

EXPERIENTIAL ENGAGEMENT IN EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC AND
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

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Introduction: The Relationship Between Experimental Music and Alternative Education

Experimental music can enhance one's sensitivity to sound, the surrounding environment, and other people. Although it encompasses a broad spectrum of approaches to sound and music, in its essence experimental music pushes the boundaries of musical exploration and is not restricted by tradition. It is an invaluable resource for alternative education systems that seek to promote community and mutual respect while simultaneously providing individually focused development. The implications of including the study of experimental music in alternative education go beyond the desire to produce professional artists. It evinces the greater possibilities for the arts to aid students in developing sensitivity to their surroundings and a sense of creativity that they can apply to all facets of life.

The type of experiential engagement possible with experimental music is remarkably similar to the “living experience” quality alternative schools seek in their educational methods.¹ The ability of experimental musical practice to promote engagement with oneself and one's surroundings is propitious for realizing the paramount goal of alternative education to create healthy individuals and strong communities from which pervasive social and political change may develop. With a primary focus on experiential-based learning, the two together create a potent educational environment for children and adults alike to develop healthy mental frameworks that aid them in leading rich, fulfilling lives.

As I will demonstrate, the inclusion of music and the visual arts in alternative

¹ I have frequently come across the term “living experience” in alternative education writing and it denotes a key difference between those schooling systems and traditional education. It refers to learning based on activity rather than by memorization. By directly engaging with the material and having a personal connection to it, students will better understand how that material applies to their own lives.

schools varies widely, but the potential for these subjects within these systems is quite consistent. Summerhill in Suffolk, England and Black Mountain College, now closed but formerly near Asheville, North Carolina, are examples of the breadth of variety found in alternative education, yet both have uniting characteristics that demonstrate the main objectives of this type of schooling. The principles and approaches of these schools are designed to aid students in achieving a healthy relationship with themselves and their community by promoting the idea that each student is an individual with his or her own needs and interests. These schools concentrate on different age groups, have rather different formal structures, and differ in their approaches to the inclusion of music and art in their curriculum. However, they both stress individual experience and personal connections to learned material. Their curriculums include music and art in varying degrees and demonstrate some of the possibilities for these subjects to promote development and experiential education, but only to a limited extent. By examining these schools and their educational goals, I hope to show that inclusion of experimental music would enhance students' development because of its experiential emphasis and the way it encourages interaction with sound, space, and people in new, creative ways.

The term “experimental music” is very broad and it is likely that many musicians who fall into this category may not be interested in the ideas on which I am focusing in this paper. I am principally interested in artists and musical practices that engage one to experience sound and one's surroundings in a new or unusual way. I will examine select works by Pauline Oliveros and Alvin Curran and discuss their interests and approaches to creating music. Examination of their work illustrates that the experience and effects of experimental musical practice could help fulfill the aims of alternative education. Both

composers have unique ways of promoting engagement with one's surroundings and they each understand how their work can foster community and provide new ways of imagining social organization.

The broader implications of alternative education are pronounced because it was developed in response to traditional schooling and thus by its very nature stands in contrast to social norms. Institutionalized learning may seem at odds with the goals of alternative schools and their oppositional social stance, namely the focus on independent development and anti-authoritarian structures common to these schools. However, alternative education schools retain many aspects of traditional education. It is necessary to briefly elucidate how alternative education situates itself within structured, institutionalized models yet still upholds its principal goals. Two approaches allow alternative education to realize its aims while positing a social alternative to traditional schooling: building from a non-rejectionist philosophy and establishing a focus on community.

John Dewey, a pre-eminent theorist on the subject of experiential-based learning, upheld that one should not build an alternative school by rejecting the ideas of traditional schools, but instead should entirely focus on achieving its philosophy. If one builds from a negative point of view, then it is likely ideas that would support your goals will be shunned to the detriment of the educational experience.² Alternative institutions can assert their own individuality while concurrently maintaining useful qualities of traditional schools. Yet, how do these schools maintain a focus on relating knowledge to everyday life within a formalized educational context? One of the main ways they achieve this is through their focus on personal development in a community-oriented

² John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, 1944), 21.

setting.

Alternative education schools tend to have a stronger focus on community than traditional schools. This is evidenced in both Summerhill and Black Mountain College. When I asked Zoë Readhead, the current principal of Summerhill, about the institutional dimension of the school, she replied, “One of the huge benefits of Summerhill is the community and the fact that we are all a part of it. If this is institutionalised [*sic*] I'm not sure, but I would call it a village or tribe and therefore the natural way for people to live!”³ Readhead's sentiments reflect the enriching role that community can have in education, and shows how alternative schools maneuver within a formalized educational structure. Black Mountain College also developed with a focus on community. When the college was first established everyone involved collectively decided how it would run, and this inclusive, non-hierarchical emphasis permeated the student experience at the school.⁴ This emphasis on community also helps students situate themselves within a larger social context and to realize that education does not only take place in an isolated manner, but is connected to learning in all aspects of one's life.

Experience as the Basis of Education

The concept of experience is a crucial connection between experimental music and alternative education. Alternative schools are built around the concept of creating quality experiences that allow students to make associations between different areas of knowledge and to understand that education does not just have to take place in the classroom. While Dewey also wrote extensively about art and experience specifically, his

³ Zoë Readhead, e-mail message to author, 28 March 2013.

⁴ Vincent Katz, ed., *Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 19.

description of the “experiential continuum” and the interaction between one's inner experience and the outside world are directly applicable to the effects of experimental music as demonstrated by Pauline Oliveros and Alvin Curran.⁵ Dewey's philosophy helps us assess the effectiveness of alternative education while also illuminating the similarities between the living experience cultivated by these schools and the experiential engagement of experimental music.

Dewey argued that students taught in traditional educational systems are forced to learn facts and ideologies passed onto them from a pre-existing knowledge base that does not look forward into the future, consider present situations nor question itself or its potential fallibility. It is essentially a static system imposed upon those being educated, who most often lack the experience needed to grapple with the information taught.⁶ Dewey suggests that instead of having a predetermined idea of what students should learn, an educational system should be focused on creating an “experiential continuum” that allows students to have a personal connection to what they learn and gives them a foundation from which to develop.⁷ Rather than learning by rote, students should be encouraged to identify directly with their education and engage in the educational process to create quality experiences from which they can understand the context of what they have learned. With this personalized understanding and deeper connection to material, students can creatively engage information in endless areas of their life rather than have only one specific application for it.

⁵ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934). While Dewey's work on art and experience is rather comprehensive, it is more focused on the philosophy of aesthetics rather than on learning through tangible experiences. Dewey certainly saw a connection between his theories on the experiential continuum, the effects of art, and the mental state of the artist during creation, and he tries to detail the substance of that similarity in this book.

⁶ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 18-19.

⁷ Ibid., 28.

An effective education is one that capitalizes on these personal connections to knowledge by creating the greatest possible amount of quality experiences. A quality experience is one that leads to as many other experiences as possible. Each experience builds upon previous experiences, which in turn change how one receives future experiences. As Dewey states, “the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after.”⁸ The moving force, the way an experience shapes future experiences, should always be taken into consideration. Of course, every experience alters a person to some extent, but those that lead to the greatest number of new experiences and development in the most areas are most desirable. A beneficial experience is one that arouses curiosity and actively encourages one to seek out other experiences.⁹

When assessing the potency of an experience, one must consider the interaction between the individual and his or her internal experiences and the external, objective situation. Experience affects an individual internally by altering desires or a sense of purpose, but the force of an experience also projects outward to surrounding people and situations. “Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had.”¹⁰ A person's internal changes from an experience will cause him or her to act differently within their external environment. This is how communal and societal change is possible.

Similarly, objective conditions act upon individuals, altering one's internal experiences and affecting how one receives or processes future experiences. A person's

⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁹ Ibid., 36-45.

¹⁰ Ibid., 39.

reaction to a current experience will be influenced by his or her personal history, such as social or familial experiences up to the present. For example, in large part because of the environment in which he or she grew up, a child from an impoverished neighborhood and a family with little or no secondary education will have a different set of experiences than a child from a wealthy home in which university education is common. The same is true for children from disparate racial and cultural backgrounds. Each child will have different needs in a scholastic situation and will likely react differently when presented identical material in similar ways. To create a quality experience one's individual past experiences and ideas must be taken into consideration along with the current surrounding environment.

The difficulty of assessing the value and force of an experience makes being an educator within a system based upon living experience especially challenging. In regards to the role of the educator, Dewey states, "Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worth while."¹¹ A teacher ideally opens as many doors to other experiences as possible without shutting off other avenues. As Dewey says, an educator must "be able to judge what attitudes are actually conducive to continued growth and what are detrimental. He must, in addition, have that sympathetic understanding of individuals as individuals which gives him an idea of what is actually going on in the minds of those who are learning."¹² Already a difficult task, an educator's role is further complicated by the fact that experience is not only an internal, personal process, but is also influenced by one's present surroundings and socio-cultural

¹¹ Ibid., 40.

¹² Ibid., 39.

environment.

If the above influences are not taken into consideration, then the individual will be limited in his or her ability to apply the experience to different environments, or situations. Similar to the continuity of experience, one situation naturally leads to and influences another. One learns to use the knowledge and skill gained in one situation to understand and deal with future situations. Ignoring either of these factors limits the scope of the experience.¹³ This interaction works alongside one's continuity of experience to allow for easy, broad application of experiences, which allows one to move more fluidly from one situation to another.¹⁴

The power of experiential-based learning is evident when one considers the potential that can arise from the interaction between internal experiences and external conditions. Our surroundings have a huge influence on how we internalize an experience and, in turn, individuals have immense potential to affect the community around them because of the outward force of experience. One inescapably affects the surrounding environment through actions derived from his or her set of personal experiences. For these reasons, a focus on community and awareness of social and political factors is necessary for effective alternative education institutions, and this is present at Summerhill and was also an educational value at Black Mountain College. These types of changes within education hold the potential for significant impacts on how individuals engage with their surroundings and, through extension, on social development as a whole.

Experimental music's ability to craft an experientially based form of engagement between the listener and the surrounding environment makes it especially useful as a

¹³ Ibid., 44.

¹⁴ Ibid., 42-44.

subject of study within alternative schools. The work of Oliveros and Curran demonstrate how experimental music has immense potential to further many of Dewey's core ideas regarding education and experience, namely engagement between the individual and the surrounding environment, and the cultivation of a flexible, creative mindset. The work of these composers creates engaging experiences for participants and viewers that can then be applied to endless situations. Furthermore, their work has a focus on community that makes their approach particularly compatible with these types of school structures. Utilized within an alternative education situation, their work would be of immense benefit to cultivating the type of creative perspective desired within these schools to allow students to craft an education most suited to themselves, and to give them the tools to live as happy, confident, and engaged members of a community.

While Oliveros and Curran are examples of artists who successfully engage the ideas of experience so essential in alternative education, I do not think it necessary for composers and musicians to actively engage in experiential ideas as purposefully as Oliveros and Curran in order to benefit alternative education. These composers are particularly interesting to discuss in this context because they conscientiously strive to engage so many of the same concepts as these school systems. Their work focuses on ideas of community, personal engagement, new ways of experiencing a situation, and creative approaches to awareness and connections between different ideas. Much like alternative school systems, their work engages current social and political issues and suggests alternatives to dominant social structures. In addition, both composers have held positions as instructors at institutions and have developed their own ideas and approaches to teaching.

Oliveros' Deep Listening practice expands awareness and increases attunement to the vast potential of oneself and one's surroundings.¹⁵ She declares that her practice literally changes the way one's mind works.¹⁶ This development is outlined in her *Sonic Meditations*, which are the foundation of her work and ideology. This collection of pieces shows a variety of ways that participants can develop their awareness through the medium of sound. Oliveros maintains that Deep Listening creates the possibility for great social change in the way it alters one's awareness and interaction with the surrounding environment. She also suggests alternate social frameworks in the experiences of pieces such as the *Sonic Meditations* through symbolism and structured interactions among participants.

Curran's work also emphasizes a connection to one's surroundings, but with an egalitarian emphasis and more overt political focus. While placing importance on community, Curran upholds the idea that music is an entity that everyone possesses and has the power to create. His work with Musica Elettronica Viva and their piece called *Sound Pool* are prime examples of his belief that anyone can create music while also demonstrating how important it is for one to embody music and relate to it on a personal level. This work also demonstrates the political intentions of Curran and his colleagues through its free form and anti-authoritarian nature. Furthermore, Curran encourages new relationships with the surrounding environment through his site-specific work, which he termed "music outside of the concert hall," such as *Maritime Rites*, and his use of

¹⁵ "Deep Listening" is the name Oliveros has given her specific form of listening meditation. For a more detailed description of Deep Listening, its connection to the *Sonic Meditations*, and Oliveros' far reaching intentions for the practice, please see: William Osborne, *Sounding the Abyss of Otherness: Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening and the Sonic Meditations*, 11 August 1999, <<http://www.osborne-conant.org/oliveros.htm#central>> (December 7, 2012).

¹⁶ Pauline Oliveros, interview with author, 5 October 2012.

environmental recordings in pieces like *Watercolor Music*.

Oliveros and Curran also share a strong interest and great skill as improvisers. Both composers have discussed the focus and mental state necessary for successful improvisation, which is to be extraordinarily aware of everything happening in the moment, a perfect example of the mindset that would help students creatively engage with ideas taught to them and to be able to make their own experientially based connections between different areas of study. The extensive body of work by Oliveros and Curran reflects the dynamic qualities sought after within alternative education systems to promote development of personal awareness, community, and social change. Their ability to create palpable experiences and excite new ways of experiencing one's surroundings, are key to the effectiveness of their work and its potential within an alternative education environment.

Pauline Oliveros and the *Sonic Meditations*: Creating Tangible Experiences

In an interview between Glenn Glasow and Pauline Oliveros, Glasow asks if Oliveros thinks it is possible to teach people to improvise. She replies, “I don't think it's possible to teach anyone how to do anything, but I think it's possible to induce people to do things – to induce people to improvise.”¹⁷ This statement summarizes Oliveros' approach to musical creation, but it also speaks to her focus on experientially based music that leads to both personal and social change. Oliveros uses focused listening in her compositions to make the performer deeply aware of mental and physical processes within him or herself and to foster a great awareness of the external environment.

¹⁷ Mills College, Center for Contemporary Music Archive, 780.904 M65CD189, CD189, Track 1, Pauline Oliveros interviewed by Glenn Glasow, KPFA Radio, July 21, 1960.

Oliveros believes this focused awareness changes the minds of performers and gives them a stronger connection to other people and the world at large. One of the first ways Oliveros began to express these ideas formally and succinctly is through her *Sonic Meditations*, a collection of twenty-five short prose compositions focused on different modes of listening and engagement. With the *Sonic Meditations* she created a way to successfully induce new musical and experiential states. The pieces successfully transfer symbolic ideas and gestures into tangible experiences that actively alter the individual participant's psyche while simultaneously presenting alternative social constructs and interactions. The focus she expresses in these compositions has persisted throughout her career, and has become the foundation of her work and practice.

Oliveros' work is well suited for an alternative education setting because both attempt to unite various parts of one's awareness to allow for new perceptions of surroundings and relationships with others. Her body of work is a powerful demonstration of Dewey's ideas on how the objective environment influences one's experiences, but also how one can influence the surrounding environment. This interwoven connection is very important to demonstrate the potential of her music for both personal and social change. Her willingness to embrace these concepts allows her to create compositions that powerfully engage participants in a multitude of ways.

Oliveros created the *Sonic Meditations* in a context of political dissatisfaction and feminist issues, and was a way for her to engage with the social issues around her:

This was just at the end of the Vietnam War and that, of course, had been very important. There were draft resisters. It was a senseless war just like the one we've been fighting. Or senseless as far as I'm concerned. Senseless in that they're based in profit motive rather than any kind of ideals...I felt the need to address some of the issues that were around me and I was beginning to do my own meditation...I wasn't involved in any

traditional meditation practice, but I called my work sonic meditation at the time.¹⁸

This statement not only asserts that social and political concerns around her influenced Oliveros' desire to compose, but it also alludes to a focus on the importance of the individual within the broader social context. Oliveros mentions that she had already begun her own meditative practice, and suggests that it was a way for her to deal with the issues around her. Thus it only seems a natural extension for her to write the *Sonic Meditations* as a way to share the practice with others in an attempt to alter the socio-political situation through focus on the individual whose influence then radiates outwards to the community.

The feminist movement and Oliveros' experiences as a female musician and composer were also very important factors that affected her work. As a young female musician, Oliveros encountered prejudice from male instructors and fellow students alike. In one early instance a male horn teacher asked her, "Why do you want to be a horn player? You will only get married and have children."¹⁹ This comment infuriated Oliveros and made her suspect of male teachers. She encountered similar problems when attempting to establish herself as a composer after moving to San Francisco in 1952. It was challenging for her to find a composition teacher because they were skeptical about the serious candidacy of a female composer. Oliveros remembers that at a composer's workshop at San Francisco State College all of the male students would leave the room whenever the instructor would examine her music.²⁰ Although Oliveros has been successful in establishing herself, she notes, "It is still true that unless she is super-

¹⁸ Pauline Oliveros, interview with author, 5 October 2012.

¹⁹ Idem, "Harmonic Anatomy: Women in Improvisation," in *Sounding the Margins: Collected Writing 1992-2009* (Kingston, NY: Deep Listening Publications, 2010), 132.

²⁰ Oliveros, "Harmonic Anatomy: Women in Improvisation," 133.

excellent, the woman in music will always be subjugated, while men of the same or lesser talent will find places for themselves.”²¹ Today Oliveros continues her advocacy for women in music because such barriers still exist. Although her work is strongly associated with women's rights, Oliveros wishes foremost for equality and mutual respect between all people so that creative energies can be used together in the strongest possible way.

In 1969 Oliveros formed the Women's Ensemble at the University of California, San Diego, where she was teaching. She took it upon herself to create the ensemble as she realized that the institution was not going to recognize the need and desire for women to express themselves musically. Improvising with women strongly informed the development of Oliveros' work, and she developed her *Sonic Meditations* out of her collaboration with the Women's Ensemble. A feeling of “kinship, collaboration, and community listening” emerged in her music and there was less focus on technical mastery and more on how the sounds interacted to create textures.²² Oliveros says, “My music was now coming from a deeper inner place. Working with women gave me a kind of permission to be myself that had been covered or hidden in the mostly male musical environment I inhabited where, as a woman, I had to prove myself more intensely.”²³ In the absence of having to prove her worth as a composer or improviser, she was able to rid herself of anxieties and was free to musically explore. The openness of the Women's Ensemble gave her work a stronger emphasis on community and non-hierarchical collaboration.

²¹ Idem, “And Don't Call Them 'Lady' Composers,” in *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-1986* (Baltimore, MD: Smith Publications, 1984), 48.

²² Idem, “Harmonic Anatomy: Women in Improvisation,” 137.

²³ Ibid., 137.

Oliveros also became more open personally in the *Source* magazine publication of the first twelve *Sonic Meditations* in 1971, when for the first time she publicly identified herself as a lesbian.²⁴ This suggests that Oliveros' involvement in experimental musical engagement influenced her personal internal experience and in turn altered how she interacted with the external environment. Her experience playing with the Women's Ensemble gave her more confidence both in her musical exploration and in how she related to the external environment and community. By first becoming aware of how her musical practice affected her, Oliveros began to realize the impact it could have on others. In this way, as she addressed the social issues around her, her solutions to those issues began to be directly reflected in her work.

The development of the *Sonic Meditations* was also heavily influenced by Oliveros' connections to several people outside of the field of music. One such influence was Elaine Summers, a dancer who developed the idea of "Kinetic Awareness." Summers worked with the Women's Ensemble to help members develop understanding of their movement and tension in their bodies through exercises that emphasized awareness of the body as a whole and of its individual parts. These exercises primarily consisted of massage and very slow, small movements of the body. She also taught Oliveros the acupuncture points and meridian lines, which helped Oliveros realize that there are more layers at play internally than one typically realizes.²⁵ One can see the influence that Summers had on Oliveros' developing concepts of voluntary and involuntary actions and unconscious mental responses, and with slow controlled movements such as those she employs in her playing of long tones. The focus on breath

²⁴ Oliveros, "Sonic Meditations," *Source* 10 (July 1971): 103-107.

²⁵ Idem, interview with author, 5 October 2012.

prevalent throughout the *Sonic Meditations* shows her concern with the relationship between the body and the mind. Oliveros uses breath to unite mental and physical awareness.

Oliveros' interest in meditation developed through observation of her breathing and her practice of playing long tones on her accordion. Her affiliations with Al Chung Liang Huang, a choreographer, dancer, and T'ai Chi Chuan teacher, and Lester Ingber, a karate teacher who was also a theoretical physicist, encouraged involvement with these practices.²⁶ As Oliveros studied T'ai Chi with Huang, she began to transfer the slow, purposeful movements and breathing rhythms into her solo improvisations. She had already been playing and singing droning improvisations, and the addition of awareness of the breath had a positive, calming influence on her mentally and physically.²⁷

In addition to karate lessons, Oliveros' friendship with Ingber included discussions on consciousness and the role it has in karate and music. Ingber's background in physics caused him to teach in a very technical way, which Oliveros found beneficial. Karate had a profound effect on her personally, and she wanted to better understand this psychological change.²⁸ The martial art confirmed a considerable amount for her about listening. She found it to be a very auditory practice because one must constantly listen for cues and utilize an expanded awareness. As she says, one must "listen in the moment and not move, not until it was really necessary."²⁹ Oliveros gives an example of this expanded sense of awareness by asking how one would approach having twenty attackers at once. She explains how one could choose to handle them individually or treat them all

²⁶ Heidi Von Gunden, *The Music of Pauline Oliveros* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983), 88.

²⁷ Oliveros, "On Sonic Meditations," *Software for People*, 148.

²⁸ Von Gunden, *The Music of Pauline Oliveros*, 88.

²⁹ Oliveros, interview with author, 5 October 2012.

as one opponent. The latter requires a change of perspective and the expanded awareness of karate practice that had resonated with her so strongly.³⁰ These experiences marked an important step in her engagement with sound, bodily awareness, and expanded awareness of one's surroundings. In addition to their possibilities for musical exploration, it furthered her engagement with meditation and her understanding of how controlled breathing and movement can alter one's consciousness.

Oliveros' engagement with scientists and professionals in areas outside of music demonstrates the far-reaching goals she has for her meditative-based work. She uses knowledge from fields outside of music to confirm her experiences and to better understand the process of meditation in order to most successfully induce a creative mindset for herself and other performers. She knows from experience that certain changes from meditative practices are true and very palpable, and finds it helpful to verify these changes from a number of sources.³¹ The wide-ranging influences on her *Sonic Meditations* show the extensive potential of her work and the interdisciplinary connections she knows to be possible, including the capacity of her work to support the learning environment desired by alternative education schools.

In her meditative practices, Oliveros differentiates between the concepts of focused attention and global awareness. She considers attention to be a physical phenomenon and awareness to be a mental process. Ideally the two work together in balance so that awareness is able to expand to any degree while centered around one's attention. Simultaneously attention can focus in any direction within the field of awareness. When attention and awareness are harmonious in this way one is able to be

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

aware not only of his or her own body and mind, but also of the surrounding environment and other people. Oliveros summarizes this in the following statement:

While one's attention is focused to a point on something specific, it is possible to remain aware of one's surroundings, one's body, movement of all kinds, and one's mental activity (in other words remain aware of inner and outer reality simultaneously). Attention is narrow, pointed and selective. Awareness is broad, diffuse and inclusive.³²

By utilizing these two complimentary techniques, the practitioner can experience an immensely expanded and well-tuned sense of awareness. One explores the possibilities of synchronizing voluntary and involuntary activity and attempts to be continually aware of both internal and external stimuli.³³

The *Sonic Meditations* specifically use sound as a focal point for one's attention. If applied to improvisation, the combination of global and focal awareness allows one to be immensely receptive to the sounds being played, one's surroundings, and the actions and intentions of both oneself and others. This in turn allows for more effective improvisation because one is simultaneously aware of what is happening in the moment and of his or her own possible responses. In describing the relationship between these types of awareness, William Osborne explains that, "focal listening is a form of global listening, since there is an infinitude of detail in every sound."³⁴ The infinite detail Osborne refers to is the endless realm of sonic possibilities a performer can engage with or use when responding during an improvisation. By honing these two forms of awareness, performers can open themselves to the myriad possibilities of sound in the moment, expand their creativity, and intuitively respond to the situation. This ideal

³² Oliveros, "On Sonic Meditations," 139.

³³ Ibid., 141.

³⁴ Osborne, "Global and Focal Listening," <<http://www.osborne-conant.org/oliveros.htm#central>> (7 December 2012).

mental state allows the mind to fully relax. The improviser is then able to play and respond to other sounds with a natural ease because there are no stimuli that obstruct the mind's processing of the sounds, interfere with reaction time, or stunt creativity. Through intensive, inclusive listening the mind is able to focus.

Oliveros carefully crafted each of the pieces comprising her *Sonic Meditations* to engage participants in a variety of ways that work together to create different modes of experience with the ultimate goal of expanding their sense of awareness in all ways. She does this by transferring symbolism into palpable experience, and each of the pieces engages the performer in a different manner to achieve this goal. Stephen Miles has thoroughly demonstrated the spectrum of engagement invoked by the different pieces by arranging them into seven distinct categories ranging from what he terms “Subjective Subjectivity” to “Intersubjective Intersubjectivity.”³⁵ These terms detail the range of the pieces from those that only use a personal, internally focused form of engagement with no interaction with other people or the outside world to those in which one’s experience is completely dependent on the actions and intentions of others. While I will not describe this spectrum in detail, Miles’ categorization is immensely useful for demonstrating how each of the *Sonic Meditations* engages a different type of experiential mode.

Each of the pieces, and thus each of these experiential modes, works with the others as a unified body to create an overall expanded awareness for performers. Their effects will best be realized by performers who play all, or at least a variety, of the pieces.

³⁵ Stephen Miles, “Objectivity and Intersubjectivity in Pauline Oliveros’ *Sonic Meditations*,” *Perspectives of New Music* 46 (Winter, 2008): 4-38. Miles’ analysis is useful for understanding the subtle distinctions between the types of focus that the different pieces of the *Sonic Meditations* invoke. He clearly describes how the pieces shape one’s awareness and cause one to interact with, influence, and be influenced by others to varying degrees. In this way the *Sonic Meditations* are a teaching tool in and of themselves by gradually causing participants to become more aware of their interactions with others and their own internal stimuli.

This cohesive quality makes the *Sonic Meditations* particularly easy to apply in an educational environment because they were developed as a whole to teach engagement and awareness. The individual parts function independently, but are even more powerful together because each one builds upon the experiences of the others.

Because of the experiential nature of the *Sonic Meditations* the pieces are intended to be performed and not simply read or watched as a passive audience member. To emphasize this point, Oliveros borrows a phrase from Sufi Inayat Khan about how music is “not a theory but an experience,” meaning that music is not an entity to be contemplated, but should include a personal connection that leads to a tangible experience.³⁶ Oliveros breaks down the performer/audience dichotomy by inviting everyone present to participate. The goals of the *Sonic Meditations* are not only the musical results, but also the experiential benefits of enhanced observation and awareness. These latter results can only be gained through participation in the pieces and by engaging both global and focal awareness as outlined above. Oliveros is especially concerned with the *process* of the *Sonic Meditations* and the resultant *engagement* of the performers.³⁷ Thus, to gain the full benefit of the pieces they must be experienced through active participation.

Oliveros iterates that non-musicians may participate in the works, and even suggests that they might be able to realize the goals of the pieces better than musicians, whose training can make the process harder because of ingrained musical responses.³⁸ This problem is somewhat similar to the lack of flexibility within traditional education in that one learns how to respond to a given situation in one specialized way. Training gives

³⁶ Oliveros, “On Sonic Meditations,” 148.

³⁷ Miles, “Objectivity and Intersubjectivity in Pauline Oliveros' *Sonic Meditations*,” 19-20.

³⁸ Oliveros, “On Sonic Meditations,” 157.

musicians embedded reactions to musical situations and as a result they often have trouble resisting consciously manipulating the sounds during a performance.³⁹ Oliveros' work attempts to break players free from their learned responses to expand their awareness of possibilities in the moment. The group dynamic of the *Sonic Meditations* is an important factor that affects everyone present. It is thus important for everyone participating to engage in the piece as sincerely as possible for the benefit of each person's experience.⁴⁰

The ability to follow Oliveros' instructions is crucial for the accurate realization of the work. While the *Sonic Meditations* are improvised, Oliveros carefully designed them to produce rather specific, controlled musical results. Performers should not make substitutions inspired by their own interpretation of the pieces, but should strictly abide by the score. Common improvisatory practices, such as performers cuing one another or consciously repeating a gesture of another player, obstruct the intentions of the work. Although the results are indeterminate, Oliveros chooses her wording very carefully to craft the resultant sounds and effect of the pieces.⁴¹

This care is demonstrated in the first piece of the collection, "Teach Yourself to Fly." Oliveros has carefully written the piece to create a specific type of experience for performers through transference of symbolic ideas into tangible experiences. In explanation of why she specified performers sit in a circle, Oliveros states, "People sitting in a circle are a living symbol of unity as well as a unified reality."⁴² Not only does this describe her reasoning for the circular formation, but Oliveros' statement also shows

³⁹ Von Gunden, *The Music of Pauline Oliveros*, 113.

⁴⁰ Oliveros, "On Sonic Meditations," 157.

⁴¹ Von Gunden, *The Music of Pauline Oliveros*, 110-11.

⁴² Oliveros, "On Sonic Meditations," 149.

her engagement with symbolism and tangible experience. That is, she uses the symbolic representation of the circle to create an experiential unity for the performers, which communicates new possibilities of social relationships to the participants.

The *Sonic Meditations* also require balance of awareness of oneself with the awareness of others, thus placing oneself in the context of the surrounding group, or community. This means that no more emphasis should be placed on one's own responses and desires than any other person's in the group. Each individual is equal to every other one. This relationship aids the group as a whole in addition to each individual. For example, when discussing the balance of attention, awareness, conscious observation, and unconscious observation, Oliveros says, "Progress to new levels of finer, more sustained attention and larger, more inclusive awareness is arrested in the absence of accurate, objective feedback from the observation mode, either from an outsider or the insider: one's self."⁴³ Here Oliveros describes how the *Sonic Meditations* open one up to objective feedback from others and oneself, which in turn deepens the potential for expanded awareness. The group dynamic can actually improve one's experience by providing more types of objective feedback. This is another demonstration of how Oliveros uses the interplay between one's personal experience with the external environment to make her work as effective as possible.

The inclusiveness of the *Sonic Meditations* reveals the social considerations Oliveros incorporated within the pieces. By inviting equal participation from everyone present, Oliveros promotes non-hierarchical collaboration and social interaction. This approach causes a breakdown between the roles of composer, performer, and audience. As Osborne relates, "This removal of hierarchical relationships encourages the

⁴³ Ibid., 154.

development of community based on the interaction of every individual empathically listening deeply to the collective.”⁴⁴ Just as Oliveros demonstrated the calming effects of controlled awareness of breath and how that can benefit one beyond the immediate experience of the *Sonic Meditations*, so too is she demonstrating alternative social structures through the work. Like the benefits of the breath work, the community focus of the pieces can extend beyond the immediate experience.

“Zina's Circle,” one of the *Sonic Meditations*, is an example of an especially community unifying piece. It consists of everyone standing in a circle holding hands and moving inwards and outwards slowly while observing the breath cycle. The circle then returns to its original size and one designated person, the transmitter, squeezes the hand of the person to his or her right who in turn does the same to the next person. This should happen as quickly as possible, and when one has his or her hand squeezed he or she should simultaneously shout “hah.” The transmitter subsequently begins more cycles – slowly at first with pauses in between and then with the duration between cycles decreasing until one cycle starts immediately at the end of another. The goal is for each person's reaction time to get faster and faster until everyone is nearly shouting in unison. Stephen Miles' account of the experience of a performance of the piece is that it was incredibly unifying and exhilarating for performers and audience members alike.

Oliveros' ultimate goal of works such as the *Sonic Meditations* is to create a broadened sense of awareness that will carry into all aspects of participants' lives. As she states, “The key product of all this training is the development of receptivity. In general, our cultural training dominantly promotes active manipulation of the external

⁴⁴ Osborne, “The Egalitarian Leveling of Status in Musical Relationships,” <<http://www.osborne-conant.org/oliveros.htm#central>> (December 7, 2012).

environment through analysis and judgment, and tends to devalue the receptive mode which consists of observation and intuition.”⁴⁵ By enhancing our sense of observation and intuition one becomes more receptive to people and experiences around us and thus can act in accordance with them with much more ease and less anxiety. It is in this way that experimental works like the *Sonic Meditations* expand outwards from a subjective, personal experience and sense of change to the greater community and foster change in a broader social context.

In regard to the great potential of experimental music Oliveros states:

Creative music or music that is newly composed or improvised can influence change by challenging habitual thought patterns. Change provokes further thought and dialogue. Thought and change of habit and dialogue brings resistance to outmoded social institutions. Thus, creative music is often disparaged by threatened conservative interests.⁴⁶

In this case there can be no doubt about the pervasive goals of Oliveros' work. Creativity leads to new modes of personal thought in addition to encouraging thoughtful dialogue. By altering one's awareness and perception, the *Sonic Meditations* literally cause one to think differently, which in turn effects one's interactions with other people. This is the basis of social change. By encouraging non-hierarchical, respectful relationships amongst all people, Oliveros is a social pioneer. Her subtlety is immensely impressive and very effective. Through work such as the *Sonic Meditations* she is able to transfer symbolism and ideas into tangible, life changing experiences. The expansive qualities of her work make it ideal for including in an alternative education setting.

⁴⁵ Oliveros, “*Meditation Project: A Report*,” *Software for People*, 163.

⁴⁶ Idem, “Breaking the Silence,” in *Sounding the Margins: Collected Writing 1992-2009* (Kingston, NY: Deep Listening Publications, 2010), 16.

Alvin Curran: Egalitarian Music for Social Change

Alvin Curran's work embodies an idea of true anti-authoritarianism in music. Through the use of environmental sounds, site-specific work, and improvisation, Curran's work emphasizes communities of people and a belief that everyone is capable of making music, that it belongs to everyone, is around us at all times, and can encourage us to engage with our surroundings in new ways. His involvement with Musica Elettronica Viva (MEV), and more specifically their realization of *Sound Pool*, demonstrates the foundations of his egalitarian approach to music. Simultaneous with this development, Curran has a strong focus on environmental and day-to-day sounds and the use of spaces outside of traditional musical venues, often outdoor spaces around which the work is tailored. He has often employed environmental recordings in his work, such as in his piece *Watercolor Music*, and believes that ambient sounds are music in themselves. The use of easily accessible spaces connects to his ideas of the need for attainability of music for all social and economic classes and is an example of the political and social intents that underscore much of his work.

By encouraging participants to reconsider their relationship to sounds around them, Curran is demonstrating new, creative ways they can engage with their surroundings. His belief that each person's experience and interpretation could be very different from everyone else's resembles Dewey's point that individual internal experiences need to be permitted and embraced, not ignored as in traditional education. Curran's ideas concerning improvisation, his egalitarian approach to music, and his commitment to group music-making reinforce the community focused aspects of alternative education schools. This non-hierarchical approach does not limit the

possibilities of one's experience, and Curran's belief that everyone can make music is the most inclusive viewpoint possible. This open approach, combined with his encouragement of engagement with surroundings and other people, would make his work a beneficial contribution to an alternative education environment.

Curran began his formal composition career by studying at Brown University under Ron Nelson and at Yale with Mel Powell and Elliot Carter. Shortly after finishing his graduate degree at Yale in 1963, Curran accepted an invitation from Carter to participate in the inaugural year of the Young Artists in Residence Program in Berlin under the auspices of the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (DAAD). The residency may have been part of an effort organized by U.S. military intelligence to culturally revive Berlin with a strong Western influence in the midst of Communist control.⁴⁷ Curran arrived in Berlin at the end of 1963 and found the situation of Berlin as a walled city within East Germany very paradoxical.⁴⁸ One might question whether this tense and precarious situation influenced the political sentiments in Curran's future work.

Curran's individual style and concerns as a composer truly began to develop when he moved to Rome in 1964. He decided to visit Rome with Joel Chadabe shortly after returning to the United States from his trip to Berlin. Previously Curran had been predominantly steeped in a modernist composition environment, but was excited to explore different possibilities. Now for the first time he was able to shrug off the academic impositions of twelve tone theory and engage with music, and sound, in a

⁴⁷ For an account of the United States government's attempts to use culture promotion in Europe as a form of subtle weaponry during the Cold War, please see: Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2000).

⁴⁸ Eleonora Ludovici, "Music Without Borders: Alvin Curran Between Europe and America," in *Alvin Curran Live in Roma*, Daniela Margoni Tortora, ed. (Giugno: Die Schachtel, 2010), 60-61.

completely free fashion.⁴⁹ As Curran says, “I spent a lot of time in that period composing music, but I spent an equal amount of time learning to uncompose music also.”⁵⁰ One of the ways in which he began to branch out was by extensively recording the ambient sounds around him. Initially he had no specific plans to use the recordings. In reference to this time, Curran writes, “There is no question that my attraction to natural sound lay in an intuition that these sounds – whatever they were – were private, very personal sources of music.”⁵¹ Curran was drawn to environmental sounds because he felt that it was music that was accessible to everyone and had special meaning for each person. He sensed that each person's internal experience of these sounds would be different, which he found intriguing. Curran's growing interest in environmental sounds shows his engagement with several concepts that would become central to much of his work.

Curran maintains that environmental sounds are music into and of themselves. He relates, “I began to collect environmental sounds because to me, they were, de facto, MUSIC; moreover, music that belonged to everyone.”⁵² He was inspired by the ambient sounds around him and began to use them in composed work. His first piece utilizing environmental recordings was his musique concrète piece *Watercolor Music*, which he created to accompany an exhibit of watercolor paintings by Edith Schoss at the American Church of Rome.⁵³ He was fascinated by the sounds of water in Rome, and began work on *Watercolor Music* by recording sounds of water throughout the city, including

⁴⁹ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁰ David W. Bernstein, “An American in Rome: Conversations with Alvin Curran,” in *Alvin Curran Live in Roma*, 140.

⁵¹ Alvin Curran, “Out of Place,” 15 February 2000, <<http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/out%20of%20place.html>> (March 17, 2013).

⁵² Idem, “Music From the Center of the Earth,” 1 February 2001, <http://www.kunstradio.at/ZEITGLEICH/CATALOG/ENGLISH/curran_a-e.html> (March 17, 2013).

⁵³ Ludovici, “Music Without Borders,” 70.

fountains, spluttering bathroom pipes, and washtubs in courtyards.⁵⁴

Rome not only inspired Curran because of its environmental sounds and intriguing public spaces, but also because of the burgeoning creative arts scene there. Curran had contact with a number of adventurous musicians including John Eaton who played one of the first voltage controlled synthesizers, the SynKet; William O. Smith, a clarinetist and composer who was also a political radical devoted to improvisation; and Cornelius Cardew, whom Curran initially worked for copying orchestral scores and who became a good friend and source of inspiration.⁵⁵ Curran began to openly embrace experimental composition and explore sound in and of itself. In regards to experimentation and blurring the lines between different styles of music, Curran says:

The subject of “contamination” of genres does not interest me in itself – for, my own background in Jazz and Popular and improvised musics as well as in the latest electronic and experimental tendencies – leave me naturally and pleasantly contaminated. I do sincerely feel that beyond such academic considerations lie the real edges, the outer pale, so to speak, where one can begin again to have “uncontaminated” musical experiences.⁵⁶

This belief shows his radical approach to music making and how strict institutions can inhibit musical possibilities.

In 1966 Curran co-founded the electronic improvisation group MEV. The group had a musically and politically anarchistic approach to its music and performances. While over time the active members of the group changed, the original core group was Alvin Curran, Fredric Rzewski, Jon Phetteplace, Carol Plantamura, Richard Bryant, Richard

⁵⁴ Bernstein, “An American in Rome,” 141.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 138-39.

⁵⁶ Alvin Curran, “Making Music With People You Have Never Seen Before And Will Likely Never See Again,” 6 January 2005 <[http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/music%20 with%20people.html](http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/music%20with%20people.html)> (March 17, 2013).

Teitelbaum, and Ivan Vador.⁵⁷ MEV focused on the idea that music belongs to everyone, and tried to communicate this through its emphasis on a democratic and community focused process of making music. Curran summarizes the basic principles of MEV as he saw them in the following points:

- 0) Any physical space is a potential musical space as is, any time of day or night an [appropriate] musical time.
- 1) All music starts anew each time, as if there had never been any music before it.
- 2) Any member of the group may utilize any audible or imaginable sound at any time.
- 3) Musical remembering and musical amnesia are of equal value - in short one could build on past or conditioned experience or try to forget everything ever known.
- 4) The requirements for musical participation are no longer based on purely musical skills, education, technique, experience, age, gender, race, or religion but on an implicit code of universal harmony and mutual acceptance. This resulted immediately in a form of transnational music.
- 5) Each player provides his/her own instruments and sound sources.
- 6) The act of collective performance has no specified duration and performances begin and end by tacit (musically understandable) agreement.
- 7) Without leaders, scores, or any rules at all, the music should be based on the musicians' mutual respect for and trust in one another, the public, and the individual and sum of all the sounds emitted into the performing space.
- 8) Because this music is fragile and dangerously based on almost nothing ([ephemeral] sounds and precarious human relationships) the players must cultivate extraordinary levels of attention, vigilance and artistic selectivity - primarily through silence and listening, and appropriate action and reaction - so to prevent the music from becoming literally nothing. This form of personal and collective commitment endowed everyone involved (including the producers and public) with finely tuned ears and magnanimous attitudes.
- 9) No matter what transpires, a sense of transcendent unity is likely to be the unspoken goal of every improvisational event. (This sense of unity, while indescribable, is very recognizable, almost tangible in certain

⁵⁷ Idem, "From the Bottom of the Soundpool," 1 February 2001, <<http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/soundpool.html>> (March 17, 2013).

moments. Especially when you can not answer the questions: "did I make that/ did we make that/ did you make that/ did they make that?").

10) All members share equally in the promotion, economic stability and creative growth of the group - in return for an equal share in received proceeds.

11) This is a space for your own contribution.⁵⁸

MEV further demonstrated a radical approach to its music by accepting any audible or imaginable sound as acceptable as musical material. This is clearly demonstrated in the individual members' choices for their music-making devices. Early on the group focused on inexpensive and often homemade instruments: Curran performing on an amplified, prepared five-liter can from which he could create extremely loud drum-like sounds; Rzewski playing an amplified plate of glass that he activated with plastic scrapers and his fingers in addition to a selection of amplified springs; Phetteplace playing amplified cello in addition to random objects, such as coat racks, that he found at each venue; Vandor on saxophone, often employing multiphonics and other extended techniques; Bryant using a modified electric organ; and Teitelbaum playing a Moog synthesizer and a brainwave amplifier.⁵⁹ Clearly, Curran had sonically come a long way from his academic twelve-tone compositions.

The often intense intermingling of these sounds can be heard in their piece *Spacecraft*, which the group performed in over eighty concerts across Europe.⁶⁰ An emotionally intense work with no formal structure, *Spacecraft* epitomized the early sound of the group and led to the development of *Zuppa*, their first piece to include audience participation. MEV created *Zuppa* in response to uninitiated audience participation in

⁵⁸ Alvin Curran, "On Spontaneous Music," 1 February 2001, <<http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/spontaneous.html>> (March 17, 2013).

⁵⁹ David W. Bernstein, "'Listening to the Sounds of the People': Fredric Rzewski and Musica Elettronica Viva (1966-1972)," in *Contemporary Music Review* 29, no.6 (December 2010): 541.

⁶⁰ Ludovici, "Music Without Borders," 73.

their performances. Every night for six weeks in September and October of 1968, MEV held performances in their studio and invited audience members to join them.⁶¹ Initially they only invited other musicians to play with them, but eventually non-musicians were admitted as well. Rzewski provided a carefully conceived structure for *Zuppa* to encourage the audience to not simply join in and make noise, but to listen carefully and respond to others with awareness. The group guided the audience by initially dividing the studio space in half with performers on one side and the audience on the other. Members of the group would then invite audience members to play instruments that were strategically placed around the room or offer their own instrument. The dichotomy between performer and listener would then gradually disappear, but an emphasis on listening was already established.⁶²

MEV's *Sound Pool* was a natural extension from *Zuppa*, but while the latter was carefully crafted to encourage the audience to partake in a particular type of musical engagement, *Sound Pool* was completely open ended. The only guideline for participation in the piece was to "bring your sound and add it to the pool."⁶³ *Sound Pool* was the climactic point of MEV's political aspirations and desire to bring freedom to music. Some performances of the piece were practically riotous, such as at the University of Louvain in which audience members set fire to furniture in the room.⁶⁴

Curran continued to develop his personal compositional interests in Rome after the original incarnation of MEV disbanded in 1970 when Rzewski and Teitelbaum decided to stay in the United States because of the tense political atmosphere they noted

⁶¹ Bernstein, "Listening to the Sounds of the People," 544.

⁶² Ibid., 544-45.

⁶³ Ibid., 545.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 546.

while touring there.⁶⁵ While Curran's work post-MEV may not be as overtly radical as that created with the group, he continued to embrace many of the group's foundational concepts. He also began to further emphasize the relationship between oneself and the surrounding environment through his use of environmental sounds and by adapting his pieces for particular spaces. His outdoor work brings attention to unusual details of the immediate environment and causes the audience to engage with their surroundings in a new way.

Curran's work as a teacher further demonstrates his conscientious approach, flexibility, and improvisatory skill in musical creation. His first experience with teaching began rather unexpectedly in the midst of a rebellion in 1975. A group of 200 students occupied The National Academy of Dramatic Arts in Rome and the institution called Curran to come and help them. Without any idea of what was about to happen or any previous connection to the academy, Curran agreed. On the spot he decided to instruct all of the students to sing. After instructing them to lie on their backs, he said, "Breathe...When your vocal chords begin to feel like they need to vibrate, let them vibrate as slowly as possible."⁶⁶ After some time a unison tone emerged, upon which he encouraged them to continue and freely sing a second tone. The result of this improvised session, Curran says, was a beautiful wall of sound and all of the students went into a trance.

The similarity between this improvised lesson and Pauline Oliveros' piece "Teach Yourself to Fly" from the *Sonic Meditations*, is rather striking. Both pieces successfully focus the attention of the participants to create a sensitized awareness to their

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Bernstein, "An American in Rome," 169-70.

surroundings, but while Oliveros' piece was carefully crafted over time, Curran created his on the spot in the midst of a frenetic political revolt. Interestingly enough this incident resulted in the academy hiring Curran as Professor of Vocal Improvisation, a position he filled for the next five years.⁶⁷ This experience shows Curran's belief that teaching should be a guiding effort rather than a process of forced ideas. He upheld that the most effective composition teacher does not “teach” anything but seriously engages in his or her students' work, whatever it may be.⁶⁸

Maritime Rites, or *Riti Marittimi*, was a further extension of Curran's use of environmental sounds in his work and demonstrates his growing interest in utilizing the sonic qualities of specific spaces. Curran created several different versions of *Maritime Rites*. The first was developed with his students at The National Academy of Dramatic Arts in Rome in 1978 and was performed in a small lake in Rome's central park, the Villa Borghese, as part of a public festival. Curran and his students rowed in six boats in the lake while following a graphic score based on vocal sounds. The boats passed by one another in an undetermined fashion and the voices randomly interacted with one another as well as with the sounds of the environment to form a “choreography” of sorts.⁶⁹ The piece allows loosely guided improvised sounds to intermingle with the natural ambient sounds of the lake. In reference to this first performance of the piece, he says:

These chance-structured events had a profound significance on my future work; for it was from these simple beginnings that I realized how much sonic, spatial, and theatrical potential there actually was in making music in any natural environment. Magical coincidental points where landscape and soundscape become one. Where place and music could be paired

⁶⁷ Ibid., 170.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 127-28.

⁶⁹ Alvin Curran, “Out of Place,” 15 February 2000, <<http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/out%20of%20place.html>> (March 17, 2013).

without limits of time or convention.⁷⁰

Curran sincerely believes in the power of improvisation to shape our relationship to both music and other people. In an essay on improvised music, he declares:

Improvisation is the art of becoming sound. It is the only art in which a human being can and must become the music he or she is making. It is the art of constant, attentive and dangerous living in every moment. It is the art of stepping outside of time, disappearing in it, becoming it. It is both the fine art of listening and responding and the more refined art of silence. It is the only musical art where the entire "score" is merely the self and the others, and the space and moment where and when this happens. Improvisation is the only musical art, which is predicated entirely on human trust and love.⁷¹

Curran has emphasized repeatedly that improvisation is a community and trust building activity that requires a sense of unity among everyone participating. His experience is that whenever this type of unity and focus comes into being it is “overwhelmingly beautiful.”⁷² The ability for Curran's music to induce this state of interaction with others provides a medium by which one can develop new experiences and connections to the external world. As Dewey said, experience does not happen in a vacuum, and people unavoidably affect one another.⁷³ Curran's focus in his music directs these effects in a positive, experiential way.

The work of both Oliveros and Curran embody many of Dewey's most important ideas regarding education and experience. This allows them to develop a flexible mindset from which they can creatively engage in different scenarios. If one works from this foundation, then it is possible to more easily adapt to new situations. This is Dewey's idea of an experiential continuum in practice as participants bring their own personal

⁷⁰ Curran, “Out of Place,” <<http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/out%20of%20place.html>>.

⁷¹ Idem, “On Spontaneous Music,” <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/spontaneous.html>.

⁷² Bernstein, “An American in Rome,” 155.

⁷³ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 39-40.

connections to a situation and can then more easily apply that experience broadly in the future.

Both Oliveros' and Curran's work, as well as their personal experiences, demonstrate Dewey's ideas of the exchange between internal and external influences. Oliveros personally experienced change brought on by her external situation. Her reaction to this change was to constructively engage it through the creation of her *Sonic Meditations*. As a result the collection of pieces has a similar altering effect on participants. This shows the radiating effect from objective environment to the individual back to the greater community and environment. Curran's work encourages engagement with the surrounding environment by recognizing that ambient sounds are a personal type of music for everyone. He uses this basic relationship to allow one to develop new relationships with their surroundings.

The focus on community and anti-authoritarian structure of these composers also relates to Dewey's ideas, making their work very compatible with alternative school systems. Curran believes that avant-garde music is in its nature oppositional, and states that “the more you realize that the more you begin to take on the committed sense of the creative challenge, the social challenge, the economic challenge, and the psychological challenge in changing the status quo.”⁷⁴ He upholds this thought by offering new ways for people to interact with each other through improvisation. Oliveros also offers new ways for individuals to interact with one another by representing new social relationships in her work that one can tangibly engage with, such as that found in “Zina's Circle.” The focus on community and relationships of mutual respect in their work aligns with that found at alternative education schools.

⁷⁴ Bernstein, “An American in Rome,” 143.

In this paper I am not especially concerned with the idea of the artist as educator, but am instead most interested in how an artist or composer's work engages the experiential interaction of people with their environment, other people, and themselves. I do not think it is necessary for the artist to be the one teaching experimental music, but I do think that the teacher needs to embody the creative outlook that Oliveros and Curran inspire. I think that having their music, and their approach to music making, taught within an alternative education system would be mutually beneficial to the school, the students, and to the integrity of their work. Experimental music would inspire students to creatively engage with other people and the environment around them and the composers' work would thrive in an environment with participants willing to sincerely engage with it.

Summerhill and Black Mountain College: Creative Learning and Community

To maximize their efficacy, alternative education schools focus on personalized education that helps each student develop a healthy experiential continuum. Examination of Summerhill and Black Mountain College illuminates two different structures that attempt to reach this goal. There are, of course, a variety of schools that fall under the category of alternative education, often with notably different sets of guiding principles, aims, and foci.⁷⁵ For the purposes of this paper, I am limiting the definition of alternative education to those schools that 1) focus on the student as an individual and do not force a preordained curriculum, and 2) have an overarching aim of providing a cumulative educational experience that emphasizes the connection between different fields of study

⁷⁵ For a survey detailing the varieties of alternative schools, please see: Bruce S. Cooper, *Free and Freedom Schools: A National Survey of Alternative Programs* (Washington: President's Commission on School Finance, 1971).

as well as to one's everyday life.

Traditional schools tend to use a set curriculum and educational approach that neglects consideration of individual students' backgrounds, learning processes, or desires. One encounters this in varying degrees, but this type of education is narrow minded in its approach in that it purports that the knowledge and skills it teaches are most important for everyone. The structure of traditional education stifles or destroys students' efforts towards self-exploration, and instead “make(s) certain that the student's energies are directed toward fulfilling tasks set by others; they encourage him to define his worth in terms of his success in winning their approval: high grades, good letters of recommendation, departmental honors, prizes.”⁷⁶ It is an inflexible education that does not do justice to the natural talents and personal interests of most students, but tries to force the same knowledge and learning style on everyone. This can easily quell the natural skills and curiosity of students. In addition, this type of schooling primarily teaches subjects in isolation. This can make it very challenging for students to apply their knowledge to everyday experiences because they are not taught to consider how different areas of knowledge relate to one another.⁷⁷ This opposes Dewey's idea of the experiential continuum and stands in contrast to how alternative education schools view education as a lifelong cumulative experience, not simply a means to an end.

Effective alternative schools must apply certain methods to realize Dewey's goals and as a result will have several common characteristics. Both Summerhill and Black Mountain College use methods such as allowing students to choose their own course of education, emphasizing mutual respect between student and teacher as well as peers,

⁷⁶ Martin Duberman, *Left Out: The Politics of Exclusion: Essays, 1964-1999* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 218-19.

⁷⁷ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 48-49.

promoting a community centered living situation, and emphasizing the connection between education and daily situations. The greater social implications of these schools are an additional unifying factor. Simply by being dubbed “alternative” they stand in contrast to traditional schools, and thus become venues for social commentary and change.

The structures of these two schools fundamentally differ, however, in that Summerhill has no guidelines for its students nor emphasizes any specific area of study. A Summerhill student need not attend a single class if desired. While Black Mountain College did not force a curriculum and encouraged individual study, it developed with arts as a focal point around which all other subjects were organized. While Summerhill has no such emphasis, it does advocate ideas such as the “free child” and “play.” These concepts encourage creative engagement and artistic exploration. As Readhead says in reference to music education at the school, “by the very nature of Summerhill there will be ample opportunity for experimentation and creativity.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, Summerhill is a democratic community in which decisions are made by voting, and all involved in the school have an equal vote, including the students. The school maintains that the vote of the youngest child holds the same value as that of the principal. Although it did emphasize community and was significantly less authoritarian than traditional schools, Black Mountain retained more of the traditional student/teacher archetypes than Summerhill. Though they might be implemented differently, the shared emphases at these schools allow them both to uphold the fundamental aspects of Dewey's concept of experiential education and are ripe environments for the benefits of studying experimental music to arise.

⁷⁸ Readhead, e-mail message to author, 28 March 2013.

Founded in 1921 by A. S. Neill, Summerhill currently admits students at age five while an average education there finishes at age seventeen. The school allows day students, but encourages boarding for full immersion in the school's atmosphere and to encourage the child's development of independent thought and behavior. The school claims that most children prefer to do this away from their parents. Summerhill adamantly upholds the importance of allowing children to choose their own course of study with no restrictions.⁷⁹ Its structure allows children complete freedom in creating their education and to develop at their own pace.

Because the school emphasizes the individual rights and interests of the children over requirements to study specific subjects, it is not possible for it to explicitly emphasize the arts or dictate that all students study any given subject. However, students benefit from an environment that encourages creative and artistic exploration. The school also has a focus on the idea of “play” that I think works hand in hand with the benefits of learning fine arts. Children are given the freedom to play and explore their interests at their own will. Neill even goes so far as to state, “Summerhill might be defined as a school in which play is of the greatest importance.”⁸⁰ Readhead states, “Often children who have struggled at previous schools find that the freedom to go in the Artroom or Woodwork gives them emotional permission to do what they have always wanted to do – not academic – ART!”⁸¹ The freedom the school gives its students automatically allows them, and perhaps encourages them, to seek out art in their education. The school's approach to freedom in play and education creates an environment that allows for the

⁷⁹ Summerhill School, “The Very Basics,” 1 May 2006, <http://www.summerhillschool.co.uk/pages/basics.html> > (December 2, 2012).

⁸⁰ A.S. Neill, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (St. Martin's Press: New York, 1992), 62.

⁸¹ Readhead, e-mail message to author, 17 October 2012.

development of a creative artistic mindset. The basic school structure allows students to develop a personal connection to what they are learning, making it a perfect environment for Dewey's ideas of experiential continuity to thrive.

Summerhill's structure allows children to discover their own ideas of success rather than participating in a predetermined curriculum that forces commonly accepted societal opinions of knowledge and success. Because traditional schools are rooted in a curriculum that has somehow been deemed essential for all students, these schools perpetuate a very specific lifestyle and way of thinking that reinforces commonly accepted societal roles and ideas of success and happiness. Fundamentally these systems attempt to shape children to fit into these specific roles and teach them that if they prevail they will find happiness and be successful. Traditional school systems teach children to judge themselves and others based on a very narrow scope of qualities. This type of schooling perpetuates the average American lifestyle without ever asking if this lifestyle is something that everyone wants.⁸² In contrast, Summerhill's approach is to not attempt to produce any particular “type” of child.

A. S. Neill states, “My own criterion of success is the ability to work joyfully and to live positively.”⁸³ Neill was well aware that ideas of success are subjective and he did not have a pre-ordained idea of how each student would obtain these goals. Instead he wanted to provide a supportive environment that would allow each student to discover what those ideas meant to him or her as an individual. Thus the school's pre-eminent mandate is to produce healthy, well-balanced, and confident students rather than focusing on crafting students who will fulfill certain social and occupational roles that traditional

⁸² Duberman, *Left Out*, 219-20.

⁸³ Neill, *Summerhill*, 29.

schooling and the dominant Western worldview classify as success.

Summerhill's focus on individual success rather than on a forced perception of that quality, works together with its anti-authoritarian, democratic structure to allow children to develop independence and confidence. Traditional school structures also reinforce competition in daily life, and encourage students to measure their own success and worth based on how well they dominate others rather than how well they know or control themselves.⁸⁴ This type of system stifles students' efforts towards self-exploration and is contrary to Dewey's argument that experiences should lead to further experiences. Summerhill avoids such deconstructive behavior with their emphasis on community and by encouraging each student to measure success on a personal basis rather than by a standardized guideline. Students need not be primarily concerned with being at the top of their class and with the opinions of teachers and peers, and can be free to develop on their own terms.

An important way in which Summerhill fosters a mutually respectful, community atmosphere is by emphasizing a non-authoritarian environment. The school encourages children to engage in self-regulation, which Neill defines as “the right of a baby to live freely, without outside authority in things psychic and somatic.”⁸⁵ Neill emphasizes that this does not mean that children are allowed to behave any way they wish, but that children and adults should have equal rights.⁸⁶ As Readhead says, you can make your own decision about which lessons to attend, because that is your personal business – but you can't throw litter on the ground because that affects other people.”⁸⁷ Mutual respect is

⁸⁴ Duberman, *Left Out*, 219.

⁸⁵ Neill, *Summerhill*, 105.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁸⁷ Readhead, e-mail message to author, 28 March 2013.

expected between everyone in the community and students must consider their own privileges in the context of other people. In addition, the same consideration is given to a small child's opinion and preferences as to those of a teacher, and students are not required to formally address teachers. Titles such as “professor” create a rift between teacher and student and prevent the possibility of free exchange between them.⁸⁸ Summerhill encourages self-confidence and independent thought in children by creating a respectful, comfortable learning environment, and teaching them that their opinions matter.

Offering a variety of art and music classes easily fits into Summerhill’s exploratory environment. According to the school’s website the current formal class offerings for art and music include woodworking, art, drama, music technology, DJ sessions, studio sessions, and vocal music, in addition to learning popular instruments like piano, drum set and guitar. They also list many arts and crafts projects, and it will be taken into consideration if students request other subjects be taught.⁸⁹ This shows an expanded and currently topical selection of music courses, and Readhead upholds that the music education is not traditional. She emphasizes that the children can learn whatever they want, which primarily includes modern and popular music.⁹⁰

Despite this inclusive approach to what students may study, I think a class specifically focused on experimental music would be very well received at the school. Learning how to play traditional instruments and popular music is quite a different experience than engaging with sound and space, as demonstrated in the work of Oliveros

⁸⁸ Duberman, *Left Out*, 222.

⁸⁹ Summerhill School. “Intelligent Choice: Playing, Doing, Community, Classrooms, Lessons,” 2 May 2006, <<http://www.summerhillschool.co.uk/pages/intelligent-choice.html>> (October 20, 2012).

⁹⁰ Readhead, e-mail message to author, 28 March 2013.

and Curran. Because experimental music is not mainstream, it is more difficult for children to know what it constitutes or even that it exists, and so it is important that the school make a course available so the children can discover if they are interested. This is not to say that children are not undertaking aspects of experimental music on their own, but a focused class would give them a much greater opportunity to explore these ideas.

In contrast to Summerhill, Black Mountain College organized its studies with arts at the epicenter. The founder, John Rice, recognized the potential for study of the arts to alter how one engages with his or her education and interacts with the surrounding environment. When explaining the reason for having arts at the center of the education experience, Rice said, “there is something of the artist in everyone, and the development of this talent, however small, carrying with it a severe discipline of its own, results in the student's becoming more sensitive to order in the world and within himself than he can ever be through intellectual effort alone.”⁹¹ Rice was not focused on creating professional artists, but rather on giving students the ability to decipher who they are and what they believe in. He also believed in the potential of the arts to alter how one engages with the surrounding environment in a way that traditional schooling generally lacks. He posited that the student, “by being sensitized to movement, form, sound and the other media of the arts, gets a firmer control of himself and his environment than is possible through purely intellectual effort.”⁹² Rice saw the arts as an opportunity for actively engaging with material rather than passively absorbing it and as a result Black Mountain was a good example of how Dewey's ideas of experience can be successfully combined with

⁹¹ Vincent Katz, ed., *Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art* (The MIT Press: Cambridge, 2002), 19.

⁹² Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (Northwestern University Press: Evanston, Illinois, 1972), 39.

both education and artistic exploration.

Similar to Summerhill, Black Mountain College promoted an anti-authoritarian, community focused environment and allowed students to decide their own course of study based upon their personal interests. Rice founded the university in 1933, and, although there were many organizational, interpersonal, and financial struggles over the years, from its very beginning it evolved with a focus on community. Rice believed the tight social unit of the college and community in general was a very important component of the college as it encourages everyone to learn from and relate to one another.⁹³

Guidelines for both living situations and for education were decided upon collectively, and one prevailing point was that living and learning should be intertwined and that education should not be limited to the classroom.⁹⁴ As Vincent Katz says, “Rice argued that theoretical habit, which is what institutions of higher learning then, as now promote, should be integrated with, rather than divorced from, other forms of knowledge and experience.”⁹⁵ This focus on community in combination with the school's emphasis on the arts, created a learning atmosphere that perpetuated Dewey's ideas of experiential learning.

By allowing students to create their own course of study in conjunction with an advisor, Black Mountain students were more assured that they would follow a course of study that would most interest and benefit them. Perhaps most importantly, students had access to classes and resources that in many universities would be considered outside their course of study. This encouragement towards multidisciplinary study is key to realize the aims of providing a quality education as most ideas and theories are not firmly

⁹³ Katz, *Black Mountain College*, 19.

⁹⁴ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 24-25.

⁹⁵ Katz, *Black Mountain College*, 18.

housed in one discipline. By also having a firm emphasis on the arts, Black Mountain gave students the tools of creativity and encouraged innovative thinking and observation.

Although Black Mountain had an emphasis on the arts, it did not always posit progressive artistic ideas. Music taught at the school, especially in its beginning years, followed a rather traditional route. The first years of music instruction and composition chiefly fell into a non-experimental, common modernist approach. However, in 1939 Heinrich Jalowetz, a student of Schoenberg, came to the school and helped unite the philosophical approaches of the school with the study of music. He also embraced the communal lifestyle of the school.⁹⁶ Similarly, John Evarts began working at Black Mountain when it was founded and helped to establish the philosophical base that music should be a part of daily life and that students should learn as much as possible through the act of “doing.”⁹⁷ Thus even if progressive, experimental music was not initially taught, an emphasis on the unification of different areas of study was in development and the overarching philosophical ideas of the school were present within the music department.

Largely due to the conscientious teaching of artist Josef Albers, fine art education at Black Mountain more readily exemplified many aspects of Dewey's experiential ideas.⁹⁸ Albers believed that beginning students in art should experiment freely with different materials and mediums to see what suited them best in their abilities and

⁹⁶ Martin Brody, “The Scheme of the Whole: Black Mountain and the Course of American Modern Music” in *Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art*, Vincent Katz, ed., 246.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 240.

⁹⁸ Albers was a strong presence at Black Mountain College. Not only were his classes extremely popular, but he also had an immense influence on the organization of the school. He in turn had been strongly influenced by his experiences at the *Staatliches Bauhaus* in Germany, and brought many of the Bauhaus’ ideas to Black Mountain. For a concise summary of Albers influence, please see: Frederick A. Horowitz, “What Josef Albers Taught at Black Mountain College, and What Black Mountain College Taught Albers,” 8 January 2011, <http://www.blackmountainstudiesjournal.org/wp/?page_id=48> (April 26, 2013).

interests.⁹⁹ While he did not believe it possible to teach students how to make art, he did think it was possible to create a “readiness,” an ability to see, even in students who had no talent, or rather, who believed they had no talent.¹⁰⁰ Albers also upheld the anti-authoritarian ideas of the school in that he thought teachers should not try to force their own influence on students, and instead students should create their own experiences and meaning.¹⁰¹ Albers believed that the creation of art was unquestionably tied to other areas of knowledge and to day-to-day life. As Duberman explains, “Albers had never conceived of art as an incidental endeavor on the periphery of life, but rather as a process of sensitization and insight applicable to every facet of life, one that integrated all fields of learning.”¹⁰² Although Albers operated specifically within the practice of visual arts, his approach is equally applicable to learning music.

The propagation of experimental music at Black Mountain hit its stride when John Cage arrived in the summer of 1948. Cage set out to dismantle the Schoenberg focus, an oppositional stance further perpetuated by Lou Harrison and others that followed. Cage led a “finishing school” course with the work of Erik Satie as the primary focus, and also organized a festival of works by Satie that consisted of twenty-five so-called “amateur” performances of Satie's piano music by Cage.¹⁰³ The introduction of experimental and minimalist music was quite new for Black Mountain. Cage was very confrontational in his lectures, which exaggerated their effect. His speech on Satie in which he denounced the influence of Beethoven actually resulted in a food fight.¹⁰⁴ Despite this disruptive

⁹⁹ Katz, *Black Mountain College*, 32.

¹⁰⁰ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 46-7.

¹⁰¹ Katz, *Black Mountain College*, 190.

¹⁰² Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 49.

¹⁰³ Brody, “The Scheme of the Whole,” 251-52.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 254.

attitude, Cage did embrace many of the fundamental ideals of Black Mountain.

In a similar way that the school strove to create a supportive environment of creativity for students, it also provided an opportunity for visiting artists and teachers to develop their artistic ideas and approaches. Because of its integration of art and life and its interdisciplinary structure, Black Mountain gave Cage the perfect environment to practice his newest aesthetics and apply the philosophies that were beginning to influence him, such as Zen Buddhism. This openness allowed him to engage in interdisciplinary, notational, conceptual, and aesthetic experiments. Cage's time at Black Mountain was an important moment for him because while there he clearly asserted his rejection of the emotional momentum of tonality and affirmed silence as a necessary element of music.¹⁰⁵ It was also an important performance venue; he premiered his *Sonatas and Interludes* at the school in the spring of 1948.¹⁰⁶

The lack of distinction between different areas of study encouraged creative interdisciplinary collaborations. Cage commonly worked with Merce Cunningham, with whom Cage came to Black Mountain, and during his time at the school he also formed creative partnerships with M. C. Richards, Elaine and Willem de Kooning, and Arthur Penn. One such collaboration was the "Happening," or *Theatre Piece no. 1*, which was planned with David Tudor and included Cunningham, Richards, and Robert Rauschenberg.¹⁰⁷ This work was seminal in that its structure consisted of each performer following a time bracket created through chance procedures. At the designated times the performer was to enact a particular activity, but simply as themselves rather than as a fictional character. The audience's perception of the event varied from person to person

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Brody, "The Scheme of the Whole," 255.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 257.

as the timed activities of the performers interacted with chance occurrences of unrelated activities happening in the space at the same time.¹⁰⁸ Black Mountain's open community and interdisciplinary emphasis fostered an environment where progressive and influential musical works such as Cage's happening could be successfully formed.

While Black Mountain successfully integrated interdisciplinary study, it did not function coherently as a community, and there were often rifts between groups of people regarding how the school should function.¹⁰⁹ Lack of unification undermined the overall effect of the school and ultimately these disagreements, in combination with financial difficulties, resulted in Black Mountain closing in 1957.¹¹⁰ The lack of focus on any one type of study was frustrating for some involved at the school. For example, Alan Sly, a music instructor in the early years, found the students less musically focused and thought that ensembles were too erratic and haphazard.¹¹¹ However, the general student opinion seemed to be quite positive, and as one former student detailed in a letter to Martin Duberman, even though students on average may not have been explicitly interested in the arts, they were interested in something creative. They were not interested in learning knowledge by rote, but instead wanted to engage with it. "You were there because this was something you were interested in."¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (The MIT Press: Cambridge, 1987), 226.

¹⁰⁹ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 281-440. Duberman explains in detail the demise of Black Mountain College and the myriad factors that played into its closing. The process took place over several years, and unfortunately the need for funding was the source for many of the disagreements within the community. Duberman does a wonderful job describing how individuals at the school struggled to maintain a quality of education and experience in the midst of these difficulties.

¹¹⁰ Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 240.

¹¹¹ Brody, "The Scheme of the Whole," 241-42.

¹¹² Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 99-100.

Conclusion

The type of engagement desired by both alternative schools and experimental music as practiced by Oliveros and Curran is nearly identical. Both strive to create situations that allow one to become more sensitive to the surrounding environment, other people, and one's own mental and physical processes. From this point, awareness grows to include phenomena previously unnoticed and allows one a flexibility of mind capable of making connections between incidents and ideas that may have previously been experienced as unrelated. The ideal is to induce a creative, flexible mind.

Oliveros demonstrates how interconnected different areas of knowledge are through her application of experiences from a variety of influences. From T'ai Chi Chuan to physics, Oliveros applies her experience with these practices to her listening and her musical work. She is also aware of the possibilities for music to influence the individual performer as well as the greater social situation. She has personally experienced change from musical practices, and develops work such as the *Sonic Meditations* to share these experiences with others. The *Sonic Meditations* demonstrate new social structures and types of interaction for participants, and embody an inclusivity that gives participants a sense of community. The pieces also provide concrete experience of a non-hierarchical social structure because all players are equal in the performance.

Curran is also aware of the potential of his work for social change. Musica Elettronica Viva demonstrated extreme ideas of inclusivity by first accepting all sounds as musically valid. The group then went a step further by inviting everyone to participate in improvisations like *Sound Pool*. Curran's interest in using environmental sounds in music shows an openness to all sounds as music and helps his work connect listeners to

the environment around them. Oliveros and Curran both emphasize focus on the subtleties of sound to alter how a person relates to his or her surroundings. These changes in perception will in turn effect how the individual relates to and interacts with the world at large. This effect is compounded because of the way these two composers use the structures of their pieces to suggest new forms of non-hierarchical social organization.

If experimental music as practiced by Oliveros and Curran were taught within alternative education systems the two together would prove to be a very powerful combination. Both areas uphold Dewey's ideas of creating an experiential continuum that allows one to apply knowledge to broader contexts. While alternative schools often include or have an emphasis on the arts, the inclusion of experimental music in particular is especially important because of its ability to cultivate tangible experiences that contribute to one's continuum of experience.

Summerhill is a successfully operating school that creates an open atmosphere conducive to study of the arts, but it is not explicitly introducing students to more obscure areas of study such as experimental music. If a class on this subject was made available to students, I think it would be an especially advantageous addition to the school because it would more explicitly develop the creative potential and engagement of education. In contrast, Black Mountain College included study of the arts at the center of its scholastic structure and students appreciated the creative approach to learning. The atmosphere of the school was conducive for creating experimental artworks, similar to a residency, which encouraged established and developing composers and artists to teach there. Students benefited from the new ideas these composers and artists introduced to the school. However, the school was not able to function as a successful community nor was

it financially secure. If Black Mountain, like Summerhill, had more of a cultivated atmosphere and community of mutual respect in addition to its focus on individual study, I think it could have been much more unified and successful at fulfilling its goals as a school. A greater inclusion of experimental music with a community focus like Oliveros' and Curran's works could have helped Black Mountain create the unity it needed.

Because of the independent emphases these two topics of discussion have on experiential engagement as well as a similar focus on community and anti-authoritarian relationships, it seems that a combined effort between them is only natural. Students benefit from a reinforcement of ideas and a broader base of experiences from which to work; the schools are more easily able to create the learning atmosphere they strive towards; and the music is likely to find receptive participants. This type of education strives to be democratic and egalitarian, promotes equal respect for all involved, and encourages positive relationships within the self and with others. The benefits of these types of learning experiences go beyond scholastic endeavors, and are life changing with the potential to greatly effect communities and societies as a whole.

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