion on how Smith uses inner listening during his compositional process, refer to Lacerda (2012 and 2019).

Once the listener is acclimated to the sound of an instrument, the focus of the listening experience is in the actual playing (touching) and the 'music,' which is far more than the mere sound of an instrument. In general, the construction of instruments like keyboard-computer-synthesizers that offer a seemingly infinity of sound possibilities misse this point. The design of such keyboard-computer-instruments values sound over performance. (Smith 1993, 74).

When in this passage Smith highlights his disapproval for electronic technology, he also speaks for a precedence of humanly produced over electronically produced sounds. When music is intentionally performed (that is, with the input of the human intellect), it may be used as a catalyst of symbols or abstractions originating in the creative mind. Although nature provides an infinite palette of sounds, these will only constitute music if it features the intellectual participation of all: composer, performer, and audience. Smith's stance shows at once disapproval of both: electronic sounds and Cage's wish that sounds be "just sounds" and not "psychological" (Cage 1992, n.p.)

### 3.3 "The wise silence:" silence and co-existence in *To Freshen the Moment!*

*To Freshen the Moment!* (Smith 2009), a duet for vibraphone and violoncello, symbolizes the Transcendentalist idea of Over-Soul by equalizing the roles of composer, performer, and audience.

From attending Quaker meetings to his compositional process, silence is constantly present in Smith's life and work. As he composes, silence constitutes a mediator of intuition, as it gives the composer the opportunity to engage in inner listening. Smith sometimes uses expressions such as listening "to the inner" and "listening to the silence" interchangeably, as he states:

Music centered in listening, regardless of its notational strategies, is the disciplined development and exploration of the corporeal sound-imprint. Listening to the "inner" recognizes that the intelligence of sound leaves imprints—living sound fossils of fibrous roots infixed deep in restless twists, which can be mined by leaving the mind, by listening into the silence. Not the Cage silence of nonintention, but Norman O. Brown's "Silence is our mother tongue"—the silence of the abyss—the nothing. Out of inner silence comes of its own listening.

What is heard in such listening? The act of listening-silence mirrors the will to listen—a music of itself emerges. And all perception is at base listening. Listening is self. (Smith 1994a, 215).

Smith paraphrased the statement "silence mirrors the will to listen" from philosopher Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe to expose his own viewpoint on how inner listening works during his compositional process. In fact, the statement "silence mirrors the will to listen" implies that silence is a doorway to accessing inner listening, hence to the reminiscences of his vast personal listening experience: "living sound fossils of fibrous roots infixed deep in restless twists." His compositions, then, rise solely from a "transcription" of silence. "Listening to the silence" becomes another analogy on how the act of "listening" and framing the sounds that are ingrained in his creative mind is an essential part of his compositional process.

As a consequence of how Smith "listens to silence" to compose, silence also becomes essential in how the audience listens to his music: in short, the roles of the audience and composer are leveled. What I call Smith's "silence of intentionality" is key to understanding how his music catalyzes universal unity. As discussed in a previous article (see more details in Lacerda 2012, 44-45), John Cage's silence of non-intentionality in his 4'33" invites the audience to listen to ambient sounds, whereas Smith's silence invites the audience to listen to their inner sounds. During the silence, the audience members are given the space to be an active part of the musical experience by creating their own music. In the silent action of reflecting and "composing" personal music, the roles of composer and audience become one. Cage's silence is Buddhist; that is, it is a means of perception of the outer world. Smith's silence is Quaker; that is, it is a door of access to the inner world.

Silence has permeated Smith's entire output. Noticeably in his writings, the composer has often utilized signs such as dots to indicate silence, as shown in his essay *Composing Thoughts* (Smith 2014), stylistically written as a poem. These silences clearly have the same intention as his music's silence. Silence is there to give the audience "the occasion for a time, to create their own music as to connect sounds anew" (Smith 2010, n.p.). In his music, Smith utilizes conventional musical rests or caesuras to indicate the length of silences in seconds or minutes. *To Freshen the Moment!* features both kinds of silences: relatively long successions of quarter-note rests appear for both instruments throughout the piece; the latter type appears noticeably in the last movement of the piece which only consists of a sign indicating eighty-nine seconds of silence.

*To Freshen the Moment!* is a co-existence piece, meaning the parts should be played in a soloistic fashion and not attempt to interact—except for two sections in the third movement (which the composer understands as "cadences"). Throughout the piece, rests are used to establish phrases, add drama, and, most importantly, to deepen the piece's rhythmic intricacy, as instruments will most likely not reach and leave moments of rest simultaneously. Therefore, as a co-existence piece, *To Freshen The Moment!* carries out a kind of Transcendentalist respect of each instrumentalist as a free agent and possessor of divine worth. Except for two sections in the third movement, the piece does not use a conventional score, but only separate parts. For the next example (Figure 4), the first fourteen measures of each part were chosen to illustrate how, even though the pitch material shows similarities, the two parts are not meant to rhythmically interact. Rather, an intricate polyphony arises from the two concomitant soloistic performances and the already polyphonic vibraphone part (Figure 4).

For the entire duration of the sixth and last movement, the performers are asked to silently hold their last playing position. With this request, Smith puts clear boundaries between his introspective silence and the silence of non-intentionality of John Cage. This is a crucial instance of Smith's use of silence: performers are asked not to distract the audience from exercising inner listening to create their own music and participate in the compositional process. The audience becomes just as important as the composer and the performer. This equalization of roles is a typical case of how Smith's music constitutes a symbol of oneness. Reflected in the work itself, silence becomes important to both parts of the process. Silence is, therefore, important in both Smith's compositional act and in the act of the performance, because it gives the listeners a chance to create their own music. Figure 5 shows the last movement of *To Freshen The Moment!*. The silence starts after the sounds of the short fifth movement decay completely (Figure 5).



Figure 4 – *To Freshen the Moment!*, first 14 measures, by Stuart Saunders Smith (Copyright Sonic Art Editions)  
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Figure 5 – *To Freshen the Moment!*, fifth and sixth movements, by Stuart Saunders Smith (Copyright Sonic Art Editions)  
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But what if listeners silently reflect on *To Freshen the Moment!* and think that it is about circus clowns? Or what if they fall asleep? The listeners are obviously free to reflect on whatever suits them, but Smith expects the piece's unconventionality to guide them to musically aspire. He believes that everyone possesses the aural capability to perform such task, as long as the artists are "inviting to our audiences, not just assuming they will never understand... everyone can be a creative listener... Invite them to participate. Not to be acted

on, but to act. The audiences, if they have a chance, will love to be their own persons" (Smith 2013a, n.p.). In other words, Smith hopes that the piece becomes an "epiphany" like the flute sounds John Farmer heard in Thoreau's anecdote. Because *To Freshen the Moment!* "aspires" rather than "affirms," the audience is asked to do the same when they exercise inner listening to "connect sounds anew." Therefore, although the listener is free to think or meditate on anything the music suggests to them, he hopes that listeners will feel inspired to "compose" their own idiosyncratic music. Smith's trust that the audience is capable of actively using creative listening parallels Thoreau's idea that—being literate already—we need to look for profounder literature: "I think that having learned our letters we should read the best that is in literature, and not be forever repeating our a b abcs, and words of one syllable, in the fourth or fifth classes, sitting on the lowest and foremost form all our lives" (Thoreau 2006, 112). The silence in *To Freshen the Moment!*, therefore, opens doors not for the "abcs" of listening but for "aspirational" inner listening. In making a comparison to Cage's silence, *To Freshen the Moment!* guides the audience through the moments of silence, whereas Cage's music does not intend to do so. Rather, to think about circus clowns or to fall asleep would probably be acceptable during Cage's silence (in fact, some soft giggling and snoring sounds would most likely be welcome).

During the silence, when the audience is given the opportunity to aspire and join the compositional act, a symbolic oneness emerges. In fact, Emerson relates silence to the idea of a universal spirit by referring to the Over-Soul as "the wise silence" (Emerson 1989, 399). Oneness exists after the fact, as it did for Emerson; silence is one of Smith's crucial paths to convey oneness. Smith is openly spiritual in his attitude toward musical silence: "Silence in my music gives the listener an opportunity to both imagine their own music in that space as well as give the divine a space to dwell" (Smith 2010, n.p.). For Smith, through silence, not only do the composer and the audience unify roles but also "something divine happens"—a sort of Emersonian construct implying that this bondage is also spiritual. Referring to this spiritual bondage, Smith claims that his piece *Links No. 6* "embraces silence so that something spiritual can happen" (Hess 2009, 212). There is clear connection with the "something spiritual"—leading silence and the Quaker use of silence to facilitate the manifestation of the Inner Light. In Smith's music this "something spiritual" is symbolized by the leveling of audience, composer, and performer rolls, representing oneness. By ending *To Freshen the Moment!* with a movement composed entirely of silence, Smith shows that silence is spiritual and central to his music.

#### 4. Final thoughts

Although there is a precedence of Smith's creative mind in his compositional process, he does invite the audience to think freely through active listening. Because his process is primarily guided by intuition, "inner listening" plays the important role of letting his experience speak through itself. On the other hand, "getting out of the way" and "listening to the sound's intelligence" also play important roles, as they are his approaches to exercising self-abnegation and solitude: "I try to be empty when I create so the message is pure, and not from me" (Smith 2010, n.p.). When Smith says that he wants the message not to be from him, he means that he does not want ego or conditioning to speak. Rather, only intuition should "speak," so that the piece arises naturally.

For Smith, solitude, as a means for self-development, walks hand in hand with social awareness, because one needs to improve oneself in order to make society better. As Thoreau said, quoting Confucius: "Love virtue and the people will be virtuous" (Thoreau 2006, 188). Therefore, this kind of isolation must obviously not be confused with selfishness. Rather, it leads to self-abnegation, because one who finds completeness

in oneself feels no need to exploit. Selfishness, on the other hand, brings lust for exterior approval; that is, success. The isolation Smith upholds is antithetical to selfishness, as it assists—paradoxically or not—one to become self-abnegating because the one who finds completeness in oneself feels no need to exploit.

The precedence of Smith's creative mind in his compositional process, should likewise not be confused with selfishness, as Smith does invite the audience to be free thinkers through active listening. Because his process is primarily guided by intuition, "inner listening" plays the important role of letting his experience speak through itself. Conversely, writing music intentionally aiming for success would be for Smith a reflection of societal values like overworking, over-consuming, and the need for technological advancements, which were only achieved through the depletion of nature. As a believer in the presence of an Inner Light or any form of oneness that bonds all life existent in the universe, Smith then has the duty of avoiding the depletion of the universe, as expressed in his anti-materialism and anti-technologism. Rather than depleting, Smith should *add* to the universe by exercising freethinking. These are values present in the discourse of both the Transcendentalists and Smith. In his compositional process, Smith surrenders to the self-abnegating condition of disregarding success, conveying stances like anti-materialism and anti-technologism, and by consequence writing music that allows for transcendence.

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