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After Eric Garner: Invoking the Black Radical Tradition in Practice and in Theory #BlackLivesMatter

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In this article, I document a series of pedagogical responses in my high school instrumental music classroom following the events of Eric Garner's murder in New York City. Foregrounding traditions of black radical politics and aesthetics originating with the Black Power Movement in the 1960s, I explore their implications for classroom practice in a larger movement against the systemic killings of Black Americans in the United States. In this work, ideas of politicized listening, multimodality, response, and collectivity emerge, alongside a process of "fumbling" through issues of essentialism and authority, race and aesthetics.

Keywords: *Black Lives Matter, social justice, radical aesthetics, multimodality, instrumental music, Black Arts Movement*

1. An Opening: Eric Garner (1970-2014)

Daniel Pantaleo is not charged for the death of Eric Garner, for putting Eric in an illegal chokehold, for pushing Eric's face in the sidewalk while we can all see on the video that Eric is saying *I can't breathe*. The morning after in New York in my classroom I am looking for how it is we mark, we witness, we understand what the law will not understand (the verdict is "hard to understand" says former U.S. President George W. Bush, an equivocation best understood as refusal), and I find myself reaching for John Coltrane.

I am reaching for Coltrane because today I need him to be something for us. I am reaching for a tradition of black radicalism in which and for which his music stands, a tradition whose demands, whose critique might call us into encounter with a contemporary social upheaval. This is the Coltrane heard as "an insistence on breaking the very patterns that he discovered" (Benston 2000, 123), the Coltrane of

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"capitalism dying" and "can be"s (Baraka 1996, 2), the Coltrane that "blew away our passsst /and showed us our futureeeeee" (Sanchez 1973, 274) — the Coltrane upon whom the "topos of performed blackness is felt most resonantly" (Benston 1989, 176). I am hopeful something of the openings Coltrane provided to activists in the 1960s might become ours, and bring us closer somehow to Eric Garner and who we are in relation to him.

My tenth-grade students and I play through and listen to his *Alabama*, an extended wail and interrupted improvisation over the 1963 bombing of a church in Birmingham by the Ku Klux Klan. I ask my students in the context of Eric Garner how we understand this music, and by this music I mean this wail — by which I mean this speaking, and speaking on the gross injustices dealt to black men and women in our country. I telescope the potential meanings of Coltrane's work, momentarily, to ask what's at stake in this music — to ask what power Coltrane holds, and whether we as musicians — or is it human beings or black or white or female or male or (in my case) Asian and gay — hold this power. I ask under what conditions and under what standings we find our way *in* to this music, and how we find our way back *out*, out from, outside of, through this music and through this world we inhabit.

What follows is an exploration of my classroom practice in the wake of Eric Garner, who is not by any means the first (or last) victim of excessive force by police against black men and women,[1] but embarrassingly the first to jolt me out of my complacency as a classroom teacher and demand my direct response. I thus pose this question for myself and for music educators and researchers: where is the space in our classrooms for a radical politics of engagement with the current Black Lives Matters movement? By radical, I indicate a politics that moves beyond sympathy or support and toward a restructuring of value and understanding and practice, musical and otherwise.

It is worth pointing out that this question of politics in the classroom, and even radical politics, is not new for this profession (see, for example: Bradley 2012; Hess 2015; Shaw 2012; Gould et al. 2009; Benedict et al. 2015; Allsup and Shieh 2012). In a recent issue of *ACT*, numerous researchers call upon frameworks that are important in this work, drawing upon the anti-racist framework of George Dei, the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, and Gloria Ladson-Billings's culturally responsive

pedagogy (see Talbot 2015). Here I look instead to a different body of scholarship, associated with black radical politics and aesthetics reaching back to and before the 1960s that has been largely absent in these conversations. This absence is striking, given the explicit relationship between music and politics explored by this work ("black radicalism is (like) black music" declares Fred Moten (2003, 24)), but perhaps not entirely surprising given its origins with the Black Power Movement which is often marginalized in representations of the African-American struggle for civil rights. My argument, which is also a negotiation in my classroom, is that this tradition suggests a particular stake in the question of radical politics of music, and radical politics in relation to black lives.

A word by way of my relationship with this tradition of black radicalism: I first encountered its scholarship as an undergraduate student interested in the intersection between music education and social justice. I gravitated to the writings of Amiri Baraka because of his conviction that black revolutionary thought was inseparable from understandings of how black musicians perform, position themselves, and are positioned with respect to a historical past (more on this to follow). For me, as a Chinese American aware of my own struggles with racism and marginalization and in the Midwestern United States, Baraka's foregrounding of identity politics and the power in the collective history of a people resonated. It is important to recognize, however, that the narrative of black radicalism is not in many ways my narrative and that where I represent and extend upon its theorizing here it changes in my telling. I make my own negotiations here and in my classroom, and ask readers to make this an opening rather than an end. In a similar way, the personal stories and intersecting identities of my students play a role in how they take up the call of black radicalism and Black Lives Matter.

It is also useful to keep in mind that this tradition, in its relationship to ideas of racial ontology and "blackness," opens to issues of essentialism — the reduction of groups of people or cultures to a set of defining characteristics. It thus contains the potential to limit the meanings and agencies of black music and musicians and activists while reinforcing ideas of inherent racial difference. I suggest throughout that like the understandings of Coltrane nurtured in this tradition, it is possible to improvise upon such conceits — an extended negotiation or fumbling through terrain

that is fraught with considerations of essentialism and race, aesthetics and authority. In detailing such improvisations in my own practice and thinking, I propose ways of engagement in the music classroom that are both enabling and timely for music educators in a world of Trayvons and Ericks, Michaels and Tamirs — a world "where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise" (Garza 2014, para. 2).[2]

2. A History: Amiri Baraka (1934-2014)

Situated at the opening of a field, engagement with the black radical tradition requires grappling with the rupture, the response to state violence, that is the work of Amiri Baraka (née LeRoi Jones) — founder of the Black Arts Movement, poet, playwright, performer, music historian and critic.

Consider Baraka's aesthetics from the 1960s: in "The Screamers" (1967), an early short story, he imagines the performance of fictional jazz musician Lynn Hope. Over the course of (and through) the performance, a black audience divided by class is drawn into solidarity and led out of the club into the streets where — with Lynn playing at the fore — they "made to destroy the ghetto":

> We screamed and screamed at the clear image of ourselves as we should always be. Ecstatic, completed, involved in a secret communal expression. It would be the form of the sweetest revolution, to huckle-buck into the fallen capital, and let the oppressors lindy hop out. We marched all the way to Spruce, weaving among the stalled cars, laughing at the dazed white men who sat behind the wheels (79).

It is an idealized, and ecstatic vision of what music might be capable of, but one also rooted in personal experience. In his writing on the Black Arts Movement, Baraka (2000) has described the relationship many black intellectuals at the time had with the music — jazz, blues, new experimental black music: "We could feel ourselves, we could become truly self conscious inside it" (497).

What Baraka and his collaborators felt — and sought — was a politicization of the aesthetic. They located a place where an interaction with music had social and political implications, in direct opposition to the active (and very much political) depoliticization, decontextualizing of music that in their view dominated society. Certainly it is an understanding of music, reduced to the acquisition of instrumental skill and silenced of political context, that continues in today's classrooms (Bradley

2007, 2012). Championing a politicized understanding of Black American music, Baraka may be best known in academic music circles for his seminal history *Blues People* (1963), in which he argues (radically at the time) that black music is inseparable from the experiences of Black Americans — that it can neither be understood nor interpreted without recourse to that history. The music of white musicians following jazz forms or structures of the time, he argues, was not "jazz" when understood thusly — but rather a co-opted, commercialized, and sterilized music, lacking the blues impulse, the trace of enslavement that is simultaneously the knowledge of freedom. Thus, while white music and musicians and critics might be concerned primarily with form, "Negro music is essentially an expression of an attitude, or a collection of attitudes, about the world, and only secondarily an attitude about the way music is made" (Baraka 1968, 13).

In this regard, one way to look at the Black Arts Movement is as a *pedagogical intervention* as much as an artistic movement: to hear music as an attitude is to *learn* to hear music as attitude (just as to understand music narrowly as a set of harmonic structures or familiar forms or technical challenges is also learned). During this time, Baraka, along with Larry Neal and A. B. Spellman, launched a magazine called "The Cricket" (1968-1969) to propagate socially- and racially-mediated understandings of black music — a form of education. It is also important to recognize that, over his fifty-year career, Baraka's most prolific writing has been as a music critic, where he has developed a particular style of speaking about music. As an example, in one of his late reviews, Baraka (2009b) described saxophonist Peter Brötzmann as "absorbed by this form qua form, projecting it as a complete aesthetic construct, thereby minimalizing its deeper philosophical and creative use as musical innovation. . . . [He] strips the paradigm of its deeper compositional and improvisational expressiveness" (399). While not as beholden today to the black nationalism of his 1960s writing, Baraka continues to call for a hearing of music that moves beyond *form qua form*, "complete aesthetic construct" — a hearing that "sees" context, history, identity, struggle.

From here, it is not difficult to hear the legacy of John Coltrane, and understandings of his music that grow from a tradition of listeners and artists who refuse the erasure of black bodies from black music, refuse the practiced

"depoliticization of reference" (Baraka 2009a, 19) that accompanies music listening. It is a legacy that challenges my teaching, authorized by various standards, that the *elements of music* — pitch, rhythm, timbre, etc. — should be taught disappeared of elements of history, cause, ourselves. It is a disappearance that serves well a commercial music industry that hides its own commercial interest, as sharply present in the music if only I listen with a broader lens.

And so later in the school year, a month after our encounter with *Alabama*, which is also our encounter with Eric Garner, which is also perhaps our encounter with New York City, my student Aaron (pseudonym) in my tenth grade instrumental music class concludes in an essay analyzing a YouTube video of Beyoncé performing "Ornithology" and "It Don't Mean a Thing":

> And so if we are looking at Beyoncé's song for her and not for the actual song then how can we feel its attitude, how can we feel the swing, how can we be part of the conversation and listen to the question, how can we start the revolution and guess the purpose and how can the music answer the question. The answer is that we can do none of these things. Once music has become mainstream, part of corporate, and part of a person's identity rather than the artist become [sic] part of the song's identity then we cannot call it Jazz, we cannot call it music, we may only call it what it's [sic], dead music that seeks to indulge itself in its own fakeness and unoriginality, while consuming any real music that does not meet its standards of "popularity."

Aaron's four-paged analysis, in contrast to some — but not all — of his classmates', makes no mention at all of melody, of harmony, of improvisation, of the call-and-response figure that initiates Beyonce's set. Has he failed to listen to the music, or has he heard something (or begun to hear something, which is what we are all hearing whether we are high school sophomores or not)? And what is it he has begun to hear? What is the question, the revolution? Has he heard or misheard (Beyoncé?) and something that might matter (to him? To us)?

3. Fumbling #1: Listening for a Revolution

Let me return to December 4, 2014, which is the day after the Staten Island grand jury, like most grand juries with respect to police officers,[3] does not indict Daniel Pantaleo. My students and I play *Alabama* and we listen to Coltrane play *Alabama*, and I ask what they hear, what it means. They hear the lack of a regular beat, notice the head is (mostly) performed over a single C minor chord: Riya calls it a "cry," and

Michael says it feels "stuck," like African Americans are trying to get out of something but can't break free. José points out the improvisation section, which he describes as "kind of happy." He says it's what's going on above the tragedy, above the mourning — "most people don't notice that something terrible has happened." Or maybe, Sean suggests, it's about the fact that after the initial impact, people forget. Eric Garner, too, will be forgotten.

This conversation about *Alabama*, actually, does not last very long. We spend the rest of the class talking about Eric Garner and Akai Gurney, the appalling rubber stamp that is the grand jury system in America, the demonization of black victims (including the false assertion propagated by the media that Eric was selling illegal cigarettes), and why black lives matter. This has very little to do with the music.

Admittedly, we are far from Lynn Hope's screamers in solidarity, or the Black Arts Movement leaders who find a new self-consciousness in the music. What happened? My students are very diverse in terms of both race and class, and we are not all black (in the above conversation Sean is) — which as I suggested earlier has implications regarding how we enter this work. I, in the role of teacher, am Chinese American, which no doubt has an effect on what students choose to say and not say. Nor are we all informed in a way as the subscriber to *The Cricket* or a black person in the context of the 1960s might be — informed of Coltrane's life, of the ideals of Black Power. The issue of practice is also apparent: this is not how my students and I are taught to listen (I have spent much of my professional teaching career unlearning a reflex of depoliticizing, of quarantining my interactions with music). I believe as we do more, seek greater contexts, our conversations will get richer.

But this is not only a matter of "getting there," which assumes there is a set end. Admittedly, I am not convinced I want the kind of listening Baraka was after in the 1960s, a listening that has been repeatedly criticized for its essentializing of black persons and black arts in ways that were often misogynist and homophobic, even as they were enabling. bell hooks (1990) is instructive when she argues Baraka's understandings "did not allow for recognition of multiple black experience or the complexity of black life" (107–8).[4] I wish for our inheritance of this work to be a rupture, an opening, a contending with new perspectives — not an end.

As an illustration, there is an awkward interview in which musicologist Frank Kofsky interviews John Coltrane about the relationship between his music and revolutionary politics and pushes — multiple times — for Coltrane to define a relationship between his music and the politics of Malcolm X. Trane finally asserts, "I think that music, being an expression of the human heart, or of the human being itself, does express just what *is* happening. I feel it expresses the whole thing — the whole of human experience at the particular time that it is being expressed" (Kofsky 1970, 225). Trane deftly avoids an end (Malcolm's politics), and simultaneously opens the music up to a larger realm of interaction, one that calls into play not simply Coltrane's particular time, but our particular time and persons as well. I don't wish that larger realm of his work to be lost upon my students.

The difficulty — and it is a pedagogical difficulty — is also avoiding a proliferation of musical reference, a personalization that borders on narcissism, a way of musicking that has us listening to ourselves, from our insides and not out from the outside. Maxine Greene (1995) gives a beautiful suggestion to music education that the classroom might be a place for "the reappropriation of cultural forms by all the diverse students in our classes — through our emphasis on interpretive and critical approaches, through our continuing efforts to break through enclaves and make all sorts of forms accessible to new and unexpected readings" (57). She is interested in the agency for all to enter into musical forms, and to find (and, importantly, share) personal and informed readings. Certainly there is a place for this, and new and unexpected readings/performances lead to new understandings, but if my (partial, open) aim is a radical politics of engagement with Black Lives Matter — which may not always be my aim — then the context of exploration must be — temporarily, tenuously, incompletely — narrowed.[5]

I am fumbling here for a theoretical stance that is clearer in practice — a back-and-forth in my classroom that is neither an insistence on the experiences of Black Americans in the understanding of music, but also a recovery of their presence in our present context. A stance that is neither an embrace of racial essentialisms nor a denial of racial difference and its political importance. It is a fumbling that threads its way through the black radical tradition, with Brent Edwards (2001) observing a repeated "theoretical grappling . . . toward a position and a praxis that would attend

to both class *and* race in promoting social transformation" (2). Fred Moten (2003) offers an enabling articulation, pointing both away and toward Baraka's insistent nationalism of the 1960s,[6] noting he is "not reducible to nationalism. . . . He's after and before nationalism as a nascent revolutionary ethics of response" (130). As a *revolutionary ethics of response*, our politicized aesthetic, our politicized ethic.

Now we are getting closer to something. If there is no theoretical stance, but rather a response — and response to a particular injustice — a response that calls to us through our ways of understanding our world and our music, then the narrowness is not in the way we inhabit music but in the way we respond *in* music to particular injustice. Responses, which are multiple, can be trials and improvisations rather than theories of the aesthetic — they can be strategic aestheticisms, if you will, paralleling Gayatri Spivak's (1988) articulation of strategic essentialisms. We can propose a shared context for understanding or performing a musical work for the purpose of shared action. Essence becomes convergence. Rather than shy away from political engagements, and particular political engagements, we might seek them as part of an *ethics* of how we musick, and a politics of musicking that recovers the way music spills — and must spill — into the historical, the political, the social, the present. This is a move that mirrors, in some ways, Bradley's (2012) and Hess's (2015) calls for greater attention to the socio-political contexts of musical works as a way of dismantling whiteness in the classroom. But the work of Baraka pushes deeper into a politicized aesthetic — constructing transformational potential not simply by elucidating the sociopolitical contexts of the music, but also by actively constructing that potential in the music itself through the ways that we listen to it.

Before I get too far afield, let me return to Alicia Garza (2014), co-founder of Black Lives Matters, for a final articulation of this negotiation, when she pushes against the #AllLivesMatters adaptation that appeared in many protests following the inception of the movement: "#BlackLivesMatter doesn't mean your life isn't important — it means that Black lives, which are seen as without value within White supremacy, are important to your liberation" (para. 14). I am not suggesting an understanding of music that is pre-determined or essentialized, which risks the agency of our students that Greene brings to our attention. I suggest that attention to particular politicizations of music are important to the ways we might attend to all

music, and that the black radical tradition offers us ways into that engagement. This formulation also re-calls my own stake, as a Chinese American in this work, in this writing — that my listening for this revolution, my continued engagement in transforming the nature of racist institutions, including schools, is integral to my own liberation and my capacity to act justly. So, too, must my students recognize their stake.

4. From Hearing to Performing: Fred Moten and the AACM

The politicized aesthetic in the black radical tradition does not end with this idea of listening for revolutionary content, powerful as it is. For the artists of the Black Arts Movement who sought a revolutionary intersection between ethics and aesthetics,[7] the presentation or performance of aesthetic works was also key. Cultural theorist and poet Fred Moten, in his analysis of the aesthetics of the black radical tradition, *In the Break* (2003), describes ways by which the black radical tradition presents a particular *multimodal* orientation that renders visible its own multimodality in the service of radical politics.

The idea of multimodal forms of communication has begun to receive some attention in education circles, referring to today's communicative landscape where people increasingly use multiple modalities simultaneously in communication — for example, photo and text (see Vasudevan 2010; Jewitt 2008). In this vein, consider *Alabama* and the way it oversteps being understood as exclusively aural (or, to use Moten's term, phonic): it carries with it a textual caption — a title that demands reference — and a formal inquiry of sorts (the absence of beat, the sudden end of improvisation) that gestures towards the non-phonic. It asks, and might ask, to be understood in relation to Coltrane himself, in relation to jazz, in relation to Alabama in 1963, in relation to New York in 2014. Vasudevan (2010) reminds us that, speaking in terms of the context of aesthetic work, that "contexts are not static but shaped by individuals and communities and the literacies through which they mediate their participation across space and time" (88). All work, in some fashion, presents in this way. Today, it is nearly impossible for Taylor Swift, or any contemporary pop artist, to be "heard" in a way that does not include the accompanying music video or the celebrity or the genre, which are related to the way

we identify through music, which are related to culture, which are related to a transformative politics, commercial and sexual and racial and otherwise. Only through a forceful narrowing of the sensory frame can something like a photograph be understood as exclusively visual or a piece of music as exclusively aural.

The need to attend to multimodalities is an assertion that both Vasudevan (2010) and Jewitt (2008) make regarding all classrooms, echoed in much of the literature on critical media literacies. Moten (2003) suggests the importance of attending to them in the construction of aesthetic works, and argues that work by Black Americans constantly perform recognition of this multimodality. In *In the Break*, his subjects are as diverse as they are extraordinary: he describes how Billie Holiday "operates as a massive acting out" in readings of her work, refusing domestication and aesthetic reduction (104), and argues Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the photograph of Emmett Till's mutilated corpse, the performance art of Adrian Piper, all carry phonic components that enable them to overstep their surface presentations. Elsewhere, with Stefano Harney (2013), he points to the work of many black popular artists, including Marvin Gaye in "What's Going On":

> And of course the title is already letting you know: goddamn it, something's going on! This song emerges out of the fact that something already was going on. Then, from a certain limited perspective, we recognize, there are these people milling around and talking and greeting each other — and then, something that we recognize as music emerges from that. But then, if you think about it for half-a-damn second, you say, "but the music was already playing." Music was already being made. So, what emerges is not music in some general way, as opposed to the non-musical. . . . And black popular music . . . is just replete with that. . . . [I]t's more than just a device. It's more than just a trope. It's almost like everybody has to, say, comb that moment into their recording practices, just to remind themselves, and to let you know, that this is where it is that music comes from. It didn't come from nowhere. (128–9)

What Moten is after is the ways in which artistic works might draw attention to their context, and in doing so expand their aesthetic understandings and expand the possibility for action. Through reading Black American work, he suggests numerous examples that are important for the ways we might understand music, and also teach and enact and perform it.

George Lewis (1998), member and historian of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), gives further shape to this idea, calling

these instances "embedded autocriticality." By embedding in performance a sensibility of critique, they employ "signifying strategies" that expand "the integrative paradigm from a primarily critical project to one that artists can also articulate" (70). Lewis documents such strategies, almost always multimodal (what he means by "integrative") in design, in the visual spectacle that sometimes marked performances of the AACM and particularly the Art Ensemble of Chicago (both black musicians' collectives from the 1960s). These include speaking, shouting, dancing, and the use of costumes, face paint, African instruments, and invented instruments. In his history of the AACM, Lewis (2008) also returns repeatedly to the idea of "creolization" — the appropriating or working through different genres and styles, often in new and surprising ways. In strategically calling up a range of musical traditions, and bringing new meanings through visual and other non-musical material, AACM musicians found a way of breaking from the phonic into the multimodal, into broader realms of meaning.

This is performative work that again is at its heart pedagogical, drawing attention to the way music might best be understood as pedagogy. Musical performance teaches us about music; it is a way of positioning us in response to culture. It is no accident that early in its history, in 1967 at the height of the Black Arts Movement, the AACM opened a school that continues to this day to educate *in the tradition*. Privileging individual agency, creativity, and innovation in opposition to induction in music education, the AACM school's early teachers emphasized an "egalitarian, nonhierarchical vision of pedagogy" even as they recognized a socio-political imperative "to protect our race, protect our Black children, protect our Black boys and girls and to raise them up to be strong and broad-shouldered and proud" (Lewis 2008, 177–9).

This is a way of teaching music. I recall very distinctly the moment Brent Edwards at the Center of Jazz Studies at Columbia University insisted I attend to what Curtis Mayfield was saying (not singing — *saying*), which is what the audience was saying, during a recording of "We're a Winner." "What if we let the music (no reduction to the aural, no mere addition of the visual but a radical nonexclusion of the ensemble of the senses such that music becomes a mode of organization in which principles dawn) take us?" Moten asks (2003, 96). What if, indeed? I think it was

hours later, at home listening *hard* to Curtis Mayfield for too many times when Edwards's question finally broke through, and I began considering all the non-musical, musical ways we might make music in the classroom. I wondered who I would be if I always listened and made music this way.

5. Fumbling #2: Founding a Collective

Because I am wary of where I have left my students with *Alabama* and several subsequent listenings, I decide to draw attention to the different ways we might approach music listening and we examine together the writings of numerous musicians and theorists on jazz (Wynton Marsalis, Ralph Ellison, Ingrid Monson, Kimberly Benston, Theodor Adorno, Virgil Thompson, Wikipedia, and of course Amiri Baraka). I tell them they are all true (with some caveats for Adorno's understanding of what constitutes jazz). Their challenge is, individually or in groups, to pick two approaches and use them to structure two performances of the same jazz standard. That is, to enact a particular way of listening in performance — to embed autocriticality in their performance. This is after Eric Garner (a figure of speech — we will never be "after" these events), and I am hopeful these performances, in the context of this assignment, may enact some way for us to grapple with what is happening in the lives of Black Americans.

Almost every student gravitates toward Ellison's idea of the individual and democratic in jazz, and Adorno's critique of commercialization. It turns out that when given a choice most of the students disagree, though they sympathize, with what Baraka has to say. Jazz is not — to them — the story of blackness, or Black America. There is an inclusiveness to Ellison and even to Adorno that appeals. In our final performances, students find a litany of ways to signify different understandings of jazz and meanings in the songs — but I am disappointed when we find ourselves no closer to interrogating values, or taking collective actions. I am reminded of what Moten (2003) tells us, riffing on Cedric Robinson:

> That black radicalism cannot be understood within the particular context of its genesis is true; it cannot be understood outside that context either. In this sense, black radicalism is (like) black music. The broken circle demands a new analytic (way of listening to the music). (24)

That by shying away from directly engaging with the legacy of enslavement in the United States, and its contemporary manifestations, we also shy away from the possibility of an engagement with a movement such as Black Lives Matter.

Perhaps I am documenting a failed classroom project here, then, one that finally arrives at a "safe" engagement with aesthetic understandings rather than a more "difficult" engagement with our political culpability and agency. More generously, perhaps this is simply a beginning. In hindsight, I notice the way I shied away from pressing all the way through toward political engagement into our performances, a discomfort with my authority in the classroom — who am I to call my students to action? What action would I call them to? Let me share this line of inquiry Moten offers, pointing to the London Riots of 2011 and the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York:

> What if authoritative speech is detached from the notion of a univocal speaker? What if authoritative speech is actually given in the multiplicity and the multivocality of the demand? This was something that was also happening at that same moment in the music [of Black Americans], so that the figure of the soloist was being displaced. (Harney and Moten 2013, 136)

For Moten, for Occupy, for London, for Black American musicians in the 1960s, the demand is already there. For the AACM the demand is already there, waiting for its call, its (multivocal) responses. The demand in New York, in the United States, is already here.

It is clear, I think, that the call is not mine as a teacher alone to issue and for my students to act as respondents to. The call is demanded of all of us, to act as subjects and not objects of that demand. If we were to communicate that demand — or at least refuse to *refuse to recognize* that demand with our students (isn't curriculum, after all, a decision of what to keep after the cutting board?), would our students be able to issue their calls as musicians in response to it? Such an interaction may call us into a radical politics, a restructuring of value and understanding, a courageous action into streets and city squares and the pervasive media-saturated sites of music-making.

I wish to conclude with a final proposition, which is also a direction I take with my classes as we build upon these initial engagements with the Black Lives Matter movement. I am attracted to Moten's articulation of the power in multivocality, to

Lewis's description of the AACM as an artist's collective. What if the collective is used as a structuring metaphor for the music classroom — suggesting a space to learn and define actions individually, but also in some way to inhabit the same space or context together. I am searching for a way to decenter my own authority, but not my political engagement in the ways we make music. I am searching structurally to displace the band or orchestra or jazz ensemble, as unitary performance ensemble and closed construct with something looser but not devoid of solidarity — that is not a move toward the soloist, that seems capable of both hearing *and issuing* a call.

I tell my high school students at the end of the year that, considering the demands we as musicians and human beings seek to respond to, we will be founding this music program again — together, as a collective. I tell them about the AACM, and about my past work with another collective whose demands continue to resonate in my work — the Prison Creative Arts Project and its work against mass incarceration. Buzz Alexander (2010), progenitor of the latter, has a way of narrating all of its participants as "founders," capable of risking collaboration and creativity and taking "ownership of their voices" even as we shared a common and emerging sense of purpose (6). In my classroom I hope we, too, are founding a very different kind of music program.

What if, as a classroom or collective, we share and learn who we are in this world? What if we understand our development as musicians to be a development in musical multimodalities, a politicized and contextual music? What if we do not disappear the world's demands and our culpability in them? We would be struggling to create an alternative way to exist as artists in this world, perhaps even a radical way.

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Notes

[1] Consider the high-profile murders of Amadou Diallo (1999), Ousmane Zongo (2003), Mohamed Bah (2012), Jonathan Ferrell (2013), and John Crawford III (2014). After Eric Garner Michael Brown, Jr. (2014), Ezell Ford (2014), Tanisha Anderson (2014), Akai Gurley (2014), Tamir Rice (2014), Jerame Reid (2014), Eric Harris (2015), Walter Scott (2015), Freddie Gray (2015), Sandra Bland (2015), and Samuel DuBose (2015). Janelle Monáe's song "Hell You Talmbout" (2015), which chants the names of many black Americans killed by police as well as vigilantes, is instructive.

[2] Alicia Garza (2014), co-founder of #BlackLivesMatter, elaborates:

> Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes. . . . When we say Black Lives Matter, we are talking about the ways in which Black people are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity. It is an acknowledgement Black poverty and genocide is state violence. It is an acknowledgment that 1 million Black

> people are locked in cages in this country — one half of all people in prisons or jails–is an act of state violence. It is an acknowledgment that Black women continue to bear the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families and that assault is an act of state violence. ("Broadening the Conversation," para. 1–2)

See also Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* (2012) on the discriminatory use of state power to incarcerate hundreds of thousands of black Americans and the collateral consequences, Kevin Gray et al.'s *Killing Trayvons* (2014), for perspectives on the overlapping contexts of violence that contributed to Trayvon Martin's demise, and Radley Balko's *Rise of the Warrior Cop* (2013) on the increasing militarization of America's police force and its disproportionate effects on blacks.

[3] See McKinley and Baker (2014) for a discussion of why, in contrast to most grand jury charges, those brought upon police officers rarely result in indictments.

[4] Radano (2013) offers a historical review of the construction of "racial embodiment" in music by Black Americans, including its use during the Black Arts Movement, and concludes that we must "deracinate music's critical lexicon and modes of analysis" (133). I am sympathetic to this position, but argue that the best way to move forward is not strictly erasure, but an improvisation between somewhat contradictory positions of recognition and critical reflection of the racial and political in music.

[5] In documenting another classroom engagement, Shevock (2015) describes an instance where he is facilitating student dialogue around jazz performances. Absent explicit politicization or historicization — which in his case involves reading the liner notes of a Mingus album, his students make no mention of race but adhere almost entirely to discussions of musical taste and technical challenge.

[6] It is worth noting that Baraka himself points away from his early nationalism, considering it a transitional phase.

[7] Larry Neal (1968) describes the Black Arts Movement this way:

> The motive behind the Black aesthetic is the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas, and white ways of looking at the world. The new aesthetic is mostly predicated on an Ethics which asks the question: whose vision of the world is finally more meaningful, ours or the white oppressors'? What is truth? Or more precisely, whose truth shall we express, that of the oppressed or of the oppressors? . . . In a context of world upheaval, ethics and aesthetics must interact positively and be consistent with the demands for a more spiritual world. Consequently, the Black Arts Movement is an ethical movement. Ethical, that is, from the viewpoint of the oppressed.

About the Author

Eric Shieh is a founding teacher and curriculum leader at the Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School, "A School for a Sustainable City," in New York City. He has previously taught orchestral music in St. Louis and founded music programs in prisons across the United States. His recent articles and chapters on progressive music pedagogies and curriculum reform have appeared in *Music Educators Journal, Arts Education Policy Review, Philosophy of Music Education Review*, and the *Oxford Handbook of Social Justice in Music Education*. Eric holds degrees in music education, multicultural literary theory, and curriculum policy from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and Teachers College, Columbia University. In 2009, he served as a student archivist for the Black Radical Archive at Columbia University, which houses Amiri Baraka's late collection.

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