Women in music: Utilising an inherently bi-directional subject position to provocatively, performatively, and iteratively reshape the landscape

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Abstract

This article examines the ways in which women in music culture have changed, and continue to change, the landscape of misogyny. Female musicians, critics, fans, and others are subject to sexism within musical texts and within the music industry. Despite, and often because of this, they have used and continue to use their marginalised identities to enact subversion and transgression. While I concede that subversive techniques can result in sexist stereotypes being replicated, nonetheless I assert that women are irrevocably altering the vocabulary of what it means to be a woman in music. I consider musicians' various techniques and self-representations as engendering a discussion of what it is to be female in music. Further, I take music as a concrete example to practically illustrate the broader situation of women's subjugation and contemporary gendered roles. The body in music is considered as being the locus for many of the performative techniques that women in music utilise.

Introduction: The bi-directional subject position of women in music

Women in music culture hold bi-directional subject positions. Subject to systemic misogyny, they use their marginalised identities to enact subversion and transgression. At the same time, they may unwittingly replicate sexist stereotypes. Nonetheless, from Lady Gaga's grotesque iconography to Peaches' queer appropriation of the electric guitar, women in music have gradually and iteratively changed the landscape of music culture through a variety of techniques, including parodic and exaggerated displays of femininity. Adopting Rosalind Gill's term 'sexual subjectification', or, 'the construction of a new femininity (or, better, 'new femininities') organised around sexual confidence and autonomy' (2003, p. 103), Stephanie Genz (2009, p. 155) asserts that sexual subjectification showcases the conflicting modes that women in contemporary society enact. Both complicit and transgressive, female musicians engage in strategies such as masquerade and gender parody to utilise a 'double gesture that exploits in-between spaces in an attempt to undermine totalising dichotomies' (2009, p. 155).

They use their bodies, through dress, dance, and the playing of instruments, to enact a variety of performative interventions. Judith Butler labels this as being 'trouble' – but trouble, she asserts, need not be thought of in negative terms. Instead, trouble is understood as the intervention of 'a female "object" who inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position' (1990, p. xxviii).

Replicating Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) model of taking a concrete example to practically illustrate a larger discussion, I assert that women's societal subjugation can be better understood by way of close attention to a specific example. Hence, I take music as a fitting lens through which to interrogate women's role in patriarchal society. Music has been selected as an exemplar because members of a society may understand key aspects of a culture by turning to its music. Tia DeNora (2000, p. 44) asserts that music is a referent 'for clarifying the otherwise potentially polysemic character of non-musical phenomena' such as social and cultural circumstances. In short, music can be seen to both transmit and reflect social and cultural attitudes.

While it is often exaggerated in the music industry, it is nonetheless one of many industries in which women are relegated to a marginalised subject position. Gillian G. Gaar notes that an obvious reason that women in rock are recurrently presented as a novelty is that 'women as a gender are not integrated into society but are still seen as an 'other' that deviates from a male norm,' and that this is visible across many settings (1993, p. xii). Gaar also surmises that while women in rock do share a similarity, it is not their sex but rather, 'the experience they have faced as women working in a male-dominated industry' (1993, p. xv). According to Susan McClary, paying critical attention to precisely how it is that music 'has participated in articulating and transmitting social beliefs, anxieties, hopes, and desires' 1994, p. xi) is of material significance because to deny the representational capacities of music is to risk thereby also denying 'its very real power as a cultural medium' (1994, p. xi). In a discussion of popular films, but which is equally salient to music and literature, Clementine Ford argues that disproportionate and flawed representations of women matter for girls and women, and that 'pop culture and entertainment should broadly try to reflect the world in which we live' (2018, p. 91). Further, by foregrounding women's

experiences 'many normalized behaviours in the history of rock – indeed, the entire 'sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll' mythos – take on a much more sinister edge' (Strong, 2019, p. 218), and are able to be reconsidered, and hopefully, changed.

Music's impact on social and cultural norms

Historically, gender has permeated every part of music culture. Non-static definitions of masculinity and femininity, as well as 'cultural notions of creativity and genius', have determined how listeners define what constitutes music, as well as what music does (Cook & Tsou, 1994, p. 1). Music's impact on social and cultural norms is not only of relevance to musicologists and critics but is also useful in cultivating an understanding of how social and cultural norms are 'delineated, communicated, learned, and perhaps challenged' (Solie, 1993, p. 10). Sheila Whiteley suggests that understanding the role that the feminine plays in music depends upon an examination of 'the ways in which representations are made within a social system, [and] how they contribute towards commonsense ways of knowing, believing, and experiencing' (2000, pp. 51-52). Music, in short, is a powerful medium in reflecting and transmitting both hegemonic and alternative norms.

Additionally, music can signify space and place – in the sense of patriarchal space, understood 'as a social structure,' (Hassel, Reddinger, & Van Slooten, 2011, p. 1) – and materially as patriarchal place, defined here as a 'male-dominated, male-identified, male-centered, and control-obsessed' physical environment (Johnson, 2014, p. 37). This dual meaning makes music an especially useful site for understanding identity, especially as it pertains to women. Contemporary spatial theory suggests regardless of its dimensionality, all space 'is socially and materially saturated' (Russo, 1994, p. 50). There is a legacy of women, particularly in punk and DIY communities, forming safe spaces for women and girls, such as rock camps and women-only festivals (Bourdage, 2007, p. 84), and these spaces are uniquely women-led and dominated. However, once women step out of these safe(r) spaces and are seen to trespass upon 'traditional' male spheres, they 'are always already transgressive-dangerous, and in danger' (Russo, 1994, p. 60).

Toril Moi insists that for a project to possess lasting rhetorical power it must be 'specific and particular' (1999, p. 199). Further, Moi defines Beauvoir's strategy of 'staking her own subjectivity' (1999, p. 227) as enacting a kind of 'exemplary' representation which helps to elucidate a general question. De Beauvoir's approach allows us to acknowledge that, just as there are certain claims that 'in their very nature going to be general' (Moi, 1999, p. 230), there are certain experiences that will be inevitably absent from a single subjective account. Hence, rather than being exclusionary, exemplary representation allows one to better understand sexism, and to participate in the dialogic process of building a better analysis of what it means to be a woman, and of sexism (Moi, 1999, p. 223). I believe that post-feminism and post-humanism are insufficient frameworks as they risk reducing women to their general humanity, and that 'claiming one's own difference may be a form of resistance against subsumption into an undifferentiated universal subject' (Solie, 1993, p. 6). Interrelatedly, Sarah Ahmed maintains that a part of the difficulty of the category of woman is the realities of residing within that category, with violence a possibility for either

being recognisable or not, as a woman. Ultimately, she states, 'in a world in which human is still defined as man, we have to fight for women and as women' (2017, p. 15). Her argument for a pluralistic feminism undergirds the proceeding discussion, in which examining women in music allows us to examine the roles women hold in general society as well.

Historic, endemic, and prolific: marginalisation within the music industry

Music has historically been troubled by a 'taint of misogyny' (McClary, 1994, p. xi). This can be perceived in the lyrical, musical, and visual elements of a range of musical genres, even those that would at first appear to embody a more liberated ethos. For example, Whiteley contends that while the lifestyle and music of the 1960s and '70s counterculture famously espoused freer sexualities and reactionary politics, both lifestyle and music ultimately still cast women in regressive roles, 'as romanticised fantasy figures, subservient earth mothers or easy lays' (2000, p. 23). Similarly, Gracyk, looking at classic and contemporary rock music, asserts that while rock is generally considered to epitomise the ideals of sexual liberation, it too suffers from what he deems an 'infestation of sexism' (1996, p. 210). Most rock, he insists, rather than challenging regressive gender norms, instead reinforces them: lyrically, visually, and in lifestyle. Likewise, in her analysis of rap music, Venice T. Berry maintains that 'negative sexual images of females in the male-dominated music industry' proliferate the sphere (1994, p. 184). While every musical genre presents its own specificities, what is common to all genres is that 'a stereotypical gender image dominates in this sphere of popular culture' (Leibetseder, Hawkins, & Burns, 2012, p. 2) and further, that it is 'circumscribed and confined by patriarchal definition' (Whiteley, 2015, p. 374). The implicit risk in the perpetuation of feminine archetypes is that recurrent stereotyped images of women in music can result in particular stereotypes becoming ingrained to such an extent that they are ultimately unquestioned (2000, p. 35). Thus, exposing and challenging negative female representations with the creation of alternative representations 'help us form alternative stereotypes' (McConnell-Ginet, 1980, p. 10).

The #MeToo movement and revelations of abuse within music culture

Following the advent of the #MeToo movement, instances of abuse and harassment within the music industry have begun to be more widely reported than previously. For example, R. Kelly and Michael Jackson number among the more notable male musicians who have had serious charges of abuse and harassment levelled against them. However, reporting on sexism within music has been noticeably less widespread than in other industries, and retribution, in turn, often less swift. Compared to Hollywood where actors are no longer beholden to contracts with a single company, 'many female recording artists remain contractually tied to their labels' (Heawood, 2018). Beyond this, Laura Snapes suggests that another reason may be that the music industry is 'built on a generally permissive culture of excess and blurred lines between work and leisure – but also because the myth of the unbridled male genius remains at its core'. Snapes (2019) takes allegations of abusive behavior made against indie rocker Ryan Adams as a prime example of the sort of abuse of power that is

tolerated in the name of presumed male genius. Indie music, generally considered to be a less overtly phallocentric genre and which 'prides itself on being different to rock: more sensitive; feminist, even', may ultimately disguise, and even allow for a more insidious kind of misogyny (Snapes, 2019). From indie rockers to pop superstars, it seems increasingly apparent that the very identity of the music industry 'devolves around the structural subordination of women' (Whiteley, 2000, p. 152). While music has seen myriad changes throughout the decades, minimisation and mistreatment remains a lasting truism for women within the industry. As yet, the long-term repercussions of movements such as #MeToo are difficult to appraise, however, #MeToo does suggest that the pressing need for systemic change is entering into the public consciousness and conversation.

Music as a site of resistance: different approaches to rebellion

While the #MeToo movement may have been less visible in the music industry, nonetheless music has historically been a site of resistance as well. Whitely proposes a direct correlation, saying that 'it is not unrealistic to suggest that under-representations and misrepresentations have been the catalysts in instigating change both in feminist politics and popular music' (2000, p. 123). For example, in response to 'a hardcore punk scene that socially and spatially excluded women in favour of an aggrieved, aggressive male body' (Crawford, 2015, p. 48), 1990s underground feminist punk performers labelled Riot Grrrl encouraged female fans to the front of the crowd at gigs, echoed consciousness-raising strategies via a network of zine making and distribution, manifesto-writing, and writing of misogynist epithets across their bodies in ink and lipstick in an attempt to reclaim those terms traditionally weaponised against women (Crawford, 2015, p. 48). Writing on the 2019 reunion tour of Bikini Kill, the all-female punk band often considered to be synonymous with Riot Grrrl, Hannah Ewens surmises that, while it may be 'hard to tell whether it's depressing or galvanising that a mission begun three decades ago still feels so relevant' it nonetheless must be conceded that the Riot Grrrl movement was overwhelmingly successful. She concludes that the contemporary musical landscape would be unimaginable without Riot Grrrl (2019b). Ultimately, it is 'the sense of process and interaction,' as opposed to any finite end result, that is the most significant takeaway of movements such as Riot Grrrl (2000, p. 200). Riot Grrrl can be assessed as enacting a form of rhetorical engagement, in which the intention is 'not to win the argument or to have the last word, but to engage and extend the dialogue in productive ways' (Zwagerman, 2010, p. 2).

The legacy of Riot Grrrl can be found in American rapper Princess Nokia encouraging women to the front of her performances, in 'an effort to reduce the dominance of men taking up space at her shows' (Whitehead, 2017, p. 14), and in Australian rock band Camp Cope's comparable calls during their shows. Journalist Kate Hennessy asserts that artists such as Camp Cope represent 'a generation of women who are literate in, yet wholly intolerant of, the excuses for inequality they keep hearing' (2018). Further, Hennessy discusses an open letter signed by over 360 musicians, including Courtney Barnett and Tina Arena, in which signatories move to take a stand against systematic sexism in the music industry. She suggests that both the letter and its associated hashtag

#meNOmore indicate a 'positive, future-facing' movement of women in music (2018). Author Sam George-Allen declares that #MeNOmore illustrates 'a global climate that is, for once, taking women's stories of harassment and discrimination seriously' (2019, p. 36). George-Allen suggests that, if nothing else, 'these shared experiences provided concrete evidence of a casual hostility to women in music that had been taken as a given for far too long' (2019, p. 37). Similarly, Catherine Strong claims that by prioritising the experiences of the abused rather than the abusers, 'the culture of abuse within the music industry' becomes challenged (2019, p. 228).

As well as consciousness-raising and activism, feminist interventions in music can be observed in musicians' performances and presentations. Pop stars from the 1980s (to the present day) such as Madonna, Annie Lennox, and k. d. lang, have variously challenged 'traditional representations of femininity' (Whiteley, 2000, p. 196) via how they each individually perform their gender. Specifically, Madonna, Lennox, and lang differently employ masquerade, and play with stereotypically gender-coded looks in their 'sexual stylising of butch/femme identities' (Whiteley, 2000, p. 216). By engaging with feminine and/or masculine conventions, these artists implied that 'the unitary categories which had earlier characterised 'identity politics' (female/male, gay/straight, black/white) had been replaced by cultural forms' that refused static categories (Whiteley, 2000, p. 196). Writing fifteen years later, Whiteley points to The Raincoats, Suzi Quatro and PJ Harvey as examples of female musicians who each 'confronted rock machismo by performances which evidenced an assertive femininity, so highlighting and subverting the inscribed codes' (2015, p. 365). With differing approaches, each of these artists serve as examples of how gendered conventions may be rendered in non-binary, and non-traditional understandings.

What's in a genre? Marginalisation across genres and subcultures

From Madonna to Suzi Quatro, female artists operate within a wide variety of musical genres. As with feminist confessional literature, there is a risk in identifying any musical genre adjectively. All genres are subject to 'a constant state of flux' (Brackett, 2015, p. 190), and this is exacerbated and complicated by the advent of streaming services and other digital technologies. Amy Raphael contends that, while her 1995 collection *Never Mind the Bollocks: Women Rewrite Rock* largely contained interviews with female indie rockers; no such discrete genre is applicable to the diverse array of women interviewed in her 2019 collection *A Seat at the Table: Interviews with Women on the Frontline of Music*. Highlighting streaming service Spotify's 'Playlist' function, which allows users to curate a personalised 'Best Of' list, Raphael states that 'genre no longer exists in the same way' as it did during the initial publication of *Never Mind the Bollocks* (2019, p. 15). Interviewed within the collection, singer Maggie Rogers concludes that 'if we live in an environment where Selena Gomez is sampling Talking Heads, maybe pop stars are dead' (in Raphael, 2019, p. 129).

A musical text may not wholly adhere to a genre, however, this does not necessarily mean that it does not participate in one, a distinction which underscores the 'temporal, experiential, functional, and fleeting qualities of genres while nonetheless retaining the importance of the genre concept for

communicating about texts' (Brackett, 2015, p. 190). While the diminishment and mistreatment of women is common across all genres, it is inevitably enacted in differing ways across differing genres. For instance, within what can be categorised as 'alternative' subcultures, such as punk and metal, women are frequently only nominally accepted by male group members, as opposed to being 'full-fledged members of the subculture' (Pruitt, 2018, p. 26). Helen Davies agrees, reiterating that 'subcultures do not generally welcome women, and those that have tend to accept them only in very limited roles' (2001, p. 307). Moreover, subcultures; which are traditionally defined 'in opposition to the dominant culture and ideology of mainstream capitalist society' (Ambrosch, 2018, pp. 1-2) are potent exemplars of the complex ways in which music can simultaneously uphold, as well as resist cultural narratives. Punk, for example, is both imbricated in and 'a counter project to, popular culture' (Ambrosch, 2018, pp. 1-2). Women within these subcultures must grapple with the specific, and often implicit, codes and regulations of their musical communities, while also navigating 'a culture that often does recognize feminine traits as stigmas' (Pruitt, 2018, pp. 53-54).

Women participating in 'serious' music genres such as rock, equally experience prejudice. Davies insists that the music press frequently fails to acknowledge the existence of female fans of 'serious' rock music, noting that the 'serious' music world defines itself directly against a 'feminine mainstream' (2001, p. 313). She contends that, in Western society, women who profess to be fans of 'intelligent music' are often assumed to not actually understand its complexities, 'with their fandom explained by sexual attraction to a male musician' (2001, p. 313). She posits that women in music are often reductively deemed to be little more than groupies, asserting that 'the word 'groupie' is often used not in its literal sense, but is instead applied to female fans, women working within the music industry, and wives and girlfriends of rock stars, and is a shorthand for 'ridiculing and denigrating all women with an interest in music' (2001, p. 313). Anwen Crawford, in her discussion of public reception toward provocative singer and Hole frontwoman Courtney Love, concurs. She argues that the 'underlying public antagonism towards Courtney Love is the same suspicion that has dogged female participants in rock 'n' roll for decades: that, in the end, she is merely a groupie' (2015, p. 50). While not dismissing the assertive female sexuality enacted by groupies, Crawford explains that at its core, 'groupies reaffirm the phallus worship that lies at the heart of rock culture' (2015, p. 50).

Popular music and Adorno's (reductive) theory of regressive listening

Popular music has a historically fraught relationship with scholars and critics. It is often deemed to be outside of the scope of serious analysis, and when it has been discussed, it has customarily been censured and dismissed. Much ensuing criticism can be seen to originate from Theodore Adorno's 1938 essay 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening'. Adorno theorises that what he calls 'low' (popular) music creates passive listeners who, above all else seek reassurance and distraction in the music that they favour. He claims that low art, with the exception of some insignificant variations, is formulaic, and that this is directly tied to its commodified nature. On the other hand, 'high' art,

such as classical music, is seen by Adorno to be stimulating and challenging; producing active listeners who seek and embrace new and novel musical experiments (Adorno, 2001).

Certainly, music should ideally be innovative and challenging in order to disrupt musical and societal norms, and 'the aesthetic impulse that Adorno recognised in high art' should also be intrinsic to 'low' art (Frith, 2002, p. 20). Theodore Gracyk credits Adorno with recognising that 'any appraisal of music must begin with its social history and cultural norms,' but suggests that his theory might have been greatly nuanced had he 'stretched that insight to include popular music' (1996, p. 150). In the introduction to Adorno's updated *Culture Industry*, J. M. Bernstein suggests that understanding mass culture as no longer being a vehicle of a monolithic ideology enables us to recognise that it, 'however unwittingly or intentionally, includes moments of conflict, rebellion, opposition and the drive for emancipation and utopia' (2001, pp. 20-21).

As a consequence of understanding the culture industry as the producer of multiple, inconsistent ideologies, the distinction between popular and artistic music is an increasingly arbitrary and even redundant notion. Foreshadowing Raphael's insistence on the current lack of distinct musical genres, Frith advances that rather than 'distinct autonomous music worlds' there instead exist 'historically evolving discourses across a single field' (2002, p. 43). Because 'the commercial music world['s] values are created by and organized around the music industry,' (2002, p. 41), every genre grapples with issues prompted by commodification. Gracyk questions whether there is a need to choose between 'commercial entertainment and personal expression' (1996, p. 151), suggesting in his rhetorical silence that the implicit answer is an emphatic no.

Adorno's theory is further problematised by Frith's observation that all musical genres necessarily build on and derive from their predecessors (2002, p. 150) Attempts to establish a divide between popular and artistic music is further complicated by an understanding that what was unpopular during its time may later be popularised and even canonised (2002, p. 168). Additionally, popular musicians frequently engage with conventions drawn from artistic music, thus altering the original composer/performer's intent and changing their meaning (2002, p. 173). Finally, music is interpreted differently across different musical communities. Each individual listener within these myriad disparate subcultures listens 'within a complex social and historical context' (2002, p. 167). No one genre, in short, exists in a vacuum. Any informed consideration of music should be 'grounded in a community of musicians and listeners, not in a transcendental "essence"' (1996, p. 173).

Music as identity work: What music tells us about ourselves

The task of this discussion is not to preference any one genre over another. What is consequential in outlining some of the different musical genres is illuminating the 'different ways in which music works *materially* to give people different identities, to place them in different social groups' (Frith, 1996, p. 124). Simon Frith proposes that our experiences of music, whether in creating or

listening to it, are directly linked to the construction of identity. Both an individual and communal identity are implicitly acknowledged in music, in which a musical experience understood 'by *taking on* both a subjective and a collective identity' (Frith, 1996, p. 109). Arguably more central than querying how a particular musical text may reflect its audience is questioning how it produces them; 'how it creates and constructs an experience' (1996, p. 109). Frith suggests that 'pop tastes do not just derive from our socially constructed identities; they also help to shape them' (2002, pp. 267-277). Common across all musical genres, he asserts, is that music draws our attention to our social circumstances, but it also suggests that these circumstances are not unchangeable. Further, music can suggest that a community of others 'share our dissatisfaction' (2002, pp. 267-277). The process by which music does this is by offering experiences 'which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative and cultural narratives' (2002, p. 275). Of course, this process is replicable to any area of popular culture, but it is enhanced in music because of music's emotional resonance, allowing us to 'absorb songs into our own lives and rhythm in our own bodies' (2002, p. 273).

Ultimately, it may not be musical genres in themselves that are significant, but instead, 'the stories [that music] tells about us in our genre identities' (2002, p. 90). Music is able to be 'converted or transposed – in and through interpretive appropriation' (DeNora, 2000, pp. 69-70). A sense of self is found in musical pieces that provide representations of what the listener herself already recognises and values (2000, p. 69). Music 'provides a material rendering of self-identity; a material in and with which to identify identity... Through the mutual referencing of self to music and music to self' (DeNora, 2000, p. 69). In her article 'Private words, public emotions: performing confession in indie music', Ariana Phillips-Hutton describes this exchange as a kind of reciprocity of confession being enacted between performer and audience, saying that in 'making their experiences (however mediated) available, confessional artists lead audiences into a distinctive relational sphere predicated on a sense of reciprocal confession (2018, p. 348).

Provocative twerking and phallic re-appropriation: The body in music

Just as, in conveying a performance and a story, music describes the social in the individual and vice versa, so too does it describe 'the mind in the body and the body in the mind' (Frith, 1996, p. 109). Music is, after all, fundamentally a physical experience. David Byrne, singer of band Talking Heads and author of *How Music Works* (2013), explains that music communicates 'social things, psychological things, physical things about how we feel and perceive our bodies' (2013, p. 101). He adds that 'music *embodies*' how other people think and feel, allowing listeners to enter into their worlds in a uniquely transformative experience (2013, p. 101). Looking specifically at rock music, Frith assesses that the markers of a successful rock concert are determined by the performer's physicality as well as the audience's physical responses (1996, p. 124). He furthers that 'music affects our emotions bodily as well as engaging our feelings mentally' (1996, p. 266). Likewise, DeNora maintains that not only does music have an emotional effect on people, but it also has an effect on the body, 'providing entrainment devices and prosthetic technologies' (2000, pp. 107-

108). She explains that music should be considered not as a stimulating force, but rather as something which affords 'structures, patterns, parameters and meanings that bodies may appropriate or latch on to... Music is, or rather can serve as, a constitutive property of bodily being' (2000, p. 99).

Bodies are implicated in nearly every aspect of music. Physical movement on stage is perhaps the most obvious type of a bodily experience of music. This refers not only to dance, but also gesture, defined here as 'a movement or change in state that becomes marked as significant by an agent' (Gritten & King, 2006, p. xx). Its significance is granted by the receiver of the action in so far as 'it must be taken intentionally by an interpreter... in such a manner as to denote it with the trappings of human significance' (2006, p. xx). To illustrate, the ease and apparent confidence with which singer, rapper, and flautist Lizzo Beating (stage name Lizzo) moves and poses on and off-stage is imbued with interpretive meaning through this framework. Lizzo 'occupies a space that's common in pop: her body as sexual and covetable' (Garza, 2019). But because Lizzo is African American and big-bodied, and because 'black and brown bodies have been historically configured as excessive, with unrestrained desires' (Durham, Cooper, & Morris, 2013, p. 725), the act of Lizzo posing naked, or in tight body-suits, whether suggestively twerking or merely sitting, becomes loaded with secondary meaning.

Similarly, it is useful to interpret dance not just as choreographed movement, but as 'an ideological way of listening' which 'draws our attention... to arguments about its own meaning' (Frith, 1996, p. 224). In short, how we move to music tells us a great deal about how we feel about the music, and about what it is that the music is communicating. George-Allen says that dance is significant because of how often women have historically been and contemporarily are dissuaded from embracing their physical capabilities. Dance becomes 'an escape clause for women who long to move their bodies in a society that still prefers women to be still and passive' (2019, pp. 83-84). Ahmed explains the importance of bodies in a feminist movement as 'bodies that prance; bodies that dance; "bodies that matter," to borrow Judith Butler's (1993) terms; bodies that have to wiggle about to create space' (2017, p. 247).

Dance, like music, has and can reflect and reinforce 'cultural conceptions of corporeality – in particular, conceptions of women's bodies and identities' (Banes, 2013, p. 1), but it has also often 'formed and in some cases criticised' the very same (2013, p. 1). In this regard, dance acts as a powerful symbol; 'an efficacious tool of expression for women who must reconcile the disparity between the physical reality they encounter and society's representation of human development' (Arkin, 1994, p. 36). A striking example of this is seen in Beyoncé Knowles' 2014 MTV Video Music Awards, in which the juxtaposition of Beyoncé's sexually-suggestive dancing with writer and feminist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's words, 'We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way that boys are' displayed behind her, can be interpreted as 'a negotiation of that marginalisation, and a reclaiming of the black female body and sexuality' (Weidhase, 2015, p. 125). Lisa C. Arkin says that 'dance movement that emerges from women's experiences helps destroy assumptions and social constraints imposed on how we value our bodies and how we use them to create and communicate' (1994, p. 38).

Clothing adds yet another dimension to what we can infer from the body in a musical context. Clothing is 'one of the most visible markers of social status and gender and [is] therefore useful in maintaining or subverting symbolic boundaries' (Crane, 2000, p. 1). Not least for women, fashion 'has always had a social agenda.… And clothing behavior is always socially motivated' (2000, p. 19). Much more than merely the body's 'stage dressing', clothes are 'the way the body sees; without them it has nothing to say. Hence the pop significance of dressing up, making up, Madonna's endlessly "revealing" costumes' (Frith, 2002, p. 218). At 61, Madonna is, in part via her clothing, 'flaunting her fluid sexuality, making trouble.… refus[ing] to grow up' (2002, p. 42). This is especially ntobale in a society which dictates that aging women abandon any claim to sexuality.

Similarly, Riot Grrrl participants used clothing to express their defiance of gender expectations. Riot Grrrls 'spoofed femininity, modelling independence, assertiveness and action in baby-doll dresses and Doc Martens' (2002, p. 31). Following Riot Grrrl, the Spice Girls global pop takeover of the 1990s demonstrated an altogether different kind of 'girl power'. While I am not unreservedly defending their brand of 'cultural globalism run riot' (Hopkins, 2002, p. 13), the Spice Girls can be seen to have 'fused the independent 'go-girl' stance of Riot Girl with the sex appeal and naked ambition of Madonna' (Hopkins, 2002, p. 32). This was in no small part due to their clothing and overall image. The Spice Girls 'were selling not just music but an entire attitude, fashion, identity package' (Hopkins, 2002, p. 17). While by no means the only, or variously even the most defensible examples of aesthetic communication, Madonna, Riot Grrrls and the Spice Girls' enduring place in the discourse of feminist debate demonstrates that when we look at the clothes of a woman in music, 'we don't just perceive a musician's body as costumed' (Frith, 2002, p. 219), but can also infer a range of rhetorical choices.

The playing of musical instruments is another element of musical bodily experience that is laden with symbolic significance. The electric guitar, perhaps more than any other musical instrument, is often considered as an 'obvious phallic symbol' (Bourdage, 2007, p. 49), and is frequently worn slung low over the player's hips. When played by women, the electric guitar thus appears as an incongruous signifier of masculinity. Even on female players, the electric guitar 'appears as an extension of the male body type' (Bourdage, 2007, p. 49). This raises the vexed question originally posed by American writer Audrey Lorde, of the effectiveness, and even appropriateness, of using the 'masters tools' (Lorde, 1984) in an attempt to dismantle the house – or concert hall. Feminists have historically debated the 'propriety of using musical structures that are normatively masculine, actively misogynist, and clearly heteronormative' (James, 2009, p. 87). Robin M. James specifically points out the 'presuppositions at work in cock rock vs. teenybop dichotomies' (2009, p. 87), phallic symbology of the guitar, and the racial prejudices imbedded in the Anglo-American popular music industry as all further problematising women's use of the electric guitar. Monique M. Bourdage concurs, stating that unlike the 'feminine-coded position' of vocalist (2007, p. 66), the electric guitar's associations of 'speed, violence, power and volume,' all typically associated with the masculine, imbue the instrument with an uneasy phallic significance (2007, p. 51).

However, both Bourdage and James propose that, contingent on certain criteria, the master's tools can in fact be effectively appropriated for feminist musical projects. James refers to queer musician Peaches, specifically citing her collaboration with band Chicks on Speed in their song 'We Don't Play Guitars'. The song's video clip features Peaches playing a hot-pink, flying-V guitar, surrounded by male guitar players falling to their knees before running away. James proffers that Peaches' performance inverts and challenges the typical conceptualisation of what the electric guitar represents; in an appropriation that renders the instrument 'an abject, disgusting object that patriarchy can no longer tolerate' (2009, p. 88). James engages with Butler's discussion of resignification in her book *Undoing Gender* to contextualise her analysis, suggesting that when Peaches, a queer woman, plays the guitar, she does so in a way that radically re-signifies its presumed meaning. Peaches contests 'binary, heteronormative gender and the inevitability of heterosexual masculinity,' while also making accessible, pleasurable music for female and feminist listeners (2009, p. 88). When such re-appropriation is performed by 'those conventionally excluded by or from that idea,' the term itself is transformed (2009, p. 82).

Female bodies as performative instruments

The implications for a woman in music 'to show her body publicly, to pose' (Frith, 1996, p. 213) are radically different than for a male performer or participating spectator. Quite literally, when a woman is performing onstage, 'the sonic seems to be blocked through the primacy of the scopic, as the figure she presents is primarily categorized as female' (Björck, 2011, p. 57). Further, she is seen to be 'making a spectacle' out of herself, something which Russo suggests is 'a specifically feminine danger' (1994, p. 53). Such exposure is inevitable for women in music, simply because women's bodies are noticed in a way that men's bodies are not. The female body is far less escapable for women in patriarchal society than for men. Indeed, 'whatever the woman says, she will have her body – her female sex – taken into account' (Moi, 1999, p. 196). One strategy for negotiating this reality is by considering the body in Beauvoir's proposed terms of backgrounding and foregrounding. In a defence of Beauvoir's framing, Moi postulates that engaging with these terms in order to position the body allows one to simultaneously affirm that 'sexual difference is a fact of fundamental philosophical and social importance *and* that it is not necessarily the most important fact about a human being' (1999, p. 206). Rather than being indicative of a transcendental essence or meaning, Beauvoir instead sees the body as merely being the 'phenomenological background … against which a woman's choices and acts will be foregrounded' (Moi, 1999, p. 206). This is useful because, rather than being essentialist or reductionist, it allows the sexed body to be understood as constituting one element in the consideration of women in music. In short, it is only because men and women are seen to be different, that 'transgressive performance becomes possible as a fertile form of sexual lying' (Frith, 1996, p. 218). Framing the female body as a background allows us to acknowledge the existence of the body and how it is perceived, while simultaneously recognising that it 'is constituted and produced by culture' (Solie, 1993, pp. 4-5). Understanding this is especially beneficial if it is accepted that 'music making and music listening… are bodily matters' (Frith, 1996, p. 274).

Unruly women: Inadvertent and deliberate transgression

Women in music, by the very nature of their perceived intrusion into a male sphere, are always potentially in danger – and by the same turn are always, potentially, dangerous to patriarchal order. By 'mis-performing' their gender, however unintentionally; women in music render 'social laws explicit' (Butler, 1988, p. 906). Transgression in this context may have 'more to do with a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries' (Russo, 1994, p. 53) than any conscious act of rebellion. Simply put, it is 'difficult to stay 'feminine' in a rock band simply because 'femininity' is an artifice: it assumed that women do not sweat, that their noses do not go red and shiny, that their hair stays in place' (Bayton, 1997, p. 40). In its most overt state, transgression in this context may involve the deliberate deployment of such strategies as 'radical negation, silence, withdrawal, and invisibility, and the bold affirmations of feminine performance, imposture, and masquerade' (Russo, 1994, p. 54). In either regard, 'there are temporal and collective dimensions to these actions, and their public nature is not inconsequential' (Butler, 1988, p. 906).

Gaga's meat dress and the proto-utopian sphere of heavy metal: The grotesque and the carnival

If the female body in music is 'ungrounded and out of bounds' (Russo, 1994, p. 9), it can be inferred that the female body in music is therefore also quite often grotesque, in the Bakhtinian sense of the word. The grotesque figure in Bakhtin's framework 'is not simply what is disgusting or obscene in a limited sense but a potentially limitless challenge to the structural and moral orders of everyday life' (Halnon, 2006, p. 36). Likewise, Julia Kristeva defines the abject body (not to be conflated with the grotesque, but nonetheless sharing several of its characteristics) not as merely unhealthy or unclean, but rather, 'that which perturbs an identity, a system, an order; that which does not respect limits, places or rules. It is the in-between, the ambiguous, the mixed' (1982, p. 127). This recalls Whiteley's discussion of the various women in music who have challenged 'single determinate meanings' (Whiteley, 2000, p. 196) of femaleness, and specifically of femaleness in a musical context. Grotesquery disturbs 'sacred' gender conventions. Pop superstar Lady Gaga's performances, in a far cry from conventional pop concerts, often include an array of bodily grotesquery, such as 'a chandelier dropping on her head, with Gaga slowly bleeding to death as she [sings]' (Moran, 2011, p. 257). Gaga's infamous raw meat dress (Moran, 2011, p. 260) meanwhile, ironically juxtaposes the comfortable (from a distance, a glamourous gown worn by a petite figure) with the uncomfortable (death and decay, the animalistic). Caitlin Moran appraises Gaga's interpretation of sexual mores as examining 'female dysfunction, alienation, and sexual neuroses' (Moran, 2011, p. 257). While not implying that Lady Gaga is consciously engaging with French theory to appropriate grotesque conventions, nonetheless 'the Gaga body has always been central to Gaga, the concept: she's a living breathing performance-art piece of wonder and revulsion' (Ewens, 2019a, p. 75). Gaga's public body reveals her 'statement on celebrity culture', that it is 'hilarious and theatrical but also traps stars – by dressing absurdly, she felt she had power over her image' (2019a, p. 75). The female

grotesque as enacted by Lady Gaga disrupts convention; 'her iconography is disconcerting, and disarranges what we are used to seeing' (Moran, 2011, p. 260).

The 'multiple, and changing' (Russo, 1994, p. 8) female grotesque is also identified with the carnivalesque, and with 'social transformation' (1994, p. 8). In Bakhtin's 'Carnival and Carnivalesque' (Bakhtin, 1984), the medieval carnival is described as a 'highly transgressive, playful retreat from, and inversion and debasement of, the totality of officialdom' (Halnon, 2006, p. 36). Music, and specifically the concert setting, enact many carnival elements, and likewise, the female participant in music can embody an abject or grotesque figure within this setting. Indeed, Kristeva asserts that the artistic experience is fundamentally 'rooted in the abject' (1982, p. 138). In her consideration of the heavy metal music scene as enacting a form of grotesque-realism, Karen Bettez Halnon says that the 'heavy metal carnival is a protoutopian politics of resistance against an alienating society of spectacle and nothingness' (2006, p. 36). Heavy metal is an especially striking enactment of the grotesque due to its participants' use of corpse paint, blood, and other iconography affiliated with death and decay. However, the 'sweaty bodies pushing, grabbing, swaying, rubbing, and touching' (Halnon, 2006, p. 40) found in many other concert settings also mimic the participants of medieval carnival, not just the heavy metal genre. It is the explicitly physical aspect of the carnival/concert which may be one of its most transgressive elements. It rebels against a societal 'primacy on autonomy, self-interest, and individualism'(Halnon, 2006, p. 40), instead choosing to prioritise the physical and emotional connection of members of community. The grotesque body, says Russo, 'is connected to the rest of the world' (1994, pp. 62-63).

Moran discusses what she calls the 'end point' of Lady Gaga's persona/performance, concluding that it is 'the thrill of examining her own feelings and expressing them to her... gay-friendly, freak-friendly' fans (2011, pp. 260-261). Central to both medieval carnival and heavy metal carnival is 'the exposure, elevation, and celebration of the marginalized and the stigmatized' (Halnon, 2006, p. 39); misfit communities not unlike those comprising Lady Gaga's audience. While Halnon does not look specifically at female heavy metal-participants in her study, Russo, in her interpretation of carnival and feminist theory, makes explicit reference to the female grotesque. She describes the grotesque female figure as playing with 'bodily exposure and containment, disguise and gender masquerade, abjection and marginality, parody and excess,' and as enacting 'models of transformation and counter production situated within the social system and symbolically at its margins' (1994, p. 53). Similarly, Halnon identifies the carnival-grotesque as not just highlighting 'interior aspects of anatomy but also what is spurned, spoiled, stained, and hidden in the body politic' (2006, p. 39). When attempting to answer Frith's question: 'What then, is the role of the body in our understanding of musical performance and music response?' (1996, p. 215), it is the prioritisation of marginalised bodies that allows us 'to realize the possibility and desirability of difference' (2006, p. 46).

Performativity in music: Subversive gestures

Musical performance allows for unique possibilities to engage with performativity. Indeed, Symons and Taylor suggest that 'corporeal gestures of vocality and physicality,' or simply, song and dance, 'resonate with performativity' (2013, p. 2). This may seem a somewhat redundant notion, however performativity is defined in the discourse of performance studies as not simply being a performance, but rather a stylised act which 'invokes complex dynamics meted out between performer and audience, transgressing established sites of discourse and bleeding across/through embodied identities' (Symonds & Taylor, 2013, p. 6). Performativity in this sense is understood as a kind of impersonation, or drag, which Butler says has the capacity to be subversive if it 'reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced' (1993, p. 125). To be subversive, performative acts must mimic and displace the gendered conventions being recalled, through repeated (mis)performance. Furthermore, there must be an underlying understanding that there is no true prior gender; that the original 'is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations' (1993, p. 125). If this is not recognised, then performativity merely reinforces gendered conventions, rather than challenging them.

Conclusion: Women in music stimulating dialogue within a double-bind

This article began with a provocation: that women in music culture, despite the often oppressive parameters imposed upon them, may alter conceptions of what it means to be a woman in music, and in society. It is important to acknowledge the limits of musical performance, and performativity. Ultimately, while the various modes of transgression discussed may at times ambiguously operate in a double-bind, reinforcing and refuting patriarchal scripts, nevertheless it can be ceded that 'the histories of subaltern and counterproductive cultural activity are never as neatly closed as structural models might suggest' (Russo, 1994, p. 58). The effects of these models of transgression are diverse and individually-determined, and they 'continue to resonate with us, to act on us, as the memories expand outward into our shared history, until eventually they dissolve like the ripples in a pond' (Symonds & Taylor, 2013, p. 293). But, say Dominic Symonds and Millie Taylor, these ripples never entirely disappear. Rather, 'they have been performed and their performativities continue to affect us, to resonate as experience and memory, and to be rearticulated when reactivated' (2013, p. 293) by the reengagement with or recollection of a musical experience. Women in music are using what is available to them to provoke a dialogue which has lasting ramifications.

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