
ANTIOPIC

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The artists invited to participate in this installment of the *Allegorical Power* series had no prior knowledge of the following text. Their participation can in no way be taken as a sign of support for the position outlined in the text.

Free Music, Literally

Experimental music presents a curious model for thinking about political art. Political sloganeering and symbolic gestures must be immediately rejected as they exist in the realms of representation that this art form attempts to bypass. One could say that experimental music inherently presents us with a political challenge in that it continually questions the dominant idea of what music is and, therefore, encourages a reassessment of all cultural/ideological hierarchies. It rejects musical *laws* and questions the authority from which these laws have been issued and used in the service of. If it can be said to speak at all it necessarily speaks of freedom; of the free play of sounds and an anarchic approach to organization that allows for creative re-organization, association and interpretation in its receivership. Unfortunately the anarchic spirit of experimental music has, for the most part, been limited to its content with only slight, less concentrated experimentation with its social context. The widespread adoption of contextual paradigms developed by corporate managers of "culture" and entertainment industries undercuts the potential politics expressed in the music, and it will only be through a rejection of such ready-made contexts and the conscious creation of new contexts that the political implications of this music will be more fully realized.

Antiopic's *Allegorical Power* series presents an obvious place to begin reassessing one aspect of the context in which experimental music exists: the context of commodity status and exchange and its potential negation through technological developments. The positive aspect of this potential lies in the ability of producers/listeners to create forms of distribution that oppose the dominant models of distribution with a radicality comparable to the music's critique of dominant ideas of musicality.

Economically experimental music exists to the side of mainstream music; while not directly controlled by the multi-national corporations that own the major labels, independent labels still replicate the mainstream model of distribution, propagating the economic ideology that such a distribution model is based on: simply, the ideology of capitalism, an ideology that is completely at odds with what Asger Jorn has called "living culture."

Living culture—the acknowledgement that individual creativity is inseparable from the collective experiences of a community—lives through the use (appropriation, plagiarism, reference, inspiration) of its artifacts, ideas and processes, making spurious any claim to ownership of cultural output. For this reason it is a concept of culture that is intolerable to capitalist ideology, which exchanges the living for the dead: private ownership and strictly controlled use. With the introduction of new technologies we have witnessed an increasing resistance to such an

understanding of culture. Technologies of home recording (cassette and minidisc recorders, CD burners etc.), sampling and computer file sharing have resulted in the assertion, first seen with the invention of printing technologies, that it is not only the distribution of the physical artifact over which the publisher can claim control but also the way in which the consumer is allowed to consume that artifact. This assertion tends to revolve around the argument of protecting the rights of the artist to get paid, but this obscures the far reaching consequences of such control and also that, in fact, it is not in most artists interests at all. It is quite simply a denial of the roots of music; it denies that the development of music has been the direct result of the appropriation, plagiarism and communal participation inherent to folk music and all subsequent music. (The prohibition of access to our roots can hardly be said to be in our best interest.)

The introduction of new technology always presents the dual possibilities of using that technology to strengthen and intensify the status quo or, alternatively, to subvert, resist and attack the status quo. With the development of electronic communication technologies we are already seeing an intensification of the commodity status of music through pay-per use services and consumer surveillance techniques—but it also affords us the opportunity to experiment with a de-commodification of music through the instantaneous free exchange of musical information coupled with a rejection of copyrights and generalized transgression of electronic property rights. The assumption that the only course for an artist is to sell a product (and staunchly protect future profits that can be derived from that product) is an ideological assumption and therefore must be called into question and alternatives experimented with. Conversely, the view that artists must be sentenced to poverty by rejecting any material gains resulting from their work is also to indulge in ideological purities and equally suspect.

Experimental music sells in very small quantities making it near impossible for an artist to survive on the sales of their CDs. But money is also available through grants, prizes, performance and lecture fees, commissions etc., all of which are increasingly accessible in relation to the increased exposure of an artist's work. The wider the distribution of their work, the more people get to hear it; the more well known they are the better their chances of accessing the funds necessary to spend less time as wage slaves and more time developing their work. Somewhat paradoxically the increase in exposure through an artist's "gifting" of their work may even help the sales of their CDs. In our age of extreme commodity fetishization it is unlikely that we will see a total dematerialization of music, as the desire to buy and collect "official" products will remain. Implementation of copyright and the failure to efficiently use all available means of distribution serves to support a system from which most artists are ultimately excluded at the same time as it retards their ability to get financial compensation for their endeavors.

The rejection of capitalism's ideological priorities of privatization and commercialization will open a space where a context that embraces the communal aspect of living culture can emerge. This will be but one step in the necessary experimentation with the social context of artistic production—experimentation that, with continued effort and concentration, can not only match the aesthetic achievements of experimental music but also allow the profound political implications of this music to become explicit.

—Dion Workman, July 2003, NYC