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## Music After Sex

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All of this issue's contributions were written before the election and before Pauline Oliveros' passing. The issue's planning goes embarrassingly far back – initially conceived in 2015 as our "SEX issue." As editorial delays piled up and as 2016 in all its violence progressed, our confidence in the urgency of the theme faded (who's [horny](#) at such times anyway?). Recently though, reflecting on the loss of our friend Pauline has helped us to rally and finally approach framing this issue.

Since all processes are dynamic, one must allow for and be prepared for change. Changes in role, relationship and valuation must occur as the process unfolds. *How does one hear?* also means How does one affect and effect relationships with sound as well as with others? How are others affecting, effecting such relationships?<sup>1</sup>

At least as early as her 1974 *Sonic Meditations* (the score for which opens with an announcement of her abandonment of composition and performance as such) Oliveros' work was oriented toward a simultaneous questioning and enacting of both sounding and community. How else can we be together? How else can we hear together? How else can we feel together? In Oliveros' work, even in its more "new age" moment, 'experimentalism' finally gestures toward a break from its typical function as relational political metaphor. Music, listening, becomes a means for an experimental convocation a specific group at a specific time and place (the all-female "♀ Ensemble," for instance, for whom the *Meditations* were originally composed).

But what to make of the affirmation of music's community binding potential right now – in light of the wall of pathos upon which the current American presidential administration is built? Must we condemn the non-verbal, the irrational, the emotional, as so many pundits have demanded? Must we privilege the rational, verbal, discursive as modes of a "real politics" in need of rescue? Must we return to "hard facts?" Or does our engagement with

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<sup>1</sup> "The Noetics of Music," in *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-1980* (Baltimore: Smith Publications, 1983), p. 131

work and thought such as Oliveros' point to something else? – toward another orientation of affective politics, another instrumentalization of emotion, another sublimation of the irrational? If music has always also been about non-linguistic form of relating, of being, being together, couldn't the experimental reorganization or redistribution of such forms play a significant part in a desperately needed reinvigoration of radical politics and practice?

As Judith Becker details in her *Deep Listeners* (a nod to Oliveros), religious cultures from the Sufis to Southern Pentecostals have long histories of allowing 'deep listeners' to enter all manner of eccentric, irrational, ecstatic states, accompanied by music. *Who* is allowed this ecstatic response, *when* they participate, and *where* they participate is of course strictly prescribed and culturally variable. But if Oliveros' works offer us a sort of deconsecrated access to such eccentric relationalities, how might radical political practices at large learn from 'deep listeners' in this expanded sense?

We had originally thought of editorializing via a missed encounter with Leo Bersani. In a 2015 lecture given in Berlin entitled, "Sex. Just Say No," he suggests:

Drives are our psychic bodies. They are the mind's energetic reformulations of the internal stimuli constantly pressing upon it. [...] Like the floating affects that remain in consciousness after the representations to which they belong have been repressed [...], stimuli wander in consciousness in search of the images or the behavior that will be a response to them. The body shocks the mind into accounting for its intensities, into providing psychic doubles of those intensities, thereby responding to multiple calls, a summons that reaffirms the oneness of body and mind. I can only say parenthetically here that we might think of this as analogous to the traumatic shock of art. Shocks that open us to other relational fields that most consequentially might reconfigure the social and the political.<sup>2</sup>

Art is, has always been, as Bersani suggests, a kind of alternative to "sex," another mode of modulating the most intimate relation between soma and psyche. And the stakes of that "other" mode, those "other relational fields," would be toward the articulation of forms of life divorced from the literal and symbolic traces of white hetero-sexist patriarchy. Our contention is that musicians such as Oliveros, as well as authors featured in this issue, have

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<sup>2</sup> The entire highly recommended lecture, given at the ici Berlin on June 18th, 2015 as a part of their "Desire's Multiplicity and Serendipity," can be viewed here: <https://legacy.ici-berlin.org/event/680/>

inherently understood and been working on this all along.<sup>3</sup> The current political moment demands that we not only perpetually recall the radical orientation of "the experimental" (in the "left of Cage" sense Marina Rosenfeld has suggested) but likewise challenge ourselves to take the implications of our work in this sense (toward or as the formulation of "new relational modes") as seriously as we can. We can no longer afford the play of autonomy (could we ever?). We are working on ourselves and each other, always.

We think of you, Pauline.

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<sup>3</sup> Bersani's "the creation of the relational circuitry along which as yet unimagined pleasures might move" is a phrase Oliveros herself might have written