

# Unofficial Release

## A Guide to the World of Homemade Audio, 1980s-Present

Edited by Thomas Bey William Bailey

Since the alleged triumph of technologically-aided “alternative” communication networks beginning with the Punk era, we have been told that the means of music creation have been wrested from the profit-motivated oligarchy of the recording industry and handed down to a multi-national, ideologically diverse body of free-thinking individuals. With everything from multi-track recording capabilities to professional graphic design suites now available to a greater number of consumers than ever, the chance to express oneself musically –and to distribute those expressions to a select audience- is never too far out of reach. But has the war for true self-expression, free from the dictates of market forces and public opinion, really been won, or is it just beginning? The world of ‘independent music’ has expanded to the point where it now has its own self-appointed censors and autocrats mandating rigid guidelines for ‘acceptability’, with a monopoly on aesthetics that sometimes exceeds even that of the cultural mainstream (a single magazine often acts as the main interpreter and kingmaker of new, modern music.) New forms of anti-utilitarian elitism have arisen within the independent music world and thrown all dissenting opinions into a catch-all container labeled “outsider audio.” Meanwhile, the ongoing privatization of public space makes it more difficult to produce the social energy needed to maintain a cohesive ‘scene,’ leading to the importance of digital-era ‘non-places.’ As the global economy also reels from manufactured economic panics and from resource-related anxiety, the question once again arises- how many people *really* have access to the means of music creation?

This book aims to explore those elements within independent music that have successfully developed and maintained their own communication networks, without official approval or representation by either commercial media or an already established “avant-garde” critical community. Tape trading, CD-recordable releases, internet-only releases and other “unofficial” forms of distribution have become an increasingly utilized outlet for those whose economic realities and ideological idiosyncrasies frustrate their ability to reach like minds with their sound. This book will attempt to catalog the many sub-movements within this larger movement of home-replicated media, taking note of the widely varying motives behind the creation and dissemination of their work.

“Unofficial Release” will contain a number of essays and ‘oral histories’ by sound artists and musicians with intimate knowledge of home-made media. Questions to be answered will include (but not necessarily be limited to) the following:

- In what circumstances do artists turn to home recording, rather than waiting for the opportunity to utilize ‘pro’ media for their works?
- What advantages do ‘small run’ media have over mass-produced music media, both for their producers and their consumers?
- How effective is home-made sound for circumventing bans by State authorities and other repressive bodies?
- What causes some artists to make such prolific use of this media (sometimes releasing dozens of cassettes, CD-rs etc. in a single year?)
- The *objet d’art* release: using visual media, what have artists done to make homemade music releases more than ‘just’ storage media for audio information?
- Is a home-made music release more ‘authentic’ than a mass-produced one, and are the creators of ‘unofficial’ releases always immune from elitism?
- Has the ‘unmediated’ phenomenon of tape-trading and internet music distribution blurred boundaries of class, race and gender, or has it reinforced previously-existing prejudices?
- Beyond music: what kinds of other audio information can be conveyed through home-made media, since there is no obligation to record works of a musical nature?

I am now accepting proposals for essays to be included in this book, as well as setting up personal interviews with artists working in the audio field. Any interested parties should email me at [niflheim.thom@gmail.com](mailto:niflheim.thom@gmail.com) or contact me via Skype (user name: niflheim.thom.)

All efforts will be made to publish this on a high-quality publisher of books dealing with media studies, otherwise (true to the subject at hand!) I will self-publish this on my own ‘[Editions Belsona](#)’ imprint.

Thank you for your consideration!,  
Thomas Bey William Bailey