

SOUNDS LIKE TORONTO

Queerness and Musical Boundaries

Grade 11 – Music

Guiding Question: How do experimental creative practices support social activism?

Description

This lesson can act as a short unit in which students are asked to identify and critically reflect on the links between experimental music, queerness and other identities often excluded from mainstream culture, and social activism through music

The timing, content, and delivery of the following content should be shaped according to your timetable, class length, and age of participants. Please make adjustments, edits, and/or additions as you and your students see fit.

This lesson is flexible. A teacher may wish to focus more on students' creative writing, reflective writing after listening, or summarizing among other curriculum and administrative expectations. Further inquiries and other artists you may include are suggested below.

Materials: smart board/projector to show music videos, paper for student compositions, writing utensils

Introduction/Minds On

Musicologist, Christopher Small (1977) sees art and science as explorations of reality; “the aim of art is to enable us to live in the world, while that of science is to enable us to master it” (1977, p. 4).

Ask students to write some thoughts about scientific experimentation. Ask students to write some thoughts about artistic experimentation.

Open discussion questions for students to start thinking about experimental music, either on their own in writing or in small group discussions:

- What are some similarities between scientific experimentation and artistic experimentation? What are some differences?
- Does experimentation have a goal? How do you know if an artistic experiment is successful? Can you know? How might you tell when an artistic experiment has been completed?
- If an artistic experiment produces something new or different, how does it enter the mainstream? If something experimental enters the mainstream, is it no longer an experiment?

Today we will look at two Canadian bands who explore queer identity and social activism through experimental musical practices.

In small groups, visit the **Sounds Like Toronto website** and read the entries on [Fifth Column](#) and [Lorraine Segato and The Parachute Club](#). If possible, the class can also listen to music by both bands before tackling group discussion questions.

Fifth Column and the creation of queercore as a genre, The Parachute Club and the world music scene on Queen West, particularly at The BamBoo, were bands/places that were being excluded by the dominant musical culture. The music scene is still predominantly white and straight, and works to erase people/stories/bodies that don't conform. These bands aimed to increase the visibility of queer/racialized people, and also expanded sonic boundaries within the musical world. Their experimental processes and blurring of boundaries were integral to their artistic process, and their social activist aims.

Group discussion questions:

- How are processes of cutting up, mixing, and fusion used by members of Fifth Column and Parachute Club?
- Can experimental artistic processes be separated from the messages of the music? What are these bands trying to say to their audiences?
- Is there a difference between mainstream popularity and grassroots popularity?
- What are the links between musical styles and music venues? Where did these bands perform, and who listened to them? Why might certain venues support more radical messages or experimental sounds?
- Can you name current musical groups who are using sounds or styles similar to Fifth Column and Parachute Club? Are there any other artists on the Sounds of TO website who were influenced by Fifth Column or Parachute Club? Would you consider these current groups mainstream or grassroots? (e.g.: Orville Peck, SSION, Peaches)

Body/Action

Activity/ Assignment: Perform some artistic experiments, using text/video/sound

Have students use their cellphones to capture short video footage of the classroom or surrounding school area. If there is enough time, students can edit their video clips together to make longer videos. If this is a larger unit, students can take footage on their way to or from school over a period of a few days.

Have students create their own zines on a musician that matters to them, either individually or in groups. Alternatively, they can create a zine about one of the artists on the Sounds of TO website. Project examples of zines made by members of Fifth Column as an example. Zines are typically made with photocopiers, and text and images are glued together to produce a “cut-up” aesthetic.

In groups, students can work to perform excerpts from their zines while projecting their short video clips. Students might also want to consider the location of their performance, to reflect on how places impact both audience and performers.

Sound experiments

Compose a vocal piece based on a mode of transportation. Use that word and the sound of that mode of travel only. Ensure there is a beginning, a middle, and an ending.

Compose a piece of music that is exactly thirty seconds long that explores one of the following.

- Higher and slower sounds
- Longer and quieter sounds
- Faster and lower sounds
- Shorter and louder sounds

Compose quartets (using varying instrumentation) for nearby locations and soundscapes. Research by sitting, listening, journaling, and reflecting on the sounds of that location. Reflect and compose a piece for performance on site.

Consolidation

Students should have some written responses/notes/group discussion conversations around the “Minds On” questions, and will also have performed one or a series of artistic experiments in a range of artistic mediums.

These responses could be compiled into an essay on experimental art forms, on queerness and its influence on the arts, on social activism and resistance to mainstream culture. Students could expand one of their experiments to produce a longer zine, video, or sound piece

Further inquiry section:

Both of the bands in this unit are linked to experimental queer subcultures, but they also worked to critique issues of racism, police violence, and capitalism. What are other musical groups that perform similar critical work? Does recognition or mainstream success expand the reach of these critical messages, or neutralize them? Many of the music venues where these bands first performed have since closed. What are the effects of gentrification and urban renewal on grassroots musicians and music scenes?

Assessment

The work produced in this lesson does not need to be formally assessed (assessment of, evaluated), however, here are some suggestions for doing so.

With students.

1. Brainstorm
2. Sort and Categorize
3. Make and post a T-chart

From Gregory, K, Cameron, C., & Davis, A. (2011). *Knowing What Counts: Setting and Using Criteria*

A sample of Success Criteria (with rubrics) are given below for reference

See below for curriculum expectations covered a sample of student created success criteria.

Sample Rubric

Criteria for Sound Experiments	4	3	2	1
Application of the creative process (evidence of generating ideas, reflection, revision, imagining, experimenting)				
Transfer of previous skills and knowledge (use of figurative and descriptive language)				
Effective word choice and use of syntax				
Creative (unique end product)				
Analysis (evidence of editing and effort in creating a unique piece of writing)				

CURRICULUM

We have listed grade 10 and 11 Music Arts curriculum objectives below, however this work could easily be adapted for other grades and/or subjects.

AMU2O/AMU3M/O

B1: The Critical Analysis Process

B1.1 listen to selections that represent a variety of musical styles and genres, and describe and reflect on their responses to them

B1.2 identify and explain the use of elements and other components of music in a variety of selections, including their performance repertoire

B1.4 conduct research to gather information relating to music, musicians, and the musical opinions or analysis of others

B2: Music and Society

B2.1 explain the origins of traditional, commercial, or art music with reference to the culture or community in which it was created

B2.2 describe significant contributions of individuals within a community or culture to genres of traditional, commercial, and/or art music

B3: Skills and Personal Growth

B3.1 explain how the study of music has contributed to their personal growth (including the development of their values), their ability to express themselves, their awareness of social and environmental issues, and their understanding of others

B3.3 describe and demonstrate interpersonal skills and work habits that contribute to the success of individual and collaborative musical work

B4: Connections Beyond the Classroom

B4.3 identify opportunities for and explain the benefits of ongoing involvement in musical activities and the arts community

C: Foundations

C2: Characteristics and Development of Music

C2.1 demonstrate an understanding of the development of various musical forms

C2.2 identify and describe shared and unique characteristics of traditional and contemporary music, including Aboriginal music, from Canada and around the world