

Art, Community & Cultural Resistance

by

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Introduction

Music and songwriting have always felt like tools to combat chaos for me, both personally and politically. Surviving the most recent wave of American fascism has taken so much, yet it has left a portal in its wake. Understanding how our personal experiences are impacted by the political changes we live through is crucial in dismantling systems of supremacy. I am fascinated by the human ability to navigate personal and political trauma while still finding ways to create subversive art and organize social movements. From Riot Grrrl radical feminist music and movement of the 1990's to the artist-activist collectives born of Occupy Wall Street in 2008, resistant art and culture often grow from times of personal and political violence.

I started this project five years ago in the fall of 2016, with the naive confidence that I would soon finish my senior year of college and live to see the first woman elected president. I was getting ready for a Halloween show in Soho with my bestie when my mom called to tell me my dad died. The last time we talked on the phone I sent him money to pay for my mom's chemotherapy. Then somehow, like a perfect hell, the Republican Party embraced Trump as the 45th US president. The rise of fascism that followed continues to plague the globe, and deeply changed how I view the role of sociology, art and culture in resisting the violence of late capitalism.

I played my first open mic in Yonkers a week after the 2016 election results, people were in mourning and gathering together to share the weight. Soon after, my younger sister and I quit school to work and take care of our mom. Working three bullshit jobs while navigating hospitals,

Medicaid & cancer research taught me more than I ever wanted to know about social order. My personal experience has never been so vulnerable to the political whims of the fascist elite as it was under the Trump administration. I can still feel the tightness in my chest at the threat of more cuts to Medicaid during that time. I wrote more music on my way to work and hospitals than I had ever written in my life.

After losing my mom in 2018, I turned to our Sicilian heritage for comfort and strength. I thought of everything the women in my family had endured, and why we often died so young. One sleepless late night on the internet, I found my way to Rosa Balistreri, who's first song "Buttana Di To Mâ" (Motherfucker) was written from a Sicilian jail when she was 15. After suffering an arranged marriage by her violent alcoholic father, she was locked up for defending herself against her abusive 'husband'. After stabbing her abuser with a kitchen knife and escaping her domestic terror, she assumed she had killed the man who tormented her. When she found out that he was still alive, she wrote "Buttana Di To Mâ" to express her discontent. She went on to perform and record Sicilian folk music that criticized the Italian fascist government, patriarchy and the colonization of her island. Through her music she was able to carry the *vox populi*, the voice of the people:

Si può fare politica e protestare in mille modi, io canto. Ma non sono una cantante... sono diversa, diciamo che sono un'attivista che fa comizi con la chitarra.

It is possible to talk about politics in thousands of ways. So I sing, but I'm not a singer... What I do is different, let's say I am an activist who does political speeches with a guitar.

(Piccolo, 2021)



This project is inspired by artist-activists like Rosa Balistreri and countless others, who dare to create subversive art in the face of personal and political crises. With a radical feminist lens, I explore the relationship between the personal and political, specifically the connection between creative expression and cultural resistance. In the following section I discuss the importance of art and culture in resisting violent supremacy in its many forms, namely neocolonialism and late capitalism. Drawing on the extensive work of marginalized artist-activists, indigenous land protectors, feminist scholars and qualitative sociologists, my senior project explores our long standing global history of cultural resistance. My methods are qualitative in nature and do not attempt to quantify complex concepts like art, community and cultural resistance. My intent is to highlight micro-level personal narratives of creative expression that speak to macro-level concepts like art, community and cultural resistance.

Literature Review

Cultural Resistance

The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies defines cultural resistance as, “the collective intention to oppose an oppressive, dominant or hegemonic social order”. Early concepts of cultural resistance have been documented since the late 1800’s, most notably from British poet and cultural critic Mathew Arnold. However, the practical application was first recorded by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci in the early 1900’s. Written from an Italian fascist prison, his later work reflects the challenges of communist revolution, namely underestimating the power of culture to change social structure. He concluded that communist revolutionary action was not possible without a strong counter culture formed in opposition to capitalist values. In contrast to Arnold, Gramsci argued that a culture of resistance cannot be cultivated within existing power structures, no ‘top down’ models so to speak. Rather, cultural resistance is only possible if actively created by marginalized people (“Resistance - Cultural Resistance”).

The sociological concept of cultural resistance was brought into contemporary discourse largely by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, formed in 1970’s Britain. Their work offers great insight into the rich history of cultural resistance in working-class subcultures. It is important to note that these are some of the first key documentations of cultural resistance, often centered in Eurocentric postmodern contexts. This is not to be confused with the first examples of cultural resistance throughout history, often indigenous and anti-capitalist in nature. As social

scientists, a critical analysis of Western academia and our relationship to the content we study offers much needed insight into our limited vision of art and activism.

In contrast, we can draw on the powerful legacies of cultural resistance in indigenous anti-colonial movements like *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN)*. Commonly known as the Zapatistas, this anti-colonial movement of communities indigenous to Southern Mexico separated themselves from the Mexican government through a 1994 uprising. These independent autonomous communities now occupy and control a significant amount of land in the southern state of Chiapas. Mexican-American sociologist María Inclán offers an exhaustively researched body of work in the sociological study of the Zapatistas and the response of the Mexican government. Since their inception, they have been met with the constant threat of violence from the Mexican nation-state in defense of their ancestral homeland. In recent years however, violent opposition to the Zapitastas has gradually declined, allowing the movement to focus on garnering Mexican and international support (Inclán, 2012). One strength of the movement is their focus on resisting the colonial destruction of language, art and culture. Famously articulated by rebel-poet Subcommandante Marcos of the Zapatista army:

In our dreams we have seen another world. A sincere world, a world definitively more just than the one in which we now move.... That sincere world was not a dream of the past, it was not something that came from our ancestors. It came from ahead, it was from the next step that we had taken.

Contemporary sociologists continue to build on this work, documenting the thriving presence of global cultural resistance. In this senior project, I draw heavily on the sociological

contributions of Paula Guerra of Portugal, Thiago Pereira Alberto of Brazil and Elizabeth Turner of the UK. I found their work compiled together in the art centered social science journal *CIDADES, Comunidades e Territórios*, founded by Professor Vítor Matias Ferreira (Guerra, 2021). This biannual online publication is one of the only free peer-reviewed sources I found for my research. With six articles translated into English, this issue was just recently published on October 20, 2021. The fact that this publication is current, bilingual and free to people outside of academic institutions made it an ideal source for this senior project.

Sociology of the Arts: A Brief History

Born in the 1980's, Sociology of the Arts is a relatively young subfield within the social science disciplines. Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* (1982) first broke ground in documenting the understudied relationship between art and collective action, creating an early framework for the emerging study. In contrast to art history and philosophy, Becker is less concerned with art's aesthetic value and more with the social cooperation required to produce and distribute art. Through the theoretical lens of individualism, he explores how a single artist can be sanctified while the social networks connected to them are denigrated. He interrogates the assumption that one artist can be entirely responsible for the artwork they participate in making. Instead, he deconstructs this division of labor into the material and immaterial resources produced by complex social networks upon which artists rely.

Becker's focus on the material culture of art brings into question the social conventions and limitations art is made within. Most art requires physical space and capital, which exist within the framework of private property and late capitalism. Becker asks, who paid for art

school, studio space, supplies, the time to make art exclusively, etc. His work questions the priorities of the state in dictating the political space art is made within, namely the shifting role of public arts funding and censorship (Becker, 1982). This is particularly relevant to marginalized artists who continue to create work despite the lack of visibility, validation and financial return. His substantial contributions to the field highlights the importance of social structures in art making. This senior project builds on his research by exploring the relationship between creative expression and cultural resistance.

Vera Zolberg's sociological study of art and culture expands on Becker's contributions, offering an interdisciplinary feminist perspective. She connects the history and idols of sociology, art history and media studies by deconstructing the work of men like Weber, Wolfflin and Adorno. She explores their focus on Marxist theory to understand the role of class in the 'production' of art and cultural 'capital' and argues that class dynamics are always compounded by gender, race and ethnicity. Her work asserts that the lack of women and people of color in the art historical canon has material implications for current cultural institutions. She furthers the discussion by studying the cultural context these art worlds and social sciences evolved within, namely their connection to each other. In questioning the role of elite aesthetic 'taste' in reproducing class stratification, she explores how high art and culture have often aligned with the interests of the state. She identifies valued artists throughout history as "preferably men of genius" and culturally glorified noblemen above socio-economic struggle. Zolberg argues that social science and art history can reinforce social inequality by ignoring the role of class, gender, race and ethnicity in the making of art and culture.

As the role of the church and state declines in funding public art and self-identified artists, the global art market is evolving with the rapid pace of technology. Zolberg argues that ‘cyberspace’ and computer technology is de-sanctifying high art by making it accessible to more people than ever historically possible. Culture coops technology by taking art out of elite institutions like museums and academia and into the hands of marginalized people. Like her contemporaries, she marks WWII and postmodernity as important cultural tipping points, social shifts away from white male centered art and culture. The material implications of confronting hegemonic power are significant for both liberal and conservative culture (Zolberg, 2015).

Zolberg’s body of work is so vast and significant to the field, notably her focus on the role of gender, race and ethnicity in art and culture. There is still much to be discovered in how art can function as a form of cultural resistance, particularly when accessible to marginalized groups. This senior project builds on her founding works by exploring contemporary art and culture created by non-elite artists and communities.

A New Sociology of Art

Tia Denora & Sophia Krzys Acord continue to push the boundaries of sociology of the arts by exploring the relationship between art and action. Drawing on early scholars like Bourdieu, Becker, and Zolberg, they question arts neutrality by deconstructing the role of class and culture in art making. In contrast to earlier theoretical works, Denora & Krzys Acord study the aesthetics of specific artworks to explore what they refer to as ‘art sociology’. Grounded in ethnomusicology, they explore the interactive experience between people and art by studying how music makes people feel. “Music or artistic forms have power over bodies insofar as they provide structures, patterns, parameters, or meanings to which bodies semi-consciously latch on -

or more consciously try to work with to constitute themselves or particular states of being.

Assuming that the latching on to (making connections with) art forms is constitutive of embodied action, the question remains: Why are connections made in the ways that they are?" (Denora & Krzys Acord, 225). While the authors still ground art making in the roles of human actors, they also value the physical connections people make with individual creative works.

Denora & Krzys Accord's research illuminates the relatively understudied sociological relationship between the body and sound. By exploring the gap between art sociology and the embodied experience of music, they offer depth to the subfield beyond the study of conventional elite art worlds. In contrast, their research examines the unique power of a musician's personal creative expression and artistry to evoke a physiological response from people experiencing their music. Broadly studying creative auditory stimulation and physical vibration as a catalyst for social action offers a much needed framework for understanding music as cultural resistance. I identify with their ethnomusicological approach to the sociology of art and embody their qualitative research style throughout this senior project.

Eduardo de la Fuente's *New Sociology of Art* offers an exciting vision for the future of the subfield. Informed by founding scholars like Becker, Bourdieu and Zolberg, his work challenges social scientists of the arts to reach further. He argues that hyper-scientific methodology often ignores the vast complexity of sociology and art making. While early sociology of art prioritizes quantifiable measurement over artistic aesthetic, he explores the 'new sociology of art' that is not only possible, but thriving. Citing Jeremy Tanner, he posits that quality art history has a sociological lens and relevant sociology of art includes respect for 'artistic volition'. Fuente critically analyzes the evolving discussion around contemporary social science and artistic

agency. He highlights Tia DeNora's contributions to musicology as critical to centering autonomy and aesthetics in the sociological study of art. His work contends that social scientists can unintentionally commodify music and art into solely products for consumption in an effort to scientifically objectify art making.

Beyond creative expression, Fuente explores the growing ability for sociology of art to question power. He quotes sociologist Janet Wolff in saying, “‘most sociologists of culture and the arts base their work on pre-critical, sometimes positivistic, premises’...Her basic point is that much of the sociology of art has not engaged in the kinds of questioning of power, representation and subjectivity, of the sort we find in cultural studies (Fuente, 7)”. I appreciate Fuente's ability to break down complex concepts into digestible language, bringing into question the elite nature of academic writing. My senior project continues to explore art and social science that is critical of white supremacist heteropatriarchy.

William Deresiewicz offers a unique perspective on the evolving identity of the title 'artist' into a multiplatform creative entrepreneur. He explores the historical shift in social roles and expectations of the artist from community artisan to solitary genius. Like Zolberg, he notes the significance of WWII and postmodernism in dramatically shifting the role of the artist as both artistic professional and creative entrepreneur. As religious and cultural patronage are replaced by universities and museums, the professional artist is expected to assume responsibility for all aspects of creative processes. Deresiewicz aptly notes, “Now we're all supposed to be our own boss, our own business: our own agent; our own label; our own marketing, production, and accounting departments...Everybody understands by now that nobody can count on a job” (Deresiewicz, 1993).

In the absence of material resources, art evolves to include entrepreneurship as essential. Like Zolberg and many others, he explores the growing power of internet technology to decentralize the historically elite white male art world. As public funding for art continues to decline, new informal structures continue to emerge on The Web, requiring a direct artist to ‘customer’ relationship. Throughout this senior project, I draw on Deresiewicz’s analysis of what it means to make art within the confines of late capitalism. My qualitative research continues to explore how artists make and distribute their work through semi-autonomous structures outside of formal institutions.

Creative Expression & Resistant Communities

David Faigin and Catherine Stein analyze how grass-roots theater impacts the lives of adults living with significant mental health needs. Data was collected from in-depth interviews using snowball sampling of community members and theater participants, as well as historical analysis of their nineteen-year performance history. Their study uses grounded theory methodology to allow participants to shape their research and understand the nature of their creative expression and cultural resistance. They analyze their findings through the ability of theater to combat social stigma and serve as a form of community building for participants. In collaboration with local mental-health providers, the community theater troupe The Stars of Light produce and perform original works by participants with significant mental health needs. Faigin and Stein conduct their research in an effort to create a broader understanding of social activism within community-based theater and the mental health field (Faigan & Stein, 2014).

While there have been similar studies focusing on the changing attitudes and public perception of mental health, this study focuses on the impact of collective creativity and mental health care. Their qualitative style of research allows for a broad interpretation of success and I emulate this model to further explore the role of community building in cultural resistance.

Isler et al. questions how poetry and spoken word can create social networks that resist the cultural stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS. This study was conducted as a pilot program to address social barriers to accessing sexual health services in African-American communities. Data was collected through in depth-interviews and participant observation of an existing community organization known as GRACE (Growing, Reaching, Advocating for Change). Their work is centered on the lived experience of fifteen African-American youth, adults and care-givers living with HIV/AIDS.

Using performance and poetry as a form of creative expression and cultural resistance, GRACE and The Spoken Word Project work to increase access to public health services in rural North Carolina. Their study found that The Spoken Word Project built on the strengths of existing community resources by creating space for collective creativity and destigmatizing testing and treatment (M.R. Isler, 2015). As outside social scientists, their qualitative research style of supporting existing community resources is an asset to the field. This pilot program was limited in the number of participants, but serves as a powerful example of the relationship between creative expression and cultural resistance.

In 2009, American sociologist Susan Pietrzyk led a twenty-one-month ethnographic study of the relationship between art and public health in Zimbabwe. In collaboration with the

Zimbabwe AIDS Network, Pietrzyk explores art forms like poetry as forms of cultural activism in response to the global AIDS health crisis. In this study, local artists and activists worked with public health programs to organize cultural events that provide free STD testing in a more accessible environment. Pietrzyk reflects that, “the persistence of HIV and AIDS is interrelated with economic, political, and social dynamics as inflected through class, gender, race, and sexual practices” (Pietrzyk, 6).

Pietrzyk’s work uses a wide understanding of the terms art and activism while attempting to quantify broad social concepts. Her research methods define effective public health outreach as increased levels of STD testing through the Zimbabwe AIDS Network. Her research findings propose that 93% of effective outreach includes local art and collective expression. Pietrzyk notes the popularity and success of community spaces that host weekly poetry slams and performances by women living with HIV/AIDS (Pietrzyk, 2009). By making spaces for people to express and connect through performance, we are able to collectively fight social stigmas surrounding sexual health and access vital services. In contrast to traditional public health outreach, this model allows for participants to cultivate autonomy and cultural resistance through poetry and community building.

Other art forms like dance and choreography use placed-based social justice to choreograph political pieces that reflect local and global issues. Eric Mullis’s work with independent dance collectives in Charlotte, North Carolina explores specific political dances in response to local and global issues. Mullis draws on the political choreography and performance of Kurt Jooss’s *The Green Table* (1932), Anna Sokolow’s *Dreams* (1961), Mats Ek’s *Soweto*

(1977) and Bill T. Jones's *Still/Here* (1991), among others to explore dance as a form of cultural resistance.

Quoting Marion Kant's 2008 essay on German dancers and Nazi politics Mullis cites, "Dance can flourish in any society, whether democratic or dictatorial; human rights cannot. Dancers, choreographers, performers—they too are responsible for making a society that accepts the ideals of freedom, justice, and peace and takes responsibility, moral and political responsibility, for the ideas that their dances promote" (2008, 18). The explicit political content of their choreography requires social responsibility from other artists and demands that art respond to culture (Mullis, 2015). Rather than operating within a cultural vacuum, Mullis takes his work into public spaces and writes with a poetic style that evokes feeling, movement and imagery. My senior project embodies this writing style of depicting empathetic narratives across multiple forms of creative expression.

Crisis & Cultural Resistance

During the 2004 reelection of US president George Bush, the republican administration proudly explained to journalists their ability to denounce reality and create their own. In response, author and artist-activist Steve Duncombe wrote the moving book, *Dream: re-imagining progressive politics in an age of fantasy*. This poignant cultural critique offers much needed insight into how progressives can use the art of fantasy and spectacle to further liberal politics. While progressive politics often rely on facts and logic, his work offers a unique contribution to the subfield by expanding our political tactics to what he calls 'artistic activism'. Through historical analysis of past movements and the connection between Enlightenment

principles and progressive politics, he argues for a new model of political consciousness in an age of fantasy. He uses in depth-interviews with artist-activist collectives like the Lower East Side Collective, Reclaim the Streets, Absurd Response and the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army to explore strong examples of cultural resistance.

Duncombe contends that progressives can use the same tactics of fantasy and spectacle used by conservatives to gain traction for a liberal political agenda. He elaborates that, “Universal health care, free education or a more equitable economy are worthy objectives. But we also have to give serious consideration to how we reach these targets—that is: how we do politics. We need to rethink progressive politics in terms of our game play. Perhaps one of the reasons progressives are not winning much these days is that lately our game isn’t much fun to play” (Duncombe, 65). His work chronicles how artists-activist collectives can appeal to an ethical cultural imagination, in contrast to solely using facts and logic as a political strategy (Duncombe, 2007).

On a micro-level, Duncombe’s strategic use of the first person in his writing serves as its own example of cultural resistance. By identifying his own role within his writing he calls on readers to do the same, encouraging his audience to participate in imaging a more ethical world. By drawing on established artist-activist collectives and powerful examples of cultural resistance, Duncombe makes complex social stratification feel approachable. His work moves beyond deconstructing oppressive power and into what ethical power distribution could look like when we use our personal creativity to support collective action. The importance of joy in cultural resistance through art and community is echoed in the discourse across disciplines. “Protest groups such as London-born Reclaim the Streets put this philosophy of resistance into

practice in the 1990s: throwing large, illegal street parties that literally *demonstrated* to participants what the experience of a participatory public culture feels like. What is being created, through acts of resistance, is a revolutionary imagination” (“Resistance Refuted And Reimagined”).

A User's Guide to (Demanding) the Impossible is a poetic cultural piece written in response to UK students protesting government budget cuts in the early 2000's and the creative strategies they employed. Gavin Grindow and John Jordan reflect on the ways art can be taken out of the profit driven art world and into the hands of communities and movements that further ethical social action. Grindow & Jordan assert that as long as art is only taken seriously as a means of cultural and physical capital, it is stripped of its power and potential for radical social justice. The authors use historical analysis of social movements and interviews with artist-activist collectives to understand how art functions within activist communities. Their work focuses on historical figures like Sylvia Pankhurst, who left the confines and prestige of the art world to create work that furthered the Suffragette Movement.

Through narrative descriptions the authors paint a vivid picture of art as an active movement instead of a static object. “This guide is not a road map or instruction manual. It's a match struck in the dark, a homemade multi-tool to help you carve out your own path through the ruins of the present, warmed by the stories and strategies of those who took Bertolt Brecht's words to heart: 'Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it'” (Grindow & Jordan, 2010).

Grindow & Jordan explore how art can serve as a form of cultural resistance when strategically incorporated into social movements. Their work offers well researched critiques of the absence of cultural activism in conventional art worlds while remaining anti-academic in their writing style. This piece reads like a fairytale from another world, invoking vivid imagery with language that is captivating and accessible. I embody this approach to sociological research by centering poetic language and imagery with the intent to invoke an embodied response from the reader.

Portuguese Sociologist Paula Guerra approaches the new sociology of art with a powerful focus on the socio-economic crises art is often made within. Her extensive work in youth studies and cultural activism connects transnational stories of young people confronting neo-colonial empires through music. Guerra seamlessly ties together local narratives that articulate a globalized experience, particularly how music and cultural resistance are created and maintained in postmodernity. She explores the brutality inherent in late capitalism and the inevitable cycles of economic collapse, notably in 2008. Guerra explores the ways in which young people are left to rage against violence in its many forms, namely capitalism and neocolonial powers.

Echoing the discourse of other sociologists in the subfield Guerra notes, “Dillane, Power, Devereux, and Haynes (2018) detail that across the world, we find examples of protests led by young people within music scenes where a sense of attachment and commitment flourish. In Portugal, the song ‘What a Fool I Am’ (‘Que Parva Que Eu Sou’, 2011), which was used as a manifestation of the conditions of austerity and precariousness experienced by qualified young people post-2008 crisis is one such example” (Guerra, 7). I embody Guerra’s style of research in providing specific songs and works of art to demonstrate examples of cultural resistance.

British sociologist Elizabeth Turner examines the distinction between protest songs and resistance music through her qualitative study of pacific reggae band Herbs. Like her contemporaries, Denora, Krzys Acord and Guerra, Turner centers specific songs, texts and imagery within the context of social crises to explore the often ambiguous idea of art and activism. Drawing on Barbara Harlow's notion of resistance poetry throughout history, she explores the slave spiritual "We Shall Not Be Moved", Lead Belly's "Bourgeois Blues" and Marvin Gayes "What's Goin On?" among others, to illustrate a long history of resistance music and indirect cultural activism. She explains that, "Habits of indirection and circumlocution were a long-standing and necessary protection because for an enslaved and greatly oppressed people to articulate complaints or protests was to court physical danger" (Turner, 26). This brings into question the privileged nature of traditional protest strategies often employed by American left-wing institutions, a largely white and upper-middle class demographic. As social scientists and cultural critics, we run the risk of reinforcing oppressive social structures if we remain uncritical of how we define art and activism. If we only study activism as the ability for people to protest power without the threat of violence, we ignore rich histories of cultural resistance in marginalized communities.

Turner's primary focus of this study is the critical analysis of the band Herbs through the six songs on their 1981 EP *What's Be Happen?* and their politically charged album art. This collection of powerful resistance music was self-produced in response to apartheid, namely the racist violence against Polynesian people in New Zealand. Turner makes the distinction from protest songs in that resistance music can conversely serve as a form of protection against violence. By creatively expressing discontent through indirect modalities, resistance music can

support community solidarity rather than increase direct targets of violence through traditional protest strategies.

Turner critically analyzes the role of cultural resistance in ethical social action and identifies direct protest as, "...a legitimate, even essential, aspect of modern democratic societies...but there are places in the world today where protest still involves risk and where those who have the courage to protest are suppressed with violence. The ability to consider and differentiate, in some contexts of analysis, between the musical expression and construction of protest, the production of creative resistance in song, and elements of social critique therefore seems useful" (Turner, 2021). Her critical race analysis of eurocentric social activism serves as an important critique of sociology of the arts. In my senior project I emulate this model to explore resistance music as an act of defiance against oppressive power and systems of supremacy.

Portuguese sociologist Paula Guerra continues to bring a much needed anti-colonial approach to the subfield by studying cultural resistance in Brazil, a former colony of Portugal. Guerra's research offers an exciting perspective on art and culture in neocolonial contexts, notably Do-It-Yourself (DIY) scenes in Portugal and Brazil. She argues that DIY practices vary across local contexts, but can be defined as the "creation of a symbolic alternative through a space of self-empowerment, mutual help, and alternative social engagement" (Guerra, 2021). This well-researched study explores 214 interviews with members of the Portuguese punk scene, 32 interviews with members of the Brazilian funk/alternative rock scene and case studies of DIY artists from both countries.

Guerra argues that DIY culture functions as a form of cultural resistance in response to being denied social resources. In the absence of institutional support, marginalized communities are utilizing DIY practices to gain cultural and financial autonomy. She notes that the traditional Portuguese DIY scene is overwhelmingly male and upper-middle class. She studies the work of well known punk artist Rafael Bruno, a musician, community organizer and zinester from Lisbon, Portugal. His bands, zines, and herbal wellness company have all been a testimony to local DIY practices, which is largely seen as an attempt to escape ‘the system’. He understands that taking a pay cut is an unavoidable part of committing to a DIY lifestyle in Portugal.

In Brazil however, the DIY scene is comprised of largely poor, working-class women and queer people of color. In Rio de Janeiro, queer funk artists like Linn da Quebrada are using DIY strategies to break cycles of poverty and social fragility. Using social media, YouTube and crowd funding site Kickante, Quebrada recorded her first LP *Pajubá* in 2017 with São Paulo producer BadSista. After years of crowdfunding, recording and performing, Quebrada released her stunning visual album comprising fourteen songs, each complete with music videos (Guerra, 2021).

Self-described as “afro-funk-vogue”, her debut album *Pajubá* features other gender nonconforming artists in Brazil and quickly gained international acclaim among Latinx listeners. Popular Latin American media company *Remezcla* reviews the album with nuance and reverence for what it took to produce. While *Pajubá* is at once a rebellious celebration, it is also layered with the complexity of being a queer person in late capitalism. *Remezcla* elaborates that, “This is not to say that she masks the pain of her country’s virulent transphobia. On *Pajubá* track “Bixa

Travesty,” she paints a gory self-portrait: “With just one breast, hair dragging on the floor/And in a bloody hand, a heart.” In the video, a makeup-free Linn struggles to put a hair piece on a disinterested German shepherd, before eventually donning the bangs herself. À la “Hold Up,” her vulnerability soon turns to strength. “Actually, I changed my mind,” sings Quebrada. “I made you a beautiful surprise/When you leave, don’t forget/Leave your dick on the table. Go!” These defiant lyrics that embody the essence of cultural resistance are delivered within a stunning audio visual masterpiece (Donohue, 2017). The album is titled after the Afro-Brazilian crytolect Pajubá, which was adopted by the LGBTQ community during Brazil's military dictatorship. Guerra explores Quebrada’s use of ‘queer counter-language’ as an act of cultural resistance in and of itself, in addition to her music as a form of social intervention.

Guerra also interviews Brazilian queer alternative rock musician and zinester Fernanda Meireles, who has a well established role in the Rio de Janerio DIY alternative rock scene. Meireles founded the bands *Devotchkas* and *Alcalina*, created numerous zines and most recently opened the mobile DIY store Loja sem Paredes (Shop without Walls). She echoes the sentiment of many marginalized communities using DIY strategies in saying, “The song writing, writing zines was always a form of intervention, of making myself heard. And also, a fight for gender equality, for the LGBTQI+ cause, for my existence as a citizen and for my economic survival” (Guerra, 2021). This study is of importance for so many reasons, particularly the queer anti-colonial lens that Guerra brings to the sociology of art.

True to their previous works, Paula Guerra and her colleagues deliver a nuanced understanding of music as a form of cultural resistance in postmodernity. Their qualitative study

of specific songs that confront oppressive power connects common themes across the globe.

Through a transnational feminist lens, their research offers a new methodological approach to the sociological study of art and cultural resistance.

When exploring art and globalization Guerra et al. references specific queer artists who's work narrates a larger cultural experience. "For instance, artists like Pablo Vittar, Liniker, Linn da Quebrada and Johnny Hooker have produced artistic trajectories that embody strategies of political resistance permanently coupled with their sound and lyrical discourses. Through the different modulations of musical genres (soul, brega, funk), their performances are connected to the latent experiences and oppressions experienced by the LGBT community in Brazil. This reality has been arising all around the globe, pointing to the existence of new shapes of protest songs. In fact, these new forms of protest are not a result of single concerted action, but rather a set of actions by scattered artists aiming for the same goal" (Guerra et al., 4)." Their research eloquently speaks to complex global experiences of marginalization and cultural resistance through music.

Guerra and her colleagues' deviate from eurocentric research models which quantify activism only in its ability to interact with institutionalized power. However, Guerra et al. argues that some of the most powerful cultural activism is happening in decentralized networks of artists and community members working independently towards the same goal -- cultural resistance and autonomy.

Thiago Pereira Alberto offers an innovative perspective to the sociology of art and cultural activism. Among others, Alberto references Latin American scholars Néstor García Canclini and João Freire Filho alongside cultural artists Criolo and Ygor Marotta to paint vivid

pictures of cultural resistance in São Paulo, Brazil. Like his peers Paula Guerra and Elizabeth Turner, Alberto provides tangible, place based art works to explore youth resistance against social crisis.

Alberto's research explores the relationship between the popular graffiti tag “Mais amor por favor” and the song “Não Existe Amor em SP” by Brazilian rapper Criolo. The graffiti tag “More Love Please” was already sprawled across the city when Criolo released his song, “There is No Love in SP”. These independent works of art evolved in conversation with each other to build a strong community of marginalized young people and artists. Alberto reflects on the role of artists in social action and the significance of Criolo’s 2011 MTV Brazil Music Awards first place performance. Alberto explains that Criolo’s, “prize winning video is a gathering of images that showed spray-painted inscriptions and graffiti drawings around the city of São Paulo, focusing especially on the ‘Mais amor por favor’ graffiti. At the award show, the musician performed a version of the song in a duet with Caetano Veloso, author of one of the most notable São Paulo themed songs (“Sampa”, 1978), with an arrangement that gave to the more attentive viewers the sensation of parental artistic affiliation, as well as a generational stamp: the union of poets who had the same city as a muse but versed under different temporal optics” (Alberto, 2021). This collaboration of street art, music, film and intergenerational live performance gave birth to a collective political identity that would mobilize the following year.

In 2012, conservative politician Celso Russomanno’s reelection campaign was met with resistance and solidarity between artists and activists. Collective organizing between musicians, street artists and cultural activists gave way to the defiant political cultural event “Love Yes,

Russomanno No”. The night before the election, an estimated 8,000 people occupied public land in opposition of Russomanno’s oppressive government and in favor of Fernando Haddad, the candidate of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers Party). Criolo performed the emerging anthem of resistance, “Não Existe Amor em SP”, inviting people to sing, dance and exchange subversive literature. Pamphlets from the event read, “For years, SP has become increasingly more aggressive, repressive, individualistic, forbidden, militarized. While slums catch fire and police gain militia status, political power attempts to take over the public for the sake of the private. Ending the party for the sake of silence. Killing the poor for the sake of the rich. Ending justice for the sake of order.” The election of Fernando Haddad and the Workers Party validated the growing political power of young artists and activists to oust oppressive governments through cultural resistance (Alberto, 2021). Alberto’s work is exhaustively researched and nuanced and I draw from his radical anti-capitalist perspective on the power of making music, art and cultural resistance.

Understanding our intersecting global history of cross-cultural resistance is vital if we want to engage in creating a more ethical world. Our personal experiences are not only impacted by supremacist politics but evolve in relationship to each other. In completing this senior project and living through late capitalism, I often turn to the work of subversive artists and cultural critics for inspiration. I always find hope in the powerful words of Indian author and activist Suzanna Arundhati Roy:

Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our

joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness – and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we're being brainwashed to believe.

The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling – their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability.

Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them.

Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.

— Arundhati Roy, War Talk

Methods

My intention for this senior project is to creatively explore personal and collective expressions of cultural resistance across communities and social contexts. In contrast to traditional academic text, my writing style asserts my identity and centers my relationship to the research, informants and content. My qualitative research methods explore the sociological study of art, community and cultural resistance through in-depth interviews with self-identifying artists and activists. In line with the new sociology of art, I analyze the aesthetic content of informants' artwork in order to expand on theoretical frameworks of cultural resistance. I expressed my intent and obtained consent from informants to include their poetry, illustration, and music in this senior project. As agreed upon prior to our interviews, I will send the final project to all contributing artists after review and submission.

Qualitative research allowed me to center the empathetic narratives of self-identifying artists and activists in their own personal experiences, communities and cultural contexts. Instead of attempting to objectively quantify complex narratives, qualitative methods like in-depth interviews and content analysis offered a more subjective approach for this senior project. Interviews were semi-structured and conversational in nature in order for informants to direct the conversation and provide their own creative content for analysis. Informal and open ended questions allowed informants to guide my research and relatively limit my assumptions and preconceived notions of their creative expression and cultural resistance.

Through convenience and snowball sampling I was able to conduct four in-depth interviews with self-identifying artists and/or activists. I connected with three informants roughly seven years ago while I was a sociology student at Purchase College. However, I was originally introduced to one informant when we were both about twelve years old in a Rochester, NY community theater production. After moving to Seattle, WA two years ago, I met my most recent informant at a series of free zine events at a local bar. I reached out to four informants currently living in three American cities – New York City, Rochester and Seattle, alongside one Mediterranean municipality in the European Union – Gozo, Malta.

I originally chose to reach out to these particular informants because they all self-identify as independent artists with strong roles in their communities. Having met each other organically through our lived experiences in community theater, liberal arts college and collaborative zine workshops, these artists serve as dynamic informants for the qualitative study of art, community and culture. While there are infinite personal expressions of transgressive art, I believe each artist represents a unique aspect of cultural resistance in their communities. Interviewing artists in US

cities on the East Coast and West Coast in addition to the EU allowed me to compare and contrast the socio-political contexts within which art, community and cultural resistance are cultivated.

From our interviews I explored a small sample of informants' artwork, specifically two songs and two independent publications. With a queer feminist lens, I examine this content alongside audio, visual and literary content posted to their music streaming platforms and social media. After interviewing two self-identifying queer musicians I analyzed the content of their albums, specifically their lyrical text, intonation pattern and album art available on Bandcamp.

Following interviews with one self-identifying queer writer and one self-identifying visual artist, I analyzed the content of the poetry and zines they provided, particularly their poetic language, comic text and illustration. I pay close attention to interview responses and creative content that center subversive artists and communities who are critical of oppressive power. I decided to analyze the content of informants' art in order to explore common themes of resistance across cultures and art forms. Where the sociological analysis of art content can be limited in subjectivity, it offers a more nuanced approach to the study of creative expression, community and cultural resistance.

I chose to interview Zora Acephala (they/them) for this senior project because their queer anarchist approach to art and activism explores the complexities of transgressive folk music as cultural resistance in Rochester, New York. As a queer banjo player, Acephala often puts their own spin on country classics by creating subversive versions of traditional songs and repopularizing the music of queer country elders like Lavender Country. As the first openly gay

American country band, Lavender Country's subversive battle cry "Cryin These Cock Suckin Tears" serves as rich content for analyses in this senior project.

Acephala was one of the first visibly queer kids I saw growing up, we met around 2003 at Rochester Area Performing Arts (RAPA), a local community theater. Since then, Acephala has become an accomplished self-identifying queer country recording artist and well respected anarchist organizer in the Rochester community. They first started self-identifying as an activist and anarchist after working with Earth First! -- a decentralized network of activists who halt or shut down environmental destruction projects like hydrofracking drill sites. After connecting with a larger community of direct action anarchists, Acephala worked extensively with Take Back the Land. This Rochester housing network is well-known for breaking into abandoned houses to estimate liveability, fighting banks for legal rights and housing homeless families.

Acephala brings a militant anti-capitalist approach to their music and community organizing, a much needed perspective in this economically depressed city. Their longest community organizing commitment is their role in co-founding Girls Rock! Rochester, a volunteer run music camp for girls and young queer people. Working on direct action projects for housing and environmental rights informs Acephala's explicitly anarchist approach to queer music making and feminist community organizing.

Cat Camilleri (she/her) is a queer Gozitan-American writer and community organizer currently living in Gozo, Malta. I decided to interview her because her writing, cultural activism and lived experience offer a much needed transnational queer feminist perspective to the study of art, community and cultural resistance. I met Camilleri in 2013 while she was studying Creative

Writing and Literature at Purchase College. We became fast friends after working together as student organizers for Freenew, an anti-capitalist upcycling project on campus. Since then we have built a strong friendship on the shared value of ethical power distribution in our personal and political choices, beliefs and communities.

Since graduating college Camilleri has moved abroad to Gozo, Malta where she cares for her grandparents while working as a writer and queer community organizer. She uses her art as a writer to organize the Creativity Club through LGBTQ+ Gozo, where she creates a non-judgemental space for queer people to share their experiences conversationally and through their art. Camilleri's focus on queer friendship highlights the importance of strong creative communities in cultural resistance. In this senior project I analyze the content of her poem *Sylvia 'Y'all Better Quiet Down' Rivera*, which she recently shared with the Creativity Club.

I chose to interview Jordanna Felice (she/they) to study the role of micro-level creative expression in macro-level community contexts, like co-creating music and teaching virtual lessons. Felice's presence in the New York City queer pop-punk scene is becoming more prominent as she continues to perform and distribute her third album. I met Felice in 2014 when they were a Journalism student at Purchase College and we became friends after seeing each other at an Adult Mom show in Brooklyn. Felice has a vast wealth of knowledge in songwriting, performance and recording which is showcased most recently in their band Eithermore. Beyond their three album discography, they also teach music lessons online and collaborate with queer artists on other audio projects like podcasts.

Felice brings a personal vulnerability to their music that speaks to the complexities of queer love in conservative cultures. Their song “Red State” offers insightful content for analysis on their personal experience of falling in love and the impacts of oppressive politics in American states controlled by the Republican Party. This personal yet political perspective is important in studying how queer artists make relationships, community and music in larger more densely populated East Coast US cities like New York City.

I chose to interview Palm because of my experience as a queer zinester finding community through his free public art events. I met Marc J Palm (he/him) in September 2019 when I first moved to Seattle, just before the horrific and largely preventable COVID-19 pandemic. Before the city shut down in quarantine, he organized a free monthly zine workshop known as Dune at a local bar. Walking into Dune for the first time, I was warmly welcomed by a diverse crowd of local artists working alongside emerging zinesters. Well known self-published comics and illustrators like Palm and his friends at Self-Satisfied Publications were drinking and drawing with young punks and experimental artists. Maybe most importantly for this senior project, Palm collected a page from every artist to create a collaborative Dune zine for all participants. This free and thoughtfully crafted monthly zine continues to be co-created and distributed remotely in an effort to support virtual communities of independent artists in Seattle.

While Palm does not self-identify as a queer artist, his work is often critical of gender norms and toxic masculinity. His contributions to this senior project allow me to explore how independent artists as a whole can be of service to marginalized artists and communities. I analyze the content of his most recent zine *Have a Little Fun* to explore how independent publications can critique oppressive power through text and illustration. His accessible and

collaborative approach to creative expression offers an experienced perspective on independent art communities in densely populated US West Coast cities like Seattle.

Findings & Analysis

Throughout my research I was fascinated and at times frustrated by the abstract nature of studying art, community and cultural resistance. Although the subjectivity of qualitative research was a challenge to distill, in-depth interviews with self-identifying artists and activists offered common themes from individual narratives. The qualitative analysis of transgressive art allowed me to deconstruct abstract ideas like art and activism into tangible examples of songs, poems and zines that are defiant of supremacist ideology. In the following section, I explore how writing, illustration and music can foster creative expression, community and cultural resistance.

All four informants were so generous with their time and artistry, with each interview lasting roughly an hour. Three out of four informants are Purchase College graduates who are between four and nine years into making transgressive art in their personal and professional networks. I interviewed these same three artists virtually over FaceTime from my apartment in Seattle, with two artists in New York (Rochester and Brooklyn) and one artist in Gozo, Malta. After we were both fully vaccinated I was able to safely interview Marc J Palm in person at an outdoor coffee shop in Seattle. One of the benefits of interviewing artists in person is artwork! From my only in person interview I was thoughtfully gifted a copy of Palm's 2021 zine, *Have a Little Fun* along with an archived copy of a local self-published newspaper, *The Intruder*.

Each interview was first recorded on my iPhone SE and later transcribed onto my Chromebook (Google laptop). The distance between Seattle and Gozo was the most difficult to

navigate but we were able to sustain a relatively consistent audiovisual connection. I have never been so cognizant of the quality of my technology and developed a slightly cyberborg-like attachment to my phone and laptop. Recording interviews on my phone through my computer was challenging and in retrospect I should have invested more time and energy into downloading or purchasing more efficient software. As I found in this senior project, private space to communicate through FaceTime or Zoom is also a limited resource in most postmodern urban settings. Beyond ‘going virtual’ for public health safety I was also able to complete this project remotely from Seattle. This implies my privileged access to reliable WiFi and Smart devices, a significant commodity in navigating the COVID-19 pandemic and late capitalism.

Writing & Illustration as Cultural Resistance

Cat Camilleri (she/her) is a queer writer and community organizer currently living in Gozo, Malta. Originally from NYC, she grew up in a Gozitan-American family in Forest Hills, Queens. She attended LaGuardia High School for Drama and graduated from Purchase College with her BA in Creative Writing and Literature in 2017. She has been living in Gozo, Malta since January 2020 where she cares for her grandparents while working as a writer, editor, ESL teacher and community organizer. She described the competitive nature of her well-known creative arts high school as ‘abysmal’, noting that it was actually a community theater in Queens, The First String Players, where she felt the most comfortable to express herself as a young queer artist. She stressed the importance of non-judgemental creative space for queer kids and her hope to bring that to her community in Gozo. Like many queer artists, she works to actively make space for the next generation that was often inaccessible to her growing up.

Shortly after arriving in Gozo, she began working with a dedicated group of queer artists and activists involved in the creation of LGBTQ+ Gozo. Prior to their inception, the only sexual health centers and queer community organizations available to Gozitans were a ferry ride away on the main island Malta. After five years of operating remotely, they opened their first LGBTQ+ Gozo office space and health center in September 2021, pride month in Malta. As the first queer organization and sexual health clinic on the island, they organize annual surveys asking members which services are lacking in their community. Each year the results of the previous survey are implemented in an annual “Action Plan”, resulting in their current office space and sexual health clinic. After five years of community building and public health outreach, they utilized the quantifiable nature of the “Action Plan” to apply for grants and government funding.

Mindful of COVID-19 safety restrictions, Camilleri organizes a virtual Creativity Club through LGBTQ+ Gozo for queer people to create and share works across art mediums. The twice monthly meetings are conversational in nature and range in topics from queer spirituality to gender and sexuality. Originally starting as a poetry club, the group eventually expanded to encompass the diverse artistry of queer Gozitans. Camilleri emphasizes the importance of community and autonomous space in saying, “It means so much to have a physical space where you're represented. You say hi I'm here, I'm not in the closet, I'm here -- out. Of course there's nothing wrong with people in the closet, but to say that I'm here, I'm openly queer I'm not gonna police myself in any way and express myself freely. And to be able to access services, knowing that your not going to met with discrimination, it's incredibly important. For young people exploring their sexuality, even just walking past the office, or hearing about the Creativity Club,

they'll know ok these are people I can go to, these are people I can turn to if my family and my friends are not accepting of me." Her dedication to queer youth and cultural resistance echoes the sentiment of the other queer artists I interviewed -- how to create spaces we often did not have as young people.

While Gozitan culture still retains a strong sense of catholic patriarchy, queer culture is gaining institutional support, in this case as a potential voting demographic. Camilleri notes that while NYC can feel more culturally liberal, it is actually in Gozo as a member of the European Union, where fiscally liberal policies support stronger social services. Camilleri elaborates, "I have to say for the government here they set us up, we don't have to pay for the office space. Heating and electricity, we don't have to pay that, they covered it for three years. They're very good here in terms of social programming, I've told you this before elder care here is amazing. They have great elder care here. I think the decision to give us an office space and to be so generous about it was a political move, the minister of Gozo's probably planning for reelection soon. But we're not complaining! It's pretty amazing and exciting, but of course on paper Malta is very progressive when it comes to gay rights. We're the first EU country to ban conversion therapy, gay marriage is legalized here, people are generally pretty open. But of course you still have discrimination and violence weather it be physical or verbal violence, in the workplace, at home, so these spaces and these opportunities for people to express themselves creatively, to use art as a way to document their struggles and move past them in whatever way they can is so important and needs to be something we continue to do." Understanding queer community as a form of protection against violence reflects the larger discourse in the subfield around art as a form of cultural resistance. In contrast to NYC and other American cities, Camilleri has access to

significantly more social services and public funding for art and community organizing in Gozo, Malta as a member of the European Union. Her lived experience navigating NYC and Gozo as an artist and organizer offers a necessary transnational queer perspective to this senior project.

While her own poetry is a vital part of her personal creative expression and queer visibility, it also functions as a catalysts for queer community and cultural resistance. Her poetry often chronicles movements towards queer liberation in the radical work of transwomen of color like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. During a recent Creativity Club, she performed a reading of her poem *Sylvia 'Y'all Better Quiet Down' Rivera*, which honors the fundamental role of transwomen of color in resisting the violence of cishetero-patriarchy.

“I am you and you are me”

She cries

“My blood is your blood

And yours is mine

I toil in the trenches

And fight the same

Unyielding fight

As you

Yet I stand in the shadows

Casted by an unforgiving world

I am silence

I am harrunged
I am beaten by my brothers and sisters
Who say my differences are too different
Who say I am an abomination
For being born in the wrong body
In the wrong skin.
An outcast among the outcasts.”

Her crackled voice
Fills the stoney circle
Of Washington Square park.

Her brothers and sisters
Sit in silence
Unwilling to understand
What they refuse to hear

By sharing these direct quotes along side her own prose, she creates a poetic style that breathes life into the history of queer cultural resistance. Her work challenges the idea that a single author or artist alone can be entirely responsible for the work they create. By including quotes from queer elders within her own poetry she brings to light our intergenerational legacy of cultural resistance -- the shoulders we stand on so to speak. Her collaborative writing style also

calls for participation from the reader and the queer community at large: “Her brothers and sisters/Sit in silence/Unwilling to understand/What they refuse to hear.” As a cisgendered queer woman active in an emerging organization, Camilleri’s critical prose argue for trans rights and representation within queer communities across cultural contexts. Through her work with LGBTQ+ Gozo and the Creativity Club, she is able to use her writing as a form of solidarity and cultural resistance. By building on the strengths of their personal and collective creativity, members of LGBTQ+ Gozo are able to mobilize towards a common goal -- queer community and cultural resistance.

Through my own lived experience of our friendship, Camilleri has consistently used her time, resources and writing craft in service of other queer people like myself. While I was caring for my mom at the end of her life, Camilleri always picked up the phone for me to cry over FaceTime and sent money we desperately needed without ever being asked. She galvanized our friends online with a beautifully written GoFundMe article and offered to edit my college admissions essay as well as this senior project. Although we often live continents and time zones apart, our relationship embodies a lived experience of transnational queer community, creative expression and cultural resistance.

Marc J Palm (he/him) is a Seattle based artist and illustrator who has self-published two comic books, *The Fang* and *The Fang II*, numerous zines and organizes monthly art meetups. When I moved to Seattle in 2019, the first event I went to was one of Palm’s art meetups known as Dune at the bar Cafe Racer. My cousins boyfriend invited me, a heterosexual cisgendered man, and I was uncertain of what his art scene might look like. Much to my surprise, the bar was packed with a diverse range of folks -- queer punks wearing Black Trans Lives Matter patches

alongside non-traditional makers of varied gender expression, race and age. The creative and welcoming atmosphere made *Dune* a sought after event so well attended that I often had to sit on the floor when chairs filled up. What started as a small group exploded into a wildly popular monthly art zine where local artists got together to create and submit their work for publication the following month. Every month an eclectic crowd of zinesters packed into Cafe Racer to produce and submit one complete page each by the end of the five hour event. Unlike other art bar events, each collective art session produced a physical *Dune* zine. Or rather, Palm collected, scanned, printed and stapled thousands of pages together and distributed them for free the following month.

Dune became one of many free collaborative publications in Seattle, where there is a strong independent publishing community. Palm explained, “For a punker to have it in their back pocket at a show that just brightened our nights, they're gonna be stoned later, read it and laugh -- we did it! That's what we want. So that energy is in Seattle, there's a lot of it, that newspaper *Scarrf* took over after all this, that's another free paper...*Mundane Fantasies*, published through patreon, is another local submission zine.” While Palm is not a self-identity queer artist, the crowd that these publications and community events gather is often a diverse and visibly queer group. Like other DIY art scenes, the Seattle zine community is a central part of independent art making, if not always an explicitly queer space.

There can often be a common understanding in DIY punk scenes that art does not have to be commodified to be of value. In reference to *Dune* participants Palm reiterates, “Maybe they didn't go to art school, maybe it's not polished but there's a beauty in what they actually did versus trying to see it as perfect...a lot of people reject it because it is not polished, it doesn't look

like a commodity they are used to.” From this perspective, self-publishing outside of formal institutions holds its own unique power or ‘beauty’. That authentic and subversive DIY ethos is present in Palms art, which often critiques toxic masculinity and gender norms.



His most recent zine from september 2021, *Have a Little Fun*, includes his pinocchio series in which the comic illustration proclaims, “I don’t want to be a real boy” and text bubbles plead, “please, you gotta get me away from these...PEOPLE!” in reference to the ‘real boy’ sketches in the background. While it greatly deviates from queer resistance art, accessible spaces and independent publication that is critical of toxic masculinity is also of service to queer communities.

Music as Cultural Resistance

Jordanna Felice (she/they) is a queer musician, songwriter and lead vocalist/guitarist for the NYC based pop-punk folk band Eithermore. They started the band with two close friends shortly after graduating with a BA in Journalism from Purchase College in 2016. Their style ranges from neofolk-americanana to pop-punk progressions that shift dramatically in their first album, *The Cycle of Opposites* released in 2017. Throughout their three album discography, the collective sounds of Felice and their bandmates invoke a gritty tenderness that is all their own.

Along with recording and performing their original music, Felice also composes music for other queer artists and teaches virtual lessons in guitar, voice and song-writing. From the fruit of their creative expression, they have built their teaching artist practice largely through personal networks of queer people on social media. Most recently, Felice responded to an Instagram post by *Big Calf*, an intersectional feminist podcast discussing the lived experience of being queer and fat in America. After offering to compose and record a theme song for the podcast, Felice negotiated their price rate and completed the track. They noted during the interview that naming their price as an artist, especially for other queer people, was the most challenging aspect of the relationship.

They expressed their desire to work collectively on collaborative projects, but acknowledged the financial incentive to teach and compose music for other artists. “I’m finding other avenues to make money doing what I love, teaching lessons, writing music for other peoples podcasts, working with other artists or composing music for them. And if I can do music most days of the week and pull in some money, then I’m happy. If I don’t have to work five days a week in a corporate setting, that’s great.” Felice reiterated a common experience among

informants, who all expressed the need for multiple streams of income to support themselves and make art in late capitalism.

Felice recalled the motivation to self-promote her music online from the lack of openly queer artists she heard played on the radio as a kid. “We grew up not seeing that representation and not seeing ourselves...and that's what's so radical about the internet is that it connects us, it also disconnects us at the same time it's this super paradoxical thing, but it's a really good means to find community and see yourself represented.” They went on to discuss the important role of the internet in their life as a queer person, both personally and professionally. Like many of our peers, Felice met their partner on social media and they distribute their music on multiple streaming platforms. Their song “Red State” explores what it's like to fly to a conservative state to meet your internet crush, a very relatable experience for many young queer people.

I came down south

I never thought I'd come around to meet you here

So tell me what you're all about

This context makes things complex you're so far away

I never thought I'd wanna stay in a red state

This track from their first album *The Cycle of Opposites* is a lo-fi folk ballad turned pop-punk love fest that expresses the complexity of queer people finding love in conservative American states. Dissonant chord progressions give way to complex harmonies, heartfelt vocals, and transgressive yet tender lyrical text, like if Steven Universe and The Cranberries formed a

punk band. With familiar pop-punk melodies underscoring experimental intonation, listening to this album felt both nostalgic and hopeful at the same time. These defiant lyrics, vocals and instrumentation argue that despite the crushing weight of sexism and homophobia, we somehow still manage to find love, adventure and community.



The album art of *The Cycle of Opposites* depicts a combination of gendered symbols often associated with trans and gender nonconforming identities. This queer symbology is layered over geometric floral shapes on a soft but vibrant blue and yellow blended backdrop. This aesthetic emodies the work of the following artists Everdene Holler and Lavender Country, whose album art also abstractly explores the relationship between queer identity and the non-binary nature of plant life and organic matter.

Zora Acephala (they/them) is a queer banjo player and community organizer based in Rochester, New York. They currently record and perform their solo project Her Dads Banjo and co-create with their bandmate Clara Riedlinger in the queer folk band Everdene Holler. Their first self-produced and self-titled album was released in march 2019. Available on Bandcamp, their six song EP is an experimental combination of banjo, fiddle, vocals and natural sounds that is truly a vision of their own. With The exception of “Undone in Sorrow” by Ola Belle Reed, the EP is a combination of traditional folk progressions reappropriated in expressions of queer cultural resistance. Acephala notes, “The old time folk scene has it’s own set of issues with patriarchy, homophobic and racism, it feels really good to be sort of turning it on its head, digging for old songs and messages that are relevant to today or that can be changed. And that we can have an influence, the basic things of not changing the gender in a folk song that was originally written for a man to sing. We have a whole set about queering men that are terrible.”

Growing up in Rochester NY, Acephala attended School of the Arts High School for voice but recalls becoming politicized while studying abroad through Purchase College. In collaboration with the Mexico Solidarity Network, students engaged with scholars, activists and artists involved in the Zapatistas movement. Acephala learned Zapatista songs and resistance music in a few of the languages indigenous to southern Mexico and Guatemala, returning to New York with these subversive songs and experiences. They noted, “I learned all these songs and I got home and I was like I want to be able to play these, I love these songs I love the messages that they had.” They mark this experience as a motivating force in learning how to play the

banjo. After playing around learning different string instruments, Acephala fell in love with banjo shortly after studying abroad in Mexico.

Using banjo as an entry point into queer country music, Acephala continues the long held folk tradition of playing centuries old songs reappropriated in contemporary contexts. Discussing the banjo as a traditionally African instrument they note, “this is an instrument oppressed people have used to express themselves for many many years, working class people are doing it, queer people are doing it, black people have a long history of doing it. Being a part of that history feels huge.” Acephala brings a much needed critical race perspective to tradition folk scenes and queer country music. They speak to a common sentiment between all three queer artists who expressed the desire to connect their work to a larger legacy of cultural resistance against systems of supremacy.

After graduating from Purchase College with a BA in Economics in 2012, Acephala returned home to Rochester where they became an active part of the queer music scene. Alongside other creative projects and social actions, they expanded their role as a founding member of Girls Rock! Rochester. In this community they became part of a network of queer feminist musicians organizing annual music camps for girls and young queer people to write, produce and perform their own music. Acephala started out by volunteering to organize lunch as a teenager and became a teaching artist during college.

After ten years of volunteering their time and creative skills, they now sit on the Girls Rock! Rochester Board of Directors as an accountant and established local musician. Acephala laughed when saying they had recently become a CPA after roughly ten years of performing,

recording and community organizing. “I found something more stable that I could support myself, and ideally in a few years have it be flexible so that I could offer my skills to movements. I could take a month off and do a tour and not worry about whether or not I’m gonna be able to pay rent afterwards.” Acephala’s narrative reflects a common experience between informants, who all navigate the complex realities of survival and cultural resistance in late capitalism. However, Acephala performs and records somewhat obscure queer folk music in a relatively small and struggling city in Western New York. In contrast to other informants in more populated and fiscally liberal cities, Acephala is relatively limited in receiving public funding or institutional support for their music and community organizing.

In reference to their work with Girls Rock! Rochester they note that, “we’ve always been very queer and trans friendly but we added a second week that was much more explicitly for LGBTQ campers. That’s been really huge and beautiful. I like, weep everyday looking at these young teenagers who have words for themselves that I just never had at that age.” Like many other queer artists and organizers, Acephala centers intergenerational community in their work. In line with the other queer artists interviewed, they emphasize the importance of seeing yourself represented as a marginalized person in late capitalism.

When asked which queer artists inspired their work, their eyes lit up and they beamed with their love for Lavender Country. As the first openly queer American country band, they recorded their first self titled LP in 1973 and reissued the album in 2014. Acephala explained that, “the band faded into obscurity until somebody put recordings on YouTube, people were like this is amazing you should reissue the album, so they reissued the album. Somebody bought it

for me as a gift, Patrick Haggerty the lead singer he's still alive, he was telling these stories that I never heard before -- talking about queer love and the complexities of it. Talking about cruising culture that can feel really enriching but can also feel very empty, being punished for being gay. Some of these topics are really heavy but he communicated them with such nuance and such experience that it just felt amazing to hear." Acephala cites the transgressive lyrics and folk progressions of Lavender Country as motivation to form a band and record their first album. In particular, Acephala identified the song "Cryin These Cocksuck Tears" to describe the style of transgressive queer country they draw on and embody in their music:

Well your sexism's a broken record, record, record

It's been screeching for ten thousand years

And the battle's begun sir, I tell you I'm done sir

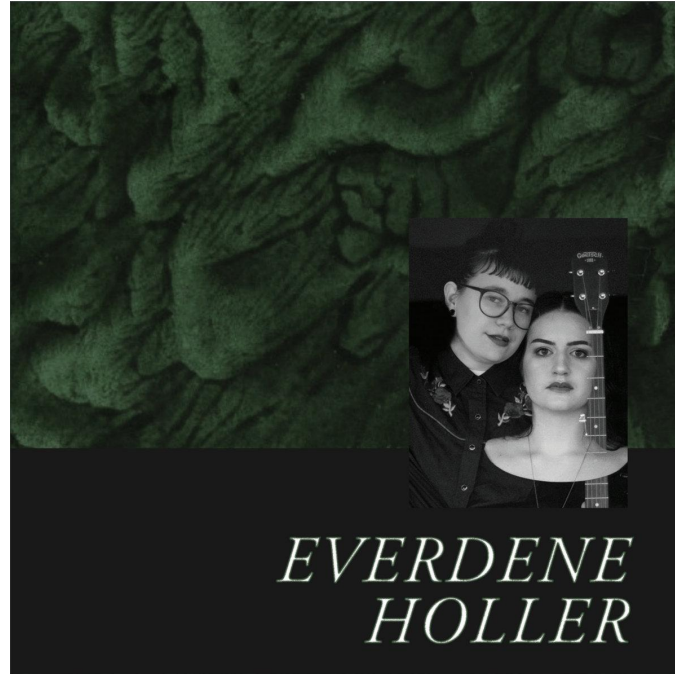
With Crying these Cocksucking Tears

This call to arms or "battle" is an act of lyrical defiance and cultural resistance against centuries of sexism. The use of 'cocksuckin tears' as an indication of sexual identity, widens the narrative beyond queer people to straight women and anyone who participates in 'cryin and cocksuckin' under heteropatriarchy. These catchy and versatile lyrics can be reappropriate in so many contemporary contexts, continuing a long legacy of queer country and subversive folk music.

In tandem with Felice and Camilleri, Acephala acknowledges the importance of the Internet in connecting independent artists and building resistant communities. Finding a queer country scene and continuing this tradition of subversive folk music became a motivating factor to record and perform. Beyond music itself, the community created from collective creative expression became the cultural resistance that supported and inspired them to make music. Acephala stated, “Nobody in the queer country scene is competing with each other, they’re all promoting each other, touring with each other, it feels really amazing. Wanting to be part of that has pushed me to refine my sound, figure out what I want to say. I don’t actually write a lot of my own music but I’m working on finding what narratives people aren’t hearing, or ya know saying the same thing Patrick Haggerty is saying in a different way to new audiences, with a banjo.” Acephala’s focus on queer history and elders reflects a common theme between all the queer artists I interviewed. Where the glorification of solo genius is minimized, there is significant expansion in the importance of creating art that is part of a collaborative and subversive community of cultural resistance.



The album art on *Lavender Country*'s self-titled record features detailed text composed of flowering vines and cut wood over a simple lavender colored backdrop. The word 'Lavender' written in intricate whimsical text stands in stark contrast to the linear man-made structure of the word 'Country' built out of cut wood nailed together. While the artistic style of both fonts juxtapose each other, they are also read in relation to one another as a cohesive phrase. These subtle aesthetic choices in album art pave the way for queer recording artists like Felice and Acephala to confront conflicting truths through visual art and music. Their work builds on this legacy of creatively exploring the complicated relationship between the patterns we witness in nature and the social structures we navigate in late capitalism.



Everdene Holler continues to abstractly explore the complicated relationship between the organic non-binary growth in nature and the violently binary social constructs of gender and sexuality. Their premiere album art builds on these subversive concepts layered with their own self-asserting title *Everdene Holler* in simple text over a soft green plant-like backdrop. In contrast to *Lavender Country*, *Everdene Holler* include their self-portraits on the cover, depicting a tender embrace between two queer people. Historically, the relative safety to put your face on your artwork as a marginalized artist has not been a given. This radical depiction of queer love in their album art, produced about 50 years after *Lavender Country*, is a moving testimony to queer visibility and these small but hard won movements towards queer liberation.

Implications & Conclusion

My research reiterates that all macro-level social change starts with micro-level movements like the work of the artists in the previous sections. Their creative contributions allowed me to explore how marginalized artists create subversive work and reliable support systems. This senior project reinforces the importance of creative expression and strong community networks in resisting the violence of late capitalism. Throughout this process, I realized how quickly concepts like art and activism can become empty buzz words if they remain in theoretical contexts. My qualitative research offers tangible examples of music, poetry and visual art that create cultural resistance in diverse communities. As social scientists and cultural critics, I learned how important it is to explore ‘activism’ or ‘protest’ in both direct and indirect modalities. This approach allows us to explore how creative expression and subversive art can cultivate community and cultural resistance.

My interests and intentions evolved significantly from when I first started this senior project in the fall of 2016. At the time, my personal perspective and sociological research style were much more abstract and academically oriented. I had yet to live through some of the most devastating and pivotal moments of my life, both personally and politically. From October 2016 to December 2021 I lived through my dad's sudden death, Trump's fascist republican government, becoming my mom's caregiver, the heartbreak of her death and the COVID-19 pandemic. I have spent the better part of the past five years mourning too many lives lost and our orphaned plans—all of the stories that could have been. My personal experience of exploring, communicating and creating this senior project served as its own form of creative catharsis and cultural resistance.

Researching the subversive work of artist-activists throughout history gave me the reference points and inspiration to keep reading, writing and creating work that is poetic, accessible and critical of oppressive power. Interviewing artists and organizers in my personal life allowed me to reconnect with my own powerful network of queer community support. Jordanna Felice, Zora Acephala and Cat Camilleri are now part of a queer community of artists and activists that I intend to collaborate with beyond this research paper. On a practical level, the completion of this senior project allows me to graduate with my BA in Sociology and finally join my college cohort in our intersecting fields. It was incredibly validating to see my friends creating subversive art in their communities after graduating from the same college.

I am not the first queer person to explore the study of art, community and cultural resistance and I am confident that I will not be the last. This senior project has limited time-constraints in that I am a 28 years young 'returning learner' working a full-time minimum wage job through a pandemic. Given more time and resources I would have loved to interview more people and have provided a wider range of content analysis across art forms. Mindful of and limited by COVID-19 public health precautions, most of this project was completed remotely.

In the future, I would love to safely include data collected in person, like ethical participant observation in Seattle. Rain City Rock Camp! is Seattle's version of Girls Rock! and would be an ideal setting to explore feminist youth studies through art, community and cultural resistance. I think it would be really interesting to volunteer at this summer camp to further explore this research. It was exciting to see how many resistant community projects exist in Seattle, like Coyote North and Coyote Central. These community centers in North Seattle and the

Central District offer accessible art workshops with local teaching artists for young people ages 5 to 18 years old. Workshops are offered for free or on a sliding scale basis and they regularly post teaching artist positions starting at \$35 an hour. Beyond free public arts programming and paying artists a living wage, their presence in the community has an explicit social justice component. Their website and their community street fronts prominently display their pronoun policy, BLM commitments, indigenous initiatives and land acknowledgements. Groups like these give me hope that kids in the city of Seattle might not need to wait for the privilege of college to become politicized and make subversive art. Radical intergenerational communities offer much needed models for the future of cultural resistance.

Is art made by marginalized people always a radical act of resistance? Arguably no, not in and of itself. But when we are given the space and resources to share our art with each other we can create resilient communities with the ability to resist violence in its many forms: sexism, racism and homophobia to name a few. Through creative expression, collective action and community, we can cultivate cultural resistance founded on our individual offerings to each other. And maybe most importantly, it is our collective creativity that has carried us this far. Cultural resistance against the violence of neocolonialism and late capitalism is not only possible, but thriving across the world. We have always been here, queer and making subversive art in defiance of empire.

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