Convergences in Music Analysis (or, Music Theory's Queer Complex)
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Twenty years ago, Dora Hanninen expanded her important work on segmentation and associative organization in the article "Associative Sets, Categories, and Music Analysis." Since the analyst's own associations are what define segments, Hanninen insisted that orientations are important for understanding "the motivation or rationale for particular segments and segmentations" in music analysis.[1] One's "theoretic orientation," she ascertains, is informed by one's interests and perceptual habits, their interpretive goals and one's music context, but, remarks Hanninen, this aspect is often left unsaid in music analysis.[2] In an earlier article concerning "Orientations, Criteria, Segments" Hanninen provoked that it is precisely "what goes unsaid [that] is nonetheless (or therefore) open to misunderstanding."[3] For Hanninen, music analysis is a theorist's way of "*making music*."[4] But music analysis is not merely a manner of conveying the *analyst's* hearing. Analysis can also be a form of collaborative hearing, where one convinces other listeners to hear a work from a peculiar analytical position. And so, Hanninen turns our attention to "theoretic orientations" so as, in her words, to "open up the possibility for precise and reasoned intersubjective discourse."[5]

While music theorists were examining what implications orientation could have for perspectives of music, theorists of another sort also turned to orientations to address epistemologies of experience more generally.[6] Summarizing some theories from this latter context, queer theorist Sara Ahmed's recent essay "Orientations" turns to phenomenology to imagine what a *queer* phenomenology might be.[7] She asks, "what does it mean to be oriented?" and, "What does it mean for sexuality to be lived as oriented? What difference does it make what or who we are oriented toward in the very direction of our desire?"[8] To begin with, Ahmed writes, "Orientations are about starting points."[9] And given the mutual affinities of queer theory and music theory, I, like Ahmed, view "orientation" as a common starting point. By turning a queer eye on music's existing theories, I position queer theory and music theory at a shared vantage point for a new joint venture. Where historicity favors existing models, I account for points at which the disciplines already overlap to avoid establishing a hierarchy between Music Theory *per se* and its queer offshoots, between music theory as primary and queer theory as secondary, or between what came before and which was after. Theory after all is not acquired; it

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[1] Dora Hanninen, "Associative Sets, Categories, and Music Analysis," *Journal of Music Theory* 48/2 (2004):150.

[2] Ibid, 148.

[3] Dora Hanninen, "Orientations, Criteria, Segments: A General Theory of Segmentation for Music Analysis," *Journal of Music Theory* 45/2 (2001): 346.

[4] Ibid, 345. Emphasis added.

[5] Ibid, 347.

[6] Georges Bataille, *Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo*, trans. Mary Dalwood (New York: Walker & Co., 1962),155; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[7] Sara Ahmed, "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12/4 (2006): 544.

[8] Ibid, 543.

[9] Ibid, 544.

is always in the making. It is continuous but also continual, where each theoretical vantage *point* serves as a *field* of convergence or departure, of continuity and discontinuity.

Orientations concern directions, but also *dimensions*.[10] Points of orientation are analogous to what David Lewin terms "EVents of perception," in his investigation "Music Theory, Phenomenology, and Modes of Perception."[11] In the perceptual ConteXT, the EVent is an objectification of an element, whether musical or otherwise, it is a temporary freezing of time to explore one fracture point in all of its dimensions. We may choose to focus on a single "tone," as Edmund Husserl does, or we may focus on a smaller point of contact, on the "acoustical quanta" otherwise known as the grain, the smallest perceivable particle of sound.[12] Barry Truax is an electroacoustic composer who, since the 1970s, has worked almost exclusively with grains, and here I'll take a brief detour to explore Truax's *Song of Songs* from 1992 as one place for converging orientations.

Curtis Roads's book *Microsound* (2001) defines "A grain of sound…[as] a brief microacoustic event, with a duration near the threshold of human auditory perception, typically between…(1 to 100 milliseconds)."[13] When composing with grains, sounds are digitally sampled at a very high rate to isolate between 1000 and 2000 grains per second. As with any sound, each grain is characterized by an envelope—Attack, Sustain, Release. In granular synthesis, the composer reintroduces these click-length grains through various ramps and presets; the manner of interpolation determines the duration, pitch, amplitude, and timbre of the resulting sound. When grains with the same pitch repeatedly overlap in **pitch-synchronous** granular synthesis, we perceive the sound as though it were stretched out from Ba to Ba-a-a-a. Whereas introducing gaps between successive grains produces anything from crackling pops to a round specular cloud. Alternatively, we can combine these, expanding the gaps between successive grains at variable increments to produce a recurring pattern, i.e. rhythm, or we can combine the synchronous and quasi-synchronous techniques to give the impression of a sonic "pulling apart."

Truax's first explorations of granular synthesis began with the work *Androgyny* (1978), and he later developed his technique in *Androgyne, Mon Amour* and *Twin Souls* from '97, in the electroacoustic opera *Powers of Two* (1999), and in *Song of Songs*, for oboe d'amore, English horn, two digital soundtracks and computer graphic images, which I'll introduce here but I explore in greater detail in my dissertation. Truax says that the time-shifting introduced in *Song of Songs* "[prolongs] the sounds into sustained timbral textures," which allow listeners to engage more closely with sound.[14] He further explains that this engagement imbues sound with a "sensuousness, if not an erotic quality...." And when applied to texted speech, he writes, "a word becomes a prolonged gesture, often with smooth contours and enriched timbre. Its emotional impact is intensified and the listener has more time to savour its levels of meaning."[15] I'll now play an example from the movement "afternoon" in *Song of Songs,* aside from prolonging the

[10] Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

[11] David Lewin, "Music Theory, Phenomenology, and Modes of Perception," *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 3/4 (1986): 327-392.

[12] Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, trans. J.S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964).

[13] Curtis Roads, *Microsound* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 86.

[14] http://www.sfu.ca/~truax/gsample.html

[15] http://www.sfu.ca/~truax/songs2.html

speech, notice how the voice interweaves with the sounds of chirping crickets and cicadas. The composer evokes his own associations here to the erotic Mediterranean climate.

Song of Songs is based on the sensual Song of Solomon text from the Bible, and in the piece, two different voices recite the same text retaining the male and female gendered pronouns. Truax modifies the duration, pitch, and timbre of these recorded voices to blur some differences among them while also accentuating similarities. Let's just hear a short example of both voices from later in the movement. When we take the textual blurring in account also with the frequency modulation and convolution of the voices, Truax seems to blur *gender* categories, but also sexual categories, as sexual orientation is often more concerned with *objects* of affection than *subjects*. In the words of Eve Sedgwick,

> "It is a rather amazing fact that, of the very many dimensions along which the genital activity of one person can be differentiated from that of another (dimensions that include preference for certain acts, certain zones or sensations, certain physical types, a certain frequency, certain symbolic investments, certain relations of age or power, a certain species, a certain number of participants, etc. etc. etc.), precisely one, the gender of object choice, emerged from the turn of the century, and has remained as *the* dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous category of 'sexual orientation.'"

In preserving the gendered pronouns of the text, Truax puts into question the sexuality of the speakers, who address one another and also fractured replications of themselves and others. And, in this regard, we should not discount the text's contribution. Some examples of which are: "I sat down under his shadow and his fruit was sweet to my taste," and "The joints of thy thighs are like jewels," and another "thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes."[16] It is on account of the text that the digital processing of the voices leads to a blurring of sexual preferences, by suggesting orientations but by also reorienting our assumptions about the Judeo-Christian heritage of this text.

Truax says that, "The basis of granular synthesis in the seemingly trivial grain" has not only changed how he conceives of composing, but it has changed the way he thinks of music and its larger social and historical functions.[17] He writes, "[Granular synthesis] clearly juxtaposes the micro and macro levels, as the richness of the latter lies in stark contrast to the insignificance of the former."[18] Interpolation then offers an intimate engagement with sound, getting somehow "inside" the sound, but it can also yield to greater abstraction, where previously recognizable sounds are displaced from their sounding sources or simply resituated. And, as with any digital process, there is always some indeterminacy involved. Listening to electroacoustic music can therefore be as disorienting as it is orienting. But Truax provides various anchors for listeners, so that we don't get lost. These anchors provide what electroacoustic composer Leigh Landy calls "the something to hold on to factor."[19] "Something to hold on to" includes maintaining a constant in a musical work, something familiar, be it 1) in the musical domains, such as a recurring pitch, rhythm, or constant duration; 2) textural considerations, certain dynamics,

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[16] http://www.sfu.ca/~truax/songtxt.html

[17] Barry Truax , "Composing with Real-Time Granular Synthesis," *Perspectives of New Music* 28/2 (1990): 123; 132.

[18] Truax , "Composing with Real-Time Granular Synthesis," 123.

[19] Leigh Landy, "The 'Something to Hold on to Factor' in Timbral Composition," *Contemporary Music Review* 10/2 (1994): 49.

timbres, or an inflection, and/or 3) programmatic or concrete elements, the so-called "extrinsic" factors listeners might recognize. And in this regard, Landy promotes the voice as the "most familiar and most versatile instrument there is."[20] What some may be more reticent than others to admit is that, given the erotic sentiments of *Song of Songs*, we listeners "hold on to" Sedgwick's dimensions also while we are exploring quote, "musical domains."[21]

Music analysis is premised on associations and disjunctions. In Christopher Hasty's words, "an analysis or division of a musical object can proceed in countless ways depending upon what we choose to regard as its constituting elements or factors, how we choose 'to carve it up.'"[22] And Dora Hanninen meets Hasty at this juncture, writing, "Much of what we do as music analysts is predicated, in some way, on the recognition and modeling of repetition."[23] In like terms, Sara Ahmed's "queer phenomenology" too turns to repetition, with a metaphor that translates easily into music-analytical terms. She conceives of history as a series of repeating gestures on the macro scale and of these repeating gestures on a smaller scale, as orientation.[24] On the micro level, sound appears discontinuous or granular, and simultaneously at the macro level, music ex-tends from that point at an angle. Indeed analysis *must* account for music's patterned continuities in both the near and far perspectives, since without this "measure of change" analysis loses perspective of the composition as a "work," or conversely it comes in danger of abandoning identity at the microscopic level, as identity is always contextual[25] Identity, from the Latin *idem* meaning same, implies that things, persons, objects, or *grains* are both identifiable and classifiable by associations and by disjunctions. In other words, there is, of course, a politics to identity.

Philosopher Elizabeth Grosz has dedicated much of her recent work to exploring the indeterminacy of sexuality. She writes, "The function of sexual selection is to maximize difference or variation..."[26] and "the world itself comes to vibrate with its possibilities for being otherwise."[27] Here, sexuality is inherently indeterminate, and yet, such an insistence potentially undermines sexual identity, as subjects no longer have a common ground from which to identify with one another.[28] In the words of Eve Sedgwick, when sexual difference is considered *a priori*, we enter into a "stylized violence of sexual differentiation," where difference "must always be *presumed* or *self-assumed*—even, where necessary, imposed—simply on the ground that it can never be finally *ruled out*."[29] In characterizing queerness as immanently aleatoric, always in tangent to dominant normativity, we sacrifice queer specificity for an "asocial ontology" that supplants any stability from which to determine identity; *ergo* we give up even what is sexual or

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[20] Denis Smalley, "Defining Transformations," *Interface* 22/4 (1993): 279-300; Landy, "The 'Something to Hold on to Factor,'" 54.

[21] Christopher Hasty, "Segmentation and Process in Post-Tonal Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 3 (1981): 57.

[22] Christopher F. Hasty, "If Music is Ongoing Experience, What Might Music Theory Be? A Suggestion from the Drastic." *ZGMTH* Sonderausgabe (2010): 205.

[23] Dora A. Hanninen, "A Theory of Recontextualization in Music: Analyzing Phenomenal Transformations of Repetition," *Music Theory Spectrum* 25/1 (2003): 59.

[24] Ahmed, 553.

[25] Boretz "Metavariations" IV-I, 158.

[26] Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 130.

[27] Grosz, 72.

[28] Grosz, 84.

[29] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction Is about You," *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 11-2.

sexed about queering.[30] This "proliferation of subject positions" is ethically suspect, because it institutes a rifting divide between people and things, whereby each individual believes themselves—their identity—to be more important than their neighbors', and is this not the very definition of a God complex?[31]

Thus far *cis*-music theory—the fixed ahistorical notion of Music Theory (in capital letters)—is presumed disinterested or even averse to sexuality. Music theory's "queer complex" then becomes apparent in our habitual orientation away from queer elements, our assumption that such elements don't exist in music theory, and our readiness to engage with some associations while denying others. But what I find most useful about music theory is our discipline's manner of maintaining complex definitions and of leaving room—at any and every juncture—for pulling apart a queer identity. A complex is a determined coordinate—a unit or dwelling, a point in time on a map or in a score: a molecular identity. But, as a singular point within a vast macroscopic scale, the complex is also an instance where similar identities converge. The complement to this *synth-esis* is analysis, from the Greek *analusis*, an *unloosening* of relations, a gradual despecification or granular "pulling apart." The "complex" in my paper's title is therefore a question of orientations.

Like music theory, our current history of electronic music reflects a poverty of queer sensibilities, what Truax recognizes as the absence of "personal voice." He writes, "Art is said to mirror society, but if you look in the mirror and see no reflection, then the implicit message is that you don't exist."[32] On the one hand, Truax sees it as the composer's duty to account for this absence, to "[progress] from being an artist who happens to be a woman, gay, lesbian, transgendered, of colour, and so on, to one for whom any and all of those qualities become integral parts of their work."[33] But, on the other hand, the composer ascribes *listeners* with much less responsibility. Where before certain qualities were muted entirely from musical discourses, such that the universal or majority view was implicitly heterosexual, Truax simply asks that listeners, and namely professional listeners (i.e. music theorists), accede to broader possibilities. He says, "If you don't make heternormative assumptions, it doesn't have to be any more explicit than that. If you don't do it in your discourse, then you won't do it in your work."[34]

' My ambition today was not to codify a new music theory that would subvert the old way of doing things; I aim only to point our awareness toward existing intersections between the queer and musical realms many of us in this room simultaneously inhabit; to thus orient one another toward our mutual interests and converging knowledge. We are told that divergences from the "straight" path are queer, but where queerness breaks away, analysis forms bonds. Segmentation illuminates moments of convergence and provides listener's with something to hold on to, an intersection from which to map analytical alliances. In this sense, "queering" music analysis involves shedding assumptions and gaining new insight from existing models. And so, intersubjective discourse might then begin at the complex of our mutual convergences.

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[30] Jordana Rosenberg, "The Molecularization of Sexuality: On Some Primitivisms of the Present," *Theory & Event* 17/2 (2014): n. pag. Web. 23 October, 2014.

[31] Grosz, 84.

[32] Barry Truax, "Homoeroticism and Electroacoustic Music: Absence and Personal Voice," *Organised Sound* 8/1 (2003): 119.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Jerry Pergolesi, "With A Friendly Disposition and Unassuming Personality, Barry Truax Would Hardly Be Thought of As A Trailblazing Radical," interview with Barry Truax for LGBTQ leadership, *Musicworks* 108 (2010): 27.