

The Black Equation Form 2.

So here we are in the 21st century of a new millennium and I actually agree to sit down and write about being black, American and experimental. The genesis springs from looking at a magazine devoted to challenging, progressive musics from around the world, and seeing their top 50 list for last year and the only black Americans were a rapper, and a jazz man who has been dead for over 30 years. So I bring up this observation about the lack of a black American presence on the avant garde scene under the age of fifty just to see if maybe I'm not paying attention. I'm constantly fed this steady stream of future thinking folks from Germany, Japan, New Zealand, U.K., Australia, Norway, etc. but when it comes to America all I hear about is the genius that is free folk or if it's black it must be hip hop, jazz or long dead. How many more articles on Albert Ayler do we really need? That isn't a diss, I love Ayler but... And as far as hip hop being the future of black American music, well, let's just say that the things Ornette, Butch Morris, Cecil Taylor, Anthony Braxton, Henry Threadgill, etc talk about, are not the same things that any rapper or producer that I know is talking about. (The exception being perhaps RZA five years ago) And believe me, I'm looking, I'm listening. I really want to eat these words. Am I missing something or is there really no young black Avantists? Is there a black American avant garde under the age of fifty? I speak of the black American because that is what I am and that is what I will be no matter where I go. What does the black American musician / artist do now with the space s/he has been given? Hip hop existed, jazz existed, blues existed, the rhythms of improvisation and resourcefulness are present. Also the awareness of European traditions, Asian traditions, and nature inform our approaches.

Technology is within reach, the hype of the interconnectedness of individuals is here. What does the black American do with all of this? What do we do now that sample culture is so prominent? What do we do when success comes before an actual gestation period with our materials?

Will we still want to create? How many have written about the absolute need of the American artist or thinker or doer to render completely what this space and time has to offer? Emerson and Whitman laid a certain groundwork for being what and where you are and in that comes an expression which is unique. Nevermind aping foreign traditions, America is still impressive in scope, scale, confidence and arrogance, and our task as artists is to report on what we see and feel. My question is also: where is the next generation of black artists willing to go into this unknown, fertile wood to come back with the new blueprints we so desperately need? Oh, everyone is an artist and everyone wants to be famous and get on the festivals, but I wonder how much homework these people do? I thought the "giants" who came before all taught that you must find and develop your own voice. It cannot be a carbon copy of a great, it must be yours. That is how you must contribute to the world. Over and over I seem to meet new folks and I can't understand why they haven't internalized this lesson? How can you love a Coltrane or Miles or Lee Perry or Sun Ra or Grandmaster Flash and not see that they changed the world with their singular outlook and expression. They didn't copy anyone. They invented new traditions on the structures and flesh and bone of old ones. New times demand new tactics. My generation is sitting on all these jewels and it seems like so much time is wasted with how it's gonna look, or what the people are gonna say, or "oh I'm shopping it to the labels." I want to see what the black American under the age of fifty is working on in terms of taking this music, this sound forward. Beyond all the current categories. I want to hear the effort that is there when looking at the future straight up.

My generation is still dependent on old guard record labels and the old guard press for affirmation and that pat on the back. I think it's time to start planting our own seeds now. Where is the black American with a magazine dedicated to the new arts and music? Where is the black American writing the book on the Art Ensemble of Chicago or the Black Artists Group or Don Cherry? Seems we have to wait for a European to do it for us. (the George Lewis book on the history of the AACM, "Power Stronger Than Itself" is out and is required reading) Where are the other books in our own words on what makes us do the things we do? Where is the label run by a black American dedicated to more experimental forms of music? There doesn't seem to be any network set up to share ideas and information or just plain spiritual support. Ah, the

spirit? Where has it gone? I might hear animated discussions about MAX and LISA, or gushings about how it is to be just off the plane from some festival in Mexico City or Helsinki or Tokyo, but never about that old dusty spirit. Spirit is what you will need during those lean years of study and practice. Spirit is what you will need when compiling your work in the solitude of a room somewhere with the knowledge that nobody knows you exist. Spirit is what you will need when time finally does catch up to you and you make your statement. Spirit is what you will need to keep working. I write this not out of negativity but rather as a beginning to a new dialogue and action. The playing field is wide open right now and that makes it all incredibly exciting.

Morgan Craft

<http://www.roughamericana.com>