

Julius Eastman/Gay Guerilla

The Otolith Group's *The Third Part of the Third Measure* presented in association with Old First Concerts January 12, 2019 — Yerba Buena Center For the Arts

In partnership with **Old First Concerts**, Cinematheque is proud to present two programs celebrating the work and legacy of composer Julius Eastman. Join us on **Sunday, January 13** at **Old First Church** (1751 Sacramento Street at Van Ness) for a special program of music by Julius Eastman—programmed by pianist and composer Luciano Chessa—featuring performances by Chessa (piano & voice), Sarah Cahill (piano), Regina Myers (piano), Chris Brown (piano), Kevin Baum (baritone) and Richard Mix (bass). **info: www.oldfirstconcerts.org**

Queer African-American avant-garde composer, pianist, vocalist and conductor, Julius Eastman (1940–1990) wrote and performed compositions whose ecstatic militant minimalism initiated a black radical aesthetic that revolutionized the East Coast new music scene of the 1970s and 1980s. While engaging passionately and actively in avant-garde musical circles of his day, Eastman faced racist and homophobic opposition throughout his career. No recordings of Eastman's compositions were released during his lifetime and he died destitute in 1990 at age 49. Notably, Eastman faced aggressive censorship on the occasion of a 1980 performance at Northwestern University (Evanston, IL) when the titles of his compositions *Crazy Nigger* (1978), *Evil Nigger* (1979) and *Gay Guerrilla* (1979) were literally redacted from concert programs, prompting an eloquent pre-concert statement presented by Eastman prior to the concert. *The Third Part of the Third Measure* (2017), by British collective The Otolith Group, features verbatim performances by Dante Micheaux and Elaine Mitchener of Eastman's statement while celebrating the complex ecstasy of Eastman's music.

Also screening are The Otolith Group's *Be Silent, For The Ears Of God Are Everywhere*, a work exploring the demand for post-political safe spaces as voiced in the visual culture of record sleeves and Cauleen Smith's *Entitled* an epistolary engagement with the painterly still life, and with painters (including Charles Ethan Porter)

Entitled (2008) by Cauleen Smith; digital video, color, silent, 7 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

Speculative still lifes project desire on painters and attempt to collapse time by sharing mundane details about the contemporary conditions of life in some American cities. (The Flaherty Seminar, 2016.
www.flahertyseminar.org/talk-back/)

Be Silent, For The Ears Of God Are Everywhere (2006) by The Otolith Group; digital video, color, sound, 12 minutes, exhibition file from LUX

Commissioned by Fundacion Biacs, for the Seville Biennial 2006, *Be Silent...* emerges from an ongoing concern with mapping the affective dimension of contemporary modalities of power. Today, power no longer operates by reaching into the past to capture the narration of the historical; instead, it seeks to manage futurity through the capture of potentiality. It is from within the affect of the pre-emptive that this work enunciates itself; we define this affect as a condition that we term ambient fear. This work does not seek to comment upon this condition, which we perceive to pervade the social at all levels; rather it seeks to render one aspect of it sensible.

This work explores the demand for a space of safety that exists outside of disagreement. A space of self-institutionalised intimacy and proximity where those who self-identify as virtuous gather together under the sign of the Good Shepherd, the Brand, the Guru. This is the space which understands itself to be post-political; it is, strictly speaking, irreducible to nationalism, fundamentalism, liberalism and New Ageism.

The work locates these longings in the visual culture of the record sleeve and in the rotation of the vinyl record. As the means through which the Guru broadcasts his or her alternative pedagogy, the black vinyl record becomes a delivery system, which creates the milieu of safety; it is itself the space of safety. The rotation of the record creates a sense of satisfaction, which is hard to define, but is imbued with safety and with danger. Upon hearing putative

revolutionary statements from his students in 1968, Lacan is reputed to have replied that “Revolution is nothing more than going around and round in circles.” This work operates in the passage between these two times and spaces of revolution. (The Otolith Group. www.lux.org.uk/work/be-silent-for-the-ears-of-god-are-eveywhere)

The Third Part of the Third Measure (2017) by The Otolith Group; digital video, color, sound, 43 minutes, exhibition file from LUX

“There are of course 99 names of Allah, but there are 52 niggers. So therefore, I will be playing two of these niggers.” This is what Julius Eastman said during his introduction to the Northwestern University audience [...] June, 1980, and it is repeated in the Otolith Group’s *The Third Part of the Third Measure* [...].

During the video, that lasts 50 minutes, two performers (a black man, Dante Micheaux, and a black woman, Elaine Mitchener) recite the entire statement. It is a riveting recitation by both actors, whose deliveries are very different. Micheaux, who performs at the beginning of the video, is calm and matter of fact in his approach, while Mitchener at certain points wails, as if begging the audience to hear and understand the import of what she says. After the actors’ declamation the pianists play—four pianists at two pianos bring *Evil Nigger*, *Gay Guerrilla* and *Crazy Nigger* to life. The appearance of the four pianists provide an odd visual contrast: they are all white and their faces are marked with abstract shapes contrived with silver makeup. The combination of the extraordinary visuals and the minimalist music of Eastman—an avant-garde, black, gay composer of music that sounds otherworldly—keeps me in my seat with no sense of time passing.

The music is astonishing. It begins with trills in the treble clef that repeat in a relatively simple chord progression, which then moves to the bass register and the music starts to become more elaborate from there. Soon, the second piano joins in repeating a motif that is in counterpoint to the first. Together they rise to a kind of driving, repetitive mélange that seems both atonal and melodic. It seems almost overbearing, the kind of music by which you might drive a team of horses beyond their natural capacities in order to bring word of the coming war. It is almost apocalyptic. In his statement Eastman explains that these compositions are “formally an attempt to make organic music.” The performers repeat him saying, “There is an attempt to make every section contain all of the information from the previous sections, or else taking out information at a gradual and logical rate.” I’m baffled by this, but the rhetorical confidence of the performers speaking for Eastman, and the intense urgency of the music makes me suspend my need to intellectually grasp the work.

I didn’t expect to encounter the word “nigger” at the Sharjah Biennial. I thought the politics that are invoked by that word would be thousands of miles away from here. Yet when I encounter this word, it’s soon followed by his explanation: “I reason I use that particular word ‘nigger’ because for me it has... a basicness about it, ...the first niggers were of course field niggers and upon that was the basis of the American economic system.” He goes onto say, “A Nigger for me is that thing that kind of thing that attains himself or herself through the ground of anything, and that’s what I mean by ‘nigger.’ And there are many niggers; there are many kinds of nigger ... 52 niggers.” What can I say to this? In his rhetoric and his music he sought rough and uneasy truth and he proffered that truth without apology and without mitigation. Bit by bit, there is a triumph in Eastman’s music, I can hear how he found a way to extricate joy from all the suffering implicated by that term, “nigger,” and by all he would have encountered being who he was, a black, gay composer of difficult and turbulent ecstasies. (Seph Rodney: “Channeling Julius Eastman, a Gay, African American Composer.” *Hyperallergic*, August 1, 2017.

www.hyperallergic.com/368709/the-otolith-group-third-part-of-the-third-measure/

The Otolith Group is an award-winning collaboration whose practice spans the moving image, audio, performance, installation and research. Founded in 2002 by the artists and theorists Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun, the group engages with the cultural and political legacies and potentialities of non-aligned movements, new media, Black Study, Afrofuturism and Indofuturism while thinking speculatively with science fictions of the present. Their methodologies incorporate post-lens-based essayistic aesthetics that explore the temporal anomalies, anthropic inversions, and synthetic alienation of the posthuman, the inhuman, the non-human, and the anti-human. www.otolithgroup.org

Cauleen Smith is an interdisciplinary artist whose work reflects upon the everyday possibilities of the imagination. Operating in multiple materials and arenas, Smith roots her work firmly within the discourse of mid-twentieth-century experimental film. Drawing from structuralism, third world cinema, and science fiction, she makes things that deploy the tactics of these disciplines while offering a phenomenological experience for spectators and participants. www.cauleensmith.com