Decolonizing Sound: Experimenting Otherness in the 1960s and 2010s

Thesis

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by

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PREFACE

From Oppositional Consciousness: Empowering People of Color

The idea for this thesis first came about following a conversation I had with India Cooke concerning racism on the Mills College campus and how difficult it is for both gendered (meaning non-cismen[1]) people and people of color to find visibility, support and solidarity in the music department, especially at the graduate and faculty level. It is important for me to mention the systematic issues that exist globally exist everywhere. As pertains to my experiences, it is important to address issues at an individual and community level if we are to address systemic issues. Neither can happen separately; both systematic change and personal/communal change must happen simultaneously. That being said, I was thankful to find India as an ally, not only as a member of the faculty who also must parse through this terrain, but also as an inspirational force in the new music community.[2]

When she offered me the opportunity to present in her class, I realized that I didn't feel qualified or able to present these ideas on my own. This anxiety around opening

[1] Cis is short for cisgender defined as: denoting or relating to a person whose self-identity conforms with the gender that corresponds to their biological sex; not transgender.
[2] This text is a transcription from a talk with Zachary James Watkins and Marshall Trammell on April 28th, 2014 at Mills College. This talk was in conjunction with India Cooke's African American Studies course and her event series *Patterns.* There was an improvised performance between Zach, Marshall, and myself to precede the talk. We also had a survey we handed out to the attendees that can be found in the appendix. Our collective is called Oppositional Consciousness and seeks to use creative music as a decolonial aesthetic and mode of resistance that can be used in material struggle.

up these conversations is part of the struggle we face. It is dangerous to speak out. It is dangerous to attempt to be visible because most everyone else in the world has not seen you. One of the greatest difficulties we have as gendered people and people of color is to harness the ability to take agency within our own practice and redefine the ways in which we are perceived.

The main question I have is a question I surround myself with everyday: why is this work important? Not why is this political work important, although that is a question too, but why is having an art practice important, an art music practice, and what value does it serve to our communities? I believe there is magic in the subversive and that to some extent this level of experimentation still remains untapped by capitalism's claws. It is magic in that it is not yet viable under capitalism. Yet throughout history, the people we learn about in classical music, contemporary music, new music, and art music are white men, and in some cases, white women, as if the techniques that most of the white men and women have adopted (especially today) haven't been appropriated from global cultures that have been colonized and massacred by white people throughout history. And in all that, how often do we acknowledge where our ancestral music comes from? For example, how often do we talk about the history of the samples that are taken in some contemporary electronic pieces? And when we do talk about it, what analysis is associated with that? There's a vulnerability I feel in even asking these questions because they are so hot. They seem "inflammatory" and dramatic in the institutional

setting, but I say this to remind myself that these feelings are part of the silencing process as well.

What are we doing to bring up these conversations? How pertinent are they in creating our art, and what purpose does our art serve in that? Does our music create change in its existence? I think it can, but I look to you to find what makes the existence of an art object by a person of color, a gendered person of color, a queer gendered person of color, significant.

I spoke of George Lewis at the last Oppositional Consciousness while he visited us at Mills College for a short period of time. He spoke of the problem of representation, and I want to mention this again because I think it's really important. I don't know what my music is supposed to look like, being a gendered brown weirdo that could pass as Muslim or Hispanic, but is really Bengali with very conservative Indian parents, who grew up listening to and hating classical Indian music, and instead embraced Mariah Carey, and harsh noise, and funk and old school, and whatever else. I was only able rediscover and embrace the music of my ancestors when achieving autonomy outside the context of family. As a queer woman of color with learning disabilities, my diaspora appears in very nuanced ways. I do not fit into the prescription of a model minority, as I should with my perceived race. So what does it mean to create a language for myself outside of the languages and identities I've been assigned and which I have adopted? What does it really mean to redefine and deconstruct identity in a highly gendered and racialized world? For me, it means

creating a new language through sound that is outside of pop music and outside of western classical music, and outside of traditional south Asian music. My language utilizes the tools of these other languages, but it has reassigned them in a different way. I think this is the importance of art and experimentation — to be able to create something unique for expression outside the systems of oppression we live in.

So, I listen to whatever I listen to now, but that doesn't translate my diasporic experience or what that experience is. Zachary James Watkins and Marshall Trammell and I were talking about this concerning some other spaces. For instance, a black man "should" be playing Jazz music, and that is the identity that has been put upon them, but why is that? There is a brain behind that and there are other experiences within that. I want to be analyzing these things and think about making new rules for our selves in the time that we live in. There are less than a handful of people who look like me (women of color with not light skin) or even have my skin color, that are doing experimental electronic music or other forms of creative music in my program at Mills College. That is not to say that they don't exist, but their relevance is not that of John Cage, or Pauline Oliveros, et al. This is doubly surprising because in the contemporary music world, these people who are the champions of our musical understandings are primarily appropriating from the music of our ancestors: they are taking techniques from east Asia, south Asia, the Middle East, Africa and South America. I've realized that most of the women of color I do know of participating in more out music/experimental music scenes are those in my community. So most of the folks who are doing this work are in my age group and in

the bay area. This is significant also; there are not really mentors or elders for us to look up to in this landscape, and those who can be our mentors, those who have set up this way of understanding our compositional architecture are primarily white folks who have predominantly appropriated and taken techniques and spirituality from the non-Western cultures. This is virtually another form of colonization. This makes me believe that it is our responsibility to build a new language and skillset around our practices that is intentional and mindful of our political place in this system.

To be clear, I do not wish to spend my time here proving that certain people revered in experimental music are racist and I do not wish to further prove that the craft that I participate in, that is, creative music and electronic music, are sexist. For me, this is obvious, and it will never ever be possible to truly convey the experience of those oppressions to the white man who reads these pages. It is obvious that the social and economic factors that marginalize and capitalize upon the female body, the idea of the feminine, the colored person, the other, and that body's desire for social equity result in a devastating gendered oppression that systematically erases women from history and represses women into submission. That said, I do wish to identify the ways in which otherness is a central part in creating the avant-garde, and show that the practice of decolonial aesthetics is necessary in deconstructing dominant musical cultures.

Two More Things

1: I want to emphasize this thing of nuance. I've talked about race and gender, and not a lot about class, and I worry that in these conversations the nuance when talking about race and gender and class is thrown out the window in lieu of solidarity and empowerment. I think it's really important to find power in our differences and in our ability to be allies for one another in different ways. I am not black, and my skin color elicits certain oppression in America, yet my ethnicity and perceived race also allows me some privileges. Zach and Marshall are cis-men, and so they are free from certain types of gendered oppressions, yet are also subject to the overt state violence that targets black men in this country. Obviously, this is the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Nuance is something to meditate on, and I want to encourage that the conversation about what intricate differences in racial oppression really look like. I also want to mention that these differences can also be a means of solidarity, and we need to have compassion for ourselves and our brothers and sisters when dealing with the vulnerabilities that come with talking about these issues. We talk about these problems so we can release them and come up with ways to be better together.

2: George Lewis also speaks of improvisation as a tool for understanding greater systems of community organizing and life in general. Zach and Marshall were saying something, in response to my anxiety about playing with the two of them, about how our improvisation was not going to be this project of all of us playing together, but

each solo vernacular/language was going to have a conversation with one another, and our job is to see where the conversations go. I'm interested in what dynamics play out within us, but I'm also really interested in encouraging improvisation as a tool for exploring our identities and our relationships. What does listening look like for you? What does playing look like for you? What processes are intuitive and what processes need attention. Is the attention difficult, useful, both?

INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to argue towards three ideals. 1: Creative music is a means towards liberation. 2: We must be critical in our practices of creative music to fully determine who is highlighted and who benefits. 3: We must be critical of how the means of production in music directly affect accessibility and how that accessibility is contingent on a capitalist force. I aim to show that creative music is a means towards liberation through emphasizing musical moments that coincide with political moments. The examples that will be discussed are the Art Ensemble of Chicago in conjunction with the Chicago Freedom Movement[3] and the underground experimental music (both electronic and otherwise) scene surrounding Occupy Oakland.[4] While this thesis cannot examine every facet of capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy in its relation to musical and political events, we hope to

[3] Chicago Freedom Movement lasted from mid-1965 to 1967 and is credited to the 1968 Fair Housing Act

[4] Occupy Oakland lasted from August 2011 to March 2012 and began as an offshoot of Occupy Wall Street

investigate and illuminate some connections while underlining methods that artists have used to overcome these systems of oppression.

With this work, I hope to develop a perspective that emphasizes the method of new creative music practice in conjunction with revolutionary ideals outside of the white supremacist framework. In the words of Anthony Braxton in his *Tri-Axium Writings*: "If many of the problems we are dealing with in this time zone directly relate to the inability of western culture to provide the proper ethical and spiritual dictates necessary for culture, then the restoration of creativity can be viewed as the first step towards re-establishing positive change."[5] This thesis is analyzing the processes that keep marginalized bodies out of creative music contingencies and underscores the bodies that break through despite these systems of subjugation.

The Role of Creative Music in Political Uprising or How to Make a Dragon out of a Raging Fire

In 2013, I am on tour with a group of self-identified womyn of color. All of us are transitioning from one mode of existence to another, sharing our music across the South with the hopes of being heard and inspiring others to be seen. In some spaces we are the only people with pigmented skin in the room; in others we are surrounded by people of all shades and sizes, bearing torn jeans, glittered cheeks, and a need for revolution in their eyes. My tour mates are screaming saturated under layers and

[5] Anthony Braxton, *Tri-axium Writings*, vol. 1, series 1 (San Francisco: Synthesis Music, 1985), 86.

layers of noise and synth beats, speaking of struggles of queers and people of color. The room is participating with this moment in a slow rocking, a communal movement. We feel as though we are participating in something bigger, until the set ends and we pack up to move on to the next city. We are participating in the aftermath of Occupy Oakland. We are looking for something beyond ourselves to validate our experiences. We are looking for solidarity among our peers and searching for something that can be legitimately called a safe space. We are in what many people are calling "the lull." We are in the moments between actions, the time between the communes, waiting for the next call for revolution. We are tired and broke. We are frustrated and ignored. We are awaiting the next moment of violence. We are gestating. We are approaching the threshold. We are ready to fight back.

Throughout the twentieth century we have seen a curious and pertinent correlation between great moments of discontent and great moments of artistic renaissance. This is no coincidence; the relationship is simple. Political repression, economic inequality, institutional violence, lack of public resources, and social conservatism all result in a communal suffering so immense that there is no choice for the masses but to revolt, either through material resistance or through art. The artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have led these moments of revolt by means of critique and creation. Dating as early as the post World War I Weimar period, the avant-garde emerged as the mystics of their time, foretelling the rise of the Nazi

Party as imminent totalitarian fascism.[6] Creative music, since, has played a particularly prominent role in trends of political uprising. Sound, in this paradigm, has served as a resource in creating spaces, is simultaneously creating and defined by context, and is presented as means of liberation and fostering community.

Still, in times of immense struggle, the avant-garde and DIY communities around music have come together to create new spaces of enrichment, education, and art. While the public spaces of political resistance are brimming with visible protests, riots, rallies, speeches, and now twitter hash-tags and viral videos, the communities of creative music work in the underground, creating solidarity in subterranean venues just outside of society's view. The venue, thus, has become a place to create political resistance. The sounds created and the bodies that produce those sounds catalyze a political space. A backyard show is at once a place to present work, to express ideological views, to receive support, and to fundraise for the next action. Author Gaye Theresa Johnson argues:

> When conservative economic policies produce joblessness, poverty, and declining infrastructure, an outsider's observation of a low-income neighborhood may yield only the most obvious indicators of economic inequality. It may be impossible to see how a dilapidated backyard becomes a weekly venue for music performances or how a discarded industrial warehouse can become an unauthorized cultural center.[7]

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[6] Bärbel Schrader and Jürgen Schebera, *The "Golden" Twenties: Art and Literature in the Weimar Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 12-25.
[7] Gaye Theresa Johnson. "Teeth-Gritting Harmony": Punk, Hip-Hop, and Sonic Spatial Politics," in *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 135.

The venues she speaks of are unformulated zones that serve as both sanctuaries and organizing spaces. These spaces are contingent on reproducing the warriors of class, race, and gender war. The rejection of the artist as a feasible participant of the working class in the capitalist society has created a definitive movement of the artist from the neoliberal rhetoric of upward mobility toward the liberatory rhetoric of revolution.[8] Conversely, the people's struggle and the lower-class laborers have historically come together around modes of improvisation and community music making to find safety, solidarity, and communities of resistance.[9] In the slave era of the United States and elsewhere, for example, traditional African lullabies or improvised freedom songs served as the only means of comfort in times of great suffering.[10]

Each instance of music making produces a unique combination of forums and forms that I have termed the "musical moment." Although music does not necessarily serve as a tool for liberation *in its essence*, the musical moment *can* serve as a liberation tool and as a setting for resistance in its mode and context. It can serve as a method of identification, division, and categorization as well as a means of

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[8] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on art and literature*. (Columbia University Press, 1993), 66–87.
[9] George E. Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives," *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (1996):94, doi:10.2307/779379; Deborah Anne. Wong, *Speak It Louder: Asian Americans Making Music* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
[10] Although her book focuses on the Caribbean, Bush refers to slavery throughout the West, in Europe, the United States, and the Caribbean.; Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Kingston: Heinemann Publishers (Caribbean), 1990), 4-15.

unification, community building, and even transcendence.[11] Its role is elusive, nebulous, and because of this, enchanting in its relation to human experience and societal formation.

Some of the other questions to consider throughout this thesis include: What allows for these spaces of musical movement to exist? What role did these musical communities have in the greater political scheme? In what ways can these new forms of musical expression be seen as moments of resistance? How does the context of these moments of creative expression serve as a model for the corresponding political and social struggle? While all of these questions cannot necessarily be answered within the scope of this paper, I seek to use these questions to form a critical analysis of race, gender, class and sexuality within these musical-political moments.

Battles Between Social Movements: What It Is Not

The following section examines a convoluted dichotomy between "popular" and "creative" music that I feel is important to unpack.[12] Adorno has defined the distinction between the popular and the creative in the past as "Popular Music" and

[11] Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3-21.

[12] Here we define Creative Music through the lens of the Association of the Advancement of Creative Musicians, where Creative Music is seen as an exploration of music that necessarily coincides with the context of the musician.

"Serious Music" implying that one is less valid or legitimate than the other.[13] I want to move away from defining these two terms as mutually exclusive, as popular music can be creative and a creative musician can seek to be popular. Rather, I choose to define this dichotomy as one that is distinguished predominantly by access.

Despite that both creative music and popular music often help define political movements, history chooses to highlight certain songs as anthems for eras. When the political moment is linked with a musical moment it is often under the pretense that it must be widely accessible in order to be accessible at all. There is a question amongst my political community who define themselves as musicians: why is it that bringing creative music into political spaces is met with such resistance amongst activists, particularly activists of color? While some might say that creative music is an elitist niche, I would argue these attractions and aversions to popular and "unpopular" music need to be considered through a lens that holds capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy as the foundational heart of the problem. When this music often is created by those who seek to oppress us, why is it that we still use them to represent, or even, define the spaces we choose to call political?

To investigate these questions we must strive to determine whether creative music is even outside of these aforementioned realms of capitalism. Creative music is still, undeniably, defined by capitalism, if only in that everything in our society is defined by capitalism. Cornelius Cardew speaks of this in his book *Stockhausen Serves*

[13] Theodor W. Adorno and E. B. Ashton, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 21.

Imperialism:

> In bourgeois society, the artist is in the employ of capitalists (publishers, record companies), who demand from him work that is, at least potentially, profitable. And ultimately he is in the employ of the bourgeois state, which demands that the artist's work be ideologically acceptable. Since the state controls our main organ of mass communication, the BBC, it can determine whether or not a work will be profitable by exercising its censorship.[14]

Thus the popular here will be defined as simply that which is accessible to the mainstream culture. It is that which is commodified and often is created for the sole purpose of commodity advertisement. It is communicated widely across national borders and is public. The creative, alternatively, walks between a public and private landscape. It, at times, reaches many. It, at times, only reaches the creator. Sometimes it is defined within an academic setting. Sometimes it is people's music; it is created in bedrooms and taken to the community to facilitate gathering. Creative music, further, is created by challenge, as a site of opposition. Practitioners of creative music can define success on their own terms without necessarily reaching a wide audience. Reception is not necessary for the existence of creative music. Milton Babbitt, in his article *Who Cares If You Listen?* claims:

> "… if this music is not supported, the whistling repertory of the man in the street will be little affected, the concert going activity of the conspicuous consumer of musical culture will be little disturbed. But music will cease to evolve, and, in that important sense, will cease to live."[15]

This of course does not represent practitioners of creative music as a whole and, on the contrary, many practitioners do feel that their music is indeed a mechanism for

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[14] Cornelius Cardew, "Introduction," in *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism; and Other Articles: With Commentary and Notes* (London: Latimer, 1974), 5.
[15] Milton Babbitt, "Who Cares If You Listen?" in *High Fidelity* (Harvard, 1958), 38-40.

societal transformation. Despite there being many disagreements regarding the context and purpose of creating experimental music, it can be said that there is a distinction between popularity and success for creative musicians.

The popular music dichotomy, on the other hand, requires a context of mass production to exist. As soon as it enters into the atmosphere as a commodified object, produced by mass forces, it becomes not only complicit in capitalist production, but a tool of that. *Both* of these categories can be seen as music of movements. Bob Dylan's folk tunes defined an era of resistance, as did gospel improvisations within the Black church.[16] The significance of this dichotomy, then, is not in the usefulness of the music in a political environment; rather, it is in the difference in the means of production and value of reception.

The dichotomy that is presented is often assumed to be contradictory, but the terms are in fact only different in that they operate on varying levels of complicit subjugation. The dichotomy can be further demonstrated by the interpretations of music and context by the two authors Pieter Van Den Toorn and Mao Zedong. In *Politics, Music, and the Academy,* Pieter Van Den Toorn emphasizes the ways in which the political and the musical cannot intersect.[17] Mao Zedong, in his *Talks,* emphasizes the opposite.[18] He argues that art is inherently political in that it cannot

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[16] William G. Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 11.
[17] Van Den Toorn Pieter C., *Music, Politics, and the Academy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 14.
[18] Bonnie S. McDougall and Mao Zedong, "Mao Zedong's: Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art: A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary." (lecture, Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1980).

contextualize itself. His question is concerned with how and where is it politicized. Musicians and sound artists, thus, have consistently put themselves into two camps. One is that of the political musician, whose art is related to struggle and power, and the other is in a hypothetical purely musical artist who supposedly makes art for art's sake.[19]

Political communities in the United States continue to be drawn to that which is reproduced, commodified, and popular. In many cases such as with NWA and Public Enemy, the popular is grown from creative roots. It is formed in community or as a site of opposition and then later grown into an accessible form through the capitalist machine that is later used as a means to further control the masses. So, why is it that Malcolm X chooses to define his struggle with the music of Duke Ellington and not the Art Ensemble of Chicago, when the latter managed to break all barriers between art, theatre, race and time? Why is it that Occupy Oakland chose to be defined by Rihanna's "We Found Love" instead of Sun Ra? Some thoughts around the accessibility of rhythm, which is also racialized and gendered, come up, but ultimately, these questions are beyond the scope of this thesis. I bring them up because I find it important to keep them in mind throughout this text.

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[19] I would argue that the purely musical camp does not exist. There is always a context for a musician, even if it is limited to the space, body and time period that the musical moment exists in.

CHICAGO 1960s

The Color of Sound: Black Spirits and Brown Noise in the 1960s

> "There is no such thing as Art for Art's Sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics." – Mao Zedong[20]
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> "One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." – W.E.B. Du Bois[21]

The 1960s, with the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King Jr., the Black Panther Party, the shift in Civil Rights emphasis to Black Nationalism, and the coinciding demise of the colonial hold on over 100 countries around the world, is known as one of the most socially and politically liberatory moments in history.[22] Musically, this became the time in which alternative methods of creating, listening, and performing music took the Western world by storm. Both the avant-garde and popular culture emerged with new means of creating music and listening. Eastern influences and synthesizer music became increasingly accessible. The marriage of Yoko Ono and John Lennon symbolized a merging of the musical underground and the popular culture. Likewise, the political and the cultural became intertwined. Revolution meant experimenting with art forms and social forms, sexual forms and political forms. In this section, we will examine the specific intersection between the social movements of the Chicago Freedom Movement and

[20] Zedong, *Talks,* 15 Full citation the first time
[21] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1961), 45.
[22] Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues,* 1–20.

musical movement of The Art Ensemble of Chicago (AEC) and the great Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). Because these latter groups were encompassed within a greater political moment that can retrospectively be understood to have been male-dominated, this portion focuses on the racial and economic implications of their work.

The members of the AEC resisted in several ways. They morphed and extended ideas of identity through exploration with presentation via creative costuming. They extended the means and parameters of performance by expanding on ancient, current, classical, and avant-garde musical techniques. They created a co-operative means of distribution and self-sustainability for themselves. They created their own community of audiences that rejected the music industry. To fully understand the way in which the Art Ensemble revolutionized creative music as a means of resistance, we must first understand the historical context, musical context and political context of the era in which they existed. Within this examination, I hope to illuminate ways that white supremacy, orientalism, and fetishization manifested within this avant-garde modality.

The Chicago Freedom Movement and The Art Ensemble of Chicago

In 1966 the AEC united via the AACM in order to create a system that was an alternative to the arrangements of communal music (such as Jazz and bebop) that

were accessible at that time.[23] The Art Ensemble of Chicago was comprised of Roscoe Mitchell and Joseph Jarman on saxophone, Lester Bowie on trumpet, and Malachi Favors on bass. In 1967 Philip Wilson also joined them as a drummer for a brief time. Famoudouh Don Moye later connected with the group and became the AEC's long-term percussionist.[24] These were not the only instruments they played; the Art Ensemble was known for playing multiple instruments. Jarman and Mitchell explored a range of instruments including alto and tenor saxophone, bass saxophone, flutes, and clarinets. Everyone in the group experimented with percussion. Lester Bowie, in addition to the trumpet, also played flugelhorn, cornet, shofar and conch shells. Over the years, most of the musicians experimented with text, electronics, piano, percussion, found objects, synthesizers, and more.[25]

Historical Context

The 1960s was the crux of the Great Migration to Chicago.[26] The Great Migration historically refers to the period of time after the civil war up until the Civil Rights Movement reached its peak and refers specifically to the migration of African Americans from the southern United States to Chicago to escape Jim Crow laws.[27] By 1970, blacks made up 33% of the population; whereas blacks in Chicago prior to

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[23] Ronald M. Radano, "Jazzin' the Classics: The AACM's Challenge to Mainstream Aesthetics," *Black Music Research Journal* 12, no. 1 (1992): 79-95, doi:10.2307/779283.
[24] "Art Ensemble Of Chicago Website," Art Ensemble Of Chicago Website, Main Page, accessed November 03, 2014, http://artensembleofchicago.com/ (access date).
[25] The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "Art Ensemble of Chicago (American Jazz Group)." Encyclopedia Britannica Online.
[26] James Grossman, "Great Migration," Great Migration, History, accessed November 03, 2014, http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/545.html
[27] Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1991).

the migration were only 2% of the population.[28] Because of this, by the time the AACM and the AEC began developing their practices in the mid 1960s, segregation was a prominent issue in Chicago. Although communities were vibrant and operated very cooperatively,[29] the resources available for the communities were limited and the south side of Chicago was systematically transformed into slums.[30] It can be speculated that this was a significant reason for why Martin Luther King aimed his sights on Chicago as the next site for the Civil Rights crusade.

Musical Context

The musical environment between 1965 and 1967, the time that the AEC was developing its foundation, was nebulous in its ouput, but overwhelmingly "pop heavy." In contrast to (or maybe because of) the heavy political action that was happening around the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, the pop charts were filled with "feel good" songs, including such classics as "We Can Work It Out" by the Beatles and "Good Vibrations" by the Beach Boys (*see Fig. 1).*

[28] James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
[29] Roscoe Mitchell, "Art Ensemble of Chicago," interview by author, August 11, 2014.
[30] "Chicago to Be Target of Massive Freedom Movement," *The Bulletin* (Bend, Oregon), January 8, 1966, 28th ed., Front Page sec.

The Hot 100 - 1966 Archive

ISSUE DATE	SONG	ARTIST
January 01	The Sound Of Silence	Simon & Garfunkel
January 08	We Can Work It Out	The Beatles
January 15		
January 22	The Sound Of Silence	Simon & Garfunkel
January 29	We Can Work It Out	The Beatles
February 05	My Love	Petula Clark
February 12		
February 19	Lightnin' Strikes	Lou Christie
February 26	These Boots Are Made For Walkin'	Nancy Sinatra
March 05	The Ballad Of The Green Berets	SSgt Barry Sadler
March 12		
March 19		
March 26		
April 02		
April 09	(You're My) Soul And Inspiration	The Righteous Brothers
April 16		
April 23		
April 30	Good Lovin'	The Young Rascals
May 07	Monday, Monday	The Mamas & The Papas
May 14		
May 21		
May 28	When A Man Loves A Woman	Percy Sledge
June 04	Paint It, Black	The Rolling Stones
June 11		
June 18		
June 25	Paperback Writer	The Beatles
July 02	Strangers In The Night	Frank Sinatra
July 09	Paperback Writer	The Beatles
July 16	Hanky Panky	Tommy James And The Shondells
July 23		
July 30	Wild Thing	The Troggs
August 06	Summer In The City	The Lovin' Spoonful
August 13		
August 20		
August 27		
September 03	Sunshine Superman	Donovan
September 10	You Can't Hurry Love	The Supremes
September 17		
September 24	Cherish	The Association
October 01		
October 08		
October 15	Reach Out I'll Be There	Four Tops
October 22		
October 29	96 Tears	? (Question Mark) & The Mysterians
November 05	Last Train To Clarksville	The Monkees
November 12	Poor Side Of Town	Johnny Rivers
November 19	You Keep Me Hangin' On	The Supremes
November 26		
December 03	Winchester Cathedral	The New Vaudeville Band
December 10	Good Vibrations	The Beach Boys
December 17	Winchester Cathedral	The New Vaudeville Band
December 24		
December 31	I'm A Believer	The Monkees

Fig 1.0: Billboard Hot 100 from 1966 filled with pop songs.[31]

Whereas the sixties are infamous for being the era of psychedelic music, free love, and radical social movement, the charts show us a very different story. The political songs of Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Marvin Gaye, Aretha Franklin, and many others are considered the musical staples of the 60s, but the dominant musical hits of the 60s still consisted of love songs and anthems purporting positivity. Alternatively, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and the Black Panthers were rallying their

[31] "The Hot 100 - 1966 Archive | Billboard Charts Archive." Billboard. Accessed November 3, 2014. <http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1966/hot-100>.

respective communities around gospel songs in the church and Jazz greats such as Duke Ellington, John Coltrane, and Ella Fitzgerald.[32]

Malcolm X in particular was a huge proponent of Jazz as a liberatory and separatist tool. In his book, *A Power Stronger Than Itself,* George Lewis quotes Malcolm X saying:

> The white musician can jam if he's got some sheet music in front of him. He can jam on something he's heard jammed before. But the black musician, he picks up his horn and starts bowing some sounds that he never thought of before. He improvises, he creates, it comes from within. It's his soul; it's that soul music…He will improvise; he'll bring it from within himself. And this is what you and I want. You and I want to create and organization that will give us so much power we can sit and do as we please.[33]

While Duke Ellington was known as a key musical representative of the Civil Rights Movement, the AACM and Art Ensemble of Chicago directly intersected with the Chicago Freedom Riots in a different way, creating tangible community via new forms and languages. Ellington defined black music as being formulated via "sorrows" of the people.[34] The Art Ensemble, conversely, was formed around community and creativity.

> The AEC was formed at a critical point in American history, musical and otherwise, during a decade when, more than ever before, African Americans were emphatically shaking off the restrictive trap-pings of "colonization" and insisting on living and working according to their own lights… Among

[32] Roscoe Mitchell, "Art Ensemble of Chicago," interview by author, August 11, 2014.
[33] Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary: Speeches, Interviews, and a Letter by Malcolm X,* ed. George Breitman (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 63-64. cited in George Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 97.
[34] Kevin Gaines, "Duke Ellington and the Cultural Politics of Race," in *Music and the Racial Imagination*, ed. Ronald Michael. Radano and Philip Vilas. Bohlman, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 585-687.

> activists of the time, "jazz" was understood as a label given by the white mainstream to an expression that had been hopelessly diluted and commercialized, a label that failed to bring credit to the music's creators.[35]

The AACM and the Black Panther party at similar temporal beginnings, both organizations taking off circa 1965. In 1966, the Civil Rights movement, publicly "led" by Dr. Martin Luther King began to focus on Chicago as its next stop for resistance. King spoke directly to the segregation issue in Chicago as a phenomenon of economic exploitation.

> The Slums in Chicago are a prototype of those chiefly responsible for the Northern urban race problem, [Martin Luther King] listed the public and private fields that will come under strongest attack as education, real estate, building trade unions, banks, mortgage houses, the courts, the police, and politics.[36]

Given the state of devastation for blacks in south-side Chicago both economically and socially, the community served as the primary vessel for safety, survival, and resistance. Michael J. Budds in *The Art Ensemble of Chicago in Context* contends:

> The street serves as a meeting place, a spontaneous theater characterized by disorder: All the elements of urban life, which are fixed and redundant elsewhere, are free to fill the streets and through the streets flow to the centers, where they meet and interact, torn from their fixed abode'. The streets are simultaneously contested, regulated, and resisted. Movement and interaction are both obligatory and repressed.[37]

In a personal interview with Roscoe Mitchell, he spoke of his early musical education as a process that stemmed from community and street roots. He asserts

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[35] Michael J. Budds, "The Art Ensemble of Chicago in Context," *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry* 3 (January 01, 1997): 59-72 ,
[36] *The Bulletin*, Front Page sec.Full citation first time
[37] James A. Tyner, ""Defend the Ghetto": Space and the Urban Politics of the Black Panther Party," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 1 (2006): 105-18, doi:10.1111/j.1467-8306.2006.00501.x.

on many occasions, "This music came from the neighborhood."[38] It appears then that the backgrounds of the AEC, as well as the AACM, were in essence reflections of the greater organizational structures coming from the black neighborhoods in the North.

Unlike the Black Panther Party, AACM and the AEC were not explicitly separatist organizations; on the contrary, within the groups there were great ideological differences on whether or not blackness was a requirement for membership.[39] Nevertheless, the AACM and AEC's members were made up of all black musicians. Considering that this exclusiveness was mainly in the context of fostering and maintaining strong community holds, the AACM's aims were contingent on this separatism in order to maintain the idea of creating supportive networks for creative musicians to both create and perform music seriously and ultimately survive through that craft. In *Defend the Ghetto: Space and The Urban Politics of the Black Panther Party,* James Tyner stresses the necessity for this inclusion,

> Whereas many of the southern-based civil rights campaigns were predicated on integration (e.g., the lunch counter sit-ins, school desegregation), a prime focus articulated by Malcolm X, and later by the Black Panther Party, was a control of their own communities rather than integration into white communities[40]

Although Tyner is speaking of the organizational practices of the Black Panther Party, the AEC encompasses this ideal as well. As he later expresses, "many groups

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[38] Roscoe Mitchell, "Art Ensemble of Chicago," interview by author, August 11, 2014.
[39] George Lewis, "Chapter 7: Americans in Paris," in *A Power Stronger than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 285.
[40] Tyner, *Defend the Ghetto,* 106.

have sought to separate themselves and their territories from the governing state as a means of defending their separate identities."[41] This separation was a mechanism used to define the AACM and the AEC as communal entities necessary for resistance within this greater struggle. Lewis mirrors this point in *A Power Stronger Than Itself* when he quotes Charmichael and Hamilton, "The point is obvious: black people must lead and run their own organizations."[42] George Lewis reiterates this point in *Singing Omar's Song*:

> The AACM was and remains an organization whose goals center on community involvement in the project of ensuring the transmission of African-American musical culture and ideals to succeeding generations. This assertion of African-American artistic agency is aimed at providing musicians with a framework for understanding the complexity of the social and cultural environment inhabited by diasporan African musicians.[43]

Tyner further affirms this point in regards to political reflections, "The Black Panther Party, therefore, did not emerge as a cultural nationalist group, nor a variant of Pan-Africanism; rather, the Party was a founded initially as a grassroots organization formed to address local concerns."[44] Similarly, the AEC was not a cultural nationalist group, but an organizational collective formed to address music on their terms, from a global perspective to a local level. Roscoe Mitchell claims, *"We are all individuals who came together around music*,"[45] stressing that although the political was an imminent part of the group in its existence, their primary goal was musical. Their concern was local, and they were focusing on advancing their own

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[41] Ibid., 107.
[42] Lewis, "Chapter Four: Founding the Collective," in *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 46, 112.
[43] Tyner, *Defend the Ghetto,* 109.
[44] James Tyner, . ""Defend The Ghetto": Space And The Urban Politics Of The Black Panther Party." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 1 (2006): 105-18. (109)
[45] Interview with Roscoe Mitchell by the Author. 2014.

creative music. In *A Power Stronger Than Itself,* Lewis refers to specific conversation in the creation of the AACM:

> "What are we calling it?" asked Sandra Lashley, who was taking notes. "The Association for the Advancement of Creative… 'Music' or 'Musicians?'" Cohran's thoughtful response evinced a keen awareness of that long history of exploitation. "If the association is to advance the creative musicians, they are the ones who need advancing," Cohran declared. "We can all create music and somebody else can take it and use it. The musicians are the ones who need the help."[46]

The significance of these parallels is not simply in the ways Black culture and political organizing coincided in the 1960s, but further, to draw a greater connection between the necessity for communities in struggle to organize around music as a means of refuge and resistance. The AEC was significant in its musical make-up, its relationship with identity, and in its inherent reflection of the political framework in black resistance music throughout the United States. But the AEC also engaged with this resistance in a way unlike most other movements of that time in that they sonically and materially created and provided for their own spaces. This was not just a moment of artistic renewal, but it was also a moment in which agency was taken to determine a new type of resistance. The AEC was an extension of the AACM, and the AACM's fundamental ambition, whether explicit or implicit, was to emancipate the creative musician from the white man's ownership so that its members could realize their unique artistic goals. It was created under the intention of restoring agency to the black body and the black spirit.

[46] George Lewis. "Chapter Four: Founding the Collective" In *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 111. London: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Unfortunately, despite the racial autonomy claimed in these groups, there was still a strain in the AACM and AEC's gender dynamics. The members of the AACM were predominantly men with the exception of one or two women such as Amine Claudine Myers and Shanta Nurullah.[47] The misogyny that was rampant within the Civil Rights movement, and that drew folks like Assata Shakur and Angela Davis away from the Black Panther Party, also permeated the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Hence, we can view the greater Civil Rights movement as an explicit reflection of both the problematic issues within the AACM and the AEC as well as the community building properties that allowed them to thrive. The lack of gender representation within the AEC and the AACM shows not only the lack of internal analysis and underlying patriarchal tones of the groups, but also the fundamental patriarchal problems in racial organizing in general. Indeed, the issue of patriarchy and the means by which it subsumes smaller systems appears in all institutions and the gender implications of the AEC and the AACM continue to occur in radical organizing movements and musical environments today.

Kimberle Crenshaw, in her essay "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," explains this phenomenon in well-defined terms:

> The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women. These mutual elisions present a particularly difficult political dilemma for women of color. Adopting either analysis constitutes a denial of a fundamental

[47] Lewis, "Appendix A" In *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 516.

> dimension of our subordination and precludes the development of a political discourse that more fully empowers women of color.[48]

The greater matter, then, is of the invisibility of the position of a gendered person of color in the field of creative music. The contradictions inherent within a black feminist existence, especially in the 1960s era when the primary issues were that of economic sustainability, voting rights, and basic visibility, are irreconcilable within a greater movement of either anti-patriarchy or anti-racism. The AEC and AACM were created under this communal context without any investigation into what it means to provide for a community in terms of either nurturance or family. The place of the family and ‘‘reproductive labor” will illuminate more of these contradictions as we further examine the communal activity of the Art Ensemble for Chicago.

Communal Activity

As mentioned before, the problem with speaking about the communal environment and not acknowledging the multiple layers of reproductive labor that goes in to supporting a community is that it creates an incomplete picture of the AEC during this era. The women in Jazz in this era were (and continue to be) systematically erased, both in how they contributed to groups such as the AEC and the AACM and in their roles as musicians. Other than Fontella Bass, the AEC rarely featured any female guest musicians in their performances. Bass often played the more

[48] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241-299.

"feminine" instruments, which included piano and voice,[49] and was never considered an integral part of the AEC despite her marriage to Lester Bowie. On the contrary, in the stories regarding their initial move to France, the members of the AEC rarely mention Fontella Bass's role in contributing to this move. Lester Bowie and Fontella Bass were married, so how did their marriage and her moving to Paris with them contribute to the traveling environment? This is not something that is asked in interviews and additionally is not an easy topic to broach with the surviving members.[50]

Issues regarding gender and race and the complex intersectionality of these two social subjects, are important to analyze. Across disciplines, especially in radical organizing rhetoric, the beliefs of "if you destroy capitalism, you will destroy white supremacy," and further "if you destroy white supremacy, you will destroy patriarchy,"[51] although actively challenged, still run rampant. This reasoning sounds very nice in theory, but ultimately fails. As mentioned in Crenshaw's essay, the two issues of patriarchy and white supremacy deal with fundamentally different and often times contradictory issues. For women of color especially, being in a marginalized position in both a racial and gendered context, even if that context is political, often leaves the woman in an irresoluble "catch 22." Despite the focus on

[49] Chris Jones, "Art Ensemble of Chicago Les Stances a Sophie Review." BBC News. January 1, 2009, < http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/reviews/9vn8> (accessed November 3, 2014).
[50] Ted Panken, "A WKCR Interview with Lester Bowie (R.I.P.) and Don Moye (and Lester and Malachi Favors) on Lester's 70th Birthda," Today Is The Question Ted Panken on Music Politics and the Arts. October 11, 2011, <http://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2011/10/11/a-wkcr-interview-with-lester-bowie-r-i-p-and-don-moye-and-lester-and-malachi-favors-on-lesters-70th-birthday/> (accessed November 3, 2014).
[51] "Occupy Davis," interview by author, January 2011.

family and community in many movements that center around racial resistance, the fact is that womyn and queers, especially those of color, are perpetually left behind.

This point demands further explanation. Pauline Oliveros, a lesbian womyn who in some ways has achieved sainthood in the world of academic new music and was gaining recognition around the same time as the Art Ensemble of Chicago, has copyrighted the term "Deep Listening" regardless of the fact that Deep Listening is a technique of mindfulness in Buddhism that has been around for, literally, thousands of years. This blatant commodification of an ancient technique, while affirming her legacy, is a means of appropriation that wholly capitalizes upon and takes away from ancient Buddhist cultures throughout Asia. It is important to think about this, not just in terms of the problems within the sixties era's problems with addressing race and class, but to further see the relevance of this analysis to today. Racism and sexism, and the perpetuation of patriarchy and white supremacy in the arts supports a framework of domination that ultimately stymies the ability for artists who choose to restore their own agency and define their own identities. Oliveros remains a strong feminist perspective from her time at the San Francisco Tape Music Center and throughout her career afterwards and her work and perspective are important and invaluable. However, because so much writing has been focused on her work alone, she in many ways serves as the primary and sole representative of gay women in new music.

The problem with this lack of general awareness of the race and gender issues that

are fundamental in creating music is that the community surrounding music is then inherently created and participatory under a colonial and patriarchal context. For example, if I were to do a meditation piece, in the Bay Area, in 2014, despite my Hindu and Buddhist ancestry, it would be inherently connected to either Pauline Oliveros's text scores and ideas of Deep Listening, *or* tied to a white appropriation of yoga and meditation that has pervaded the Bay Area. The context of my piece is given to me unless I can actively challenge that by creating an oppositional space or presenting my piece in an oppositional setting.

The concerns of gender and race are even more complex in the Jazz world because of some of these aforementioned issues. The gendering of instrumentation, for instance, is only one manifestation of problematic essentialism within this particular creative music community. The racialization of varying genres of creative music is, for example, also highly gendered. Throughout history the black male body has represented jazz. As of recent, this music has been appropriated by the white man as a symbol of masculinity.[52] The subject of jazz as a practice, thus, is a masculine one, regardless of the gender irrelevance to the improvisational practice. Sherrie Tucker speaks of this in her introduction to her work *New Orleans Jazz Women*:

> We now know that women participated on every instrument, in every genre, in every period of jazz history. We also know that they often participated differently, or in different areas, than are ordinarily considered historically important, such as in family bands, all-woman bands, or as dancers or

[52] Aaron J. Johnson, "Trumpet Men: Performances of Jazz Masculinity." United Kingdom Mediating Jazz Conference. November 1, 2009. https://www.academia.edu/5771082/Trumpet_Men_Performances_of_Jazz_Masculinity

> teachers, and that these areas typically became minimized in jazz histories.[53]

The notes here on the venues in which womyn were represented, the family bands, or "all-woman" bands (when we know that there is no categorization needed for an "all-man" band), are important to investigate as a further means of gender segregation. In the case of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, the woman's place remained in the family, rather than the community, regardless of the fact that the family is an integral part of the community. Tucker, earlier in her work, states:

> Because gender—or the array of social meanings associated with femininity and masculinity—have a knack for seeming natural, instead of as cultural and historical, it is extraordinarily easy to miss its operations when conducting a research study of an area believed to be a history of men.[54]

The identity of a gendered ensemble operates in a similar way. Where the masculine group is identified as a community maker, a social vehicle or a necessary machine of resistance, the gendered group is considered a *natural* communion.

Unfortunately, instrumentation, race, and gender are infallibly linked. Women are perceived to play "soft" instruments and tend to be vocalists or pianists. Men are seen to play more "aggressive" instruments. Black men are associated with percussion, bass, and brass instruments, especially in light of the jazz movement.[55] White men, as recently observed, are associated with electronic music, both in the

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[53] Sherri Tucker,"A Feminist Perspective on New Orleans Jazz Women." New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park National Park Service 1, no. 1 (2004): 12-20.
[54] Ibid, 16.
[55] Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious As Your Life: John Coltrane and Beyond* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992), 200-40.

analog and digital world.[56] The disparity between recognition is not true to life, however, the resource allocation for creative musician continues to be fixed to a gender and race dynamic.

Notwithstanding this, the Art Ensemble of Chicago still managed to replicate many elements of the commune. One example of the Art Ensemble's communal or "co-operative"[57] framework was in their methodology for economic sustainability. They were financed without the support or undertaking of a white label and therefore had autonomy in their musical production. In an interview, Mitchell talks about the efforts it took for the AEC to first get to Paris and speaks about a moment where Lester Bowie sold all of the furniture in his house in order to fund the travel costs to Europe. Lester Bowie mirrors this sentiment in an interview with WKCR:

> Well, we had to go to Europe because we weren't getting enough support to sustain ourselves in the States. We moved to Europe in the beginning of 1969. Now, prior to that, we had been working about four times a year. We'd work four gigs a year, we'd have about three hundred rehearsals — but we were only working about four days out of a year. But when we got to Europe, after we were in Europe about three days, we were working six nights a week.[58]

At its foundation, the AEC was incredibly self-reliant. For example, the group would play shows to audiences, and then take the money to buy a van for their group. They would take that van to the next show and with their earnings buy another member a van. The methods of their co-operative allowed this self-deterministic approach to be sustainable. That sense of solidarity, a sense of community beyond just working

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[56] Rodgers, "Introduction," in *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1-4.
[57] Roscoe Mitchell, personal interview with the author, August 11, 2014.
[58] Panken,"A WKCR Interview," October 11, 2011.

together, but really trusting each other, was an integral part of what allowed the AEC to become and remain successful. Bowie speaks of this in his interview with WKCR:

> We have to think of the music not just as an academic experience, but also as a very spiritual thing. Just hanging out with these guys, seeing how these guys looked or how they had fun. All these sorts of things were very important to me.[59]

Fig 2.0: Art Ensemble of Chicago, Paris 1969[60]

Identity

Lisa Berham in *Diversity in Architectural Processes: Identity and the Performance of Place* writes,

> Performativity… allows for the discussion of the occupation and re-creation of space by marginalized identities without reverting to essentialism. Identities such as race are unmoored from their seemingly biological

[59] Ibid.
[60] Michael Ullman, 1992.

> foundations, becoming instead an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle. Our focus shifts from the identity itself to the formulative frame, which defines the identity; and the tactics, habits, and repetition within the body, and within the space the body describes that deviate from this frame.[61]

According to Berham, performance, in many ways, allows gendered and/or racial bodies to exist in dual worlds: to both be seen and carry whatever comes with that visibility and at the same time create space that exists only for that moment and is constructed via the sounds we catalyze. In other words, the body inhabits its relative self and a universal self: a racial or gendered body and a "human" body. The moments of liberation that exist within the presence of performance can serve as a glimpse of what musical autonomy can look like. The AEC used performance in a way that directly confronted the dichotomy of the musical and the political. They addressed the relative self in its performance context using body paint referring to ancient African traditions and costuming that offered a glimpse into what the African of the future might look like (see Fig 2.0*)*. While Lester Bowie, Joseph Jarman, Malachi Favors, and Don Moye all donned extravagant costumes, Roscoe Mitchell often either wore plain clothes or a tuxedo, representing a more simple, sophisticated body with his instrument as an extension of that self. Bowie, out of all the members, perhaps donned the most interesting costume. He wore a white lab coat and glasses and was representing the "scientist" in some ways while representing the "future" in others. Bowie appeared to signify a modern ideal of the

[61] Lisa Berham. "Diversity in Architectural Processes: Identity and the Performance of Place." *20 on 20/20 Vision: Perspectives on Diversity and Design* 1, no. 1 (2003): 1-10.

black body while challenging the white gaze and its perception of what is and is not black (see Fig. 2.1).[62]

Fig. 2.1: Lester Bowie in Scientist Outfit, Roscoe Mitchell in casual clothes, Don Moye chillin', Malachi Favors and Joseph Jarman in "Ancient to the Future" costume.

In one video of the Art Ensemble simply titled *Art Ensemble of Chicago Live in the 80s*,[63] the ensemble can be experienced in full valor with every mode of costume. Lester Bowie, in this iteration, is again, dressed in a lab coat. What do these costumes even represent? Does the African garb and face paint really signify the

[62] John Bloner Jr., *2nd First Look: Art Ensemble of Chicago,* January 1, 2013, <http://www.2ndfirstlook.com/2013/01/art-ensemble-of-chicago.html> (accessed November 3, 2014).
[63] *Art Ensemble Of Chicago Live in 80s*, perf. Art Ensemble of Chicago, Youtube / Art Ensemble Of Chicago Live in 80s, December 31, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mto9EaN2pbM (accessed).

African descent of these players, or is a means of forcing the audience to question the ways in which they view Black artists? What is that scientist's outfit even about? Potentially, that Lester Bowie is a musical doctor, but I would argue that Bowie is using this garb to challenge the commodification of identity in the first place. What does it mean for a black man to be a scientist or doctor throughout the ages? What about Joseph Jarman, in ancient African garb and colorful face paint? Is he attempting to represent his ancestors? Or maybe he is attempting challenge the audience and their perceptions of a primitive other? A lab coat, a new-future alien outfit, Roscoe Mitchell in his shirt and trousers; all of these elements, none of which are particularly articulated during the performance, are all means to extend the imagination of the audience. Allan M. Gordon in *The Art Ensemble of Chicago as Performance Art* iterates, "The Art Ensemble of Chicago aspires not only to transmit the material and renew the language of their art, but also to educate and transform both themselves and their audiences."[64] Thus, the audience is not just witnessing a spectacle, they are also forced to interpret and examine their own judgments in regards to the performance they are watching. The significance here is the process in which an audience member might watch the Art Ensemble, where they may initially examine the costumes and use of instrumentation, but ultimately they are being led into a presence with the complex sonic world that the AEC is exploring. The judgments and identities eventually disappear, falling back into the "spiritual" world of their creative music. Bruce Tucker in *Narrative, Extramusical Form, and the*

[64] Allan M. Gordon, "The Art Ensemble of Chicago as Performance Art," *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry* 3 (January 1, 1997): 56.

Metamodernism of the Art Ensemble of Chicago contextualizes this use of challenging performance methods, calling them "extramusical contexts":

> These extramusical contexts [costumes and instrumentation] partially displace attention from the performance of the music to the performance of the performance. Neither mere embellishments, metaphors, or simple assertions, they are differing domains of discourse—visual, textual, iconographic, dramaturgic—that, taken together, orient the performance as one that is simultaneously mythic and historical, ritualistic and open-ended, all-inclusive but undertaken from the perspective of a particular time and place.[65]

He further explains the significance of this point by declaring:

> Yet the people whose identity is at issue in the Art Ensemble's work is neither a national group nor a tribe. And the epic vessel - the music - is marked by characteristics that have as many differences as similarities between times, places, and peoples. In short, the Art Ensemble is offering an epic myth of identity in a diasporic context of profound discontinuities of time, place, nationality, language, historical experience, and much else, while significantly revising the notion of epic itself.[66]

Music and Instrumentation

Anthony Braxton, in his *Tri-Axium Writings*, speaks of creativity as an entity that is necessarily intertwined with cultural make-up. Creativity, thus, is not a process that merely allows an artist to survive, but rather serves an intricate part of a larger, unified, communal being. He says the following regarding an African musician he met while touring, "The idea of becoming a professional musician had no meaning to [the musician] because in his country[67] not only would there be no one to play for—and make a living from—as such, but also in his tribe everyone played the flute as

[65] Bruce Tucker, "Narrative, Extramusical Form, and the Metamodernism of the Art Ensemble of Chicago," *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry* 3 (January 1, 1997): 34.
[66] Ibid, 35.
[67] The specific country here is not named.

well as he did—if not better."[68] This notion that music has not always been a commodified object is significant because it also speaks to why the deep study of music carried such a spiritual element to the AACM and the AEC.[69] The spirit was part of a communal practice of unification.

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Fig 3.0: The Art Ensemble of Chicago with full instrumentation

The Art Ensemble of Chicago was significant in that they were able to create and utilize a wide array of instruments in order to achieve their collective sound goal,

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[68] Anthony Braxton. "Creative Music Outside of America." In *Tri-Axium Writings*, 1st ed. Vol. 2. (Synthesis Music, 1985.) 68-78.
[69] Steven Feld, "Sound Structure as Social Structure," *Ethnomusicology* 28, no. 3 (1984): 383-409.
[70] Henry Kuntz, "Bells | Free Jazz Journal by Henry Kuntz." *Art Ensemble of Chicago*. Accessed November 5, 2014. <http://bells.free-jazz.net/bells-part-one/art-ensemble-of-chicago-performance-of-sunday-november-25-1973-berkeley-community-theatre-berkeley-and-of-monday-november-26-and-tuesday-november-27-1973-keystone-korner-san-francisco/>

which was ultimately to "make good music."[71] None of the members of the Art Ensemble were restricted to the instruments they specialized in. Don Moye would bring literally hundreds of percussion instruments, pots, pans, etc. to the stage (see Fig 3.0). Each member was often found playing found objects, little flutes, or even a conch shell. Many of the members of the AEC as well as the AACM referred to their found objects and percussive explorations as "little instruments."[72] While a relative identity may have been presented in the Art Ensemble's costuming, a sort of universal identity was represented in the AEC's sonic atmosphere. John Bloner Jr. expands on these instruments in a 2013 review of the Art Ensemble of Chicago:

> The AEC played traditional jazz instruments: trumpet, saxophones, drums, and acoustic bass, but they also banged on gongs, rattled cans and cowbells, hummed into kazoos, sounded party noisemakers, squeezed bike horns and made bird calls to add a texture to their soundscapes. They have performed with more than five hundred instruments, including found objects.[73]

The significance of these instruments goes beyond the sonic palette and is actually very reflective of the inspiration and intention of the ensemble. Having all of these instruments allowed the AEC members to expand their limits as musicians but also extend their methods of listening and ultimately of sounding. They often referenced to standard jazz formulations and traditional drumming techniques, but their ability

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[71] Roscoe Mitchell, personal interview with the author, August 11, 2014.
[72] George Lewis reminisces about the ensemble's instrumental diversity saying, "This multiplicity of voices, em-bedded within an already highly collective ensemble orientation, permitted the timbral diversity of the whole group to exceed the sum of its instrumental parts… Jarman and Mitchell would be responsible not only for the entire saxophone, flute, and clarinet families but for some percussion as well." George E. Lewis, "Singing Omar's Song: A (Re)construction of Great Black Music," *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry* 4 (January 01, 1998): 78.
[73] Bloner, *Art Ensemble of Chicago,* January 23, 2013.

to switch between those genres and then expand into a pure sonic exploration was what made the ensemble unique; the majority of the Art Ensemble's song structure broke all preconceived notions of what musical motion should look like and in turn, redefined musicality as a resistant being. The AEC was not limited to classified "black" or "jazz" instruments; rather, they created their own method of instrumentation through the exploration of this sound pallet.[74]

One example of this is in the *Art Ensemble of Chicago Live in the 80's*[75] video where the Ensemble goes on for 3 full minutes without playing a single pitched note. Again, their nods to Jazz as well as traditional African drumming and the extension of identity through breaking these musical formulations allow the audience and listener to in a sense, extend their own identity. Then, slowly as Favors leads in with a slow rhythmic bass section, the camera moves to focus on Mitchell playing long smooth tones that are, for whatever reason, enchanting. All focus in that moment is shifted to the music. The costuming disappears. So, with acknowledgement of the elaborate costuming, the AEC's music is able to take the imagination to a place that actually allows the audience to be present with the sonic space above all else. The Art Ensemble, in this piece, replicates a sense of unity through their sonic atmosphere. Bruce Tucker's interpretation of the AEC parallel this description:

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[74] Jann Pasler, "The Utility of Musical Instruments in the Racial and Colonial Agendas of Late Nineteenth-Century France," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 129, no. 1 (2004): 24-76.

[75] *Art Ensemble Of Chicago Live in 80s*, perf. Art Ensemble of Chicago, Youtube / Art Ensemble Of Chicago Live in 80s, December 31, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mto9EaN2pbM> (accessed)

> Thus the music moves simultaneously forward in the history of jazz and back to Africa, eventually converging in shimmering sound-fields of free jazz… expanding the music in both directions on either side of it and then converging in music that defies description. The Art Ensemble erases genre lines, geographic lines, and often melodic and bar lines to inscribe their own set of connections, to traverse the musical terrain and create a narrative line.[76]

An example of a more political piece[77] is the AEC's "Non-Cognitive Aspects of the City" featuring text by Joseph Jarman and a setting chosen by Roscoe Mitchell for ensemble and baritone vocals.[78] Musically, the work is powerful, ranging from moments of dis-ease lead by Malachi Favors continual bass to ruffling cityscapes produced by minute percussive devices to expectant jazz canons all mixed together with Joseph Jarman's consistent yet alluring voice reading the formidable text. This poem speaks of pain, confusion, astonishment, dissolution, apathy, glamour, fascination, suffering, and excitement. Jarman's text is as haunting as it is powerful; he speaks of poverty, identity, capitalism, and pain all with tremendous eloquence:

> …the city / long history / upheaval / the health valueless in its norm / now / gravestone or ginger cakes / the frail feel of winter's wanting / crying to leaves they wander / seeing the capital vision / dada/ new word out of the 20s chaos / returned in the suntan jar / fruits of education / with others / non-cognitive - these motions / embracing sidewalk heroes / the city - each his own where no one is more alone than any other/moan, it's the hip plea to see me, see me, I exist/enter the tenderness for power/ black or white/ no difference now/ the power/ city[79]

The body of this piece is felt within the body of the listener. Its politics is cutting; its

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[76] Tucker, *Narrative,* 36.
[77] The text seems very political, but various members have different associations with the text.
[78] Art Lange, "Muhal Richard Abrams / Roscoe Mitchell / Spectrum," Spectruminfo. <http://mutablemusic.com/mm/spectruminfo> (accessed November 5, 201)..
[79] Joseph Jarman, *Non-Cognitive Aspects of the City*, orch. Roscoe Mitchell, Art Ensemble of Chicago, Roscoe Mitchell, 1966.

music is inspiring. This piece is the quintessential example of where the political and the musical are intertwined and yet still manages to achieve a somewhat transcendental quality; the music of the piece wanders into a spiritual space that the Art Ensemble so often refers to.

George Lewis, in *Singing Omar's Song* speaks of his first experience with the Art Ensemble as a means of breaking all of his pre-conceived notions of what was and was not possible:

> Born and bred on the South Side of Chicago, this sixteen-year-old high-schooler, already a trombonist of sorts, found himself completely baffled by the music, struggling to understand what was going on. Neither my previous experience with an enlightened high-school jazz-band faculty nor my heavy turntable rotation of late Coltrane had pre-pared me for the onslaught of (I think it was) Joseph Jarman's body-painted arms, attacking a vibraphone with mallets swishing dangerously close to my nose. I remember being so frightened that I seemed literally to faint. When I came to, it was to squeals and raspberries from the trumpet player (certainly Lester Bowie, in retrospect), which led to long drone sections in which somebody playing a bass (it must have been Malachi Favors) unwound long strings of melody, employing timbres of a kind I was too stunned to follow. All the while, some-body (probably Roscoe Mitchell) stayed a bit apart from the others, contentedly puttering about in a secret garden of percussion.[80]

The significance of this anecdote is not in what he observed as a teenager in the South Side of Chicago, but in *how* significant it was to observe that at the outset. Part of this thesis is meant to emphasize the way in which our bodies, those that are racial and gendered, are able to be inspired via the performance bodies we are exposed to. To see the work of the Art Ensemble and then to be privileged enough to witness and be a part of AACM enabled George to revolve his life around this

[80] Lewis*; Singing Omar's Song,* 71

creative music work and additionally become one of the premiere electronic musicians of his generation.

From Improvisation to Liberation

The AEC used form and crushed form in ways that were very important to the manifestation of an exploratory music. The means by which the AEC did this (through improvisation) offered a more comprehensive means of playing, but as a whole, a new way of listening that was oppositional to the standard forms that were reproduced in the western imagination. Ronaldo Radano refers to a quote from Stuart Nicholson in *Urban Bushman* reviewing the Art Ensemble of Chicago:

> The AEC have continued to hold onto their hard-earned corner of the avant-garde into their third decade; their music simultaneously far-out or accessible-depending on which end of the telescope you view them from. Their ability to rationalize the freedom of the '60s with dynamics, form and structure, sprang from a realization that the great energy of players such as Coltrane in his final period, Ayler and to a lesser extent Shepp, was ultimately destructive.[81]

This claim that "the energy" was somehow "destructive" might be a bit inflammatory, but nevertheless lends itself to a further analysis regarding the limits of these forms: i.e., using tonality, repetitive jazz structures, and standard instrumentation as means of destroying the standard systems in place. While the efforts behind the AEC's work paid its respect to these means of production, they also reflected a process of letting go.

> Mitchell's recollection of his initial turn toward free jazz suggests a struggle with a kind of musical repression: "After I began to really listen to this music, I would be playing and feel the urge within myself to play things I would

[81] Radano, *Jazzin' the Classics*, 80.

> hear, and I fought it for a long time because I wasn't really sure that this was what was happening. Then after I stopped fighting, it just started pouring out" (quoted in Martin 1967, 21). Abrams, moreover, envisioned his big band scores as "psychological plots" (quoted in Litweiler 1967, 26)." (Radano, 89) The efforts here suggest a means of listening and playing that allowed a new pathway to performance. "According to Abrams and Mitchell … harmony stood as an aesthetic barrier that restrained black musicians in their search for spiritual unity. As the principal component of European-based music, it became a metaphor for white cultural dominance and oppression: harmony was a sonic reconstruction of the chains that had bridled blacks, of the rationalism that had stifled African spiritualism.[82]

The emphasis on black oppression is an important one. It centers the emphasis on non-harmonic music as that of resistance, again going back to the idea of creating new worlds. Radano centers much of his argument in the *BMR Journal* regarding the AACM's political practice on the emphasis on the creativity being a liberatory practice. "Leo Smith argued, for example, that critics have created rules and labels in order to set limits on black musical expression (Wilmer [1977] 1980, 114). Echoing Smith's claim, the Art Ensemble of Chicago suggested to a group of writers for *Jazz Hot* that it was whites who applied labels to black musical genres (Gras, Caux, and Bernard 1969, 18)."[83] This suggests that the Art Ensemble largely used improvisation, free jazz, and their oppositional composition forms to create a framework outside of that of white supremacy.

[82] Radano; "Jazzin' the Classics", 90.
[83] Ibid, 89.

Distribution

"Wake yourself up. This is an awakening we're trying to bring about about."

– Muhal Richard Abrams[84]

In *A Power Stronger Than Itself,* George Lewis quotes Abrams during one of the initial AACM meetings regarding the venues in which they could play:

> "No, no, we're not working for club owners, no clubs," Abrams interrupted quickly. "This is strictly concerts. As far as this organization is concerned, we're not working taverns, because we believe we can create enough work in concert. See, there's another thing about us functioning as full artistic musicians. We're not afforded that liberty in taverns. Everybody here knows that."[85]

This emphasis on using the concert as the venue for creative expression rather than the tavern, or the club, for example, is vital in understanding the greater struggle of the black musician who was invariably in a position where his or her music could only be legitimized by either a white enterprise or a greater white system, that is, capitalism.[86] The concert format allowed not only a valorization of the act of musicianship as an autonomous act, but also served as a means of restoring agency in music making and performance to the performer rather than the consumer or producer. By using the concert as the primary venue, the performer had complete control over how, where, and what elements would and would not be involved with the concert. Given this autonomy, the artist is instantly able to leave the white capitalists' model. This autonomy, then, allows the artist to resist while in struggle.

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[84] Lewis, A Power Stronger Than Itself, 106.
[85] Ibid, 107.
[86] Nancy Leong, "Racial Capitalism," *Harvard Law Review* 126 (June, 2013): 2151-2226.

It should be noted, naturally, that the AEC did not exist outside of capitalism, relatively, they resisted the form in which Capitalism reproduces itself by creating their own modes of production. Representation, in this case, was now up to the artist rather than at the inevitably misrepresentative hands of the white producer.

When audiences in Chicago did not support them, they went to Paris, often still playing for largely white audiences.[87] Although their work was still largely supported by white folk, their means of creation and distribution were predominantly on their own terms. Their live audiences contained the demographic with money, which was the white upper class. This, unfortunately, was the case for any person of color in the West at that time. Music was largely patronized and produced by white audiences.

The privilege associated with the patrons who are able to support performers in the avant-garde can be divided into class, race, and gender privileges. The first involves resources and access, while the latter two involve visibility and support. Of course these privileges occur simultaneously and with the maintenance of one another. The white hegemony of the avant-garde audience is a post-colonial problem that surfaces in contexts such as these. Further, the dominant forms and venues for black music at that time were facilitated by the white music industry. Production and reception were regulated by the music industry's ability to further control access through determining what was and was not on the radio, who appeared on

[87] Fred Frith, personal conversation with the author, September, 2014.

the television and what body and form was deemed acceptable and, most importantly, productive. For example, if Ella Fitzgerald and James Brown were the dominant musical forces at that time it was because the music industry facilitated that, and that is what the majority of black audiences had access to consume outside of a localized environment.

Georgina Born speaks a little bit more to this complexity of identifying communities in musical production in her essay, *Music and the Materialization of Identities.* Her observations include the parallels of transcending the notion of identity through music while simultaneously being defined by the social structures it occurs within:

> It is clear that music can become a primary vehicle of collective identification – even if this is traversed by other vectors of identity (race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality). This remains an invaluable insight and bears out a co-constitutive theory of social mediation: music both producing its own affective and aggregative identity effects, its own modes of 'imitation' or contagion (Tarde, 1969, 2001[1890]), while also responding to and transforming pre-existing social formations.[88]

Radano furthers this notion in regards to the AACM:

> From the AACM's perspective, acceptance of established critical categories would only perpetuate the in-justices and repression that black musicians had had to endure over the years. Accordingly, terms such as "Great Black Music," "creative music," and "spiritual plane" offered a way out of that trap, setting up new boundaries constrained only by the limits of one's own musical imagination.[89]

[88] Born, *Music and the Materialization of Identities,* 376-90.
[89] Radano, *Jazzin' the Classics*, 90.

The Art Ensemble served as a precursor to the brimming idea of de-colonial aesthetics. Alanna Lockward, among others, has supported the idea of de-colonial aesthetics under the Transnational Decolonial Institute. The definition is as follows:

> Decolonial aesthetics refers to ongoing artistic projects responding and delinking from the darker side of imperial globalization. Decolonial aesthetics seeks to recognize and open options for liberating the senses. This is the terrain where artists around the world are contesting the legacies of modernity and its re-incarnations in postmodern and altermodern aesthetics.[90]

Hence, the AEC's performance, under this framework, allowed this reclaiming of potential appropriation of an African musical tradition while simultaneously allowing new autonomous identities. Again, by dressing as the past, the present, and the future, and further morphing the identity as an extension of the body, the AEC was not only able to create a decolonizing space, but also able to force a decolonial perspective on the white audience and capitalize off of it.

SF BAY AREA 2009-2014

Decolonial Aesthetics: New Movements, New Visions

> Transnational identities-in-politics have inspired a planetary revolution in knowledge and sensibility. The creativity of visual and aural artists, thinkers, curators and artifices of the written word have affirmed the existence of multiple and transnational identities, reaffirming themselves in their confrontation with global imperial tendencies to homogenize and to erase differences. The affirmation of identities is tantamount with the homogenizing tendencies of globalization, which are celebrated by altermodernity as the "universality" of artistic practices. This notion chastises the magnificent diversity of human creative potential and its

[90] Alanna Lockward, et al. "Decolonial Aesthetics (I)," TDI+Transnational Decolonial Institute, Decolonial Aesthetics, accessed November 03, 2014, <http://transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com/decolonial-aesthetics/.>

> different traditions; it perennially aims at appropriating differences instead of celebrating them. – Alanna Lockward[91]
>
> … it is clearly impossible to bring work with a decidedly socialist or revolutionary content to bear on a mass audience. Access to this audience (the artist's real means of production) is controlled by the state. This is why Marx and Engels say that the bourgeoisie have reduced artists to the level of wage-slaves… The artist has a job, and the conditions of employment are laid down by the bourgeoisie. – Cornelius Cardew[92]

Today, experimental and creative music is becoming a much more active political process, both in that the spaces where creative music is presented are more political, and that the bodies that create experimental music are more diverse. The intersection of the musical and political is important because it shows us that: 1) music can be an expression of resistance and 2) the systematic oppressions marginalized bodies face are necessarily reproduced within musical microcosms including experimental music scenes.

The black and brown body is inherently political. These bodies have come through a long line of struggle and resistance and in their active music making as a means of resistance have infiltrated the dominant music atmosphere. These bodies must be distinct from the bodies that dominate (i.e. cisgendered white men) in order for the body to be a political vehicle in its self. This is because, unlike the white cis-male body, the othered body (whether it is non-binary, female, or racialized) is always presenting itself as a site of opposition. Regardless of the intentionality behind that, or even if the body is being used as a tool for the white supremacist and capitalist

[91] Alanna Lockward, *Decolonial Aesthetics,* accessed November 03, 2014.
[92] Cornelius Cardew, "Introduction," in *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism ; and Other Articles: With Commentary and Notes* (London: Latimer, 1974), 11.

powers that be (like many black and brown pop and hip-hop stars today), the body, in its presentation, serves as at least a shallow oppositional impulse to the masses. The question, then, is how is this site of opposition successful and how does it fail? Where does the microcosm subsume the marginalized people within it? The musical and political happenings around Occupy Oakland can give us a glimpse into the answers to these questions.

"Pop" Music in Resistance and the Creative Apathy

Our existence now, as artists and activists, is very different than that in golden age of the 1960s. The revolution we long for is not purported with statements such as "All you need is love." Rather, the popular music of our time, even that which is associated with political ideals, is deep with sardonic messaging. Rihanna sings, "We found love in a hopeless place"[93] over a simplistic repeating song structure that is hard not to fall in love with. Ke$ha sings "Let's make the most of the night like we're gonna die young,"[94] over a standard techno beat that suggests a tantalizing invitation into a Dionysian wasteland. A rapper named Zoeja Jean's simplistic song "Let's Start A Riot" becomes the immediate anthem for every rally surrounding Trayvon Martin. The lyrics tout, "All black in my hoodie / All black in my hoodie / Strapped up with them AKs / F – K protesters / Let's start a riot / Fight, let's start a

[93] *Rihanna - We Found Love*, prod. Calvin Harris, perf. Rihanna, Youtube, October 11, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tg00YEETFzg.>
[94] *Ke$ha - Die Young*, dir. Uprising Collective, perf. Ke$ha, Youtube, November 8, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOubzHCUt48.>

riot."[95] These examples show us that the moment of the riot, while still inspiring and unifying, has a stagnant stench of hopelessness. With these examples movement continually decays; the bursts of progress are met with the horrors of a police state. The reality is consuming, yet the resources to cope (TV, the workday, alcohol, drugs) are ever numbing. The lyrics, while relatable, are contrived, based in a shallow understanding of struggle. Still, they are mass-produced, transmitted globally, and engrained into the ear of every 13 year old with a radio dial. Pop and hip-hop in the mainstream are wrought with misogyny and self-objectification. Because of this, these forms of music have become the quintessential neo-liberal tool for a hegemonic power structure. The social implications of mainstream[96] pop music and the more complex issues of misogyny within hip-hop[97] are beyond the scope of this paper, however it is important to note this to fully comprehend the relations between political movements today and the musical moments that coincide with them.

This idea that pop music functions as a demonstrative glimpse into the world of a disenfranchised and restless populace is limited. Pop music reflects this dystopian attitude in many ways, but is also in many ways irrelevant. Even those who choose to show their care for the respective actions are limited in their ability to contribute to the work it requires to sustain a movement. For instance, Occupy exemplified a

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[95] "'Let's Start a Riot': First Rap Song Devoted to Trayvon Martin Calls for Violence." The Blaze. Accessed November 4, 2014. <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2012/03/29/lets-start-a-riot-first-rap-song-devoted-to-trayvon-martin-calls-for-violence/.>

[96] Mainstream meaning the pop music that is produced and controlled by larger systemic corporations

[97] Margaret Hunter, "Shake It, Baby, Shake It: Consumption and the New Gender Relation in Hip-Hop," *Sociological Perspectives* 54, no. 1 (2011): 15-36, doi:10.1525/sop.2011.54.1.15.

number of artists that took the stage to be a part of the movement, all of whom were oscillating in popularity and in "creativity." Ranging from the underground political hip hop of the Coup in Oakland to the classic feminist folk of Joan Baez to the destitute alternative country of Billy Bragg,[98] Occupy had a wide range of artists coming to show their solidarity. With the exception of Boots Riley of the Coup, however, most of these artists proverbially showed their support and then disappeared into the political aether. The more significant performances were those that occurred from the local activist scenes. HotTub, a multi-ethnic queer band, was one of the favorite performances of the Occupy Oakland stage according to many of the events organizers[99] and seemed to represent a much more comprehensive idea of what Occupy Oakland was trying to accomplish, that is, a sense of self-defined identity and unity (see Fig 4.0). HotTub wears multicolored spandex, low cut tops, and face paint or messy makeup. The group consists of three front-women and a DJ and tends to fluctuate between rapping and screaming. Their instrumentation varies, from simple vocal freestyles and screams to found objects to misused[100] percussion instruments. Their style of music is not fixed to any genre, but is at its core fun, unusual, and experimental. They manage to create an aesthetic that is both messy and comprehensive with complex beats and confrontational lyrics. HotTub's "1-2-3-4… Go!" screams the words "revolution" over and over again as the vocalists crawl all over the floor.

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[98] Kevin Gosztola, "Eighteen Noteworthy Musical Performances for the Occupy Movement" *The Dissenter.* September 17, 2012. <http://dissenter.firedoglake.com/2012/09/17/a-collection-of-noteworthy-musical-performances-in-the-occupy-movement/.>

[99] Occupy Oakland Anti-Repression Crew Poll of Favorite Artists from Oscar Grant Plaza, raw data, Oakland, CA.

[100] By 'misused', I mean played differently or with improvised and extended techniques.

Fig. 4.0 HotTub at Oscar Grant Plaza[101]

In 2003, the protests against the Iraq War were said to be the "largest protest in Human History."[102] A global movement of liberals united against the war broke out all across the US and in 33 other countries around the globe. In 2009, student protests erupted globally. The United Kingdom, Spain, and multiple states in the US, including New York, California, and Wisconsin, engaged in massive teacher-student strikes. University of California students in Santa Cruz, Davis, Los Angeles, and Berkeley all occupied buildings for days at a time in response to an 82% increase in tuition (at the public school level). In UC Berkeley, hundreds of people marched to the Chancellor's house and multiple arrests were made. This sparked even more protests which resulted in 51 students and one faculty member being arrested at a UC Davis sit-in, 43 students arrested at a UC Berkeley sit-in, and 100 students

[101] ""HotTub at Oscar Grant Plaza," digital image, Occupy Oakland, January 1, 2011, <https://occupyoakland.org/pics-vids/6250861609_e2c8dc1b5e_b/.>
[102] Stefaan Walgrave and Dieter Rucht, *The World Says No to War Demonstrations Against the War on Iraq* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xiii .

arrested at a UC Santa Cruz occupation.

Fig. 5.0 “Protesters Drop to Their Stomachs in an Arrest Position, Chanting "Please Don't Shoot" outside Oakland's City Hall in a Rally to Protest the Killing of Oscar Grant, Killed by a BART Police Officer. Later, the Protesters Walked down 14th Street to to the Superior Court Building on Oak Street.”[103]

Simultaneously, riots broke out in Oakland in response to the shooting of Oscar Grant on January 1st 2009, a case where a white officer killed yet another black man (See Fig 5.0). Riots in the UK, aptly called the “BlackBerry Riots” broke out in 2011 over a paralleled instance of police brutality[104] just before the height of Occupy Oakland began. Occupy Oakland officially commenced with the creation of the Oakland Commune in October of 2011, while the organizing of Occupy Oakland began months before and in congruence with Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in August

[103] Michael Mahoney, *The Chronicle*. January 15, 2009.
[104] Saskia Sassen, "Why Riot Now?," *Newsweek International*, August 29, 2011, section goes here, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-264933158.html?refid=easy_hf.>
; "The BlackBerry Riots; Technology and Disorder.," *The Economist (US)*, August 13, 2011, http://www.economist.com/node/21525976.

2011.[105] Almost two years after the biggest housing recession since the Great Depression (2008-2009), OWS originally began under the terms "We are the 99%," referring to the lack of agency of most workers and consumers in the US in light of the corrupt bankers on Wall Street.[106] In many ways, the political momentum of the sixties has not faltered, in fact, the means by which material resistance occur are in some ways *more* successful. For example, during the West Coast Port Shutdown on November 2nd 2011 there were an estimated 6,000 participants in just the Oakland protest and over $4 million dollars in damages to the industries targeted, including Goldman Sachs and EGT (See Fig 5.1).[107] The port shutdown was in solidarity with the International Longshore Workers' Union (ILWU) and occurred in San Diego, Los Angeles, Long Beach, Oakland, Portland, and Anchorage.[108]

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[105] Occupy Oakland Anti-Repression Crew Poll of Favorite Artists from Oscar Grant Plaza, raw data, Oakland, CA.
[106] Adam Weinstein, ""We Are the 99 Percent" Creators Revealed," Mother Jones, October 7, 2011, http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/10/we-are-the-99-percent-creators.
[107] Peter Little, "One Year After the West Coast Port Shutdown." *CounterPunch: Tells the Facts, Names the Names.* December 23, 2012. <http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/12/21/one-year-after-the-west-coast-port-shutdown/.>
[108] Adam Gabbat, "Occupy Aims to Shut down West Coast Ports - as It Happened," The Guardian, December 12, 2011, section goes here, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2011/dec/12/occupy-west-coast-ports-shut-down.>

Fig 5.1 During the day at the General Strike on the way to the Oakland Ports (Margot, 2011)[109]

In further connecting the musical moment of the 1960s to 2014 we continue to see underground musicians speaking out loudly against the repressive world we live in. Pussy Riot, the guerilla punk protest band from Russia, comprised of only women-identified people, also began in August 2011.[110] Boots Riley, lead member of political hip-hop band The Coup, was one of the loudest voices of the Occupy Oakland movement, mimicking leadership during the West Coast General Strike.[111] Thus while the popular ”music of our time” outwardly seems to mirror an aesthetic of indifference and futility, the underground music has actually been working to create material spaces in which resistance can occur. The desperation of these pop star attitudes actually inversely mirrors an underground compulsion to revolt. As

[109] Ben Margot, "Photo / AP." The Guardian. November 2, 2011.
[110] Kathy Lally and Monica Hesse, "Pussy Riot Generates Outrage in Russia, Acclaim in the West," *The Washington Post*, June 10, 2013, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-34762498.html?refid=easy_hf.>
[111] Mark Binelli, "'Doing What's Right, Not What's Legal': Boots Riley on Occupy Oakland," Rolling Stone, January 30, 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/doing-whats-right-not-whats-legal-boots-riley-on-occupy-oakland-20120130.>

mentioned earlier, these times of extreme stagnation, repression and, contrariwise, extreme revolution breed artists turned activists from the rejected workforce.

MUSICAL-POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

Rather than emphasize one particular group or artist, this section will be more of a survey of different musical movements surrounding Occupy Oakland and other resistance movements in the past five or so years and their contributions to oppositional cultural production. The focus in this section is primarily on queer musicians of color who have chosen to intersect their work with political atmospheres.

POLITICS

Occupy Oakland was a particularly significant, momentous act, in that a live commune was formed in the middle of a metropolitan city. This was increasingly unique because the movement was not "led" by white academics, but rather, was created and upheld by and for people of color. While Occupy Wall Street was maintained under the pretense of the "99%" rhetoric, Occupy Oakland focused on a far more fundamental, visceral, immediate material need: anti-police brutality and, in that, anti-capitalism. There are many different voices that disagree with this sentiment, but the lasting remnants of Occupy Oakland from 2012-2014 continue to be centered on the controversial "FTP Marches" that aimed to bring awareness to the police brutality and have been filtered into anarchist spaces such as Os Qilombo

(formerly The Holdout).[112]

MUSIC

Fig 6.0 Black Salt Collective 2013 with Sylvia Viviana

The growing musical moment lies in the mirroring of political views and experiences that were being expressed within the experimental music community. For instance, many venues became explicitly anti-police by displaying signage like "No Cops, No Bosses" on their walls. Further, these venues often deemed themselves "Safer Spaces" referring to the dense history of queers organizing and communing in autonomous spaces or underground clubs.[113] Today, the political elements of this creative music are no longer limited to the shallow liberal aspects of social equity.

[112] Qilombo, Os. "Qilombo Radical Community Social Center." Qilombo. Accessed November 4, 2014. http://qilombo.org/about/.
[113] Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 376.

Rather, these musical communities, specifically queer communities of color making creative music, have begun to refer to their work in greater social contexts. The Black Salt Collective (see Fig 6.0) is one such group, created within the Bay Area, that states in their description: *"the work is cultural, but not 'cultural' in the anthropological sense of the word, as cultural art is often seen through a Western lens. Black Salt is about contemporary non-linear identity in which experience results in atmosphere."*

Black Salt Collective is an all female, queer, people of color experimental music and art collective creating political, cultural, and spiritual work that unified in the Bay Area and has now extended its roots to Los Angeles. The collective is currently made up of Adee Roberson, Anna Luisa Petrisko (Jeepneys), Grace Rosario Perkins and Sarah Sass Biscarra-Dilley.[114] (See Fig 6.1) Sylvia Viviana left the group in the beginning of 2014 for personal reasons.[115] Not all of the members are musicians, but those who are explore the extensions of diaspora, community, and ideas of transcendence. Former member Viviana performs under the projects *Fanciulla Gentile, Cloud Lite,* and *Felidae,* among others, and explores tape music, electronic music with tropical and indigenous influences, and ritualistic prayer music. Anna Luisa, a recent MFA graduate from CalArts who worked closely with Wadada Leo

[114] Collective, Black Salt. "BLACK SALT COLLECTIVE." BLACK SALT COLLECTIVE. January 1, 2011. Accessed November 4, 2014. http://blacksaltcollective.tumblr.com/.
[115] Anna Luisa Petrisko, "Decolonizing Sound: Jeepneys," e-mail interview by author, August 12, 2014.

Smith, alternatively creates interactive "experimental operas,"[116] multi-media environments, and explores alternative instrumentation in electronic pop accessing her heritage and investigating her queer POC identity.[117]

Fig 6.1. From left to right Adee Roberson, Sarah Sass Biscerra-Dilley, Grace Rosario Perkins, Anna Luisa Petrisko[118]

Similar to the contributions that community building had on the AEC's spread of creative music, the transmission of experimental musical forms by queers of color often relies on the creation and sustenance of community. In an interview with Jeepneys, she says:

> …being in [Black Salt Collective] has changed everything for the better! Especially when it comes to applying for institutional opportunities such as grants or residencies, it feels so much stronger to have each other's backs!

[116] Anna Luisa Petrisko, "Decolonizing Sound: Jeepneys," e-mail interview by author, August 12, 2014.
[117] Anna Luisa Petrisko, "Jeepneys Home Page," Jeepneys, accessed November 3, 2014, www.jeepneysjeepneys.com.
[118] Black Salt Collective, 2014.

> It's rough out there... As women artists of color we feel vulnerable and isolated. Critiques can be harsh but they're necessary for growth as an artist. As a collective we push each other's work further and we can critique each other as trusted peers. It's sometimes difficult too, to trust each other and to communicate well, because we all come from different places of hurt, tragedy, and ancestral stuff. We all make work that deals with heavy shit coming from our ancestors. We're glad to have each other in this regard.

Jeepneys' method of performance is unique, creative, and encompassing. She often uses text referring to her Filipino ancestry and uses a wide array of techniques and instruments including, but not limited to, coconuts, various percussive instruments, tap shoes, samplers, saxophone, synthesizers, and electronic drum machines. She uses her performance to create a tropical yet metropolitan soundscape. The name Jeepneys refers to the colorful buses that were once very common in the Philipines and recalls her grandparents owning a Jeepney Company. Much of this reference is in reflection of her diasporic experience and her determination to use performance as opposition. Petrisko proclaims:

> …I think performing as radical people of color is a revolutionary act. Embodying our true selves and being public with it, we really fuck with people's projections/perceptions of us. We shatter stereotypes; we begin to reform the synapses in their little brains. My identity is not fixed and neither is my performance persona so people cannot classify me or catch me, and therefore not colonize me. Performance is about creating intimate and complex worlds, and when you put intention into those worlds then they become real. Whether or not the audience "gets it" on a physical level, it works metaphysically too.[119]

This metaphysical inference bellows back to the AEC's consistent referral to "spiritual music." Through the deep investigation of experimental practices in sonic arts there is a transcendent quality that is not only aimed at expressing a political

[119] Anna Luisa Petrisko, "Decolonizing Sound: Jeepneys," e-mail interview by author, August 12, 2014.

agenda, but also serves a transformational process for the audiences. This decolonial aesthetic of creating identities that cannot be classified allows for a method of creating community around a truly unified ground.

From Punk to Noise: Autonomous Spaces and Festivals

The emergence of punk as a movement for people of color and queers first activated in the 1970s and 80s, with the growing focus on alternative punk in queer colored communities emerging in the 1990s.[120] Creative music had not taken on a more explicit social role in challenging oppression until the last decade. Where feminism and gendered resistance emerged through punk and experimental music in bands like *Throbbing Gristle*[121] and *X-ray Spex,*[122] the clear connection and use of solidarity in creative music for queers of color has been drowned out by white men and their synthesizers, saxophones, and guitars until fairly recently. This new paradigm shift can be seen in many different locales in the Bay Area. Bay Area LadyFest and Scream Queens Fest are just a few of the many festivals that center around the development of queer, gendered artistry as a revolutionary art practice.

Venues / Occupations

Occupy, in many ways represents the reclaiming of the other's place in discursive spaces. In conjunction with these social movements, and especially afterward, came

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[120] Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict,* 262.
[121] "THROBBING-GRISTLE.COM." Accessed November 5, 2014. <http://www.throbbing-gristle.com/.>
[122] "Welcome to Poly's Punky Party." X-ray Spex Official Site. Accessed November 5, 2014. <http://www.x-rayspex.com/.>

a surge of autonomous venues that served as simultaneous spaces for organizing and for creative music making. The Oakland Commune was built and supported around a largely anarchist framework. Food Not Bombs provided nourishment, medics were trained within the commune, and reading groups, yoga circles, and feminist organizing was all done through informal organizational practices. Likewise, most underground venues in Oakland are solely run through this kind of autonomous volunteer work. Similar to the goals of separatism within the AACM and the Black Panther Party, organizers believe that oppositional spaces can only be created by oppositional voices and bodies, and those voices and bodies can only do so in a self-deterministic, or intentional, fashion.[123] The means by which oppositional voices are able to create these spaces in music is through autonomous organizing and booking systems. One example of Occupy Oakland self-deterministic practices employed is the means by which "general assemblies" were created.

The general assembly came about as a space where unsung voices were able to express their opinions or ideas. The assembly at large would split up to discuss and decide on what to do about any given matter or whether the idea was even worth talking about. Additionally, the "mic check," which has many links to communal music making and call and response improvisation techniques as well, was a means for any person at any point to gain visibility and speak an idea or opinion or direction.

[123] "RCA," interview by author.

Underground venues and sacred spaces of musical expression have a long history in the United States, especially in their connections to places of political resistance. The Fillmore in 1920s was one such area for black blues artists and beboppers. Today, the spaces look very different. Throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s, they moved away from the bar and concert hall and moved into the empty warehouse, back alley, garage, and living room. Whereas the place does not necessarily look different for alternative music makers, the space does. The sounds and body that encompass it determine the space. For instance, while an all white girl-punk band singing about anti-fascism creates one space, a brown body playing solo improvised violin in a room full of queer brown folks of varying ethnicities and races creates a very different one. This is both because of the sounds and the body creating those sounds. One inherits one type of privilege, diaspora, and means of liberation in one space and one is *creating* a *new* means of liberation in the other. Jeepneys speaks to this about her own music as well:

> I've always played shows with people in my community and sometimes those pairings are also musical and sometimes not. However, I like to be the freak on the bill... the music that doesn't quite fit in in terms of genre or form. I think my music can be difficult to situate and if I don't have creative control (of the venue, the other acts, the lighting, the ambiance, the DJ, etc), then I'd rather let my music sit awkwardly in the space. People are usually surprised after they see me play because it's usually unexpected. That surprise can be both positive and negative haha!
>
> When I do have more artistic license and control, my performances naturally gravitate towards a more multimedia platform. These days, I rarely perform music without intentionally crafted visual and kinesthetic elements. I work more often than not with dancers, which led me to begin making experimental multimedia operas. I love the genre of opera because it's such a limiting form in the popular mind; it's so static and highbrow and loaded

> with meaning, but all the more reason to fuck with it! There's so much room for experimentation in opera.[124]

While I do not know of many renowned festivals or even singular concerts throughout U.S. history that showcase ONLY womyn of color outside of cultural expositions, I do know of many that have occurred in the last few years within the San Francisco Bay Area community and I do know that these occurrences are gaining more and more traction. *Scream Queens Festival (SQF)* is one example of this. The SQF, which had its only occurrence to date in May 2013, featured an almost entire cast of womyn and trans sound artists. Few of these acts had any set song structure. The two hosts of the *Scream Queens* radio show on Berkeley Liberation Radio formulated the festival. DJ Fereshteh and DJ Glossah[125] are two queer women of color who exclusively play queer political music from the past few decades. The festival had hundreds of attendees from throughout the bay area, many who were deeply involved with Occupy Oakland and continue to be heavily involved with post-Occupy activism.[126]

Bay Area LadyFest perhaps took this a step further, purposely booking primarily womyn of color bands of varying genres and mashing them together on the same bill. This was happening in conjunction with a full day of large workshops, one of which featured my own *Decolonizing Sound* workshop, aimed at investigating the

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[124] Anna Luisa Petrisko, "Decolonizing Sound: Jeepneys," e-mail interview by author, August 12, 2014.
[125] "•scream♀queens•." •scream♀queens•. Accessed November 5, 2014. <http://screamqueensradio.tumblr.com/.>
[126] The author attended and performed at this event.

very topics of this thesis. Many of the workshops fixated on exploring oppressive systems that permeate within queer and anarchist scenes and concentrated on developing methods of care and resistance, including a "Radical Sex" workshop as well as a "Merch" workshop that focused on creating the alternative distribution methods mentioned earlier.[127]

Oppressions

Unfortunately, the mirroring of organizing practices between the political and musical microcosms also occurred within the practices of oppression from the social atmosphere and the state. The way that the system worked to oppress marginalized bodies within the Occupy movement mirrors the struggles of gendered and racialized creative musicians in avant-garde microcosms. For example, the Oakland Commune fell apart primarily through a process of police brutality. On Nov 12, 2011 1000 police officers proceeded to break up the commune.[128] Likewise, autonomous music spaces that simultaneously served as organizing spaces were broken up through gentrification measures guised as noise ordinances and evictions. One such venue is the, now defunct, RCA that mysteriously caught on fire towards the end of 2013. Throughout Occupy and afterward, RCA/Hot Mess served as a beacon for anarchists, communists, and other organizers to witness local music. The space was created as a vessel for solidarity and expression. The 2013 fire of RCA/Hot Mess

[127] "2014 Schedule of Events." Bay Area Ladyfest, Accessed November 5, 2014. <http://bayarealadyfest.tumblr.com/schedule2014.>
[128] Amy Goodman, "Occupy Oakland Encampment Raided for Second Time: Live Eyewitness Report." Democracy Now! November 14, 2011. Accessed November 5, 2014. <http://www.democracynow.org/2011/11/14/occupy_oakland_encampment_raided_for_second.>

happened after a series of eviction and foreclosure notices that the local community actively fought against.[129] Flash bangs, tear gas, and batons were used in repeated instances to destroy the commune and reinstate a sense of "order" within the people's protest.

Identity Politics and Microaggressions

The social policing of both Occupy and the related musical microcosms are, in some ways, even more dangerous in that they disguise the intention of the state as the intention of the alternative "culture." In regards to Occupy, both identity politics and the inherent racism and sexism that appeared in power struggles gave equal weight to the destruction of Occupy Oakland and the movements preceding and following it. In an article aptly named "*Who is Oakland?"*[130] an anonymous group curtly named Croatoan[131] boldly critiques the identity politics model of anti-racist and feminist organizing. They fittingly assert, "privilege theory and cultural essentialism have incapacitated anti-racist, feminist, and queer organizing in this country by confusing identity categories with solidarity."[132] The opposite, of course, was also very true,

[129] "The Burning Question." The Nonanarchist. July 21, 2014. Accessed November 5, 2014. http://nonanarchist.org/category/oakland/.
[130] Croatoan, "Who Is Oakland: Anti-Oppression Activism, the Politics of Safety, and State Co-optation", *Escalating Identity*, May 1st, 2012, <https://libcom.org/files/whoisoaklandsyn.pdf>
[131] The word Croatoan refers to the legend of the 'Lost Colony' who attempted to colonize the Roanoake tribe, but then mysteriously disappeared off of the Croatoan Island.
[132] Croatoan, *Who is Oakland?,* 4.

where women of color were continuously sexually assaulted in the plaza, and the community did not know how to address or rectify the problem.[133]

Women of color in everyday society are perpetually left behind, even when the material cost of problematic infrastructures is thrown in the face of the respective administrators. Even though Occupy was a "leaderless movement," those with power within and without the social movement determined that the concern of sexual assault was only useful if it pertained to an economic gain for the state. In addition to and regardless of the fact that the community did not react swiftly or effectively to the sexual assault charges, the state was instantly able to use this problem as a means to shut down the commune. Again, this did not help the women of color who were seeking refuge from the state anyway, and so ultimately they were still left behind. This, unfortunately, is a historic fact in all uprisings dating from the days of the Black Panthers, permeating into the 70s 2nd wave feminism movements, to today. The infighting in organizing committees throughout Occupy Oakland in many ways was what caused the movement to implode.

These problems are mirrored in musical organizations as well. In the case of music within feminist communities, the false solidarity between women of color is deeply damaging, and this sense of false solidarity is even more common between white

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[133] Arthur J. Bloom, "Sexual Assaults Continue to Plague 'Occupy' Protests." *The Daily Caller*. October 30, 2011. Accessed November 5, 2014. <http://dailycaller.com/2011/10/31/sexual-assaults-continue-to-plague-occupy-protests/.>

women and brown women.[134] Our experiences are not the same, and the damages that can come from organizing together without a clear objective and material goal can destroy an organization. In 2012, a group called The Tsega Centre was attempting to create an autonomous feminist organizing space in East Oakland. The head of fundraising was attempting to create a program that was both socially diverse and musically diverse. They recruited exclusively women, trans people, and gender queers, the majority of whom were people of color, all of whom were creating music that was genre-non-conforming. Out of 12 people, only four of the members of the Tsega Centre were womyn of color. One member, Bela, explained that the music that was recruited for the fundraiser was not music that people of color listened to and was not music of the community. Most of the bands that had been asked were from Oakland or the Bay Area and again, the majority of them were people of color. A conversation ensued that ended with *"Where I'm from, only black people and Latinos are considered people of color,"* implying that the artists and organizer were not official "people of color" regardless of their skin-color, ethnicity, and perceived race. After multiple mediations, the fundraiser did not happen and the group ended up disintegrating in March of 2013. This is an example of the ways in which identity politics can be a huge deterrent in creating spaces of solidarity, especially in music. As shown in the Chicago section, creative music can serve as a means of liberation for people of color and is not in itself a counter-revolutionary

[134] Andrea Smith, "The Problem with "Privilege"" Andrea366, August 14, 2013, <https://andrea366.wordpress.com/2013/08/14/the-problem-with-privilege-by-andrea-smith/.>

act. Regardless, the perception of creative music is still challenging for many activists.

The resistance towards creative music by activists of color illuminates the complexities of racialized representation. For instance, black womyn making hip hop are far less likely to get recognition, and far more exposed to material consequences such as rape, assault, and economic inequality simply for being in a "male-dominated" field. During Heiro Day 2014, an Oakland hip-hop festival, there were no womyn identified acts on the bill.[135] Again, this is not to say that there are *fewer* women making this music, just that racial and gender stereotypes put men at the forefront as a capitalized entity, and womyn as a submissive other.[136] A dominating woman suggests a threat to the means by which capital is produced, and only if the production value of a woman artist can be maintained, will the music industry allow her to be a visible force for consumption. In creating music that is less accessible, the gendered creative musician is seen as inauthentic. For example, in improvisation, often the gendered creative musician is producing a piece that only exists in that moment of performance, further lessening the likelihood for her to be reproduced and commodified into a viable monetary entity. Because the exposure of this artist is contained, and the music is not in a form that is already

[135] "Hiero Day 2014: Hip Hop Music Fest & Block Party | Oakland." FunCheapSF.com. September 1, 2014. <http://sf.funcheap.com/hiero-day-hip-hop-music-festival-block-party/.>
[136] Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins*, 1259.

widely reproduced such as pop, hip-hop, or folk, the gendered creative artist is, again, ignored and devalued.

The second issue that was mentioned is that of the overt racisms and sexisms that occurred within Occupy in the form of material repression and sexual oppression. Obviously, this problem is rampant within musical atmospheres and creative music scenes are no exception to this phenomenon. The elephant in the room is always the body. What I seek to illuminate is what weight is carried for bodies that are not male and not white. At the very basic material level, across the board, women of color and queers are far less likely to survive economically in any art industry. As mentioned in an article by Robert Ferdman of the Washington Post, "Nearly four out of every five people who make a living in the arts in this country are white, according to an analysis of 2012 Census Bureau data by BFAMFAPhD, a collective of artists dedicated to understanding the rising cost of artistry."[137] The reality of this material inequality is that it stems from a long-standing system of domination instated by capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. When speaking of race, in the liberal arts especially, it's very easy to forget that the foundation of economic inequality in the United States is a deep history of slavery and genocide.[138] Immigrants from Asia, the Middle East, and other parts of the world endure their own material penalties resulting in pay gaps, violence, and incarceration. Even in profitable industries such

[137] Robert A. Ferdman, "If You're Lucky Enough to Earn a Living from Your Art, You're Probably White." Editorial. *The Washington Post* 21 Oct. 2014: n. pag. *Washington Post.*
[138] Ravi Arvind Palat, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism (review)," *Journal of World History* 11, no. 1 (2000), doi:10.1353/jwh.2000.0022.

as technology, people of color make significantly less than whites, and Latino workers make more over $16,000 less than non-Latino workers.[139]

In relation to the creative music scene in the Bay Area, micro aggressions can turn into violence in terms of both race and gender. In the Summer of 2013, three bands embarked on a tour named *Anal Cube Tour*[140] that started in Oakland, CA, ventured through the south of the United States to Tennessee, and veered back through the south to Oakland, once again. All of the women on this tour were women of color, coming from various ethnicities, backgrounds, and class privileges. The tour consisted of three to four acts, SBSM, Beast Nest,[141] Gorgeous Vermillion, and Nadi. Nadi is collaboration between Gorgeous Vermillion and Beast Nest. SBSM, a synth-noise band consisted of three members, one of whom is a trans-woman of Iranian descent (See Fig. 7.0). They utilized harsh noise, feedback, and live sampling techniques under screaming vocals speaking of capitalism and patriarchy and the struggles of existing within these paradigms. Gorgeous Vermillion is queer Cambodian performance artist who uses live tape loops, captivating performance art and dance, and improvised saxophone to access her ancestral heritage and navigate a diasporic experience that challenges white appropriation and dysmorphic identities (See Fig 7.1). Beast Nest creates electronic soundscapes through layers of live synthesis, live audio processing, sampling, manipulated

[139] Jessica Guynn, "High-tech Pay Gap: Minorities Earn Less in Skilled Jobs," USA Today, October 09, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2014/10/09/high-tech-pay-gap-hispanics-asians-african-americans/16606121/.>
[140] "ANAL CUBE." ANAL CUBE. Accessed November 4, 2014. <http://analcube.tumblr.com/>
[141] Beast Nest is the name of the author's solo project.

environmental feedback and no-input mixing. She holds that her pieces are political without any necessary explanation of that. Her website describes her as "utilize[ing] an unwavering depression [and] restrained horror to channel left-eyed spirits. While simultaneously clearing and entering, the sewage pipes of the body and the patriarchy congeal into watery soundscapes as a vehicle for achieving liberation through the darkest of fears."[142] Her pieces focus on a hope of dilating identity through an active listening experience.

Fig 7.0 SBSM in Los Cruces, NM[143]

One memorable moment for the group was at one of their first stops, in Los Angeles, CA at a place called "The White Lodge." There were six acts that night, one of which

[142] "Phenomenology of S," Where Do You Hide, About, accessed December 03, 2014, <http://www.sharmi.info/.>
[143] DJ Gallasoh, "SBSM - Los Cruces," digital image, 2013.

was another woman, most of whom were men making noise music. One of the other touring acts was a trio from France. SBSM played first. During their set they announced that the next piece was concerning "being fetishized as a woman of color in music." One of the men in the French act quickly shouted "Me so horny!" out at the audience. Lora of SBSM, who is of Japanese descent, yelled back, "I'm going to eat your dog," and the man and other audience members just laughed. The mood darkened after that and an infiltrating vulnerability sat among the WOC artists of the room. Beast Nest played next, wearing a halter-top to battle the summer heat. One man whistled as she was setting up. As she looked up another man, the same French man, rolled his eyes, obviously doubting the ability of a feminized brown girl to use complex electronic instruments. After the performance was over, the consistent heckler came over and curtly said, "Wow, your set really surprised me." "Oh, really? Ha. Why is that?" "I don't know, I just didn't expect it, you know?" "No... I don't know. What *did* you expect?" "I just didn't expect to have such a, you know, emotional response… I was really impressed." "Ah. Ok. I see. I'm cleaning up right now. Thanks."

Fig 7.1 Gorgeous Vermillion, 2013[144]

This man did not simply have a strong emotional response to Beast Nest's music so much so that he had to go up and exclaim all that, especially in the context of the prior interaction during SBSM's set. It was not such a surprising performance in that the music developed in an offbeat improvisational manner. It was, in fact, the opposite; the music Beast Nest performed was a slowly building soundscape. This man, alternatively was shocked that a skinny, brown, feminized person that was not identifiable as a "punk" or a "weirdo" and may have been just as easily seen at the mall than at a noise show, was creating music that was, in fact, creative. The identity of a submissive south Asian artist could not be reconciled with the music that was being heard. Because the being of the artist was in itself a contradiction to the man, he had to settle for resolving his internal bigotry via shock which could be read as a confusion and "an emotional response" which can be read as both feminized and

[144] DJ Gallasoh, "Gorgeous Vermillion," digital image, 2013.

submissive. So, ultimately, this artist was put in a submissive and thus vulnerable position via this performance because the preconceived notions of submission and domination were challenged by a music that was built to invoke a simple state of listening and presence. The music of Beast Nest is only intended to shape a space.

Alternatively, the music of SBSM mirrors stylistic choices of *Chicks on Speed* and Riotgrrl.[145] Their harsh sounds and strange instrumentation is still accompanied by a predictable song structure and a consistent rhythm. Their anger and rage is overt, their lyric style explicit. There is no problem with this; in fact, it is extremely useful and inspiring to those who hear their messages. The white man, however, exhibits no awareness of this and receives a systemic benefit from putting down gendered bodies. We see this when his comment is reinforced by other snippets of laughter in the room.[146] His social position is rectified through the domination of the womyn in the band. Alternatively, the act of creating dominating music, which here I will define as simply, loud, overt, sounds with accompanied loud, fast, vocal and percussion styles, actively threatens the position of the white man in punk and noise.[147] In a historically white-dominated subculture, women and queers have often been met with both symbolic and material violence.[148] In this case, the white man has symbolically rejected the sentiment of strength and uses that to further

[145] "SBSM," interview by author, 2013.
[146] Here I am referring to both the specific white man in this instance as well as the socio-political construct of a cis-white man's position
[147] Matthew Bannister, *White Boys, White Noise Masculinities and 1980s Indie Guitar Rock* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), 60. Curry Malott and Milagros Peña, *Punk Rockers' Revolution: A Pedagogy of Race, Class, and Gender* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 22-26.
[148] Ibid., 90.

assert his dominating role in the power structure. He puts the women down, and in the wake of her resisting that response, further humiliates her by invalidating her efforts through, in this case, laughter.

It should be noted that in subcultures such as these racism and sexism manifests most commonly in the form of microaggressions. This anecdote is not an isolated incident; it is representative of an implicit trend of domination that appears throughout musical subcultures. Matthew Bannister reiterates this in *White Boys, White Noise Masculinities and 1980s Indie Guitar Rock* when he analyzes Paul Willis on masculinities in rock:

> Willis connects masculinities with an ideal of "unreified" existence, a working-class reality that represents an implicit left-wing critique of the "straight", capitalist world: 'This absolute security of identity was characteristically expressed through a distinctive [masculine] style…" This sense of "ontological security" is maintained at least partially by attacking other social groups as "feminine", including women but also blacks, "Pakis", mods, hippies, and even subordinate members of the group… Willis defends these attitudes by claiming they are preferable to "blood-less humanism": the rocker's sexism and racism is more honest than an intellectually correct but abstract worldview.[149]

In an interview with Adam Adhiyatma, a Singaporean improviser in the Bay Area, he further iterates:

> It's not really a hegemonic white racism… it appears often in a way of colorblindness and through the discourse of liberalism. White people in subcultures often feel they don't have to be aware of racism because their racism doesn't appear in overt ways. They have already identified a racist other, maybe as the conservative old white guy from the south. So they don't identify as a racist even though they might say offensive things when witnessing, for example, a Japanese punk band in New York. They might say complex, or seemingly innocent things like calling a band "cute." Calling them

[149] Bannister, *White Boys, White Noise,* 3.

> cute is a complex thing, it is condescending and it is violent, but it is also part of the band's presentation. The band might feel like they have to present as a certain trope, in this case cute Japanese rocker girls, in order to be visible at all. It really is a system that perpetuates this racism, rather than particular racist individuals. Both sides perpetuate this. The white man, in this situation, gets to do the naming and has the privilege of not noticing what the Japanese band members have to do to get noticed in a white dominated scene.[150]

The significance of these examples is that they demonstrate the more subtle forms of microaggressions and how they result in material costs. The material cost in the case of the first example is validated by how the payment was distributed. The majority of the audience members had left by the time the French band played; many left during their set. We, alternatively, had three bands and were travelling to Tennessee. The French band was not going back to France and was actually stationed in Los Angeles. We had five people and three bands and they had three people and one band. At the end of the night, the three white men received 75% of the bill, and we received 25%. This became a consistent trend throughout our tour. If we were not on an all POC bill or on a bill that was explicitly booked by a person of color, then we were usually given nothing or a minimal amount compared to the white local acts. If we were on a bill booked by a person of color, we took back all of the funds of the night, usually three times the amount that we had made in the city before. The violence of this does not need to be explicit. Our violence does not need to lead to rape or death in order to be real. The violence here is the lack of economic equality, distribution, respect, and support. It is what prevents women of color from continuing in the arts, what prevents women of color from succeeding in art

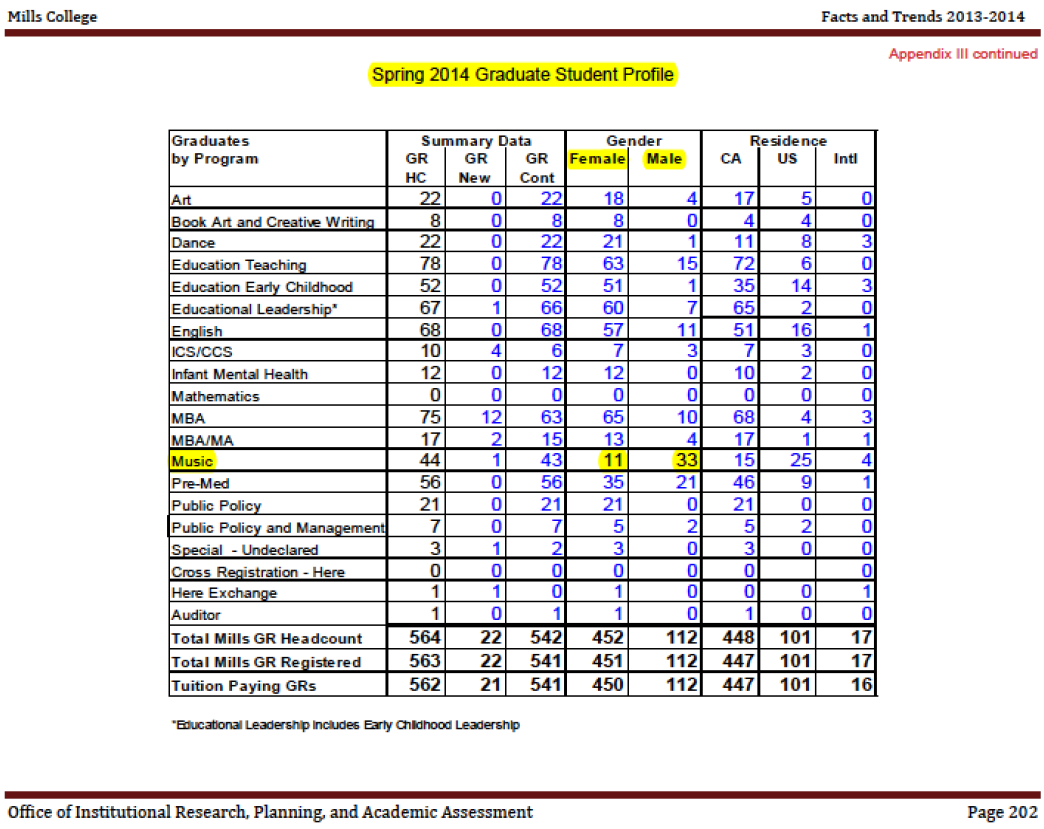
[150] Adam Adhiyatma, personal conversation with the author, December, 2014.

programs, and what causes women of color to leave improvised and creative music circles over and over again.

To be a woman in any improvisation or creative music setting is rare in itself; one must fight for visibility, and if visibility is gained it is often under a fetishized pretense. To be a black, brown, or latinx woman in western new music is even more rare, not because we are not there, but because women, and especially women of color, are systematically erased from electronic and creative music environments. In "The Evolution of Electronic Music" by David Ernst there is not a single woman mentioned. In other classic new music books, such as the esteemed *Source Magazine: Music of the Avant-Garde 1966-1973,* the only women mentioned, at all, are Pauline Oliveros, Anne (Annea) Lockwood, and Jocy de Oliveira.[151] There are only a few men of color mentioned throughout the entire series. Many of the women and people of color left out include: Ruth White, Delia Derbyshire, Eliane Radigue, Yoko Ono, and more. Each magazine (a total of 11) featured roughly eight to ten artists. This phenomenon pervades the academic world, even in one of the most prestigious women's colleges in the US. At the Mills College Center for Contemporary Music, one of the epicenters for new music and contemporary music thought, the gender and racial breakdown is still far from equal (See Fig 8.0), albeit the Mills College music department has a far more equal gender breakdown than most colleges. Of course, Mills College has been one of the major contributors to

[151]Larry Austin, Douglas Kahn, and Nilendra Gurusinghe, eds., *Source Music of the Avant-garde, 1966-1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

women's education in the United States, and is famously known for supporting women in the arts. Tara Rodgers, the author of *Pink Noises*, Blectom and Blechdom, Maggi Payne, Pauline Oliveros, Laetitia Sonami, Miya Masaoka, and many others who have paved the way for gendered analysis and womens' experimental music have also been associated with Mills. While this is true, a deeper analysis of the gendered and racial divide is needed.



Mills College — Facts and Trends 2013-2014

Appendix III continued

Spring 2014 Graduate Student Profile

Graduates by Program	Summary Data GR HC	GR New	GR Cont	Gender Female	Male	Residence CA	US	Intl
Art	22	0	22	18	4	17	5	0
Book Art and Creative Writing	8	0	8	8	0	4	4	0
Dance	22	0	22	21	1	11	8	3
Education Teaching	78	0	78	63	15	72	6	0
Education Early Childhood	52	0	52	51	1	35	14	3
Educational Leadership*	67	1	66	60	7	65	2	0
English	68	0	68	57	11	51	16	1
ICS/CCS	10	4	6	7	3	7	3	0
Infant Mental Health	12	0	12	12	0	10	2	0
Mathematics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
MBA	75	12	63	65	10	68	4	3
MBA/MA	17	2	15	13	4	17	1	1
Music	44	1	43	11	33	15	25	4
Pre-Med	56	0	56	35	21	46	9	1
Public Policy	21	0	21	21	0	21	0	0
Public Policy and Management	7	0	7	5	2	5	2	0
Special - Undeclared	3	1	2	3	0	3	0	0
Cross Registration - Here	0	0	0	0	0	0		0
Here Exchange	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Auditor	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
Total Mills GR Headcount	**564**	**22**	**542**	**452**	**112**	**448**	**101**	**17**
Total Mills GR Registered	**563**	**22**	**541**	**451**	**112**	**447**	**101**	**17**
Tuition Paying GRs	**562**	**21**	**541**	**450**	**112**	**447**	**101**	**16**

*Educational Leadership includes Early Childhood Leadership

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Fig 8.0 shows the 2014 breakdown of the gender gap

In 2014, the music department at Mills College remains the only graduate department that continues to admit substantially more men than women. In 2013, out of the 50 students in the department, only 12 were women. The next year, out of

the 44 students in the department, only 11 were women.[152] From 2009-2014, the average gender breakdown in the music department is 24% women to 76% men. The racial synopsis for individual graduate departments was not available. Clearly, the gender disparity here is far from "equal." But what does it mean when fewer women are admitted and even fewer women of color? This problem goes beyond on an issue of equality or representation and should, rather, be examined as a problem of perpetuating and reproducing systems of material oppression. Again, according to Ferdman's article, most of the artists who are surviving off of their art are white, so how does this music department gender breakdown apply to the larger trend of most artists being white?[153] We can assume that fewer women are succeeding in the arts and thus we can assume that of those women fewer are people of color. This means that the material reality for women of color in the arts is despondent. The ability to survive financially determines the ability to not only eat, have housing, and support one's self emotionally, but further, determines whether one can continue to produce more work.

When questioned about the difficulty in admitting and retaining gendered students at Mills College, one faculty member[154] alluded to the problem being two fold. The first problem is the lack of funding for the overall institution. The second: the lack of women and women of color in the faculty. Of course, this brings us back to the issues of class, race, and gender and the necessity for an intersectional approach in

[152] Alice Knudson, *Facts and Trends 2013-2014*, report (Oakland: Mills College, 2014), 202.
[153] Ferdman, *If You're Lucky Enough*, October 2014.
[154] Fred Frith, personal conversation with the author, September, 2014

examining these discrepancies. While most institutions are able to offer prime candidates full scholarship and assistantship, Mills College limits the amount of full funding that can be distributed, notwithstanding the music department. Thus, the capitalist claw once again reinforces a systemic gendered and racial subjugation that infiltrates from the governmental level to the classroom level. That is assuming that the material conditions of class allow them to enter into the field of higher education and graduate work at the onset. This is certainly a greater institutional issue of western education that permeates beyond Mills College and all other music institutions in the US and speaks directly to the lack of gendered and racial representation and material sustainability in music, specifically creative music, as a whole. Further, the discrepancies in representation in these departments are the means by which gendered and racialized people are erased and manipulated out of creative music. Conclusively, then, we can assume that material support such as financial assistance, faculty representation, job availability and encouragement for women, people of color, queers, and especially gendered people of color is the strongest vehicle for resisting these implicit systemic abasements in the academy and otherwise.

CONCLUSIONS

The mechanisms of control from the state permeate every facet of social and cultural production. The artist is required to have waged work in order to survive and is thus forced away from her chosen work of creating art. The artist then creates work in her given hours that would otherwise be used for reproductive labor to

create more work. The artist then attempts to work in the public sphere via art shows and concerts and performances, only to be rejected or ignored by the masses for her skin color, breast size, or "feminine aesthetic." She is put down by critics, or worse, dismissed. If she is so lucky, the artist allows herself to create solidarity networks with "like-minded" bodies. She thinks she is home free, for a moment, until her body also rejects her with the permeating internalized oppressions she has been attempting to destroy. When she finally finds a safe-haven (as if there is such a thing), the state shuts that venue for expression down, or beats her, or rapes her, or arrests her, or imprisons her, or kills her. If she survives, she finds that assimilation into the white patriarchal hegemony is the only means of survival. The only way to survive is to actively work against her agenda and her own people. She must adhere to the rules of conduct. She must be submissive. She must obey. She can only survive if she is of direct economic value to those systems that continue to oppress her.

It is both inefficient and incorrect to analyze the phenomenon of gendered and racial disparity within the creative music environment as an intentional or malicious act by individuals. It is, in fact, a consequence of a deeply imbedded structure that feeds itself and continues off of the backs of brown women. It is not random; rather it is a result of a profoundly institutionalized process of domination that demands that women be submissive and womyn of color, who are systematically fetishized or ignored by mass media, are only ever seen and valued as an accessory to whiteness. Despite all this, it is useful to notice, highlight, and find new ways to support the trends and intentional acts of creativity that resist against

these systems. As aforementioned, the occurrence of autonomous organizers and spaces gaining traction is one such movement that should be both noticed and enriched. The autonomous space both as a sonic body and as a venue has historically allowed for a different kind of consciousness to exist, if only for a few hours. Institutional reorganization is necessary. Community building and alternative transmission is imperative. Fostering oppositional spaces is essential to a liberatory aesthetic.

Therefore when we, who are women, queers, and people of color, talk of creative music, we do not unassumingly refer to making music outside of the conventional or classical or popular forms of music; we mean we are creating new worlds for our bodies to exist in. This music is important to embrace, not only to create some sort of representation or as a means of reclamation of our histories, but also to create a venue for transcending the systems of oppression that subjugate us. Through creative music we are not only able to "express our sorrows" as Duke Ellington stated, but are also able to restore agency in a world that relentlessly seeks to take that agency away. We are experimenting our otherness in order to define our freedom, free of identity, forging a new spiritual unity.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FROM DECOLONIZING SOUND
OCTOBER 11TH 2014

Name:
Artist/Project Name:
Date:
Gender:
Ethnicity:

1. How do you feel this moment is developing musically and how do you feel your music fits into this either in genre, form, and/or community?

2. In what ways do you feel community or communal activities influence / help form your art practice? Maybe speak to your communities and your own practice? What ways do you support each other, what does the collective provide for you?

3. How do you feel your music is/is not political? What role does identity play for your practice? What role does identity play in how you feel you are received?

4. I am interested in Buddhist concepts of non-self, especially the idea of having a relative and universal self. Performance, in many ways, allows gendered and racialized bodies to exist in both of these worlds: to both be seen and carry whatever consequences and tropes that come with that visibility and at the same time create space that exists only for that moment and is constructed via the sounds and visuals we catalyze. The moments of liberation that exist within the presence of performance can serve as a glimpse of what musical autonomy can look like. That said, what do you feel performance contributes to/takes away from identity?

5. In regards to self-expression and artistic practice, what have your experiences been in/out of institution? Systemically, academically and in autonomous communities?

6. Do you think there is anything special about this moment in time? Yes? No? Why?

Please e-mail answers to sharmi@sharmi.info

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