

Musicology Meets Queer Theory and Good Things Happen

Deborah J. Sidel

GSWS 620-901

Professor Myrl Beam

December 2, 2015

## Preface

Music as a practical activity has an interminable history while musicology, as a process of academic study, with inquiry and reflection on music as its subject, has had a relatively short life in comparison.<sup>1</sup> Across the last two centuries there have been numerous intellectual standpoints from which to discuss music that have circulated within the Western academic arena. A lineage of theoretical foundations can be traced that have shaped how we have come to understand what we think music is along with how we experience it. Branches of musicology have been categorized by their topical focus as well as by what terrain they purposely omit. The aim of this research project is to establish an introductory descriptive historical narrative of the genealogy of queer musicological scholarship. It will assess and describe the contributions of some prominent queer musicologists within the discipline's scholarly discourse and beyond its immediate intellectual community. How and where is queer musicological scholarship situated within the academic field of musicology? Who or what are queer musicologists? What kinds of questions do they ask? Since queer musicology cannot be explained in a vacuum, this research project will first address the following questions: What is the "normative" academic field of musicology? What are its components? Chronologically, what are its historical roots? Who are considered to be its prominent contributing figures and theorists? What are some of the inherent challenges and tensions within musicology? And in turn these questions are to be addressed: Does queer musicology merely intersect with specific aspects of musicology (perhaps feminist criticism) or has it been subsumed into the mainstream bulk of musicology, or could it be neither of them?

---

<sup>1</sup> David Beard and Kenneth Gloag, *Musicology: The Key Concepts* (Psychology Press, 2005), 1.

How do queer musicologists present or document their work and how has their work been received by the academic community? What do queer musicological scholars bring to the arena of musicological scholarship, queer theory and pedagogy/education?

Clarifying what traditional musicology is and isn't is a logical starting point before venturing into queer musicological scholarship and examining intersections, parallels or avenues of synthesis or departure. Before presenting plausible definitions of musicology and a broad yet selective overview of its origins and historiography, I would invite the reader to consider the uniqueness of the art form commonly known as music, which will provide a framework and hopefully sensitize the reader to the inherent challenges and tensions with regards to writing about it. One loose definition of music that is widely circulated states that music is humanly organized sound (s). It is aural, sonic configurations. Very conservative and or elitist professional musicians, writers and music educators may refer to non-musicians as the uninitiated for whom music is imbued with mystique. This is most pronounced with textless (purely instrumental) music which may have no readily apparent narrative content. Literature has linguistics and fine art has visual signs which make it easier to identify and analyze content in their respective fields of endeavors. Carolyn Abbate aptly describes another central tenet of music – that music is perceived as generating expectations on the basis of culturally established paradigms. One of those paradigms within the Western art music tradition is that music is always moving through combinations of tension and release toward closure. Music can deftly create and convey an emotional mood and, like visual art and literature, music is capable of depicting and referring to objects in a world outside its own aural realm. The phenomenon of music is intrinsically elusive, infused with semiotic ambiguities and complexities.

## A paradigmatic tale of musicology

Early music historians described musicology as the scholarly study of music, as thinking about the study of music that stands outside the creative process in order to provide a clearer perspective.<sup>2</sup> In 1955 the American Musicological Society stated that musicology is “a field of knowledge having as its object of investigation the art of music as a physical, psychological, aesthetic, and cultural phenomenon.” The term musicology which is associated with the pursuit of music studies has been *interpreted* as “research”, which means work in any area of musical inquiry (drawing on the models of research in the natural or social sciences and humanities) is what turns the study of music into musicology.

When tracing the historical roots of the discipline of musicology the traditional academic narrative commonly begins by acknowledging that there were complex musical systems in the ancient cultures of China (Buddhist chants) and India (ragas) and promptly proceeds to ancient Greece. It specifically fixates on Plato’s (*Republic*) and Aristotle’s (*Politics: Writings on Education and within that on Music*), their theories of the nature, content, and function of music. Pythagoras studied numerical relationships and believed that sounds were related to the stars and planets, and numbers were the prime condition of sound. Pythagoras observed vibrations on a taut string which became known as the Pythagoras monochord.<sup>3</sup> During the Middle Ages music was taught and studied in tandem with arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy known as the Quadrivium. Treatises and polemics were generated. Sounds and intervals were supposedly

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent Duckles and Jann Pasler, “Musicology I: The nature of musicology,” In *Grove Music Online*, accessed March 20, 2015, *Oxford Music Online*.

produced by the planets and they were compared with ratios of string lengths of the Pythagoras monochord.<sup>4</sup>

During the Renaissance, music was understood as divine. The belief that the laws of nature should be the laws of music led to a desire to understand how music was related to nature. The seventeenth century was marked by a move towards an ideological turn from what music could do to people to what people could do to or with music. “Music was considered as a construction of artistic invention rather than a natural function of the ear.”<sup>5</sup> In the 1700s with the rationalization of knowledge of the Enlightenment, scholarly attention was given to studies of acoustics and the physics of sound. We see the rise of formal musical analysis of compositional scores; scoring and structural form now determine genres expressing a strong categorizing impulse.<sup>6</sup> In the 1800s Romanticism generated the ideology of the master narratives, composer as hero, and the cult of genius thrived. The intellectual discourse reflected literary and linguistic dimensions of musical experience.<sup>7</sup> There was a search for nationalistic expression fueled by patriotism. Music created a storyline through a succession of specific emotional states. Musical unity and coherence were stressed using a surface/depth metaphor in analysis. Organicism, which was borrowed from biology, had a musical work seen as an organism or as an integrated whole. The organic aesthetic prevailed, stressing that a work of art should possess unity in the same way and to the same extent that a living organism does.<sup>8</sup> It is here that musicology is firmly

---

<sup>4</sup> Richard Parncutt, “Systematic Musicology and the History and Future of Western Musical Scholarship”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary Music Studies* 1, no. 1(Spring 2007), 15-16

<sup>5</sup> Beard, 137.

<sup>6</sup> Parncutt, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Beard. 128.

<sup>8</sup>Ruth A. Solie, “The Living Work: Organicism and Musical Analysis”, *Nineteenth-Century Music* (1980), 148.

entrenched in positivism via the concept of absolute music, which asserted that music had no content or meaning outside the musical work itself. Thus, making a musical work totally independent of context, it is valued and privileged without question and is central in the discourse of high culture.<sup>9</sup>

In 1845 A.B. Marx published *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition* in which he introduced and articulated the labels of feminine and masculine themes in music. Bold gestures were described as masculine and strong whereas lyricism was deemed as expressing femininity, tenderness, and dependence. Marx also gendered the sonata form, which is constructed by transitioning from a first or principal motif (now male) to a second motif called subsidiary (now female), connotations that were still in common use in the 1960s.<sup>10</sup>

In 1863 the term Musikwissenschaft (science of music) was used by Friedrich Crysander within his work, *Jahrbucher fur musikalische Wissenschaft*, to emphasize the idea that musical studies, particularly historical ones, should be raised to the same standards of seriousness and accuracy as the social sciences and humanities.<sup>11</sup> Musicology was seen as a subdivision of Musikwissenschaft and regarded as such by German scholars. The French used the term musicology by itself and this is how it is regarded in the United States as well.<sup>12</sup> In 1885 Guido Adler's "The Scope, Method, and Aim of Musicology" codified the division between historical and systematic realms of music study, and created charts of contents and methods. The Historic field of musicology which is framed by distinct epochs covered notation, categories (musical forms), laws and theories, and instruments.<sup>13</sup> Adler was influenced by the art historians Alois

---

<sup>9</sup> Duckles, Musicology I.

<sup>10</sup> Beard, 52.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 140.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Parncutt, 1.

Riegl and Arnold Hauser, particularly in regards to describing the history of music as the history of style (periodization).<sup>14</sup> The Systematic field had: justification of laws, aesthetics/psychology, music education, musicology/comparative studies, and research - asking non -historical questions.<sup>15</sup> This was the initial formal impulse to divide musicology into branches or sub-disciplines, mimicking the more established disciplines of law and theology.<sup>16</sup> “The Scope, Method, and Aim of Musicology” is regarded as a significant formative force in establishing the academic discipline of musicology. Scientific systematic musicology is empirical and data oriented, consisting of components such as empirical psychology, sociology, acoustics, physiology, neurosciences, technology, and cognitive sciences.<sup>17</sup> Humanities systematic musicology consists of ethnomusicology, philosophical aesthetics, theoretical sociology, semiotics, hermeneutics, music criticism, cultural and gender studies,<sup>18</sup> and this is where feminist and queer work is situated.

During the 1900s there were many advances in mathematics and linguistics which contributed to a plurality of musical styles and techniques and enabled music theory to become a discipline on its own terms. The avant-garde and modernists desired to subvert, overthrow and invent new generic conventions. Modern aesthetics stemmed from an interest in non-Western music, such as African and Asian, to create and broaden musical repertoires. Technology pervasively impacted the amount, type, production and reproduction of music. Music was marked by diversity, dramatic changes, expansion and an overall repudiation of the ideologies of

---

<sup>14</sup> Beard, 129.

<sup>15</sup> Duckles, Musicology I.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Parncutt, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

the 1800s; it was studied as a social force. The philosopher of artistic modernism, Theodor Adorno, considered art to be “concentrated social substance” and that nothing could be popular and high art at the same time.<sup>19</sup> He was groundbreaking in his application of critical theory to musicology and was among the first to assert that music is intrinsically tied to subjectivities and social practices.<sup>20</sup> In 1955 the American Society of Ethnomusicology was established and the term comparative musicology was dropped. Ethnomusicology has been defined by Alan Merriam as the study of music in culture, by John Blacking as the study of different musical systems of the world, and by Elizabeth Helser as the hermeneutic science of human musical behavior.<sup>21</sup> In 1960 Donald Gout published his iconic text of the history of Western music with distinct historical periods, specific stylistic groupings, and lifeworks of composers. In 1977 Carl Dahlhaus called for the inclusion of structural history, reception history and cultural history in musicology.<sup>22</sup> Maynard Solomon was one of the first scholars to introduce gender and feminist issues into musicology by arguing that Schubert may have been homosexual and that this was an important lens through which to analyze his compositions.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Andy Hamilton, “Adorno”, In *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*, edited by Theodore Gracyk and Andrew Kania, London: Routledge (2011), 393.

<sup>20</sup> Jodi Taylor, *Playing it Queer: Understanding Queer Gender, Sexual and Musical Praxis in a new Musicological Context* (Griffith University, 2009), 92.

<sup>21</sup> Alan Merriam, “Definitions of “Comparative Musicology” and “Ethnomusicology”: An Historical – Theoretical Perspective”, *Ethnomusicology* Vol 21, No.2 (May, 1977), 198.

<sup>22</sup> Parncutt, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Renee Lorraine, “Musicology and Theory: Where It’s Been, Where It’s Going”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51:2 (Spring 1993), 237.

The “cultural turn” of the 1980s and 1990s affected scholars in most areas of history. According to Duckles in “Musicology I: The nature of musicology”, the cultural turn was a scholarly movement within the humanities, and specifically, it was inspired largely by anthropology. It looks at the use of language and cultural symbols to represent the changing values in society and views musicians as acting within a social or cultural environment. There is a pronounced shift from regarding music as a fixed object or product to describing it as a process involving composer, performer, and listener.<sup>24</sup> New methods of approaches are appropriated from contemporary social sciences (anthropology, ethnology, linguistics, sociology, gender studies, and cultural studies) just as they were borrowed from the existing ones in the late 1700s and throughout the 1800s.

Broadly speaking, all musicology is now associated with ethnomusicology and it is at this juncture that feminist scholarship gains traction in the scholarly discourse, which includes queer theorists/musicologists. In 1980 Joseph Kerman’s “How we got into Analysis, and How to Get Out” is often credited with ushering in a “new musicology” that is “more critical and less positivistic, where interpretations are privileged over facts, that is interdisciplinary in nature”, and becomes associated with post modernism ideology which Lawrence Kramer champions in the late 1990s.<sup>25</sup> By this time many feminist and queer theory scholars had entered the field of musicology, yet despite all of the diversity and hybridity of interests, traditional historical musicology remains doggedly dominant in today’s university settings, reflecting the systemic, hierarchal power politics in academia. This selective depiction of normative musicology’s

---

<sup>24</sup> Duckles, Musicology I.

<sup>25</sup> Beard, 4.

evolution provides a foundation from which we can now start to trace the lineage of queer musicology in academia.

### **Feminist inroads pave the way for queering**

Musicology is a conservative, insular discipline within which feminist inroads were late in construction in comparison to other fields such as literary criticism and other fine art traditions. It wasn't until the second wave of feminism that feminist musicology/ethnomusicology established a marked presence. Indeed, it was second wave feminist theory and later poststructuralist feminism that facilitated the emergence of queer theory by challenging the categories of sex/gender/sexuality.<sup>26</sup> Early feminist scholars such as Ruth Solie, Janet Levy, Rose Subotnik, and Peter Burkholder attempted to deconstruct the various approaches to Western music<sup>27</sup> In 1987, *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, edited by John Shephard, Richard Leppert and Susan McClary, was one of the first collaborative publications of critical essays. Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings* (1991) was a groundbreaking collection of essays in feminist music criticism within which McClary addresses problems of gender and sexuality in repertoires ranging from the early sixteenth century to rock and performance art. She explores both how music is informed by matters of gender and sexuality and how music, as a medium, informs our notions of gender and the erotic. McClary examines the musical portrayal of female opera characters and looks at the narrative strategies of contemporary female composers. Her work has met with much push back from within the field of musicology from both feminists and non- feminists and yet has weathered the test of time –

---

<sup>26</sup> Rachel Lewis, "What's Queer about Musicology Now?" *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 13 (2009):44.

<sup>27</sup> Philip Brett, "Are You Musical? Is it Queer to Be Queer?" Philip Brett Charts the Rise of Gay Musicology" *The Musical Times* (1994): 372.

citations of her work are ubiquitous. In her article, “Reshaping a Discipline: Musicology and Feminism in the 1990s”, she claims that just as women met with resistance as performers and composers, feminist musicologists have been ignored by the discipline’s mainstream. McClary creates a genealogy of feminist music criticism which includes: Ruth Solie, Jeffrey Kallberg, Suzanne Cusick, Lawrence Kramer, Carolyn Abbate, Caryl Flinn, Lina Austern, Richard Leppert, Philip Brett, Barbara Engh, and Eva Reiger. McClary also describes some of the challenges that feminist musicologists encountered within the academic community.<sup>28</sup> Multiple readings of a single work were resisted and feminists were criticized for not going into enough detail with the music itself.<sup>29</sup> Musicologists lagged behind current trends by trying to find meaning in their musical texts, while literature and film scholars were challenging the validity of the very concept of a text having any real meaning.<sup>30</sup> The heated debate over the threat of essentialism was divisive as well.<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Wood, who has been the center of lesbian work in musicology as conveyed in “Lesbian Fugue: Ethel Smyth's Contrapuntal Arts” and “Sapponics”, is a scholar who calls for more theoretical analyses that link the work of feminists in music to feminist scholarship elsewhere.<sup>32</sup>

Marcia Citron’s book, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, which was published in 1993 was a classic in gender studies in music and drew on a diverse body of feminist and interdisciplinary theories. She argued that the western art canon is not intellectually pure, that it is a complex mixture of practices and interests that go unchallenged. Anthropological ideas were introduced that opened up the space to talk about the “other”, specifically the queer, in Western classical

---

<sup>28</sup> Susan McClary, “Reshaping a discipline: Musicology and feminism in the 1990s”, *Feminist Studies* 19 (1993):412

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 413.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 414.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*. 415.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 417.

music by Henry Kingsbury's *Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System*.<sup>33</sup> In his article, "Musicology, Anthropology, History", written in 2001 for *Saggiatore Musicale*, Gary Tomlinson addressed identity issues. Previously, Tomlinson had contributed to the robust intellectual discourse within musicology with his "Musical Pasts and Postmodern Musicologies: A Response to Lawrence Kramer", authored in 1993 for *Current Musicology*. Philip Brett states that "the first notable collective presence of gay and lesbian perspectives occurred in *Musicology and Difference* (Berkeley, 1993)", edited by Ruth Solie, that included essays on gay and lesbian rights. However, the landmark publication that definitively demonstrated the visibility of queer musicology was *Queering the pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, published in 1994. The essays that comprised the book were previously presented at the first "Feminist Theory and Music" conference in 1991, organized by Lydia Hamessley and Susan McClary.<sup>34</sup> This is often the arena that scholarly queer musicologists inhabited until in 1994 when the first queer musicology conference, "Anything Goes" was held at the University of Berkeley, in California. The conference was run by graduate students who also founded their own journal, *repercussions*. Suzanne Cusick and Philip Brett were the keynote speakers. The second queer musicology conference, "Queer Vibrations", was held at Cornell University in 2007 and was an interdisciplinary graduate student conference on music and queer performance that was jointly funded by the Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Studies Program and the Department of Music.<sup>35</sup> Queer musicological conferences are still taking place through similar scenarios such as, for example, the Department of Musicology jointly sponsoring the "UCLA Queer Studies Conference 2010". However although poetry and movement are included, music

---

<sup>33</sup> Brett, "Are You Musical?", 373.

<sup>34</sup> Rachel Lewis, "What's Queer about Musicology Now?", 44.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 43.

is missing from the roster of topics for the upcoming 2016 Queer Conference that will take place in March at Hampshire College in Amherst, MA. This omission will be addressed momentarily.

Queer musicological publications have emerged that hone in on distinguishing themselves from feminist musicology by strenuously taking the body as an object of investigation and critique. They build on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to better understand music and themselves – "of thinking of music as among the discourses through which we perform ourselves as embodied, having gender and sex".<sup>36</sup> Examples of collections of such essays are: *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity*, (2002) edited by Nadine Hubbs and Judith Peraino, *Queering the Popular Pitch*, (2006) edited by Sheila Whitely, and "Gaily Reading Music" (1992) and "Musical Virtues" (2004) by Mitchell Morris. Judith Peraino has observed that "that the aural dimensions of gender and sexuality – voice and music – have haunted the margins of [queer theory] but have seldom factored as centrally as the visual".<sup>37</sup> Specifically, representation of lesbian desires has been neglected or deemed impossible in much of the literature. Emily Wilbourne addresses this in "*Amor nello specchio* (1622): Mirroring, Masturbation, and Same-Sex Love".

In a Foucauldian manner, she explores the relationship between music, language, and narratives of lesbian possibilities<sup>38</sup>, whereas Zarko Cvejic takes Wilbourne's discussion into the contemporary field known as (dis)identification politics by focusing on Klaus Nomi's androgynous falsetto voice. Cvejic hears the potential for a "totally free identification" or free self-invention within Nomi's shifting personae whereas others heard Nomi as not quite fully human or disembodied.<sup>39</sup> This article opened the door for discussing transsexuality and vocality

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 48.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 48.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 49.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 50.

which is an area that still has very little published musicological scholarship devoted to theorizing about it.<sup>40</sup> Additionally there is little written about the voice in transgender musicological literature either despite the fact that one of the greatest challenges to transsexuals' ability to "pass" hinges on the voice.<sup>41</sup> Intersectionality has been largely absent in much of queer musicologist's work by not considering race, class, ethnicity or nation and musicologists in general lag behind both feminists and queer theorists in adopting a global perspective.<sup>42</sup> In other words, much of queer musicology is still actually historical and Western musicology. Ironically, ethnomusicologists (who study music outside of the Western classical tradition) tend to be the most reluctant to engage with the globalized work of queer theorists since they advocate "localized", specific approaches to gender and sexuality.<sup>43</sup> Obviously any burgeoning academic topic will always have territory to explore, have to struggle to define itself, and queer musicology is no exception. The new perspectives, questions, and insights that they generate have challenged and stimulated traditional musicologists and music educators. Phillip Brett and the prolific Suzanne Cusik are two iconic, trail blazing, queer musicologists whose work has greatly impacted the fields of musicology and gender studies and merits a more detailed discussion of selected exemplary publications.

In his 1994 article, "Are You Musical?", Phillip Brett states that when his first essay on Benjamin Britten appeared in 1977, which discussed homosexual oppression, no answering voices were heard.<sup>44</sup> He commented that it would take an infusion of the post- modern theories and methods of the 1980s to help diversify the field of musicology. *The identity of music itself*

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 52.

<sup>44</sup> Brett, "Are You Musical?" 371.

*was to become an issue to be explored.* (Italics are mine) In another article, “Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet”, that was featured in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, Brett invokes Foucault’s detachment of “sexuality” from the physical and biological sciences, interpreting it instead as a cultural production.<sup>45</sup> Brett also refers to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s work in pointing out the condensation of sexual categories in our century before turning to essentialism. Brett wants to compare “homosexuality” with “musicality” as sets of deviant roles. He continues; “what happens when we separate the word “musicality” from the word “music” is comparable to what happens when we separate “homosexuality” (or “sexuality”) from “sex”.<sup>46</sup>

Musicality and gay identity exist in an uneasy relation to one another. Music has often been considered a dangerous substance, morally suspect in its effects on people and for those who are its practitioners. It could ravish your soul. Music is regarded as the most *feminine* of the arts. Hence, it is considered to be irrational or not easy to control. Musical pleasure is physically arousing, initiating dance and it resists precise meanings. Throughout the ages there have been many attempts to regulate music, to appropriate it for the enforcement of patriarchal order, and to defeminize it. This is most noticeable in educational institutions where it is packaged as a rational, masculine, and heterosexual endeavor. Brett states that realism and naturalism were not available as corrective forces in music and that “initiation into a largely German ideology of the absolute is a very potent part of what it means to become a musician in the Western tradition.”<sup>47</sup> He deftly describes, with subdued sarcasm, what an undergraduate student majoring in music will encounter. He insists that talent and musicality are linked to constructed power relations,

---

<sup>45</sup> Philip Brett et al, *Queering the pitch: The new gay and lesbian musicology* (Taylor & Francis, 2006), 9.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 13.

leading to training in ritualized activities. Brett continues to further assert that these constructed power relations are also how cultural values are inculcated into the scholastic program, thus producing the way that we come to understand what music is.<sup>48</sup> Brett critiques the excessive harmonic detail forced upon Bach's four-part chorales and suggests that it could be seen as a paradigm of the patriarchal appropriation of music which insists that the purity of the German canon be preserved.<sup>49</sup> According to him, ethnomusicology courses, when offered as electives, are still generally associated with primitive forms of music and peoples and these courses are often taught from a patronizing perspective.<sup>50</sup> Brett frankly points out that "the presence of homosexuals who do not fully identify as gay and who are in positions of power in the music profession is one reason why alternative voices such as those of women composers have a hard time getting heard."<sup>51</sup> He thinks that closet gay and lesbian musicians pay a high price to have elite status in the traditional hierarchy and although musical performance is a perfect field for the display of emotion; we can't fully participate in the constructed role of musician in our society until we recognize music's deviance and acknowledge the norms of our society itself.<sup>52</sup> In other words, the privileged life of musical expressiveness comes at the "cost of a tacit agreement to continue to play the deviant role in such a way that the norms of society are tacitly reinforced."<sup>53</sup> The dramas of the closet may be played out in particularly revealing and suggestive ways because music lacks rational verbal discourse. Brett's entreats us to ask ourselves what good does being "discrete" do if it merely "reinforces dominant culture by confining homosexuality to the private sphere while making it obscurely present in public discourse as an unthinkable

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 16.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 18.

alternative?”<sup>54</sup> He challenges the “essentialist myth of musical creativity as a force deriving from the “eternal feminine” in man”<sup>55</sup> and he asserts that homophobia and misogyny are intertwined. Moreover, Brett is convinced that the “special dedicated role signified by the word musicality is comparable to, and linked with, the role of homosexuality in our society.”<sup>56</sup>

Suzanne Cusick’s article, “On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight” was also included in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*. In it she opts to speak publically about her own musicality, which she considers as private a part of herself as her sexuality is. She states that to say the word “lesbian” in a musicological crowd is to speak a foreign language.<sup>57</sup> Cusick is trying to understand the relationship between her being a lesbian and her being a musician or musicologist. She wondered if there was such a thing as a lesbian aesthetic and concluded that the “music she loved had to do with intensity of experience, not so much emotional or sexual, but about the joy of being very much aware of being alive.”<sup>58</sup> Cusick’s writing style resembles Judith Butler’s cascading questions in *Gender Trouble*. She notes that musical activity may be the most important way she expresses or enacts her identity and that her sexual identity might be more “musician” than lesbian. She does not experience lesbian as a noun but rather as a way that she organizes her relationship to the world. Cusick goes on to suggest that sometimes music might be regarded as a significant other or beloved partner and that different positionalities in relation to this significant other could be explored or experienced.<sup>59</sup> When relating to music as a teacher she teaches music as the lover, the active force which generates pleasure and strives to get students to associate pleasure with

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.22.

<sup>57</sup> Suzanne Cusick, “On a lesbian relationship with music: A serious effort not to think straight”, *Queering the Pitch: The new gay and lesbian musicology* (Taylor & Francis, 2006), 68.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 73.

joy instead of with danger and guilt.<sup>60</sup> She also teaches her own listening posture, which is through extreme attentiveness to what in the music gives her pleasure. Cusick actually personifies music as another woman, as a subject that may have unexpected things to say. She bypasses traditional valued strategies of analysis which seem to dismember music and instead focuses on texture and timbres. She feels most fully alive when she has *become* the music, when she has loved it in return, and attends to its messages.<sup>61</sup> She falls in love with new repertoire and gleefully reveals hidden love relationships within the music when performing it. Cusick states, “I love using my body to enable the existence in the air of a model of independent intimacy.”<sup>62</sup> She asks what if music IS sex? What if it is a means of “negotiating power and intimacy through the circulation of pleasure, a form of sexuality in which the sites of giving and receiving pleasures are separated?”<sup>63</sup>

Cusick has not addressed a specific text in her essay which she considers to being counter-cultural because that is what a musicologist expected to do - critique texts. She states that “a focus on texts tends to trick us into staying in a power-over paradigm that is mighty close to the regime of compulsory heterosexuality.”<sup>64</sup> This strikingly physical, erotic lens of discussing music is a quintessential example of queer musicology. Cusick has boldly and honestly discussed music from a very personal perspective and has presented innovative concepts about music and identity that are mediated through the body. Her discussion is explicitly about sexuality, about repudiating the mind/body split and also about disrupting the narrative of the transcendence of

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 75.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 78.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 79.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 80.

music as an unembodied text. She has had a long career and has written extensively about gender and sexuality (queer theory) in early modern Italy and North America.

In “On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex” within *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, (1999) edited by Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley, Cusick considers the framework of “embodied music criticism” and its implications for musicological scholarship. She proposes developing a performance-centered rather than listening-centered music criticism that would address both the literal and the figurative ways that bodily actions constitute musical performances. Judith Butler’s theory about understanding gender as being a set of repeated performances is applied to the physical production of voices. Cusick agrees that gender and sex are both the result of human actions or performances.<sup>65</sup> She sees how musical performances are simultaneously expressing the performances of bodies. Music is viewed as an idea that is performed through a body, by a body for other bodies. Cusick wrestles with Butler’s theory as she considers her performances of Francesca Caccini. From an intriguing perspective, Cusick contemplates whether she would be rendering ideas from the seventeenth century bodily performances with or through her twentieth-century body. This could be viewed as a performance of a dialogue or contrapuntal relationship between the two embodiments.<sup>66</sup>

Cusick proposes that because voices originate inside the body’s borders and not on the body’s surfaces, voices do stand for the bodily imperatives of biological sex. We commonly think of the voice as being the body, yet voices are culturally constructed, a negotiated relationship. Performances of Song (voices) are “primary sites for performances of sex, gender, and even sexuality.”<sup>67</sup> They cross the body’s borders and “singers allow cultural norms to

---

<sup>65</sup> Suzanne Cusick, “On musical performances of gender and sex” In *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, ed. Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley (Theodore Front Music, 1999), 26.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 29.

penetrate and discipline their physical interior spaces and actions.”<sup>68</sup> The discipline of Tonality is deeply embedded and vocal registers express sexuality in an unconscious if not compulsory way. Boys “abandon the register that they might share with girls and chose to re-learn the interior bodily performances of voice production required to produce a manly lower register of Speech.”<sup>69</sup> In contrast, girls are most often told that their voices do not change and girls typically continue onto adulthood using their childhood vocalizations.<sup>70</sup> She claims that singing requires deeper bodily discipline (throat and chest) than speaking (mouth) does and that fewer men than women sing in our contemporary culture. Cusick uses a vocalist from Pearl Jam to exemplify her theory about masculinity as a relationship to Culture, rather than an inevitable consequence of hormones.<sup>71</sup> The Indigo Girls use their voices in ways that resist cultural heterosexual norms. Cusick ponders about what singing meant to people in Caccini’s time, how singing could threaten a woman’s reputation. Also of interest to Cusick is identifying the changes in the technical regimes of vocal training as our medical understanding of the body evolved.<sup>72</sup> She sees the history of musical practices as inextricable from the history of the body.

As music scholars, embodied-music criticism would require that we move away from the premise that music is primarily a transcendent or aesthetic experience. “Instead, intellectual inquiry about music would be grounded in the premise that music is a functional tool of culture, a medium through which people negotiate their relationships to others, to their cohort, and to their cohort’s values.”<sup>73</sup> Cusick suggests that music could be enjoyed by “thinking of it as among the discourses through which we perform ourselves as embodied, having gender and sex.”<sup>74</sup> She

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 32.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 42.

theorizes that rather than an escape from this world, music could be a site where the body enacts resistance, evasion, liberation and joy and gives us a means to remake our world.<sup>75</sup>

In 2008 Cusick wrote, “Music as torture/ Music as weapon”, in an attempt to “understand the military and cultural logics on which the contemporary use of music as a weapon in torture and war is based.”<sup>76</sup> This article resonates with Jasbir Puar’s writings on sexual torture. Acoustic bombardment accompanied sensory deprivation and sexual humiliation as among the non-lethal means by which prisoners from Abu Ghraib to Guantanamo could be coerced to yield their secrets without violating U.S. law.<sup>77</sup> Besides being shocked and deeply disturbed by this development Cusick is curious to know what in our contemporary musical culture, in the civilian United States, might mimic this conception of music and she investigates the way that musical torture is discussed via blogs. Cusick firmly explains that she is not engaging in a moral, ethical, or political debate but rather is offering a taxonomy of a complex subject. Tightly focused beams of infrasound have been produced, as well as “repetitive impulse waveforms” and “intense acoustic energy”, that when experienced can cause pain, spatial disorientation, nose bleeds, induce vomiting, and or prolonged tremors.<sup>78</sup> In Iraq in 2004, the city of Fallujah was bombarded with music by the band Metallica which reverberated off the walls of buildings and this was understood as “preparing the battlefield”. Although the choice of music was left up to the soldiers, the tactic of bombarding the enemy with sound was made at the command level.<sup>79</sup> Yet despite the difficulty in tracing the use of sound as a weapon because it leaves no trace, it is clear that it is being used in detainee interrogations. One cited example is holding detainees in

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>76</sup> Suzanne Cusick, “Music as torture/Music as weapon,” *Transcultural Music Review* 10 (2006): 1.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 3.

shipping containers and repeating playing songs at high volume while another is chaining detainees to the floor and subjecting them to extreme heat, extreme cold, or extremely loud rap music.<sup>80</sup> Islam has a very narrow definition of what is acceptable to listen to so the selection of rap music was aimed at intentionally further traumatizing them beyond its sheer decibels of delivery. This no-touch torture is a component of a standard set of interrogation practices developed by the CIA.<sup>81</sup> Cusick turns our attention to how the blurring of distinction between music and sound has evolved in modern compositions and listening practices. An acoustic continuum has been constructed that can be experienced as either highly embodied or almost disembodied.

The belief that music can dissolve subjectivity in the listener has been championed by university music scholars. Cusick draws a connection to using music for the purpose of dissolving subjectivity in the listener to the military. She also stumbled upon numerous blogosphere responses to press stories about music's use to torture detainees and thought that they documented an important aspect of the current war's home-front.<sup>82</sup> Some immediate responses accepted without question the idea of music being used to torture detainees, moving on to political discussions while another typical response was to debate what torture is, which stayed focused on music for longer periods of time.<sup>83</sup> Ideal playlists were generated by some bloggers in virtual conversations. Cusick states that the idea that music could torture seems linked both to homophobia and to heterosexual fantasy. Some bloggers imagined music torturing by either a racial/cultural affront, or more often by feminizing and or queerifying Muslim men; both would emasculate the detainees. Clearly masculinity is at issue here. However the choices

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 7.

of these would-be torturers from the “home-front” are very different from the choices of the soldiers in the field. Soldiers use heavy metal and rap music (embodied sounds of coded masculine rage) that they have wired into their helmets when they go into battle.<sup>84</sup> Cusick asserts that we live in an increasingly warrior-worshipping public culture and that these soundscapes are being used for feeling victorious in a struggle of masculinities.

Loud music can produce the feeling of being touched without being physically touched by anyone through vibrating air waves. From this concept, Cusick draws an analogy to Foucault’s definition of power. “If the torture scene is “performative”, what relations of power are brought into being?”<sup>85</sup> Cusick has plunged into uncharted musicological territory which vividly departs from traditional historical musicological topics. This particular article, which exposes disturbing events, crosses disciplinary boundaries creating conceptual bridges to interdisciplinary discourses. It expands the discursive scope in the study of music in many directions which in turn must also affect pedagogical paradigms. Furthermore, it could serve as a catalyst in eliciting new content, context, and methodologies from musicologists and educators. All of which would certainly entail much more than simply generating titillating, compensatory musicological works or impassioned political rhetoric. The disciplines of musicology, queer theory and education have tremendous transformative potential when interacting synergistically.

### **Queer musicology and pedagogy**

Contemporary feminist and queer theorists purport pedagogy’s aim as being emancipatory teaching and learning practices, and that ideally for queer theorists, embedded in the pursuit of any knowledge is the thwarting of the repetition of both heterosexual and lesbian/gay

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 11.

normalization. Susanne Luhmann has eloquently written about queer theory in education and Jodie Taylor's somewhat radical doctoral dissertation, published in 2009 by Griffith University, *Playing it Queer: Understanding Queer Gender, Sexual and Musical Praxis in a "New" Musicological Context*, examines "musically facilitated expressions of queerness and queer identity".<sup>86</sup> Luhmann cautions that one must learn to be self-reflective of one's own limitations in order to heighten one's awareness of the ever present risk of creating a new "normal". She challenges the notion held by many that see homophobia as a problem of ignorance that could be eliminated by better curricular representation which would at the very least offer role models and self-esteem to non- straight students.<sup>87</sup> Instead of creating a new expanded view of normal, she sets her sights on the very processes by which some people become normalized and others marginalized in the first place. She cites Sedgwick's critique which asserts that the homo/hetero oppositional binary is central to modern Western culture's concept of self,<sup>88</sup> and furthermore, that it is fundamental to any valid understanding of any cultural aspect. Luhmann states that difference is the necessary condition for identity, even fluid identities and she suggests that "the queer insistence on undermining idyllic stabilities of normalcy might be an important point of entry from which to employ queer theory for thinking through a queer pedagogy."<sup>89</sup> She asserts that we begin to ask how we come to know what we know, that we shift our energies from

---

<sup>86</sup> Jodi Taylor. *Playing it Queer: Understanding Queer Gender, Sexual and Musical Praxis in a 'new' Musicological Context* (Griffith University, 2009), ii.

<sup>87</sup> Luhmann, Susanne. "Queering/querying pedagogy? Or, pedagogy is a pretty queer thing." *Queer theory in education* (1998): 3.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 5.

conceptualizing pedagogy as a set of methods and strategies of transmission towards trying to understand what the student understands, and to finding out what conditions facilitate an understanding or refusal of understanding knowledge.<sup>90</sup> Luhmann wants us to ask “how does the reader or student insert herself into the text?” She sees learning as a process which requires that we become implicated in knowledge; that we persist in new identifications, which includes risking the self.<sup>91</sup> Her depiction of learning is a highly social process and she sensitively uses the metaphor of learning a new language to illustrate the terrain of discovery and transformation.<sup>92</sup> Luhmann’s work pulsates with strong proclivities for successfully mapping into a musicological paradigm. Jody Taylor launched her professional career as a scholar with just such an alignment.

Taylor wants to find out what there is to gain by making use of queer theory within musicology. She wonders if it will provide better representation of queer-identified people and if it will aid in the production of queer readings and new knowledge regarding queer musical performance, composition and participation.<sup>93</sup> The gist of her argument is that “musical performance provides a creative context for the expression of queer identities and the empowerment of queer agency, as well as oppositional responses to and criticism of heterosexual hegemony, and the homogenization and assimilation of mainstream gay culture.”<sup>94</sup> Taylor’s pursuit of the possibility of a musical “queer aesthetic” is reminiscent of Sally McArthur’s *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, which was published in 2002. However, Taylor is emphatically interested in popular musicology studies which actually began in sociological institutions during the 1950s. Debates have flared in which sociologists have accused musicologists of ignoring

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 10.

<sup>93</sup> Taylor, *Playing It Queer*. 4.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. ii.

social contexts and musicologists have lashed back claiming that sociology is overly concerned with social contexts and lyrics and fails to consider the importance of music as a sound object.<sup>95</sup> Taylor intends to broker a path of greater congenial interaction between them. Popular music foregrounds “interpretation through performance and is received primarily in terms of the body and emotions rather than as pure text”.<sup>96</sup> Popular music provides a context to perform gender and sexual identities as well as producing social realities. The musical genre known as queercore, which originated in the punk scene during the mid-1980s, is a perfect vehicle for such constructions and Taylor carefully interviews local musicians from four queer bands as part of her research. Queer scholars are concerned with “exploring multiple and overlapping experiences and expressions of gender and sexuality outside of fixed, body-based notions of sex and same-sex desire.”<sup>97</sup> They are striving for more fluid and comprehensive critiques of sexual meanings within music. Music is deemed a facilitator of desire which harkens back to Suzanne Cusick’s “On a Lesbian Relationship with Music”. Taylor dismisses the efforts of colleagues who seem to be more concerned with claiming queer ground than with the dissolution of binary identity categories.<sup>98</sup> She challenges her colleagues to instead consider linking queer musicological work to larger social justice issues. Here again, Cusick has already met this challenge. Taylor admits that queer musicology is not easily defined in that it does not have distinctive disciplinary boundaries or deal categorically with specific musical genres, cultures or epochs. Music might be a way to get beyond the categories of “gay” or “straight” and then in turn produce new pluralities of musical thought.

---

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 93.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 93.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 95.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 100.

## Good Things

Taylor has done her homework and is able to articulate several positive attributes of queer musicology such as: “it allows us to look at and provide insights into the ways queer people make sense of gender, sexuality, and to the broader social world through musical participation, it permits the expression of queer identities, queer empowerment and agency, and the opportunity to critique the heterosexual hegemonic tendencies within musicological research.”<sup>99</sup> Thus, it is important for all of us to become aware of and sensitive to the fact that gender and sexual binaries, along with heteronormative logic, influence the way we talk about music and inevitably influence the way we shape musicology as well.

Despite the inherent tensions within the discipline of musicology itself and the limited prestige garnered within the wider academic milieu, musicology has persisted in attracting dedicated scholars (many who are musicians) who are willing to write about it. The caliber and volume of work generated by queer musicological scholars have created and firmly established a distinguished subdivision in the field of musicology that is transforming what the normative historical narrative of music both looks and sounds like. Its multidisciplinary character is an asset that encourages pluralism, that has begun to foster intersectionality, and exudes potential for constructing junctures that expand or challenge our current theoretical frameworks and accepted knowledge base. I am confident that some of the best is yet to come for the field of musicology from queering it.

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 234.

## Bibliography

- Barkin, Elaine, and Lydia Hamessley, eds. *Audible traces: Gender, identity, and music*. Theodore Front Music, 1999.
- Beard, David, and Kenneth Gloag. *Musicology: The Key Concepts*. Psychology Press. 2005.
- Brett, Philip, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary Thomas. *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*. Taylor & Francis, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Are You Musical? Is It Queer to Be Queer? Philip Brett Charts the Rise of Gay Musicology." *The Musical Times* (1994): 370-376.
- Brickell, Chris. "The sociological construction of gender and sexuality." *The Sociological Review* 54, no. 1 (2006): 87-113.
- Butler, Judith. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination1." *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A reader* 1 (2006): 255.
- Citron, Marcia J. *Gender and the musical canon*. University of Illinois Press, 1993.
- Cusick, Suzanne G. "Music as torture/Music as weapon." *Transcultural Music Review* 10, no. 2006 (2006). 1-24.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "On a lesbian relationship with music: A serious effort not to think straight." *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (1994): 67-83.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "On musical performances of gender and sex." *Audible traces: Gender, Identity, and Music* (1999): 25-48.
- Duckles, Vincent and Jann Pasler. "Musicology, I: The nature of musicology." In *Grove Music Online*. Accessed March 20, 2015. *Oxford Music Online*.
- Foucault, Michel. "The History of Sexuality: Volume I-An Introduction." (1978).
- Gould, Elizabeth. "Feminist Imperative (s) in Music and Education: Philosophy, theory, or what matters most." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 43, no. 2 (2011): 130-147.
- Hamilton, Andy. "Adorno". In *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*, edited by Theodore Gracyk and Andrew Kania. 391- 402. London: Routledge. 2011.
- Kerman, Joseph. "How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out". *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1980), 311-331.

- Kumashiro, Kevin K. "Queer ideals in education." *Journal of Homosexuality* 45, no. 2-4 (2003): 365-367.
- Lewis, Rachel. "What's Queer about Musicology Now?" *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 13, no. 1 (2009): 43-53.
- Lorraine, Renee. "Musicology and Theory: Where It's Been, Where It's Going", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51:2 (Spring 1993): 235-244.
- Luhmann, Susanne. "Queering/querying pedagogy? Or, pedagogy is a pretty queer thing." *Queer theory in education* (1998): 141-155.
- McClary, Susan. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press. 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Reshaping a discipline: Musicology and feminism in the 1990s". *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 399-423.
- Merriam, Alan P. "Definitions of" comparative musicology" and" ethnomusicology": An historical-theoretical perspective." *Ethnomusicology* (1977): 189-204.
- Parncutt, Richard. "Systematic musicology and the history and future of western musical scholarship." *Journal of interdisciplinary music studies* 1, no. 1 (2007): 1-32.
- Shrewsbury, Carolyn M. "What is feminist pedagogy?" *Women's Studies Quarterly* (1993): 8-16.
- Solie, Ruth A. "The Living Work: Organicism and Musical Analysis". *Nineteenth-Century Music* (1980): 147-156.
- Taylor, Jodie. *Playing it Queer: Understanding Queer Gender, Sexual and Musical Praxis in a'new'Musicological Context*. Griffith University, 2009.