Colloquy

Musicology Beyond Borders?

TAMARA LEVITZ, Convenor

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Introduction

TAMARA LEVITZ

North American musicology appears to be in a period of giddy expansionism. In 2011, the program committee for the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society (AMS) increased the acceptance rate for papers from 25 to 30 percent (programming 192 papers over 144 the year before), and the board welcomed nine study groups: a rapid recent proliferation since the original creation of the LGBTQ and "Hispanic" (subsequently Ibero-American Music) study groups in 1991 and 1993 respectively. As a result of these developments, the annual meeting ran nine sessions simultaneously that year. At the

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[I would still conclude, as I did in 1998], that the basis of a solid discipline of Latin American musicology lies in "elaborating theoretical premises for the investigation and analysis of music in all its different modes of production," and also in engaging more intensely with "sociological and psychological aspects of musical creation and consumption," and, I would add today, with economic and administrative factors that the global cultural industry demands and with structural aspects of the social function of music that are being constantly modified by the increased migratory flows brought on by the international situation.[57]

Borderline Subjects, Musical Objects

RYAN DOHONEY

Borders are queer things. They mark where home is. They give a measure of comfort by securing for us a habitable space. They are, however, not given. Borders are established through struggle.[58] Often hard-won, they need to be defended as they protect *our* home, not that of another. Borders are agonistic sites of contestation and, as such, are provisional and relational. I will respond to Tamara Levitz's provocations by considering music's role in maintaining and reconfiguring borders between self and other, and thus in what Isabelle Stengers has called "productions of subjectivity"—practices through which we sense ourselves and our place in the world.[59] I am interested in particular in border drawings and crossings as they occur in the relational dynamics of musical experience.

A growing number of musicologists are studying the relationship between musical experience and subject formation. Naomi Cumming, Benjamin Piekut, and Antoine Hennion have all proffered approaches for analyzing how subjective borders are marked and reconfigured through sound production.[60] Cumming makes a convincing case for the importance of music in the construction of a "sonic self" or a particular musical being composed out of a network of social and affective relations. Hennion notes that our attachments (musical and otherwise) in many ways constitute our sense of self and mark us off from what we are not. Piekut, in a similar vein, argues that "every musical performance is the performance of a relationship."[61] Rather than reinscribe Enlightenment notions of sovereign selfhood in the productions of subjectivity they document, these scholars track the construction of selves out of un-

57. Eli Rodríguez, "Hacia una funcionalidad mayor," 57.

58. As Deleuze and Guattari have written, "Now we are at home. But home does not preexist." *Thousand Plateaus*, 311.

59. Stengers, "Experimenting with Refrains," 39.

60. Cumming, *Sonic Self*, Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, and Hennion, "Those Things That Hold Us Together."

61. Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 159.

stable attachments that are constantly in flux. "Like a live wire, the subject channels what's going on around it in the process of its own self-composition," Kathleen Stewart writes, "it's a thing composed of encounters and the spaces and events it traverses and inhabits."[62] We traverse and inhabit sonic borders in the most sublime and mundane of our musical experiences. Sound rubs up against what we think we feel and how we live. A sound can change us, and force us to do something we didn't expect to do.

Carolyn Abbate recognizes music's capacity to participate in the formation of subjectivity when she discusses music's drastic abilities to reconfigure our perceptions and the kinds of stories we tell about them. In the rush to critique Abbate's work, we have foreclosed productive paths for the drastic, which I would reinterpret as a peculiar musical affect marking different kinds of border crossings and reconfigurations that invite our attention and documentation—instead of reducing us to silence. Through her "autobiographical tidbits" Abbate conveys her sense of the affective flow and perceptual reconfiguration that occur during particularly intense live performances. I am most interested in her discussion of the possibilities in attending to the "neurological misfire" that accompanies drastic experience, which leads to uncertainty and confusion in response to music.[63] Abbate restricts the drastic by privileging its production during live performance, however. Yet the type of "presence" she celebrates occurs as well when human beings confront technologies and nonhuman objects. The relationships of which music is made are not only between people but also between people and *things*.[64] As Hennion notes, music "cumulates intermediaries, interpreters, instruments, mediums, all needed for its presence in the musical milieu."[65] Listening to any performance or recording is to partake in an experience distended in space and time and mediated by musicians, playback systems, instruments, and both physical and virtual bodies.

It was a rather mundane activity that got me thinking along these lines. In early 2012 I indulged in my penchant for thrift-store shopping in downtown Portland, Oregon. I wandered into a Goodwill boutique, a well-curated and

62. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 79.

63. Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?," 536, 535. My reinterpretation of "the drastic" (one might say deliberate misreading) is in sympathy with James Hepokoski's critique of Vladimir Jankélévitch: "While not discounting the directness of music's impact as performed—which must remain an elemental reality for any considered reflection—one might still ask the counter-Jankélévitchian question of whether one ever approaches the captivating force of music in an unmediated way, as an isolated and independent subject emancipated from external constraints, free to recognize on one's own terms the ineffability believed to be really there"; Hepokoski, "Ineffable Immersion," 230. For another view on confusion and lack of mastery over musical experiences and our attempts to narrate them see Dubiel, "Uncertainty, Disorientation, and Loss as Responses to Musical Structure."

64. On the unpredictability of subject-object relations and the power of non-human agents, see Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 63–86; and Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 175–90.

65. Hennion, "History of Art—Lessons in Mediation," 238. See also idem, *La passion musicale*.

miniaturized version of the more familiar thrift stores planted in strip malls across the country. I made my way past some costume jewelry and chintz to the small men's section hoping to find a tie or some other professorial garb. The soundscape of the store, as is often the case in retail environments, was not intrusively apparent.[66] The music encouraged evenly hovering attention to shopping, the task at hand. The selection of Top 40 hits from the 1980s and 1990s gave me a sense of, if not comfort, at least familiarity and allowed me to feel sonically at home. This soundscape was not necessarily conducive to intense experience, and yet something drastic did happen when "Take My Breath Away"—a song written by Giorgio Moroder and Tom Whitlock and performed by the band Berlin—started to sound from the speakers.

"Take My Breath Away" is familiar to those who have seen the film *Top Gun* from 1987, in which it accompanies a rather tame love scene between Tom Cruise and Kelly McGillis. As the song began to play, two shoppers at the Goodwill appeared deeply affected by it. They stopped what they were doing, mouthed the words in silent karaoke, and stared up at the speakers. I noticed their sudden shift in bodily attitude: they appeared captured by the song and held in momentary reverie. After several moments of immersion (lasting the length of the first verse and chorus) they began to shuttle back and forth between two observable modes of listening: at certain moments they treated the song as background music to their shopping, while at others they abandoned themselves to spontaneous flashes of sonic absorption. Although the shoppers may have appeared to be going inward in their moments of reverie, or setting up a border between themselves and the outside world by creating a fantasy of being sonically separate from it, they were in fact redrawing their connections rather dramatically by focusing acute attention on the technological apparatus (the speakers) that was enabling their drastic experience. Because I observed the changes in the shoppers but didn't feel the experience myself, I had some trouble empathizing with it. I kept wondering, "What is going on?" I am not sure that I have gotten it right. There is something in this experience that reminds me of Raymond Williams's "structures of feeling"—which describes intensities of feeling that are felt before they can be narrated.[67] Such affects are "*changes of presence*" that "do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they can exert palpable pressure and set effective limits on experience and action."[68] If we open up Abbate's definition of the drastic, we begin to understand that it describes not a blank moment of pure listening, but rather a chain of relationships established between subjects and objects as they enter social and technological networks they did not foresee.[69]

66. See Sterne, "Sounds Like the Mall of America"; and DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 131–50.

67. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 128–37.

68. Ibid., 132. Emphasis in original.

69. Abbate is not alone in idealizing liveness and physical copresence. See my critique of philosopher Adriana Cavarero along these lines in Dohoney, "Antidote to Metaphysics."

What makes my autobiographical tidbit of interest to border thinking is that it gives evidence of how listening experiences divert our attention and profoundly affect our sense of self. David Hesmondhalgh questions whether music's role in the production of selfhood is always positive, however. He argues that contemporary modes of listening such as those I've described above exemplify a form of musical subjectivity particular to neoliberal capitalism. Drawing on the work of sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, Hesmondhalgh describes this subjectivity as "connexionist": "the self is an individual enterprise, and transitory relationships and commitments are considered more legitimate than stable ones because rapidly changing one's connections can supposedly lead to personal growth and greater self-realization," he writes.[70] Many current technologies—Facebook, for example—dramatize and visualize our hyperconnected selves; others like Spotify integrate social networks with musical tastes resulting in a visualized real-time display of our listening practices.

The Goodwill scene above is no less technologically mediated. Music exerted power over the shoppers by reorienting their attention to a technological apparatus and created a sense of presence and immediacy that drew them away from their daily, mundane tasks. This story demonstrates that *something* happens to us when we're in the world listening. We become reoriented and affected, brought into dialogue with memories, technologies, emotions, and practices that alter our borders and wrap us up in experiences that we may not be able to name or describe terribly well. Recognizing these boundary situations and finding ways to articulate how they function will go a long way toward achieving an understanding of the aurality of contemporary life. As Hesmondhagh, Hennion, and Georgina Born agree, music's ability to blur or maintain borders influences both our daily lives and our scholarly work. Thus, more and more, it seems urgent that we attend to the ways in which we are being made and remade by sound. And yet many of us shy away from reflexively considering how we listen because we fear that our reflections will sound too personal or subjective. This reticence may lead us, as Gary Tomlinson wrote eloquently nearly two decades ago, to fall short in the ethical task of attending to "the immense complexity of the historian's dialogue with past subjectivities."[71] I believe that we are at a crucial juncture and that we need to reassess the terms of our historical dialogues lest the border between musicology and matters of worldly concern become permanently impermeable. Given the state of the discipline as described by Levitz, we might well wonder where we stand in terms of our own subjective agency. Are the borders we tear down

70. Hesmondhalgh, "Towards a Critical Understanding of Music, Emotion, and Self-Identity," 334. See also Boltanski and Chiapello, *New Spirit of Capitalism*. See also Eric Drott's contribution to this colloquy for a related critique.

71. Tomlinson, "Musical Pasts and Postmodern Musicologies," 20. On the disciplinary constraints on personal accounts see Guck, "Music Loving, or the Relationship with the Piece."

being replaced by others over which we have little control? And what might we do about it?

Musicology on the Edge: Reflections on Medieval Borders

EMMA DILLON

This contribution offers observations about the border of the most enduring, and frequently contested, territories of the discipline, namely, the medieval border of the Western musical tradition: the edge that marks the beginning of music history. For decades, it has been the starting point of staple undergraduate history surveys; and in its most recent narration, Richard Taruskin's *History of Western Music*, the "curtain goes up" with the earliest notated traditions, beginning with Gregorian chant. Furthermore, by virtue of its roots in nineteenth-century philological methodologies, the study of medieval repertories marks another border: the beginnings of the field of musicology itself. The continuous presence of the medieval border thus makes it a prime witness to the topic of this colloquy, capable of speaking not only to the question of what constitutes a disciplinary border, but also of the complicated and changing history of borders within musicology. During its long lifespan, it has witnessed expansions and contractions, and, like the larger territory it demarcates, it has been construed as only marginally relevant and restrictively dominant by turns. Yet throughout all these formations and reformations, one constant remains: the seemingly unassailable endurance of the medieval border, manifest in the continuous practice of medieval-music studies in the mix of musicologies past and present. My purpose is not to rehearse the reasons for its ongoing presence, or that of the historical territory it frames; nor is it to defend, depose, or map the current position of the tradition, even though these possibilities remain pressing in many quarters. Instead, I will explore what place the practice of medieval borders may have in the border musicologies imagined by Tamara Levitz and other contributors. Specifically, the case of medieval borders illuminates questions pertinent to Levitz's consideration of contemporary directions of our field: what is the place of historical musicology in a musicology attuned to contemporary geopolitical borders, what might it contribute to, and learn from, these emerging initiatives? Pressing here is another, more challenging question: can, or indeed should, the historian or historically inclined participate in a future musicology in the border, a musicology in which one that is acutely aware of the "material reality" and violence of today's borders?

Medieval musicology does not just mark a border of disciplinary history. It is unequivocally *in the border*: a space of in-betweens. We can thus understand the tag "medieval musicology" as a kind of abbreviation. Expanded, it opens out onto a compound or chain of hyphenated identities, whose baseline is the