

Queer Music Theory

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Queer musical phenomenology refers to the practice of disorientation away from established music theories, including one's own. In Lewin's "Phenomenology" article, queering can be understood as his intentional, self-critical, conceptual disorientations—first departing from Schenkerian theory, and then moving toward and finally away from the perception-model. Through a close reading of Lewin in combination with Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, which offers a theory of embodied lives marginalized by pathways of normativity, I examine the generalizable application of theories such as queer phenomenology to another domain beyond gender and sexual embodiment: music theory at large. Lewin's practice models a form of music theory that I regard as phenomenologically queer.

Keywords: phenomenology, David Lewin, queer, sexuality.

Two decades since its emergence, queer music research continues to sustain its vitality—but much more so in the discipline of musicology than in music theory. The emergence of this situation is rooted in the complex history and genealogy of the music research disciplines, but the critical issue might be summed up as: What does music theory have to do with gender and sexual embodiment? While musical scholarship has demonstrated precisely that relationship, beginning most notably with Susan McClary's music analyses in *Feminine Endings*, gender and sexual embodiment continue to perturb contemporary music theorists.¹ With an eye on working toward an anti-normative practice of music theory, this article begins with a reading of David Lewin's theory of musical phenomenology through Sara Ahmed's "queer phenomenology" of embodied lives marginalized by pathways of normativity; for Ahmed, disorientation caused by deviation from well-trodden paths has ethical connotations which I discern in Lewin's self-critical moves—first departing from Schenkerian theory, and then moving toward and finally away from his own perception-model. The article then discusses the conceptual conundrum of embodied gender and sexual specificity versus the generic anti-normativity of "queer," before outlining the disciplinary formation of "queer music theory." I should state from the outset that this article is an attempt to move by means of Lewin toward queer music theory, rather than a definitive and comprehensive statement of what queer music theory is—something that may not be possible in the moment of what I regard as queer music theory's emergence. The article gestures, through a close reading of Lewin in combination with select readings from queer theory, toward a methodology of "queer formalism."

LEWIN'S "PHENOMENOLOGY" ARTICLE

While music theory has often been criticized as abstract to the point of not being relatable, some music theorists have shown

an acute awareness of this problem. As David Lewin recounted in his famous article "Music Theory, Phenomenology, and Modes of Perception": "I worry a lot about the many examinations I have attended and given, in which students are certified as competent musical 'perceivers' primarily on the basis of the way in which they run critical analyses of given art works, using received languages L that are not music. Sometimes a student becomes paralyzed if I go to the piano, play something, and ask: 'Do you mean, like *this*?'"²

That the received Language is *disembodied* is indicated by the student's failure to connect that Language with what Lewin calls the "acoustic signal."³ "Language" is defined here in the broadest sense of a system of signs, which can encompass anything from Schenkerian symbols, to mathematical equations, and algorithms in computer science that Lewin draws on in the same article to counter disembodiment.

Because of a dissatisfaction with the evident disconnect between Languages of music theory and students' listening experience, Lewin devised what he called the perception or "p"-model in his "Phenomenology" article, in which "p=(EV, CXT, P-R-LIST, ST-LIST)" (which hardly seems to approach embodiment at first sight).⁴ As alternatives to alienating Languages such as Schenkerian theory, Lewin proposes two of his own Languages in the article, beginning with computer science equations of mathematical precision (the perception- or "p"-model), and ending in poetic rhapsody. Although Lewin devised the p-model in response to the disconnect

² Lewin (1986, 379).

³ Ibid., 351.

⁴ A detailed explication of the p-model can be found in Moshaver (2012, 182–87). Using the language of Artificial Intelligence (computer speak), Lewin articulates the p-model as p=(EV,CXT,P-R-LIST,ST-LIST): perception = (event[s], context, list of perception-and-relation pair, list of statements in stipulated language). A parser determines EV and CXT, while an EVALuator determines the P-R-LIST and ST-LIST of EV-CXT.

¹ McClary (2002).

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Ver - driesst dich denn mein Gruss so schwer? ver -
 Du blon - des Köpf - chen, komm her - vor! her -

14

stört dich denn mein Blick so sehr? So muss ich wie³- der
 vor aus eu - rem run - den Thor, ihr blau - en Mor - gen -

EXAMPLE 1. Schubert, *Morgengruß*, mm. 11–16

between music theory and listening experience, he ultimately came within the same article to view his own p-model as still inadequate. In this section of the article, I examine Lewin’s “Phenomenology” article (Lewin’s “Phenomenology” from this point) in light of recent scholarship on queer modalities of phenomenology. I begin with my own narrativization of the queer alterity of rejection in Schubert’s *Morgengruß*, before moving on to the much more technical, perceptual insights of Lewin’s analysis of the song in his article.

There is something queer about the rejected male courter, who, spurned by the one he loves, fails to enter into heteronormativity. In *Morgengruß*, the miller’s entreaties are met with rejection. In that crushing moment, there is a sudden deviation from the original intention of courtship, and feelings of shame and anxiety arise. One is forced to recalibrate, to square passion with reality. This is expressed in tonal ambiguity, when—in one possible description of the tonal plan—C major veers without warning into a D-minor phrase excluding the implied tonic, and then a C-minor sequence (also without the implied tonic), in mm. 12–15 (Example 1). The cheerfulness of the miller’s greeting at the opening of the song (*Guten Morgen, schöne Müllerin!*) turns into anxious self-questioning as to whether the miller maid turns her head away because she finds his greetings and glance offensive. The miller is disoriented because of a shift in the way one relates to the world.

In *Morgengruß*, the miller’s disorientation comes from the miller maid’s rejection, and this is aesthetically expressed in the tonal disorientation of the chromatic modulation to two minor keys with the implied tonics excluded (D minor: G- as iv, A+ as V, missing i; C minor: F- as iv; G+ as V, missing i), matching the textual question marks, as Lewin shows in Fig. 8.7 of his article. In fact, Lewin’s analysis of this passage is inspired by what can be seen as a *disorientation of his own*—away

from the Schenkerian-hierarchical reading, of the entire passage as the elaboration of the dominant of C major, as the *only* possible reading. As Maryam Moshaver noted, “the perception model apparatus . . . does not begin from a theory-neutral position in its parsing procedure [to determine the segment of music under consideration]. It uses the process to direct the reader . . . to an insight whose source and origin is . . . of a different language [other than Schenkerian theory].”⁵ Lewin’s p-model presents *multiple* perceptions that could be true to the same “acoustic signal,” encompassing both Schenkerian-based perception, and perceptions that are more localized and thus correspond to the disorientation caused by modulatory disruptions. He presents nine interlocking perceptions using his p-model, each corresponding to some portion of a fixed number of measures in the musical score (mm. 9–15). Each perception is “recursive” in that it impinges on other perception-contexts of varying spans that overlap in terms of musical measures, and may look beyond the stated measures toward anterior or posterior measures.⁶ The relationships between perceptions include not just implication and realization (Narmour 1997), but also “inclusion,” “denial,” “reinforcement,” “realization,” “annihilation,” “confirmation,” “elaboration,” “modification,” “sequential expansion,” “support,” and “qualification,” as summarized in Lewin’s Figure 7.⁷ Different perceptions tabularized in summary form in Figure 7 are elucidated as analytical examples in Figure 8. They can be divided into perceptions of tonal “disorientation” (Figures 8.3, 8.4, 8.6, and 8.7) and perceptions of the Schenkerian variety (Figures 8.2, 8.5, 8.8, and 8.9).

⁵ Moshaver (2012, 209).

⁶ Lewin (1986, 330).

⁷ Ibid., 345.

Whereas most theorists would have ended the article at the point where they have laid out a complete theory, Lewin disorients himself immediately from the newly minted p-model, and gestures toward a different definition and practice of music theory. After laying out the new phenomenological Language of the p-model, Lewin proceeds to argue that it does not even qualify as a “theory of music.”

[S]ince “music” is something you *do*, and not just something you *perceive* (or understand), a theory of music can not be developed fully from a theory of musical perception. . . . Actually I am not very sure what a “theory of music” might be, or even a “theory of modern Western art-music,” but so far as I can imagine one (of either) that includes a theory of musical perception, I imagine it including the broader study of what we call people’s “*musical behavior*,” a category that includes competent listening to be sure, but also competent production and performance.⁸

By “competent production and performance,” Lewin meant a range of activities from everyday noises (metal objects) and rhythms (walking) to rehearsals and self-awareness in performance. At the heart of Lewin’s anxiety over the disembodiment of a music theory focused exclusively on listening perception is its separation from music as “something you *do*.” Whereas the composer and performer engage in the “act” of perceiving music, music theory purportedly offers only an “aid” to or “preconceived ‘perception.’”⁹ Lewin’s concern over disembodied music theory seems to center on a personal conviction that the perception of the theorist is somehow not equal to perception in the activities of composition and performance. There are, however, parallels that can be drawn between theory, composition, and performance because all of them involve ways of hearing. A theory of music invites particular aural perceptions, while compositional rumination involves the consideration of multiple possibilities of realization. Performers think about music’s “recursive” nature, the way that later passages are built upon and comment on earlier ones. But these parallels were not sufficient to convince Lewin that the p-model was sufficiently embodied.

As Moshaver suggests, Lewin’s dissatisfaction with the p-model might have arisen from his own bracketing of the kinetic continuity of musical temporality in the overlapping percept-series of spatialized time fragments.¹⁰ Rather than a single experience encompassing the entirety of Example 1 as it unfolds in a single time stream, the p-model stacks up a series of incompatible perceptions anchored in the same musical passage, each perception based on a slightly different segmentation. These overlapping perceptions reflect a particular understanding of phenomenology that is expressed in Lewin’s article. Lewin was influenced by West Coast philosophers (Izchak Miller and Hubert Dreyfus) who assume a “split between sense and reference” in their reading of the

phenomenology of Edmund Husserl.¹¹ In Lewin’s musical terms, this means that the same acoustic signal (the same chord on the score as “referent”) can be perceived differently (chords in mm. 12–13 heard as either part of a local D-minor or global C-minor tonality) because the musical context (“sense”), as defined by the musical segment, is different. Through differently segmented contextualizations or a different “sense” of the music, different musical perceptions converge on the same acoustic signal or “referent” (the Husserlian “determinable-X”).¹² In other words, it is because Lewin drew on West Coast phenomenology that his p-model ended up reflecting a sense/reference split, which, I argue, crucially informs his conception of the dichotomy between music theorists (inner “sense”-making) and music makers (who produce the external “referent,” or acoustic signal). This conception reflects Lewin’s dissatisfaction with the p-model, and thus he points to what he regards as a “post-Husserlian” way of thinking that closes the gap between subject and object.¹³

In the final pages of Lewin’s article, he proposes to close the embodiment gap through a “poetics of analysis,”¹⁴ switching from systemic theory of musical fundamentals (a p-model that applies to all music perception) to detailed reading of the particularities of an empirical work (“analysis”). The key source supporting Lewin’s proposal here is Harold Bloom’s famous discussion of the anxiety of influence, according to which the meaning of a poem can only be discerned in “another poem” (as opposed to an analysis of the poem), since poets inevitably speak through others’ voices. Whereas a “Bloomian” view allows only listening to actual music to be considered as “real” perception (“another poem”), a “post-Bloomian” view supposedly allows musical *analysis* to be considered as *poetic*, a perception in and of itself. This is the point in Lewin’s argument where he reverses the earlier privileging of the acoustic signal in the dichotomy of music theorists versus music *makers* (composers and performers). In contrast to music theory as a mere “aide,” the “poetics” espoused by Lewin comprises a combination of “more-or-less-traditional” poetry, “verbal musical composition,” critical theory, and analysis.¹⁵ Here is Lewin’s description of the G♭/F♯ enharmonicity in the development section of the first movement from Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony: “And then, after all [the tonicization of G♭], you throw off your G♭ cloak and reveal yourself enharmonically as F♯ all the time!! The enharmonic shift takes place when the ‘becalmed’ accordion-type alternations of the you-minor triad in the winds and strings shift to a you-six-three harmony that is spelled as a D triad in first inversion.”¹⁶ Lewin uses rhetoric to conjoin *valid* phenomenological perception to the external acoustic signal in the form of “you-minor” and “you-six-three,”

¹¹ Kane (2011, 31).

¹² *Ibid.*, 30.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴ Lewin (1986, 382).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 383.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 390.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 377, emphasis added.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 381–82.

¹⁰ Moshaver (2012, 210).

grounding the perceptions at least partially in “*you*,” lest they should appear solely to be facets of an objective acoustic signal that support the ontology of an independent musical work, about which Schenkerians can assert hierarchical truths that preclude “*your*” perceptions.

Harold Bloom’s theory of the anxiety of influence was conceptualized in the 1970s when feminist and queer voices constituted forces that destabilized masculine identity, and the theory is predicated on a self-sufficient, impervious model of creative subjectivity that is deeply masculinist.¹⁷ However, Bloom’s theory was critical for Lewin in that it served as an escape hatch from the technical Language of Lewin’s p-model, allowing music analysts to express themselves in poetry and “verbal musical composition.” For Lewin, a *post*-Bloomian theory allows for the extension of “real” perception from the “actual” musical experience of music makers, to the act of music analysis. In other words, Bloom enabled Lewin to disorient himself away from what Lewin regarded as the insufficient embodiment of even the p-model. Beginning with Lewin’s observation that there is a disconnect between Schenkerian theory and students’ aural perception, he effected a series of critical disorientations, which led to changes in the Languages employed, from Schenkerian theory, to the p-model, to the “post-Bloomian” poetics of analysis.

I would imagine that Lewin’s disorientations were not easily executed. In many ways, it is easier to follow the established route and adopt established music theories, rather than to occupy a marginal position. Perhaps this is why Lewin chose to articulate his understanding of phenomenology using a highly technical language that is mainstream in music theory, rather than leaping into poetry. Yet Lewin’s attempt to catapult himself outside of his own p-model is an admirable move, one that reflects a willingness to relinquish the self-contained, impervious model of subjectivity that Bloom’s anxious artist inhabits. Lewin’s critical disorientations as a music theorist—from Schenker to the p-model to poetry—exemplify the kind of *productive* disorientations found in what Sara Ahmed calls “queer phenomenology.”¹⁸

Whereas disorientations are disruptive, *orientations* comprise established social lives as embodied in practices, relationships, people, and material objects. Our lives are laid out through affiliations to groups (race, gender, class, sexuality, politics, profession, family members), and affinities to friends, lovers and colleagues; affiliations and affinities are expressed in people, objects, actions, ideas, and feelings—photographs of loved ones, contact lists, smiles for a congenial colleague, furniture in the family home, the family itself, the neighborhood you live in, the places you frequent, the ways you spend money, the organization you work for, the party you vote for, stolen glances at a crush, feelings of love, aspirations for a better life. Rejection—whether voluntary as in Lewin’s rejection of his own p-model, or involuntary as in the miller maid’s

rejection of the lad—means that one’s world no longer contains the promise of stability, but is filled with uncertainty: the world becomes *queer*, disoriented.

For Ahmed, an orientation is phenomenological because it involves embodied “lines.”¹⁹ These lines that bodies follow are not literal lines, but are the effect of what bodies do repeatedly, things that bodies reach for, spaces that bodies inhabit. Because the phenomenology of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty is conceived from the point of view of what bodies *can* do with ease, what bodies *can* reach for without obstruction, and the spaces bodies *can* inhabit without obstacles, Ahmed regards their phenomenology as describing lines of whiteness—the philosophers’ thought expresses the *privilege* that comes from being white.²⁰ The body that can follow the line of whiteness easily orients itself with regard to people, objects, actions, ideas, and feelings. In contrast, the phenomenology of non-white bodies comprises stoppage, obstructions, and obstacles—in other words, the *absence* of a line. When white and non-white bodies, cultures, and spaces intersect, the result is an ambivalence that stems from the unpredictable mix of conformity with and deviation from pre-existing lines and directions, which Ahmed calls “queer phenomenology.”

QUEER AT LARGE

Queer phenomenology offers to us a theory with which to think through the apparently intractable issue of embodiment within music theory, alluded to at the beginning of this article. On the one hand, hermeneutic readings like McClary’s have shown how analysis can be used to support feminist and queer interpretations of gender and sexual subjectivity. In addition, scholars like Fred Everett Maus have shown how *practices of music theory* are themselves gendered and sexual; in his view, systemic theory is a masculinist practice designed to ameliorate the (male) music theorist’s anxiety over his perceived passivity in listening to music.²¹ (We can note here the “infectiousness” of conceptual vocabulary extending from subjectivity as embodied in the music to the subjectivity of music theorists; queer phenomenology similarly extends from Schubert’s *Morgengruß* to Lewin’s thought processes.) On the other hand, music theorists at large continue to relegate gender and sexual issues to musicology, preserving a music theory whose analytical goals often concern pitch and rhythm.

To understand the complexities of musical embodiment, we might turn to a parallel conflict within queer theory. In recent years, the conceptual anti-normativity of queer theory has come under critique as scholars re-center people’s

¹⁷ Whitesell (1994).

¹⁸ Ahmed (2006, 157).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6. In the business meeting of the Queer Resource Group at the Society for Music Theory conference (held jointly with the American Musicological Society) in 2014, Danielle Sofer presented a paper, “Convergences in Music Analysis (or, Music Theory’s Queer Complex),” in which she suggested that Lewin’s phenomenology is a productive starting point for queer music theory.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 114–15.

²¹ Maus (1993).

embodied lives at the heart of their work. At the point of its euphoric emergence, queer theory promised to be the voice of opposition to everything that is normative, dominant, and oppressive in society. For David Halperin, “queer is . . . *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence.”²² Halperin’s work is a logical extension of Judith Butler’s seminal *Gender Trouble*: gender is not an essence but a series of performative acts that contain the possibility of subversion of the heteronormative script of binary masculinity and femininity, even as this script exerts its power. Halperin’s theory of queerness is a *formalist* take on Butler: if embodied performative acts of gender can *deviate* from a standard script, perhaps deviation in *general* can be definitional for all forms of queerness, embodied or not.

For scholars of intersectional studies, however, Halperin’s theory of queerness represents a form of white privilege that can afford to ignore the lives of actual LGBTQ persons. Patrick Johnson, for example, argues for an intersectional, embodied analysis of sexuality and race, which seeks to ground analysis in lived experience, rather than what the author casts as Butlerian “discursive” performativity.²³ Rather than gender non-normativity as construed by Butler on the basis of J. L. Austin’s theory that speech is performative (e.g., the phrase “I promise” actually *does* something, and is not just words said out loud), Johnson observes that some lives are *indelibly* embodied, such as the lives of queers of *color* who fall back insistently on racial identity because of the catastrophic effects of racial oppression on their lives. Queers of *color* do not have the white privilege to perform non-normative gender on a page, when they are unable to perform their way out of racial oppression and a racialized existence in their real lives. The implication of Johnson’s argument is that queer studies must pay heed to the embodiment of race and sexuality in particular, and to embodiment in general: there is an irreducible particularity to embodied lives that makes them more than just generically anti-normative.

While the re-centering of embodied LGBTQ lives in queer theory is a critical and necessary move, my worry is that a queer theory which is *solely* concerned with sexual and racial lives may miss out on the opportunity to garner as many allies as possible who are white and/or non-LGBTQ-identified. Ahmed’s theory of queer phenomenology is indeed grounded in embodied lives: *white* embodiment is expressed in lines connecting people, actions, objects, and spaces, thereby forming an orientation, while *disorientation* is experienced by people of *color* who are treated as interruptions to those lines. I cannot overstress the importance of keeping in mind Ahmed’s motivations in conceptualizing queer phenomenology, which was intended to address the precarious, embodied lives of queers of *color*, by disorienting the white male canon of philosophers of phenomenology such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. At the

same time, while Ahmed emphasizes the sexual specificity of queer embodiment, she does not deny the agenda of a broader anti-normativity which can drive progressive politics. This is in spite of the fact that she was responding to critics who held that “queer” should retain its broad anti-normative denotation, since even gays and lesbians can follow *normative* orientations (e.g., marriage)—and thus are not necessarily fully queer in the anti-normative sense. “Queer describes a sexual *as well as* political [generically anti-normative] orientation.”²⁴ Ahmed’s text is characterized by an expansive tone, as seen in her concluding remark that queer phenomenology should accommodate “those whose lives and loves make them oblique, strange, and out of place.”²⁵ Describing the productiveness of disorientation, she writes: “If orientations point us to the future, to what we are moving toward, then they also keep open the possibility of changing directions and of finding other paths.”²⁶ There is, within Ahmed’s text, a productive disorientation that allows us to see how queer phenomenology can be enabling for both “sexual” and “political” queerness.

The power of Ahmed’s theory is that it can be applied to *any* kind of disorienting deviation, *and is also* tied to specific experiences of racial and/or sexual marginality. Because Ahmed articulated queerness in the broad *experiential* terms of phenomenology, her theory is not limited in its applications to an understanding of race, gender or sexuality, although it *does* critically contribute to just such an understanding. Queer phenomenology is simultaneously a theory of non-normative racial and sexual lives, *and* a theory of non-normative moments of rejection, critique, and intellectual foment (the rejection of the miller lad, the critical shifts within Lewin’s thought). By allowing queer phenomenology a broad ambit, we accommodate all those who are committed to challenging the status quo, allowing innovative queer theorists of phenomenology (or “performance” etc.) to provide progressives at large with ever more tools for fighting the hegemonic forces of normativity.

GAY IN PARTICULAR

The dynamics of what I am calling “queerness at large,” versus empirical and embodied LGBTQ lives, speak to a fundamental condition of modern knowledge as explicated by Foucault in *The Order of Things*. A field of knowledge such as history is predicated on the finitude of an empirical person’s cognition of temporality. My sense of time is limited, but I can project my understanding of time onto the discipline of history, such that I might conceptualize originary points in time, e.g., the beginnings of Western civilization in classical antiquity—Foucault assesses this conceptual projection with the “analytic of finitude” as applied to history and knowledge in general.²⁷ This empirical-transcendental dynamic captures the universalizing

²² Halperin (1995, 62).

²³ Johnson (2005).

²⁴ Ahmed (2006, 172), emphasis added.

²⁵ Ibid., 179.

²⁶ Ibid., 178.

²⁷ Foucault (1970, 312).

impulse of modern knowledge, and applies equally to queer theory as well as to music theory. The pitfalls of universality are well known and do not need to be rehashed. Here, I will note that rejecting the fictions of universalization (e.g., originary points in history) does not preclude us from directing transcendentalization toward political, coalitional, and communicative ends—as opposed to a haphazard projection of one’s own preconceptions onto all that exists.²⁸ My aim in this section is to cautiously and strategically direct the transcendentalizing function of knowledge, which is at work in Ahmed’s own thought, with the end goal of broadening support for queer music theory.

Through queer phenomenology, I have elucidated the queerness at large of both *Morgengruß* and Lewin’s “Phenomenology.” There is however a more specific reading of Lewin’s article in terms of gender fluidity and the sexual act which I will advance in this section, and which will illuminate the potential advantages of taking a two-pronged, empirical-transcendental approach to knowledge production. I argue that such an approach helps us to form alliances within the community of music theorists. In “Masculine Discourse in Music Theory,” Fred Maus speaks to the issues of systemic Languages and listening experience that haunt Lewin’s article.²⁹ A crucial analytic in Maus’s article is gender and sexual embodiment. Music theorists, he argues, feel passive in the listening act and respond through the masculine, controlling imposition of systemic music theory to compensate for it. This power dynamic can be construed in relative abstraction, but the scene of the asymmetrical male/female, active/passive, top/bottom sexual act finds its way into Maus’s text: to succumb to this “sexualized conception of listening” is “to get fucked. Perhaps a rigidly maintained ‘top-down’ position [of imposing systemic theory] offers a way of getting on top.”³⁰ Maus explains that he meant to “economically” convey with the “get fucked” expletive how a *male* music theorist is anxious about his masculinity.³¹ In the following, I use Maus’s reading to understand Lewin’s article as inhabiting a gay-friendly subjectivity, and even as accommodating (as opposed to expressing) a gay bottom subjectivity,³² before returning to a more encompassing notion of queer (LGBTQ) gender and sexuality (and generic queer anti-normativity) in the next section.³³

Against normative masculinity, the recession of the p-model in Lewin’s “Phenomenology” article, in favor of a “poetics of analysis,” implies the emergence of a non-normative subject who no longer feels the need to exert systematized control—the transition from the command of technical language within a systemic theory, to the literary language of a relatively impressionistic analytical style, signals a shift of gender/sexual position and its associated power dynamics. Here is the passage again: “And then, after all [the tonicization of G♭], you throw off your G♭ cloak and reveal yourself enharmonically as F♯ all the time!! The enharmonic shift takes place when the “becalmed” accordion-type alternations of the you-minor triad in the winds and strings shift to a you-six-three harmony that is spelled as a D triad in first inversion.”³⁴

The poetics of analysis frees Lewin to express himself in high camp of the double exclamation mark (“!!”): the enharmonic F♯ *comes out* of the closet, shedding the “cloak” of G♭; “you” assume different drag costumes, first in the “you-minor triad” then in “you-six-three harmony.” As a first step in understanding Lewin’s new form of expression, we might note the *continuities* between the Languages of poetic analysis and the p-model, which are markedly different. First, both express Lewin’s theory of the phenomenology of musical temporality: descriptive statements should be made with reference to perception of a particular moment in a listener’s experience, and the moment should be related to a specific context. Second, from one perspective, Lewin’s poetic writing is just as masculine as the p-model’s technical language, in that both could be read as assuming the passivity of the listener who receives either multiple p-model perceptions or a series of impressions imposed in the form of “you-minor triad” (versus “I”). Perhaps the masculine sense of agency in Lewin’s poetic analysis is intended to ameliorate the music theorist’s perceived loss of agency (as theorized by Maus) relative to music makers whose agential, embodied experience Lewin tries precisely to capture in literary language. It is notable, however, that Lewin made a distinct switch of languages, from the systemic control of the p-model to a freer rhapsodic prose that can reasonably be read as a form of queering that expresses at least some degree of gender fluidity. Perhaps the new form of campy expression comes from a theorist who is less fearful of “getting fucked” (to continue Maus’s thread). Perhaps the poetic theorist is a new kind of theorist whose subjectivity can be described as *gay-friendly*—this theorist has flipped from the homophobia of being penetrated to the *post-homophobic* state, or has even (who knows?) developed a desire for musical “penetration”—a desire

28 For a critique of the mantra of articulating contextual differences at the cost of frameworks that are needed for tackling global neoliberalism, see Currie (2009). For a review of recent considerations of commonalities such as a shared human vulnerability, see Blochl and Lowe (2015, 35–41).

29 Maus (1993).

30 Ibid., 273. The problematic of “Who’s on top?” in the relation between the sounding music and the listener is posed in Cusick (1994). For a key contribution to the theorization of how the minority subjectivity of the scholar should intersect with minority studies, see Ramsey (2001).

31 Ibid., 281.

32 Maus (2013).

33 By invoking gay sex, I am not implying that this form of sexuality is necessarily transgressive and progressive in and of itself, particularly because a

sexual politics must focus critical attention not just on sexual diversity but also sexual persecution. Rather, I am using one form of alternative sexuality to elucidate the empirical-transcendental dynamics of modern knowledge: empirical sexual embodiment of a specific group of people is evoked in musical contexts in a way that speaks to music theorists at large, regardless of their sexualities and sexual practices.

34 Lewin (1986, 390).

to relinquish control and be utterly overwhelmed by the music, to be *told* to become “you-minor triad.” If this theorist willingly submits to the power of the composer’s agential persona in the music over him, he could be also described as a “masochist.”³⁵ If the masochist were a gay man, he would be a gay *bottom* (in the sense of submissive).

To some readers, I must be stretching the limits of credulity by drawing an equivalence between Lewin’s poetics of analysis, on the one hand, and not just a male who is anally penetrated, but specifically a *gay bottom* who *identifies* with that sexuality and position. But I would point out that this is a logical end point of the gendered and sexual reading of systemic music theory proffered by Maus. This is where the reading *could* go, and perhaps it should. There are surely music theorists who are gay bottoms, and the notion of a subjectivity (of the gay bottom) which desires instead of fearing *musical* penetration is surely comprehensible to the average reader. After all, audiences (gay bottoms or not) in concert halls sit passively in the dark, taking in the music without much control over what is acoustically sounded. Together, musical and sexual “penetration”—both *construed broadly as an open-armed receptivity* (toward the top or the composer’s persona)—express the empirical-transcendental dynamic of knowledge making. We might view sexual penetration as the “empirical” base that not all music theorists might accept (not everyone is sexual, nor sexual in the same way), whereas musical penetration is the delimited and strategic “transcendentalization” of sexual penetration *in musical terms* for *specifically the readership comprising music theorists* (the delimited context)—the point is not that one or the other term is essentially empirical or transcendental, but that concepts have an infectious quality and can travel across domains.

Parallel to the former conceptual traveling from sexual to musical “penetration” is Ahmed’s critical move in theorizing queer phenomenology not through LGBTQ lives but through racial minorities: the theory informs *both* sets of lives as well as their intersection. We might also understand conceptual traveling through the impetus of communicative texts, which convey knowledge of, for instance, minority lives to a reader in such a way as to evoke the reader’s empathy, thereby “transcendentalizing” that information (again, in the delimited context of text and reader). The *key* point is that consideration of gay bottom subjectivity allows us to illuminate certain practices of listening and thus constitutes one form of the practice of queer music theory that is based specifically in the embodied experiences of gay persons *but can also* speak to the musical experience of music theorists at large. By evoking the masochistic gay bottom, we can incorporate tenets from BDSM theory (BDSM is a combination of BD/DS/SM—bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism), such as the theory that the gay bottom is not passive but actively directs and limits the repertoire of painful-pleasurable sensations that the top visits upon him. The embodied

experience of the gay bottom allows us to reconceptualize the supposed passive receptivity of the listener as a form of agential perception.

QUEER FORMALISM

Lewin’s article lends itself to a queer reading and (crucially) to an exemplification of the empirical-transcendental dynamic that I regard as critical both to understanding the challenges faced by queer music theory, and to broadening support for it. While what we might call a “queer formalism” might be close to the heart of queer music theory—insofar as much existing scholarship on gender, sexuality, and music theory can broadly be categorized under that label, formalism as a concept is mired in extensive and well-deserved critiques. In the context of music theory, “formalism” has been understood by its opponents (especially since the 90s) as a focus on musical form to the detriment of musical experience and meaning, e.g., Schenkerian, mathematical or other abstract reductions that do not cohere with “naïve” listening experiences. However, as Lewin’s article has suggested, there are ways of approaching music theory that respond to listening experience: we might describe theories of musical ambiguity—when established and expected lines are disrupted as in queer phenomenology (e.g., tonal disorientation in *Morgengruß*)—as theories of queer formalism broadly construed. Queer formalism can be a flexible category dedicated to the exploration of music, repertoires, and the practice and nature of music theory in terms of queer gender and sexuality, as well as queerness at large. Queer formalism attends to what is heard and experienced in the temporal span of a musical performance, to that which is audible in principle but which may be embodied in broad swaths of repertoire, and to the practices and nature (a meta-“formalism”) of music theory itself. Queer formalism can be divided into the following categories:

1. Analyses supporting gendered or sexual interpretations of particular music works, e.g., McClary’s *Feminine Endings*,³⁶ as well as recent publications, such as Hisama on the black gay composer Julius Eastman,³⁷ and Peraino on the transgender synthpop composer Wendy Carlos.³⁸
2. Theories of musical non-normativity broadly construed, such as musical ambiguity (e.g., Schubert’s *Morgengruß*), and theories of non-normative musical form (including Raykoff on formal deviation in piano transcriptions that paraphrase the original Lieder, and Rycenga on experimental form in songs of the English rock band Yes).³⁹
3. Theories of the relation between gender and sexual categories, on the one hand, and general categories of musical

³⁶ McClary (2002), especially the discussion of Tchaikovsky on pp. 69–79.

³⁷ Hisama (2015).

³⁸ Peraino (2015).

³⁹ Raykoff (2002), Rycenga (2006).

³⁵ Maus (2004).

procedures and tonalities, on the other, e.g., Scherzinger on the relation between tone row symmetrical inversion and what was understood as gender and sexual “inversion,” and Hubbs on the relation between straight/gay and tonal and post-tonal repertoires.⁴⁰

4. Theories of the relation between gender and sexuality, and practices of the music theorist at large, or the very nature—the politics, practices, and ontology—of the field of music theory,⁴¹ as well as recent papers presented at AMS/SMT 2014 (in the panel “Queer Music Theory: Interrogating Notes of Sexuality”) and SMT 2015 (in the “Queering Musical Form” panel). As of this writing, the conference papers are not published yet, but they indicate an emerging direction in queer formalism and thus brief discussion here is warranted. Papers from the 2014 panel touched on the politics and practices of formalism. James Currie spoke on formalism as a variety of “cruising” (referring to gay hook ups) that could potentially subvert the trappings of identity-mapping in the neoliberal era, when Mexicans in the United States are identified and subjected to the contradictory demands of transnational capitalism versus white nationalism.⁴² Judith Peraino discussed the alternative, abridged, “queer” temporality of the practice of music theory as embodied in analytical graphs, versus a performance recording.⁴³ Two papers from the 2015 panel by Marianne Kielian-Gilbert and Judith Lochhead touched on the ontology of social and sexual differentiation beyond gender, sexual and other binaries, and how this can be embodied in music theory.⁴⁴ The key takeaway here is that, these papers point to an emerging trend of examining the “form” of music theory itself—as opposed to “form” as it relates to works, types of musical form, and types of audible musical features. If music theory is a theory of musical form broadly construed, *queer* formalism—in addition to the consideration of musical sound—can contribute to a *self-reflexive* view of music theory by drawing on queer theory, examining the ethical promise, temporal practices, ontological status, and gendered and sexual aspects of music theory and music theorists. Queer theory and queer theorists’s concoction of queer formalism, queer phenomenology, queer temporality, and queer ontology are incontrovertible evidence of the empirical-transcendental dynamic at work. Our task as knowledge producers is to be aware of this dynamic, and to use it to our political advantage, taking care to delimit the scope of any transcendentalisms

while always remembering and valuing the embodied lives that inform our conceptual interventions.

CONCLUSION

A pair of well-known articles rehearses a series of disorientations contained within Lewin’s “Phenomenology”: Kerman’s “How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out,” and Agawu’s “How We Got out of Analysis, and How to Get Back in Again.” Kerman advocates for a broad cultural evaluation of music’s aesthetic value in terms of expression and meaning, in contrast with technical means of elucidating musical works. Regarding the different assignation of *Urlinie* scale degrees proposed by analysts for Schumann’s *Aus meinen Thränen sprissen*, Kerman writes that “more serious interest might attach to this debate if someone would undertake to show how its outcome affects the way people actually *hear, experience, or respond* to the music.”⁴⁵ Thus Kerman in 1980 foreshadows Lewin’s 1986 disorientation from Schenker toward the p-model, both driven by the desire for a practice of music theory/analysis that addresses listening experiences. Lewin’s “solution” to the dichotomy of disembodied music theory, on the one hand, and embodied composition and performance, on the other—through a “poetics” that *resolves* the embodiment gap in music theory—is paralleled in Agawu’s 2004 article, in which Agawu rejects Kerman’s position and conceptualizes music analysis *as* composition and performance. Music analysis for Agawu is more than both the external written *texts* of music analysis publications⁴⁶ and the *inner* auditory ability to extrapolate the final acoustic realization of music from the skeletal form of what is commonly called “reduction.”⁴⁷ Analysis is *performative* in that it involves repeated listening and rethinking, requires the “composition” of musical prototypes (reductions) premised on knowledge of a particular musical language, and produces a provisional outcome (*an* interpretation rather than *the* interpretation) in the form of a publication that needs to be *read* musically. Between Kerman’s anxiety over disembodiment, and Agawu’s alleviation of that anxiety, we have the basic disorientational structure of Lewin’s article, which exemplifies a queering ethos, containing in the space of one article the conceptual opposition seen in Kerman/Agawu.

Lewin’s first disorientation from Schenkerian theory to the p-model has concrete departure and destination points and thus serves as an illustration of a fully executed disorientation. His second disorientation from the p-model, reaching for a theory of musical behavior, is an admirable instance of reflexive self-criticism. But because the theory of musical behavior is only mentioned in the briefest way, the final disorientation to the poetics of analysis seems to be little more than compensation for Lewin’s anxiety over the perceived disconnect that still

⁴⁰ Scherzinger (1997), Hubbs (2004).

⁴¹ For example, Maus (1993 and 2004).

⁴² Currie (2014).

⁴³ Peraino (2014).

⁴⁴ Kielian-Gilbert (2015), Lochhead (2015).

⁴⁵ Kerman (1980, 325), emphasis added.

⁴⁶ Agawu (2004, 275).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 278.

exists between the p-model and aural perception. Having closed the gap between aural perception and music theory somewhat in the p-model, Lewin is still perturbed by the fact that the p-model is relatively disembodied in comparison with composition and performance. Thus he disorients away from the p-model toward a theory of “musical behavior.” Without having fleshed out a theory of musical behavior, however, Lewin executes another disorientation toward a poetics of analysis that lacks any substantive elaboration beyond the case study of enharmonicity in a specific work. It needs hardly to be said that a “poetics of analysis” is not the same thing as a theory encompassing *all* musical behavior. Disorientation has to be grounded in something concrete, in order to suggest the promise of something yet to come into being. What is notable is that Lewin’s desire for embodiment is so trenchant as to produce not just one but multiple disorientations that can be discerned in the space of one article. What Lewin can exemplify for queer phenomenology is the *relentless productiveness* of disorientation.

Disorientation—even though it is not named as such—is often the ethical anchor of various strands of intersectional, transgender and transnational studies, and studies in queer non-normativity, covering musicology, ethnomusicology, and music theory. All these forms of interdisciplinary studies have as their aim the undoing of hegemonic orientations in order to make room for a more diverse world to emerge. As the umbrella of what is known as queer theory grew since its inception, developing first as gay and lesbian studies, then growing to include intersectional, transgender, and transnational studies,⁴⁸ the meaning of the word “queer” has come under scrutiny. In particular, queerness as anti-normativity has come to encompass so broad of an agenda that embodied LGBTQ lives are in serious danger of being occluded. And yet the power of queering to infect broad swathes of the social sphere beyond LGBTQ lives is acknowledged even by those who argue for the sexual specificity of queer. Recall that Sara Ahmed maintains that “queer describes a sexual as well as political [generically anti-normative] orientation.”⁴⁹

On a final note, I should point out that my gesture toward queer music theory in this article is critically delimited by the viewpoints of mostly white music theorists working on European music. While there is a rich and varied body of research on embodied, phenomenological listening from multiple, gender fluid perspectives, music theorists do not number among the authors of this research, which is not couched in the terms of music theory as it is conventionally understood.⁵⁰ In this article, I proceed from central figures in music theory and work outwards in the direction of diversity—a necessary conceptual move. The outcome is that the perspective on queer music theory articulated here is colored by a privileged form of

subjectivity which can rise out of the condition of minority gender and sexual embodiment, in that white privilege effectively shelters a significant number of white LGBTQ persons from the forces of social oppression. Thus white privilege gives certain queer theorists the freedom to ponder issues beyond that of minority embodiment, as seen in the conception of queer as generically anti-normative in any sense (are wealthy white hipsters queer?).⁵¹ Queers of *color*, on the other hand, are often catastrophically impacted by their minority embodiment both in terms of gender and sexuality, and in terms of race.⁵² Comparing the embodied lives of queer whites and queers of *color*, it becomes obvious that queer theory that adopts a generic definition of anti-normativity is likely to be the product of a life of white embodiment.

In fact, beyond “white” queer theory, there exist legions of scholarly endeavors that do not respond to the urgency of dealing with the oppression experienced by specific minorities directly. This scholarship is probably enabled by white privilege, and it includes almost the entire corpus of music theory scholarship. But barring a wholesale reorientation of music theory toward only minority embodiment (a wonderfully utopian but impractical and also methodologically suspect goal),⁵³ how can music theory move forward? One answer comes in the form of using white privilege for ethical ends. In its expansive conception of queer as anti-normative, what we might call “white queer theory” does have the potential to help in conceptually paving the way for a broad alliance of *all* those (women, queers, people of *color*, people with disabilities, even hipsters?) who are committed to undoing hegemonic norms. Rather than essentializing “white” in terms of racial embodiment, I would define it in this context to mean privileged. If privilege here refers to the freedom to conceptualize beyond the realm of minority embodiment, then perhaps this privilege is enjoyed to at least some extent by those who are lucky enough to teach full time in tertiary institutions that value research. Those of us with this kind of privilege should use our freedom to forge the path forward toward diversity, using all the tools available at our disposal, including tools that take us *to* and/or *beyond* the consideration of minority embodiment. If queering takes us to the realm of epistemology and phenomenology—as it does in this article—our responsibility is to remember that even research that does not seem to proceed from embodiment, minority or otherwise, is able to do so precisely because it stems from a *specific* type of embodiment—that of privilege.

⁴⁸ See Lewis (2009).

⁴⁹ Ahmed (2006, 172).

⁵⁰ See, for example, Kernodle (2004), Rustin and Tucker (2008), Monson (2010), Barg (2013), Ramsey (2013), and Rustin-Paschal (2017).

⁵¹ Halperin (1995, 62).

⁵² Johnson (2005).

⁵³ An exclusive focus on only minorities is likely to lead to exoticization and preempts the deconstructive force of systemic critiques that examine the emergence of specific minorities as such in the first place. As Tucker (2008, 1–2) argued, “to limit queer theory to queer bodies is to settle for the ‘Where’s Waldo’ school of GLBT historiography, in which ‘spotting the queers’ becomes the object, and research becomes an exercise of historically informed ‘gaydar’ that fails to interrogate the historicity of straightness, not to mention the historical and cultural specificity of the closet.”

I would argue that the moment for a generically anti-normative, *queer* music theory that ranges far and wide is not over—it has hardly begun. What queer music theory needs most now is a broad agenda that can attract the largest following of music theorists under the banner of anti-normativity, *while still paying heed* to musical, gendered, sexual, and racial embodiment of marginalized lives. In order for this alliance to take root, we might have to get used to “waiting for aspiring progressives.”⁵⁴ There is a tendency—even imperative—for academia to constantly extend its ethical fights to new frontiers, which can create difficulties for music research, because this impetus is by and large externally driven by the field of gender and sexuality studies, and so music scholars may or may not be as up-to-date as we would like. There could be a variety of responses in this scenario, but I would advocate building an “under construction” environment where music scholars feel comfortable talking to one another about what our colleagues in gender, sexuality, and race studies are doing these days. Music scholars who are not already experts in these latter areas should not feel like they have to know everything at once, although that could be an aspiration shared by all.

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⁵⁴ Lee (2018).

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