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Music Analysis; Queer Academy

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The activity from which I experienced most pleasure in my studies as a music undergraduate was music analysis. Maybe it is the nostalgia of hindsight, or just a truth about the relatively unfettered quality of the engagements one has earlier in one's life—particularly in comparison with the cramped conditions that later professional complicities impose—but I remember it distinctly as an activity into which I could, and happily would, disappear. I would hazard a guess that my blithe memories of music analysis are not unique and that others have had similar experiences of the pleasures of forgetting attendant upon its practice. Looking back on it, there is something about these experiences that now resonates to me with some famous words of Walter Benjamin. In his book about his childhood years in Berlin, he wrote: “Not to find one's way around a city does not mean much. But to lose one's way in a city, as one loses one's way in a forest, requires some schooling.” For Benjamin, this was an art that he “acquired rather late in life.” And it held the possibility of a certain childlike happiness for him, for “it fulfilled a dream, of which the first traces were labyrinths on the blotting papers in my school notebooks.”¹ And so how wonderful it seemed back then to lose track of time as I followed, searched for, or found once more the thread of a motif through a piece! How oddly happy I could feel when I looked up, disorientated, and realized what a taste I had for not being able to remember what had led me to where I now found myself! How liberating it felt to encounter my aptitude for getting lost and for taking pleasure for a moment in my own modest *dérèglement* of the senses! Hadn't I been trying to prove a point about sonata form? Why then was I now standing agog in front of some strange, isolated rhythmic feature?

¹ Walter 2006, 53–54.

Such moments produce next to no exterior manifestations and are almost completely without dramatic interest for, and maybe even imperceptible to, anyone watching me at my desk bowed over some score. They are unimpressive. But they have made my life while I was in them feel like a strangely clandestine privilege: rich without threat that the magnitude of my abundance would produce the ostentation of display. Nevertheless, indulging in such pleasures is a risky business in the contemporary North American academy, for it has become an entrenched discursive convention for everyone in that scene, angels and devils alike, social-justice scholar-warriors as much as crass neoliberal middle-management administrators, to talk of what ought to be happening in the academy only in terms of quite literal-minded interpretations of use (of relevance, worldly application, engagement, effectivity, austerity measures, transferable skills, community outreach, and so forth). So, it is testament to the genuine queerness of this essay that I find myself distracted by imaginings of an academy founded rather on a principle of luxury. Is it not possible to consider that such uselessness might indeed have some use? This is my abiding question.

By the early 2000s, I would set off to music analysis more like some obedient goose, full of all the good professional intentions that graduate school and conference participation had rammed down my throat. Getting lost had been replaced by the desire to be delicious enough for a university to want to consume me through employment. I was trying to become part of that world of professionalized knowledge production of which Theodor Adorno was so often so scathing: a world where “[d]ivergence from the facts becomes mere wrongness, the moment of play a luxury in a world where the intellectual functions have to account for their every moment with a stop-watch.”² So I would get on the correct train at the correct time with the intention of making sure I would arrive at the correct destination.

As Fred Maus has so carefully explained, such disciplinary protocols go deep into the details of key texts of music theory and, thus, hinder the realizations of other potentialities.³ For example, in his virtuosic reading of Allen Forte’s seminal 1959 essay, “Schenker’s Conception of Musical Structure,” Maus shows how Forte’s rhetorical and figurative language works “to create and circulate an image of a particular kind of person,” with the resulting function of helping both to propose what should constitute the

² Adorno 1991, 127.

³ Maus 2004, 13–43.

professionalized identity of a music theorist and also to encourage us to emulate it.⁴ Forte's text thus "not only says 'Read and evaluate the following claims,' but also: 'Be like me. Do as I do,'"⁵ . . . and for heaven's sake, get on the right train. Nevertheless, on the occasions when the train of my professional life came to rest in some nowhere spot, waiting perhaps for more important freight to pass, I could still, as if I were in a mild trance, watch myself stand up, move to the door, disembark, and then walk off into the landscape and out of sight. For it was only once I was invisible to others and their validating gaze, only when the train, not even noticing my absence, had departed that the music analysis I had tried to forget could really have its way with me once more. There was, and has remained, something secretive to it, something hesitant in its response to injunctions to socialize.

Thankfully, it transpires that old habits die hard. And so what first as an undergraduate had seduced me, and what had then troubled and threatened to derail my early attempts at professional rectitude, I now in this essay seek to recoup, perhaps free of guilty conscience: a music analysis that constitutes a self-validating activity, one practiced for the tautological reason of me having a proclivity for wanting to practice it; something indifferent to aspirations toward efficiency. For as Kofi Agawu has put it, once music analysis has entered into this register, it "guarantees nothing save the pleasure—or edification, if you want to get pious about it—of doing."⁶ Indeed, even Joseph Kerman, who argued so polemically against music analysis, and whom Agawu in turn sought to refute, could admit that, "taken on its own terms, [it] is one of the most deeply satisfying of all known critical systems."⁷ If pushed, I would take the point further still and argue that at its most focused—and thus for me most pleasurable—the doing of music analysis is tantamount to a form of Being, and thus calibrated toward existential rather than instrumental concerns. At any rate, queerness in this essay is reserved primarily for academic practices that take pleasure in that which is in excess of, and even indifferent to, instrumentality.

I certainly did not articulate my burgeoning relationship with music analysis quite so expansively and in such loaded terms in the early 1990s, when I was first setting forth. But even if the thirty somewhat-sad and difficult years since have imbued the thought of music analysis with a kind of vexed

⁴ Ibid., 14. Forte's article first appeared in *Journal of Music Theory* 3, no. 1 (1959): 1–30.

⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁶ Agawu 2004, 275.

⁷ Kerman 1980, 321.

poignancy, the feelings were nevertheless still strong enough in 1992 to inspire me to pack up my life in London, where I was not unhappy, and ship it off to New York, where I had been accepted into a PhD program. Here I hoped to write a music-theory dissertation on Berg's *Lulu*. God writes in crooked lines, so I ended up writing a historical-musicology dissertation instead—and moreover, on a completely different topic, fugal counterpoint in the instrumental music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven.⁸ Because musicology has often offered hospitality to those wishing to engage in music analysis, I did not envision that jumping ship from music theory would ultimately come at the price of having to leave behind the founding pleasures that had led me toward seeking a life within the academy in the first place. Music analysis intersects with the activities of both disciplines and in some instances creates a reliable gangplank between the two—an important image for my argument. It is partly for this reason that in the following essay I flip-flop between musicology and music theory without feeling particularly obliged to be overly pedantic about their distinctions.

This essay is therefore not completely qualified to appear in this volume. My primary interest is in providing an initial framing for the queer potentiality of musical analysis, not the potential queerness of music theory per se. In part, my reasoning is that since musical analysis is *not* merely a subset of music theory, it should be allowed to open out onto other things as the whim takes it. By framing the queer potentiality of music analysis in this way, I therefore afford myself the opportunity for getting at a variety of other questions about the forces that either aid or hinder our attempts to pursue happiness and habitation within academic life. So this is a very queer essay indeed. For as David M. Halperin has famously stated, queerness is not an inherent condition of something, but a quality arising from something's position with regard to a norm; it is relational, not ontological: "Queer is . . . whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers."⁹ Policed by a small army of editors and production managers, what's not "normal," "legitimate," and "dominant" about the assumption that an essay in a collection should remain strictly within the boundaries of the collection's presiding theme? Or, to put it another way, if queer music theory necessitates that we stick to music theory, how queer is it anyway?

⁸ Currie 2001.

⁹ Halperin 1995, 62.

Indeed, I would argue that there is potentially something both self-defeating *and* craven about attempts to sustain disciplinary identifications amid talk of a desire to queer. Such endeavors, common as they are, exude the distinct odor of a desire to bat on both teams: a suspicious proclivity for trying to keep everyone happy by, on the one hand, reaping the undeniable rewards that come these days from having one's moral and political profile validated by one's cutting-edge credentials while, on the other, simultaneously performing one's role as a good citizen of the discipline and its continuing health. However, even though this is an essay that propounds the value of luxury, I would argue that in this instance it is difficult to have one's cake and eat it.

My reasoning is informed by consideration of a broad background of transformation in the nature of academic professionalism over the past thirty-or-so years. In the early 1990s, for example, Edward Said could define academic professionalism as that which keeps one attentive to “what is considered to be proper, professional behavior—not rocking the boat, not straying outside the accepted paradigms or limits, making yourself marketable and above all presentable.”¹⁰ For Said, back then, such professionalism was precisely what prohibited the possibility of radical inquiry and action. Now, by comparison, professions across the board are bending over backward to proclaim their radical status. The result is a very particular symptom of our times, which, for want of a better term, we might label *the professionalized radical*. For this type, “what is considered to be proper, professional behavior,” and what therefore allows the academic to be “marketable and above all presentable,” is precisely the “rocking the boat” that had previously constituted academic professionalism's outside. No doubt for some the fact that the circumference of academic professionalism has expanded over the past thirty years to consume what once lay beyond its purview is cause for celebration. (And so what's not to love about a queer music theory?) But I argue that such an image of professionalism's progressive elasticity has been purchased through an extensive colonization of discursive space by forms of unquestioned instrumental thinking. And to ignore that fact is to choose to ignore the invasive degree to which the increased economic pressures of recent times have intruded into (and manipulated, distorted, and even debased) thinking life within a professionalized academic context—a topic that I turn to consider in the next section of this essay.

¹⁰ Said 1996, 74.

Certainly beyond the level of undergraduate classes, and thus certainly *within* the professionalized confines of North American music theory and musicology, music analysis is often instrumentalized into various related functions: as proof, example, elaboration, and so forth. It is frequently put to work for the theory or historical claim by which it has been employed, so that even when it works harder than anything else, and even when it is drenched in a profligacy of exquisite insights and stunning observations, it is mostly not considered the thing itself. As Agawu observed early on, there exists a certain moral injunction against the possibility of music analysis existing in-and-of-itself: “you must attach the [formalist] patterns you have observed to something else: a plot, a program, an emotional scenario, a context, an agenda, a fantasy, or a narrative.”¹¹ In the North American scene, music analysis thus functions once more like a gangplank, for it is the means not the end; it is there to transport us within a professional context from hypothesis to verification. As Agawu continues, “[t]he findings of formalist analysis are like a severed phallus; they should be re-attached.”¹² And to follow through on the psychoanalytic implications, if the phallus is allowed to be free-floating, we might then realize that the Father is impotent. Or, similarly, we might suspect that he is merely playing with himself—music analysis as masturbation. Certainly, if music analysis is left to its own devices, Daddy will end up queer.

In order to protect authority from embarrassing itself, we therefore all jump to the tune. Even in my own work, I have felt the pressure to show willingness to employ music analysis as a means of verification rather than in the queer form that I envisage for it here. In my *Music and the Politics of Negation*, for example, music analysis is conscripted to give weight to involved arguments regarding, among other things, music’s non-mimetic relationship to culture and society, the destabilizing excess inherent to all stylistic categorizations, the fundamentally exilic nature of music’s historical inscriptions, and the feminist potential in music when it is perceived as having presence.¹³ Music analysis here does a *lot* of work; it *doesn’t* play. Similarly, things are no different when music analysis appears in queer musicology and music theory in the Anglo-American world. Writing of a choice passage in the slow movement of Schubert’s piano duet Sonata in C, D. 812

¹¹ Agawu 1997, 299. The famous Kerman 1980, 311–31

¹² *Ibid.*, 299.

¹³ Currie 2012.

(the so-called Grand Duo), Philip Brett is adamant: “This is not a drama of neighbor notes.”¹⁴ The critical momentum set in motion by his analytic observations must either expand outward like reverberations of a struck bell, justifying their relevance, or be damned for the parochialism of never having left home. And since worldliness is *de rigueur* in the modern academy, expansion is what happens, and journeying forth ensues. We travel first to the assertion that the notes of Schubert’s passage create the affect of “a carefully constructed undecidability.”¹⁵ But we have still not traveled far enough, and Brett, sensing we might capitalize on the fact of having made it this far to justify turning back, reasserts the message just quoted from his previous sentence: this is an “undecidability” that “affects the very identity of *more than notes*.”¹⁶ Suitably disciplined, we fasten our seatbelts and submit to the inevitable, and Brett’s interpretation accelerates rapidly off into increasingly weighty issues. Out of this “carefully constructed undecidability” can be woven “dramas of public and private, illusion and reality, and more precise and important still, the ‘not-knowing-which-is-which,’ the intense confusion of thought and feeling that is connected with the image of the emasculated male in the age of sensibility and that, for different reasons, homosexual children and adolescents grow up with today.”¹⁷ It is for these reasons, I assume, that Brett concludes by stating that “[o]n supersensitive days,” when playing this passage with his piano duet partner, “our pianissimo rubato here has been breathtaking.”¹⁸ Asphyxiation as guarantor of relevance—I wonder if it is not too high a price to pay.

Of course, exceptions to this pervasive tendency exist. For example, there is the exceedingly important question, which I can only touch upon here, of what other potentialities for music analysis might be afforded by different global locations, and how these might inform future queer endeavors for North American music theory. The disciplinary controls imposed upon music analysis in the North American scene are, after all, very far indeed from being universally valid. Even in somewhere as culturally similar to the United States as the United Kingdom, things function quite differently. This, in part, is because the relationship there among the different music disciplines is somewhat less bureaucratically formalized than it is in the United States;

¹⁴ Brett 1997, 159.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., my emphasis.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

and so music theory does not exist there as such a definitive entity. As a result, it is interesting to note that the journal *Music Analysis* originates in the United Kingdom and still resides there. By comparison, the major journals where extensive music analyses occur in the United States are predominantly advertised as venues for music theory (*Music Theory Spectrum*, *Journal of Music Theory*, etc.), and thus music analysis appears therein as being more *in service* to music theory. A temporary working theory to draw from this would be that increasing disciplinary specialization within an economically and institutionally loaded professionalized setting works to create an environment hostile to intellectual activities that cannot be immediately domesticated in terms of their function. Or, alternatively, that the bureaucratic instantiation of particular academic disciplines and their societies creates an exponential increase in the demand that all activities that take place within the confines of that discipline must be capable of being mapped according to accepted paths of functionality according to the discipline's goals. Such working theories are given credibility by the findings of recent critical-historical investigations into the foundations and development of the modern music disciplines and societies.¹⁹

If a global perspective on music analysis might offer a fledgling queer music-theory inspiration, so too should the smattering of exceptions provided by the few prominent cases where musical analysis has been marveled at for its own sake, such as Scott Burnhman's haunting work on Mozart, or certain choice essays by David Lewin. But even here, validation has not occurred uncontested. Burnhman's own *Mozart's Grace* was winner of one of the American Musicological Society's most prestigious awards, the Otto Kinkeldey Award. Yet its introduction is troubled by self-consciousness, and the venture not therefore so blithe an act of unfettered, self-validating music analysis as a queer scholar such as myself might like. There are worries that "one might suspect that my project is rather more *self-indulgent* than systematic," and confessions that "nor would it be incorrect to do so."²⁰ There is an acknowledgment that the expectation is that scholarship should labor to get something done, and that some of his colleagues "*working hard* on the broad and complex *front lines* of musicological inquiry may well regard my enterprise as *a retreat into some hopelessly Romantic engagement*."²¹ So often

¹⁹ Notably, see Levitz 2018, 9–80.

²⁰ Burnham 2012, 5 (my emphasis).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 5–6 (my emphasis).

we are told that our scholarship must engage with the world and wake it up when it looks like it might be asleep on the job. We must, in short, disenchant! And yet, as Burnham admits, his own work looks as if its goal were “to *escape reality by drifting* into an *enchanted realm*.”²² Similarly, Lewin’s impressive canonical stature as a music theorist is indisputable. But the strangeness of certain aspects of his work has either been humored because he so powerfully fulfilled elsewhere the criteria for professional validation—through being eminently capable of laying out complete music theories—or has been celebrated precisely for the dissonance it creates in relationship to such criteria. It is therefore ultimately unsurprising that, in an attempt to move toward a queer music theory, Gavin S. K. Lee focuses in on such aspects of Lewin’s work.²³ Lee, for example, emphasizes how, moving beyond theoretical closure, Lewin deliberately “disorients himself immediately”;²⁴ or, how he makes the “attempt to catapult himself outside” of the stability of his own models;²⁵ or, how he exposes us to a world that “no longer contains the promise of stability, but is filled with uncertainty”;²⁶ or, how he allows through his “poetics of analysis” for the emergence of “a non-normative subject who no longer feels the need to exert systematized control.”²⁷ For Lee, drawing on the “queer phenomenology” of Sara Ahmed, with Lewin “the world becomes *queer*, disorientated.”²⁸

Another source of inspiration for the kind of non-instrumental queer music theory that I seek could also be found in the past. This essay, after all, is very far from being the first to draw to attention to already-existent but nevertheless alternative modes of academic practice and being centered around music analysis. Nearly twenty years ago now, Agawu could similarly assert that with music analysis there is “always a surplus to be contended with because the materiality of the proceeding is its own reward.”²⁹ In part, Agawu’s decision in the early 2000s to adopt a different rhetorical register than mine may well have resulted from a sense of confidence that the position from which he was writing (from music theory outward) was less corseted by disciplinary protocols than his addressee (the new musicology) had wanted

²² *Ibid.*, 6 (my emphasis).

²³ Lee 2020, 143–53.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 4. In this article, Lee works in detail with Ahmed 2006.

²⁹ Agawu 2004, 276.

to believe (in order rhetorically to clinch its own deal) and maybe even less self-censored than the addressee itself (since the new musicology comes out of Agawu's account looking like they have made a straw man out of music theory in order to disavow a more difficult self-realization).

Indeed, in the competition since the 1990s to see who among the music sub-disciplines can appear most cutting-edge, musicology has frequently relied upon a pretty crass representation of the practices of music theory in order to justify its (quite annoying) swagger. This, I would argue, has helped many—especially musicologists, but perhaps music theorists too—to forget the significant moments of radical activity that have constituted music theory's disciplinary history and might put musicology to shame. For as far as I know, there is *nothing* in North American musicology of the 1970s and early 1980s that is *even close* to the radical stance, and queer potentiality, of, for example, the phenomenologically driven, and often experimental, literary activities of writers such as Elaine Barkin, Marjorie Tichenor, Benjamin Boretz, and J. K. Randall. Forty-plus years ago, Boretz could regularly be found pronouncing on how the “reification of competence and skill enables us to substitute the visible tokens of approval, admiration, and status for the non-negotiable needs, interest and expression.” Fully worked out was an understanding that, as a result of professionalization, “[s]tatus replaces identity, erudition replaces experience, technique replaces awareness. Discipline replaces engagement. Knowing replaces searching. Self-congratulation replaces self-fulfillment.”³⁰ If, at the beginning of the third decade of this century, I therefore feel the need to recapitulate these themes in a queer key, then that is as much cause for melancholy as it is a sign of my empowering determination. Through a dark paradox, I have been forced to instrumentalize the attention that attributing a queer label can garner in order to attempt to salvage non-instrumental modes of academic being from some perhaps-final state of obsolescence. Queering, in this instance, merely constitutes the last stop before exhaustion, giving up, and abandonment of academia for other locales where life-enhancing practices might (*just might*) still be possible.

If music analysis is but a means to an end, it is, to invoke a recurring image of mine, a gangplank. And if it is but a gangplank, it can easily just be overlooked as merely the conduit for getting us from one side to the other. The authority of usage easily distracts from the experience and appreciation of the occasion or thing that is being used. To nod toward Heidegger,

³⁰ Boretz 1981/1982, 505 and 507.

we could say that we become so habituated that the thing, in its instrumental condition of being a tool, becomes all but invisible and only attracts our attention when it breaks.³¹ And so this essay is therefore an attempt to make music analysis break so that, to continue the Heideggerian theme, it might finally give its Being up to us. But in our present context, where instrumentality is so strongly valued, such a form of musical analysis will easily start to seem a little sad, abandoned, or abject. A gangplank, after all, is neither here nor there (nowhere); it is a place where it is potentially embarrassing or even professionally dangerous to be found loitering. And so, once more, it is queer, since there is a long lineage of pronouncements by queer writers regarding the fact that queers have always been involved either in having to take up habitation and functioning in spaces not normally intended for such things, or in spaces not intended for queers per se. George Chauncey has even argued that there is “no queer space, there are only spaces used by queers or put to queer use.” He continues: “Nothing illustrates this general principle more clearly than the tactics developed by gay men and lesbians to put the spaces of the dominant culture to queer uses.”³² Indeed, this is especially so when one considers the question of sex in public that has been so important in the history of queer lives.³³

In a similar vein, Ahmed notes that heterosexuality, like a gangplank, “can function as a path,” indeed as a “straight path,” one that “you follow if you are living your life in the right way.” If you are living in this “right way” then “you have to reach certain points in order for a life to count as a good life.” As a result, you need “not to be distracted by what happens or by what you encounter along the way.”³⁴ In this formulation, the path of heterosexuality, like musical analysis in its present disciplinary inscriptions, is to be used to get from one place to another. By comparison, as Ahmed then shows through a riff on a passage from Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, a “pervert gets lost on the way.” Not unlike music analysis considered as a self-justifying activity, sexual perversion thus constitutes a form of “delay” in which “you take up time that could have been used to get to the point.” And so she concludes: “Queer use: we linger; we do not get to the point.”³⁵

³¹ For example, see Heidegger 1971, 17–87.

³² Chauncey 1996, 224.

³³ Califa 1994.

³⁴ Ahmed 2019, 204.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 206.

I will return to this important theoretical provocation in the third section of this essay.

At this historical moment of its subaltern positioning within the hierarchy of agendas in the North American academy, music analysis considered as a self-justifying activity is self-evidently suspiciously queer. I assert this unambiguously. The fact that this may ultimately be a good thing does not cancel out attendant difficulties. Ahmed writes about the queer experience of the heterosexual family in the following fashion:

When you inhabit such a world, you can feel like you are watching yourself disappear: watching your own life unravel, thread by thread. No one has willed or intended your disappearance. They are kind; they are welcoming. But slowly, just slowly, as talk of family, of heterosexuality as the future, of lives that you do not live, just slowly, just slowly, you disappear.³⁶

And I would argue that trying to set up home in the academy in activities that do not immediately justify their functionality in terms of agendas that have been sanctioned as those that are important will likewise lead you as a scholar into analogously ghostly forms of dissipating existence. Even as a graduate student, I found it difficult to pull off fashioning the appropriate disciplinary stance, and I felt as awkward as a musicologist as I had as a music theorist. It was my impression at the time that I was a bit too bloated with history to be able to slip into something minimalist off the rack from Pitch Class Set Theory, and a bit too thin on contextual specifics effectively to butch out a tight white t-shirt from the New Musicology. Looking back on it, I see now that the problem was that I was always trying to find the means of doing as much music analysis as possible; that I was seeking that pleasure, and hoping it could avoid getting snagged on other disciplinary agendas. And so if it often felt lonely back then, it still often does; academia has not felt particularly hospitable.

But if, as Ahmed argues, “[c]reating a shelter and disrupting usage can refer to the same action,” and if, as a result, “[a] doorway becomes a meeting place,”³⁷ then a home can also be made on a gangplank, or in the practice of the art of music analysis—however precarious either of them might at first glance seem. So what would it mean for the North American academy to

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 229.

become hospitable to music analysis not in its presently instrumentalized form (as means to an end), but performed as a self-justifying activity (as an end in itself, a pleasure, and even a form of Being)? And in what ways, however modest, would offering hospitality to the pleasures of such a practice of music analysis contribute to the creation of a queer academy? I would argue that if such practices could be given voice, the effect would be radically transformative. But the forces that conspire against this happening are of immense power and venerability, and increasingly global reach. Indeed, they are of such magnitude, and their effect on the academy so disastrously invasive, that they have created an ingrained and tacit self-loathing among academics that is analogous to internalized forms of homophobia. So before we can start patting ourselves on the back by imagining what a queer academy might look like, we have first to come out about how vigilant we remain (queer scholars too) at making sure the academy never turns queer. It is to the articulation of what some of these forces are that I now turn.

* * *

The question of whether academia is hospitable enough to offer us a home is a topical one. One of the most salient and highly colored threads within the ongoing weave of present academic discourse is constituted by politically and ethically committed endeavors to bring to light the inhospitable conditions of professional academic institutions, disciplines, and their assigned professional societies for certain of their members. A certain assumed consensus of opinion has arisen regarding the aims to which our political and ethical value systems ought to be directed: academic disciplines and their professional societies should offer a kind of radical democratic hospitality to the array of human differences constituting their actually and also potentially existing membership. Since very few within the academy tend to come out publicly against such basic assumptions, the larger part of this critique has therefore been taken up with acts of calling to account when a purported allegiance to assumed democratic responsibilities as hosts has been shown to be profoundly wanting in terms of actual material realizations—or, to put it otherwise, when a theory of what kind of home the academy should offer has been shamed by display of what kinds of practices to date have resulted.

Since I think that those who go about cashing in on the performance of their ethical and political credentials should have to include a scene in their stage shows where they are made to put their money where their mouth is, I have found the spectacle of most of this greatly to my liking. It is also quite

interesting in terms of what it suggests for our long-term historical understanding of the music disciplines. With regard to musicology, for example, I note how present acts of calling out discrepancies between the theory and practice of scholars' disciplinary responsibilities makes sense as itself the historical playing out of the final act of a theory-to-practice drama stretching back to the second half of the 1980s. After all, the places where cutting-edge musicology of the late 1980s and 1990s had its most consistently undeniable success and impact were to be found in the strikingly effective rhetoric of its characteristic assertion: that if we believe our role as citizens is to foster the creation of an increasingly pluralistic democracy, then that belief must also be made to intrude far into the intimate details of our academic practice as well; the questions that motivate us in our non-academic life must be allowed to resonate in the issues we bring to bear on our academic research. The result was an exponential deregulation of what was deemed acceptable as research and a refreshing efflorescence of inquiry into politics, gender, sexuality, embodiment, race, popular culture, colonialism, and more.

By necessity, attendant upon this was a requisite condemnation of musical autonomy. If such a thing as the music itself actually existed, then that would present a significant push-back to the inviolability of emergent assumptions that academics were ethically and politically beholden unto making connections between that which happens within the boundaries of academic research and that which happens beyond its purview.³⁸ Neither music nor the academy could be allowed to remain autonomous, and so musical autonomy got written off as but a mere chimera of history, the symptom of a set of broader ideological strategies.³⁹ In certain cases, music even started to be conceptualized as *ontologically* heteronymous and relational. For Lawrence Kramer, for example, "Music is our premier embodiment of the drive for attachment."⁴⁰ In this formulation, music's purported ability to link things together (to attach) nicely mirrors the politically and ethically enlightened scholar's desire to make connections between academic and extra-academic concerns. As a result, and metaphorically speaking, connecting extra-academic democratic life to academic practices could itself start to appear

³⁸ Writing against this assumption of postmodern musicology of the 1990s, a small minority of scholars has sought to show how musical autonomy (and its related concepts: formalism, absolute music, and so forth) might in fact do all sorts of tangible things in the world. See, for example, Scherzinger 2001, 5–117; Scherzinger 2004, 252–77; Currie 2017.

³⁹ As for example in McClary 2000, and Chua 1999.

⁴⁰ Kramer 2007, 33.

as a means of acting musically; practicing music analysis as a self-justifying activity, in-and-of-itself, therefore became implicitly unmusical.

Such discursive developments by scholars in the later 1980s and throughout the 1990s were instrumental in breaking down the rhetorical distinctions between the concerns of the academy and those of the so-called real world, and that inheritance is tangible in present debates over the discipline's hospitality ratings. So, for example, when Susan McClary is to be found writing the preface to William Cheng's *Just Vibrations: The Purpose of Sounding Good*—a text that, among other things, registered contemporary questions of disciplinary hospitality at a relatively early date within North American music studies—that can be interpreted as an act of inheritance within the lineage of the discipline's theory-to-practice traditions.⁴¹ Crudely put: where McClary fought primarily to make musicological research hospitable to a wider array of inquiries, Cheng and others now seek to make the social realities of disciplinary life more hospitable to a wider array of actually existing human subjects. There would seem to be very little to question about this in such a volume. Queer theory develops in part from the overflowing of a wave, into both academic research and the discursive and material constitution of its disciplines and professional societies, of historical energies accumulated from the experience of generations of scholars who, in their extra-academic existence, have been subject to social and political forms of violence that have directly impacted the possibility of their access to full representation within the *Demos*. It would seem inconceivable that a queer scholar versed in this literature would not therefore wish to constitute part of a united vanguard pressing for the implementation of radically democratic practices of disciplinary hospitality. And indeed, this particular queer scholar has no desire to be extraordinary in this regard.

What does give pause, however, is the accompanying assumption that the academy resulting from the implementation of such democratic principles should be one constituted by a plane of consistency that, free from conceptual turbulence, can pass across and link together the particular ethical and political hopes and dreams of our extra-academic life with academic life itself. What threatens here, at least from a theoretical perspective, is that any positive possibility of academic life constituting a tangible form of authentic *difference* in relationship to extra-academic life is annulled. As a result, in order to implement a rigorous ethics of respect for difference within the academy,

⁴¹ Cheng 2016.

it has therefore been necessary sometimes to eradicate either any potential positive difference that the academy might constitute in and of itself, or anything that might help bring such a difference into being. And regarding the latter, I would argue that a self-justifying practice of musical analysis, queerly conceived as a kind of indifference to instrumentality, could indeed participate in its small way in the creation of such a difference.

The irony of this complicit relationship between diversity politics and patterns of ideological exclusion is something that I have examined before, primarily through the optic musicological discourse regarding the question of context.⁴² More recent critical work on racial capitalism, however, takes some of these ironies into the realms of the more materially tangible economic repercussions for institutional life writ large. Nancy Leong, for example, makes the brilliantly blunt observation that in a “society preoccupied with diversity, nonwhiteness is a valued commodity. And where that society is founded on capitalism, it is unsurprising that the commodity of nonwhites is exploited for its market value.”⁴³ As a result, affiliation with nonwhite individuals “becomes merely a useful means for white individuals *and predominantly white institutions* to acquire social and economic benefits while deflecting potential charges of racism and avoiding more difficult questions of racial equality.”⁴⁴ By definition, actions aimed at increasing diversity in the academy are congruent with the assumption that a plane of consistency can and should be drawn to pass across and link together the particular ethical and political hopes and dreams of our extra-academic life with academic life, in and of itself. But the easy coexistence of a capitalist commodity economy with diversity initiatives within the academy leads ultimately, according to Leong, to a degrading of nonwhiteness. Further, because racial capitalism within the academy is, as Leong argues, a systemic problem, the university diversity initiatives that help to sustain it are, therefore, tantamount to forms of coloniality. And this is particularly the case, as Tamara Levitz has for example argued, when we are dealing with academic life in the North American context.⁴⁵

After all, capitalism is the predominant means by which colonial power came into being. And since, according to Nelson Maldonado-Torres, coloniality means “a logic, metaphysics, ontology, and a matrix of power

⁴² Currie 2009, 145–203.

⁴³ Leong 2013, 2154.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2155. My emphasis.

⁴⁵ Levitz 2017, 1–13.

that can continue existing *after* formal independence and desegregation,”⁴⁶ then to talk seriously about decolonizing the academy must on some level mean to start the process of formally amputating the deep structures of our thinking and institutional Being from the unquestioned logic of the capitalist worldview in which they have long been historically entrenched. We must create relations of critical *discontinuity* between, on the one side, diversity initiatives within the academy and, on the other side, the relationship between capitalism and race as it exists pervasively elsewhere. Such an act of severance could work toward “rehumanizing the world,” and to “breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities,” including those within the academy itself.⁴⁷

But if capitalism is the problem, then it is one whose roots stretch deeply, maybe even constitutively, into the form and function of the academy. Economically speaking, the modern university has never been a tower made of unblemished ivory. The only thing different about our present moment is that universities have now lost whatever squeamishness they once had about appearing in the raw in this regard. And so, as a result of the exponential increase in the intrusion of neoliberal economic thinking into the very heart and structure of the academy’s functioning, the construction of the academy’s towers are now increasingly indistinguishable (metaphorically) from the tall buildings of any corporate or financial zone. Most academics I know claim to be horrified by such developments. And yet one of the most typical ways in which neoliberal deans and their recently hired hordes of middle-management cronies confront us is in terms of demanding that we justify the real-world relevance and applicability of our research—or, to recast it in the terms of this section of my essay, that we prove a line of continuity between one and the other. If we are made anxious by this demand, part of our unease must then surely come from the experience of its uncanny dialectical reversal. For in a strange act of ventriloquism, out of the mouths of neoliberal administrators now come our own calls for the eradication of the distinction between the concerns of the academy and the concerns of the world beyond its parameters. Of course, not all mouths are the same. And so even though the forces do in fact significantly overlap, those that compel academics into speech are not identical with those that mediate the mouths of university bureaucrats. Nevertheless, I argue that it is precisely the ease

⁴⁶ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality,” 10, <https://fondation-frantzfanon.com/outline-of-ten-theses-on-coloniality-and-decoloniality/>, my emphasis.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

with which, at a cursory glance, the different antagonists seem actually to be employing the same rhetoric that constitutes a significant reason for why neoliberal rhetoric went so rapidly and effectively viral in the academy in the first place. Academics have mostly been left reeling from the narcissistic wound they have received from having had to confront—or tried to *avoid* confronting—the presently existing historical fact of the relative ease with which aspects of their own position have been recruited for negative ends. Therefore, from a politically strategic point of view, it seems acceptable to propose that perhaps the neoliberal business model would not have been able to gain such impressive degrees of traction so rapidly had it encountered a confident rhetoric extolling the credible values of (once more) a productive *discontinuity* between the concerns of the academy and its purported outside. And it is one of the wagers of this essay (once more) that, within the North American context, practice of music analysis as a self-validating activity—one performed for the tautological reason of the pleasure to be gained from performing it—would contribute, in however modest a fashion, toward such a goal.

To summarize, then, the present need for the academy to address its mostly appalling track record with regard to hospitality needs to be supplemented. Transformations in access availability and the diversification of who it is that constitutes the population of the academy need to be accompanied by increased hospitality to a conceptual diversification of what, in an almost existential sense, we think life in the academy could be. We need a vibrant, and experimentally open, attempt to inhabit the potential *differences* that could be constituted by academic life in and of itself. In making this statement, I am en route to asserting that the need to think that the difference of academic life is, among other things, a strongly queer one. I am in part asking: what is the university to be used for? And since I am asking that from a queer vantage, I am assuming that there is something problematic about our present usages that we are failing to notice. As Ahmed writes, “[t]o queer use is to make use audible, to listen to use, to bring to the front what ordinarily recedes into the background.” And so ultimately, “to make use strange.”⁴⁸ Might not academic life itself be something queer? Do we need to become open not only to those who have been cast as the *academy’s* Other, but also to the fundamental *otherness* of the academy itself?

⁴⁸ Ahmed 2019, 198.

I make such statements self-consciously against the background of one of the most canonical texts of queer studies in the Anglo-American academy, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” the interview with Michel Foucault that appeared in April of 1981 in the French magazine *Gai Pied*.⁴⁹ Here Foucault famously asks: “Is it possible to create a homosexual mode of life?”⁵⁰ And so, likewise, I ask: is it possible to create an academic mode of life? As is typical in his late work, such a life for Foucault would not come from defining some essence, called homosexuality, and then finding the best way for one’s life to be an expression of it: “we have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognizing that we are.” Rather, homosexuals need to “work on ourselves and invent—I do not say discover—a manner of being that is still improbable.”⁵¹ Likewise, I seek less to find the means by which academics could identify themselves and then act accordingly (according, at the present moment, to economically manipulated professional *aprioris*) and more to attempting to formulate what the incipient moves might be toward imagining habitation in the academy as constituting a kind of experimental life practice.

Principles of radical democratic equality are presently being mobilized transformatively to diversify the demographic of the academy. Rightly so. But once the citizens of the academy have been gathered, is it not possible that they could be afforded the opportunity to be inspired by other principles of social relationality without having to assume that in doing so they are capitulating to a regressive politics? Likewise for Foucault it is not so much a case of trying to “re-introduce homosexuality into the general norm of social relations,” but rather trying to create and become within a new “empty space.”⁵² And so in “Friendship as a Way of Life,” for example, “[t]he problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one’s sex, but rather, to use one’s sexuality henceforth *to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships*.”⁵³ Accompanying this in the essay is also the possibility of making ourselves “infinitely more susceptible to pleasure [*plaisirs*].”⁵⁴

One does not need to indulge in specious analogies in order to make Foucault’s remarks regarding the new potential socialities attendant on homosexuality resonate with questions of academic and intellectual life.

⁴⁹ Foucault 1997b, 135–40.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 136, 137.

⁵² Foucault 1997e, 160.

⁵³ Foucault 1997b, 135 (my emphasis).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

Foucault himself draws out the social potentialities of academic and intellectual life frequently and in a manner perfectly congruent with what he says about homosexuality. For example, in an interview with Paul Rabinow, he explains his intellectual tendency toward dialogue precisely because it opens up possibilities of as-of-yet unknown socialities, rather than being driven by unquestioned ethical and political aprioris. In the “serious play of questions and answers, in the work of reciprocal elucidation, the rights of each person are in some sense *immanent* in the discussion.”⁵⁵ Regarding academic life in general, in an interview with Stephen Riggings, he claims that he has “worked like a dog” not because he is “interested in the academic status of what I am doing.” His activities are not performed so as to circulate within the professional economy of validating gazes and the undeniable (and mostly repellent) resulting social formations (driven by jealousy, gossip, and corrosive forms of narcissistic wounding) that so frequently monopolize the lives and behaviors of academics. Rather, it is “because my problem is my own transformation.” And for Foucault, this “transformation of one’s self by one’s own knowledge is . . . something rather close to the aesthetic experience.” It is therefore a *pleasure* taken in such transformation, since “[w]hy should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?”⁵⁶ Admittedly, such a pleasure would seem at first glance to erase the question of the social, since it is pursued only in terms of a singularly individual goal (“my own transformation”). But since the pursuit is perfectly available at one time to more than just Foucault himself, it implicitly opens up the possibility of envisioning collections of those involved in intellectual activity in a highly provocative and paradoxical form: as a community of isolates. And so precisely by means of confessing to a certain prioritization of pleasure within the conceptualization of his intellectual activity, Foucault affords us the possibility of encountering as-of-yet non-existent forms of sociality. As such, it is a fundamentally queer maneuver, and it was for similar reasons that I began this essay by acknowledging that the instigation for pursuit of an academic life arose in part from the pleasures I had once experienced in participating in the practice of music analysis for its own sake.

⁵⁵ Foucault 1997a, 111 (my emphasis). In his later work, Foucault repeatedly turns to repositioning traditional notions of rights with respect to a new mode of being. So, for example: “Rather than arguing that rights are fundamental and natural to the individual, we should try to imagine and create a new relational right that permits all possible types of relations to exist and not be prevented, blocked, or annulled by impoverished relational institutions.” In Foucault 1997e, 158.

⁵⁶ Foucault 1997d, 131.

But it is important to note that such queer maneuvers would *also* afford us the possibility of creating the kinds of productive discontinuities between academic and non-academic life that would help to hinder the effective functioning of, among other things, racial capitalism and all it does to derail the possibility of us properly making good on the project to diversify the academy and making it credible as a kind of home. So while it would be conceptually violent to conflate queer theory with the project to decolonize the academy, it is still worth noting that they can significantly overlap and offer a generosity of resources to each other. They are available to each other in the form of a kind of theoretical comradeship. For Maldonado-Torres, we need “counterdiscourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality.” And such things could ultimately “open up multiple other forms of being in the world.”⁵⁷ Not only being in the world at large, but also being in the world of the academy. And in a queer academy, too.

* * *

Why has the productive Otherness of academic life yet to manifest itself in any significantly progressive fashion? In the early 1980s Foucault could state directly that it is “the prospect that gays will create as of yet unforeseen kinds of relationship that many people cannot tolerate.”⁵⁸ And I would suggest that similar animosities breed and fester in relationship to whatever arcane, pretentious, and elitist activities and ways of being academics and intellectuals are purportedly guilty of being engaged. The fact that academic life constitutes a certain kind of privilege—although one that is still, even if one comes from privilege, relatively hard won—does not cancel out the fact of how tenuous is the guarantee of respect that academics can expect from those many more who look in askance at us in from the expanses of extra-academic life. Academics and those in pursuit of the life of the mind have been surrounded by a wealth of negative representations of themselves for a long time. Ridicule of the moribund impotence of intellectual pursuits in comparison to the vibrancy of the real has had a prominent history and is encapsulated in the standard insult that academic work is just so much intellectual masturbation—as opposed (one assumes) to intellectual copulation, which (one assumes) is to be valued for being on the side of life and

⁵⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁸ Foucault 1997f, 153.

working to give birth to realities as opposed to spawning fantasies. From this perspective, academics are pleasing themselves rather than participating in the good work of making sure they are always also pleasing others, and so they are guilty in terms of the strictures of a relational morality.⁵⁹ In the literary fiction of the West, for example, this insult is personified with particular loathing in the figure of Edward Casaubon, the dry and intellectually worn-out scholar who marries the young, intelligent, and idealistic Dorothea Brooke in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–72). His ongoing and never-to-be-finished work, *A Key to All Mythologies*—irrelevant even in scholarly terms, since he cannot read German, in which language the cutting-edge debates take place—is the altar on which he sacrifices his ability to love and engage with life, and on which he almost sacrifices Dorothea's life forces too.

Condemnations of academic activity have also been easily found closer to home. After all, so much of the work that presently circulates today in the academic humanities tends to take place according to intellectual models whose political allegiances are mostly advertised as left-leaning. As a result, even when no allegiance to a Marxist lineage is purported, it is difficult not to hear the eleventh of Marx's mighty *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845) booming somewhere in the background: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world; the point is to change it."⁶⁰ As academics, we are pursued by an always-looming threat, which for many of us in the profession probably began with being ostracized (and worse) at school for being bookish. I have long felt that lurking around every corner is an unproductive encounter with the shame of being called out for my irrelevance, or ridiculed from the position of a kind of realist authoritarianism for the moribund impotence of my intellectual pursuits in comparison with the vitality of life itself (or some such other undigested ideological standard). What I ought to be doing, purportedly, is transforming my thinking into action, becoming relevant, engaged, useful, and social, and showing myself willing at attempting to cure myself of addictions to such unnatural desires and impotent passivities. And so, if there is any credibility to my earlier assertion, that since the later 1980s, Anglo-American academics have sought out their radical credentials through an increased commitment to making their activities more continuous with the

⁵⁹ I would argue that it is fear of being called out for not being relational enough that accounts for the somewhat uncritical reception and success of certain noted publications, rather than the fact that readers have been impressed by the novelty or penetration of the arguments to which they have been exposed. In this regard, consider Born 2010, 205–43. I return to this topic later in this essay in my reading of Abbate 2004, 505–36.

⁶⁰ Marx 1978, 145.

authority with which they have imbued real-world activities, then academics now simply self-legislate the terms by which they themselves can so easily be condemned.

It sounds, of course, a lot like the internalized self-loathing that has traditionally, and efficiently, accompanied homophobia. And if there is any credibility to the analogy—between hatred of queers and hatred of academics—then maybe academics (like queers) also struggle with internalized injunctions against what they love. So what *do* academics love? One way of approaching the question would be to say that academics love that which they study. And that being the case, it would seem that we are proceeding from the assumption that the act of studying and the act of loving are therefore analogous. Certainly, it is a normative assumption that love is a relationship and that relationships require commitment. And certainly, commitment would seem to be proven by the extensive and not-infrequently harrowing professional training that academics must go through in graduate school—with, to boot, next to no possibility of employment at the conclusion of often having studied much longer than most doctors and lawyers; and, even if you do land a job, no choice whatsoever as to its location, unless you are some kind of academic rockstar or just distastefully slick at playing the scene. So if we are academics involved in the study of music, it is therefore not difficult to postulate our love for music too. For in one of its most recognizable forms, to fall in love with someone is to be made, against one's will, prisoner of a regime of attention upon the radical singularity of a particular being. All other contextual claims are potentially expendable. Academics likewise have mostly been prepared to gamble just about everything on the slim chance of maximizing the amount of time they might spend with music more directly in their lives.

So what is there to worry about? Even at a really middling drinks party, it is quite possible, as an academic working professionally within music studies, to encounter a stranger who goes weak at the knees when they find out what you do. Their response is usually some variation on the leitmotif: "How wonderful! I love music too!" This being the case, maybe the only people who really have a problem with loving music are precisely those academics who have organized their lives around music. And so, to return to one of my primary formulations, perhaps if academics could just work more effectively to create a continuity between themselves and life beyond the academy, this would then help to cancel out their shame, and their problems would be resolved. For if the world is ready to love us for what we love, then all we have

to do to love ourselves is love the love already in existence for what it is we do (which, one here assumes, is loving music). If, in this instance, we assume that love is what we need, and that such loving means opening ourselves up to the already existent, then the problem with academics is that they are too squeamish and try to uphold boundaries to keep such things at bay. Once more, what is needed is thus continuity—connection, relationship formation, openness, and so forth. If those involved in the academic study of music could only accept this, then their shame would be cancelled out.

How could music analysis relate to all of this? Certainly, back in the 1990s, the idea was floated that music analysis could be part of the love cure rather than a symptom of the psychological complaint of academic self-loathing. In a well-known statement on “music loving,” for example, Marion Guck in 1996 wrote:

Though presumably we all came to our present positions through a strong attraction to music and to specific pieces, most theorists and musicologists, whether old or new, are not comfortable with “music loving.” Or perhaps I should say I think that no one is comfortable with “loving.” We do not call ourselves music lovers; we call amateurs music lovers.⁶¹

For Guck, music analysis ought to be the means “to understand the extreme sense of intimacy one can feel for a musical work—an intimacy akin to the what one feels for a lover.”⁶² Moreover, music analysis for Guck does not only constitute “the articulation of a process of growing awareness, increasing closeness, of ‘immersion in pleasure,’ to quote [Suzanne] Cusick”⁶³; it is, therefore, not merely good PR for “the powers of music, powers of attraction, engagement.”⁶⁴ Rather, music analysis *is* such intimacy itself, and it is only by means of denying love and intimacy that it has been possible for music analysis to create “a fiction whereby one speaks purely about a piece, out there, lying on a desk perhaps, unperceived by anyone.” For Guck, to talk as if “one really could stand at a distance” from music “is an illusion.”⁶⁵ And so the logic of her argument opens up the following possible conclusion: that a music analysis founded on love would return us, through the cancelling out

⁶¹ Guck 1996, paragraph 2.

⁶² *Ibid.*, paragraph 34.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, paragraph 34. Guck is referring here, and throughout the rest of the article, to Cusick 1993, 67–83.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, sections 13 and 14.

of “illusion,” to reality, and so, perhaps, to truth. If this truth is therefore to our benefit, then love of music is therefore tantamount to love of truth, and if music analysis also has fidelity to this love, it therefore acts likewise.

But if Guck in 1996 could be found wondering why we were all so worried about getting our feet wet, by the early 2000s it seemed we were all more than up for getting wasted at pool parties. This would account for the extraordinary self-confidence of assumption regarding what it means to love music that fuels the opening rhetoric of Carolyn Abbate’s iconic “Music: Drastic or Gnostic?”:

What does it mean to write about performed music? About an opera live and unfolding in time and not an operatic work? Shouldn’t this be what we do, since we love music for its reality, for voices and sounds that linger long after they are no longer there? Love is not based on great works as un-performed abstractions or even as subtended by an imagined or hypothetical performance. But would considering actual performances simply involve concert or record reviews? And would musicology—which generally by-passes performance, seeking meanings or formal designs in the immortal musical work itself—find itself a wallflower at the ball?⁶⁶

What clinches the deal in this paragraph’s direct assault is the unquestioned authority that is given to the experience of being directly exposed to live, present-tense happening. Live musical performance has value precisely *because* it necessitates such exposure, rather than it having value in and of itself.⁶⁷ It follows that if music scholarship is to have value, then it must act accordingly. However, through a series of brilliantly damning comic observations, Abbate paints a picture of music scholarship in thrall instead to what she calls the “cryptographic sublime.” Rather than the dramatic sonic *immediacy* of live performance, music scholars are attracted by *delay*. They get sidetracked by the hermeneutic pleasures attendant on the resistance that music, scripted as social text, exhibits to the giving up of its meaning. For music scholarship, “the carnal and material in their evident and common form, as actual live performances, seem somehow too hot to handle.”⁶⁸ Music

⁶⁶ Abbate 2004, 505.

⁶⁷ Abbate’s essay is strongly influenced by the thinking of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, which is likewise concerned with arguing for the value of presence in live-action happening. Gumbrecht’s most focused articulation of his value system appears in the same year as Abbate’s essay (2004).

⁶⁸ Abbate 2004, 529.

scholarship (music analysis included) must therefore be symptomatic of a lack of courage for getting at the thing itself—of not loving well enough. And if the image of that fate is not enough to make musicology change its tune, then threatening it with being called out as sissy clinches the deal: “would musicology—which generally by-passes performance, seeking meanings or formal designs in the immortal musical work itself—find itself a wallflower at the ball?”⁶⁹ Man up to the haptic, or else! Not a particularly queer sentiment.

Abbate’s essay is driven by the tacit assumption that the *sine qua non* of true love is *detourphobia*: that if we study music, it must be because we love music; and if we love music, then we should love it its most immediate fashion possible. It is a staggeringly literal-minded philosophy—and also, as I argue, not nearly literal-minded enough. But it does provide a good cue for moving toward wrapping things up by reminding us of some observations of Ahmed’s discussed in the first part of my essay. Ahmed was there shown positing that sexual perversion is a form of “delay” in which “you take up time that could have been used to get to the point.” And if Ahmed is right, and “[q]ueer use” means “we linger; we do not get to the point,”⁷⁰ then “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?” is a very straight thing indeed, and the historical fact of its almost immediate success might therefore give us pause within this context where I am considering the possibility of a queer academy. For it seems more than a little disingenuous to say that we become academics involved in the study of music in order to replicate a certain immediacy characteristic of an initial love relationship with music. We certainly need to have an initial *relationship* with music; if we eventually become academics who study music, it is not unlikely that that relationship must have been a pretty serious one, maybe even at first love. But from the perspective of queer theory, why should musicology have to be quite such a monogamous form of fidelity, like the sentimental image of childhood sweethearts who remain together for life?

Queer scholars have long been involved with questioning the assumptions of our notions of love and relationality, and their conceptualizations can be shown to resonate directly with cutting-edge work in music theory. Take, for example, Leo Bersani’s famous reading of the scene in Jean Genet’s 1948 novel *Funeral Rites* (*Pompes funèbres*), in which one man fucks another from behind on the roof of a building at night during the liberation of Paris at the end of the Second World War. The fact that they do not fuck face-to-face is

⁶⁹ Ibid., 505.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 206.

immensely important to both Genet and Bersani, and it transforms the scene from a kind of relational intimacy—analogous to that valorized as the predominant form of loving music in scholars such as Guck and Abbate—into a form of cosmological opening out. The two men are thus “elevated” to a kind of “objectless or generalized ejaculation, a fucking of the world rather than each other.” They “come not with each other but, as it were, *to the world*, and in so doing they have the strange but empowering impression of looking at the night as one looks at the future.”⁷¹ And now take Vivan Luong’s powerful recent critique of our scholarly models for loving music.⁷² Luong takes inspiration from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s insistence that, rather like Genet’s guys fucking on the roof, “we always make love to worlds.”⁷³ As a result, she seeks to explore “what might happen if we viewed love and more specifically, music loving, not just as relations among two (a person and a piece), but among and within dynamic multiplicities or assemblages—networked, vibrant landscapes [*paysages*] comprised of many people, things, and forces.”⁷⁴ And so likewise, when I started to be aware back in the early 1990s that music analysis was making me happy, it came with a dawning realization that music analysis was more than just an expression of a couple in love: of just me and music. It also had other hues—of polyamory and productive forms of betrayal.

For what I loved and, to return to Foucault’s terms, wished to take pleasure in, was something *even more* immediately present and intimate to me within the scene of scholarship than the music that I loved. It was the deep attraction, excitement, and pleasure that I was easily able to gain from the activity of *thinking* about music—not the fact that I was thinking *about* music. Indeed, from my own experience, the ease with which I can experience a disconnect between what music I love, and prefer to listen to and perform, and the music I like to teach and think about is testament to the fact that music affords me just as much a ruse that allows me take pleasure in the act of thinking as it does a reason that ameliorates for the inconvenience of having to suffer the ignominy of living a life of the mind. It was because of *this* event in my life, and not, I might add, because I was not up to scratch, that I was inspired to betray the commitment I had made and give up pursuing a career as a classical viola player. The symptom of this betrayal was the new attachment

⁷¹ Bersani 1995, 166.

⁷² Luong 2017.

⁷³ Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 294.

⁷⁴ Luong 2017, section 1:10.

I made to the pleasures that the act of music analysis, performed for its own sake, could afford.

In this essay, I have scripted these pleasures as queer because of the way they grate against the dark complicities between neoliberal forms of instrumentality and the strategies academics perform to escape the shame of their own internalized sense of impotence and irrelevance. They are queer pleasures because they offer glimpses of habitation in the nowhere places between the disciplinary boundaries and thus offer the potential of loosening the grip that disciplinary professionalism holds over us and that keeps us bound to a capitalist worldview. If at this point of conclusion I have still not yet extensively articulated what the queer academy that music analysis intimates might be, that is in part testament to the huge resistance to it that must first be brought to light. But it is also because that academy *does not yet exist*. And so, to invoke Foucault's words once more, we have still to work on ourselves and invent that manner of being that is still improbable. It is my belief that such work would best begin by coming out about, and becoming infinitely more susceptible to, the pleasures that led us to the academy in the first place. We need to develop fidelity to the possible fact that once we were happy and that that was good enough. Or is that simply *too* queer an acknowledgment to contemplate as foundational?

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