Resilience & Melancholy

Pop Music, Feminism Neoliberalism

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Introduction

1. Sweet Nothing

A number one hit in the UK and a top ten hit in the US, Calvin Harris's "Sweet Nothing" seemed to catch on because it, like his 2011 hit with Rihanna, "We Found Love," evoked the zeitgeist in a particularly apt and compelling way. Featuring vocals by Florence Welch (of Florence & the Machine), it sets the story of a woman overcoming her emotionally and physically abusive relationship to Harris's trademark EDM soars. The lyrics tell us of a woman who is exhausted, hollowed out to a shell of her former self; she's running on fumes, living on, as the title says, "nothing." Nothing is all she's got, so Welch's character has to figure out some way to capitalize on it. Welch's character doesn't just dialectically turning nothing into something (as in the first few sections of Hegel's *Science of Logic*), she resiliently recycles "nothing" into the fuel she needs for living.

Instead of becoming some *thing*, "nothing" fuels a metabolic process, an explosive reaction that generates energy and momentum. The song's lyrics depict Welch's character as she undergoes this process. More interestingly, its musical composition *performs* the process the lyrics merely describe. If we listen closely to the song and how it works, we can hear how this metabolic process distills energy from nothing. In the same way that Welch's character has found the sweet spot at which nothing alchemically transforms into life force, the song, as I will explain more fully below, is composed so that "nothing" intensifies and augments sonic and affective energies. This is a song, not so much *about* nothing as *made of and with nothing*.

The first big musical climax—the "soar," to use a term popularized by Dan Barrow—arrives at the end of the first chorus.[1] As I will explain in more depth in the first chapter, the soar works by building rhythmic and often also timbral intensity

up to a climax; this tension is then released with a "hit" on the downbeat of the next measure. In the first soar, the repetition of the phrase "sweet nothing" initiates the soar. Dividing the song's phrases into shorter, more closely-spaced events, this repetition prepares us for the soar's main thrust, which happens in the last eight beats of the chorus's first half as Welch sings the song's titular phrase, "sweet nothing." Here, the snare goes from a 16th-note ostinato to a roll, which it holds for 7 beats as the bass drops out, and the pitch of a windy, "swoosh"-like synth ascends as its timbre sounds more constrained. The song is closing in on the upper limits of ability to hear speed and pitch—that is, the point at which we would hear *nothing*. The song builds its climax out of "nothing"—both literally, with the word itself, and metaphorically, by blowing our ears. On the 7th beat, the soar peaks; the snare roll spills over, on the eighth beat, into a less intense two-sixteenth-eighth-note motive that echoes the rhythm of the song's main treble synth, and which replaces Florence's vocals as the primary melodic voice in the second half of the chorus. We land relatively hard on the downbeat of the bridge. The soar-hit structure works like a weak harmonic cadence in a more traditional, tonal song. Instead of resolving dissonance, "Sweet Nothing's" soar-hit compresses nothing so intensely it explodes into an energetic burst—here, the "bubbly," energetic bridge. *Nothing* isn't resolved into some *thing*, but metabolized into the energy that fuels an explosive climax of musical pleasure.

But this soar, and its repetition later in the song, aren't the song's main climax; they're just intermediary steps up to it. This climax happens at the end of the chorus's first repetition, about ⅔ of the way through the song. Here, the percussion and bass initially drop out, bringing us down to our lowest low so the subsequent high will seem all the more intense. Welch sings over string synths for four bars, at which point the soar begins. The instrumentals are basically the same as in the choruses, but her vocals intensify the affective energy of this soar by, perhaps

paradoxically, cutting their rate of repetition. Instead of repeating "nothing" more rapidly, Welch sings it only twice, holding it for several bars, once as the soar builds, and then, significantly, right at the peak of the soar and on into the bubbly, dancy section. For added oomph, this bubbly section is repeated with the addition of vocals. The vocals, however, say nothing; Welch utters either unintelligible syllabifications (she's not saying anything) or the phrase "sweet nothing" ("nothing" is the thing she's saying). The song builds itself out of nothing, intensifying both literal and figurative nothingness into musical and affective energy.

Diplo and Grandtheft use a similar strategy in their remix of Harris and Welch's original. The original's accompaniment is cut and replaced with some trapstep percussion. The very rapidly repeating hi-hat 808s echo the percussion in the very peak of the original's soars. What was once excess is now a baseline norm. If you're already maxed out from the beginning, it seems like there's no room left to build a soar. How, then, do you make the song *more* intense? You do this by actually crossing over into the sonic "nothing" that Harris's soar only suggests. Harris's soar maxes out by pushing up against the threshold of our rhythmic perception. The only way to squeeze more out of it was to cross this threshold into noise and/or silence. And that's what Diplo and Grandtheft do. They takes Harris's soar, extend it by four measures, and instead of spilling over into a peak, drop the bottom out (In Chapter 1 I talk more extensively about this technique, common in dubstep and trapstep, which I call a pause-drop). In the last measure of the first half of the chorus, the remix cuts all instrumentals and inserts a male-sounding voice in place of Welch's natural voice. This male voice says "sweet," but doesn't complete the titular hook; instead of saying "nothing," he doesn't say anything. If the original soars up to a bubbly plateau, this remix falls of cliff, landing hard on the downbeat of the next measure. Eviscerating and hollowing out

the soar only makes it more powerful—sort of like how Obi-Wan Kenobi warns Darth Vader "If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can possibly imagine."[2] The remix had to "sweeten" the musical pleasure of the original, and because Harris's mix already hit the "sweet spot" (it was already maxed out), the only way Diplo could further sweeten that sweet spot is to pass over into "nothing," into a dubby-pause-drop.

"Sweet Nothing" was a very popular song. This concept of "sweet nothing"—both as an abstract idea, and as a process you undergo (as either Florence's character in the song, or someone listening to the song unfold)—must strongly resonate with audiences across the globe. But why? Why does this song—this story, this style of composition—seem to really speak to people now, in this sociohistorical moment? Why do people find nothing so sweet? What's aesthetically pleasing about the process of metabolizing energy from nothing?

Sweeting nothing is more than just a neat musical gimmick or a bittersweet story. "Sweet Nothing"'s narrative and its musical composition are examples of resilience discourse. Resilience is neoliberalism's upgrade on modernist notions of coherence and deconstruction—the underlying value or ideal that determines how we organize artworks, political and social institutions, the economy, concepts of selfhood, and so on. Resilience is the hegemonic or "common sense" ideology that everything is to be measured, not by its overall systematicity (coherence) or its critical, revolutionary potential (deconstruction), but by its *health*. This "health" is maintained by bouncing back from injury and crisis in a way that capitalizes on deficits so that you end up ahead of where you initially started (one step back, two steps forward) (Neocleous). If resilience is the new means of production, this means that crisis and trauma are actually necessary, desirable phenomena—you can't bounce back without first falling. When you can't expand your market any further because you're already globalized, the only way to increase

profits is by intensifying your current processes, recycling waste into resources (Naomi Klein calls this disaster capitalism, David Harvey calls this "neoliberalism as creative destruction). In fact, resilience discourse often treats crisis and injury as the only ways of getting ahead. So, for example, investors bet *against* stocks, turning what is traditionally a loss (poor performance) into a net win. "Sweet Nothing" exemplifies resilience, both musically, in its transformation of "nothing" into surplus aesthetic value, and narratively, in Welch's performance in the video. People find musical gestures like EDM soars pleasurable because *they perform the resilience we seek to embody.*[3]

The video fleshes out the story told in the lyrics. Welch plays a singer in a hostess club; she (intentionally or unintentionally, this isn't clear) convinces Harris, a club patron, to hire someone to beat up her abusive boyfriend. As of this writing, the song's Wikipedia entry interprets the video as the story of a woman "pouring the pain and frustration of her unfulfilled life and abusive relationship into every revealing and explosive performance." This "explosive performance" happens at two levels: first, there's the on-stage performance-within-a-performance of the song; second, there's her overcoming of her victimization by her partner. She fights back, both by verbally confronting him, and by having him beat up. The epitome of resilience, Welch's character takes her personal damage and transforms it into aesthetic surplus value for others, both within the video and beyond the fourth wall, to consume. Our pleasure isn't just in her character's musical performance in the club, but in her "bouncing back" from domestic abuse.

Even though Welch's character fights back against a man, she's still the victim of the Man, of patriarchy. As the video cuts back and forth between scenes of Welch's character's onstage breakdown and her partner's alley beatdown, it depicts them in parallel positions. Both are shown thrashing about on the ground, pushed up against walls, and throwing things (punches

in his case, props in hers). Cutting directly from a shot of her partner's assailant stomping or kicking his victim to a shot of Welch's character writhing in pain on the stage floor, the video makes it seem like *she's* the one being beaten up. So, instead of reversing the dynamics of her abusive relationship, making her male partner the victim of male violence, this visual resonance suggests that Welch's character is still the victim of patriarchal violence. Her change in wardrobe reinforces this point. Unlike the waitresses, who were wearing lingerie, Welch was fully clothed in a suit and tie. However, by the song's main soar, she has stripped down to her bra. Now she is more intensely sexualized than the waitresses, because her spectacular performance places her as the object of everyone's gaze; in comparison, the waitresses, as scantily clad as they are, seem mundane. Her resilience doesn't fight back against patriarchy, but feeds it.

2. Resilience

"Sweet Nothing" is a quintessential example of both postmillennial EDM-pop music and neoliberal ideology because it shows how the two are intertwined. Its compositional structure, its lyrical content, its video, and even this Diplo remix all turn damage and deficit into surplus value. The songs incite damage for the purpose of recycling it. Noise isn't disruptive or critical, but a resource or raw material. Noisemaking is the means of musical, cultural, and social production. This economy of noisemaking is what I call "resilience discourse." Connecting the political economy of resilience to more abstract musical structures, "Sweet Nothing" encapsulates the main argument I make in this book: *Resilience discourse is what ties contemporary pop music aesthetics to neoliberal capitalism and racism/sexism.*

But what do I mean by "resilience"? I am using the term in a theoretically and historically specific way to refer to a distinctively neoliberal ethical and aesthetic ideal. Neoliberalism upgrades systems designed to secure against, conquer, or

otherwise "cover" (to use James Snead's term) damage; the point of the upgrade is to make these systems more efficient means of social and economic management. Instead of expending resources to *avoid* damage, resilience discourse *recycles damage into more resources*. Resilience discourse thus follows a very specific logic: first, damage is incited and made manifest; second, that damage is spectacularly overcome, and that overcoming is broadcast and/or shared, so that; third, the person who has overcome is rewarded with increased human capital, status, and other forms of recognition and recompense, because: finally, and most importantly, this individual's own resilience boosts society's resilience. The work this individual does to overcome their own damage generates surplus value for hegemonic institutions—this is what distinguishes "resilience" in the narrow sense from other forms of recovery or therapy.

For example, contemporary pop music normalizes and mainstreams the noisy sonic damage of modernity's avant-gardes. As I will argue in chapter one, the pop charts are full of sounds—like glitches, rapid and jarring cuts, overdriven synths, etc.—that, just a few decades ago, were relegated to hip hop, industrial and avant-garde art music. The corporate music industry now profits from subcultural sounds and aesthetics that used to evade and challenge it—what used to kill it now makes it stronger, as Nietzsche would say. Contemporary race/gender/sexuality politics are similarly upgraded. As I will argue in chapter three, resilience discourse normalizes the sexist, racist damage traditional white supremacist patriarchy inflicts on white women and people of color as the ultimately innocuous damage that they are individually responsible for overcoming. This transforms traditional feminist and anti-racist methods of resisting oppression into techniques for reinforcing and augmenting the very oppressive institutions these methods were originally designed to resist. In both cases, noise is recycled into signal, and that signal boosts the overall health of white

supremacist capitalist patriarchy (to borrow bell hooks' phrase).[4]

3. Biopolitics

Resilience is a technique for investing in life—life as human capital, or as a measure of individual and/or population-wide "health" and success. Thus, a theory of biopolitics, or what Michel Foucault calls "the power over life" (HSv1 135), is key to understanding resilience, both in itself and as a hinge between neoliberal ideology and music aesthetics.

"Biopolitics" is a trendy concept that gets used in a lot of ways and that can mean any number of things. My understanding of biopolitics draws primarily on Michel Foucault's version (rather than, say, Giorgio Agamben's), mainly because I find it the most productive account of biopolitics for thinking about music.[5] For Foucault, biopolitics is both an ideology of vitality, health, and sustainable flourishing, and a political or governmental method whose medium is "life."

As a method, biopolitics is "a life-administering power" that is "bent on generating forces, optimizing them, making them grow, and ordering them" (Foucault HSv1 136). The object of biopolitical administration is "the population"—it deals with individuals only insofar as they are members of one population or another. So, the "life" it cares about is the population's life. This population could be a nation, a marketing demographic, people with specific conditions, traits, or backgrounds—basically, a population can be sliced in a lot of ways. In this book, I understand "population" to be all the people who count as full or relatively full members of society, the people whose lives contemporary American society is designed to support. Society supports these individual lives because their health contributes to society's overall health—it's a positive feedback loop. Neoliberal biopower incentivizes and rewards people for choosing lifestyles that keep social institutions like capitalism, the patriarchal family, and the white supremacist nation, fit and

healthy. It also disincentivizes individual ones that do not contribute to the overall health of society, it renders them "unviable" or, to use Lester Spence's term, as "exception."[6] Biopolitics compels us to invest in "life," to put our time and resources into ventures that maximize social viability (HSv1 139). At the same time, it compels us to actively seek the death of what and whomever diminishes social viability. As Foucault argues, "the procedures of power have not ceased to turn away from death" (HSv1 138). *Hegemony actively incites death and damage; resilient populations recover and even profit from it, while precarious populations exhaust all their resources in their constant struggles to stay barely alive.* Resilience discourse is a biopolitical technology that reinforces the line between those fit to live, and those whose death is necessary for society's ongoing health.

Jodi Dean argues, via a reading of Foucault, that biopolitics is a "byproduct" (Dean 7) of the shift from classical to neo-liberalism. It is the "effect of...the appearance of the market as a site of truth" (Dean 4). This approach to "the market as a site of truth" is the main thing that distinguishes neoliberalism from its predecessors and alternatives. But what does it mean to think of "the market as a site of truth"? It means that everything—biology, psychology, sociality, aesthetics, and so on—works like a competitive, "free" market.[7] Market logic is a site of truth because that's the instrument we use to evaluate and assess everything, to tell us, for example, whether society is healthy or whether an artwork is any good. A good artwork will perform in the "marketplace of ideas" just like a hot stock will on the NASDAQ or the FTSE.

But to frame everything as a free market, you have to translate biology, society and whatever else into something quantifiable in a certain way—they have to be *statistical*. Biopolitics grabs hold of "life" by modeling it statistically and "effect[ing] distributions around the norm" (HSv1 144).[8] For example, "big data" is a biopolitical enterprise; it seeks to statistically model and predict

any and everything, from my health risks to what YouTube video I'd like to watch next to who poses the most serious threat to national security. Basically, if neoliberalism views everything as a deregulated, "free" market, biopolitics is the name for the application of this view to "life"; *biopolitics understands life as a deregulated, "free" market.*

If life is modeled statistically, like the market, then individual people's lives are measured as human capital. As Dean argues, "American neoliberalism was particularly effective in extending biopolitics via its theory of human capital" (Dean 10). Human capital, briefly, is the idea that individuals are stockpiles of wealth (i.e., capital), and that everything one does generates "a return on investment, a return on capital" (Dilts 136). Human capital is the interest and resources invested in you, the quality or intensity of "life" deposited in you, by yourself and by others; it's a biopolitical theory of subjectivity that views the "self" like a neoliberal market. [9]

So, biopolitics wants to quantify everything so it can model it statistically, like the supposedly "free" market. This is why we see an explosion of data-gathering and modeling everything, from consumer behavior, to ongoing "health" and "risk" assessments by medical insurance providers, to NSA-style surveillance of our electronic communications. "Oh my, what big data you have!" we might say; "the better to manage you with, my dear," biopolitics responds.

Statistics owes a hefty conceptual debt to acoustics. For example, statisticians such as Nate Silver use the terms "signal" and "noise" to refer to accurate, useful data and corrupt, misleading data, and the term "stochastic resonance" refers to cases in which adding noise to a statistical model improves its ability to process signal.[10] These terms were likely borrowed from acoustics and audio engineering: noise is whatever extraneous sounds interfere with the clear transmission of the primary sound, the signal.[11] Similarly, visual representations of both sonic

pressure waves and many of the most commonly-used probability function algorithms take the same general shape—that is, of a sine wave. Big data algorithms and sound waves have *a lot* in common. Statistics, sine waves and signal/noise ratios are the common denominators that make it easy to translate between (bio)politics and music.

If you're interested in pop music, biopolitics is a particularly productive way of approaching the broader discourse of neoliberalism because biopolitical practices and norms are already translated into sonic terms. Also, because many musicians use the idea of *death* to push back against neoliberal hegemony and resilience discourse, biopolitics brings these critiques easily into focus. When power demands that you *live*, that you resiliently make more life for yourself, and, in turn, for society/capital, *death* seems like the obvious way to fight back. Or, alternatively, if power banks on your death, if it abandons you to die, what happens if you don't die *in the right way, at the right time,* if you don't decay *at the rate it anticipated*? If resilience is a biopolitical technique for investing in life, *melancholy* is a dysfunctional, queerly biopolitical method of investing in and intensifying "death" (i.e., hegemonically unviable practices). *If resilience is the norm, is melancholy the way to disrupt it?*

But, before I talk more about disrupting the norm, I want to further clarify my account of neoliberal normalization—specifically, how neoliberalism upgrades classical white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (to use bell hooks's term) into multi-racial white supremacist patriarchy, or MRWaSP for short. MRWaSP retools both what the norms (e.g., whiteness, masculinity) are and how normalization works. Because neoliberal ideology conceives of *everything* in economic terms, its upgrade of the means of capitalist production (from commodity to finance capitalism) also changed how gender and race work. Instead of using binaries to regulate, objectify, and exclude, MRWaSP uses resilience to deregulate the work and the effects of racialization,

gendering, sexualization, and so on.

4. Multi-Racial White Supremacist Patriarchy, or MRWaSP

Multi-Racial White Supremacist Patriarchy, or MRWaSP, is my term for early 21st-century globalized Western race/gender/sexuality/capitalist hegemony. I put a lower-case "a" in the acronym to both make the acronym something pronounceable to English speakers, and to echo the older acronym WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant). You say it like "Mr. Wasp"—emphasis on the "mister" shows that this is not just about white supremacy, it's also about patriarchy.

MRWaSP is an upgrade on WASP. As critical theorists of race have been arguing, white supremacy has retooled itself to work more efficiently in and for globalized, neoliberal hegemonies. Instead of explicitly *excluding* those with minority identities, MRWaSP purports to be *all-inclusive*: "diversity" and "multiculturalism" are now widespread norms, for example. Not only are exclusion and border-patrolling resource-intensive, they're also not the most efficient ways of promoting white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal interests. As Jared Sexton argues, contemporary multiculturalism/multiracialism is a "protest less against the genocidal objectives of Anglo white supremacy than the inefficiency of unrestrained violence as the *means* of its accomplishment" (Sexton 200). You can extend this argument to patriarchy and other institutionalized forms of identity-based oppression. It is more cost-effective to include *some* formerly excluded/abjected groups in racial/gender/sexual supremacy, because *this inclusion further reinforces both the supremacy of the hyperelites and the precarity of those who pose the greatest threat* to MRWaSP hegemony. As the always-brilliant philosopher Falguni Sheth explains,

> more and more men and women of color have been invited into the offices of White Supremacy to share in the destruction of other men and women of color who are vulnerable, disfranchised, and rapidly being eviscerated through the policies of a multi-racial white supremacy...A multiracial white supremacy is a system of power that has invited in—or exploited wherever it could– people of color in order to wage institutional, legal, political assaults on other black, brown, and poor people—at "home" and internationally.

Sheth cites numerous recent examples, including African-American former Secretary of State/National Security Advisor Condoleza Rice's central role in establishing and maintaining the US prison facility at Guantanamo Bay. Though installing people of color in positions of real political, economic, and social power may not seem to benefit white supremacy, it actually does. Putting otherwise privileged people of color at the center of white supremacist institutions obscures the white supremacy (and the imperialism/coloniality), thus allowing it to run all the more efficiently. [12](The efficiency comes as reductions in anti-racist protest and pushback—there's less resistance to police.)*This inclusion is always conditional and always instrumental*—this can't be emphasized enough. People of color are admitted into white supremacy only insofar as this augments white supremacy; the moment this becomes a bad deal for white supremacy, it ends.

Though I've used Sheth's account of race to demonstrate MRWaSP's characteristic method of domination, this method applies equally to gender, sexuality, disability, and all other social identities. Homonationalism, an idea developed by Jasbir Puar, is another example of this method.[13] The nominal inclusion of formerly abjected groups—here, gays and lesbians—is used to distinguish between successful, resilient nations and those nations in need of (white) savoirist intervention. "Good"

societies recognize that gays and lesbians are normal people, too; "bad" societies cling to primitive homophobic views and traditions. Similar discursive moves also distinguish "good" post-feminist societies and "bad" traditional societies that still overtly oppress women (e.g., through veiling, genital cutting, child marriage, sex work, etc.).

Supposedly liberated attitudes about gender, sexuality, and often also race distinguish resilient societies from primitive ones. Sometimes this distinction is used to disaggregate whiteness, generally along the lines of social class. For example, in 2013 World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) featured a bad guy character (a "heel," in industry parlance), Jack Swagger, who expressed anti-immigrant, nationalist, and sometimes overtly white supremacist views. The schtick is that these racist views are what qualify him to be a heel: they're obviously odious to fans, evidence of the character's villainy. "Good guys" should not harbor the racist, anti-immigrant views espoused by Swagger, and should instead be fully comfortable cheering on Swagger's Mexican-American nemesis, Alberto del Rio. As neoliberal capitalism restructures the economy and leaves working-class and rural whites in the lurch, framing them as backwards and uneducated makes their increasingly marginal socioeconomic status seem like the result of their individual failings, not the result of broad economic forces. Just as it conditionally and instrumentally includes otherwise privileged people of color within white supremacy, MRWaSP conditionally and instrumentally excludes otherwise underprivileged whites from the privileges to which they are accustomed as white. Similarly, just as it conditionally and instrumentally includes otherwise privileged women, gays and lesbians, and people with disabilities (think about pre-murder-trial Oscar Pistorious, or Temple Grandin's recent fame), MRWaSP conditionally and instrumentally excludes otherwise underprivileged women, queers, and people with disabilities.

Another way of saying that is: *MRWaSP uses resilience* to cut the color line—and the gender binary, the line between homonormative and queer, and to differentiate between mainstreamable and non-mainstreamable people with disabilities. (And, to clarify again, by "resilience" I mean a specific neoliberal ideology, not the general sense of surviving in the face of hardship and oppression.) Resilient populations who can overcome their race/class/gender/ sexual/immigrant/religious/ damage *in socially profitable ways* move closer to the center of white supremacist privilege, whereas less resilient, precarious populations move further and further from this center. Resilience *deregulates* the work of racialization, gendering, sexualization, bodily normalization, and so on; it treats racialization/ gendering/sexualization/etc. like a deregulated marketplace.

Tradtionally, race and gender are *regulatory* mechanisms: they determine to whom and to what extent specific laws apply. They do so explicitly (e.g., the ⅗ rule in the US Constitution), and implicitly (e.g., racial profiling). Deregulation, on the other hand, "displace[s] fordist mechanisms of social control," like social identities, with "market incentives and disincentives" (Fraser 168). In our post-identity world, we don't directly prescribe what particular individuals can and can't do (e.g., employment and housing opportunities must be open to anyone regardless of race or cis-gender identity). Rather, people are given nominally free reign to be "actively responsible agent[s]" (Fraser 168), free agents who play the (supposedly neutral) market for themselves. With deregulatory techniques like resilience, "the color line becomes etched more deeply even as it is, in some quarters, dissolved" into matters of individual choice" (Sexton 244). Rather than tying race status directly and primarily to phenotype (visible race), and then regulating on the basis of racial identity (e.g., Jim Crow, apartheid, etc.), *resilience frames race or gender as an effect or outcome* of one's response to underlying, background conditions.

At the surface level, individual "choice" isn't regulated... because, at a deeper level, the game is rigged. Instead of writing rules for the game (that would be directly regulatory), deregulation dispenses with rules and regulates the playing field, the equipment, players' access to training and practice—what Foucault calls "the conditions of the existence of the market" (BoB 140), its "material, cultural, technical, and legal bases" (141). A deregulatory institution carefully monitors and adjusts the conditions in which the game (i.e., the "market") can be played so that no matter what happens, the outcome will always be one that hegemony has already bet on. It's a way of fixing the match by managing background conditions rather than foreground activity. Background conditions are not equal, and they're definitely controlled by histories of racial exploitation, patriarchy, and so on. It's harder to bounce back if you're starting from behind. Hegemony can regulate without appearing to or feeling like it's regulating—that's deregulation.

MRWaSP is deregulated, but it is also dynamic. Your social/political status in MRWaSP—is thus not taken as an immutable given (like a "born this way" social identity), but as the effect of an ongoing process—the process, as Lester Spence puts it, of being "formed according to market logic" (Spence 15). MRWaSP doesn't care so much who you are, but what happens through you: that investing in you furthers the aims of MRWaSP, and that these aims are not better accomplished by divesting your human capital. If the color line and the gender binary cut inside from outside, human from sub/non-human, MRWaSP *doesn't so much cut a line as create a feedback process*, one that's flexible, tuneable, and tweakable so that the white always get whiter and the black always get blacker, so to speak. Racialization, gendering, etc., these aren't lines that cut but processes that distribute.[14] The process of resilience *compounds* past successes and past failures, creating a probabilistic distribution of success and failure. Your ability to bounce back from a

crisis depends on the resources at your disposal; these resources (i.e., your material and social situation) is the result of your response, or your family's response, to past crises. So, the more resilient you and your family have been, the more resilient you are likely to be now and in the future. Because white supremacy, sexism, ableism, and so on all shape the background material and ideological conditions in which we all work, those who have the best odds of successfully demonstrating their resilience are the ones who have the most heavily stacked decks. Moreover, bourgeois, cis-gendered, able-bodied people of color are generally the most resilient ones...in no small part because MRWaSP has to make fewer material and ideological compromises to let them in. Thus, though MRWaSP's methods are dynamic, the overall distribution of power, bodies, domination, resources, and so on, that remains relatively consistent.

The second half of the book discusses the relationship between resilience discourse, MRWaSP, and pop music in much greater detail; it focuses especially on the role of anti-blackness in ideals of resilient femininity. There I will argue that resilient femininity plays a very specific and central role in producing African Americans" as "the exceptions unable to be re-formed" by neoliberal market logic" (Spence 15).

MRWaSP is absolutely anti-black, anti-queer, ableist, and misogynist. It is a strategy for producing blackness, queerness, disability, and femininity as mutually-intensifying feedback loops of precariousness.[15] Just think about the most vulnerable populations in the US: it's usually queer people of color, people whose situations actively deny them the opportunities and resources necessary to profit from their own resilience. People in precarious situations are constantly bouncing back from adversity, but they don't get to re-invest the surplus value they generate back into their own human capital. Femininity, blackness, queerness, disability, class—these have always been technologies for extracting unpaid surplus value (e.g., slavery,

housework, commodified labor). MRWaSP just updates them to work in neoliberalism's preferred mode: deregulation.

If MRWaSP hegemony actively encourages you to break rules, to innovate, and to "disrupt," to use a trendy Silicon Valley term, how do you fight MRWaSP hegemony? Conventional white supremacist capitalist patriarchy excludes people; the way to resist this exclusion was by making a disruptive demand for inclusion. If "the human" constitutively excludes black men, then Frantz Fanon's claim to a new humanism reconfigures the very category of "humanity" itself. However, because MRWaSP includes and incites difference, it is immune to the old methods of opposition and resistance (in fact, as I will argue later in the book, MRWaSP has appropriated these very methods of noisy disruption as the means of value-production and normalization). How, then, do we critique and challenge biopolitical MRWaSP? One answer, I think, is by practicing *melancholy* rather than resilience. Instead of intensifying and investing in life, *melancholics go into the death.*

5. Melancholy

Just as the peak of a sine wave turns back toward a valley, "biopolitics," as Jodi Dean argues, "turns into an intensified politics of death" (JDean Krisis 5-6). Too much life is, after all, cancerous. Death is an inevitable byproduct of life-investment. Just as a stereo system needs an equalizer, so biopolitics needs "equalizers" to filter the noise—the excess life, the death—away from privileged populations and towards minoritarian ones. MRWaSP racism is one example of this; resilience discourse is, as I will argue in the second half of the book, another. In resilience discourse, femininity is the filter or, in more electrical terms, the resistor, that manages the signal and its transmission. Feminine subjects (who include but are not limited to or coextensive with "women") are responsible for reproducing "life"...just like they've always been. Except now their charge isn't limited to

sexual reproduction (and all the notions of fidelity wrapped up in its politics), but extends to caring for biopolitics' ability to consistently reproduce multi-racial white supremacist society, for the fidelity of its signal to hegemonic institutions. If "good girls" resiliently generate life, might "bad girls" melancholically invest in death?

Resilience, like biopolitics generally, capitalizes on death. The death of some intensifies the lives of others. As I will discuss in the second half of the book, resilience actively produces "exceptions"—people whose damage is too expensive or inefficient to rehabilitate. Killing in the name of "health," biopolitics *says* "life" but *does* death. Going "into the death"—investing in (rather than divesting) exceptional groups and individuals, upsetting the delicate balance of death/life—may be a tactic of counter-resilience. I call this tactic "melancholy." My concept of melancholy upgrades Freud's classic formulation in a way that parallels neoliberalism's upgrade of commodity capitalism and contractarian liberalism. As Jeffery Nealon argues, neoliberal capitalism creates value "not by conquering or assimilating new territory, but rather by intensifying new versions of familiar things" (Nealon 81). In industrial/Fordist capitalism, commodity form (understanding products as monetary values, e.g., X amount of pork belly for Y dollars) assimilated different use-values to the common denominator of exchange value. [16] Similarly, for Freud, mourning was the acceptance and assimilation of a loss into one's psyche. Melancholia was the failure to conquer and thus resolve this lack.[17] Resilience is the contemporary update of mourning; instead of conquering damage we recycle it. Damage isn't a bug to eliminate, but a feature to exploit. In this context, melancholia is not the failure to *resolve* a lack but *a misfired resilience*, the failure to bounce back *enough* and/or in the *right direction*. If properly executed resilience produces specific populations as exception, melancholy misfires because it does not produce these exceptions.

Similarly, *melancholia can also manifest as the failure to die in the right way, at the right time, or at the right pace.* Biopolitics banks on death—the health of some requires the death of others. However, if you don't die in precisely the way hegemony has bet you will, then it won't make the returns it anticipates and counts on. For example, if a banker bets against a stock, and that stock drops too soon or too late, or if it drops too much or not quite enough, then that bet is lost. Even if the banker still makes some money, they might not break even. *Misfired resilience and queered death, melancholia bends biopolitical techniques so that its positive feedback loops work instead like homeostatic holding patterns or vicious circles.*

Melancholy isn't opposed to or outside resilience.[18] At the level of individual choice and intention, melancholy is not the rejection or refusal of resilience...because resilience is not just something one chooses to perform, but also a means of judging other people's "choices." *Because resilience discourse is hegemonic, your "choices" will be judged against an ideal of resilience way whether you like it or not.* Melancholic behaviors are ones that are judged to be insufficiently resilient. Intentionally melancholic practices count on others to judge them and find them lacking; they treat resilience discourse as an inevitability. At the level of technique, melancholy is often more or less identical to resilience. Melancholy takes the "turning-a-bug-into-a-feature" routine, but it applies it to material that can't generate fully-functional features—that is, to the exception. So instead of producing dysfunction, as accelerationism does, melancholy produces *sub-optimal functionality*, functionality that just doesn't feel like it's profitable enough.[19] Melancholy invests in enterprises whose profits don't register in MRWaSP's leger—enterprises that are *too* "exceptional," too femme, too black, too queer to "count," that is, to boost the vitality of MRWaSP in general.

Queerly intensifying resilience discourse, melancholy is a method of going *into the death.* If biopolitics incites everyone to live at a precisely-managed level of resilience or precarity, going

into the death incites and intensifies individual-level phenomena so they produce an unviable, unhealthy mix or balance. The "death" we're going into here is not necessarily or even primarily about individuals—it's about biopolitical death, the unviability of a *population* tuned to optimize MRWaSP. In fact, one of the main ways to go into the death, to practice melancholic subversion, is to take care of yourself in non-resilient ways—for example, getting a regular, full night's sleep rather than constantly pushing the edge of burnout and exhaustion. *"Into the death" isn't about killing ourselves, it's about upsetting the balance of factors that contribute to the production of multi-racial white supremacist patriarchy and neoliberal capitalism,* making them unviable projects, bad investments, dead ends.

Melancholic sirens seduce us to make choices that send MRWaSP hegemony and neoliberal capitalism off course and into death spirals. They do this by making bad investments, investments that don't help them perform the cultural work they've been assigned by resilience discourse (that is, the work of making exceptions). Often, as I will show in chapters 3 and 4, these investments manifest as commitments to non-bourgeois black men and masculinity.

5. Siren Songs

(a) On Method, or philosophy through music

In this book, I analyze some pop songs and videos, and from this analysis I build theories and arguments about politics and aesthetics. This is both philosophy *of* music and philosophy *through* music. The two types of inquiry are, I think, complementary. The former type asks: What philosophical assumptions and ideas are embedded in musical works, performances, and aesthetics? And the latter asks: How do specific pieces of music articulate, revise, and critique philosophical concepts? The musical works I discuss do more than just *reflect* dominant

concepts, ideals, and structures. They also respond to, critique, and rework them, just as any philosophical text would.

My aim is not to provide an exhaustive, unbiased account of the music. I'm trying to think with and through musical works, performances, practices, and aesthetics. To do so, I have to interpret these musical phenomena. I'm not attempting to give an historical, ethnographic, or journalistic account of what "really" happened; I'm interpreting songs to offer a theory of how they work, why they work that way, and what it all means. This interpretative work is different from more conventionally historical or ethnographic studies of music, which aim to present a more objective account of the music. I am certainly interested in the objective properties of musical works, and their historical and cultural contexts; they're the building blocks of my interpretive argument, the evidence I use to construct a compelling theory. However, as any good historian or ethnographer would tell you, the facts never speak entirely for themselves—they require, to greater and lesser degrees, interpretation. Artworks amplify this fuzziness, refusing didacticism and explicitly demanding interpretation. Often, building a coherent interpretation means privileging some "facts" about the work and its context over others. My interpretive bent is one huge bias that determines which facts I focus on and which ones I ignore. I will show how a work supports an interpretation, but I am not at all interested in making definitive claims about, for example, the intentions of its creators. Artworks support more interpretations than the ones explicitly intended by their authors. And the theoretical lenses I use to bring my interpretations into focus have their own biases and will shape the results of my analysis. What are these lenses? Critical-race feminism, continental philosophy (especially Foucault, Attali, Marx, & Rancière), and critical musicology and film studies.

(b) Overview of the book

Through these lenses, I philosophically examine musical practices and values aesthetics of contemporary pop are connected to broader and more fundamental shifts in epistemology, capitalism, and politics. I've broken my analysis into four parts: norms and resistance, on the one hand, and resilience and melancholy, on the other. These two pairs of terms are roughly analogous. Resilience is the "norm" to which melancholy responds or, in a very loose sense, "resists."

Chapter 1 is about the norm. How does biopolitics manifest as a music aesthetic? How are specific techniques of biopolitical administration applied in musical contexts (that is, in compositional and performance practices)? How, specifically, does contemporary Anglo-American pop "upgrade" 20th century pop aesthetics and compositional strategies to make them compatible with neoliberal upgrades to capitalism and to ideology? EDM-pop, the genre of electronic-dance-music inspired Top-40 hits by artists from David Guetta to Calvin Harris to Psy, has some answers. It upgrades classic rock and R&B techniques and aesthetics, integrating them more fully into contemporary neoliberalism.

Chapter 2 is about what might commonly if clumsily be called resistance. As many theorists have noted, traditional concepts and practices of "resistance" have been so successfully co-opted by neoliberal hegemonies that they no longer have any counter-hegemonic punch. If you can't "resist" neoliberalism, what do you do? How can you critique or subvert the power over life? Is "death" the answer? I think it is. However, just as resilience discourse is fueled by "nothing," biopolitics runs on death. So, some kinds of death support neoliberal hegemonies. Death has to be made subversive, pushed to the point that, when fed back into biopolitical systems, it queers if not crashes them. Atari Teenage Riot's 1995 song "Into the Death" exemplifies this strategy.

Chapter 3 is about resilience, the imperative to recycle death and damage into life. How does resilience discourse impact gender/race/sexuality, both as structures of subjectivity and as institutional norms? And how does resilience discourse interact with the EDM-pop aesthetics and conventions discussed in Chapter 1? Supposedly post-feminist, post-racial neoliberalism uses resilience discourse to regulate gender, race, and sexuality. It is both a gendered ideal and a technology of racialization. Both aspects are manifest in the "Look, I Overcame!" narrative of feminine subjectivity. Today, you become a "good" Western woman by spectacularly overcoming the damage done to you by the male gaze. As Beyoncé's "Video Phone" demonstrates, this patriarchal damage is often attributed to the figure of the non-bourgeois black male "thug." What women have to overcome is affective and social attachments to unprofitable blackness.

Chapter 4 is about melancholia, a possible way to push MRWaSP resilience *into the death*. How does the "into the death" strategy developed in Chapter Two apply to the specifically gendered, racialized, and sexualized stakes of "Look, I Overcame!" resilience? To answer this question, I distinguish between Lady Gaga's and Rihanna's use of goth damage and monstrosity. Gaga's work ultimately overcomes the damage represented by monstrous masculinities, transforming it into human and social (media) capital; Rihanna's *Unapologetic*, on the other hand remains hung up on precisely the unprofitable black masculinities good women are supposed to overcome. Unapologetic combines both the political critique of resilience with melancholic musical strategies. I examine these musical strategies in some detail, and use them as the basis for thinking feminist responses to resilience. If resilient good girls choose life, melancholic bad girls (like Rihanna's persona) go into the death.

The conclusion returns to the discussion of biopolitics, and considers adaptations in both resilience discourse and pop music aesthetics.

This is a book about how pop music and the politics of gender and race work—both in parallel and in intersection—in the age of biopolitics. It asks: If hegemony compels us to live, what sorts of counter-hegemonic potential is there in going into the death? Pop music has some answers to this question, and that's one main reason why it is important to think carefully about pop music *and* biopolitics. So, to get started, in the first chapter I consider the ways neoliberal ideology and biopolitical techniques have influenced the aesthetics and technical conventions of contemporary EDM-Pop.