

## Gendered Bodies

The gender group (Dana Baitz, Virginia Caputo, Kip Pegley and Nino Tsitsishvili) explored several topics before moving into a discussion about marginal gender identifications and vocal performance. We brought into our dialogue articles by a number of scholars, most notably by Bev Diamond and Suzanne Cusick to see how their writings inform one another and help us to explore further these topics in our own work.

### *Kip Pegley*

Suzanne Cusick's original motivation for writing "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem" was to formulate what a feminist music theory might look like. Her insights are generated from her personal experience as a music theorist and an organist; in particular, Cusick has come to realize that the gender she produces through her disembodied musicological self is different from that of her embodied performing self (Cusick 1994: 9). "Music," Cusick argues, is "an art which self-evidently does not exist until bodies make it and/or receive it, [yet] is thought about as if it were a mind-mind game" (16). When scholars analyze music, she argues, they often talk about the mental intentions of the composers in order to better equip the listener's mind for when they hear it. What Cusick argues here is that this mind-mind paradigm (gendered as male within the traditional mind/body duality), disregards the feminine, that is, the embodied act of performing. Through her argument she makes a compelling case for a music theory that takes into account the practices of minds as well as "the practices of bodies (real ones)" (17).

I wonder how Cusick's attention to "actual bodies" might now be expanded further to take into account the phenomenological experience of transgendered individuals. In one of the discussion postings, Dana said that she reads transgendered identity as "exploratory...highlighting and celebrating dissonances and fragmentation." This distinguishes transgendered identity from transsexual identity, the latter of which she understands as a "drive towards cohesion." (I find this juxtaposition to be highly compelling, accurate and nonetheless disconcerting, for it might preclude the possibility of transgendered coherence, to the extent that any gender identification can be coherent). I believe Dana rightly identifies the fragmentation of transgendered identity, which often includes a shift from experiencing one body into experiencing several bodies. In other words,

some transgendered folks move between their "immanent" body (what Cusick might call the "actual" or "physical" body) and the body with which they often feel more connected, their "imaginary" or "transcendent" body. While Cusick's argument details why we must bring the body into music theory, is there room to develop this further to help explain how transgendered performers musically express their transcendent bodies?

This is where Bev's article "The Interpretation of Gender Issues in Musical Life Stories of Prince Edward Islanders" might be brought in to the discussion (Diamond 2000: 99-139). In this article Bev articulates the processes three women engage in order to negotiate the tensions that surface through living in a body that crosses gendered and cultural boundaries. She explores what the women have and what they freely give away, what it is that they might choose to take with them as well as what they leave behind as they move into unfamiliar territory (musical and otherwise), how they create newly formulated identities within new arenas, and then how they *talk* about these processes.

Following Bev's work, I questioned in an earlier posting how a transgendered individual--like all other individuals--negotiates more than just gender and how these identities pile up on one another. How, for instance, might a female-to-male Newfoundlander, who grew up under strict heteronormative conditions, moved to Toronto to become institutionally educated at the post-graduate level, lived in a large urban centre still find a way to stay connected to his roots (if that is important to him)? Might he feel some sense of betrayal to his community of origin? When all other cultural markers "fail" (rural identification, shared musical tastes, income levels, etc.), we still have our gendered intelligibility that helps link us to our past. What happens when this final frontier is jeopardized? Virginia responded:

When we view bodies as inscribed by many different milieu -- cultural, musical, through lenses of race, sexuality, class -- and all of these are mapped onto one another so that you can find a set of 'scapes' operating simultaneously. These milieu provide a landscape of agency as well as a set of restrictions through which individuals draw on to enclose bodies in particular ways -- by place, by genders, etc. The restrictions are material, discursive, musical --they might be in the form of memories of place, memories of songs, sounds of voices. How does this spatiality, that seems to be implicit

in the kinds of issues that have been raised, collectively, figuratively, practically, musically filter one another? This is where the question of voice as a marker of a bounded understanding of gender comes in.

As Virginia points out, there are many 'scapes' that function simultaneously in a musical performance. The artist may choose to retain some markers that provide a sense of identity coherence (gendered or otherwise) and forfeit others. Vocal performance here is critical, for the voice represents one of the body's/bodies' internal resonances and a crucial gender boundary (although this too can be manipulated through a number of parameters, including range, timbre, dynamics, and the presence or absence of breathiness).

Of course, vocal production, like speech, is always highly gendered. As Cusick has argued elsewhere (Cusick 1999: 25-48), the gendering of voices clearly is evident within the realm of popular music where some of the most valued male vocalists use a head resonance, thus refusing the dominant culture symbolic admission to their bodies. The raw head voice, valued when produced by men, is usually not socially acceptable for women within the cultural mainstream. Instead, women are encouraged to sing with a vibrato and allow the sound to resonate more deeply before it is externalized. One need only go to a local coffee house set or turn on an episode of *American Idol* to witness the different vocal expectations for men and women. Bringing us back to the current discussion, I would then like to ask: How do transgendered individuals who occupy part of their public musical lives in transcendent bodies perform gender vocally? What might an artist keep in a transgendered musical performance to maintain a sense of gender identity coherence? What is changeable and how does this vary between individuals? If music is a possible site of social transgression and cultural belonging, how is gender fragmented and reconstituted within a transgendered performance?

Returning to Cusick's initial question: What might a feminist music theory look like? I believe there is a way to take into consideration not only actual bodies, but the possible plurality of one individual's *bodies* within specific cultural contexts. As Bev aptly noted, "Music is a domain in our lives through which we can express desire, establish relationships, and actualize self. The telling of musical life stories--not as self evident reports but as constructions, fantasies, creative texts in themselves--

reveals those expressions" (Diamond 2000: 129). Although her words here refer to the retelling of stories, I believe they also can inform how we think about musical performances vis-à-vis fantasies, identifications, and the actualization of our many bodies. Following Suzanne and Bev, I hope that a future music theory will expand to encompass transgender identifications, and perhaps even put a new twist into the old mind/body debate.

### **Thoughts on the performativity of gender and sexuality and strategies of analysis**

#### *Nino Tsitsishvili*

The common debate in recent gender and feminist musicological research has been the fluidity and contingency of gendered and sexual identities and power relationships, expressed in the musical performance as well as in the discourse about music. This debate is largely inspired and strengthened by theories that gender and sex are both performed and socially constructed through the bodily enactments and repetitions of the learnt gender- and sex-specific behaviors, as argued by Butler (1990). This constructivist approach to the study of gender identities is a response to the essentialist notions of gender and sex difference prevalent in the broader society globally, according to which gender dichotomies are derived strictly from the biologically innate differences between the sexes. It is along these lines of biological essentialism and social constructedness that our discussion about the performativity of gender and transgendered and transsexual identities developed. What I also observed in connection with our group of discussion, is that our research interests are quite distinct, my focus being on gender relationships rather than on transgendered and transsexual gender identities. However, I agree with Dana that transgender could be important to everyone, not just trans folks.

In this sense, it is important that Dana Baitz brought into our discussion the contradiction between the essentialist and the constructionist approaches to the study of gender and sexuality, and emphasized the obscurity and highly abstract and figurative levels of discussions in the queer theory. As a response, Dana emphasized the need for a more balanced and integrative approach and for the combination of essentialist and constructionist views. In relation to this, what drew my

attention to Diamond's discussions at conferences, in her articles and her comments on my dissertation is her emphasis on the need to apply diverse philosophical and social-critical strategies in the study of music and gender, rather than to adopt uncritically established theoretical perspectives on gender identities and gender/sex performativity. For example, Beverley explores the theories of "performativity" developed in the feminist scholarship of the 1990s, which have as their major premise that identities are not fixed and a priori but changeable and contingent, and asks, whether these very fluctuations and contingencies are in any way breaking essentialism or on the contrary, reinforcing the dichotomized concepts of maleness and femaleness (Diamond 2000: 115).

In connection to this, the question is, how can the gender fluidity as expressed in unusual and unexpected musical and vocal performances actually change the established gender dichotomies? Can voice perform, resist, challenge and ultimately, change the ways gendered and sexed bodies relate to each other in the society? Can the sanctioning of transsexuality, noted by Dana, change the deeply embedded and socio-politically constructed power relationships between men and women, heterosexuals and the homosexuals, transsexuals and transgendered individuals? Many musicians and musicologists are skeptical regarding this in conversation and scholarly discourse. In his examination of Suzi Quatro's performance of androgyny Philip Auslander (2004) proposes that musical performativity and challenge to gender roles cannot subvert the deep-seated gender power relationships in actual social life. Cusick (1999) politicizes this issue, asking the question whether looking for gender oppression and power relations in every piece of music and performance act would deprive us the very joy which made us choose to be musicians and music scholars. However, both Auslander and Cusick agree that performers can at least challenge those norms and make unconventional representations of gender and sexuality (Auslander 2004: 6) and that the body's resistance and liberation in the act of a musical performance is as much enjoyable as a pure aesthetic experience of music (Cusick 1999: 42).

As an example of reinforcing gender dichotomies by means of gender fluidity, I thought about the tradition of polyphonic singing in Georgian villages which is a clearly male-dominated activity. Individual women who have louder and stronger voice than average woman and who come out and sing publicly with men may be called "mamali kali" and "vazhkaci kali" [lit. rooster woman; virile woman]. Women with strong physique or character can be called by similar names. While these

terms acknowledge the fluidity of gender identities and socially acquiesce women who do not fall in the category of average woman because of their gender or sexuality, they also compartmentalize them as the “in between category”, i.e. the category which is situated between the two conventionally normal heterosexual categories.

On the other hand, expanding on Cusick’s idea that the body’s resistance and liberation in the act of a musical performance is an enjoyable experience, I began to pay more attention to the qualities of courage and personal strength in those situations during my fieldwork in Georgia where the women had to turn to male practices and behave in masculine ways in order to place themselves in the centre of public attention and enjoy this attention. While I tend to interpret such adoption by the women of the masculine ways of behavior and singing as reinforcing the patriarchal values, I also acknowledge that such behaviors take certain personal qualities such as courage and confidence, especially in those social contexts where women are expected to be silent. Alternatively then, I saw the “masculine” behavior of women as an exercise of willpower within the limited opportunities of their male-dominated surroundings. At this point it is useful to draw a parallel with Diamond’s interpretations of female musical-artistic or entrepreneurial activities as not necessarily endorsing the conventional patriarchal norms but as demonstrating creative cultural leadership. Such is her reading of the Filipino woman Leti LaRosa’s activities who promotes Filipino culture on Prince Edward Island, and who gave authority to a single male dance teacher to teach the children their culture. Beverley interprets LaRosa’s passing of authority to the male teacher not only as an endorsement of patriarchy but also as her strength as a cultural leader who negotiates solidarity and enables others within the community (Diamond 2000: 123).

Another aspect that particularly interests me in our discussion is the body-mind relationship. Kip talks about the ways of expanding Cusick’s feminist music theory, which calls for a serious consideration of the embodied act of performance in our musicological analyses. One of the issues that Kip identified is to explain how transgendered performers musically express their transcendent bodies. I think the act of transcendent experience is crucial here, but it is equally important to define what is transcendence. What is being transcended and by what or by whom? It seems that at least one aspect of this process is the transcendence of our actual physical body, or more precisely, the transcendence of the society’s expectations of masculine-feminine physical dichotomy by means of our

liberal mind and liberating thinking about gender and sexuality. In short, we may bring the mind back into the feminist music theory and think about the two-way process:

1) Firstly, how the mind transcends the body, or how the social experience of identity transcends the biological experience of the body. Dana's observation that in transgendered experiences gendered meaning is located in behavior and interpretation rather than in physical-material attributes, which is the body, is relevant here, because her observation acknowledges the significance of the mind (and the brain), that it is the mind and intellect which attempt to transcend the body's physical restrictions.

2) Secondly, we might start thinking about the ways in which the bodily experiences push our minds to move between and beyond our actual and imagined bodies. It seems to me, that our "imagined" body vs. our actual "immanent" body that Kip refers to, is the act of our mind's transcendence of the body. As Cusick argues, in the Western music theory, we deal with the mind-to-mind paradigm gendered as male within the traditional mind/body duality. Alternatively, we might also think that male mind as understood in the Western music theory is the mind which transcends the body's restrictions set by the social conventions of human society. Battersby's feminist metaphysics is relevant here, whereby it is "femaleness" as a physical-biological condition and not the "femininity" as a socio-psychological quality that has hindered women from being perceived as creative geniuses. While males were (are) allowed transcendence of their biological subject-position via the tasks of spiritual production (Battersby 1989:9), females have been excluded from such spiritual production.

But let's think of Janis Joplin, or Sandra Nasic of the overwhelmingly popular German band Guano Apes, and the ways they pushed the boundaries of vocal production acceptable for women? An important avenue of research that emerges from this discussion is the ability of

human beings to push the boundaries, and transcend and contradict our socio-biological limitations.

*Dana Baitz*

In a separate chapter of this festschrift, addressing music and identity, I described a “balanced” approach that I see in so much of Bev’s work. She recognizes multiple perspectives on any given subject, and draws elements from each. This is true of her work on music and gender. When Bev was completing her musicological training in Toronto in the 1970s, many scholars were advancing an essentialist viewpoint. Gender was widely understood as an inherent quality that men and women could express or represent. Masculinity and femininity were often grounded in biology, giving them a supposed fixed and material basis. Bev’s work never adhered strictly to this perspective, despite the currency it had in her formative years. Instead, she recognized that gender could be influenced by social factors. Later, when constructionism eventually displaced essentialism as a widely preferred account of gender, Bev’s work retained its independence, its balance. Rather than understanding gender as a thoroughly fragmented and ephemeral product of cultural processes, she points to cohesive senses of gender identity, and recognizes experience and subjectivity as vital sources of knowledge.

Bev often engages with essentialism and constructionism in her work on music and gender. In many ways, these systems can seem totally incompatible. For example, constructionists may point out that a person’s physical features hold little meaning, since behaviour and performance supersede any effect they have. On the other hand, an essentialist approach to music analysis may pinpoint harmony, rhythm and form as the essential characteristics of a piece; the way it is performed has no impact on this meaning. Rather than supporting polarized views such as these, Bev seeks to bridge essentialist and constructionist accounts of gender, identity, and musical meaning.

In the *Music and Gender* anthology that Bev co-edited in 2000, she offers an article entitled “The Interpretation of Gender Issues in Musical Life Stories of Prince Edward Islanders.” Although this article is written at a time when constructionism arguably holds greater academic sway than essentialism does, Bev remains focused on recognizing the merits of each system, and ultimately connecting the two: “feminist scholars should not debate as much as relate the essentialist to the constructionist” (Diamond 2000: 132). On one hand, her view that gender is contingent

and socially mediated is clear. For her, cultural norms and traditions form a “complex web of factors that impinge on the invention of selves” (100). Bev points out ways in which gendered aspects of music have evolved over time (fiddling becoming less definitively masculine, for example), and how concepts and expressions of gender have shifted in some communities. This supports her premise that “identities are not fixed but changeable and contingent” (115). Of course, one risk associated with constructionism is that an ungrounded fluidity can develop into a loss of definition and integrity. If change is unrestricted by senses of cohesion or material factors, identity and meaning may become completely diffuse and unintelligible. Bev recognizes this risk, and qualifies her description of gender identity. She keeps her “essentialist lens still intact” (115) and locates constraints on gender fluidity, such as the traditions and norms (even “essences”) that a community uses to define itself. Bev finds that individuals and communities do have fundamental and “essential” qualities that they represent through music. This voice is rarely heard in an academic context favouring poststructuralist and constructionist accounts of gender.

Rather than merely making references to essentialism and constructionism, Bev offers two compelling strategies for integrating these two systems. Scholars who describe gender as constructed and performative often attempt to reveal its groundlessness by highlighting examples that disrupt and subvert gender norms. This is particularly evident in some queer critical theory and musicology. In these fields, sexual and gendered nonconformity is often positioned as a formal challenge to binary gender and heteronormativity. Bev offers an alternative explanation. She describes one woman’s violations of gender norms (her fiddle playing) as sincere self-expression, rather than a willful (and perhaps less committed) strike against normativity. This is an important difference. In Bev’s account, the Self is intact and expressive – whereas in poststructuralist accounts, subversive acts mean to expose the fictiveness of all social structures. Therefore, Bev recognizes traditions as communally assembled, mutable, and rooted in individual subjectivity. Construction is founded upon actual subjects with (changeable) essences. This is quite different from constructionist and poststructuralist arguments claiming that norms actually determine subjectivities. The second way that Bev integrates essentialist and constructionist accounts of gender is simply by refusing any absolute distinction between the two. She states that “essentialisms must be revealed as constructed (not

natural) and hence mutable" (105). This does not indicate that all subjects and identities are fictive constructs, and so cannot provide any reliable information. Instead, Bev repositions subjects and their experience as central and vital, while also recognizing that their "essences" or identities are prone to shift. Because of these connections between essence and construct, I understand any references Bev makes to constructed or essential aspects of gender as relative and partial. In fact, she suggests that gender may lie at some intersection of essence and construction.

Few musicologists, or other critical theorists, take up this dialectic as successfully as Bev does. Within musicology, however, Suzanne Cusick pursues comparable questions. In "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem," she argues that music cannot be understood on purely mental terms (as through analysis), and in fact bodily experiences (such as performance) offer unique pieces of information. Her "embodied music theory" seems to synthesize two seemingly disparate aspects of music and gender. Martha Mockus, too, describes gender in similar ways to Bev. In "Lesbian Skin and Musical Fascination," she describes Pauline Oliveros as transcending gender and musical norms not for the purpose of demolishing an unjust system, but to express and extend her sense of self. Even such "constructed" items as digital delay and manufactured instruments are described as extensions of the self, a self with "essences" to represent. Similar "mediated" accounts of gender that recover the authority of experience and embodiment are provided by Stephen Amico (2001, 2006) and Stan Hawkins (2002). These perspectives are well grounded in critical theory. Transsexual theorist Henry Rubin (1998) finds that experience and embodiment are legitimate and valuable sources of knowledge, yet he recognizes the constraints on this type of knowledge. He accepts the constructionist argument that we are shaped by discourse and social norms, but he integrates this with the information that subjective experience provides. Julia Kristeva (1974/1984) offers a clear and systematic model that connects material and cultural realms of meaning and experience, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty likewise locates perception in an intersection between physicality and cognition. Dualities such as these appear in many disciplines but are less often resolved; Bev is one of the few musicologist to successfully bridge two such divergent yet indispensable accounts of gender.

One reason for the success of Bev's approach to music and gender may be her focus on material situations and institutions. Viviane Namaste, a French Canadian transsexual sociologist, finds that queer

theorists often obscure transsexual lives by limiting their discussions to abstract and figurative levels. She finds that transsexuality is often most visible in institutions (such as medicine and law enforcement). A neglect of these material conditions results in a skewed emphasis on postmodernist fragmentation and ephemera, where transsexuality is less visible. Bev always attends to empirical features such as institutions and materiality. This seems to contribute to the comprehensiveness and balance of her accounts of music and gender.

I've described the musicological implications of Bev's integration of essentialist and constructionist accounts of gender. I find these implications to be perhaps most visible – and quite polarizing – in a discussions of transgender and transsexuality. As a transsexual woman myself, I feel concerned about the social and political effects of polarized accounts of gender. Transgender may be described as a cross-gender identification that largely avoids medical intervention. Here, gender and sex may “conflict” more, or else bodily sex may be understood on a non-material, performative level. Transsexuality generally presents a greater alignment of sex and gender: hormones and surgery help to bring the body in line with one's gender identity. Descriptions of gender as an arbitrary and fluid construct are very easily represented by the figure of transgender. Here, materiality is not a limiting factor, and gendered meaning is located in behaviour and interpretation. On the other hand, essentialist accounts of gender which prioritize physical features can be used to sanction transsexuality. Bodies are clear indicators of sex and gender; a Self is maintained and is based on these “essential” features. Academic discourse can thus invoke transsexuality and transgender to represent scholarly interests and values, but the divisions between these identities are not strongly felt in actual trans communities. In reality, these two identities may be found in close alliances, they may be difficult to clearly distinguish at times, they may both appear in one individual's history, and in fact an individual may identify as both transsexual and transgendered simultaneously. These circumstances demand that we find ways in our scholarly work to account for both transgender and transsexuality simultaneously – and not elevate one above the other. Exclusively essentialist or constructionist accounts can lead to a harmful stratification of trans identities. It is only by mediating these two systems that all gender identities may be balanced and equally represented. Bev's approach to music and gender facilitates this equalization. There is no aspect of Bev's work that proscribes gender identities that foreground

physicality, or those foregrounding performative and behaviour signifiers. My discussion of the transgender and transsexual implications of this musicological work is only intended to highlight some consequences of singular and absolute systems. The risks associated with essentialism and constructionism apply to the representation of non-trans individuals, and to items other than gender identity. I believe that it is only by mediating these two complementary systems, as Bev does, that accurate representations of music, gender and identity can be produced.

Bev's approach to gender and music is refreshing, in that it helps resolve dichotomies that limit musicological work. Her work is also personally meaningful to me, for the comprehensive account of trans identities that it enables. But aside from the scholarly merits of her methodology, the balance and independence that she exhibits is inspiring. Many trends that have been felt in musicology since the 1970s have influenced Bev's work, but she has always balanced these influences with her own deep convictions. This allows her to learn from others without fully blending in to her environment. I believe this sense of independence is what enables Bev to integrate and balance competing thought systems. Hers is a model I hope to continue learning from.

### **Comments on the Significance of Gender**

*Virginia Caputo*

Each of my colleague's contributions in the 'gender group' (Kip Pegley, Nino Tsitsishvili and Dana Baitz) exemplifies how necessary it is to bring a complex understanding of gender both to theorizing and to lived experience. Whether envisaged as a marker of an individual's identity, for example, in questioning how to extend and encompass many bodies in theorizing music in order to articulate transgendered musical experience; or exploring conformity and autonomy vis-à-vis patriarchal definitions of gender as occurring simultaneously in vocal performances; or gender viewed as a dialectical relationship between essentialist and constructionist views, the significance and centrality of gender is deeply felt in these narratives. Gender emerges in these accounts as a system of power relationships situated in contexts of race, class, ethnicity, locality, sexuality, age and ability, thereby providing a basis for robust analyses of music. Far from neatly defined or bounded issues, these narratives evoke an understanding of gender that is messy, contradictory and, at times, 'risky.'

In Kip's contribution, for example, we hear about 'telling bodies', of risks of 'disconnection' that individuals may make when seeking ways to expand gendered identities. Kip uses words including 'betrayal,' 'jeopardized,' and 'forfeit' to describe what may be at stake. Nino uses an example from Georgia to examine the politicization of voice in exploring gendered social relationships and, in the process, points out the gendered risks that are involved in that context. Dana articulates the political implications of polarized accounts of gender for transgendered and transsexual people, commenting on the consequences and risks of singular and absolute systems for understanding of lived experience. What is clear about the theorizing in each of the narratives is that human beings living in complex circumstances are key and the implications of gender for people's lives are profound.

This point brings me to reflect on what seems to me critical to Beverley Diamond's work as a theorist, ethnographer and mentor; namely, her concern to work ethically and honestly with consultants, with colleagues, and with students, as well as to theorize expansively about gender, cross cut by other social lines of difference, in exploring through a musical window the ways that people negotiate and make meaning for their own social lives. When Beverley writes of the relational aspects of speaking and listening, arguing that each of us speaks from a position that is constituted in part, by listeners, so that this communication is the acting out of a relationship, she points out the complexity of gendered social relationships and the double binds and risks that can occur. It is this idea - that the study of gender is about encounter, negotiation and risk - that has made a significant impact on my own work as a theorist and ethnographer. I have come to understand that there are necessarily double binds that one encounters in beginning from a position that values lived experience, that explores webs of local and global politics that play out in people's lives - whether aged 7 or 70, that confronts one's own 'locatedness' in creating the very conditions of inequality that in another breath we rail against. This is at the heart of my own concern for the everyday, sometimes seemingly mundane, human interactions that occur in lived experience and musical contexts; for me, there cannot be any other way to proceed except to face situations with honesty and to collaborate with consultants with honour and ethical discretion. Beverley models these qualities and this approach in her own work and life; to her example I aspire, and for her generosity, I am grateful.

