



Transaurality: On Listening to SOPHIE Against Queer Theory

Anton L. Blackburn

To cite this article: Anton L. Blackburn (09 Mar 2026): Transaurality: On Listening to SOPHIE Against Queer Theory, Contemporary Music Review, DOI: [10.1080/07494467.2026.2631886](https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2026.2631886)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2026.2631886>



Published online: 09 Mar 2026.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Transaurality: On Listening to SOPHIE Against Queer Theory

Anton L. Blackburn 

Department of Music, Duke University, Durham, NC, USA

ABSTRACT

This article brings recent debates within trans and queer scholarship regarding the body to bear on questions of ‘trans music’, considering in turn how trans music tempers these debates. The determinate, possessed body is the current conceptual and material problem engendering a bifurcation in trans studies, as some scholars (within and without musicology) are rethinking trans studies’ relationship to queer theory. Readings of these disciplinary renegotiations are mobilised towards setting the agenda for trans music and sound studies, asserting that the relations, however contradictory they may seem, between ‘queer’ and ‘trans’ theories and methods must be sustained. The article proposes ‘transaurality’ as a method of trans music studies. This method is tested out when listening to techniques of voice and breath in the track ‘Faceshopping’ by the late transgender artist SOPHIE. Seeking to offer a model of socio-aesthetic analysis that listens for the ways in which sound makes transitions of gender and sex audible and actual, this method develops a critical *and* material approach to aurality.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 May 2024
Accepted 10 February 2026

KEYWORDS

Trans; queer; aurality;
method; body; vocality

As music studies ought no longer be ‘an inquiry about musical objects’ but rather ‘a mode of musical inquiry’, this article attempts to develop a musical inquiry in response to current debates on method in trans studies (Pilsner 2023, 15). I ask how a trans method, which takes trans as an analytic rather than a stable object of analysis, might complicate the ways we do musical thought and scholarship (Velocci 2024). Trans^{*}1 Studies has indeed become a discipline, fully institutionalised, that now questions the infinite mobility and indefiniteness of queer theory (Amin 2017, 181–182). Moving away from queer, trans studies is developing its own methods and concepts. Predicated in much trans research, as in trans practices, is a non-naturalistic and non-identitarian conception of gender and sex, where the double movement of these categories reveals what they do rather than what they are (Bettcher 2020; Currah 2022; Stryker 2004, 2006).²

‘Transgender studies is queer theory’s evil twin’, declared Susan Stryker, a pioneer of transgender studies, in 2004. Whilst queer theory is understood as ‘the union of sexuality studies and feminism’, for Stryker (2004, 212, emphasis original) transgender studies ‘willfully disrupts the privileged family narratives that favour sexual identity labels (like *gay*, *lesbian*, *bisexual*, and *heterosexual*) over the gender categories (like *man* and

woman) that enable desire to take shape and find its aim'. Stryker suggests that where queer studies has privileged the study of sexuality, transgender studies has been more faithful to feminism in its consideration of the genderings of sex(uality) (cf. Butler 2011, 22).

Where scholars and activists in the 1980s and 90s, such as Sandy Stone, Leslie Feinberg, and Gloria Anzaldúa, instantiated a so-called 'first wave' of transgender studies, the decades since such work have witnessed myriad interventions and necessary expansions.³ However, with the critical return of the category 'transsexual', which was seemingly exorcised from the field by Sandy Stone's signal article 'The *Empire Strikes Back*' (1992), trans studies is entering its 'second wave' with renegotiations of 'sex' and 'Nature' emerging from a proliferation of trans authors and thinkers (Chu 2019). A pivotal shift in this new wave is a reorientation of the disciplinary relationship between 'queer' and 'trans', with recent scholarship arguing that Stryker's early institutionalisation of the field conceptually allied itself too closely with 'queer theory', to the point that trans concerns have been limited by what queer theoretical commitments—such as a divestment from binaries *tout court*, especially as relating to 'The Body' as a determinately possessed category—allow.

The rise and fall of the afore used asterisk, used to indicate the plurality of trans identifications, marks a destabilisation of a singular trans experience or trans political demand. In light of these critical expansions of 'the field', anti-normative and non-naturalistic conceptions of gender and sex, when idealised, are facing scrutiny within our own community. Such debates, chiefly aimed at locating the specificity of the elusive signifier 'trans', bring two interlocking issues into question: the relationship between materiality and immateriality and the relationship between 'trans' and 'queer'.

Such debates about the specific singularity of 'trans-' and its distinctions from 'queer' have had, I argue, an influential though problematic impact on music studies. A similar, though lagging, proximal repositioning of 'queer' and 'trans' in terms of the discursive and the material will be traced between queer-trans studies and music studies in this article. 'Music'—with its plural and distributed ontology (Born 2005)—has critically immanent relations to gender and sex, a condition which I take to be generative for recasting existing theories of gender and sex: that is, music may offer a particular mediation of gender and sex such that listening can emerge as a pertinent refraction of the social and political aesthetics of queer- and transness (Born 2011). This article thus addresses the relations between 'music', 'queer', and 'trans', within and without music studies, tackling head on the multiple and often contradictory concerns and political desires within trans studies and communities.⁴

Instead of an overview of queer and trans music studies, this article is a preliminary attempt to identify core problematics of methods and analytics that are immanent in previous and current trans music studies. My writing cannot fully reconcile the aims of 'queer' and 'trans' music studies, though it proposes some directions. It does so by critically assessing such recent criticisms of 'queer' made by musicologist and pianist Dana Baitz (2018), who rightly argues that 'transsexuals' cannot be accounted for by queer theory, and infusing these criticisms with politico-philosophical arguments (notably outside of music studies) that enhance our understanding of trans sound.

Stressing that bodily materialisations are always already entangled in conceptual mediations, I am more specifically concerned with Baitz's earnest attempt to 'invest' in

the (determinate, singular and, in her case, white and able-bodied) body *as such* and, therewith, divest from social determinations.⁵ I read Baitz (2018) as part of a dual genealogy between the nascent critique of queer theory in trans studies (though, as this paper will show, this critique is by no means unanimously agreed upon) and recent music and sound studies' turns to an epistemologically fraught interest in individualist phenomenologies of sound which conspicuously occlude the structural and material politics of sound.

Rather than rejecting either the materialities of bodily experiences or a conceptual mode of critique, this article seeks to do both and more through what I call 'transaural' analysis, a method which holds onto the negational movements of the material and the immaterial, socio-sonic movements which I conceptualise as 'transaurality'. Here I bring transaural analysis to work by the late Scottish transgender DJ and producer SOPHIE. Through listening to SOPHIE's track 'Faceshopping', in the analytical section of this article, I am attempting to articulate the argument SOPHIE makes about sex and gender in sound as a partial move towards materialism and critique (Feld and Brenneis 2004). In part, transaurality and transaural analysis are necessitated by SOPHIE's work as concepts and methods that bear a relation to the particularities of her musical objects.

Transaurality seeks to account for transition as it proceeds in music *without* predetermining a givenness of social identity. The mobilisation of transaurality here offers a mode of listening that understands trans as an approach to gender and sex (change) beyond identitarian 'trans' objects (Bey 2022, 24, 43). This article thus speculates on what (trans)-formations are undertaken in SOPHIE's music to offer an intervention in the shifting relations between queer and trans theory. After making clear the theoretical terrain, my analysis of SOPHIE's music attempts to draw out the ways her production techniques make audible the mutability of gendered and sexed vocalities, revealing the artificiality of their naturalism, the inseparability of nature and artifice. Though such an argument on bodily transformations is not in itself novel, it in part serves to reorient our methods towards the particularities of trans cultural production as part of wider historical and social conditions as opposed to individualist phenomenologies and nominalist claims to 'trans music'.

Transaurality seeks to sketch one method of listening informed by trans studies, asking what bodily transformations are made available through socio-sonic materialisations, though it is indebted to advances already made in sound studies and ethnomusicology (Minks 2023; Ochoa Gautier 2014; Rice 2015). Gascia Ouzounian (2006, 69) in particular has theorised the 'body as a resonant space' where bodies, drawing from R. Murray Schafer, will 'become an ear' (Schafer 2003, 71). Following Ouzounian and others (Butler 2011), understanding bodies as vectors 'of knowledge and even of historical action' (Ouzounian 2006, 71) makes it possible to engage listening as a remarkably 'thick' modality through which emergent diagrams for the social can be traced. This bodily-oriented conception of listening will be expanded such that 'the body' must be understood as indeterminate and non-singular: *bodies*, as they sound and listen, are what will constitute my theorisation of trans listening, its politics, aesthetics, and socialities. If the singular body as such is not possessed by individuals, bodies must instead be approached through the 'virtual frequencies' intensive to their potentiality (Goodman 2010).

I begin by focusing on how contemporary musicologists such as Baitz are advancing 'trans music studies' to understand 'trans music'—distinct from queer(ing) music—in an

identitarian logic.⁶ In short, the proper objects of trans music studies, for Baitz, are stable musical objects composed or designed *by* sovereign trans individuals or performed *by* sovereign trans individuals.⁷ As a constructive riposte to Baitz's criticisms of queer theory, which would not allow for a stable possession of a body, as Baitz reads it, I outline developments in queer and trans scholarship outside of (ethno)musicology, in which related debates 'against queer theory' (Keegan 2020) are emerging. In this regard, this paper brings non-musicological developments in trans studies to bear on musical matters (cf. Bey 2022; Gill-Peterson 2024; Velocci 2024). While deeply aware of the work already done in queer and trans music studies, this paper goes against music disciplinary conventions by attempting to develop 'transaurality' through trans studies proper. This more direct engagement with trans studies, I hope, offers an approach to trans music which presupposes neither 'trans' nor 'music' as the good objects of trans music studies.

Listening to the work of SOPHIE, in particular, offers an interference in emerging 'either/or' debates between the discursive and the material. Transaurality is proposed as a form of listening that (1) takes on trans-musicological concerns by attending to the materialisations of bodies when listening and (2) maintains a queer-theoretical focus on the institutionalised (racial, gendered, and class-based) power structures within and against which transness works (Bey 2022). Transaurality is thus an engagement with the matters of sound as they pertain to gender and sex changes, where one listens to, for, and with bodies as they interact, connect, and reconfigure. At the same time, transaurality is an abstraction of listening, where listening encounters positionalities of matter—how musical materialities are entangled in, and are mutually mediated by, affects that make certain bodies audible and others silent. Such a listenership can orient itself towards cisness *and* transness, such that transaurality probes all sexual *transformation* through listening. My hope is that transaurality, as I develop it through the work of SOPHIE, offers a method of aural analysis and conception of sex and gender in transformative motion which advances extant scholarship on aurality's more general inscriptions of nature and culture (Ochoa Gautier 2014). Transaurality, *through* attention to the social lives of sonic matter, listens against the naturalisation of the cis-ear and the (in)audible frequencies it has historically constituted (Velocci 2024).⁸

Queer-Trans Music and Sound Studies

Though musicology has long struggled with issues of the body and pleasure so pertinent to queer and trans studies (see Cusick 1994; McClary 1991; Solie 1993), there exist many valuable attempts to produce new lines of thought through queer and trans thinking. Since the 1990s moment of queer musicology (Brett et al. [1994] 2006), riding the wave of queer studies' institutionalisation (Amin 2017; Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz 2005), queer and trans music scholars have offered timely interventions in musical identity (Brett 2006; Peraino 2005; Taylor 2012a), vocality (Irizarry 2020; Jarman 2018; Pennington 2018), and sociality (Barz and Cheng 2019; Garcia-Mispireta 2023; Mahon 2020), to name only a few categories. My readings of current texts are informed by these historiographical attachments (Peraino and Cusick 2013). However, rather than a review of the sub-field, affirming some form of queer (ethno)musicological canon

(Wiegman 2020), I instead pursue close readings of recent texts—as symptomatic of broader genealogies—from the perspective of an ethnomusicologist and feminist theorist.⁹ In these readings, I am concerned less with the application of queer and trans concepts to ‘new’ musical objects (Berlant and Warner 1995) than I am with identifying the prevailing epistemological and methodological orientations across these texts.

Suzanne Cusick’s classic chapter ‘On a Lesbian Relationship with Music’ (1994), for instance, represents a preliminary attempt to draw out the ‘split’ that musicologists are trained to make between their experiences *and* musicological thinking. Specifically, Cusick makes a poignant yet pivotal ontoepistemological critique of musicological research (at least pre-1990, though arguably relevant today) when she writes of the ‘intellectual barriers’ which conditioned her to occlude her own lesbian identity in her *thinking* about music. When challenging this split by asking whether music *is* sex, Cusick is urging for a study of music that attends to the pleasurable ways in which listeners experience music; sexuality here is not a mere hermeneutic addition to a pre-existing music, but is rather epistemologically co-constitutive of music’s ontology. From Cusick onwards, historically constituted identities become central *objects* of queer music scholarship, as well as *analytics*.

Cusick’s is thus an agenda-setting text of 90s musicology that attempted ‘queer’ as a mode of thought, and I want here to start reparative expansions of her earlier efforts. It might seem odd to draw a lineage from Cusick to transaurality, given her focus on sexuality rather than gender in this text. Beyond a problematic bifurcation of gender and sexuality, which is not persistent across all queer scholarship, an identitarian reader may be horrified to see me draw on a cisgender writer for a trans theory. However, in reparative reading, working against paranoid reading, the reader seeks to ‘surrender the knowing’ of a text (Sedgwick 2003, 146). We ought to give ‘the benefit of the doubt’, in other words, before assuming we know the motivations or reasonings behind a text (Cheng 2016, 33). A reparative reader accepts that they can be surprised by something a text tells them rather than performing what they already know. While Cusick and I may share political desires, I cannot claim to know everything Cusick feels, thinks, or wants to imply in her work. I seek, therefore, to extend Cusick’s epistemological interventions—the disciplinary critique she develops operates in parallel to emergent trans scholarship, an elective affinity between queer and trans concerns worth highlighting.

Though Cusick, like many (not all) scholars operating during the initial rise of ‘queer theory’, is concerned with subverting *heterosexual* relationships with music, in this article I wish to consider how we might expand on this to consider how music and its social mediations may differ from, and reveal, *cisgendered* relationships with music. Transaurality makes such an opening for thinking about music as something that impresses upon us in transformational ways beyond the metaphorical, where what music does to us may destabilise and disrupt naturalised relations.

Following Cusick, that is, if music is sex, what happens to us when certain sounds fuck us, as we engage in ‘aural sex’ (Corbett and Kapsalis 2015) or ‘taking it in the ear’ (Taylor 2012b; cf. Sofer 2020)? Sofer (2020) has cautioned against the gendered tropes of ‘passive/active listening’ in musico-theoretical discourse—which Cusick was already trying to write against (cf. Maus 1993)—for their perpetuation of a dichotomy which reinforces gendered hierarchies (see MacKinnon 1983; James 2010). As I wish to displace this

structuring of listening in favour of unthought (and, perhaps, unthinkable) forces of musical sound, my rendering of ‘taking it in the ear’ rejects a humanistic (empirical, normative, or moralistic) account of ‘active’ or ‘passive’ listening. Instead, I approach listening as an *encounter* which ‘gives rise to sensibility’ and ‘forces us to think’ (Deleuze [1994] 2014, 184) beyond either ‘the lived state [of the listener]’ or ‘the object designated [by a subject]’ (Deleuze [1994] 2014, 202). In aural encounters, sexual and sexed listening is neither passive nor active. What genders take their aim, following Stryker, when such sexual relations, established during listening, find their targets? Are listeners *and* sounds gendered and (re)sexed during the dynamic act of listening? How might a trans music studies approach such questions?

Though trans scholars have been present in queer musical scholarship for some time (Halberstam 2006; Pennington 2013), trans concerns (methods, theories, objects, and so on) are coming into their own formations in (ethno)musicological discourse, from work on trans vocality (cf. Anastasia 2014; Constansis 2008; Krell 2013; Pennington 2018; Peraino 2005, 246–250) to intersectional and interdisciplinary trans music studies (Krell 2018; Snorton 2014). Such work probes silent gaps in queer music studies, ones that have implicitly operated with an assumption that (white, bourgeois) queer studies can account for transness. Queer musicology, like queer studies proper, has not always accounted for transness *qua* transness, instead merely gesturing to trans through frameworks of anti-essentialism or social constructivism (Pennington 2018); at worst, it has reduced trans struggle for emancipation to conceptions of uneven power developed within and for sexuality studies and feminism.¹⁰ Trans musicology is thus beginning to establish its proximity to queer musicology.

Baitz’s (2018) essay, ‘Towards a Trans* Method in Musicology’, is a pivotal text in queer-trans musicology that I take to be a demonstrative example of the implications of the ‘second wave of trans studies’ for musicology. Though Baitz’s argument comes out of years of prior queer and trans scholarship, it is worth reading on its own terms as *an* articulation of potential directions in trans music studies rather than reducing it to an imaginary canon that the argument is possibly writing against.

Taking herself as a case study, ‘the transsexual woman at the piano’, Baitz (2018, 1–2) argues that the methods used to approach queer musical subjects, such as Cusick’s, cannot account for transsexuals as subjects ‘Other’ to queer; notably, Baitz rebukes the departure from ‘transsexual’ initiated by Sandy Stone and the uptake of ‘transgender’ by Stryker, associating this departure with the queer theoretical urge to denaturalise. Baitz (2018, 1, 6) takes ‘queer theory’ to be primarily discursive (aesthetic-interpretive) and thus concerned with ‘*transcending*... materiality’, meanwhile ‘transsexuality is associated with *investing in* the body’. Where queer theory ostensibly seeks ‘a world without gender identity’, Baitz (2018, 6) firmly rejects such a desire for transsexual subjects. Her methodological turn from queer theory encourages musicologists to ‘investigate the material conditions affecting the emergence of this music, such as the role played by uniquely transsexual bodily experiences’ (Baitz 2018, 7). This approach would look to the production of music, especially concerned with the experiences of transsexual-identified musicians. Though admirable for its materialism, ‘matter’ is here left as an unproblematized given state capable of unilaterally affecting music. That is, both ‘transsexual’ and ‘music’ are ontologised in this approach—rather than taking each as objects of trans musical inquiry, they become the grounds of such work.

While Baitz's writing could be read as setting up an opposition between 'queer theory' and 'transsexual method', a more empathetic reading may suggest that she is positing existing queer theoretical approaches as inadequate tools that would wrongly presuppose an equivalency between queerness and transness. Though her characterisation of queer *studies* is misleading, I am sympathetic to the political futility of *queerness* especially when it fails to account for the particularity of anti-transness (Berlant and Warner 1995). But rather than divesting from queer studies, the *investment in the body* and its materiality which Baitz calls for is an approach to trans music that I argue can work contiguously *alongside* queer theory. This temperament of Baitz's critique of queer theory maintains a queerly charged critical rejection of immediacy and 'the lived state of the speaker' (Deleuze [1994] 2014, 202), stressing that a material investment is always already part of conceptual mediations. In this sense, my expansion of Baitz's 'investment in the body' works *contra* her argument (that queer thought can only be practised discursively) towards re-establishing the elective affinities between queer and trans thought.

In order to situate and complicate Baitz's essay, it is appropriate to contextualise her argument amid foundational and current arguments circulating in queer and trans scholarship. Focusing on Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) and *What's The Use?* (2019) allows me to establish ways in which some queer-theoretical models can be expanded to think transness in ways that Baitz does not acknowledge. Beyond a 'what about ...' explication of Ahmed, teasing out the parallels and dissonances between Baitz's paper and other trans scholarship makes clear that we need not necessarily rush away from the critical desires of queer theory.

Queer-Trans Affinities

Queer

Queer theory offers a multiplicity of epistemological and ontological critiques of normative understanding. As an analytic, queer theory need not take queer subjects as 'objects' of study, but rather it brings 'queering' as a *means* of identifying and challenging hegemonic networks that reciprocally de/naturalise certain genders and sexualities. As such, I wish to draw on queer theorists whose work demonstrates the capacity for queer studies to orientate itself in such a way that accommodates for transsexuality and other such sex-changing experiences that are an investment in the body, thus establishing the contiguity that Baitz fails to recognise.

Recent writings by Sara Ahmed (2006; 2016; 2019) maintain an intersectional mode of queer thinking that is simultaneously concerned with the micro-scale realities of lived, working-class, raced, and gendered experiences whilst theorising such modes of being in relation to macro-scale power structures (Crenshaw 1991; Ferguson 2004; hooks 1981; Muñoz 1999).¹¹ Ahmed (2006, 126) considers the ways in which our bodies inherit certain normative 'lines', how in such habituated trajectories certain things are made easier—proximally more 'at reach'—for privileged (white, cisheterosexual, middle-class) subjects and harder for Others.¹² She writes about phenomenal 'lines', as in the 'straight lines' that we are coerced into striving for by cisheteropatriarchal white supremacy: soberly walking in a straight line; having a straight, linear argument;

straightening up. More recently, Ahmed has made clear that ‘lines of use’ are only straight (and cis) by default because they are what has been made easy (Ahmed 2019, 21, 208–209). To deviate from the straight and narrow is, for Ahmed, to actively queer one’s orientation and the objects to which one relates. This ‘one’, moreover, is always already a multiplicity, such that deviations are collectively sustained. ‘Queering’ is a mediation that is in movement with, and often against, the social. Thus, to sustain friction against a system, we must remain aware of and respond to the Other that inheres in the supposed Self, constituting the one as already many.

Ahmed demonstrates the phenomenological and sociological power of queer-theoretical models and proffers modes of queer thinking that allow us to account for positionalities beyond the common conception of ‘queer’ (i.e. where ‘queer’ functions as an identitarian misnomer for ‘lesbian, gay, and bisexual’). Indeed, Ahmed illustrates that queer theory owes much to multiply marginalised subjects, whilst also developing theories out of such experiences that provide conceptual apparatuses through which we can unpick broader asymmetrical power relations. Ahmed is by no means representative of the entirety of contemporary queer studies, but I have detailed some of her ideas here as I believe her simultaneous consideration of embodied experiences (the micro) as entangled in wider, discursive power structures (the macro) points toward a variation in queer thinking that can start to account for trans positionalities and materialities in ways Baitz has perhaps not considered.

Trans

Stryker’s (2006, 7) introduction to *The Transgender Studies Reader* makes clear that neither feminism nor queer studies were up to the task of making sense of the ‘lived complexity of contemporary gender’. Whilst the former was too concerned with binding the category of ‘woman’, the latter was too often a code word for ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’, and as such transgender phenomena are misapprehended through a lens that privileges sexual deviance as the primary means of contesting ‘heteronormativity’ (Stryker 2004, 214).

Recent criticisms from within trans studies itself have argued that Stryker’s influential institutionalisation of ‘transgender’ (Stryker 2020) has caused trans studies to depart too radically from ‘transsexual’, so much so that transgender studies is methodologically and intellectually indistinguishable from queer theory.¹³ Such is the argument of trans writer Andrea Long Chu and trans historian Emmett Harsin Drager’s article ‘After Trans Studies’, in which Chu writes: ‘Trans studies is over. If it isn’t, it should be’ (Chu and Drager 2019, 103). As a rebuttal to Stryker, Chu (103) claims that transgender studies is not ‘queer theory’s evil twin’, but rather, ‘trans studies is the twin that queer studies ate in the womb. (The womb, as usual, was feminism)’. Their provocative article makes the claim that the poststructural tendencies of queer theory have too readily appropriated ‘the material body of the transsexual’ (Halberstam 2005, 105; Prosser 1998) to theorise radicality (cf. Krell 2018). They argue (Chu and Drager 2019, 108), at bottom, that ‘transsexual is the only thing that *trans* can describe that *queer* can’t and that [transsexual theory] will be impossible *with* anti-normativity’.

Chu in particular has been heralded the initiator of the ‘second-wave’ of transgender studies, with the first—so our mythology goes—being forged by Sandy Stone and her

essay ‘The *Empire Strikes Back*’. What seems to be at the heart of this second disciplinary juncture is the duality of the immaterial and the material. There, in both Chu and Baitz respectively, is the valid frustration that queer theory, with its apparent desire to transcend materiality (and therewith the gender binary), has not provided enough scope for the complexity and variety of trans experiences. In particular, the ‘transsexual’ is apparently erased by first-wave transgender studies’ inheritance of queer frameworks, since trans people who seek medical transition want a dimorphic transition. In turn, such scholars—as my précis of Baitz made clear—appear to be seeking a return to the constativity of the material. It is clear from Baitz’s writing that she feels queer theory (and some transgender theory) cannot accept the metaphysics of binary sex or gender and thus does not service the transsexual desire, as Chu writes, for a normative, ordinary life.

It might be too soon to say, but I sense that the second wave of trans studies is moving towards a form of phenomenology that places emphasis on individual embodied experience. Whilst I am excited by this resurgence of energy in the field, I follow Talia Bettcher (2020) in being critical of trans phenomenology for its current inability to accommodate transsexual identifications *as* identifications that involve more than a singular, possessed body, but include a body’s social life. Transaurality is here an attempt to push such a phenomenological current in trans studies towards critical *and* material schematics. Such a method tries to account for multiplicities of experiences as always already in connection to the social world that goes beyond the ‘skin ego’ (Anzieu 1989).¹⁴

Though we may be critical of Chu and Harsin Drager’s point-blank evisceration of the anti-normativity of queer theory, the trans critique of queer theory is perhaps the most important epistemological and disciplinary issue in the field today. Film and media studies scholar Cael Keegan, for example, has expressed a more nuanced critique of queer studies in his article ‘Against Queer Theory’. At the start of the paper, Keegan (2020, 349) defines ‘against’ not as ‘in opposition to’ but as being ‘in or into physical contact with (something), so as to be supported by or collide with’. Rather than declaring trans studies is over, Keegan (2020, 349–351) suggests that trans studies is *still* ‘against the conditions of perceptibility that queer theory enforces’, such that ‘queer’ collects and universalises all that is perceived as nonnormative. Rather than collecting all LGBTQ+ experience under ‘queer’, Keegan’s article suggests a more lateral approach, where ‘queer’ and ‘trans’ can remain in dialogue, but where it is not assumed that ‘queer’ is the beginning and end of *all* trans experience and modes of analysis.

These recent shifts from queer to trans signal that trans studies is at a disciplinary juncture. I believe it premature to follow Chu and Harsin Drager in either letting trans studies die, or—perhaps more what they actually intended—operating without the deconstructive and anti-normative ideals of queer theory. However, it is clear that ‘trans’ cannot be subsumed and fully encompassed by ‘queer’. As such, I wish to follow the line of thought sketched by Keegan insofar as ‘trans’ operates conceptually *against* ‘queer’. This discursive and physical proximity suggests that trans studies need not consign queer theory to an intellectual dustheap, but rather that queer studies and queer scholars need to listen to trans activists and scholars more closely and make room for trans methods and theories that seem, at first, to go *against* the poststructural tendencies of queer theory. For music studies, this would entail a reinvigoration of queer scholarship which moves both beyond identity and ‘queer’ as a misnomer for ‘sexuality’ or a much vaguer and often co-opted ‘radicality’.

Rereading Baitz

There are notable parallels between the renavigation of queer theory in trans studies more generally and the trans methods emerging in musicology as found in Baitz. Firstly, there are criticisms that urge us not to completely erase ‘transsexual’ or ‘transgender’ through a universalised ‘queer theory’ (Keegan, Baitz; see also Krell 2018). Secondly, Baitz’s criticisms resonate with the views of other trans scholars (Chu and Harsin Drager) who believe that queer theory has effectively subsumed (in the North American context, at least) everything considered to be ‘nonnormative’ with regard to gender and sexuality without accounting for differing positionalities *within* the LGBTQ+ community itself (see Salamon 2010, 103; cf. Krell 2018). Differences within marginalised communities must be accounted for so as not to reify a homogenously united ‘queer community’. However, following Keegan, we can aggregate the intellectual discrepancies within our community in ways that potentially agglutinate their concerns.

I therefore believe that Baitz’s analysis of queer theory (as discursive transcendence and thus incapable of accounting for transsexual subjects), like Chu and Harsin Drager’s, is only partial and sometimes overdetermined, as the respective examples of Ahmed and Keegan’s work demonstrate. I want nonetheless to take seriously Baitz’s core proposal of *investing in* the body. However, I wish to do so with a more critical understanding of matter than Baitz’s phenomenological commitments. When considering the *matter* of music (the material forces that constitute its situated production, circulation, and reception), it is important to heed Judith Butler’s analysis of materiality in their classic text, *Bodies That Matter* (2011 [1993]), which was in fact a response to these very issues as they were posed to them after the publication of *Gender Trouble* (1990). Through a reading of Aristotle’s (via Foucault) and Plato’s (via Irigaray) respective distinctions between matter (body) and form (mind), Butler (Butler 2011, 22) deconstructs the category of ‘woman’ and her bodily materiality, arguing that ‘to invoke matter is to invoke a sedimented history of sexual hierarchy and sexual erasures which should surely be an *object* of feminist inquiry, but which would be quite problematic as a *ground* of feminist theory’. Following Butler, I read Baitz’s valid concerns for the erasure of transsexual subjects as, simultaneously, a potential reinvestment in such sedimented histories of hierarchy and non-normative existence. Trans inquiry, then, must find a line of inquiry that considers ‘matter’, as demanded by Baitz, without reproducing an unproductive empiricism.

This call for a trans musical inquiry, which proceeds from materialisation as an object rather than a standpoint, returns us again to the work of Cusick. In addition to her provocations on musical sexuality, Cusick has formidably addressed the issue of the mind/body ‘problem’ as one foundational to music studies’ perpetually deferred theoretical capacity for thinking about gender and sexuality. Questioning the mind-mind model of musical analysis, wherein the ‘work’ is conceived as a product of the composer’s mind which is to be studied by the analyst’s, Cusick reminds us of the embodied acts that constitute music. While her 1994 article calls for ‘performer-centred’ analyses—something ethnomusicology had already been doing (Feld 2012, 174–182)—we could take Cusick’s (1994, 18) ontologisation further by doubly implicating the mind and body. To affirm the body as such, even if it is performatively constituted, has two issues: first, it bears no transformational politic, for it ontologises and affirms something

presumed to already be taking place; second, it assumes the logic which it seeks to undo. Trans music studies thus picks up Cusick's concerns, but resituates the ideas of 1990s queer, trans, and feminist musicology within issues which cannot be solved by a turn to the somatic in general, or the performer in particular, alone.

The analytic division emerging between queer and trans studies, centring on the ontologisation of bodies, is irreducible to the mind/body problem. However, Cusick's analysis offers another understanding of Baitz's perspective. As a musicologist, Baitz presents to us the way in which a music scholar—operating with and against the problems identified so early by Cusick—understands and translates these issues when thinking about music. Notably, the reaction against 'music' as an abstract object often leads to uncritical commitments to the phenomenological—an investment which affirms that which it seeks to escape. Rather than an ungrounded disavowal of music studies as always already dualistic, however, I want to write *against* the version of music studies (and queer theory) which Baitz symptomatically expresses. In trying to develop new analytics that do more than translate feminist, queer, and trans concerns for music studies, I am not rejecting music studies generally or as expressed by Baitz but rather I am writing in the intervals which such discursive fields generate.

The established tension between matter and discourse, trans method and queer theory, is thus the site of friction I wish to grapple with through the following analysis of transgender producer SOPHIE's track 'Faceshopping'. I accept Baitz's argument that if it is not to exclude transsexuality, a trans method must account for materiality. At the same time, I do wish to maintain the insights of Butler and queer theorists such as Ahmed and Jack Halberstam (2011, 96–98) in acknowledging that what constitutes 'a body' is discursively produced through various social apparatuses. In this sense, I combine queer and trans methods by maintaining the queer theoretical urge to discursively unpick and dismantle cisheteropatriarchal power relations while simultaneously developing a trans method that works *against* (in physical contact with) queer theory as it attempts to understand cisness and transness as distinct from though related to queerness. It is only through this conceptual uptake of Keegan's 'against', as part of the ongoing development of trans studies, that the nuanced critique of Baitz's premature departure from queer theory becomes clear.

Listening to SOPHIE

SOPHIE (1986–2021) was a Glaswegian musician long affiliated with the UK avant-pop label PC Music (2013–present). Her early and central involvement with the label marked her as a leading, though initially mysterious, figure in the 'hyperpop' genre. Although already an established producer and DJ—having worked on tracks for artists such as Madonna, Vince Staples, and Charli xcx—SOPHIE's solo 'breakthrough' occurred with the release of 'BIPP' in 2013, the opening track of her 2015 compilation album *Product*. Since *Product*, the queer, pop-avant-garde scene has been fixated on her output (Pareles 2015, 2021). It was only with the single release of 'It's Okay to Cry' ahead of her studio album *Oil of Every Pearl's Un-Insides* (2018), when SOPHIE first used her voice and image in a release, that the artist came out as a transgender woman (Lhooq 2017). Though her art ought not to be read *only* through an identitarian 'trans lens', there is an extent to which SOPHIE's music must be heard in a political

context (the United Kingdom) which is violently anti-trans (Bassi and LaFleur 2020; Horbury and 'Xine' Yao 2020; Lewis and Seresin 2022).

The track 'Faceshopping' features on the 2018 album *Oil of Every Pearl's Un-Insides*, with an official music video released on YouTube.¹⁵ A 3D render of SOPHIE's face and body, which is distorted at various points in the track (see Figure 1), appears throughout the video. The opening verse and refrain to the track is thus:

My face is the front of shop
My face is the real shop front
My shop is the face I front
I'm real when I shop my face

Given the track's textual and visual elements—the above text's clear emphasis on the realness of artificiality in conjunction with SOPHIE's predominant, 3D-rendered face being moulded, deflated, chopped throughout the track—it is easy to understand it as a commentary on 'beauty', 'realness', and 'authenticity', issues that matter both within the pop music industry more generally but also for trans people specifically (see Faye 2015). For instance, trans women often undergo facial feminisation surgery (FFS) in order to 'pass' (present feminine) in quotidian life, as a medical alteration of the body to alleviate the dysphoria that many trans people experience (Plemons 2017). In this regard, the 'face', as something that pop music fans often value as an authentic ('real') part of a singer's multidimensional being, is synthetic for SOPHIE, something that can be rearranged, reread, and rematerialised in ways that she wants it to be. 'Realness', for SOPHIE, is no longer determined by socially normative understandings of 'face/body', but rather *de/reconstructed musically* in a way which reveals transness as method.

The musical material is initially dominated by a dry, ostinato-like bass line, with the entire track comprised of sounds created and sculpted via a combination of software such as the digital audio workstation (DAW) Ableton Live and wavetable synthesisers such as



Figure 1. Screenshots from SOPHIE's 'Faceshopping', by author.

Xfer Serum, as well as sequencer hardware such as the Elektron Monomachine (see Table 1). Specifically, the ‘voice’ is here also treated like the ‘face’, as something to be surgically sculpted and transformed in the studio. The first verse after the opening refrain contains the lyrics:

Artificial bloom
 Hydroponic skin
 Chemical release
 Synthesise the real
 Plastic surgery
 Social dialect
 Positive results
 Documents of life

However, the lexical content of this verse is rendered almost unintelligible. Indeed, only when looking up the text did I begin to ‘listen for’ these words, since the voice is here moulded into the texture of the bass line. The voice, that is, is compressed and only its lowest frequencies are made audible such that the above lyrics sound like they are more a part of the bass ostinato and its rhythms than part of a (‘human’) voice as it sounds. Moreover, ‘the voice as it sounds’ is called into question by SOPHIE, stripping *and* maximalising aspects of its materiality towards a purely phonetic as opposed to lexical modality. Rendering the voice so that it is becoming-percussion seems like a simple privileging of music/sound over text. More than this, however, I notice the multiple voices that SOPHIE renders in the track: the robotic speaking-voice in the refrain, dryly edited with no reverberation; the pure-grain/texture-voice that coalesces with the bass in the verses, negating any ‘naturalness’ of the voice; the melismatic, sexualised voice of the bridge, accelerating an investment in the body as it pushes the ‘femininity’ of bridge-section vocals (conventionally melismatic, breathy, and emotional) to a near-unrecognisable extreme. Listening to these voices, how they are rendered, sculpted, and smashed against each other in the space of around four minutes, I think about the multiple bodies being performed and materialised as I listen. These multiple bodies traverse the range of the Natural body, that of the almost-conventional bridge section, and a

Table 1. Structural sections with some description of voice types and sonic material to guide discussion. Timestamps refer to the YouTube version.

Section	Vocal / sonic material	Time stamp
A (refrain)	Robotic / electronic ostinato	00:00–00:25
B (verse)	Voice as part of sonic fabric, stretched, EQ-distortion	00:25–00:58
	‘Pop’ voice singing ‘na na na ...’	00:58–1:14
A (refrain)	Robotic, dry	1:15–1:32
B’ (verse)	Voice-sonic	1:32–1:48
	‘Pop voice’	1:49–2:04
A (refrain)	Robotic, dry	2:05–2:22
C (bridge)	Melismatic, sped-up, re-pitched (up), breathy, sensual voice / synth-pop accompaniment / wet	2:23–3:12
A’ (refrain, extended to end)	Robotic	3:13–4:04

transformed body, one that contradicts this naturalised voice and, through this negational movement, renders the natural to be wholly part of artifice whilst highlighting the artificiality of Nature. With the incorporation of a multiplicity of voices, my initial reaction is as though I can *hear* the constructedness of multiple bodies ‘in ... voice[s] as [they] sing’ (Barthes 1977, 188). More than the general acknowledgement that the voice, as an act, performatively constructs identity (Eidsheim 2019; Neumark 2010), SOPHIE’s hyper-vocality sonifies the actual changing of the body-voice.¹⁶

In an interview with Arte TRACKS (2018, 1:08–1:45), SOPHIE speaks about her production practice as grounded in a ‘hyperreal world of sounds’ where she can synthesise imagined ‘sounds which cartoonise and exaggerate naturally occurring organic sounds and phenomena, and materials that don’t exist’. Rarely ever using pre-recorded samples, SOPHIE believes that, through electronic music, she has the possibility to ‘generate any texture [she] can think of and would never want to ‘limit’ herself by *not* using software synthesisers to generate her own sounds. This offers some insight into the techniques used for ornamenting the voice and, in SOPHIE’s words, cartoonising and exaggerating its qualities. Indeed, there emerges a confluence between SOPHIE’s practice, her ethics of sound production, and the outcome of her material, the former perhaps shedding some light on how her music is so distinct from, while at the same time belonging to, either the electronic dance music or avant-garde worlds.¹⁷

Through holding contradictory voices—socially audible, breathy, ‘feminine’ voices (Sofer 2022, 105–124) against (in close contact with) socially inaudible, incommensurate voices—and their relations together, certain voices start to sound stranger, more alien, than others. The first sounding of the pop-like vocals (00:58), including the hyper-melismatic/slurred phraseology of the bridge (2:23), seems like an anchoring of the track in more conventional voices that may sound (more) ‘real’ since they are the sounds to which many of us are accustomed if we listen to pop music. However, within the whole soundscape of SOPHIE’s complex weaving and rendering of synthesised rhythm and bass with distorted vocals, it is these ‘real’ voices that start to sound out-of-place. Indeed, the stylised use of the sensual, breathy voice in the bridge (what is often the most emotional and driving part of a track) sounds like a parody of such ‘authentically’ emotional moments in pop. This may be SOPHIE demonstrating that she can perform the voice that is constructed and naturalised as the normative ‘feminine’ within a pop context. But, at the same time, my listening locates in these invocations of poppy vocals a critique of the very ‘realness’ that is entangled in issues of voicing gender. For me, the vocal sounding of multiple and differing aggregations and formations of a body negotiates and pushes against the limits of what a body can do.

Foregrounding SOPHIE’s multiple manipulations of voice entails listening for the complex ways in which gender and sex can be presented, how they can change, and how they gain social meaning with and against one another (see Goldin-Perschbacher 2013). I want to go further still. What are the granular techniques that SOPHIE uses in order to make an authentic, emotional, and feminine voice sound paraodic?

When listening transaurally, we might zoom in on the breathy vocality in the bridge of the track as just one mechanism of vocal gendering and sexing. Breath, in the ‘phonographic staging’ of recorded popular music, is often used to signify emotional intensity and intimate proximity (Lacasse 2010). Additionally, breath sounds—in/exhalations, sibilance, whispers, and so on—make audible the connection between voices and

bodies (Cavarero 2005, 199–201). Something that is easily edited out of a vocal pop recording, SOPHIE chooses to make this breath audible in this hyper-feminised section. If we remark that the vocals of the refrain and as part of the sonic fabric are dry and breathless, transaurality means asking what these breath(less) vocal stagings do in terms of expressing gender or sex (change).

So you must be the one
That I've seen in my dreams
Come on, touch me
Set my spirit free
Test me ...
Do you see what I see?
Reduce me to nothingness

The voice singing these notably sibilant lyrics is soft and airy. The vocal cords are not fully closed, like when one whispers, allowing air to escape between them when phonating. What I find significant about the breathy voice here is that it brings to mind *a body as such*—the larynx, vocal cords, a tongue close to alveolar ridge to make a hiss—more than any other vocality in the track. As a descriptively embodied voice, the voice here sounds out what would be socially heard as a feminine voice in Western culture (Cavarero 2005; Dunn and Jones 1994; Sofer 2022). Breathy, bodily, feminine.

When heard in isolation, as mentioned above, SOPHIE's breathy vocals here present a staging which articulates that SOPHIE knows what a feminine voice sounds like. The sibilant breathiness comes to signify 'the real' voice of a woman (trans or cis) who passes. It is SOPHIE's sculpting of breath that attaches this voice to a legibly gendered and sexed body. Yet, when heard not in isolation but with the other voices of the track, the intensity of this breath comes to sound unreal, cartoonish, and exaggerated.

That is, SOPHIE's dry, breathless vocals contextualise and problematise the feminine breathiness of the bridge: first, SOPHIE sonifies a social real of gender presentation, demonstrating that she knows how to stage a voice socially recognisable *as* feminine; at the same time, secondly, the intensity of vocal feminisation makes it sound strange when contrasted with the harshness of the other voices. Listening to the intricate ways SOPHIE stages the voice through breathiness reveals precisely the mechanisms that make strange the socially recognisable, 'real' voice.¹⁸

The transaural part of this analysis pertains to the exact way in which changes of sex or gender happen in sound. Yet, listening against queer theory, SOPHIE's track goes beyond a descriptive example of how gender and sex can change through sound. It goes beyond a normative investment in vocal femininity: rather, her juxtapositions of voices through, in this case, breath offers a critique of the conditions that make those changes socially legible—estranging us from the normality of the passing feminine voice. At once trans—insofar as it reveals the ways we can invest in voices as extensions and performative iterations of gendered and sexed bodies—and queer—insofar as it is critical of the normative body and offering vocalities which go beyond recognisable gender presentations—'Faceshopping' stages investment in the body while simultaneously making strange what is ordinary. We can, and should, invest in bodies. But, *if we take SOPHIE's argument in sound seriously*, we might resist the social illusion of ordinariness in such investments.

SOPHIE's track makes an argument in sound that can be heard as transaural. It is precisely through its sonification of the ways in which gender and sex can be changed through sound that it denatures feminine vocality. Not simply arguing that this is something which all trans people do, SOPHIE estranges the ways in which all sonic presentations of gender are made socially recognisable and audible (Velocci 2024). Rather than making a new argument about gender and sex, transaurality as present in SOPHIE's oral-aural relations is a method which seeks to analyse the ways in which one can transition, pass, and present these categories through sound.

Transaural Bodies; or, What are the Stakes of Transaurality?

This section attempts to reconcile the material urges of (some) current trans studies with the immaterial discursivity of (some) queer theory through a critical analysis of my listening and the track via theoretical lenses I find resonant with trans music studies. Given my focus here on the trans *investment in the body*, I am particularly interested in affective theories of listening (Bird 2020; Garcia 2015; Graber and Sumera 2020; Kassabian 2013) wherein 'to listen' is not simply a more 'active' mode of hearing, but rather listening, in such theories, constitutes a more formative, 'sticky' (Ahmed 2010), and 'residual' (Kassabian 2013) impact on our ways of being in the world.¹⁹

Affect encourages us to reorientate our relationships to sounding bodies (music) such that we displace dualities such as mind/body or drastic/gnostic, since affect entails that such seemingly discreet modalities operate in parallel, side-by-side (Grosz 1994, 5–10; Cimini 2010; Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Deleuze 1988, 17–18). As such, 'listening' is a situated engagement with the actuality of sonic objects as they sound and resound within and without our bodies-as-ears. Beginning to engage our bodies in this way, as 'border[s] that feel' (Ahmed 2016, 27), opens up conceptual *and* material space for developing Baitz's (re)turn to materiality in relation to 'Faceshopping'.²⁰

Though 'body', like 'listening', is a contested category (Kapchan 2015) and has likewise been an object (and method) of inquiry in musicology and sound studies (Kassabian 2013; Le Guin 2005), my understanding of it posits 'bodies' as contingencies capable of affecting other bodies as well as being affected (Spinoza 2001, 3–6). Thus, a critical-material (queer-trans) engagement with bodies can consider how they are assembled and transformed at particular moments in time and space, asking when and where it becomes possible for bodies to reassemble (Braidotti 1994; Daughtry 2020). Through listening critically with bodies, we can begin to account for how certain positionalities in the world are transformed in relation to sound. What makes this listenership 'critical' is its account of the orality/aurality of *transition* where listening participates, across the dialectics of subjects and representations, knowledge and objects (Moreno 2004), in the actualities of sonic changes in sex and gender beyond identity. We may thus move closer to comprehending 'transaural' architectures of the body, where the 'tissues of the body' form a 'resonant space' in which *sounds can resound the bodies in which we invest* (Ouzounian 2006, 69–70; cf. Haraway 1991).

This kind of approach to bodies is one that appears throughout trans literature (Nunn forthcoming; Salamon 2010; Velocci 2024) and is also found in contemporary trans music studies (Krell 2013; Pennington 2018; Roy 2019). The political theoretical foundations of this work of course develops ideas found in new materialist feminisms and,

relatedly, Deleuzian feminisms (see Stark and Laurie 2019). Due to their particular emphasis on music, I wish here to briefly offer a reading of Deleuze and Guattari as foundational for new materialism, particularly in the work of Rosi Braidotti (1994). This articulates the formative relationships between sounding and gendering/sexing. Though the music-body association has a long history in philosophy, which feminist musicologists have critiqued (Lochhead 2008), the understanding of body and music in Deleuze and Guattari has an affinity with transaurality as a method of listening that both examines the sounding of sex change as well as maintaining a criticality central to queerness.

In the tenth plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 2013), Deleuze and Guattari devote a sizable portion of the chapter to the subheading 'Becoming-Music'. Of course, the space I have here is not enough to provide a complete exegesis of this section—as a profoundly affective text, however, I need only draw out some moments of speculation that relate to transaurality. Deleuze and Guattari believe that music has 'a much stronger deterritorialising force, at once more intense and much more collective, and the voice seems to have a much greater power of deterritorialisation' (2013, 352). With deterritorialisation, which is 'always multiple and composite' (2013, 592) and thus relational even when seemingly absolute, being the decoding of a body—when my hand is in a state of becoming-otherwise, departing from something rather than arriving at a completed stratified state—music, for Deleuze and Guattari, presents a rapid intensity of deterritoriality. Indeed, like transition, music's deterritorialisations often depart and transition from non-existence towards something else—this relates to McKenzie Wark's autotheoretical explorations of her transition in *Reverse Cowgirl* (2020, 180), where the girl 'inside' her necessitated the death of the man she pretended to be: she crossed from 'temporary non-existence' and 'temporary non-masculinity' out of 'the body of Orpheus' and through 'the body of Euridice'.²¹ Does this suggest that music's (relational) deterritorialisations are transitive/-versal, in non-imitative (there is no 'original' to be repeated or to imitate) and non-figurative (music's force is not metaphorical) ways?

Surely, more than a mere metaphor for transition, bodies that listen, bodies that are hailed into being through sound, are those which sound and music can deterritorialise. When the voice, in this understanding, is a 'machining' that implies 'the abolition of the overall dualism', moreover, what does this imply for the binary understanding of gender in listening—are listener and listened moving in parallel and, when in motion, are their interactions gendered and regendering? Perhaps a glimmer of the answer Deleuze and Guattari would offer resides in the moment of this section of the book when they argue that 'Being a man *or* a woman no longer exists in music' (2013, 354). This printed emphasis on 'or' shows the abolition of a binary system is what Deleuze and Guattari have in mind: one cannot be man *or* woman, but could be man *and* woman, *neither* man *nor* woman, more-than man *or* woman, and so on. While, as above, we ought to be critical of strategies of opting out of social categories, particularly for trans theorists seeking normativity, what might be taken from these passages is the palpable importance of music and sound in *transformation*.

These readings have hopefully illuminated an understanding of the metaphysics of music—its culturally and socially contingent yet powerful capacities for affecting gender and sex—that necessitates a simultaneously material and immaterial

understanding of trans listening. That is, being material *or* immaterial is impossible in music. I position these contributions to ongoing trans theory here as I feel they make it possible to understand the critical aspects of my listening to SOPHIE.

In my account of SOPHIE's 'Faceshopping', I notice the materiality of listening to this track as it *impresses* on me, as well as the materialities it may *express* for the producer. We might however go beyond this dichotomisation of a symbolic regime towards thinking of the social affects whose functions and structural mediations are not determined by me or SOPHIE. It is necessary to maintain a critical distance (via queer theory), situating the track as a social object. Transaural listening traces the social and experiential transformations of bodies as sounded, wherein the (im)materiality of listening is heard beyond identitarian logic.²² Through my analysis, while sustaining the claims of Baitz without losing the insights of queer theory, I develop a method of trans music studies that is material yet also critical in its attempts to listen for the mutability and sociality of gender and sex.

Beyond my interpretation, SOPHIE's music invokes a 'musically imagined community' (Born 2012; expanding on Anderson 1983), which I take to be LGBTQ+ audiences in general but also trans-identified listeners (such as myself) for whom its non-identitarian sonifications of transition most resonates. The material conditions of SOPHIE's positionality specifically pertain to experiences of transition; listening for how she engages this in her production techniques reveals more about sonic gendering and sexing beyond just her positionality, however. Whilst recent work in sound studies and decolonisation has argued for an 'incommensurability' between positionalities (Robinson 2020, 53), I believe in this instance that SOPHIE's sonic de/reterritorialisation of gender and sex makes audible (for both trans and non-trans listeners) the possibilities of a transaural materialisation of body: that is, a body that can be reassembled, reread, and joyously embodied through its affective relations to resonant bodies. Since this remoulded bodily architecture is transaurally made audible, it invokes both the trans investment in the body *as well as* the queer escape from the normative, bounded body—it is necessarily both and more at the same time. This is 'trans-' insofar as it crosses over the gendering of bodies but also insofar as it goes between and beyond them. Transing, though 'trans' seeks to include those that wish to exist in the binary, is necessarily an endeavour that does not allow for the static existence of eternal dualities.

This analysis straddles two intersecting registers (micro/macro) with which we ought to understand the vocal machining I listened to above. From trans method, these voices can, as such, be heard as SOPHIE's rematerialisation of her body in a way that allows her to be heard as both a woman *and* critical of the naturalness of such soundings. Moreover, the materiality of these voices, as I hear them, alienates the ostensible 'realness' of the passing feminine voice. This alienation indicates the need for a more macro-scale analysis. In the context of cisheteronormativity, this listening to SOPHIE's voices signals the ways in which she, as a transgender woman, navigates her non-normative relationship to gender. It also allows us to hear her alienation of 'realness' as a critique of passing, even though this is a valid desire for many who transition. SOPHIE's sonic investment in and transgression from the binary of masculine and feminine, through vocal contradictions, sounds out a desire for gendered and sexed ways of being that are simultaneously staging vocal passing and denaturing gendered bodies and how they can sound. The social alienation of the non-passing voice is itself alienated through the aesthetic staging of the

artificiality of vocality; or, femininity is an actuality which is produced by a voice whose self-alienation alienates that which is deemed the inalienable, feminine voice. Whilst many examples of distorted vocals are found in pop music history, SOPHIE's is particularly salient for its exaggeration of what such distortions may signify in terms of gender, which I believe must be heard in terms of a concomitant trans investment in, transformation of, and transgression from the body.

It is impossible to listen critically to this track and the possibilities it may open up for the body without a combination of queer theory *and* trans theory. Of course, we must listen to this track with the knowledge that SOPHIE, as a transgender woman, in some sense *invested in* her body, how she navigated and orientated it, how it was read, and which apparatuses *allowed it to be read at all*.

The use of voices I mention above could be understood as a technological mobilisation of Ahmed's (2006) notion of 'lines' that are made easy. Whilst Ahmed's conception is labelled as 'queer phenomenology', there are clear possibilities to renavigate such 'lines' in a way that may constitute a transing (both going beyond and materially reconstructing) one's inherited lines. That is, in the context of cisheteropatriarchy, SOPHIE's vocal feminisation audio-surgery in this track demonstrates the ways in which what we listen to, for, and with can constitute an alternative form of knowledge about sounding bodies. Such transing is distinct from 'queering' insofar as it centres transgressions from the 'natural' voice and how such gendered vocalities become meaningful.

Scholarship on trans-vocality has already explored the ways in which voice (both spoken and sung) is not biologically determined, and indeed 'voice therapy' exists in medical and non-medical pathways as a means by which trans people present their identity (Pennington 2018). Perhaps we ought to listen to the voices SOPHIE sculpts as a non-medical *resounding* of a reassembled, transed body. SOPHIE's synthesised voices might offer some kind of creative experimentation with the limits of sounding bodies, particularly their virtual capacities to regroup and resound, or change, at least one aspect of sex and gender.²³

Transaurality: A Mode of Listening Against Queer Theory

I propose 'transaurality' as a mode which takes 'trans listening' as a method rather than a subject. Transaurality can pertain to: analyses of how sex and gender change in and through sound (cf. Nunn [forthcoming](#)); denaturing cisness, or taking cis soundings as objects (Velocci 2024, 111); and sonic expressions of *investment* and *divestment* from the body as ongoing processes. Baitz and others (Krell 2018) make abundantly clear that there is pressing need for inductive theory building that responds to the embodied experiences of trans-identified people, yet there remains the need to oscillate between inductive and deductive modes of thought, working through the empirical and the conceptual together (Born 2010). 'Queer' has been rightfully decentred as a kind of 'radial' theory that appears 'to explain everything but always [gives] the same answer' (Howe and Boyer 2016, 29). My insistence is not that we continue along the well-trodden lines of now-institutionalised queer theory, but rather that we work against these accepted paradigms.

I encourage a listening which attends to the critical phenomenology of the body-ear, wherein 'transing' is a movement within gender and sexual experiences. I have

contextualised and problematised critiques such as Baitz's, arguing—through transaurality—for a continued, lateral, and synergistic engagement with trans *and* queer theory. In this broader sense, the development of transaurality reunites trans and queer methods through careful consideration and application of their parallelly moving attempts to unpack experiences, concepts, and objects which emerge within cisheteropatriarchal conditions. To Baitz, then, I proffer a 'yes, and ...' expansion.

This preliminary analysis of a single track has attempted to offer a transaural understanding of 'Faceshopping', where the listening assembled with this track, as a 'musical body', is mediated by a multiplicity of social relations (Born and Barry 2018, 466; Cimini 2018). My analysis shows that 'music' is semiotically polyvalent and contested, where meaning coalesces both within and without the music itself. This track has consequentially elicited a listening that is at once immanently material, revealing actual transformation of bodies, but also immanently critical, concerned with the potential for musical events (as sounding bodies) to reassemble the bodies with which they socially interact. This paper has sought to open up conceptual and methodological space for trans listening as it apprehends the important ways in which our bodies reassemble, resound, and can be remade.

Notes

1. The prefix *trans-* is followed, not uncontroversially, by an asterisk to emphasise the wide range of identities designated by the term, such as transsexual, transgender, non-binary, agender, and gender-fluid (Baitz 2018). It is important, politically and socially, to group these identities together since they each ought to rely on a politics that departs from naturalisation of gender *or* sex. Though some in our community are right to complicate the political viability of a floating signifier that *always* requires radical destabilisation (Clarke 2019), I gesture to the empty signifier here, though I do not necessarily prefer it, to indicate that I reject separationism. This paper, in its scope, cannot boast to settle the political desire and demand of trans studies, but it proceeds with the firm belief that any form of listening considered 'trans' (whether it be by, for, or with trans-identified listeners/sounders *or not*) must fold the plurality of the trans community into its theoretical reaches.
2. 'Nature', that is, does not exist as some raw basis from which 'trans' emerges as a deviant. More pointedly, I would encourage a counterintuitive metaphysics that understands normative categories such as 'nature' as coming after their constitutive deviants. In this temporality, where nature comes after transness and queerness, transness and queerness exist prior to stratifications such as 'cis' and 'straight' to the extent that trans and queer can exist without cisheteropatriarchy, but cisheteropatriarchy *cannot exist without* trans and queer (see Cashmore 2021; cf. Stryker 2006; cf. Butler 2011).
3. For examples of this work (see Anzaldúa 1987; Bettcher 2020; Bey 2022; Feinberg 1992; Gill-Peterson 2018; Halberstam [1998] 2018; Kulick 1998; Preciado 2013; Prosser 1998; Salamon 2010; Snorton 2017; Stone 1992; Valentine 2007).
4. To be clear, the frictions that emerge from the heterogeneity of our community, where the crucial issue is whether we wish to transcend (from a gender binary) or transition (within a gender binary), are taken to be generative frictions, points of contention from which new lines of thought may emerge.
5. Baitz notably draws on what is by now a common, though vexed, combination of phenomenological and new materialist thinking. There are obvious shortcomings with both theoretical regimes—most notably their failed accounts of 'the social' beyond flattened, microsocial relations (cf. Latour 2005)—but they also run with respective extremes of either centralising or disappearing the problem of the subject. An extensive critique of

either social phenomenology or new materialism's respective efforts to understand the political and the social goes beyond the scope of this lengthy article. Moreover, such a reading would find thinkers operating somewhere within these traditions with whom my arguments can find camaraderie (e.g. Born 2013; Nail 2020); it is sufficient here to simply note that Batiz' *application* of these theoretical languages is too hasty and does little to transform or fully conceptualise the ways in which musical thought and scholarship tempers such ideas or, at least, might offer a much needed transsexual music theory.

6. 'Trans music' is perhaps an obfuscating nominalism, in that it attempts to name a sphere of action that is always already contingent. My conception goes beyond 'trans music' as any sonic art form produced, consumed, circulated, or interpreted by, for, or with plurally defined trans-identified subjects. A 'good object' of trans music, we might assume, is music involving trans-identified people. Trans music *as* method moves away from identity-based ontologies 'towards a transition-based method which asks what happens to 'sex' and the structures that regulate it when it changes' in relation to music (Nunn forthcoming). It is in these movements, rather than their reification, that trans musical aesthetics may be partially identifiable.
7. I briefly situate Baitz within the wider context of queer and trans music studies, as well as pointing to some of the other major voices in trans music studies. However, a full genealogy and critique of queer and trans *music* studies—as opposed to queer and trans studies, the primary interlocutor of this paper—is beyond the scope I have here. Though there are salutary examples of queer and trans music studies that do not either pursue an identitarian logic or reduce 'queer' to sexuality (e.g. Peraino 2005; Santana 2022), I focus on a close reading of Baitz due to her explicit articulation of *method*, an issue I take to be central to disciplinary formation.
8. Much like the way Paul B. Preciado (2021, 52) understands 'heterosexuality' as a 'political regime' rather than a sexual practice or identity, I am using 'cis-ear', including 'cisness' generally, to refer to a mode of listening whose politics negates transness, an aurality that can be practiced by any and indeed has structural determinants. As such, it is not tied to essential, identitarian logics. This does not position cisness as the condition against/on which transness exists, though their negational relationship is sustained.
9. Since the 1990s, a moment I deal with via Cusick for its affective attachments in current queer work (Amin 2017), there have been many attempts to think about music, gender, and sexuality. The 2000s witnessed a steady increase in 'queer' scholarship on music but much of this can be understood as lacking a politics outside of the ontologisation of queer-ness *as* radicality (Krell 2018; see also Berlant and Warner 1995). Certainly, amazing work is being done by 'music scholars' (Brooks 2021; Garcia-Mispireta 2023; Jarman-Ivens 2011), but my provocations here are rooted in a training in gender, sexuality, and feminist studies *without* music studies.
10. An often-cited example of this is Judith Butler's early writings, where they discussed trans subjects as victims of a broadly conceived 'heteronormative' force. The key example is Butler's (1990) *use* of Venus Xtravaganza, a Latin American trans woman who is a key figure in the documentary *Paris Is Burning*. Butler argues that Xtravaganza's murder is due to her gender subversion, which some trans scholars have argued demonstrates that Butler fails to recognise trans oppression as something distinct from heterosexism (see Prosser 1998, 46; Bettcher 2020). While I believe Butler metaphysically has things to offer our ongoing understandings of gender, their early writings represent the inadequacy of 'queer' and 'feminist' models *alone* for understanding Xtravaganza's oppression as transgender oppression—that is, a formal stratification within society distinct from the oppression of non-heterosexuality and cis-womanhood.
11. Muñoz (1999, 8) has, following Crenshaw, defined intersectionality as the discernment of 'a multiplicity of interlocking identity components and the ways in which they affect the social', which calls for a departure from monocausal paradigms that can only consider queer-ness at the expense of blackness (or class, or transness, or disability, for instance) and vice versa. See hooks' (1992) analysis of Livingston's 'white gaze' in the 1990

- documentary *Paris Is Burning*. For important critique of the misuse of intersectionality, see Jennifer Nash's *Black Feminism Reimagined* (2018).
12. Note that Ahmed's profound spatialisation of gender and sexuality has etymological currency when one notes that 'queer' arguably comes from the Indo-European word for 'twist' (Ahmed 2006, 67). Though I have elsewhere temporalized Ahmed's spatial argument (Blackburn 2024), for the purpose of this argument the spatial phenomenology of queerness powerfully relates to trans investments in the body.
 13. The term 'transgender' is often traced back to Leslie Feinberg's (1992) *Transgender Liberation*. 'Transgender' eventually, thanks to Stryker and others, came to replace Sandy Stone's (1992) influential conception of 'posttranssexual'.
 14. I mention Didier Anzieu's notion of the 'skin ego' here as it has notably influenced Jay Prosser's remarkable work in *Second Skins*, a text that Bettcher (2020) rightly identifies as a key critique of Butler's queer-oriented study of trans experience. Prosser presents an early form of this 'second wave' of trans studies—disrupting a teleological narrative—with his focus on transsexual bodily narratives in particular but for his similar dissatisfaction with post-Butlerian queer theory when attempting to think trans life and politics.
 15. YouTube video uploaded on 4 April, 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=es9-P1SOeHU>. [CW: flashing images].
 16. Eidsheim's work is emblematic of performative analysis of voice and naturalness, though it does little work to transform the conceptualisation of voice, nature, or the performative. For a more classic, yet more compelling, examination of vocality, see Adriana Cavarero's *For More than One Voice* (2005).
 17. One other artist whose aesthetics can be compared to SOPHIE's in their style is her contemporary, also Glaswegian-born transgender artist, TAAHLIAH. Compare their work to other transgender artists such as Arca, Dorian Electra, Jasmine Infiniti, Chase Icon, or Kim Petras—whilst all of these artists present profound mediations on transaurality and 'trans music'—and one hears a double movement of dys- and euphoria in SOPHIE and TAAHLIAH, both infused with exaggeration and maximalisation. A monograph-length comparative study of SOPHIE and other trans artists would be necessary to make this aspect of her 'avant-pop' aesthetic lucid. It is enough to note here that SOPHIE's work is audibly distinct from her equally well-known counterparts like Arca and Kim Petras.
 18. It is worth noting, too, that the feminine body which is produced within the breathy bridge is not racially neutral in style but rather distinctly Black (both vocalists, SOPHIE and Cecile Believe, are white but the production points to Black vocal styles in popular music), a tropic vocality which SOPHIE seems to clearly exaggerate (see Brooks 2010). Future research may take further the aesthetic racialisation of breath, building on, for instance, Sofer's (2022) analyses of Donna Summer in relation to breathiness as often feminised and racially white. SOPHIE continues Summer's aesthetic combination of hypersexualised, 'full-bodied' (coded Black) vocality *with* a breathiness which oftentimes seeks to unmark whiteness. Indeed, breath's conceptualisation as *pneuma* (spirit) mutually negates breath as the sonic materialisation of bodily processes (larynx), a condition which coalesces with likewise material-immaterial contradictions—all at work in sexualisation, gendering, and racialisation—discussed in this article.
 19. 'Listening' is of course one of the most central topics in music and sound studies. Whilst the concept of transaurality necessitates acknowledgement, it would go beyond the scope of a single paper to provide an extensive review of the various corpora of literature on listening. For the purpose of this article, I have attempted to focus on affective philosophies of the body and how these may resonate with and be mediated by SOPHIE's transfeminist sound-world. Hence, my references to scholarship on listening are related directly to bodies as ears.
 20. Important to note is that my turn to affect, as seen in the 'ontological turn' in sound studies, is mindful of and careful to avoid treating the materiality of sound (or, the 'acoustic condition') as some kind of immediately or immanently universal experience (see Goodman 2010; Schrimshaw 2017); instead, I follow Brian Kane in understanding the 'sound'/'music' distinction as a matter of degree versus kind and, as such, I hold sonic

experience to remain mediated by our heterogeneous auditory cultures (Kane 2015; see also Feld 1984).

21. For more discussion of the ‘transgender intimacy with death’ and non-existence (though not necessarily the same thing), see Colby Gordon’s *Glorious Bodies* (2024, 95).
22. There needs to be more work done to consider how notions of ‘sounding out’ or ‘voicing’ works for those that understandably are not public about their identity as trans, those who do not wish to be audible or visible in the first place. As Shon Faye’s (2021) recent agenda-setting text made clear, visibility and the politics of representation continuously fails those who are most marginalised and most at risk, namely those who are working class and non-white. I am left wondering whether ‘listening’ is ever enough, particularly for helping those that cannot risk being heard. The scope of this discussion cannot answer these urgent needs; I hope my exploration of trans sonic aesthetics does not negate the demands for radical and tangible emancipation but rather operates in parallel to the practical and urgent demands of trans emancipation.
23. I appreciate that the argument emerging here does seemingly very little to address the current systemic issues faced by working-class trans people of colour, whose grievability in the eyes of the state and the wider public ought surely to be at the centre of our concerns (Butler 2009). The realm of the aesthetic, however, operates in relation to the political and the ethical. Although SOPHIE represents an elite member of this minority within a minority, being as she was white and (presumably) financially secure, the politics that SOPHIE’s music opened up *through* its aesthetics offers ways to address the most marginalised in our societies, for us to be able to listen to ways in race, class, age, and disability come to condition sex and gender transition and its inaudibilities.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Gascia Ouzounian for her generous comments on an early version of this article. I am also extremely grateful to Daniele Shlomit Sofer for supporting this work through to its publication. I thank Billie Cashmore for thinking with me on this topic for many years. I am also, finally, indebted to my former and current advisors, Georgina Born and Louise Meintjes, for the respective ways in which they have nurtured and shaped my thinking—I hope the traces of their impact can be felt on these pages.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on Contributor

Anton Blackburn is a Ph.D. candidate in Ethnomusicology, with a graduate certificate in Feminist Studies, at Duke University. Anton’s research centres on philosophies of death, listening, and breath in relation to electronic dance music within London’s queer and trans nightlife scenes. Through following the ways in which the aesthetic, the social, and the political coalesce and dissociate on and off the dancefloors of Britain’s capital, Anton’s doctoral thesis develops ‘transaurality’ to challenge romantic narratives of resistance, agency, and experience in contemporary anthropological and ethnomusicological thought.

ORCID

Anton L. Blackburn  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9989-3213>

References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2010. "Happy Objects." In *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 29–51. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2016. "An Affinity of Hammers." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3 (1–2): 22–34. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-3334151>.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2019. *What's the Use?: On the Uses of Use*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Amin, Kadji. 2017. *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Anastasia, Andrew. 2014. "Voice." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1 (1–2): 262–263. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2400208>
- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco, CA: Spinsters/Aunt Lute.
- Anzieu, Didier. 1989. *The Skin Ego: A Psychoanalytic Approach to the Self*. Translated by Chris Turner. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press.
- Arte TRACKS. 2018. "SOPHIE: The Producer Taking Pop to the Future." YouTube, October 26. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ifh0tDrwBA>
- Baitz, Dana. 2018. "Toward a Trans Method in Musicology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness*, edited by Fred Everett Maus and Sheila Whiteley, 366–381. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793525.013.44>
- Barthes, Roland. 1977. "The Grain of the Voice." In *Image, Music, Text*, edited by Stephen Heath, 179–189. London: Fontana.
- Barz Gregory, and William Cheng, eds. 2019. *Queering the Field: Sounding Out Ethnomusicology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bassi, Serena, and Greta LaFleur. 2020. "Introduction: TERFs, Gender Critical Movements, and Postfascist Feminisms." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 9 (3): 311–333. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-9836008>
- Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner. 1995. "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?" *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 110 (3): 343–349.
- Bettcher, Talia. 2020. "Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2020 Edition)*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-trans/>
- Bey, Marquis. 2022. *Black Trans Feminism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bird, Jacob Mallinson. 2020. "Haptic Aurality: On Touching the Voice in Drag Lip-Sync Performance." *Sound Studies* 6 (1): 45–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20551940.2019.1640512>.
- Blackburn, Anton L. 2024. "Dragging Music: Towards a Queer Socio-Cultural Semiotics." *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 149 (1): 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/rma.2024.14>
- Born, Georgina. 2005. "On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity." *Twentieth-Century Music* 2 (1): 7–36.
- Born, Georgina. 2010. "The Social and the Aesthetic: For a Post-Bourdieuan Theory of Cultural Production." *Cultural Sociology* 4 (2): 171–208. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.duke.edu/10.1177/1749975510368471>.
- Born, Georgina. 2011. "Music and the Materialization of Identities." *Material Culture* 16 (4): 376–388. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183511424196>
- Born, Georgina. 2012. "Music and the Social." In *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, edited by Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton, 261–274. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Born, Georgina, ed. 2013. *Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Born, Georgina, and Andrew Barry. 2018. "Music, Mediation Theories and Actor-Network Theory." *Contemporary Music Review* 37 (5–6): 443–487. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2018.1578107>.
- Boyer, Dominic and Cymene Howe. 2016. "Portable Analytics and Lateral Theory." In *Theory Can Be More than It Used to Be: Learning Anthropology's Method in a Time of Transition*, edited by Dominic Boyer, James D. Faubion and George E. Marcus, 15–38. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 1994. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Brett, Philip. [1994] 2006. "Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet." In *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, edited by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, 9–26. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Brett, Philip, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, eds. [1994] 2006. *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Brooks, Daphne A. 2010. "'This Voice Which is Not One': Amy Winehouse Sings the Ballad of Sonic Blue(s)face Culture." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 20 (1): 37–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07407701003589337>
- Brooks, Daphne A. 2021. *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. [1993] 2011. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York, NY: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 2009. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.
- Cashmore, Will. 2021. "Queer Futures." *Nameless Desires* (Blog post, June 21). <https://namelessdesires.substack.com/p/queer-futures>
- Cavenero, Adriana. 2005. *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*. Translated by Paul A. Kottman. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Cheng, William. 2016. *Just Vibrations: The Purpose of Sounding Good*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Chu, Andrea Long. 2019. *Females*. London: Verso Books.
- Chu, Andrea Long, and Emmett Harsin Drager. 2019. "After Trans Studies." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6 (1): 103–116. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-7253524>.
- Cimini, Amy M. 2010. "Gilles Deleuze and the Musical Spinoza." In *Sounding the Virtual: Gilles Deleuze and the Theory and Philosophy of Music*, edited by Nick Nesbitt and Brian Hulse, 147–162. New York, NY: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315609966-11>
- Cimini, Amy M. 2018. "Music Theory, Feminism, the Body: Mediation's Plural Work." *Contemporary Music Review* 37 (5–6): 666–683. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2018.1577642>.
- Clarke, Eric F. 2007. "The Impact of Recording on Listening." *Twentieth-Century Music* 4 (1): 47–70. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000527>.
- Constansis, Alexandros N. 2008. "The Changing Female-To-Male (FTM) Voice." *Radical Musicology* 3. <http://www.radical-musicology.org.uk/2008/Constansis.htm>
- Corbett, John, and Terri Kapsalis. 2015. "Aural Sex: The Female Orgasm in Popular Sound." In *Microgroove: Forays into Other Music*, 102–111. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>.
- Currah, Paisley. 2022. *Sex is as Sex Does: Governing Transgender Identity*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Cusick, Suzanne G. 1994. "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem." *Perspectives of New Music* 32 (1): 8–27. <https://doi.org/10.2307/833149>.
- Cusick, Suzanne G. [1994] 2004. "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not the Think Straight." In *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, edited by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, 67–83. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Daughtry, J. Martin. 2020. "Did Music Cause the End of the World?" Transposition [En ligne], Hors-série 2 | 2020, mis en ligne le 15 mars 2020, consulté le 17 février 2026. <http://journals.openedition.org/transposition/5192>
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1988. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books.
- Deleuze, Gilles. [1994] 2014. *Difference and Repetition*. 2nd ed. Translated by Paul Patton. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 2013. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Dunn Leslie C., and Nancy A. Jones, eds. 1994. *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eidsheim, Nina Sun. 2019. *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Eng, David L., Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz. 2005. "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" *Social Text* 23 (3–4): 1–17.
- Faye, Shon. 2015. "To Be Real: On Trans Aesthetics and Authenticity." *Blog post*, October 20. Versobooks.com. 20 October 2015. <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2293-to-be-real-on-trans-aesthetics-and-authenticity>
- Faye, Shon. 2021. *The Transgender Issue: An Argument for Justice*. London: Allen Lane.
- Feinberg, Leslie. 1992. *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come*. New York, NY: World View Forum Pub.
- Feld, Steven. [1982] 2012. *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression. Third Edition*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Feld, Steven. 1984. "Sound Structure as Social Structure." *Ethnomusicology* 28 (3): 383–409.
- Feld, Steven, and Donald Brenneis. 2004. "Doing Anthropology in Sound." *American Ethnologist* 31 (4): 461–471.
- Ferguson, Roderick A. 2004. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Garcia, Luis Manuel. 2015. "Beats, Flesh, and Grain: Sonic Tactility and Affect in Electronic Dance Music." *Sound Studies* 1 (1): 59–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20551940.2015.1079072>.
- Garcia-Mispirota, Luis Manuel. 2023. *Together, Somehow: Music, Affect, and Intimacy on the Dancefloor*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Gill-Peterson, Jules. 2018. *Histories of the Transgender Child*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gill-Peterson, Jules. 2024. *A Short History of Trans Misogyny*. London: Verso.
- Goldin-Perschbacher, Shana. 2013. "'The World Has Made Me the Man of My Dreams': Meshell Ndegeocello and the 'Problem' of Black Female Masculinity." *Popular Music* 32 (3): 471–496.
- Goodman, Steve. 2010. *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Gordon, Colby. 2024. *Glorious Bodies: Trans Theology and Renaissance Literature*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Graber, Katie J., and Matthew Sumera. 2020. "Interpretation, Resonance, Embodiment: Affect Theory and Ethnomusicology." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 29 (1): 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17411912.2020.1808501>.
- Gregg Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds. 2010. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. <https://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/1469/The-Affect-Theory-Reader>
- Grosz, Elizabeth A. 1994. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Halberstam, J. Jack. 2005. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives, 20th Anniversary Edition*. New York City, NY: New York University Press.
- Halberstam, Jack. 2011. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Halberstam, Jack. [1998] 2018. *Female Masculinity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Halberstam, Judith. 2006. "What's That Smell? Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives." In *Queering the Popular Pitch*, edited by Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga, 3–26. New York, NY; Abingdon: Routledge.

- Haraway, Donna Jeanne. 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books.
- hooks, bell. 1981. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- hooks, bell. 1992. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. London: Turnaround.
- Horbury, Ezra, and Christine 'Xine' Yao. 2020. "Empire and Eugenics: Trans Studies in the United Kingdom." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7 (3): 445–454.
- Irizarry, Larissa A. 2020. "Queer Intimacy: Vocality in *Jesus Christ Superstar*." *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 24:162–177.
- James, Robin. 2010. *The Conjectural Body: Gender, Race, and the Philosophy of Music*. Lexington Books: Bloomsbury.
- Jarman, Freya. 2018. "Watch My Lips: The Limits of Camp in Lip-Syncing Scenes." In *Music & Camp*, edited by Christopher Moore and Philip Purvis, 95–117. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Jarman-Ivens, Freya. 2011. *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kane, Brian. "Sound Studies Without Auditory Culture: A Critique of the Ontological Turn." *Sound Studies* 1 (1): 2–21.
- Kapchan, Deborah. 2015. "Body." In *Keywords in Sound*, edited by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, 33–44. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375494-004>
- Kassabian, Anahid. 2013. *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Keegan, Cael M. 2020. "Against Queer Theory." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7 (3): 349–353. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-8552978>.
- Krell, Elías. 2013. "Contours through Covers: Voice and Affect in the Music of Lucas Silveira." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 25 (4): 476–503. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpms.12047>.
- Krell, Elías. 2018. "The New 'Queer' and the Old Racism." *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 22:63–71. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wam.2018.0006>.
- Kulick, Don. 1998. *Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture Among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lacasse, Serge. 2010. "The Phonographic Voice: Paralinguistic Features and Phonographic Staging in Popular Music Singing." In *Recorded Music: Performance, Culture and Technology*, edited by Amanda Bayley, 225–251. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Le Guin, Elisabeth. 2005. *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Lewis, Sophie, and Asa Seresin. 2022. "Fascist Feminism: A Dialogue." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 9 (3): 473–479.
- Lhooq, Michelle. 2017. "Pop Producer SOPHIE on Anonymity, Honesty, and Artifice." *Teen Vogue*, December 7. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/sophie-producer>
- Lochhead, Judy. 2008. "The Sublime, the Ineffable, and Other Dangerous Aesthetics." *Women & Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 12 (1): 63–74.
- MacKinnon, Catherine. 1983. "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 8 (4): 635–658.
- Mahon, Maureen. 2020. *Black Diamond Queens: African American Women and Rock and Roll*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Maus, Fred Everett. 1993. "Masculine Discourse in Music Theory." *Perspectives of New Music* 31 (2): 264–293.
- McClary, Susan. 1991. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Minks, Amanda. 2023. *Indigenous Audibilities: Music, Heritage, and Collections in the Americas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Moreno, Jairo. 2004. *Musical Representations, Subjects, and Objects: The Construction of Musical Thought in Zarlino, Descartes, Rameau, and Weber*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. 1999. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nail, Thomas. 2020. *Marx in Motion: A New Materialist Marxism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nash, Jennifer C. 2018. *Black Feminism Reimagined. After Intersectionality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Neumark, Norie. 2010. "Doing Things with Voices: Performativity and Voice." In *Voice: Vocal Aesthetics in Digital Arts and Media*, edited by Norie Neumark, Ross Gibson, and Theo van Leeuwen, 95–114. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262013901.001.0001>.
- Nunn, Zavier. *Forthcoming*. "Solomon's Salamanders: The Legal History of Sex/Change and Trans Men under the Nazis." *American Historical Review*.
- Ochoa Gautier, Ana María. 2014. *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ouzounian, Gascia. 2006. "Embodied Sound: Aural Architectures and the Body." *Contemporary Music Review* 25 (1–2): 69–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494460600647469>.
- Pareles, Jon. 2015. "With 'Product,' Sophie Swarms the Senses with Synthetic Sounds." *The New York Times*, 2 December. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/06/arts/music/with-product-sophie-swarms-the-senses-with-synthetic-sounds.html>
- Pareles, Jon. 2021. "Sophie, Who Pushed the Boundaries of Pop Music, Dies at 34." *The New York Times*, 30 January. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/30/arts/music/sophie-dead.html>
- Pennington, Stephan. 2013. "A Meditation on the Relationship between Gender Variance and Sexual Variance." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 66 (3): 857–860.
- Pennington, Stephan. 2018. "Transgender Passing Guides and the Vocal Performance of Gender and Sexuality." In *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness*, edited by Fred Everett Maus and Sheila Whiteley, 238–275. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793525.013.65>
- Peraino, Judith A. 2005. *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=236963>
- Peraino, Judith, and Suzanne G. Cusick. 2013. "Colloquy: Music and Sexuality." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 66 (3): 825–872.
- Pilsner, Joshua D. 2023. *Quietude: A Musical Anthropology of Korea's Hiroshima*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Plemons, Eric. 2017. *The Look of a Woman: Facial Feminization Surgery and the Aims of Trans-Medicine*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Preciado, Paul B. 2013. *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*. Translated by Bruce Benderson. New York, NY: The Feminist Press.
- Preciado, Paul B. 2021. *Can the Monster Speak? Report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts*. Translated by Frank Wynne. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions.
- Prosser, Jay. 1998. *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Rice, Tom. 2015. "Listening." In *Keywords in Sound*, edited by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, 99–111. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Robinson, Dylan. 2020. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Roy, Jeff. 2019. "Remapping the Voice through Transgender-Hijrā Performance." In *Remapping Sound Studies*, edited by Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes, 173–182. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Salamon, Gayle. 2010. *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Santana, M. Myrta Leslie. 2022. "Transformista, Travesti, Transgénero: Performing Sexual Subjectivity in Cuba." *Small Axe* 26 (2): 46–59.

- Schafer, R. Murray. 2003. "I've Never Seen a Sound." In *Le son dans l'art contemporain Canadien*, edited by Nicole Gingras, 66–71. Montréal: Édition Artexes.
- Schrimshaw, Nick. 2017. *Immanence and Immersion: On the Acoustic Condition in Contemporary Art*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 2003. "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You." In *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 123–151. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Snorton, C. Riley. 2014. "On the Question of 'Who's Out in Hip Hop'." *Souls* 16 (3–4): 283–302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2014.968974>.
- Snorton, C. Riley. 2017. *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sofer, Danielle Shlomit. 2020. "Spectres of Sex: Tracing the Tools and Techniques of Contemporary Music Analysis." *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie* 17 (1): 31–63.
- Sofer, Danielle Shlomit. 2022. *Sex Sounds: Vectors of Difference in Electronic Music*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Solie, Ruth A. 1993. *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Spinoza, Benedictus. [1677] 2001. *Ethics*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions.
- Stark, Hannah, and Timothy Laurie. 2019. "Deleuze and Transfeminism." In *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Feminism*, edited by Janae Sholtz and Cheri Carr, 127–140. London: Bloomsbury.
- Stone, Sandy. 1992. "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto." *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 10 (29), 150–176. https://doi.org/10.1215/02705346-10-2_29-150.
- Stryker, Susan. 2004. "Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10 (2): 212–215. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-10-2-212>.
- Stryker, Susan. 2006. "DeSubjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies." In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, 1–18. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Stryker, Susan. 2020. "Institutionalizing Trans Studies at the University of Arizona." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7 (3): 354–366. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-8552992>.
- Taylor, Jodie. 2012a. *Playing it Queer: Popular Music, Identity and Queer World-Making*. Lausanne: Peter Lang.
- Taylor, Jodie. 2012b. "Taking it in the Ear: On Musico-Sexual Synergies and the (Queer) Possibility That Music is Sex." *Continuum: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 19 (1): 603–614.
- Valentine, David. 2007. *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Velocci, Beans. 2024. "Denaturing Cisness, or, Toward Trans History as Method." In *Feminism Against Cisness*, edited by Emma Heaney, 108–132. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Wark, McKenzie. 2020. *Reverse Cowgirl*. South Pasadena, CA: semiotext(e).
- Wiegman, Robyn. 2020. "Love and Repudiation in the Feminist Canon." *Feminist Formations* 32 (1): 1–14.