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Contemporary Music Review

ISSN: 0749-4467 (Print) 1477-2256 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/gcmr20

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To cite this article: Alejandrina M. Medina, Dan Arthur Levy, Nicholas Tran & Poe M. Allphin (09 Feb 2026): Whither Trans/Queer Music Studies?, Contemporary Music Review, DOI: 10.1080/07494467.2026.2621563

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2026.2621563

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC REVIEW
https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2026.2621563

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Whither Trans/Queer Music Studies?

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the authors develop a critical dialogue to trans/queerly trouble paradigmatic directions in music studies. Particularly, the authors engage the liberal tendency to celebrate trans/queer interventions as a discipline's *progress* towards becoming more diverse and inclusive. The article emerges from a recent panel at Feminist Theory and Music 17 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Through wide-ranging engagement with music and sound, we attempt to (re)orient our relationship to music studies and its various interventions, including the (im)possible emergence of trans/queer as a distinct area of study. The authors collectively draw on mutable forms of embodiment to explore trans/queer music studies otherwise—that is, to pursue a relational mode of scholarship that provokes generative and capacious directions in our study. Recognising ourselves within the 'terrible we' of trans scholarship (Awkward-Rich, 2022. *The Terrible We: Thinking with Trans Maladjustment*. Durham: Duke University Press)—as junior, racialized, (dis)abled, trans/queer scholars—how do our relations on and off the page revel in loudness, noise, and dissonance? Simultaneously, we locate these trans/queer relationships within contemporary material histories, including the regulation of bodies through anti-trans/queer legislation, relational modes of performance and composition, and Brazil's history of slavery. We might imagine this article as a discordant chorus more than a harmonious gesture of calcification, which is to say that the voices in the article indulge in a dialogic cacophony in order to trace (dis)connections between the fractal nodes of trans/queer critical thought in music studies. While it may be comforting to proffer a legible response to recent developments in trans/queer music studies, we instead suggest that a critical hesitancy might better afford an overdue reflexivity for trans/queer music scholars. As such, the essay invites readers into the 'terrible we' in hopes of grounding our work in contemporary material quagmires to open toward possibilities of trans/queerly musicking otherwise.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 2 September 2024
Accepted 20 January 2026

KEYWORDS
Trans; queer; music studies; embodiment; materialism; pedagogy

Introduction

> 'Every click in representation follows a shift in Empire's calculation of how to restabilize relations, how to absorb or reabsorb an error, a wound, a loose stitch without evidence of its ever having torn, without a scar, without a past'.—Aurora Mattia, *The Fifth Wound* (2023, 33)

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> 'Hope's biggest obstacle is failure. Hope falters, we lose hope, but we need hope to think otherwise in the face of odds that are stacked against us. In part, we must take on a kind of abstracted hope [that] is not much more than merely wishing … a mode of hoping that is cognizant of exactly what obstacles present themselves in the face of obstacles that so often feel insurmountable'.—José Esteban Muñoz, 'Hope in the Face of Heartbreak' (2019, 207)

> 'We must become undisciplined'.—Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016, 13)

In a moment within music studies at large where trans/queer modes of thought appear with exponential frequency in conference programmes, journals, and edited collections, thinking trans and writing critically queer is more than a nascent dream for music scholars. Today, more than thirty years after the first 'Gay and Lesbian Study Group' (now 'LGBTQ Study Group') at the 1989 American Musicological Society (AMS) conference and the inaugural Feminist Theory & Music conference in 1991,[1] trans/queer music papers are often allotted multiple panels at major annual meetings, such as AMS, the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM), and the Society for Music Theory (SMT).[2] We could certainly view these growing numbers as a marker of assimilatory success, celebrating this new outpouring of scholarship or equating it with trans/queer liberation. However, we understand that a trans studies panel does not in itself fix transphobia, just as J. Logan Smilges asserts that 'access does not by itself fix ableism … Even if they say they want us there now, how do we trust them after all this time?' (2023, 7). Thus in this work, through four explorations of various modes of 'thinking trans' (Medina 2023) in music studies, we hope to address calls within trans studies at large for disciplinary interventions that focus on the material conditions of trans/queer life (Amin 2023; Billard, Everhart, and Zhang 2022),[3] and apply this imperative to our current positionalities as trans/queer graduate students within North American music departments.

With this goal in mind, we recognise that all too often, trans gets subsumed into queer, as focus tends toward areas of overlap without articulating possible distinctions and frictions. For instance, the increasingly common framing of 'queer and trans' in queer musicology often allows for a nod towards trans people without meaningful engagement with trans scholars or the materiality of trans life—that is, writing 'queer and trans', but rarely meaning it. We invoke 'trans/queer' to reverse this imbalance, and to hail the dialectical relationship between the signifiers *trans* and *queer*. Here, the conspicuous slash acts as a caesura, a 'loose stitch' (Mattia 2023, 33) signalling the productive dissonance that such a relationality might develop. To bring together trans/queer in the fashion of a still-open wound might mean to remain receptive to frictions, tensions, and incongruencies that mobilise critique. This critical mode can be met with trans/queer curiosity, a manner of 'finding sequins in the rubble' (Alvarez 2016, 619; see also Alvarez 2020)[4] that moves toward 'reparative' readings (Sedgwick 2003). As Sedgwick intimates, one of the possible 'names for the reparative process is love' (8). How might we lovingly assemble the 'murderous part-objects' of queer musicology into 'something like a whole'? (128).

In his introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness* ([2018] 2022), Fred Maus highlights three contributions to the handbook that are authored by trans contributors or concern trans topics, and notes that 'the B and T of LGBTQ have received

relatively little emphasis in queer music studies. This is especially conspicuous for transgender issues, where there is, meanwhile, drastic discrimination and violence in non-musical life … in general there has been little uptake in academic research' (Maus 2022, 13). Similarly, in his introduction to the first queer music theory collection *Queer Ear* (2023), Gavin Lee notes that despite efforts to the contrary, there are no trans theory or contributors featured in the volume, and expresses '[hope] that this book will lay the foundation for future research in these areas' (Lee 2023, 18). While Maus and Lee find space to begin this much-needed conversation, these 'inoculating critique[s]' (Modleski 1991, 6) may ultimately function to excuse the conspicuous marginalizsation of trans perspectives in the formative volumes of 'queer ethno/musicology'—*Queering the Pitch* (Brett, Thomas, and Wood 1994), *Queering the Field: Sounding Out Ethnomusicology* (Barz and Cheng 2019), and *Queering the Popular Pitch* (Whiteley and Rycenga 2006)—while also allowing for more of the same. In response, we hope to call attention to a mode of critique and activism organised around the sign trans that, unsatisfied with the present moment, dreams for and towards a future otherwise. To this end, we point toward thinking trans as one way in which our hopes and desires might catalyse through our analysis of this dissatisfaction. If thinking trans in music studies offers a productive avenue for critique in music studies, it might best be articulated as a method for amplifying the lived experiences of bodies peripheralized by regulatory systems through a careful attunement to social structuration and, most importantly, to the ways in which music and sound work to trouble the strictures of our present moment.

To place our hopes, however, in the emergence of 'trans musicology' as a discrete discipline couched within humanist discourse is also to pave over the violent histories of musicology in particular as a discipline which has, until recently, relegated all but a few bodies to the status of object. Calls for a distinct 'trans* method in musicology' put forward by Dana Baitz in the *Oxford Handbook* ([2018] 2022) recognise the utility of trans as a specific mode of inquiry, highlighting the centrality of an investment in the materiality of the body for trans music studies. However, in the tradition of a musicology primarily concerned with whiteness and 'Western Art Music', this intervention perpetuates the centring of white, middle-class perspectives in trans meaning-making. This form of deracination that pervades institutionalised trans studies at large ultimately neglects to acknowledge the construction of the legibly trans (white, abled) body as a product of historical relegation of certain (racialized, captive, disabled) bodies to less-than-human status. In contrast, Stephan Pennington's contribution to the volume, as well as works by Pennington and Elena Krell for the 2018 special issue of *Women and Music* on 'Race-ing Queer Music Scholarship', offer critical analysis beyond this white frame, and a way forward for more expansive modes of trans/queer thought in music studies. Likewise, we place our work within musicology's uptake of the material turn in the humanities, and thus a longer intellectual genealogy of feminist musicology's focus on the body: scholars such as Suzanne Cusick have taken note of the gender, race, sexuality, and class 'implications to this denial of the flesh' in music analysis (1994, 16).[5]

Moreover, thinking of 'trans musicology' or related trans interventions in music studies as discrete from other modes of thought limits our ability to actually *think trans:* that is, to see trans studies' investment in the mutability and constructedness of ability and racialized gender as indebted to genealogies of, for example, Black feminist

thought. Rather than invest ourselves in a 'new' discipline (i.e. 'trans musicology'), as Christina Sharpe intimates, 'we must become undisciplined' (2016, 13), and remain cognisant as to whom a discourse of disciplinary emergence serves in academic institutions that feed off the neutralisation of political discourse. In this sense, a grammar of emergence risks contributing to a world-making project that depends upon the peripheralization of subjectivities and bodies (Black, trans, Indigenous, disabled) that are regulated by our current (bio/necro)political regime. For us, thinking trans moves us away from imperatives to unearth proper or legible subjects of trans musicological discourse, and towards an interrogation instead of the 'subject produced by trans studies'—or in this case trans music studies—'and that process of production itself' (Beauchamp in Aizura et al. 2020, 136). As Medina suggests in her essay below, trans music studies, then, becomes less the study of trans music in a representational sense (i.e. music made by trans musicians, composers, etc.), and more the study of how 'race, sex, gender, and sexuality are relationally and iteratively crafted as social and spatial arrangements' (Ellison in Aizura et al. 2020, 132) within the expansive cultural context of music and sound.

A decade has passed since the so-called 'Transgender Tipping Point' (Steinmetz 2014), during which time trans people have reached unprecedented levels of visibility, which, while sometimes positive, predominantly manifests in anti-trans antagonism, rampant scapegoating, and violence. In the intervening year since our initial presentation of these ideas, Donald Trump has again seized the White House, and the position of (certain white, abled) trans people as rights-bearing liberal subjects once again proves to be precarious and illusory: a trap door. As Gossett, Stanley, and Burton note in their pivotal volume *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility,* 'In today's complex cultural landscape, trans people are offered many 'doors'—entrances to visibility, to resources, to recognition, and to understanding. Yet … these doors are almost always also 'traps'—accommodating trans bodies, histories, and culture only insofar as they can be forced to hew to hegemonic modalities' (2017, xxiii). One could certainly think of this article, emerging as it does from a conference panel brought together under the sign *trans,* as simply an (admittedly, much needed) instance of trans representation in music academia. However, we hope that rather than fall into this trap, this confluence of ideas allows us to scope out alternative forms of thinking (and being) trans/queer in music studies—ones that resist the temptation to celebrate our inclusion in the academy's vicious cycles of accumulation that continually absorb, defang, and depoliticise minoritarian discourse. How can we avoid getting trapped by the mirage of visibility as liberation? What *is* trans/queer music studies otherwise, and, how might graduate students collaborate to access this otherwise terrain? And as Aren Z. Aizura asks in the roundtable 'Thinking With Trans Now', 'What does it mean to think trans in a time of crisis?' (Aizura et al. 2020, 125).

The following four short essays offer intersectional perspectives that allow for a reinvigorated investment in music's political claims, through a broad spectrum approach to materiality, performance, and reception. In 'Musicology is Burning: On Proper Objects in Music Studies', Alejandrina M. Medina offers a critique of a music studies that takes trans music as its object, instead putting forward *trans* as a mode of inquiry in itself. She begins an exploration of Jota Mombaça's *opera infinita chapter 0: has the fire read the stories it burnt?*, tracing the aesthetic burning as racial mattering through Brazil's history of enslavement. Medina's excerpt folds into 'Squinting with Your Ears: On

Listening to Beverly Glenn-Copeland's *Keyboard Fantasies* (1986)', Dan Arthur Levy's interpretation of Black trans elder Beverly Glenn-Copeland's now-iconic New Age album and its reverberations into the present. Levy examines the material circumstances and interrelationalities that have converged to make up *Keyboard Fantasies* as an 'ever new' musical work. He suggests that a proliferation of covers, remixes, and arrangements actualise this music's message of continual, processual becoming, and provide a site of expansive t4t (trans for trans) relationality. Pivoting on the axis of embodied performance practices, Nicholas Tran offers a critique of hierarchical, master/apprentice compositional pedagogy in 'Proliferating Bodies Through Co-Creative Composition Pedagogy'. They suggest a co-creational compositional practice that engages with the embodiment of both composer and performer, using an ethics of care and Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenology as guiding frameworks. Finally, we end firmly grounded in the urgent material realities facing trans youth, with Poe M. Allphin's critical discussion of regulatory (state and legal) bodies and their regulation of non-normative bodies. In 'Regulatory Bodies, Regulated Bodyvoices: against Transcrip as Metaphor', Allphin writes at the intersection of trans/queer and disability studies, grounding his analysis in a 1970s music educator's employment discrimination case and two more recent cases involving trans teens in Texas. Together, the excerpts below engage in a trans/queer musical dialogue, exploring peripheralized topics in music studies that tend to occupy their own realm, but that are permitted here to coexist in tenuous harmony.

Alejandrina M. Medina (University of California, San Diego)

Musicology is Burning: On Proper Objects in Music Studies

I am wary of trans music offering a political vantage outside of late liberal economies of representation. What I suggest is trans as a mode of inquiry rather than a proper object of discourse. How might we, as music studies scholars, think trans, that is, think across, through, and between; think within the spectral and fractal; sense beyond and around the human and its presupposed body? To say this succinctly, if we are to take seriously a call to think trans in the ravages of racial mattering,[6] it is paramount that we approach the production of music with a certain promiscuity towards reifying forms of human life. Such a procedure is unintelligible in our current regime of liberal humanism because thinking trans, as a methodological manoeuvre, does not simply resist the urge to describe trans music as an investment in the body, but rather obliterates the material grounding of the body's agency altogether. I am drawn to the way artists disturb the role of the body in their works and open up new ways of sensing collectively. The Black, Brazilian, and travesti artist Jota Mombaça offers us one way of thinking trans through sound, performance, and the aesthetic. In collaboration with Denise Ferreira da Silva and Anti Ribeiro, her sound art piece *opera infinita, chapter 0: has the fire read the stories it burnt?* (2021) taps into an otherwise made possible by the mutability of race and sex, often through force, captivity, and violence.[7]

This work begins with with a texture that is fuzzy, without centring pitch, which might suggest key or mode. After a deep, pulsating beat, sound starts to fold in on itself in an oscillating motion. The deep beat pulses a few more times, trickling an almost wet sound between the ears. I resist describing these sounds as notes, for they have a metallic sound

bringing sensorial memories of machinery to the ear instead of notated sounds' intersection of pitch and time. What is most present in the texture and contour of the opening material is timbre and sound quality—both of which are fuzzy, haptic, and grainy. A voice enters with a lowering distortion effect, blurring our ability to decipher the words being spoken. The fuzziness elicits the crackling of burning material fusing with flame, growing. Mombaça's voice becomes clearer while the background texture grows denser and more chaotic. 'I suddenly sensed that it was coming in my direction' echoes a few times before subsiding again.

The scrambled text Mombaça recites is from the sixth and penultimate section of her speculative fiction piece 'Can You Sound Like Two Thousand?', published online in *The Contemporary Journal* (2020). In it, fire engulfs the narrator first appearing as an 'unbearable heat' and later as a voice that 'wasn't discourse, just sound. An opaque, mysterious, somehow magical sound'. The voice grows louder in the narrator's senses, pressing her with the increased sense of presence, and yet this opaque sound/voice resists visual location. In the following paragraph, she realises where she is: on top of the fire—and it begins to transmutate her body into the metaphysics of the fire's 'gases and particles' by such extreme forms of heat. She notes, 'It should have been unbearable, and maybe it was, but I surrendered'. The fire in this text and also sonically crafted in *opera infinita, chapter 0* takes form through the narrator's sense of sound. Her own form—that is, her body—is not destroyed by this fire even if it consumes her entirely; she is now able to sense with 'new organs' afforded by the quasi-alchemical fire/sound/voice.

What the work offers is a complication of liberal humanist modes of recognition, representability, and legibility—it obliterates semiotic mapping in favour of sensorial noise. Burning, as an aesthetic, relays the work to longer histories of materiality in Brazil,[8] including the destruction of its archive of enslavement, mismanagement of public funds in the Bolsonaro regime, cobalt mining near the Amazon basin, and anti-Black religious violence by evangelicals. Returning to the subtitle of the work, 'has the fire read the stories it burnt?' we see how fire reacts in this subject position in the inquisitive mode, a register of questioning and critique that remains hesitant. We might say that the histories that fire critiques are left mutable. And yet, the mutability of these stories is grounded in the ontological nature of racial mattering, of which the value accumulated is presupposed on the labour of the object, its estrangement from the biopolitics of nonlife through state violence. This hesitancy is where I want to mobilise trans, which is too frequently used as a metaphor for the body's agency. What if trans, as method, were a reaction to social structuration that rendered it loud, a fire provoked by racial mattering to fan the flames, a heat that melts the sensorial past our knowable world? Trans burning, then, might offer new stories to be burnt that imagine music studies otherwise.

Dan Arthur Levy (McGill University)

Squinting with Your Ears: On Listening to Beverly Glenn-Copeland's Keyboard Fantasies *(1986)*

I remember vividly the day in December 2020 when, scrolling Twitter, I paused on a retweet of a GoFundMe campaign for a Black, trans musician in his mid-seventies

named Beverly Glenn-Copeland. Following a remarkable story of 'rediscovery' in which a record collector happened upon an original cassette of Glenn-Copeland's 1986 electronic album *Keyboard Fantasies* (Glen-Copeland [1986] 2020), the pandemic cut short his 2019 tour, and he was left on the brink of homelessness. In the early days of my own transition, struggling with the seeming impossibility of my own futurity, to see my transness reflected in somebody sixty years my senior was a revelation—one which only intensified upon hearing his music. My story of encounter is just one among many: Lazarus Letcher writes in a 2023 profile piece for *Them* magazine, 'I stumbled on an article about a Black trans musician in need of support. I remember … feeling a rush of recognition and hope, realizing that we can and do grow old. Without pause, I put on 'Ever New' and let the musician and dreamer's soft melodies wash over me' (Letcher 2023). As Eliza Steinbock suggests, this 'shock of recognition … enables the imaginary to process new images',—and, I suggest, sounds—'which have material impact and influence on the possible range of embodiments we can imagine ourselves doing' (Steinbock in Aizura et al. 2020, 135). A frequent site of first encounter with Glenn-Copeland's music, the song 'Ever New' has become something of a trans anthem in the years since *Keyboard Fantasies'* 2018 reissue. By first relating these moments of recognition, I hope to ground this exercise in 'thinking trans in music studies' in the tactility of encounter.

In what follows, I examine the material circumstances and interrelationalities that have converged to constitute *Keyboard Fantasies* as an 'ever new' musical work, or a 'changing same'.[9] I suggest that a proliferation of covers, remixes, and arrangements actualise this music's message of continual, processual becoming, and provide a site of t4t (trans for trans) relationality that reverberates across difference. I move from the material circumstances that motivated the original album's D.I.Y. production in the woods of Ontario, to its resounding impact in today's trans/queer musical landscape. From my own positionality as a white, transmasculine PhD student in musicology, rather than use this space to attempt to render Glenn-Copeland a 'good' or legible subject of 'trans musicological' discourse, I wish to interrogate instead the processes by which this subject might itself be produced (Aizura et al. 2020). Thus, in line with Allphin's emphasis on materiality over 'identity', I situate my analysis in the mundane and the (trans)relational, rather than the spectacular.

The term 't4t'originated in Craigslist personal ads in the early 2000s, functioning as a subcultural signpost that allowed trans people to seek out connections with one another for sex and love; however, as Cameron Awkward-Rich and Hil Malatino note in their introduction to the 'T4t Issue' of *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 'the overlapping things that it presently names … have been most robustly theorized within trans literature and other forms of cultural production that both predate and outlast the Craigslist personal' (2022, 2–3). Today, invocations of t4t as an expansive ontological framework can signify a sexual politics; a mode of engagement with literature, art, and, I suggest, music; as well as a larger ethic of mutual aid and care and a 'route to political praxis or love across the frictions of difference' (Aizura et al. 2020, 129). By employing 't4t' here, I do not intend to imply that the impact of this music begins and ends with a trans audience, nor to invoke an unproblematic or utopian vision of 'trans community' of the type that has often 'distracted from or covered over the significant axes of difference, race chief among them, that characterize and trouble trans affinities and solidarities' (Awkward-Rich and Malatino 2022, 2). I use t4t much like 'trans/queer', that is, to

signal a conspicuous prioritisation of the materiality and interdependency of trans life that acknowledges that, while these relationships are often vexed, 'everyone's lives affect and are affected by trans people and the conditions that attenuate trans lives' (Hsu 2022, 114). Amira Lundy-Harris suggests an expansive vision of a t4t praxis guided by Black feminist thought that includes 'coalitions with those perceived to be outside the boundaries of gender normativity, connections with ancestors and trancestors, and even relationships with/to narratives that help us examine our understanding of self' (Lundy-Harris 2022, 85), a framework capacious enough to approach both Glenn-Copeland as a 'trancestor', and his music as a point of sonic connection.

Glenn-Copeland says that there have essentially been three challenges in his life: 'being black in a white culture, being trans in a heteronormative culture, and being an artist in a business culture' (Dixon 2020), intersecting factors which have continuously interacted to shape the sound of his music, and the conditions of possibility for it to be heard. Despite notable performances in the 1960s and '70s, including features on CBC television and radio and at Montreal's Expo '67, and collaborations with notable Canadian musicians from Bruce Cockburn to Lenny Breau, Glenn-Copeland's trademark generic creativity and his positionality as a Black, gender-nonconforming person continually left him on the outskirts of mainstream success. In a 1979 interview, he describes a dream for an expansive, collaborative sound 'like an orchestral sound … using everything from Gamelan bells to all kinds of Moog synthesizer, and a couple of pianos and a string section … and a horn section … and then a whole African drumming' (Merril 1979, 62). Three years later, he joined the disco-era exodus of Toronto's working musicians for the quiet of Ontario's Muskoka wilderness.

With the 1983 release of the Yamaha DX7, the first affordable digital synthesiser for the consumer marketplace,[10] a sci-fi and computer-obsessed Glenn-Copeland was suddenly able to realise this multi-layered sound through previously unforeseen routes. In combination with his vocals, a Roland TR-707 Rhythm Composer, and an Atari computer, the DX-7 was the primary instrument used in *Keyboard Fantasies'* production. Glenn-Copeland's then-partner, Evelyn Wolff, says that she 'blew through her retirement savings' to buy him the synths and computer equipment: on a practical level, she says, 'We were never going to have enough money for Glenn to hire backup musicians' in order to realise the complex, layered sounds that he envisioned (Lewsen 2023). This early form of DIY electronic music production, combined with Glenn-Copeland and Wolff's foundation of their own independent record label (Atlast Records), allowed Glenn-Copeland to firmly take control of his music's means of production and distribution. Thus, on a material level, Glenn-Copeland's now-iconic synthesiser sound was born not solely out of inspiration through what he calls the Universal Broadcasting System, but also out of practicality, economic necessity, and a need to operate outside a record industry whose narrow categories yielded no room for him or his music.[11]

Nearly forty years after its initial production, *Keyboard Fantasies'* reissue in 2018 prompted the album's transformation through cover versions in 2021's *Keyboard Fantasies Reimagined,* and in arrangements for performing ensembles. Glenn-Copeland's solitary electronic sounds have become a gathering place for primarily young, queer and trans musicians in arrangements for Toronto's Queer Songbook Orchestra, for his touring band Indigo Rising, and for concert choirs. Expanding tracks like 'Ever New' from a solo work to arrangements for large ensembles perhaps materialises Glenn-

Copeland's dreams for a collaborative, 'orchestral sound' in a context (and a time) never before imagined. Beyond the relational possibilities of live performance, *Keyboard Fantasies Reimagined* (Glenn-Copeland 2021) compiles cover versions by a wide range of artists from Arca to Blood Orange. This album notably includes three 'reimaginings' of 'Ever New', which was also covered by trans and nonbinary artists Nakhane, Anjimile, and Rae Spoon. Most recently, a version of 'Ever New' featuring both Glenn-Copeland and nonbinary pop artist Sam Smith served as the keystone for the nonprofit Red Hot's 2024 compilation album *TRAИ2A,* a sweeping forty-six-track, four-hour epic marketed as 'a spiritual journey celebrating trans people' (Red Hot 2024). Journalist Wren Sanders describes 'Ever New' as 'a musical tool for moving yourself from who you are toward who you are becoming' (2021): a site of t4t 'sonic interpellation' (Weheliye 2005, 52). This ongoing musical versioning solidifies the song's place as a metonym for Glenn-Copeland's ethos of intergenerational care, enabling the 'collective creation, as opposed to self-making' (Lundy-Harris 2022, 91) of trans cultural histories and selves.

In the context of these always-evolving cover versions and live performances, the song's message of rebirth and renewal becomes especially poignant. Glenn-Copeland's earnest lyrics speak directly to the listener, interpellating us within an expansive 'we' that includes all those whose life schedules and subject formations exceed the predetermined temporal rigidity of (white/cis/hetero)normativity. An extended introduction of gently rising and falling, intricately layered synthesiser lines allows us ample time to situate ourselves comfortably within this utopic sound-space before Glenn-Copeland's vocals enter, forming a dense texture that the main melody can lean on for support. He sings, 'Welcome the spring, the summer rain/ Softly turned, to sing again/ Welcome the bud, the summer blooming flower/ Welcome the child, whose hand I hold/ Welcome to you, both young and old/ We are ever new'. This chorus, which repeats, mantra-like, throughout the song, invites us to imagine ourselves as the dialogic 'you' addressed in the song, and place ourselves within the collective 'we' that he sets forth ('*we are ever new*'). Beyond the evident sincerity of the lyrics, Glenn-Copeland opens a sonic space in which we can allow ourselves to feel held. The first word we hear is, fittingly, 'Welcome'.

In closing, I want to offer a metaphor for sonic t4t relationality based on Glenn-Copeland's own embodied experience of synthesised sound. On composing with the DX-7, Glenn-Copeland says that he 'had access to things that almost sounded like a violin, if you squinted really hard, with your ears' (Dixon 2020). With this metaphor, Glenn-Copeland suggests an ostensibly impossible reorientation of the body, asking us to confront boundaries between synthetic and organic, synthesised and acoustic, silicon and carbon: a decidedly trans claim to truth and naturalness. As Westley Montgomery notes in his analysis of affinities between trans musicians and hyperpop, 'the connection between trans artists and electronic music has a long history dating back, at least, to Wendy Carlos's Moog synthesiser innovations in the 1960s' (Montgomery 2024, 379). Beyond commenting on the slippery, amorphous nature of synthesised sound, Glenn-Copeland's vivid metaphor provokes a critical reorientation of the body toward the 'ever new' potentialities of trans relationality through sound. His turn of phrase suggests that it is in the act of squinting with our ears that we can find pleasure and joy, putting forward a particularly trans ontology of sound in which the goal is not to seamlessly mimic the (cis)normative, but rather revel in the possibilities of the sonic otherwise.

Nicholas Tran (CUNY Graduate Center)

Proliferating Bodies Through Co-Creative Composition Pedagogy

Conservatory composition lessons are usually taught in a master-apprentice model. Typically, a student-composer will share a draft manuscript to the master-composer, who audiates and critiques it, and a discussion about the student's artistic aims ensues. Margaret Barrett (2006) observes that the common teaching strategies in the master-apprentice model include the master referencing canonical works, setting parameters for the composer's identity, and giving licence to change. It is common for the master-composer to assign a list of pieces for the student to study, giving the student a chance to absorb what the 'taste-maker' deems as 'good', 'fitting', and otherwise regulating the student's ear and musical imagination (Smith 2024, 79). John Kratus writes that in many 'traditional music-teaching settings, the teacher provides the music, either through model or notation, and the students respond in accordance with the teacher's instructions' (2012, 380–381).

This model constructs a linear, hierarchical transmission of knowledge where music moves from master to student and where musical knowledge can be imagined as something that can be handed down unchanged. Such linearity reproduces what Sarah Ahmed (2006) calls 'straight orientations' or, in this case, lines of listening that point toward a right direction of musical matter. To think transqueerly in composition pedagogy, I suggest, is to move through these lines and reorient how bodies, sounds, and knowledges amalgamate into composition.

The master-apprentice model can be dominating to the ears of the student-composer. It is important to remember that the field of contemporary music is still heavily white and male, with many American university composition departments employing mostly men.[12] Again invoking Ahmed, we can see how this system re-produces itself by training students to align their musical bodies toward those who already occupy institutional space. Composer Lauren Redhead writes that 'this discourse [situates] knowledge in composition within a relatively small canon of examples' (2022), foreclosing our ability to compose *freely*, to engage our ears autonomously, or, following my co-authors Levy and Medina, to complicate our understanding of the hegemonic (normative) creative mind. Recalling my own experiences, I remember when established composers told me in trial lessons that my music was *wrong* or that I should *leave classical music to the white people*, statements that mark non-cishet, non-white ears and bodies as musically untrainable or *unfixable*. It follows that many master-composers assume competence with the canon '*should be the precursor to the development of [the student's] independent compositional voice*' (Redhead 2022, 33, italics added), or a regulating of the musical ear. To think transqueerly might be, then, to open the master-student configuration to move between composer, *performer*, and *instrument*.

Those who make music will notice that missing from this master-student image of composition pedagogy is inclusion and care for the performer and their bodies (and their instruments). Renowned oboist Katherine Needleman posted publicly on social media that composers are 'clueless' about the practicalities of her instrument, decrying ridiculous passages that cause performers to 'roll our eyes together at you across the space and time continuum' (2025). This is a common and truthful sentiment—how are performers not integral to the composition teaching model? If, instead, we move toward a co-creative pedagogy, one that centres student-composer and *performer* relationality, then we might

rebalance the power dynamic between the student- and teacher-composers, performer, and instrument such that an exploratory intimacy emerges, especially where 'speech acts and other sonic matter converge' (Cheng 2016, 8), and that composition is understood as a process of coming together of roles rather than a fixing of a musical body. This explorative intimacy frees the composer from the temptation to 'control' the compositional process and seeds both creative and physical agency *with* the performer and instrument.

University readings of student work often reduce performers to 'live MIDI', given limited rehearsal time. What then, does a composition pedagogy that centres a composer-and-performer relation look like? Drawing upon feminist political theorist Joan Tronto's ([1989] 1995) discussion of 'caring for' (as opposed to caring about) I suggest a pedagogy that centres co-composition, broadly defined. To apply Tronto's caring is to contextualise the bodies that perform our music and to allow ourselves the freedom of bodily *(re)invention*—that is, exploring composer, performer, and instrument *together*. Replacing the 'live MIDI' treatment, co-creation, appropriated from choreographer Susan Foster's 'co-motion' (2002, 108) where dancers and choreographers messily exist with and betwixt each other, perhaps space is created for the unruly 'we' of composers, performers, and instruments. 'Co-composition is already something of a resistive act against singular conceptions of creativity', says Smith (2024, 81), but I would argue that co-composition is the norm by which professional (that is, non-student) composers already operate. Sandra L. Stauffer (2024) asked twelve professional composers about their co-composition habits: Jennifer Jolley has a 'personalizing' (as opposed to objectifying) process (99); Anne McGinty begins with the question '*Who* can be featured?' (99); Steven Bryant says to 'Pester your friends into playing passages for you' (103); and Eric Whitaker admits that 'if a musician makes a suggestion, especially an instrumentalist, they're right'(103). The co-composition model is not only viable but is common.

In 2024, I asked my composition students to invite a performer to one of their lessons. This experience allowed the composition lesson's 'frame' (Smith 2024, 79) to be shifted away from the teacher and unto the students. In many instances, the composition student and the student performer would improvise and explore, shifting perspectives from 'I want you to sound like this' to 'What can this body, this instrument, this we, do?' Such inquiry is rooted in Tronto's ([1989] 1995) 'caring for' and with bodies. In my own courses at Hunter, Queens, and Lehman Colleges, students learn how to write for one another's performance abilities. They compose not toward an abstract ideal but through the material affordances of each performer's body. Critical to co-creation is the exploration of vulnerability, uninhibited by notions of how sonic bodies are 'supposed' to exist. To think trans in composition might be to imagine music-making as a site where bodies, sounds, and instruments proliferate beyond the boundaries of normativity. This type of intimate composition releases us from the fixity of role and form toward a creative practice centred on mutable forms of exploration.

Poe M. Allphin (CUNY Graduate Center)

Regulatory Bodies, Regulated Voices: Against Transcrip as Metaphor

Many attempts at *thinking trans* or *thinking disabled* in academia imply that the frameworks of transness or disability can be neatly excised from the bodyminds[13] in which they

operate. These approaches seek to use transness and disability as metaphors at the expense of ignoring the material conditions of transcrip lives. Max Thornton articulates that just as Susan Stryker has identified trans studies as queer studies' evil twin (2004, 212), crip studies is disability studies' evil twin, and I borrow Thornton's use of 'trans/crip … to name the inextricable entwinement of gender normativity and able-bodiedness, and hence also the entwinement of gender nonconformity and disability' (2019, 359). I have previously advocated for a model of collaborative music analysis that, similar to Tran's suggestions for composition pedagogy, takes the trans composer's positionality, intentions, and humanity into consideration (Allphin 2021). While conversations and oral history as method remain a central part of my scholarly practice, the changing political landscape and my own positionality as a chronically ill transsexual have shifted both my relationship to music studies and my dreams for what it might become.

Here I centre the material conditions rather than the 'identities' of trans musicians, contextualised within the ableism of transphobic rhetoric and rule-making. Regulatory bodies regulate trans bodies and voices, which are currently at the centre of contemporary legal and social discourses in the U.S. and beyond. Ideas about so-called natural bodies and healthy tissue, rooted in ableism, are a contributing factor to the work of the state and other regulatory bodies as actors of violence against trans and disabled bodies and voices. The new U.S. secretary of Health and Human Services, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr's recent framing of autism as a national 'epidemic' that is 'destroying our greatest resource, our children' (2025) echoes Lisa Marchiano's 2017 framing of trans teens as a 'psychic epidemic', as further popularised by Abigail Shrier's (2020) *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*. These messages are clear: trans and disabled youth are seen as a threat to both the family and the nation.[14]

Bioessentialist, normative expectations of how voices and bodies and birth assignments should align in performance spaces keep many disabled and trans performers alike offstage.[15] I approach one historical case involving a music educator who lost her tenured position for transitioning and two recent cases that highlight how a climate of legislative measures and transphobic anxieties in the U.S. have led to school policies that discriminate against young trans performers.[16] The strict categorisation taking place in these cases, governing which bodies and which voices are allowed in which places, is the same sort that has always impinged upon transcrip lives.

Specifically, trans and disabled bodies demonstrate the mutability of the human form, which elicits discomfort and legislative backlash. As I have argued previously, building on Mikey Elster's work (2022), pretences of 'natural' and 'healthy' in contrast to ideas such as 'disabled', 'mutilated', or 'transsexual' serve a white cisheteronormative ableist project that justifies sweeping bans on trans existence, through limits on healthcare, changes to choral rulebooks, and drag bans that extend beyond the club to impact every part of trans and performer life (Allphin 2024). While, as Eli Clare (2017) notes, the act of transition is often framed as a *chosen* disability, transness and disability frequently overlap,[17] are tied through each group's struggles to access essential healthcare, and still maintain an uneasy alliance through antidiscrimination law and diagnostic code (Awkward-Rich 2020).[18] Regardless of whether transness and disability are both claimed by an individual or community, their social, medical, and legal paradigms have historically been intertwined.

In 1971, Paula Grossman was suspended without pay from her fourteen-year tenure as an elementary school music teacher. She had privately medically transitioned, and finished out the school year wearing men's clothes, informing the superintendent that she had changed her sex and planned to return in the fall as a woman. The school board instead offered Grossman the option, which she rejected, of resigning her tenure, obtaining a new teaching certificate under her new name, and accepting a one-year appointment as a new teacher (New York Times 1971). In her pamphlet, *A Handbook for Transsexuals*, Grossman renounced the requirements that governed American gender clinics, insisting that no one should be forced to divorce a loving spouse, live for a year in the desired gender role ('I'd like to see you do it, if you are a schoolteacher … or a concert baritone'), or 'disappear, and start life in a new town' (Grossman 1979, 13–16) as preconditions for medical transition. After losing her position, she turned to lecturing, clerking at a city agency, and playing piano in 'third-rate night clubs' (Grossman 1979, 21). In 1978, after a prolonged legal battle, a New Jersey court ruled that Grossman was entitled to a disability pension, even though she, the examining psychiatrist, and the court all agreed she was both physically and mentally fit to perform her previous duties. However, since she had been deemed incapacitated to teach on the basis of potential psychological harm to her students due to her physical condition following a sex change, she was still ruled eligible for and entitled to a disability pension.[19] Grossman reacted to the decision, explaining, 'It's a victory in the sense that if the state decides to disable anybody for any reason then they're going to have to pay for it' (Hanley 1978).

The entanglements between transness and disability in U.S. law have amplified in recent years. Although the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act excludes 'gender identity disorders not resulting from physical impairments', the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit held in 2022 that it extends to gender dysphoria, and in 2023, the Supreme Court left this ruling in place.[20] The Biden administration concurred in 2024, updating its regulation of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973's section 504 with the reasoning that gender dysphoria 'may constitute a disability under section 504' and that restrictions interfering with an individual's access to care due to gender dysphoria 'may violate section 504'.[21] Later in 2024, seventeen states responded to this by challenging the constitutionality of section 504,[22] and in February of 2025, these states filed a joint status report with Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., citing current president Donald Trump's executive order against 'gender ideology' and insisting that they were not asking for the court to declare section 504 wholly unconstitutional, only the amendment that extended to gender dysphoria protections.[23] This is the contemporary legal context in the United States within which any conversations of transness, disability, or the intersection of the two must take place. Of course, as Dean Spade has argued, antidiscrimination laws will not be the cause of transcrip liberation, but we can use legal reform tools 'as part of a broader strategy to dismantle capitalism's murderous structures while we build alternative methods of meeting human needs and organizing political participation' (Spade 2015, 49). Since theory, too, is not a surefire pathway to liberation, it is all the more important to ground our theory in material analysis that understands the lives at stake in the conversation as real lives.[24]

In August of 2023, the American Civil Liberties Union filed a complaint on behalf of the parents of a transgender, nonbinary singer, anonymized as Margo Moe. Margo, a soprano who feels most comfortable in gender-neutral and female groups, was initially

offered an audition for the Texas Boys Choir, but declined this invitation, instead auditioning and receiving an invited callback for the Singing Girls of Texas. The superintendent of the school attempted to halt the audition process for all students, claiming that this was to give the school board time to determine eligibility rules for the choir. When he realised Margo had completed the audition process, he allowed the other students to complete their auditions. One former Texas Boys Choir member testified in support of birth-assignment-based ensembles, urging Texas Boys Choir, notably not the ensemble a trans child was trying to join, 'to [remain] a biologically male choir', saying that 'a biological girl's voice has a different timbre, in my opinion' (Fornoff 2023). Despite directors of both choirs speaking out against the policy changes, the two choirs passed changes in their handbooks to require that unaltered birth certificates be submitted before auditions to ensure students are placed in the vocal ensemble corresponding with their assigned sex at birth (ACLU 2023).

In the fall of 2023, 17-year-old trans Texan Max Hightower was cast as Ali Hakim in his high school's production of *Oklahoma!* Administrators told him and several of his fellow students (both trans and cis) that the show would be recast and rescheduled so that all students were cast in roles that matched their assigned sex at birth. After this news spread to media outlets, the school reversed the policy, announcing they would replace the full-length show with the one-hour children's version that omitted Max's solo, citing concerns over mature content. Thanks to pressure from a regulatory body (the school board), although opening night was delayed, the show eventually went on in its full version, with Max's solo reinstated (Runnels 2023).

These cases demonstrate how a culture of transphobic regulations impact both trans and cis musicians. Max Hightower and Margo Moe are real teens, not metaphors. While the impetus to avoid further objectifying the bodies of trans and disabled subjects is understandable, trans and disabled people cannot simply suspend their existence in the physical sphere for academic convenience. Yes, trans can be used as a way of thinking, but as Kadji Amin (2023, 57) writes, 'in investing in trans* and trans-, scholars have reified mobile abstractions, contributing to the valorization of trans as a catchall that dangerously conceals the actual heterogeneity of trans life'. Similarly, much of music disability studies has centred on the idea of disability in music as representational (Straus 2018), treating disability as a useful conceptual tool, 'something you do rather than something you are', for exploring music and musicians on the margins (Howe et al. 2015, 5). Where do these approaches leave the disabled trans musicians who both *do* disability and *are* disabled, who think trans but also must battle doctors and insurance daily to receive necessary healthcare? By revisiting the material conditions troubled by regulatory bodies, we are reminded that we cannot separate theories of music, disability, or transness, from disabled and trans bodyvoices, bodyminds, performances, and lives.

Conclusion

We might ask ourselves once again the oft-repeated question in music studies: why this music, at this time, at this place? That is to say, operating under the shadow of (neo)liberal identitarian logics, with what utility and urgency are we to approach a trans/queer otherwise in music studies? To think in terms of sound, we might tune our ears toward those moments within this work that crunch against one another, that dissonate

and suspend resolution, engaging consciously in a practice of collectivity in difference that 'allows separate visions to 'rhyme with each other and sound strange'' (Awkward-Rich 2022, 20). We attempt this emergent potentiality to navigate the 'interregnum … between the regime of what was and the promise of what might be' (Malatino 2019, 644), by committing to a dissonant, noisy mode of scholarship. Maladjusted noise is part and parcel of Awkward-Rich's call for a trans studies that 'can acknowledge and think with a more expansive *we,* terrible though it might feel', while remaining painfully aware of the way this 'we' is often used to pave over the materiality of difference—particularly that of race, ability, and class (Awkward-Rich 2022, 16). Along similar lines, Amber Jamilla Musser writes that 'noise is conceptually related to excess, abundance, and the unruly … Noise, then, allows us to sense how questions of recognition, legibility, and comfort underlie reception. This version of noise is multisensory and attentive to the fabric of social relation' (2024, 4–5). Thinking with this dissonant collaborative mode, we can frame this article in itself as a formal experiment in 'thinking trans' in music studies: a noisy dialogue, a 'terrible *we*' (Awkward-Rich 2022). Working toward an 'inventive' (Amin 2023, 57) ideal of trans/queer music studies, we turn towards one another to revel in the heterogeneity, and sometimes irreconcilability, of our ideas. We do so in order to recognise 'affinities with other struggles and [invent] shared tools and techniques for diagnosing the working of power' (Aizura et al. 2020, 129). This is to say that we seek to disrupt the teleological impulse that marks thinking trans in music studies as the discipline's *progress* toward the recognition of 'trans' as coherent subject position within the music academy. Instead, we challenge rational temporality itself in the composition of the musicological episteme, one that values or devalues certain 'human forms of life' (Wynter 1992, 242; see also Wynter 2001; 2003; Wynter and McKittrick 2015) based on regimes of racialized gender, cisnormativity, and ability.[25]

Though our individual contributions to this piece are wide-ranging, we share an abiding concern with the potential of our scholarship to reach beyond the limits of the page and the institutions within which it hesitantly resides. Our refusal to normalise the disciplinary terms of legibility mobilises trans/queer as both analytic and method. We move toward a mode of inquiry that does not merely analyze trans lives in music but seeks to foreground relationality, materiality, and powerful, imaginative futures of trans and queer world-making—to compose new forms of being, creating, and knowing through sound.

We might say that music studies 'is not yet here', that we might reach towards 'a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present' (Muñoz 2009, 1). Kadji Amin suggests that 'What [trans studies needs] as a field is neither to run away from trans life nor to retrofit it to an existing schema of queer value, but to think even harder and more inventively about it' (2023, 57). That is to say, by rejecting outright the expectation of traditionally legible disciplinarity and allowing ourselves the freedom of invention, in all that it intimates (in particular: failure, repetition, and hope) we may be able to orient ourselves toward the otherwise of trans/queer music studies. The material histories of race, sex, and (dis)ability are urgent and enduring, an open wound without any horizon toward redress. Music studies, we suggest, might then venture into modes of thought which have been deemed 'too much' for music and its study. Perhaps this will allow us to sense beyond the listening or performing body, or maybe to not take its form for granted. To imagine otherwise we must believe that another world is out there, and a loud one at that.

Notes

1. The authors originally presented versions of their individual contributions to this article at Feminist Theory & Music 17 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in a panel entitled 'Voicing Trans/Queer Musical Dialogues'.
2. Of panels that were held during AMS weekends over the last five years which centred queerness or transness as a unifying feature, the 2023 program offered six panels marketed as queer, and one explicitly trans panel; 2022 had four queer/trans panels; 2021 had one explicitly queer panel other than the LGBTQ Study Group Session; 2020 had only the LGBTQ Study Group panel, and 2019 featured one panel in addition to the LGBTQ Study Group panel (see https://www.amsmusicology.org/past-annual-meetings/). Of course, each year, several other papers on queer, and sometimes trans, themes were presented outside of these panels.
3. Two recent articles, published near-simultaneously under the title 'Whither Trans Studies?' (Amin 2023; Billard, Everhart, and Zhang 2022) suggest a wider concern with disciplinary 'direction' in trans studies. While specifics of suggested interventions differ, both Amin and Billard et al. emphasise the urgency of an expansive, 'inventive' trans studies that makes a conscious turn toward 'addressing the material conditions of transgender existence,' (Billard, Everhart, and Zhang 2022, 4) and toward recognizing the 'heterogeneity of trans life' (Amin 2023, 57) concerns that we echo here.
4. For Alvarez, finding sequins in the rubble serves as a method and analytic framework for the always already embodied modes of emergence in trans/queer of colour livelihoods. For him, 'The life stories shared as fragments are tiny reflections—sequins—which together form the broader fabric of queer migrant lives' (Alvarez 2020, 82).
5. In the last decade, both the University of Chicago Press and Routledge have created book series that focus on musicology's place within this material turn, and in 2024, two of the American Musicological Society's most prestigious book awards were bestowed upon books from the University of Chicago's series. See also Watkins and Esse (2015).
6. Denise Ferreira da Silva theorizes 'blackness as matter' throughout her oeuvre, thus reconfiguring traditional Marxian underpinnings of material history (for the most direct engagement of this theory with aesthetics, see Ferreira da Silva 2017). In her first book, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (2007), Ferreira da Silva presents a long history of race in the historical formation of modernity and the subject, suggesting that blackness has been used dialectically against the modern subject to develop race as inclusive and exclusive of a slave's humanity all at once. Race qua blackness then becomes translated into the Marxian tradition *as matter* in *Unpayable Debt* (2022) by questioning the conditions by which value is engaged; where blackness is a process of non-life, race as a material phenomenon is a process of non-value. In the context of trans studies, C. Riley Snorton (2017) details the biomedical-juridical function of blackness in distinguishing proper sex characteristics as a precursor to *transgender's* (as an identity) definition of changes in sex. I use racial mattering in this essay not so much as a neologism but in the effort to concentrate theories of blackness in which matter and race are treated as an entangled co-constitutional process.
7. For an available recording, see Mombaça, da Silva, and Ribeiro (2021).
8. On December 14, 1890, Rui Barbosa, prominent abolitionist and Brazil's Minister of Finance ordered for the destruction of documents relating to the nascent republic's involvement in slavery. As the story goes, according to the *Diario Oficial*, officials gathered these documents in the center of the capital building in Rio de Janeiro and continued to burn the documents. A recently emancipated janitor, a 10-year-old boy, asked and was 'given "the satisfaction of watching" the piles of paper consumed by flames, [the] "testaments of the martyrdom and opprobrium of his race"' (Chazkel 2018, 71). Specifically, these documents pertain to the 1888 outlawing of slavery without indemnification, or the legal authority for formerly enslaved persons to request due compensation from their owners for their labor. Much like other Enlightenment attempts at rationalizing Black personhood in abolitionist logics of liberal governance, politicians in the first Brazilian Republic could not fathom redress for enslaved persons.

9. Paul Gilroy (after Amiri Baraka) describes the 'changing same' of Black vernacular music as deriving meaning not from the 'unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time', but through the 'breaks and interruptions' that characterize post-contemporary Black life (Gilroy 1993, 101).
10. Billed by *Keyboard* magazine as 'The Synth that Changed Everything', the DX7 was more portable, affordable, and user-friendly than the analogue synthesizers of the 1960s and '70s, bringing synthesizer technology to a wider population of consumers than ever before. Only produced between 1983 and 1986, over 200,000 units were sold, and in this time the synth's sound spread across the Billboard Hot 100 charts in pop, country, and R&B (Lavengood 2019).
11. Along similar lines, Glenn-Copeland's entry into the world of early folk singer-songwriter music in the 1970s was in part propelled by a need to escape the confines of the overwhelmingly white, hetero- and cisnormative world of classical performance in which he began his career. In the early 1960s, Glenn-Copeland attended school for music performance at McGill University (the institution with which I am currently affiliated). One of the first Black students to enrol in the music faculty, and the only openly queer student at the time, his experience at McGill was one of intense alienation, open racism, and homophobia: he says that administrators did 'everything they could to make it impossible … to be comfortable in any way, shape, or form' (Sanders 2021).
12. As of July 2025, the following non-exhaustive list of U.S. schools have composition faculties that consist mostly of men: CUNY Graduate Center, Yale, New England Conservatory, Eastman School of Music, Oberlin Conservatory, Curtis Institute of Music, UCLA, University of Miami, Rice University, and the Manhattan School of Music.
13. Drawing from *bodymind*, a concept used in disability studies (Price 2015; Clare 2017; Schalk 2018) to express the interdependence of the body, the mind, and their conditions, I have previously advocated for the use of *bodyvoice* as a term that captures similar entanglements between the body, the voice, and their perception and conditions (Allphin 2024).
14. Autistic and trans childhoods are further tied through both a large contemporary overlap and their pathologized histories in behaviour modification initiatives such as two concurrent programs at the University of California, Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s, one which sought to eradicate feminine behaviours in children assigned male at birth (conversion therapy), and another which punished neurodivergent behaviours in autistic children (applied behavioural analysis). Jake Pyne (2020) considers these histories together within the landscape of more recent Ontario law.
15. Although there has been some recent progress on this front (such as in the aftermath of Eddie Redmayne's portrayal of the titular *Danish Girl*), the casting of disabled or trans actors is too often limited to canonically disabled or trans/gender-nonconforming characters, and even so, nondisabled and cisgender actors are routinely cast in the few canonically disabled and trans roles. When nondisabled actors take on disabled roles and perform disabled characteristics, this is referred to as 'disability drag' (Siebers 2008, 116).
16. Note that nearly one in ten people in the U.S. live in Texas and it is a conservative state, so it is unsurprising that two of the most publicized recent cases involving trans youth in music should occur in Texas. As far as activities go, trans youth in athletics have received much more attention, and sports are much more likely to be gender segregated than performing arts spaces.
17. Trans participants in a recent study reported disability at nearly twice the rate of their cisgender counterparts in the U.S. (Smith-Johnson 2022).
18. Framings of transness as a chosen disability call to mind earlier comments about lesbianism in second-wave feminist organizing, such as Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's dismissal of 'homosexuality [as] a chosen oppression' at a meeting of Boston Female Liberation, a radical feminist organization (Brown 1970).
19. Employment Practices Decisions, Matter of Paul M. Grossman, Superior Court of New Jersey, Appellate Division, Case No. A-939-76 (February 16, 1978).
20. Williams v. Kincaid, 45 F.4th 759 (4th Cir. 2022); Williams v. Kincaid, 600 U.S. 1 (2023).

21. *Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Case*, 89 Fed. Reg. 40,066, 40,068–69 (May 9, 2024) ('Final Rule').
22. *Texas v. Becerra*, 5:24-CV-00225 (2024).
23. *State of Texas v. Becerra*, 5:24-CV-00225, (N.D. Tex. Feb 19, 2025) ECF No. 50.
24. This disconnect between theory and the immediate material needs of trans people has long been recognized by trans communities, as illustrated by a 1990s pinback button distributed by *gendertrash* editors Mirha-Soleil Ross and Xanthra Phillippa MacKay reading 'Theory Mutilates/Surgery Liberates.' See https://digitalexhibitions.arquives.ca/items/show/802.
25. Sylvia Wynter's critique of the overrepresentation of Man deeply influences our evaluation regarding certain discourses of the body. In her groundbreaking 2003 essay, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument' she details the shift in European thinking from the True Christian Self of Man1 to the rational and logical mind of Man2, allowing her to think about the genres of human: 'This issue is that of the genre of the human, the issue whose target of abolition is the ongoing collective production of our present ethnoclass mode of being human, Man: above all, its overrepresentation of its well-being as that of the human species as a whole, rather than as it is veridically: that of the Western and westernized (or conversely) global middle classes' (313). At the centre of this critique is to understand the enduring trace of Man1's matter of being—that is, as a true Christian self for whom the capacity to have a soul is guaranteed in distinction to a pagan, sexual, and racially Black savage—as ontologically paramount for the conceptualization of a referent subject. Elsewhere, drawing from Franz Fanon's development of 'sociogeny' in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Wynter invokes the 'sociogenic principle' (2001) to experience a sense of self in the eyes of the coloniser, thus reflecting the ontological shift in Fanonian theory from the colonial subject to the thing of colonisation. The colonial stakes in the maintenance of Man1 is that the self of truth and truth as being cannot be sublated by any dialectical procedure. By this, we suggest that in Western tendencies towards preserving genres of human that are presupposed on their truth, those who have been negated and marked as untrue fall out of the taxonomical order of the human completely.

Disclosure Statement

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

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