



# QUEER EAR

Remaking  
Music Theory

edited by  
GAVIN S.K. LEE

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OXFORD  
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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press  
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Lee, Gavin S. K., editor.

Title: Queer ear : remaking music theory / edited by Gavin S. K. Lee.

Description: [1.] | New York : Oxford University Press, 2023. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023004628 (print) | LCCN 2023004629 (ebook) |

ISBN 9780197536773 (paperback) | ISBN 9780197536766 (hardback) |

ISBN 9780197536797 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Queer musicology. | Music theory. | Musical analysis.

Classification: LCC ML3797.4.Q44 2023 (print) | LCC ML3797.4 (ebook) |

DDC 780.72—dc23/eng/20230131

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2023004628>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2023004629>

DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780197536766.001.0001

Paperback printed by Marquis Book Printing, Canada

Hardback printed by Bridgeport National Bindery, Inc., United States of America

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# Introduction

## Queer Ear

*Gavin S. K. Lee*

I once served on a masters thesis committee on set theory together with a violist who had performed with one of the famous orchestras in London (who then later became a professor at the same conservatory as me). The student used the standard theoretical terminology, describing pitch class sets as “chords,” to which the violist—a veteran performer of new music—remarked that he could not see how a collection of non-simultaneously sounded notes could be described as a “chord.” Although this episode could be written off as being about the vagaries of terminology, it might be better understood as a clash of musical embodiment and expectations. The violist clearly did not hear the collection of pitches *as* a pitch class set, which suggests that the important harmonic aspect of set theory might be a peculiarity of music theorists as opposed to the larger number of professional musicians who perform atonal and twelve-tone music (and who may be more interested in details of expression, articulation, and motivic derivation).

It is because of the highly specialized nature of set theory, which seems to have little appeal even for dedicated music researchers (who are non-music theorists), that Susan McClary referred in 1991 to “pitch class amoebas” (109)—the pitch class sets that are the small musical segments that constitute the building blocks of mainstream post-tonal music theory as transmitted in most US doctoral programs.<sup>1</sup> McClary was reacting then against a common-sense music academia that had for decades occupied itself mostly with verifiable, positivist facts of biography and history, or identifiable pitches in a score. With the rise of (what we might broadly call) postmodern theory (Kramer

<sup>1</sup> Certainly, set theory is not just about pitch class amoebas, but it is important to trace the history of the contention between the disciplines of musicology and music theory, and to note the early resistance of feminist and queer musicologists to music theory.

1995) in music research in the 1990s—which, among other things, questioned the notion of scientific objectivity—music scholars began to call for attention to musical histories and experiences that differed according to one’s historical context, race, class, gender, and sexuality. Feminist, queer, postcolonial, literary, and critical-race theory made powerful inroads in music research that valued historical contingencies and differentiated subjectivities. Feminist and queer musicology were natural allies, both opposed to hegemonic powers that most often were aligned with heteronormative, patriarchal masculinity, which in turn was understood to be expressed in the rationality of positivist history and formalist music theory.<sup>2</sup> As opposed to the singular scientific truth, a productive ambiguity was introduced. McClary, for instance, noted that although there may be a relationship between Schubert’s (then newly construed) same-sex attraction, on the one hand, and her theorization of a subjectivity open to ambiguous harmonic pleasures in the second movement of the composer’s *Unfinished* symphony, on the other, there is no essential link between the two. Schubert may or may not have been same-sex attracted; same-sex attracted male composers may or may not articulate a subjectivity that deviates from the normative goal-directed mold; the information we have on the early eighteenth century is spotty—and musical ambiguity may indeed be musical as opposed to an expression of non-normative masculinity or sexuality (McClary 1994, 226–28).<sup>3</sup>

It is notable that this radical degree of interpretive contingency—which stands in contrast to the generalizable impetus of the “theory” of music (or any theory, really)—was articulated by a scholar generally recognized as a musicologist.<sup>4</sup> Because queer musicology often aims to interpret implicit meanings and hidden secrets, there is a degree of ambiguity that comes with the terrain, leaving room for *degrees* of plausibility. Whether or not it is this ambiguity that has discouraged queer research in music theory, the latter field has not seen the same level of queer vitality as musicology. Musicologists have

<sup>2</sup> Feminist and queer theory of the 1990s shared a systemic, deconstructive purview of the binaries of gender and sexuality, which meant that even studies of conventional notions of masculinity or even heterosexuality had a progressive edge that usually (but not always) pointed at least implicitly to a non-normativity that lies beyond. See Borgerding 2002; Smart 2000; Purvis 2013; Dellamora and Fischlin 1997; Case, Brett, and Foster 1995; and Blackmer and Smith 1995.

<sup>3</sup> See also McClary’s interpretation and analysis of Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony in McClary 1999, 69–79.

<sup>4</sup> Although McClary incorporates music theory and analysis in her work, the relevant passages usually constitute a relatively small section of her publications, and she does not aim for an exhaustive, systematic account of musical workings. McClary is therefore widely recognized as a musicologist, even though she has been invited to present the 2009 keynote speech (published in McClary 2010) at the Society for Music Theory conference in Montréal, Canada.

examined topics ranging from “lesbian” musical experience (Cusick 1994) to musicality as a closet (Brett 1994), from musical queering as ethical practice (Peraino 2005) to ambiguity as an analytic in popular music (Lee 2018). Whereas a noted scholar of queer musicology such as Suzanne Cusick has been elected president of the American Musicological Society (2019–2020), and whereas the LGBTQ Study Group of the society is home to a vibrant community of scholars whose research has only expanded since the field’s emergence in the late 1980s and early 1990s, queer scholarship is still in its nascence in the Society for Music Theory, though the publication of this book marks a significant milestone.<sup>5</sup> Part of the explanation is that musicology has by and large come to value minority identities and perspectives, whereas music theory as a discipline is defined as the search for “general principles” (Fallows 2011) of music. Even though recent decades have seen much growth in interdisciplinary approaches to music theory, the fact that the definition of the discipline leans toward generality has major implications for those of us who ground our work in the perspectivism that is central to feminist, queer, and critical-race theories of difference—that is, what music theory looks like and sounds like is *contingent* on one’s race, gender, and sexuality, and more generally, on one’s positionality (as evinced in my opening anecdote). The “generalist” definition of music theory creates an exclusionary pressure of gatekeeping among music theorists who regard studies of gender and sexuality as belonging properly to the domain of queer *musicology*. Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that conference program committees of the Society for Music Theory frequently reject abstracts on the basis that they are not about “music theory” (and are instead about musicology, philosophy, cultural studies, etc.).<sup>6</sup> As to what precisely music theory seeks to establish general principles for, evasion can be sometimes discerned, particularly in the wake of New Musicology’s critique of music theory’s formalism—suffice it to say that a recent award-winning Oxford handbook on music theory (Rehding and Rings 2019) includes chapters on pitch, interval, mode, scale, tonic, timbre, texture, and so on, and not “gender” or “sexuality” (whereas

<sup>5</sup> The Society for Music Theory formed a LGBTQ+ standing committee that is guaranteed panels at annual conferences beginning in 2021. Panels are reviewed internally by the standing committee instead of going through the program committee, thus guaranteeing a queer presence at conferences.

<sup>6</sup> There is some debate about this, but my personal observation is that music theorists who are marginalized by their identities or by their research are more likely to have experienced scholarly exclusion and thus report on it. Music theorists who have not been marginalized, on the other hand, tend to refute that such exclusion exists.

the absence of the latter terms from a parallel volume in musicology would probably cause a scandal).<sup>7</sup>

Before going on, I need to articulate the caveat that the picture I painted above of musicology and music theory is intended as a description of general trends that are not, however, universal. There are certainly promising interdisciplinary developments in music-theory research and pedagogy that are too numerous to enlist here,<sup>8</sup> including work by a new generation of scholars breaking down the musicology–music theory divide that was historically particularly entrenched in the United States—but we only have to take a look at the requirements of US music-theory doctoral programs to understand that much work remains to be done. I will simply state that most US faculty have their disciplinary identities enshrined in their official job titles (e.g., lecturer in music theory), and many music theorists do not recognize me as a “real” music theorist. Though it may be the case that disciplinary boundaries in Europe and Canada may not be maintained to the same degree as in US music studies, which is the adopted frame in this introduction, it is unquestionable that US voices are dominant in English-language music scholarship.

Whereas music theory has largely retained its impetus toward generalization (a theory is meant to be applicable across multiple examples), musicology has largely embraced contingency as an ethical anchor—indeed, there is an almost reflexive recourse to ever smaller parcels of sociohistorical context that can blind us to overarching factors such as global capitalism (Currie 2009). And where music theory has broached relatively murky realms such as musical meaning, it has tended to do so in a systematic, taxonomic manner, premised on extensive theorizations of, for example, what a human gesture versus musical gesture are (Hatten 2004; Hatten 2018). Taken as a whole, then, music theory has not embraced postmodern theory to the same *degree* as musicology. (Morgan 2003 offers a critique—as well as, perhaps

<sup>7</sup> *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Concepts in Music Theory* is the winner of the 2020 award for an edited volume from the Society for Music Theory.

<sup>8</sup> The Engaged Music Theory Working Group (accessed March 1, 2022) maintains an interdisciplinary bibliography that brings music theory into relation with issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability:

<https://engagedmusictheory.com/>

Recent pedagogical projects published online (all accessed March 1, 2022) include:

“Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy” (<https://engagingstudentsmusic.org/>),  
 “Composers of Color Resource Project” (<https://composersofcolor.hcommons.org/>),  
 “Music Theory Examples by Women” (<https://musictheoryexamplesbywomen.com/>),  
 and “Expanding the Music Theory Canon—A Collection of Inclusive Music Theory Examples” (<https://www.expandingthemusictheorycanon.com/>).

unintentionally, a useful literature review—of postmodern approaches to music theory; more later.) Even though postmodern theory can hardly be said to be universal or even accepted by a majority of musicologists, there are sizeable bodies of work in musicology in which a certain degree of contingency is acceptable and even valorized. These musicological studies are typically premised on contexts, subjectivities, and identities defined in terms of historical or cultural difference, and gender, sexuality, race, and/or postcolonial relations. In addition, the bracketing of objective truth has meant that *any* claims are contingent and subject to interrogation, raising important questions about methodology—should we proceed via close hermeneutic interpretations of musical texts for musical meaning, or lean back, paying heed instead to the multiple historical discourses from which music emerges as a construct? On the question of necessary historical distance from, versus interpretive proximity to, the musical object, Lawrence Kramer (1993) and Gary Tomlinson (1993) have conducted a highly publicized debate—what they both share is a commitment to the principle of music’s contingency.

Among the sectors of musicology that could be described as postmodern in some respect, queer musicology in particular has benefitted from postmodern theory’s questioning of objective truth, in that one of queer theory’s founding tenets in its moment of emergence is an absolute non-normativity. To quote the classic formulation by David Halperin: “Queer is . . . *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence” (1995, 62). The relentless production of always differentiating meanings, contexts, identities, and perspectives is the very cornerstone of queer theory that validates minority LGBTQ perspectives and values these perspectives for their potential to challenge hegemonic knowledge structure on a systemic level, pushing back against normative powers. To cite just a few classics of queer and transgender theory, the non-normative impetus is seen in Butler’s theory of the accretion of daily, potentially subversive gender performance as opposed to gender as completely pre-determined (Butler 1993, 1999), in Edelman’s theory of homosexuality as the cathexis that is the crumbling point of heteronormativity (Edelman 2004), in Halberstam’s exploration of the spectrum of transgender embodiment (Halberstam 1998), and in voluminous articles in *Transgender Studies Quarterly*. By calling norms into question, a resolute non-normativity makes room for the contingency characteristic of postmodern theory, so much so that queer theory—in giving voice to an oppressed minority—is perhaps the most effective spokesman

for postmodern theories (of textual [Derrida 1974], academic-intellectual [Lyotard 1984], mediatized [Baudrillard 1994], or discursive-structural contingency [Foucault 1982]).

Critics of the non-normative tenet of queer theory have pointed to (i) the perceived dilution of “queer” to encompass far more than LGBTQ lives (are cisgender straights who profess to reject categories of gender and sexuality considered to be “queer”?), and (ii) to the privilege of white, cisgender, homonormative, gays and lesbians, who do not necessarily need a queer identity politics in order to thrive. Identity politics must by definition be anchored in the articulation of a stable group identity (e.g., homosexual, “same-sex” marriage) in the process of demanding political recognition. Critically, identity is central to the struggle for recognition by queers of color (Johnson 2005; Ferguson 2003) and transgender people (Halberstam 2005), especially black transgender women, who are the most vulnerable groups under the LGBTQ+ umbrella; this tradition of thought is indebted to black feminism, particularly that of the Combahee River Collective, for whom “the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else’s oppression” (Combahee River Collective 1977). In contrast, much of early queer theory, beginning with Butler’s foundational theory of gender as quotidian performance, aims to *destabilize* (gender) identity. The contradictions of the non/identity-based strands of queer theory can be seen in the following: pushed to its logical extreme, Butler’s theory that gender is performative would imply that “same-sex” marriage (and indeed, the very concepts of homosexuality and heterosexuality) cannot be conceptualized, since gender is fundamentally indeterminate. This is both the power and the Achilles’ heel of queer theory, which dismantles oppressive structures at the same that it appears to weaken identity-based political organization.

As a queer of color person myself, I recognize the trickiness of sustaining both the identity and non-identity facets of queer theory, but my life experience also convinces me of the salience of queerness as non-normativity. As queers of a certain age know, the vast majority of us were born into straight families and thus learn from a young age to collect scraps at the heteronormative table, recycling and reusing bits and pieces of an often hostile world to fortify our closets. Many of the queer younger generation in Europe and North America are lucky enough to have been born into a world in which equality is at least partially enshrined in legislation, but this is rarely true for global queer youths who live in fear of state-sanctioned physical and

psychological violence. Stigmatized and abject, queers as a whole *live* non-normativity, both in the traumatic sense of marginalization, and, crucially, in the sense of *queering* bits of the heteronormative world in order to survive (Muñoz 1999). Rather than arriving fully formed as an identity, queer, in the global view, usually emerges when we derive secret meanings and uses from ostensibly straight culture, people, and sounds. Same-sex marriage is, after all, modelled on its heteronormative equivalent and, for its problems, presents a significant advancement of LGBTQ+ rights.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps only the moral universalism of a Kantian hangover (the so-called categorical imperative) would mandate that “queer” can only be defined in one way—as an identity. Later work in queer theory has managed to curb some of the logical extremes to which Halperin’s conception of pure anti-normativity could be pushed (Wiegman and Wilson 2015). In particular, theorization of queer temporality has shed light on how livable queer futures are created from the reinvention of pasts (Muñoz 2009), and queer temporal diversions are bound up with the efficient timing of capitalist profit-making and cultural/biological reproduction (Freeman 2010). That is to say, non-normativity is *always anchored in a point of resistance against heteronormativity*. Queer theory’s non-normativity has roamed far and wide epistemologically, enabling even temporality and phenomenology (Ahmed 2006) to be queered. The power of epistemological queering lies in the systemic paradigm shift demanded by queer theorists, such that *everyone* is called upon to revise their normative understanding of the world around us. At the same time, queer temporality is anchored in, for example, BDSM practices upon which Elizabeth Freeman based her theory of nonproductive (hence anti-capitalist), “slow” temporality (2010, 138). Johnson’s theorization (2005) of the intersectional “quare” identity speaks not just to those who identify as black rather than queer because it is racial identity that speaks best to their lived oppression; Johnson also articulated a valuable framework for analyzing the *ambiguous* outcome of the intersection of multiple identities and subjectivities (he argues that white privilege allows for a *discursive* form of subjectivity, wherein words and concepts of non-normativity

<sup>9</sup> The mimicry of heterosexual marriage by same-sex marriage is sometimes considered to be a form of *homonormativity*, which is originally associated with a form of gay rights that is anchored in the notion of private accumulation in a personal capacity in a capitalist economy (“contributing to economic growth”), detached from the larger assemblage of left-wing, LGBTQ+, feminist, anti-racist, and socialist goals (Duggan 2002). In recent usage, homonormativity is often used to refer to queers who are white and/or male.

can be appropriated freely, whereas those without privilege are continually constrained by their *material*, impoverished, racial embodiment).

The authors of this volume recognize the importance of identity while retaining the non-normative stance of queer theory. Embracing the ambiguity that arises from the intersection of both a generic non-normativity and the specificity of LGBTQ lives means navigating the dynamics of what I term in this volume as *generalizable contingency*. Here it is useful for us to distinguish between the specific queer *identity* of LGBTQ+ music-makers, listeners, and music theorists, versus the queer *ethos* of non-normativity, which other people can be inspired by—without, however, earning the right to call themselves “queer.” Queer identity is contingent upon LGBTQ+ lives; the queer ethos of non-normativity is up for grabs by writers so inclined and is in that sense generalizable—with the caveat that for a piece of writing to count as expressing a queer ethos, there should be a focus on music-makers or -listeners who are marginalized in some way by race, gender, sexuality, or ability (e.g., a BIPOC woman composer who is not LGBTQ+). *Queer ear* refers to a non-normative *practice* of listening that may be adopted by people inspired by the queer ethos (non-normative musical practices can be learned regardless of one’s identity); however, this is to be distinguished from research on specifically *LGBTQ+ listeners and music-makers*, which I will refer to as *queer music theory*. It is worth pointing out that a writer does not need to be queer to engage in queer music theory; conversely, queer writers are naturally free to pursue any kind of research, queer or otherwise. In the following, the specific meaning of “queer” (as identity, as ethos) will emerge from the relation between contingency and generalizability.

The power of queerness lies in both in its generalizability to anyone’s experience of being in the world, *and* in its gender and sexual contingency. Our aim is to push queer studies in music—especially within music theory—toward ever more diversity and inclusion while incorporating queer theories’ epistemological ambitions to undo the worst forms of oppression. We let music theory speak to all kinds of queer agendas, making room for studies that can speak both to particular lives as well as to broader methodological points, much as the entire field of gender and sexuality studies always has done. While some chapters (Solomon, Stover, Bretherton) in this volume are based on queer music-makers, other contributions (Maus, Franseen, Lee) roam further afield, showing the *queering* of ostensibly straight sounds by listeners—including music theorists and music critics—who had no choice but to make a habitable world for themselves. Furthermore, queerness, while

linked to gender and sexuality, and to queer theory, in a concrete way, also paves the way for the emergence of *general* spheres of non-normativity, such as a non-anthropocentric conception of musical agency (Luong); an insular, non-instrumental conception of music-theorizing for sake of the pleasure of it, as opposed to the marketing of the music humanities as socially relevant in the neoliberal university (Currie); and new ways of theorizing that attend to non-canon sounds, necessitating departure from music-theoretical methods that prioritize the normative values of unity (Lochhead) or logical certainty. Crucially, these general aspects of non-normativity are anchored in lives and/or theories that are unambiguously recognized as queer and reveal the targets of resistance (anthropocentrism, instrumentality, unity) to be heteronormative, allowing us to discern how gender and sexuality inflect wide swaths of general existence. Even so, non-normativity is ultimately a *compulsory way of life* for queers, and queer theory is forged in the crucible of closets and homophobic violence.

Of critical importance in this volume is the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race in many of the chapters, whether race is part of the chapter's subject matter and/or shapes the author's history of listening as a facet of the author's identity. The tenet of non-normativity that informs queer theory is relevant in these intersectional chapters as well, marking the alterity of racial marginality. Luong's chapter points out that racial exclusion (along with the marginalization of women and queers) is constitutive of the anthropocentrism that informs music-theoretical conceptions of musical agency, with the human agency of theorists and composers placed above that of the work's "non-human" themes and topics; following post-humanist theory, the key point is that those who have historically been counted as "human" are white, male, and cis-heteronormative. Stover's chapter (an intersectional study of Sun Ra) cites Muñoz 2009 in pointing out that racial liberation movements have always included queers. Solomon's chapter examines the crafting of an orientalist, gamelan-based, erotically charged, static temporality in early twentieth-century US West Coast queer composers' percussion ensemble works, which project a utopian alterity of queer and free sexuality elsewhere. Lee's chapter refers to the homophobic environment of his youth in Singapore to argue that his queering of Schumann is a form of cosmopolitanist escape. Lochhead's chapter focuses on the music of Israeli American composer Chaya Czernowin and is consistent with recent calls for greater inclusion of BIPOCs, especially QTBIPOCs, and women in music theory.

The current work presented in this volume should be understood against the spotty and non-linear history of queer music theory (based on the musical practices of queers), with contributions crisscrossing disciplinary boundaries and often subsisting at disciplinary margins. In queer musicology, authors such as McClary and Brett have made use of analysis, but they did so within a much broader conceptual and cultural framework that is necessitated by the characteristic ambiguity of the topic at hand, requiring careful parsing and erudite exposition as authors grapple with the structural uncertainty that surrounds silences, absences, and closets (see Maus's chapter for a fuller account). Publications that can be categorized under music theory comprise a tiny fraction of the bibliography of LGBTQ music scholarship maintained by the LGBTQ Study Group of the American Musicological Society (Sagrans, Wace, and Whitesell 2018). In tracing the emergence of queer music theory, one starting point is the first conference paper in that area by Nadine Hubbs (on the "sexual politics" of Morrissey's melodic contours) at the Society for Music Theory (SMT) in 1994 (subsequently published as Hubbs 1996; see also Hubbs 2007). A notable exception among scholars of queer music studies, who usually have a primary musicological affiliation, is Fred Everett Maus, who has carved a niche for himself in the study of the subjectivity and practices of music theorists, articulating "masculine," "masochistic," or "bottom" subjectivities (Maus 1993, 2004, 2013). Martin Scherzinger (1997) has examined the late nineteenth-century conception of "inversion" in terms of music (Webern's symmetrical tone row inversions) and homo/heterosexuality. Following the tenet of queer non-normativity, Jennifer Rycenga (2006) writes on the queering of form in the music of the progressive rock band Yes, while Ivan Raykoff (2002) examines formal deviation in piano transcriptions that paraphrase the original Lieder (these book chapters lean toward queer ethos and thus do not belong to a strict definition of queer music theory). Apart from the foregoing publications, panels on queer topics were organized at the SMT conferences in 1999 and 2001, which included papers that eventually made it into print (some cited above), as well as other papers by Charles Fisk, Steven Nuss, Martha Mockus, Joseph Kraus, and Ian Biddle. More recently, queer music-theory panels have featured regularly at SMT conferences since 2014, and some of the papers are featured in this volume. Among the younger generation of scholars, a small handful of QTBIPOC music theorists have been contributing innovative scholarship (e.g., Luong 2017; Sofer 2018), expanding the possibilities of music theory in the examination of music-theoretical practices and electronic music. From the above,

we can discern that the history of queer music theory takes the form of a loose web of spidery threads; there has never been a monograph dedicated to the subject prior to this volume.

Queer non-normativity in the narrower sense pertaining to gender and sexuality has always been at least *consistent*—as opposed to identical—with non-normative approaches to music theory. These latter approaches arguably share the same ethos as the scholarship mentioned in the previous paragraph, even if they are not “queer” per se. There has always been a minority voice calling for attention to the contingencies of listening, to the act of theorizing, and to the historicity of music-theoretical values such as unity, which may not be borne out in musical works. A few readings here will suffice in exemplifying music theory’s non-normative thread. David Lewin’s theory of perception (1986) sought to reflect listening experience more closely than Schenkerian theory, twisting the latter by incorporating the fluidity of musical expectation as a work proceeds. As opposed to a hyper-rational, disembodied practice, music theory in general has been cast by Kofi Agawu (2004) as a performative act (involving repeated listening) in which the theorist exercises his musicality by “composing” an analytical graph based on knowledge of musical conventions. In his defense of a music theory premised on the traditional conception of the coherent synthesis of contrasting elements into musical unity (a vision congruent with that of a singular objective truth), Robert Morgan (2003) grouped together a number of writers who discerned and theorized non-normative musical processes. There is a sense in which the best of music theory has always celebrated ambiguity and bold defiance of structural norms (Schachter 1998; Anson-Cartwright 2001), even as the staid majority dominated music theory—from this perspective, music theory has perhaps always been a little queer in its ethos.

The above overview of queer music theory in relation to both non-normative music theory and to queer musicology raises the question of what precisely queer music theory is. Queer music-theorizing in this volume has its own specificity, distinct from historical, contextual studies in musicology, focusing instead on the experience of listening to particular pieces of music, and the articulation of that experience using concepts that correspond to the inner workings of music, defined as pitch, interval, mode, scale, tonic, timbre, texture, melody, harmony, rhythm, meter, and so on—that is, precisely the elements included in *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Concepts in Music Theory*, but repurposed for our queer uses. To give a crude definition, the most widely held notion of music theory, at its core, is the study of music

as abstracted from the vagaries of social and listening context, focusing instead on *compositional* features (which Dahlhaus calls the “practical” tradition of music theory; Dahlhaus 1984, 6–9). Rather than feelings and narratives, then, *hard* music theory in this sense focuses on pitch, interval, mode, and so on—musical elements that have a relatively large measure of verifiability and consistency across listenings. That this kind of objectivity is coded white, male, and cis-heteronormative needs hardly be emphasized for the reader familiar with Donna Haraway’s seminal work (1988) in the feminist critique of scientific knowledge, which has influenced generations of writers in queer, critical race, disability, and post-humanist theory—writers from whom authors in this volume generously draw.<sup>10</sup>

Many of the authors of this volume appropriate the apparatuses of hard music theory for queer ends, establishing a link between non-normative gender and sexuality, and non-normative compositional features or music-theoretical approaches. We might think of this as the ultimate sleight of hand as far as queering goes, dismantling and remaking masculine music-theoretical tools for the study of queer listening and queer music-makers. Bretherton’s chapter anchors his hermeneutic queering of Schubert’s *Der Atlas* in Schenkerian analysis, proposing that the exaggeration of structural norms represents oppressive homophobic and ableist forces (symbolized by Zeus and the Olympians).<sup>11</sup> Solomon’s chapter demonstrates how the exotic, homoerotic stasis of *ostinati* is situated by West Coast composers in the teleological milieu of Western musical temporality. Stover’s queer analysis of Sun Ra’s music, emphasizing emergence and transformation within a musical multiplicity (as opposed to a closed logical circuit), is connected with Sun Ra’s sexuality as well as with queer theory. Lee’s chapter critiques Schenkerian analyses of Schumann’s *Lieder* in terms of the heteronormative temporality of unilinearity, opening space for a queer reading of temporal leaps and short circuits. In all of these chapters, the queerness of the composition or music-theoretical approach is inspired by the queer sexuality of the music-makers (West Coast composers, Sun Ra) and/or of the music theorist who authored the chapter. What precisely the normative music-theoretical values are, which these chapters write against, can be gleaned from Morgan’s

<sup>10</sup> The binary of human rationality and non-human irrationality—a category to which queers are assigned, along with women and people of color—is a hoary Enlightenment conceptual framework that has informed the exercise of oppressive powers over centuries (Braidotti 2019, 7).

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Straus has written widely about the intersection of musical and social structures from the perspective of disability studies. See Straus 2011, 2018.

defense of the precept of unity (2003), and from the tendency of some music theories to iron out ambiguities in favor of maintaining logical, formal consistency.<sup>12</sup> Against this background, queer music theory undercuts the traditional masculine values of rationality (Maus 1993), unity, unilinearity, teleology, and logical certainty. It privileges provisional, idiosyncratic, non-normative theories and analyses, as well as minority, queer vantage points, narrative, and listening experiences—but in articles that seek, in spite of their queer and experiential contingency, to be generalizable. In relation to the above chapters, what makes queer music theory a “theory”—if we follow Fallows’s definition of “general principles”—is the following features: (1) the inextricable intertwining of gender and sexuality, and/or queer theory, with hard music-theoretical apparatuses; and (2) the traversing of *non-normativity* across gender and sexuality, as well as the hard music-theoretical dimensions of the chapters. Queer music theory, contingent on queer gender and sexuality, and queer theory, is generalizable both in the sense that it can challenge a normative view of the entire enterprise of music theory, and in the sense that the tools of music theory allows for the possibility for all readers to experiment with particular conceptions of music theory and musical experience from a minority vantage point. Generalizable contingency, radiating outward from queer gender/sexuality and queer theory, is seen in the *repurposing of hard music theory for queer ends*, constituting one of myriad ways by which queers remake various general aspects of an often hostile world, making those selected aspects contingent to us.

The interweaving of various chapters in this volume into my arguments above shows that there are multiple overlapping cognitive maps of the book, and many pathways built around concepts such as the valences of non-normativity (gender/sexuality versus music theory), the queering of hard music theory, and intersectionality. Yet the book does assume a somewhat

<sup>12</sup> David Ferris (2000) discusses the problems of using Schenkerian theory to analyze passages of musical ambiguity (39–43). This is not to say that *all* Schenkerian or other theories (e.g., set theory) necessarily are opposed to ambiguity, uncertainty, non-systematicity, and non-unity, subscribing instead to the notion of a unified, objective truth, but that the dominant approach to these theories, as transmitted by tenured professors who have ruled over music-theory programs for decades, does indeed reflect the rather obvious tenets of unity and logical certainty in these theories. Perhaps a corpus study of the entire literature on music theory will prove my point as to the weightage of articles leaning toward either unity and logical certainty, on the one hand, or contingency, on the other—but that is obviously far beyond the scope of this introduction. To the reader allergic to supposed “straw man” characterizations of a conservative music theory, purportedly ignoring the many advances in the field, I should point out that citing, e.g., Scherzinger 1997 as a queering of set theory does not constitute proof that set theory as a whole welcomes queer theory with open arms, or that music theory as a whole is socially oriented. Work by Scherzinger and others are *exceptions that prove the rule*.

linear structure by convention. Before providing an outline of the three sections of the book, however, a note on the coverage is necessary. Due to a variety of factors (including health, a change in viewpoint, a change in career path, and the impact of COVID-19), a number of authors who originally proposed a wide range of topics (music theory and transgender theory, bisexuality, and BDSM practices) had to withdraw from the project. While the resulting volume has a presence of queers of color in the range of authors and topics, the degree of diversity is unfortunately more limited than I had hoped, in spite of two public calls for papers in the mailing list of the Society for Music Theory in 2017 and 2018—this is in addition to personal invitations to authors, several of whom declined because of existing commitments. As the first monograph on queer music theory, this book signals the arrival of the field and the formation of a critical mass of authors, which, however, is still relatively thin in comparison with the thriving community of queer musicologists. The thinness of the field goes some way in explaining the difficulty of editorial curation and the regrettable lacunas of this book. As noted, queer of-color topics and authors are present in this book, but barely so, a situation that I find to be highly unsatisfactory; there is regrettably no transgender representation in this volume. I had faced real difficulty in curating chapters on queer/trans of-color composers,<sup>13</sup> and received no proposals on queer/trans of-color ways of listening as articulated in music theory, but I am hopeful that this book will lay the foundation for future research in these areas. As a queer of-color person myself, I feel especially responsible for the inadequate representation of queer/trans of-color composers and music-makers in this volume. I recognize my inadequacies in not attending to them from an earlier stage in the conception of this project, so that I could perhaps have written about them myself, or have innovated a theory of queer/trans of-color listening. To address the situation, I have created the QTBIPOC Composers Project, publishing online profiles for US-based composers who identify as transgender or non-binary, and have begun making related research presentations.<sup>14</sup> Composers include Mari Esabel Valverde, Holland

<sup>13</sup> Research on queer/trans of-color composers is scarce, especially in the discipline of music theory. For example, Barg 2013 contains some analysis of Billy Strayhorn's music, while Hisama 2015 has more extended analyses of Julius Eastman's music, but neither is conventionally classified as belonging to the discipline of music theory.

<sup>14</sup> QTBIPOC Composers Project folder, *Global Musical Modernisms* (created in March–April 2022, accessed April 30, 2022), <https://hcommons.org/groups/global-musical-modernisms/docs/>.

Gavin Lee, "How Not to Talk About Mari Esabel Valverde's Music: A Trans Indigenous Mexican Composer's Perspective," SMT Queer Resource Group panel, joint AMS/SEM/SMT conference (New Orleans, Louisiana).

Andrews, Nebal Maysaud, Ahmed Al Abaca, James Vitz-Wong, Mária Grand, Janelle Lawrence, Melika M. Fitzhugh, and Spencer Arias.

When a field such as music theory is full of white men, and as graduate students we are taught the primacy of citation, the products of our scholarship are going to cite a lot of white men. There have been calls to break off from mainstream scholarly conventions as well as established citational habits (Ahmed 2017, 8; Ewell, foreword to this volume; Luong 2022), accompanied by the emergence of innovative queer and feminist work from QTBIPOC scholars, for example, analysis of electronic music in Sofer 2018 (by composer Barry Truax), or reflexive articles on the gendered qualities of the very practice of music theory itself (Luong 2017). However, there is an immense “narrative scarcity” (Lee and Ramakrishnan 2021) of *both* QTBIPOC *scholars* and QTBIPOC *composers* because of the “white racial frame” (Ewell 2020). As noted by Eric Hung (2018), QTBIPOC composers such as Julius Eastman faced resistance, particularly when he made overt political statements about race and sexuality, thus leading to marginalization and loss of his music. Furthermore, queer and trans music-makers living in homophobic and transphobic regimes are often in the closet (as in Singapore, where I grew up, where gay sex remained criminalized until the prime minister in 2022 announced plans to remove the relevant statute from the penal code<sup>15</sup>) and even have their existence scrubbed from the internet entirely (as in China, where I now work, and where queer conferences—which have now ceased—used to scrub the word “queer” completely from their paper abstracts).<sup>16</sup> Even for places like the United States, where LGBTQ+ rights have advanced to a certain degree, the discussion of QTBIPOC music-makers (as in the Race-ing Queer Music Scholarship symposium of 2016 at the AMS/SEM/SMT conference in Vancouver) concentrates virtually entirely on popular music, such that Eastman to this day remains one of a very small handful of QTBIPOC concert-music composers on the radar of music theory.

As someone who is marginalized by the intersection of race and sexuality myself, I can speak in the first-person register on the importance of

<sup>15</sup> Chen Lin, “Singapore Will Decriminalize Sex between Men, Prime Minister Says,” *Reuters*, August 22, 2022 (accessed October 13, 2022), <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapore-will-decriminalise-sex-between-men-pm-2022-08-21/>.

<sup>16</sup> All references to lesbian singer Qiao Qiao have been scrubbed from the Chinese internet. Gabriel Gima, “An Inspiring Collection of Chinese LGBTQ+ Musicians,” *Fashion School Daily*, May 19, 2020 (accessed October 13, 2022), <https://fashionschooldaily.com/an-inspiring-collection-of-chinese-lgbtq-musicians-2/63459/>.

considering multiple aspects of oppression, emerging out of the whiteness of early queer music studies (try scrolling through the LGBTQ+ music bibliography; Sagrans, Wace, and Whitesell 2018). Gay Asian men like me are subject to caricaturization as effeminate in the United States, such that whenever I speak, others feel the need to speak over me—this is not the same as the oppression faced by women, but gender binarism is the shared axis of oppression for women and “racially castrated” Asian men (Eng 2001). People speak over me at conference panels I have chaired, and in the process of putting together books and special journal issues I have edited. They feel uncomfortable having me, an Asian male, as a leader and try to “teach” me how to chair panels (I have chaired thirty-one of these), or they try to take my place, appropriating my labor and my arguments. They assume I know next to nothing, that I am drawing from outdated theories, that my statements are based on guesswork rather than research, that my research methodology is faulty—the list goes on. It is within this context that I have a special investment in redefining Asian masculinity as well as gay masculinity; this will be part of a new edited book volume on queer Chinese music that I am putting together. Such a project is parallel to earlier queer theorists who appropriated the originally derogatory “queer.” It involves taking years of marginalization as a gay Asian man by US music scholars, sexual racism in the United States (on Grindr: “No Asians”), exoticization and being talked over by white rice queens attracted to specifically only Asian men, and erasure by Chinese and Singaporean regimes—and reappropriating that stereotypically effeminate positionality of the gay bottom, which is the presumed default position of gay Asians as featured in the white gay pornographic imaginary. We might take a page here from BDSM practice, wherein it is the bottom who is in charge of the scenario, who controls the intensity of the sensations that may be visited upon them with permission (note that the “bottom” role applies in lesbian and heterosexual BDSM scenarios too). While we might be tempted to read the sexual practices of (misrecognized) “passive” bottoms as allegories of gender relations in real life, this may be too much of an exercise in positivist mapping after three decades of debate over hermeneutics since the 1990s—straight male BDSM bottoms do not signify a new matriarchy; indeed, “a hatred of what is projected as ‘passive’ and therefore female” might be an expression of the heteronormative subject’s “displaced misogyny” (Watney 1987, 50). It should be noted as well that active/passive are not cultural universals. Tops and bottoms are certainly found among gay Chinese folks, but Chinese culture as a whole contains a plethora of tropes

that counter the Western masculine image of aggressive action or confrontation, most notably the Taoist notion of *wuwei* or non-action, the philosophy of moderation known as *zhong yong zhi dao*, and colloquial expressions such as *da shi hua xiao, xiao shi hua wu*, meaning to mediate a major conflict so that it becomes a minor conflict, and to resolve the minor conflict altogether.

With regard to earlier queer studies that may not have considered race, we can build on that research foundation where appropriate, while focusing our criticism on the “white racial frame.” We learned from Maus 1993 that music theory is a gendered practice: masculine music theorists impose analytic structures over listening experience in order to ameliorate their anxiety over becoming overwhelmed. It is important that a distinction is made between queer theorists who are trying to counter cis-heteromascularity, on the one hand, versus racist gays like Andrew Sullivan, who supported the Iraq war (Johnson 2005), and the depoliticized gay Republicans discussed by Lisa Duggan (2002), whose idea of emancipation is individual economic success in the capitalist economy. I find the earlier racist masculine-military homonationalism of Sullivan to be especially appalling (he has since renounced his earlier position, after reports on the torture of prisoners and the lack of evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq).<sup>17</sup>

It is because of the white racial frame that there is such a narrative scarcity of BIPOC and QTBIPOC research in music theory, resulting in heightened scrutiny of every piece of related research. But when the key methodology is reflexive contemplation about one’s own listening practice as in Maus 1993, ranging over multiple subject positions might not be possible. Perhaps the most appropriate response was what actually unfolded a year later, that is, when a woman, Suzanne Cusick, theorized feminine embodiment through the lens of the physical act of performance (Cusick 1994). This is not to say that we may only ever write about our identities—for example, there are many articles in which writers approach composers who are of a different race, gender, and sexuality than themselves. I would suggest, however, that reflexive articles that involve navel gazing about one’s own musical or listening practice is akin to autoethnography, and it would be impossible for a writer to attempt an autoethnography of another person. The crux of the matter is not whether someone is writing from particular majority perspectives—it is *how* they are doing so that should inform our response. Writings that

<sup>17</sup> “Andrew Sullivan: Dishing It Out Daily For A Decade,” NPR website, October 17, 2010 (accessed October 12, 2022), <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130629716>.

aim to subvert *cis-heteromascularity* should not be lumped together with chauvinistic texts; such an approach risks essentializing masculine gender itself as a vector of oppression when it is *cis-heteromascularity* and *right-wing* homonormativity that oppresses women and gay BIPOC men alike. Queer writings that fail to consider race may not be ideal, but it is the *white racial frame*, which results in the narrative scarcity of BIPOC and QTBIPOC music-makers as well as music theorists, that should be castigated, with harsh critique directed at the appropriate targets. Jackson 2019 may not have mentioned QTBIPOCs explicitly, but it contributed to our invisibilization all the same by refusing to recognize Schenker's racism.

I think a truly inclusive approach that covers myriad identities may be more practical in a book, such as our present volume, than a stand-alone article. Each chapter allows its author to fully explore wide-ranging discussions (as in Luong's chapter) or specific intersections of race, gender, and sexuality (as in Stover's chapter on Sun Ra; beyond this book, see Sofer 2022 on non-binary black singer Janelle Monáe). The spectrum of race, gender, and sexuality among the authors and topics covered in this book venture beyond marginalized QTBIPOCs, and I consider this to be a concrete manifestation of alliance. I observe that alliance formation that was important from the early days of queer intersectional theory (e.g., Cohen 1997) has given way to an increasingly ghettoized modality of thinking based on the identity differences that are critiqued by the very founder of Black Lives Matter, Alicia Garza, who distinguishes between *strategic* "popular fronts" based on alliance and "united fronts" that are internally integrated on all counts (Garza 2020, 233). We should remember that there is such a thing as LGBTQ+ rights because of the democratic alliance. There is the SMT LGBTQ+ standing committee because of alliance. Readers will find that there are chapters in this book that do not deal with intersections of race with gender and sexuality. However, those chapters are complemented by others that consider a diverse set of positionalities, and there remains much to be done to show straight scholars how we can discuss white queer and trans music-makers, listeners, and music theorists in a way that is cognizant of cis-heteronormativity. This book is only the start of a much longer conversation that urgently needs to be had.

While I cannot write in a reflexive way about other marginalized positionalities other than my own, I do want to ensure that a discursive space is opened up here for envoicing them. It is well known that the most oppressed of QTBIPOCs are trans women, and while my work in this area is still

under peer review and will be found only beyond this book, I thought it was important to provide some reflections on how one can approach identities beyond one's own. For my project on trans Indigenous Mexican composer Mari Esabel Valverde, I took a page from ethnomusicologists who have long emphasized collaborative knowledge production (Barz and Cooley 1997; Stobart 2008; Pettan and Titon 2019) and drew as well from my previous experience interviewing women and queer composers from Singapore. The first thing I did was to refer to writings on QTBIPOCs on trans musicology and trans theory, specifically articles by Stephan Pennington and C. Riley Snorton, sieving through what is by now quite a large bibliography on trans theory that includes mainly white authors. Having educated myself to the extent possible on my own, I then conducted an interview with Valverde<sup>18</sup> and also showed her excerpts of my analysis of her work *Our Phoenix* (2016), which is a piece that confronts transphobia and the murder of trans people, but also celebrates their survival against all odds.<sup>19</sup> Valverde provided me with notes on how to talk about trans people, including the importance of adjectival sequence, for example, if we mention “white cis male” (i.e., race then gender), the appropriate phrasing for Valverde's identity would be “BIPOC trans woman,” not “trans BIPOC woman” (which would be gender then race).<sup>20</sup> From this research experience, what I learned above all was the limits of (literary, queer) theory—trans people need material assistance in addition to representation,<sup>21</sup> and the multiplicity of their life experiences exceed what theory alone can capture (Baitz 2022). There are lessons here that are relevant too for those of us who write about queer music-makers.

In this book, the first section, “Queer Music Analysis,” contains narratological-hermeneutic, philosophical, and counter-disciplinary essays that converge on music analysis as methodology. Currie's chapter positions music analysis as the foundation of a queer academy that repurposes the neoliberal university's dictate that the humanities, unlike the profitable sciences, must justify their existence by being *socially* relevant, thereby fulfilling a “minimal” *function* in the education of young adults. Noting the disturbing resonance between the neoliberalized, functional conception of humanities,

<sup>18</sup> Interview with me on August 27, 2022 (accessed September 1, 2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr8f5wl0Jzo>.

<sup>19</sup> For more information, see composer profile for Mari Esabel Valverde, in Lee, ed., *Global Musical Modernisms* (accessed September 1, 2022), <https://hcommons.org/docs/mari-esabel-valverde-2/>.

<sup>20</sup> Email communication from Valverde on August 29, 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Valverde emphasized this in an interview. “Engender” podcast, The Choral Commons website (accessed September 1, 2022), <https://www.thechoralcommons.com/engender>.

on the one hand, and the turn to social relevance in the musicology of recent decades, on the other, Currie proposes a functionless music analysis (what I have called hard music theory), which intentionally rejects connection to other socially oriented musicological arguments. Music analysis is coded queer—in its lack of status in the neoliberal university, in the turn to the pleasure of music analysis (pleasure being a touchstone of queer and feminist theory), and in its “shameful” lack of social content, when seen from the perspective of the contemporary musicological consensus over sociality (queer shame is the result of heteronormativity). The next three chapters proceed via music analysis to construct and interrogate queer and intersectional narratives. Bretherton’s chapter (as mentioned earlier) proposes queer and disabled interpretations of the Schubert’s “Der Atlas,” departing from the conventional reading of unrequited heterosexual love. Marsico’s chapter analyzes Henze’s operas through inexplicit queer codings of homosociality, deviant human-animal pairings, and constricting, oppressive social norms. In the final chapter in this section, Lochhead proposes a method of analysis that focuses on the assembling of gestures in the twenty-first-century music of Czernowin, modelling a music-theoretical approach that actually is suited for such music, unlike mainstream post-tonal music theory. In both its selection of music and in the music analysis, Lochhead’s chapter is marked by an avowedly queer ethos.

The second section, “Queer Temporality,” contains chapters by Stover, Lee, and Solomon, which have all been mentioned above in brief. The promise of queer temporality for music studies was raised early on in Peraino 2013 (827). Chapters in this section expand on the musical implications of theories of queer temporality, exploring models of linear and non-linear temporality (Lee, Solomon), on the one hand, and models of music-theorizing that attends to process, ceding analytical control to the becoming of music (Stover). These chapters appropriate hard music-theoretical apparatuses for queer ends, showing how non-normativity in gender and sexuality infects music theory.

The final section, “Queer Narratology,” explores the linkages between narratology and queerness, covering and critiquing case studies across the twentieth century, thereby establishing an outlook on future work in this area. Making relatively little use of hard music-theoretical apparatuses, the chapters in this section primarily engage with “theory” in the form of *conceptualizations* of queer narratology. Fred Maus’s chapter articulates the foundational nature of narrative for early queer musicological writings

that sought meaning in orchestral music. Maus begins with McClary's work on Tchaikovsky and Schubert. Rather than conventional structuralist plot archetypes (victory, defeat, etc.<sup>22</sup>), McClary's readings weaved queer-world elements into minority narratives, envoicing lives that subsisted at the margins of heteronormativity. Crucially, McClary's narratives are anchored in music analysis and, together with Brett's analysis and interpretation (1997) of Schubert's four-hand piano music from the vantage point of a contemporary queer pianist, marks one of the points of origins of an explicitly queer music theory (although she is considered to be a musicologist). Maus's chapter then proceeds to make its main claim that the intimate relation between queerness and narratology serves as a foundation for projecting queerness back onto the earlier narratological work of scholars who did not construct queer musical narratives but were themselves queer. In a variety of writings by the scholars Edward Cone and Anthony Newcomb, and by the former's life partner, queer sexuality was not explicit, but their narratives nevertheless resonated with a mixed bag of queer life experiences, including the terror of being different, the pleasure of sexuality, the uncertainty that stems from being out of place, and the struggle to overcome myriad difficulties.

Kristin Franseen's chapter continues the narratological thread in her examination of US writer and music critic Edward Irenaeus Prime-Stevenson (1858–1942), who created gay characters (in the author's novel *Imre: A Memorandum*) that recur in his musical writings, which included a queerly coded narratological study of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Franseen's work points to an alternative and promising form of queer music theory that turns away from hard music-theoretical apparatuses, relying instead on literary writing to explicate queer listening. The final chapter by Vivian Luong (mentioned earlier) criticizes anthropocentric accounts of musical agency, raising the question of who or what has agency in a narrative. Rather than presuming a clear human protagonist, Luong expands on Maus's argument (1988) that close attention to listening experience reveals that musical agency is indeterminate. As opposed to the analyst or composer, Luong argues for a modality of music theory that cedes control and agency to musical elements (themes, topics), thereby decentering an exclusionary (white, male, cis-heteronormative) conception of rational control, allowing for the emergence of voices that have previously been silenced. The three chapters

<sup>22</sup> The archetypes are nascent in a lot of early narratological work but formally theorized in Almén 2003.

in this section explore the boundaries of queer narratology from various perspectives, ranging from the examination of early narratological scholarship (Maus), to the use of narratives in music criticism (Franseen), to post-humanist critique (Luong).

If readers had picked up this volume expecting *general principles* of musical queerness in the form of a catalogue of “queer musical traits,” they would be disappointed. This volume is not just about queer composers whose music can be heard differently from that of their straight counterparts, but also about queer appropriation of musical conventions that are made ambivalent in the process. Methodologically, what is most important in this book is not the production of a checklist of distinctive differences, which are shaped by the vagaries of context and chance, but the queer repurposing that results in ambiguities, and the semantic ephemerality of often-secret meanings. Another way to say this is that this volume is balanced between the interrelated dynamics of expressive sound versus listening; one might say that in addition to queering the “pitch,” as it were, this volume, like previous work, is also invested in *queering the ear*, which is particularly evident in chapters (Maus, Luong, Franseen, Currie, Lee) focused primarily on the practices and apparatuses of music theory, music theorists, other music scholars, and music critics—rather than on queer composers.

Queering the ear can be seen as being anchored in the reflexive exercise already evident in the earliest work in queer music studies, examining how musical and music-theoretical practices and pleasures are conditioned by the power dynamics of gender and sexuality. Music’s power—its ability to overwhelm the listener—has been explicated as the “other” that alienates the listener, prompting the masculine response of rational music theorizing (Maus 1993), or the reconfiguration of the dynamics of power in “lesbian” listening that puts listener and music on an equal footing (Cusick 1994). Representing a vast, multi-faceted expansion of that earlier work, chapters in this volume retain a counterhegemonic positionality against the key form of modern power—normativity (Foucault 1995, 184), while articulating myriad manifestations of queer agency, as seen with both queer listeners (scholars, critics) and queer composers. With sounds unmarked by the queer gender and sexuality of the composer, the filter of a queer ear is needed to discern emergence, transformation, gestures, stasis, non-unilinearity, danger, allure, overcoming, agency, choral voices, human-animal pairings, oppressive social norms, storylines, *Urlinie*, and even the act of music analysis itself, as queer. One of the things that we have accomplished in this book is to show

how a queer ear transposes the non-normativity of gender and sexuality onto music-theoretical apparatuses broadly conceived (ranging from hard music theory to narratology, etc.), such that “normal” compositional features become irradiated with rainbow colors. On the one hand, queer listening is contingent on the queer music-maker or music theorist; on the other hand, queer listening is a generalizable ethos if a sympathetic listener dons a queer ear and hears emergence, gestures, and so on in the way we in this volume have intended. This ambivalence is a *fact of life* and *matter of survival* for musical queers, who, like queers in general, are often “born into the homes of the oppressors” (Attinello 2018, 187) and forced to remake heteronormative culture. It is in recognition of this embodied history that I make the distinction between “queer music theory” as music-theoretical research related to queer listeners and music-makers, on the one hand, and “queer ear” as a modality of non-normative hearing that anyone can adopt, on the other. Through the queer ear, writers can acknowledge their debt to non-normative queer (music) theory, but without claiming the queer identity. If it is strategically important to limit who can claim to be queer, it is just as necessary to acknowledge that queer culture has had an impact beyond the immediate queer community. Retaining the professional designation of “music theory” for queer identity (queer music theory), while allowing for the malleability of listening habits (queer ear), seems to be a good compromise, if not a perfect one.

As Brett noted (1994), musicality itself, long synonymous with homosexuality,<sup>23</sup> entails similar *ambiguities*, conceptualized as the dynamics of “universalization” versus “minoritization.”<sup>24</sup> That is, there a fundamental ambiguity about musical queerness that resonates with the specific ambiguity of non-normativity teased out in this volume. Musicality may be synonymous with homosexuality (music itself—*all* music—is “universally” queered), but queers may minoritize themselves and their own kind through closeting. It is unsurprising that queer music theory, too, exhibits this vacillation, with

<sup>23</sup> Certainly, singing and sports are assigned the conventional codes of queer and straight in the hit TV show *Glee*.

<sup>24</sup> Brett argues that musical queerness operates in accordance with the logics of universality and minoritization, identified by Eve Sedgwick (1990) as structural features of the closet. On the one hand, universality is observed in putative homosexual panic, which is used as a legal justification for homophobic violence; in this case, homosexuality infects everyone such that straight men experience homosexual desire and thus “panic.” On the other hand, minoritization is observed in the enclosure of the closet, keeping queers out of sight (don’t ask, don’t tell). In music studies, Brett notes minoritizing efforts (sometimes by closeted queers) to block the advancement of out queers and of queer research.

non-normativity carrying different valences and resonances, encompassing both the queer gender and sexuality of music-makers and music theorists, and the queer ethos of non-normative modalities of music theory. Once one hears with a queer ear, it seems as if vast swathes of music become queer (from Beethoven to musical ambiguity to ostinati), but then again, maybe not in the cold daylight of normativity. This speaks to the *fragility* of the queer semiotic reclamation of heteronormative spaces that is easily reversed by a shift in perspective. It is imperative that we keep this fragility in mind, remembering that whatever queer sounds we hear are vibrations anchored in the work of generations of queer music-makers and music scholars who have fought to remake oppressive pasts in service of habitable futures.

In putting this volume together, I have been humbled and inspired by the work of our authors, but it is important to note again that this book merely marks the beginning of queer music theory, and much work remains to be done, particularly in the bridging of the gap between music theory (the discipline to which most of the authors belong) and its sister disciplines, in which a vast literature on listening has developed, and in which many insightful, descriptive, expressive, and hermeneutic passages based on close listening can be found (e.g., Feld 1982; Kramer 1995). There is an urgent need to expand beyond the limits of this book in terms of musical genre, and interdisciplinary bridges to musicology and ethnomusicology will become increasingly important in the future, as the discipline of music theory seeks to overcome its traditional boundaries. That evocative descriptions of musical passages often contain some kind of reference to melody, harmony, and timbre suggests to me that it is a matter of time before innovative interdisciplinary scholarship on queer listening emerges, encompassing and moving beyond the spheres of hard music theory and narratology that we have addressed in this volume. I am hopeful that interdisciplinarity will stretch toward non-music disciplines as well, with scholars in the fields of world, jazz, and popular music theory becoming acquainted with queer theory, which currently is still mainly adopted by scholars of Western art music in the discipline of music theory.

A final note here for some readers who may have a nagging feeling that perhaps the ambit of queer should just be limited to queer gender and sexuality. Since “queer” has become diluted as a code for the cool indie hipster, and there has been pushback against the appropriation of queer by straight media figures,<sup>25</sup> we as academic queer music theorists need to interrogate the

<sup>25</sup> For example, in 2015, Lily Rose Depp, the daughter of Johnny Depp, took part in a public campaign for LGBTQ+ awareness by posing for a photograph, but later stated that her non-normativity

meaning of “queer.” But this does not mean positioning social media dictates as our ethical compass. It is arguably *our* academic responsibility to conduct a comprehensive ethical review of the multitudes encapsulated in “queer,” and to elaborate on the complexities, ambiguities, and, yes, contingencies and generalities that are so often ironed out of universalist social-media pronouncements, as if complex cultural problems could be solved if one just read a blog post and followed the six-point guidelines in *all* situations—no need to consider contextual differences.<sup>26</sup> On the one hand, there are queer people of color committed to changing music theory, and writing about queer music-makers of color; on the other hand, music theorists in general may be inspired by the queer ethos to innovate non-normative methods, breaking from heteronormative masculine values. But I believe it is worth taking the risk of navigating conceptual complexities in the hope that this volume will be the beginning of a larger queering, as music theorists of all genders and sexualities—our *allies*—join us in our project. I leave it to the reader to take actions that have bearing on whether we might convincingly claim that the age of “pitch class amoebas” is over.

Finally, a note of thanks. The preparatory work for this volume took place over a long period of time. I am grateful to the authors in this book who originally took part in conference panels held in 2014 (James Currie) and 2015 (Fred Maus, Judith Lochhead) on the subject of queer approaches to music theory, plus a special panel dedicated to Fred Maus in 2017 (in which Vivian Luong participated). These were panels that I organized as chair of the Queer Resource Group of the Society for Music Theory (SMT). I was later invited to join an ad hoc committee tasked by then–society president Robert Hatten in 2019 with reviewing the diversity committees; it was this ad hoc committee that recommended the formation of a new SMT LGBTQ+ standing committee. Robert serves as a model of what an ally should be. I am also grateful to other authors who responded either to personal invitations or to public

extends only to protesting against sexuality *labels*, and not to her actual sexuality. Olivia Blair, “Lily-Rose Depp Clarifies Comments on Her Sexuality,” *The Independent*, February 4, 2016 (accessed May 17, 2021), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/lily-rose-depp-clarifies-comments-about-her-sexuality-a6853151.html>.

<sup>26</sup> A refreshing exception is found in a blog post on how to focus on actual ethical accountability instead of the public *perception* of ethical accountability. The advice is to avoid the tendency to “use the same strategy for every situation,” though that point is part of a six-point plan that presumably works for every situation. Maisha Z. Johnson, “6 Signs Your Call-Out Isn’t Actually About Accountability,” *Everyday Feminism*, May 6, 2016 (accessed August 2, 2021), <https://everydayfeminism.com/2016/05/call-out-accountability/>.

calls for contributions posted on the SMT mailing list in 2017 and 2018. I have learned much from everyone's contributions, which reflect different perspectives and positionalities. It was because of our collective work that a monograph became feasible, and the amazing support of my editors Suzanne Melamed, and later Norm Hirschy, at Oxford University Press was indispensable in bringing this work to fruition. I would like to thank everyone who has taken part in, or has been inspired by and associated with, the project of queer music theory across the years. For their invaluable advice on the introduction, I am grateful to Kristin Franseen, Judith Lochhead, Vivian Luong, and Federica Marsico—any shortcomings are of course mine.

When I first embarked on the journey of queer music theory, I was still in the final year of graduate school, and I would not have been able to navigate all of this without many people who have given me advice over the years. I am grateful for the unflagging support from mentors, colleagues, and allies who showed me how to tread the convoluted paths of counterhegemonic scholarship and of the profession in general—Philip Rupprecht, Annie Liu, Daniel Wu, Philip Ewell, James Currie, Paul Attinello, Daniel Chua, Kevin Korsyn, Sarah Weiss, and Sean Williams. Finally, my life and work has meaning because of my parents and my chosen family, Stephen Hitchner, Clement Chau, and Steve Wang.

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