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Colloquy

On the Disability Aesthetics of Music

BLAKE HOWE and STEPHANIE JENSEN-MOULTON,
Convenors

in memoriam Tobin Siebers

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Introduction

BLAKE HOWE and STEPHANIE JENSEN-MOULTON

Questions

Drawing on diverse interdisciplinary perspectives (encompassing literature, history, sociology, visual art, and, more recently, music), the field of disability studies offers a sociopolitical analysis of disability, focusing on its social

Early versions of the essays in this colloquy were presented at the session “Recasting Music: Mind, Body, Ability” sponsored by the Music and Disability Study and Interest Groups at the annual meetings of the American Musicological Society and Society for Music Theory in Milwaukee, WI, November 2014. Tobin Siebers joined us a respondent, generously sharing his provocative and compelling insights. We were deeply saddened to learn of his death a few months later.

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construction while shifting attention from biology (the traditional object of study for science and medicine) to culture (the object of study for humanists).¹ Within this cultural perspective, scholars usually operate under two methodologies: ethnography, to profile disabled persons (contemporary or historical) and investigate the ways in which their bodies contribute to their sense of identity and social reception; and hermeneutics, to examine artistic representations of disability that reflect contemporaneous attitudes and prejudices (e.g., Captain Ahab's prosthetic leg, Darth Vader's cyborg body). Both approaches have given rise to the observation that disability has historically been conceived as a fragmentation or corruption of an able-bodied norm, as a deviation from some conformational standard: think of Lucia di Lammermoor's "mad" scene, offset by a chorus of ostensibly normal onlookers; or think of the *alla zoppa* rhythm, limping against an implicit template of metrical order.

Cultural conventions associated with music (and with Western concert music in particular) can be harsh and relentless enforcers of these conformational standards, punishing divergence while favoring uniformity in ways that may profitably be understood to mirror the social oppression of disabled bodies and minds. In musical compositions, especially those that specifically reference disability, this social hierarchy deems some notes consonant and others dissonant; some rhythms as falling on the beat and others off it; some forms conformational and others deformational.² In performance, conformational practices dictate that one is either in tune or out of tune, blends with the ensemble or sticks out from it, matches the demands of a score or fails to meet them; some people will have bodies capable of holding and operating an instrument while others will not.³ In musicology the dichotomy of dis/ableism affirms that certain kinds of music—and musicians—will be deemed "fit" for study whereas others will not; certain kinds of reasoning and prose will conform to disciplinary standards and others will violate them.⁴ We might even consider the fundamentally aural nature of most musical traditions, which prejudices hearing audiences over deaf ones. Just as the non-sloped street curb or small-print typeface caters to some bodies

1. Foundational texts in disability studies include Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*; Linton, *Claiming Disability*; Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy* and *Bending Over Backwards*; and Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*. Recent musical perspectives include Straus, "Normalizing the Abnormal" and *Extraordinary Measures*; Lerner and Straus, *Sounding Off*; Lubet, *Music, Disability, and Society*; MacKay, *Shakin' All Over*; and Howe et al., *Oxford Handbook*.

2. Straus, "Disability and 'Late Style'"; Howe, "Music and the Agents"; Grave, "Narratives of Affliction"; and Gimbel, "Broken Fracture." Guided by programmatic texts, composer biographies, and historical context, these authors use embodiment, gesture, metaphor, and topic theories to locate the representation of disability in musical works.

3. For more on this issue, see Howe, "Paul Wittgenstein" and "Disabling Music Performance."

4. For multiple perspectives on this subject, see Straus et al., *Music Theory Online* 15, nos. 3–4 (special issue), and Carlson, "Musical Becoming."

while excluding others, many musicians—guided by ableist ideologies of power and exclusion—reinforce norms in their discourses of composition, performance, and analysis, appropriating abnormalities for expressive contrast if not invalidating them altogether.⁵

Recently, prominent scholars of disability theory have sought strategies for subverting the binary division that has traditionally separated ability from disability, proposing instead an inclusive mode of embodiment that encompasses the diversity of human morphology. This is an important project of Tobin Siebers's *Disability Aesthetics* (2010), which identifies within artistic modernism an aesthetics of disability, one that aligns with progressive strategies to erode traditional categories of ability and disability in social spheres. Citing the discolored, deformed, misshapen, irrational, and traumatized bodies of cubist, expressionist, and dadaist art, Siebers argues, "If modern art has had such enormous success, it is because of its embrace of disability as a distinct version of the beautiful."⁶ Disability, in modern art, is not ugly but beautiful, not marginal but central, not stigmatized but valorized. (By contrast, modern art that extols the normative or ideal body, such as Arno Brekel's monumental nudes, is usually derided as kitsch.) Such theorizing has important social consequences for the stigma that disability continues to accrue in real life, outside the ennobling frames of artistic representation. If, as Siebers argues, "[aesthetics] defines the process by which human beings attempt to modify themselves, by which they imagine their feelings, forms, and futures in radically different ways, and by which they bestow upon those new feelings, forms, and futures real appearances in the world," then, within a disability aesthetics, "the systemic oppression of disabled people would fail, and fail precisely because it could no longer be based on human appearances, features, and conditions deemed inferior."⁷ Public, ennobling displays of

5. Although we might cherish the beautiful dissonance or the transgressive operatic mad scene, consider what usually happens next: the dissonance resolves to consonance and the mad heroine dies. The internal wound, the threat to able-bodied power, is safely contained. As Lennard Davis (parsing Wendy Brown) writes about literary appropriations of disability, "Like Philoctetes, the novel must have a wound. And like that of Philoctetes, this wound is necessary, since without it the novel would not be able to perform its function. Yet, also like that of the mythical character, the wound must be healed or cured": Davis, *Bending Over Backwards*, 98.

6. Levin, "Art of Disability." Siebers summarizes his argument thus: "The modern in art is increasingly readable as disability, and to the point where we now recognize modern art and its techniques by the embrace of bodies that can only be called disabled. The techniques of Dada and Expressionism deform the bodies represented by them, seeming to picture disabled people. The palette of modernism paints human faces in greens, yellows, and purples, embracing discoloration without rejecting attendant associations of disease. The modernist determination to flatten the canvas and to draw attention to the sculptural quality of paint often stunts figures, bending and twisting them into avatars of disability. Moreover, the attention given by modern art to themes of alienation, violence, panic, terror, sensory overload, and distraction requires an openness to disability as a visible and potent symbolization of these modern themes" (ibid.). See also Siebers's book-length treatment of the topic, *Disability Aesthetics*.

7. Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 3, 56.

disability in modern and contemporary art—Siebers makes special mention of Marc Quinn’s sculpture of Alison Lapper, recently displayed in London’s Trafalgar Square—have the potential to rewrite social scripts of pathology and marginalization.⁸ Linking life and art, advocacy and scholarship, ethnography and hermeneutics, Siebers provocatively asks, “What would it mean to call a person sick without it being a disqualification? What would it mean to call an artwork sick without it being a disqualification? What is the relationship between these two questions?”⁹

Responses

This colloquy responds to these questions by investigating the links between disability aesthetics, disability identity, and disability praxis. Disability aesthetics considers cultural ideas—and ideals—of satisfaction and beauty through the lens of non-normativity; within the study of music these aesthetic considerations prompt us to examine works, performances, and modes of analysis in the context of a culture in which disabled minds and bodies create, perform, and experience music. Understood through musical means, disability identity lends itself to widely varied and intersectional discussions, relating to, for example, the ways music is embodied, the ways different minds and bodies perform music, and the ways music can create and critique bodies. And disability praxis in music implies a working out of musical material through practical means while also maintaining accessibility. This colloquy variously asks a music-centered version of Lennard Davis’s question about all three of these concepts (aesthetics, identity, praxis): In what ways and to what degree does music enforce normalcy, and how might music reverse its hegemony?¹⁰

Jennifer Iverson’s work on two settings of Ovid’s Philomela tale battles this musical “enforcement of normalcy,” as well as the strong tendency toward identity politics in disability studies. Iverson employs Davis’s concept

8. “The controversy over *Alison Lapper Pregnant* . . . compel[s] beholders, whether friendly or not to modern art, to confront human disqualification as a facet of aesthetic judgment. Their choice is either to reject artworks that picture disabled people or to embrace disability as an aesthetic value in itself. . . . Lapper’s body, once turned into an aesthetic representation, has a better chance of being accepted as art than a nondisabled body, despite the fact that disabled bodies, outside of aesthetic contexts, are still dismissed as repulsive and ugly”: *ibid.*, 42–43.

9. *Ibid.*, 56.

10. “[Normalcy] is part of a notion of progress, of industrialization, and of ideological consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie. The implications of the hegemony of normalcy are profound and extend into the very heart of cultural production. The novel form, that proliferator of ideology, is intricately connected with concepts of the norm. From the typicality of the central character, to the normalizing devices of plot to bring deviant characters back into the norms of society, to the normalizing coda of endings, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century novel promulgates and disburses notions of normalcy and by extension makes of physical differences ideological differences. . . . One of the tasks for a developing consciousness of disability issues is the attempt, then, to reverse the hegemony of the normal and to institute alternative ways of thinking about the abnormal”: Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 49.

of dismodernism (a postmodern dismantling of disability identity theory) to untie the complex essentialist knots that have typically bound disability to the identity stereotypes used to determine who is disabled and who is nondisabled.¹¹ Once the boundaries of disability identity have been dismantled, studies such as Jessica Holmes's essay on Christine Sun Kim's *Face Opera II*—a work that challenges basic aesthetic-musical ideas such as singer and composer—take on the task of dismodernist analysis, recasting deafness as both a fluid category and a community. Both Holmes and Iverson also explore the transgressive vocal and bodily spaces of interiority and exteriority.

The spaces bodies occupy instantly become cultural musicking spaces when voices sing, as in Kim's opera, or instruments are played. Michael Bakan demonstrates that participant observation works within disability cultures as much as within any other culture, reinforcing Siebers's notion of bodies as positioned within preexistent social networks.¹² Bakan asks his readers why an able-bodied observer should attempt to apply a therapeutic process to a group of disabled persons making music. Further, his notion of a participatory disability culture contemplates how music can unsettle static ideas about disabled bodies, and how disabled musicians can disrupt trenchant traditions of music performance and praxis.

In the nineteenth century, poet Matthew Arnold noted that differently formed bodies had become part of the "strange disease of modern life."¹³ Joseph Straus suggests something similar about twentieth-century musical narratives in his exploration of the links between musical modernism and disability theory. Straus's essay, which serves as a unifying force among the essays in this colloquy through its holistic consideration of disability and modernism, makes a direct connection to Siebers's theory of disability aesthetics: what is "modern in music manifests itself as disability." But if music does indeed manifest disability, then composers and analysts may also seek to rectify, "cure," or even eradicate the disability made manifest in the score, rather than allowing a disabled identity to flourish and take hold.

What happens, then, when disability identity manifests itself fully as an aesthetic aim, even a piece of scholarship? In their coauthored piece, Elizabeth "Ibby" Grace and Andrew Dell'Antonio carry out a meta-discussion in which the nature of autism is both subject and object of

11. Despite these moves to the contrary, nondismantled disability identity (in which disabilities are affirmatively claimed) remains an important cornerstone of disability studies, as seen in the contributions to this colloquy by Straus, Bakan, and Dell'Antonio and Grace.

12. "Identity is not the structure that creates a person's pristine individuality or inner essence but the structure by which that person identifies and becomes identified with a set of social narratives, ideas, myths, values, and types of knowledge of varying reliability, usefulness, and verifiability. It represents the means by which the person, qua individual, comes to join a particular social body": Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 15.

13. Matthew Arnold, "The Scholar Gipsy," quoted in Davidson, "Aesthetics," 28.

study. The very notion of an Autistic dialogue dismantles diagnostic stereotypes, and the authors play with this idea throughout their contribution to the colloquy. Dell'Antonio and Grace rupture the usual form of the essay, enacting a kind of non-sequiturian anti-positivism that re-presents the embracing of neurodiversity about which they write.

Snapshot

Brandon Stanton, the photographer and founder of Humans of New York (HONY), has been taking photos and recording oral histories all over the world, and his summer 2015 journey was to Pakistan. A recently shared photo featured a man sitting casually on a stone wall on a mountainside, stringed instrument on his lap, fingers ready to play. The man comments, "I was born paralyzed from the waist down. But this community is so tolerant that I never had to worry about fitting in." He goes on to explain that the only activity inaccessible to him (cliff diving provided particular pleasure) was playing music, because his family thought it would distract him from his studies. He concludes, "But eventually I got so good, they couldn't even tell me to stop that."¹⁴ This HONY anecdote triangulates the three primary topics addressed in this colloquy—disability aesthetics, identity theory, and praxis—topics that scholars of music and disability studies will undoubtedly continue to debate as the field expands.

As Michael Davidson has noted, "conflation of noncontingent personal pleasure with collective assent is the cornerstone of bourgeois aesthetics."¹⁵ The adventurous Pakistani photographed by Stanton developed his musical identity in a noncontingent way: unconstrained by his abilities or by politics, he pursued opportunities that interested him despite the ideas of normativity—or "conformational standards" (to revisit the opening paragraphs of this introduction)—of others. The concept of noncontingency divorces music from its attachment to preestablished modes of analysis. And as the colloquy authors establish here, writing about disability and music will be an inherently political act so long as the disabled body is a body politic, surveilled and voiced-over.

Modernist Music and the Representation of Disability

JOSEPH N. STRAUS

Tobin Siebers, the dedicatee of this colloquy, argued that modern art's "disability aesthetics" finds new sorts of beauty in disabled bodies, those marked

14. Humans of New York website, accessed August 3, 2015, www.humansofnewyork.com/tagged/pakistan.

15. Davidson, "Aesthetics," 26.

(stigmatized) as abnormal with respect to some prevailing normative standard for bodily functioning or appearance. He writes, “Disability aesthetics refuses to recognize the representation of the healthy body—and its definition of harmony, integrity, and beauty—as the sole determination of the aesthetic. Rather, disability aesthetics embraces beauty that seems by traditional standards to be broken, and yet it is not less beautiful, but more so, as a result.” Siebers goes on to assert bluntly that “the modern in art manifests itself as disability.”¹⁶ Is it possible to say that the modern in *music* manifests itself as disability?¹⁷

In the very broadest historical terms, one can identify three ways of conceptualizing disability, each deeply intertwined with representational regimes of disability in literature and the arts, including music. First, in the religious model, which begins with the first recorded discussions of disability and persists to some extent to the present day, disability is understood as an outward mark of divine disfavor or sinfulness, or in some cases of transcendent spirituality. Second, in a medical model that gathers force through the nineteenth century and achieves epistemological hegemony in the early twentieth century, disability is understood as a pathological condition that inheres in a body or mind, the task of physicians (or psychiatrists) being to diagnose and, if possible, normalize or cure it. Within the medical model a eugenic approach comes to dominate thinking about disability in the first half of the twentieth century: people with disabilities, especially cognitive and emotional disabilities, were understood as a menace to the health of the community and nation, and were increasingly segregated into institutions. Cultural modernism emerges in an eliminationist, eugenic age, and its disability representations often bespeak a corresponding horror and fear of the non-normative body or mind.

A third model, with roots in the earlier twentieth century and a dramatic flowering beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, sees disability as a social and cultural formation. In this model disability is valorized rather than stigmatized, and may be affirmatively *claimed* as a personal and political identity.¹⁸ The decline of cultural modernism coincides with the end of the eugenic age, symbolized by the late twentieth-century deinstitutionalization of people classified as mad or feeble-minded and by the simultaneous emergence of the social model of disability. The sociocultural model of disability thus flourishes in a postmodern cultural world, after the passing of high cultural modernism. Yet the origins of a valorizing attitude toward disability may be

16. Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 3, 40.

17. Elsewhere I pose this question with reference to a single piece by Stravinsky, the second of his Three Pieces for String Quartet, said by the composer to be a musical representation of a British music hall performer named Little Tich, famous for (among other things) his short stature; see Straus, “Representing the Extraordinary Body.” The present essay broadens the claims made there.

18. Linton, *Claiming Disability*.

traced right into the heart of cultural modernism in all of the arts, including music.

Cultural modernism expresses a deeply ambivalent attitude toward disability. On one side, we find the medical model of disability and the “cultural logic of euthanasia” that it engenders: the imperative either to normalize disabled bodies (through medical intervention) or to eliminate them (either by sequestration in institutions or in more direct ways)—“cure or kill,” in a widely used phrase.¹⁹ At the same time, modernist artists, writers, and composers have been aware of disability as a resource for artistic creativity, a liberating way of shattering conventions and of establishing radically new canons of beauty. In modernist art as in the societies from which it arose, disability is thus simultaneously a focus of pity (leading to normalization or cure), horror (leading to segregation and institutionalization), and fascination (leading to valorization and celebration). While this ambivalence is evident in modernist musical representations of the five disabilities I will discuss here—deformity/disfigurement, mobility impairment, madness (especially schizophrenia), idiocy, and autism—I will argue that modernist music, in a departure from the normalizing, curative impulse of an earlier period, ultimately claims disability and thus embodies disability aesthetics.

Deformity/Disfigurement

At the beginning of the twentieth century the history of deformity and disfigurement observes impulses toward both normalization and elimination within the cultural logic of euthanasia. Henri-Jacques Stiker identifies this period with “the birth of rehabilitation,” a medicalized regime designed to eradicate bodily deficiency.²⁰ At the same time, visible bodily anomalies produce a sharply negative, stigmatizing response, most evident in the “ugly laws” enacted by many American cities, which banned visibly deformed people from public spaces.²¹ Cultural modernism thus arises at a time of deep societal antipathy toward deformed bodies.

Deformation and disfigurement enter modernist music as the shattering of traditional norms of formal continuity. If a piece of music may be understood metaphorically as a body—as a vast range of musicians and writers about music throughout the Western tradition have assumed—then the modernist musical body is fractured, deformed, and grotesque. Formally, many modernist works prefer a jagged juxtaposition of discrete parts (Stravinsky, Varèse) to the more continuous forms of the Classical and Romantic traditions. What critics sometimes perceived as incoherence, modernist composers often

19. Garland-Thomson, “Cultural Logic of Euthanasia.”

20. Stiker, *History of Disability*.

21. Schweik, *Ugly Laws*.

celebrated as liberation from conventional formal restrictions and from a Romantic aesthetic of organic wholeness. With its fractured forms and fragmented textures, modernist music claims deformity and disfigurement.

Mobility Impairment

The history of mobility impairment closely tracks the history of deformity and disfigurement, but encompasses bodily functioning rather than appearance. Traditionally understood in religious terms (“the halt and the lame”), mobility impairment was increasingly medicalized throughout the nineteenth century, leading to the eugenic-era bifurcation of attitudes of pity and fear.

The idea of motion—usually toward climaxes or cadences—plays a central role in traditional canons of musical beauty. But modernist music very frequently prefers harmonies that are relatively static, turning in on themselves, lacking a sense of direction—circular rather than teleological (Debussy, Stravinsky). Harmonic immobility is often related in part to a preference for inversional symmetry, with notes balancing around a midpoint. Just as deformation results from an apparent deficit of (formal) symmetry, immobility may result from an apparent excess of (inversional) symmetry.

The relative immobility of modernist music has inspired a strong reaction of horror among antimodernist critics. (Schenker is the most extreme example—he refers to it as “paralysis.”)²² But for modernist composers mobility impairment has served as a valuable artistic resource. If harmonies are no longer compelled to move in preordained ways toward prescribed goals, they can be celebrated on their own terms. With its static harmonies, modernist music claims mobility impairment.

Madness

Throughout human history people have “heard voices” in the absence of any actual external source. Traditionally, voices heard in this way were understood within a religious framework, as something either divine or demonic, and associated with madness in either case. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, the experience of hearing voices came to be pathologized as “aural hallucination” and understood as a symptom of mental illness, especially schizophrenia (a diagnostic category created in 1908). Indeed, one might argue that the category of schizophrenia was created, in part, to provide a diagnostic home for the phenomenon of hearing voices.

Both schizophrenia and modernist art and music are centrally concerned with the splitting of consciousness—the simultaneous presentation of more than a single point of view—of which hearing voices is the epitome. Many modernist musical works incorporate jarring clashes of musical style, combining

22. Schenker, “Further Consideration of the Uraline” and “Rameau or Beethoven?”

low with high, folk and popular with more learned styles (Bartók, Ives). In some cases that stylistic clash may be enforced by quotation practices that involve the sharp intrusion of traditional tonal references within an ambient atonality, giving a vivid impression of heard voices (Ives, Berg, Schoenberg). These heard voices have frequently provoked a therapeutic urge to rationalize them in relation to their surroundings: analysts have often tried to insist that, despite their apparent source outside the frame of the piece, these quotations are nonetheless organically integrated into its fabric. The music itself, however, may seem to suggest that different voices may coexist without the need for reconciliation or cure. In its splitting of consciousness and especially its hearing of voices, modernist music claims madness.

Idiocy

Over the course of the nineteenth century idiocy was gradually split off conceptually from madness: both are characterized by a deficiency of reason, but madness was understood as acquired and temporary, while idiocy was inborn and permanent. Among nineteenth-century literary representations of idiots the most prevalent type is the Holy Fool, whose intellectual deficiency is compensated by a purity of understanding and a deeper, if inarticulate, wisdom (Wordsworth, Dickens, Dostoevsky). Idiot characters are represented as authentic and sincere, uncivilized and primitive, natural and animal-like, childlike and innocent. They inspire pity and an impulse toward care. In the eugenic age of the early twentieth century there was widespread concern over a perceived “menace of the moron,” a fear that idiocy—literally a breeding ground for criminality and promiscuity—would undermine and demoralize an otherwise healthy social body. The result was a proliferation of institutions for the “feble-minded,” designed to segregate rather than to remediate. In modernist literary representations (Faulkner, Conrad, Steinbeck), while some vestiges of the Holy Fool trope remain, the idiot now projects an aura of menace or violence, especially sexual violence, and inspires horror and an impulse to kill or incarcerate.

In modernist music, idiocy is represented by an extreme simplification of melody, harmony, rhythm, and texture, and a corresponding absence of contrapuntal complexity (Satie, Stravinsky, Virgil Thomson). As in literary representations, idiocy in music may connote either a wise simplicity (in association with the natural, the pastoral, the folk, the childlike) or, more darkly, the menace of the feble-minded (in association with the primitive). In its simplicity modernist music has often seemed to its detractors to be comparatively simpleminded. (Adorno’s terms for this aspect of Stravinsky’s music are “primitive,” “childish,” “regressive,” and “infantile.”)²³ But modernist composers have found idiocy to be a rich compositional resource, as a way of deflating

23. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*.

the grandiose pretensions of late nineteenth-century Romanticism, as a source of authenticity and sincerity, and as a window into the “primitive mind.” In its extreme simplification, modernist music claims idiocy.

Autism

The term “autism” originated in 1908 with Eugen Bleuler, as part of his constitution of the diagnostic category of schizophrenia.²⁴ In 1943 Leo Kanner appropriated the term to refer to a group of children whose behavior he distinguished in two ways from other forms of madness or idiocy. First, there was an unusual degree of social isolation, which Kanner refers to as “an *extreme autistic aloneness* that, whenever possible, disregards, ignores, shuts out anything that comes to the child from the outside.” Second, there was an unusual rigidity and aversion to any change in habit or routine, what Kanner referred to as “autistic sameness”: “[The children shared an] *inability to relate themselves* in the ordinary way to people and situations,” and an “*anxiously excessive desire for the maintenance of sameness.*”²⁵ Autism has experienced a spectacular rise in diagnostic prevalence since the 1990s, but it has its roots firmly in an earlier period.

In modernist literature, art, and music, autistic aloneness manifests itself as self-reference, recursion, radical subjectivity, withdrawal from social consensus, withdrawal from consensual languages, hermeticism, autonomy, subjective self-reliance, and inwardness (all traits that have been identified as characteristic of cultural modernism in the extensive literature). Modernist musical works are relatively “contextual” (Milton Babbitt’s term): they have a wealth (some would say a surplus) of internal relations but relatively few external ones (Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, Babbitt). In modernist music, autistic sameness manifests itself as a preference for literal repetition, especially of short fragments. Instead of germinating, flowering, and growing (those familiar organicist metaphors), modernist music often insists on a mechanistic and ritualized sameness (Stravinsky).²⁶

Excessive aloneness and sameness have often been stigmatized as pathological conditions, both for musical works and for individuals, evoking pity or horror, and inspiring attempts at normalization. But if these works, and these individuals, are taken on their own terms, their high degree of self-reference and their rejection of organicist evolution might be seen as

24. In “Zur Theorie des schizophrenen Negativismus” (1910) and many other lectures, articles, and books, Bleuler understood “the autistic withdrawal of the patient into his fantasies” as a central component of schizophrenia: Bleuler, “Zur Theorie des schizophrenen Negativismus,” 171 (“Das autistische Zurückziehen des Patienten auf seine Phantasien”).

25. Kanner, “Autistic Disturbances,” 242, 245 (Kanner’s italics).

26. The present essay broadens the focus of Straus, “Autism and Postwar Serialism,” to other aspects of modernist music.

defining strengths.²⁷ In its aloneness and sameness, its contextuality and nondevelopmental repetition, modernist music claims autism.

To some extent modernist music reflects prevailing attitudes toward disability in a eugenic age. Its representations of disability may inspire pity or horror and may thus engage the cultural logic of euthanasia. Its fascination with disability often has elements of enfreakment: disability conditions are evoked for shock value rather than being treated empathetically. But at the same time modernist music has found in non-normative bodies an essential resource for its fractured forms, static harmonies, layered textures, radical simplification, ritualized repetition, and complex contextuality. By organizing music in these ways, modernist music celebrates non-normative bodies and thus claims disability. In answer to the question I asked (following Siebers) at the beginning of this essay, I assert that the modern in music manifests itself as disability. In claiming disability in this way, modernist music composes new ways for responding to non-normative bodies and offers a sonic model for progressive behavior within a larger sociocultural framework.

Sounding Traumatized Bodies

JENNIFER IVERSON

In his contribution to this colloquy Joseph Straus suggests ways in which a disabled body can be construed in sound. My own essay continues this exploration from a different perspective, examining two contrasting electroacoustic renderings of Ovid's Philomela myth, which differ sharply in the ways they "voice" the mutilated bird-woman. As scholars such as David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (literature), Martin Norden (film), and Joseph Straus (music) have revealed, disabled bodies have historically been made safe for aesthetic consumption in a number of ways. One common technique is the overcoming narrative, whereby the disabled character is cured, healed, or made whole. The able-bodied audience celebrates the "achievement" of the now cured character, while the threat of the disability—and the implicit discomfort of the able-bodied audience—is neutralized. These narratives ensnare disability and safely bracket it off from the "normal" able-bodied world. As I will argue here, Babbitt's landmark *Philomel* (1964) participates in this normalizing and objectifying behavior. In contrast, Wishart's cult-favorite *Red Bird* (1978) invites the listener to empathize with a far more challenging Philomela. Wishart revokes the overcoming narrative, asking listeners to confront the traumatized and injured Philomela. In this way music

27. On the idea of distinctively and valuably autistic ways of making music, see Straus, *Extraordinary Measures*, 160–67; Straus, "Autism as Culture"; and the contributions to this colloquy by Bakan and Dell'Antonio and Grace.

can create a progressive disability aesthetics, one in which bodily differences can be claimed and voiced.

The very idea of “progressive disability aesthetics” merits discussion, since it invokes a political orientation toward liberalism that is ultimately a misleading diversion—after all, throughout most of history political liberals (i.e., “progressives”) have been just as willing to oppress and excise disabled bodies as political conservatives. I mean to use “progressive” in a more mundane sense, as in progress toward a society that validates and accommodates all bodies. My interest in a progressive disability aesthetics resonates with Lennard Davis’s position:

I want to make clear that I do believe it is a good thing that we are moving toward promoting diversity and away from enforcing normalcy. And there is both political and social progress in thinking of humans as diverse rather than normal or abnormal. But, in accepting this change, we should by no means feel that the new model avoids the pitfalls of what Foucault calls “technologies of life.” It would be difficult to imagine that “diversity” is so different a concept that it could avoid the larger project of modernity—the creation of docile, compliant bodies.²⁸

Davis is right that the idea of “progress” is entangled with modernity and its history of subduing and normalizing deviant bodies. But it remains worth considering: how can artworks move us toward a more inclusive attitude?

The Philomela myth, from Ovid’s sixth book of *Metamorphoses*, is disturbing. Philomela is brutally raped by her brother-in-law King Tereus, who then mutilates her by cutting out her tongue in order to silence her. Philomela weaves a tapestry that tells the story—a process that has been likened to Babbitt’s serial weaving of the pitch classes and partitions²⁹—and her sister Queen Procne reads and understands the message. At the height of the bacchanalian festival, Procne and Philomela take their revenge by murdering Itys, the son of Tereus and Procne, cooking his body, and serving it to Tereus. In a rage Tereus pursues the sisters through the woods, where close to the moment of apprehension the gods turn all of them into birds. As a human Philomela is disfigured and mute, but reconfigured as a bird—metamorphosed—she is vocal. The key point is that, in her metamorphosed state, Philomela is again abled, but only by overcoming her human muteness. Although Philomela’s muteness is not congenital but the result of violent trauma and injury, her body may still be read as disabled; as Tobin Siebers points out, “Disability has emerged as a central aesthetic concept not only because it symbolizes human variation but also because it represents the fragility of human beings and their susceptibility to dramatic physical and mental change. The capacity to be wounded,

28. Davis, *End of Normal*, 5.

29. Babbitt, “Responses,” 6–8; Mead, *Introduction*, 126–27; Lewin, “Some Problems and Resources,” 391–401; Adamowicz, “Subjectivity and Structure,” §5.

injured, or traumatized is not always considered a feature of disability, but it should be.”³⁰

The text of Babbitt’s *Philomel*, a prose poem by American poet laureate John Hollander, focuses extensively on the overcoming narrative: *Philomel* is “quintessentially operatic, with a great transformation scene in which a soprano who has been singing nothing but vocalises or choppy syllables suddenly can break out into both sustained melody and language.”³¹ Hollander’s original text specifies which phrases should be sung by the live and the taped sopranos, both of them famously voiced by Bethany Beardslee; this three-way collaboration complicates Babbitt’s authority, since Hollander and Beardslee seemingly shaped the piece with just as much artistic energy as the composer. Here I will focus on Babbitt’s sound design, which is preoccupied with the inner voice of Philomel. The wordless syllabic interplay (“eeee”) between taped and live soprano, which could be a representation of the sounds of the disabled woman-Philomel, is unfortunately marginalized within the form, and in sum lasts for scarcely more than one and a half minutes of the nineteen-minute piece. Ironically, the wordless sounds also fail as representations of woman-Philomel’s traumatized body, inasmuch as this particular vowel sound—“eeee”—can be produced only with a tongue. Instead, in most of the piece both the taped and the live soprano give voice to bird-Philomel’s inner thoughts, with Beardslee’s taped soprano echoing the “sustained melody and language” of the live soprano. We might celebrate that Philomel still has a beautiful voice, if only internally, after the trauma. And we might argue that it is valuable to have Philomel speak as a disabled main character, even if her vocalizations are improbably able-bodied. Perhaps, then, Babbitt and Hollander anticipate some of the boundary-crossing issues relating to voice, ability, and embodied sound that Kim’s *Face Opera II* raises much more deftly (see Jessica Holmes’s essay, below).

I am more inclined, however, to view Babbitt and Hollander’s piece negatively, because it marginalizes woman-Philomel’s trauma in favor of romanticized bird-Philomel’s overcoming. Both Hollander’s text and Babbitt’s sound design keep an unfortunate distance from Philomel’s rape, a sentiment that Susan McClary hinted at some years ago.³² When Philomel says, “Feel a million tears,” the tape responds, from a distance and channeled to the left, “Not true tears” (see Audio Example 1 in the online version of the **Journal**). For Babbitt and Hollander, Philomel is in need of rehabilitation, and this piece provides it. The sound design turns away from the mutilated woman-Philomel, unable to hear her as she is. As Tobin Siebers has written, “The sight [for which we might substitute “sound”] of a person with a tender

30. Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 102.

31. Hollander, “Notes on the Text,” 134.

32. McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 75.

organ disables able-bodied people.”³³ We hear instead a much more comfortably aestheticized post-transformation bird-Philomel. It is in this way that even a piece with a disabled main character can reinforce able-bodied standards. The piece tells us again and again that the raped, mutilated, and disabled Philomel is too challenging: “Look away”—or more appropriately in this case, “*Listen* away.” To paraphrase Michael Davidson, and to reinforce a central theme of this colloquy, collective assent is the cornerstone of modern aesthetics.³⁴ When we “listen away” from woman-Philomel, preferring the safer sounds of her aestheticized bird-form, we collectively allow music to reinforce normalcy and able-bodiedness.

In contrast to Babbitt and Hollander, who safely objectify and contain a romanticized Philomel within an overcoming narrative, British composer Trevor Wishart allows us to hear the mutilated Philomela. I read his *musique concrète* work *Red Bird* as an abstraction of the Philomela myth without explicit corroboration from Wishart, though he claims that *Red Bird* articulates the deep structures of myth and metaphor in sound. Wishart dwells on the transition between bird and human sounds as part of a larger, Lévi-Straussian structuralist contemplation of the soundscapes of garden and factory.³⁵ The sound design explores numerous boundaries—where phonemes turn into language, or language disintegrates into noise—and many of them are aurally unpleasant.

The first few seconds of *Red Bird* can be heard as a sonic microcosm of the entire Philomela myth in extremely abbreviated yet also shockingly confrontational form (see Audio Example 2 in the online version of the **Journal**). We hear a woman’s half-screamed vocalizations and heavy panting for a few seconds before a bloodcurdling high-pitched scream disintegrates into bird twitter. More bird and ambient forest noises enter the aural field while a woman’s whispered voice—“listen to reason”—is truncated and layered against itself, emphasizing the noisy “ssss” that quickly results from out-of-phase iterations. Much longer sections of the forty-five-minute piece elaborate on the events encapsulated in this opening microcosm. In part 1, for example (between about 1:15 and 1:45; Audio Example 3 in the online version of the **Journal**), we hear hits and slaps on flesh, gurgling, gagging, and perhaps even vomiting—the sounds you might hear from a woman with no tongue. These liquid sounds increasingly give way to panting and hyperventilation; the breath yields to “lissss” (from “listen to reason”), and finally the almost whistling “ssss” is transformed into high-pitched birdsong. It is uncomfortable, unpleasant, and challenging to be left here in the borderland between mutilated woman and bird. As Laurie Stras writes in an essay about vocal trauma, “The disrupted voice conveys meaning even before it conveys

33. Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 43.

34. Davidson, “Aesthetics,” 26.

35. Wishart, *On Sonic Art*, 163–69.

language . . . there is more being communicated by the voice than the words it speaks.” The traumatized voice lays bare the body’s traumatic history; the voice itself is evidence of the damaged body. As Stras goes on to clarify, this has a profound effect on listeners: “When listening to the damaged voice, we are susceptible . . . to the negative affect it transmits.”³⁶

We are susceptible because we listeners occupy an empathetic position. Music theorist Arnie Cox’s “mimetic hypothesis,” which draws upon the probable mirror neuron architecture of the human brain, proposes that we understand sounds in terms of our experience of making similar sounds, and that we undertake overt and covert imitation of the sounds we hear.³⁷ As Cox explains, our bodies respond to sound by engaging in subvocalization, defined as any subtle engagement of the vocal musculature where the body seems to be preparing to sing. These actions may occasionally be conscious, as in the feeling of “*wanting* to sing along,” though subvocalization is also thought to be automatic and preconscious.³⁸

It is true that the mimetic hypothesis needs much more elaboration if we are to understand how it might function in deaf, blind, or neurodiverse individuals. Holmes’s analysis in her contribution to this colloquy makes it clear that even progressive sonic art remains phonocentric; Kim’s *Face Opera* is radical because it validates a nonphonetic approach to opera. The mimetic hypothesis could certainly be used tacitly to bolster able-bodied and same-bodied assumptions if we uncritically assume that we all respond to stimuli in the same way. Despite these reservations, I still find the mimetic hypothesis interesting and useful. Most of us, regardless of our ability status, will not have had the experience of being mutilated by having our tongue cut out. The mirror neuron hypothesis provides a powerful explanation for why we might nevertheless have an empathetic response to Philomela. As Cox argues, “Mimetic comprehension puts one in a quasi first-person perspective, vicariously producing the sounds even while remaining in the second-person position.”³⁹ If we cannot escape mirroring the mutilated or distressed voices of *Red Bird*, we are thus invited to blur the boundary between our self and the disabled, traumatized Philomela. This empathy allows us genuinely to experience something of Philomela’s trauma, as well as participate in her transformation in a way that transcends the clichéd overcoming narrative.

Scholars who are concerned with disability or other modes of identity are constantly conscious that, as Suzanne Cusick says, “each of us speaks for sure only for herself, each of us from a unique situation born of multiple identities

36. Stras, “Organ of the Soul,” 173, 183.

37. Cox, “Mimetic Hypothesis,” 195–97.

38. Cox, “Embodying Music,” §40.

39. *Ibid.*, §53.

layered each on the other—class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religious beliefs, and so forth.”⁴⁰ Yet as Cusick advocates, there is reason to push past our own sure subject positions. The perspectives of neurodiversity and disability studies, as evinced in the contributions to this colloquy by Bakan and Dell’Antonio and Grace, encourage us to view bodies and minds as existing across a wide spectrum. As we reject the normalizing frame of the bell curve,⁴¹ which arbitrarily pathologizes the bodies on the margins, we begin to understand that different bodies are just that: different. Not deviant, not disabled, not disqualified. Lennard Davis has coined the term “dismodernism” for a post-postmodern stance whereby the “disabled” body can free our thinking from normalizing binary frames. When we adopt this stance we let go of the use of “we” and “they” that characterizes even the most progressive identity politics still practiced in disability, gender, sexuality, race, and class studies. As Davis says, we need to begin to “disassemble the regnant fantasies of wholeness and completion.”⁴²

Philomela, who is either a mutilated woman or a metamorphosed bird, is haunted by the terrible, unattainable specter of wholeness. Whereas Babbitt and Hollander’s bird-Philomel is internal, beautiful, and whole, if ephemeral, Wishart’s human-Philomela is injured, porous, and shifting. Wishart does not offer a normalizing framework, such as an overcoming narrative, within which Philomela can be safely viewed by able-bodied audiences. As Tobin Siebers perceptively notes, modern art often challenges and unsettles precisely because it pervasively showcases disabled bodies. He writes, “As . . . artists represent disabled bodies more and more explicitly as aesthetic objects . . . the beholders of these objects must choose whether to embrace or to reject the strong feelings excited by disability.”⁴³ Even if it is utopian to think that Wishart’s music places listeners inside human-Philomela’s traumatized body, *Red Bird* does challenge the listener to step outside of her safe, sure, able-bodied subject position. When we do, we find the boundary between self and other to be porous. We find the line between ability and disability blurred. As Siebers, Davis, and the contributors to this colloquy all argue, a progressive disability aesthetics entails an embrace or a claiming of bodily difference. This transformation succeeds when a listener genuinely empathizes with an other. Challenging aesthetic experiences, such as listening to *Red Bird*, allow us to move toward the desirable incompleteness of dismodernism, and to question what it means to be human.

40. Cusick, “Feminist Theory,” 8.

41. On the history of normalcy and the bell curve, see especially Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 23–49.

42. Davis, *End of Normal*, 16.

43. Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 40.

Singing beyond Hearing

JESSICA A. HOLMES

In recent years, music scholars have called for a holistic approach to vocality that accounts for singing as a physical, psychosensory, political, sociocultural, and relational experience, resisting the tendency in Western musical traditions and psychoanalytic thought to treat the voice as an abstraction.⁴⁴ Disability can augment this discourse on vocality by exposing certain “aesthetic presuppositions” (Tobin Siebers)⁴⁵ and “conformational standards” (Blake Howe and Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, above) relating to the singing voice that often invalidate bodily difference. In particular, the physical experiences of deafness in conjunction with the linguistic customs of American Deaf culture offer a unique perspective on singing: deafness can unsettle the precondition of vocalized sound in sung vocal production, the physical origins and contours of the singing voice, and the expressive divisions between nonverbal vocal utterance, speech, and song.⁴⁶ Ultimately, deafness can engender new and unexpected types of singing within a disability aesthetics that questions the very sonic basis for music. To illustrate this I examine Deaf sound artist Christine Sun Kim’s *Face Opera II* (2013), a multi-act performance art piece written for nine prelingually deaf performers. Kim and her collaborators defy the customary coupling of singing with audibility, and temporarily sever the related associations between the voice and vocal cords in order to “sing” using silent facial expressions belonging to the American Sign Language (ASL) lexicon. Kim’s opera further interrogates the legacy of voice in American Deaf culture by highlighting the slippage between aestheticized and pathologized vocal sounds.

Whether in her whimsical mixed-media creations, her austere sound installations, or her interactive performance art pieces, Kim engages her Deaf identity ultimately to reclaim “ownership” of sound from the hearing world, often unsettling her hearing audiences by integrating obscure insider cues from Deaf culture.⁴⁷ Like many in the Deaf community, Kim communicates primarily in ASL, deliberately refraining from “voicing,” an act that risks affirming oralist paternalism and the enduring associations between vocal

44. Eidsheim, “Sensing Voice” and *Sensing Sound*; Meizel, “Powerful Voice.” I am forever indebted to Christine Sun Kim for engaging with me in a fruitful dialogue about *Face Opera II*. Our exchange culminated in a cowritten set of performance notes containing Kim’s reflections on the conception and performance of *Face Opera II*, to which I refer throughout this essay.

45. Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 20.

46. In keeping with written convention I use the term “Deaf” with an uppercase “D” to signal a person’s identification with the linguistic customs and minority politics of Deaf culture—a diverse community of people united by the use of sign languages—and the term “deaf” with a lowercase “d” when referring to the audiological condition of hearing loss and/or people who do not identify with Deaf culture.

47. Kim, in Selby, “Todd Selby.”

utterance and selfhood in Western metaphysical thought, discourses that have historically undermined the legitimacy of sign language.⁴⁸ In ASL the voice manifests across a visual-spatial plane rather than an acoustical one: it is a language executed through a simultaneity of manual signs (i.e., hand shapes) and specific facial expressions, mouth shapes, and precise head, shoulder, and body movements called “non-manual signals” (NMS). The “voice” is thus a central theme of Kim’s practice: she explores its many complex linguistic, symbolic, and musical constructions, only to rewrite drastically the able-bodied norms on which they are commonly founded.

From a Deaf perspective, the *singing* voice is a uniquely complex form of expression, hinging on the fraught status of music within this community as well as on the ambiguous relationship between “voicing” and song. To be sure, there exists a long and rich tradition of music making within the American Deaf community, and the recent scholarship of Anabel Maler, Joseph Straus, and Jeannette Jones has begun to reverse the assumption that deafness necessarily precludes musical engagement and expression. Many d/Deaf people engage with music through visual, tactile, and kinesthetic means as an alternative to “normal” hearing.⁴⁹ Yet there are also many d/Deaf people for whom music is unenjoyable, irrelevant, or fundamentally at odds with the primacy of vision in Deaf culture.⁵⁰ The singing voice also embodies a unique expressive paradox as it relates to the political dimensions of voice in Deaf culture: in its distinctness from speech it escapes some of the aforementioned problems associated with “voicing,” yet as a form of vocalized utterance it arguably aligns with oralist ideals, whether as texted or nonverbal singing. Finally, there are certain musical conventions, or “conformational standards,” that might seem incongruous with d/Deaf singing—especially intonation. Although certain popular and avant-garde musics welcome and even cultivate out-of-tune singing as part of a larger aesthetic tradition of vocal affect, “correct” intonation is a basic technical requirement and aesthetic tenet of classical singing.⁵¹ Profoundly deaf professional opera singer Janine Roebuck recounts that as her hearing loss progressed she encountered increasing discrimination within the music industry to this effect; she was “petrified of singing out of tune,” especially following her music professor’s grim prognosis “Sing while you can . . . because you’ll never have a career in

48. Padden and Humphries, *Inside Deaf Culture*; Bauman, “Introduction” and “Listening to Phonocentrism.”

49. Straus, *Extraordinary Measures*, 167–70; Maler, “Songs for Hands” and “Musical Expression”; Jones, “Imagined Hearing.”

50. Simpson, “Music for People”; Friedner and Helmreich, “Sound Studies.” Friedner and Helmreich note further that the long-standing visual imperative of both Deaf culture and Deaf studies often constructs hearing/sound and seeing/sight as discrete, opposing modalities, a view that sometimes undermines the validity of d/Deaf sonic and musical experiences.

51. Stras, “Organ of the Soul”; Davids and LaTour, *Vocal Technique*.

music.”⁵² The critical reception of deaf American jazz singer Mandy Harvey likewise evinces a preoccupation with pitch accuracy. One headline in the *Los Angeles Times* proclaimed, “Colorado Jazz Singer Hits the Right Notes, Even Though She Can’t Hear Them.”⁵³

These foregoing contradictions take center stage in *Face Opera II*. The titular reference to opera is misleading, since the piece does not have characters, a narrative, or conventional vocalized singing. Instead Kim adopts the “opera format to show the visual and grammatical aspects of American Sign Language (ASL) and how most of its content is conveyed through the face. It is a way for me to examine non signers’ language preferences and to encourage [the audience] to ‘hear’ by looking at those choir singers’ moving faces.”⁵⁴ Throughout acts 1–4 Kim and her eight collaborators alternate between director, conductor, and chorus roles, deploying a series of ASL facial expressions—without their accompanying manual hand shapes—as a mode of singing. Kim’s motivation for isolating and aestheticizing the facial dimensions of ASL stems from their distinct expressive function in sign language: facial expressions (or NMS) are indispensable to linguistic nuance because they contextualize hand shapes, elucidate ASL grammar, and color the individual signer’s personal voice.⁵⁵ The first act, “Open Eights,” stages facial expressions that might be used to elucidate a series of unrelated concepts that could hypothetically be signed using the “open eight” hand shape, hence the act’s title. Reading from an English transcription (or gloss) of the ASL concepts, the conductor leads with her unique facial interpretations. The chorus members then respond with coordinated and precisely timed facial gestures, keeping their hands stuffed firmly into their pockets.⁵⁶ (See Figure 1.) The gloss contains successions of closely related sentiments, such as the consecutive sequencing of “early,” “obsessed,” and “sick,” as well as many striking and often humorous juxtapositions, including the direct progression from “depressed” to “masturbate.”

Overall, the singers’ facial expressions are more animated than those typical of ASL. Kim notes that one of her Deaf friends suggested that such dramatic overemphasis was insulting to Deaf signers, as it potentially reinforces misconceptions about the ostensibly “primitive” nature of sign language. She clarifies her motivations: “this [facial exaggeration] is one of the ways expression is communicated in opera,” and “I didn’t trust the hearing audience enough to be able to properly read our ‘normal’ faces.”⁵⁷ Though her reasoning stems in part from a place of mistrust, it also evinces a desire to

52. Roebuck, “I Am a Deaf Opera Singer.” To mitigate this discrimination and to supplement her own accommodations, Roebuck eventually opted to wear hearing aids.

53. Deam, “Colorado Jazz Singer.”

54. Kim, in Roffino, “Emerging.”

55. Fischer and van der Hulst, “Sign Language Structures.”

56. Kim, in Kim and Holmes, “Performance Notes.”

57. *Ibid.*



Figure 1 Christine Sun Kim, *Face Opera II*, High Line Hotel, New York, May 11, 2013. Kim swipes and holds the gloss for act 1, “Open Eights,” on the screen of her iPad as the conductor (not pictured) leads the chorus with her facial expressions. Photograph by Conrado Johns. Used by permission. This figure appears in color in the online version of the *Journal*.

establish common ground with her hearing audience; she reveals for the viewer that facial expression and bodily movement together coincide in phonetic, visual-spatial, and musical-linguistic systems, helping to articulate and stabilize meaning. Moreover, in likening the heightened emotional display in her piece to that characteristic of opera, Kim distinguishes it from regular poetic utterance and also highlights the fact that facial expressions already serve a crucial expressive function in conventional vocalized singing.

If singing is customarily understood as a heightened, musicalized utterance beginning at and emanating from the vocal folds (eventually incorporating bodily gesture to service its expression), the silent, gestural singing that Kim proposes in *Face Opera II* seems implausible. Maler’s scholarship on song signing demonstrates that the alteration of certain components of ASL, when signed alongside a preexisting song, can convey specific musical qualities such as rhythm, pitch, and register. She provocatively asks whether gestures can “in fact communicate musical concepts independently of sound?”⁵⁸ Kim’s assertion is even more radical: she suggests that stylized, performative gesture informed by but divorced from its manual linguistic complement can communicate a sense of musicality that is actually independent of any preexisting

58. Maler, “Songs for Hands,” §5.2.

sonic referent; Kim's is a musicality that exists along an embodied visual-spatial plane rather than an aural one. As Nina Eidsheim beautifully contends, "the ontology of singing is masked by our fetishization of sound. . . . The singing body extends beyond that which we conventionally recognize as the vocal instrument."⁵⁹ Eidsheim thus explores what she dubs the "internal corporeal choreography" of voice, a host of often overlooked inner micro-physiological activities that anticipate, engender, and constitute the singing voice before it is filtered through the vocal cords (the heartbeat, the breath, the movements of the stomach, etc.).⁶⁰ Similarly, Kim enriches dominant ideologies of voice, but through an attention to external corporeal choreographies with the ultimate goal of releasing the singing voice from its interdependence with sound and the vocal cords. By subverting the customary associations between hearing and music, the singers displace the singing voice from its assumed origin in the vocal tract (or even simply *inside* the body) to initiate and locate vocal expressivity elsewhere on the body, suggesting that singing does not require vocalized sound as a fundamental precondition for its existence. Kim thus not only draws attention to the expressive function of bodily gesture in conventional singing, but also implores her audience to consider the underlying musicality of ASL facial expressions by listening through visual-spatial attentiveness; this is an exquisite realization of a disability aesthetics in which disability at once underlines and transcends aesthetic presuppositions.

The opera's style of execution changes dramatically in act 5, when the foregoing "silence" gives way to a moment of deliberate sonic rupture in which the singers use their audible voices for the first and only time in the performance: the conductor signs purposefully without facial expressions, leading the chorus in a story from Deaf folklore (see Figure 2). In the absence of NMS to contextualize the meaning of the conductor's signs, an intermediary supplements the signing with his own improvised facial expressions and vocalizations, projecting his voice through a microphone. The singers assemble in a line facing the intermediary, laying their right hands on one another's backs to gauge the volume of their neighbor's voice as it vibrates along the spine, while simultaneously observing the intermediary's mouth shapes. They integrate this information to establish their own individual voices in a chain of sonic transmission. Their nonverbal vocalizations occur in fits and starts, ranging from abrupt, guttural, intoned noises to sustained howls and yells. These sounds straddle the boundaries between speech and song, recalling the practice of extended vocal techniques.

In her analysis of Trevor Wishart's *Red Bird* in this colloquy, Jennifer Iverson asserts that such seemingly abject vocal sounds unsettle listeners' subject positions, inviting them to contemplate unfamiliar embodiments.

59. Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound*, 111.

60. *Ibid.*



Figure 2 Christine Sun Kim, *Face Opera II*, High Line Hotel, New York, May 11, 2013. As part of the final act, “Soupooon,” the conductor signs without accompanying ASL facial expressions, leading the chorus in a story from Deaf folklore. Photograph by Francisca Benitez. Used by permission. This figure appears in color in the online version of the **Journal**.

Kim’s vocalizations are also transgressive, albeit to a different end: here she upends the sonic contours of normative vocal beauty as well as the persistent pathologization of deaf vocal utterance. This passage of Kim’s opera at once recalls and inverts the performative dimensions of a speech therapy session—but, crucially, without the dramatic overstatement of previous acts. Speech-language pathology is a type of standardized clinical therapy that uses oral methods to treat many different types of speech disfluencies and disorders, a discipline with which many prelingually deaf people (including Kim herself) are intimately familiar, particularly if they were born to hearing parents.⁶¹ The arduous repetition and phonation exercises that speech therapy entails can prove demoralizing and alienating for certain deaf patients.⁶² Indeed, two of the performers in *Face Opera II* refused to use their voices on account of the complexities of “voicing” in Deaf culture. “They weren’t comfortable with the idea of uttering or vocalizing something that would automatically get away from their bodies and be heard by the [hearing] audience,” notes Kim.⁶³ But for those performers willing to sing using vocal utterance, the experience offered a special opportunity to define and reclaim an audible singing voice for themselves. Kim elaborates: “Performing this act was an

61. Fava, *Clinical Linguistics*. Speech pathology is often integrated into oralist school curricula.

62. Neisser, *Other Side of Silence*.

63. Kim, in Kim and Holmes, “Performance Notes.” See also Bauman, “Introduction” and “Listening to Phonocentrism.”

amazing experience because we felt it went against what we had been taught but [was] liberating at the same time.”⁶⁴ In this sense Kim and her willing collaborators defy Deaf custom, while also resisting oralist control, effectively “reclaiming ownership over sound” by foregrounding vocalizations otherwise disqualified from aesthetic signification. Siebers’s provocations regarding the aesthetic value of sickness in modern art (“What would it mean to call an artwork sick without it being a disqualification?”)⁶⁵ are here firmly in place: although such “extraneous,” “abject” vocalizations perhaps aurally signal disability within the context of speech therapy, here they sound as valid forms of musical expression constituting singing.

Ultimately, the intersections of singing and deafness index a range of d/Deaf musical experiences, the complex legacy of voice in contemporary American Deaf culture, as well as specific musical anxieties that work against d/Deaf singing. *Face Opera II* negotiates these dimensions of voice, achieving a progressive disability aesthetics of (post)modernist music in which silent (semantic) facial gesture intervenes in, informs, and even wholly constitutes the expressive dimensions of the singing voice; in which vocalized sounds customarily signaling bodily excess translate into aesthetic beauty; and in which listening to the voice engages and integrates a host of sensory modalities beyond mere hearing. Kim shows that singing already anticipates and encompasses the many slippages between speech and song, sound and silence, utterance and gesture, hearing and deafness, ability and disability. As disability continues to play a pivotal role in shaping the emerging interdisciplinary discourse on vocality, it is my hope that such radical performances will embolden us to listen and sing anew.

Music, Autism, and Disability Aesthetics

MICHAEL B. BAKAN

In *Disability Aesthetics*, Tobin Siebers calls for “a radical rethinking of the relationship between aesthetics, disqualification, and oppression, one in which the systemic oppression of disabled people would fail, and fail precisely because it could no longer be based on human appearances, features, and conditions deemed inferior.”⁶⁶ In this essay I consider the “conditions” dimension of Siebers’s proposition, focusing specifically on autism spectrum conditions, or ASCs (a preferred designation to autism spectrum disorders—ASDs). My point of departure is the following definition of my

64. Kim, in Kim and Holmes, “Performance Notes.” See also Brueggemann, “Delivering Disability, Willing Speech,” and Davidson, *Concerto for the Left Hand*, ch. 3, “Hearing Things: The Scandal of Speech in Deaf Performance.”

65. Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 56.

66. *Ibid.*

own field: “Ethnomusicology is the study of how people make and experience music, and of why it matters to them that they do.”⁶⁷ Underlying this definition are two commitments: first, to an epistemological framework of relativism, and second, to a methodological paradigm of ethnography. These together foster a research approach that aligns readily with Siebers’s vision of disability aesthetics, and in turn with a re-presentational approach that foregrounds dialogue-based ethnography and the words and ideas of one’s field research consultants.

The tenets of relativistic ethnography maintain that all understandings should begin, and to some degree remain, at the level of emic understandings, or understandings held by the people living within a given cultural situation—cultural insiders, as it were. From such a vantage point it stands to reason that if we want to know about how people make and experience music, and why it matters to them that they do, we should not only listen to the music they make and observe how they make it, but also listen carefully to what they have to say about it and engage deeply with them in discourses related to it. We should, first and foremost, assume that these people are experts at being who they are and that they know what they are talking about with regard to themselves and their music; and we should also assume, to quote the Autistic self-advocate Julia Bascom, that they are “complete, complex, human beings leading rich and meaningful existences and deserving dignity, respect, human rights, and the primary voice in the conversation” about themselves.⁶⁸ To invoke the mantra of disability rights activism (and the source of the title of Dell’Antonio and Grace’s contribution to this colloquy), “Nothing about us without us.”

While this attitude is now commonplace among Autistic advocates and allies, ethnography is also founded on such premises. In my ethnomusicological research on the *gamelan beleganjur* of Bali, Indonesia, for example, I did not try to cure Balinese musicians of their preference for paired tunings over equal-tempered ones or to convert them from Hinduism.⁶⁹ Nor did I attempt to convince them to appoint non-playing conductors to replace *kendang* drummers as the directors of their ensembles. The very notion of pursuing such possibilities is of course ludicrous, not to mention tantamount to ethnomusicological heresy. I assumed my Balinese interlocutors to be experts at both playing Balinese music and being Balinese, and I assumed that being Balinese was a completely reasonable and viable way of being human. No musicologist—ethno- or otherwise—would expect anything less.

Yet the case is markedly different in relation to my current work on the ethnomusicology of autism.⁷⁰ Whenever I tell someone that my research is

67. Bakan, “Don’t Go Changing,” 117.

68. Bascom, foreword to *Loud Hands*, 10.

69. Bakan, *Music of Death*.

70. Bakan, “Musicality of Stimming” and “Don’t Go Changing.”

concerned with Autistic people, the initial response almost always falls somewhere between perplexity and intrigue. Either way it leads to follow-up questions about what “measures” and “interventions” I am employing, or what “benefits” or “improvements” I have observed. Only in the rarest of instances is there an implicit assumption that *these* people are experts at being who they are, or that being Autistic is, devoid of any measures of intervention or aspirations toward normalcy, a completely reasonable and viable way of being human. Thus, if you work with Balinese musicians people want to know what you have learned about who they are, what they are like and why, and how they do the things they do so spectacularly well; but if you work with Autistic musicians people want to know *what* they are, what is wrong with them and why, and what you are doing to “fix” them, “improve” their behavior or functionality, or “normalize” them. (The medical model of disability, described by Joseph Straus in his contribution to this colloquy, is the governing paradigm for this line of inquiry.)

This is not as it should be, for if the epistemological and methodological premises of a musicological discipline are sound they should be adaptable to almost any musical/cultural context or situation. In working ethnographically with Autistic people—which is rather a different thing from working therapeutically, as, say, a music therapist might do⁷¹—I should be able to proceed from essentially the same ethnomusicological vantage point as in my Balinese research: as a committed ethnographer, an engaged fellow music maker, and a firm believer in the notion that Autistic and other neurodivergent people are similarly experts at being who they are; that they too have a completely reasonable and viable way of being human and living their lives. My job is not to change Autistic people; it is to better understand where they are coming from and why: as musicians, as people, and as members of a particular cultural group with its own identity, values, style, and internal diversity.⁷²

My current line of research advances the cause of an ethnomusicology of autism so conceived through a series of transcripts of extensive online dialogues with nine diverse individuals (using platforms such as Gmail Chat). They range in age from seven to forty-seven and in musical background from accomplished professional musicians to people with no formal musical experience. All have two things in common: they have been diagnosed with an ASC and identify music as a central component of their lives, albeit in very different ways. The remainder of this essay is mainly given over to their words and ideas, excerpted from the aforementioned dialogue transcripts. These are individuals who speak eloquently on their own behalf, verbally or otherwise, and who do so in ways that are communicative, dialogical, and productive of publishable texts. I see it as my job to re-present rather than

71. Bakan, “Ethnomusicological Perspectives on Autism.”

72. Straus, “Autism as Culture”; Dell’Antonio and Grace, this colloquy.

represent what they have to say, for their words require little if any explanation or interpretation, let alone “translation,” on my part.

We begin with Donald Rindale (a pseudonym), a former trombonist diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome. He is in his twenties, holds a master’s degree in historical musicology, and currently studies law:

[Through my earlier years, I found music to] be a welcome refuge from the interpersonal engagements that I had to endure in the outside world. The music did not laugh, or judge, or make nasty comments, or quizzical facial expressions and gestures at the sight of some unexpected behavioral tendencies, among other things. For those reasons, I will always love it. . . . [Performing music] provided opportunities to more or less “get away” from the often offensive and upsetting social situations in which I had to operate, social situations, that is, where people were talking to and about me (when their mouths were not occupied by mouthpieces and reeds of various shapes and sizes!). It was a great refuge indeed.

Dotan Nitzberg, also in his twenties and diagnosed with Asperger’s, is an Israeli concert pianist. In a vein distinct from yet related to Donald’s, his views reflect Blake Howe and Stephanie Jensen-Moulton’s assertions (this colloquy) that cultural conventions associated with music can punish divergence while favoring modes of uniformity “that may profitably be understood to mirror the social oppression of disabled bodies and minds.” Dotan writes,

Many musicians offended me by saying [that I was] “emotionally handicapped,” “playing like an autist,” and other stupid statements as such. People who claim that are ignorant and should be ignored. They do not comprehend that at the moment Aspergers tackle a piece they recognize the character and “emotion” right away. It’s instilled there. Their intensity, concentration, and involvement [are] so high that it seems as if they are [just] “doing their own thing” [but that is wrong]. Only people with [a] sixth sense can catch it.

Graeme Gibson is an avid music instrument collector, world music website curator, composer, and multi-instrumentalist diagnosed with “classic autism.” He is in his thirties. Like Donald and Dotan, he has found music to be not just a vehicle for self-actualization and creative expression, but also a reflexive referent for incisive cultural critique. I asked him at one point why he was consistently placing quotation marks around “world music” in our online chats. His response was enlightening:

Ah, I often do this as a means to emphasize what world music is. People often have it marked as another genre, but because world music involves numerous traditions [up] to contemporary musics, it’s really not just a single genre of music. I prefer to think of it as a spectrum that includes numerous genres. . . . [It is the same with autism,] because in autism, I also found that everyone is different from their case, to my case and so on. I do agree with the term “spectrum” but we still have lots to learn; there is a lot of misinformation out there still. I prefer for people to see me for who I am as a person

and not judge me . . . based on what I am. Autism is a part of who I am but I do not allow for it to define me.

Amy Sequenzia, a nonspeaking Autistic woman with cerebral palsy who communicates by typing with one finger, takes a more hard-line stance on the issue of who she is vis-à-vis her autism. When I asked her, “If you could wave a magic wand and make your autism ‘disappear,’ would you?,” she replied, “I would break the wand before anyone could wave it. . . . The way I act, react, understand, and stand in the world is because I am Autistic. Autism cannot be separated from me and is part of every aspect of my life.” Amy also describes herself as a synesthete: “I can see colors coming from the orchestra or choir, I can see color in movement . . . and the colors are like waves moving above, in front, and around the music makers. Sometimes it is a big rainbow dancing, sometimes one color is dominant.” Music also has a profound impact on the way she experiences her body:

[T]he melody makes me feel things I don’t always feel, like my blood running in my body. . . . I am usually not very aware of my body. I don’t always know when I am in pain, I can’t always feel certain types of pain, I rarely know where it hurts. To simply get up from a chair is sometimes hard, as if my body forgets how to move. I don’t always know that I need to go to the bathroom. So when I feel the music inside my body, when I feel my blood running with the music, it is an amazing thing.

For the Autistic author, advocate, professor, and singer (and fellow colloquy contributor) Elizabeth J. “Ibby” Grace, who coedited the anthology *Typed Words: Loud Voices* with Amy Sequenzia,⁷³ “thinking in music” is one of the defining cognitive processes of her Autistic worldview:

I sort of “think in music” in the same way [the Autistic author] Temple [Grandin] says she “thinks in pictures” or . . . it’s the closest analogy. Music was the nexus between my self and language for a long time . . . my communicative access. When I relax among myself [*sic*] there are not words going on in my head. There are intervals, tones, it is much more relaxed. . . . Sometimes in order to think, I structure the thoughts into more like music, or they do themselves like that. Intravisually, this is close to a screensaver turning from fractals into polygons.

The above quotations from Donald Rindale, Dotan Nitzberg, Graeme Gibson, Amy Sequenzia, and Ibby Grace provide revealing insights into musical worlds of Autistic experience and Autistic worlds of musical experience. In so doing they create a discursive space in which new ways of thinking about disability aesthetics—ones that proceed in the first instance from deeply listening to what people have to say for themselves rather than trying to determine what should be said for them, and that oppose systemic oppression

73. Sequenzia and Grace, *Typed Words, Loud Voices*.

in any form—may flourish. Musicologists and theorists have access to powerful resources by which to facilitate such flourishing, from ethnographic relativism and subject-centered narrativity to semiotic and interpretive strategies of musical analysis. We see examples of their application in this colloquy in relation to modernist music's claiming of disability (Straus) and the dismodernist musical reclamation of a traumatized body (Iverson), to the musical efficacy of signed facial singing performed by Deaf people (Holmes) and the social and musical discursivities of Autistic cultural life (Dell'Antonio and Grace and the present essay). Through such works and others that they will inspire, we as a discipline stand to gain much, not just in our scholarly development but also in advancing the cause of dignity and human rights for all people everywhere.

No Musicking about Us without Us!

ANDREW DELL'ANTONIO and ELIZABETH J. GRACE

MY: I feel so Autistic when I listen to [the Electric Light Orchestra] . . . it is perseverance porn. I think I am both excited and distressed that ELO = one of my diagnosable symptoms.

NW: A further challenge in talking about [musicking] is that music affects me emotionally, but about half of the emotions I experience are Autistic emotions for which there are no words in neurotypical languages.⁷⁴

Ibby: I just had the zesty thought that what follows is not a triangulation (me, Andrew, our subject) but a quadrangulation (me, Andrew, our subject, and you—our reader). What is a waltz in practice becomes a march in the reporting.

Andrew: And as our cocontributor Michael Bakan wrote to us in the process of developing this colloquy, “waltzes—as dances—are elegant and flowing, as conversations and other dialogues tend to be, whereas marches are more directive and conformational, which is what ‘happens’ to dialogue when it is inscribed in the formal presentational mode of scholarly presentation.” As Michael also cogently observed, the mode of what follows “is a manifestation of Tobin Siebers’s challenge to valorize that which one might consider to be inherently ‘flawed’: conversational transcripts are raw, unpolished, and ‘disabled’ themselves in the extent to which they are impervious to the disciplinary actions of editing and conscription to formal normativity that other types of scholarly texts are.” Or to paraphrase the quotation from Siebers with which Joseph Straus begins his contribution to this colloquy,

74. Indented quotations preceded by two-letter abbreviations are excerpted, with permission, from interviews with neurodiversity activists that form part of our ongoing “Autistics, Musicking” project.

might a *musicology* of disability embrace scholarly discourse and methodology that seems by traditional standards to be broken, perceiving it as not less insightful but more so as a result?

Ibby: I still want to dance with the reader as much as I want to dance with Andrew and my Autistic Musicking friends. We can queer the march and make it waltzy. Get jiggy with it, then a little reductive in mathly ways. That way we fit inside the space of the paper. First we should say who we are because it is the soundtrack to how we know. Some do not know this, perhaps because their soundtrack styles were never in question.

Andrew: Essays in disability studies often begin with a disclosure—a personalization of the argument through a heartfelt connection with disability, often featuring an individual close to the writer, sometimes the writer hir/her/himself.⁷⁵

Ibby: I am Autistic.⁷⁶ The understanding of Autistic culture as culture changed my life, because I grew up without peers in that sense, and it was not so easy. I have written essays on growing up and what it was like to find my culture, to discover there were so many others. These pieces are “autistethnographies,” which is a play on the word “autoethnography.”⁷⁷ Autoethnographers write about their own lives in order to show things about their cultures. I want other Autistics never to be alone—not knowing that there is a culture—so I now do this often.

Andrew: I first met Ibby online in several forums in which I was learning to reconfigure my belief systems about the best way to parent my Autistic daughter, and then in person at a conference on facilitated communication at which she was a keynote speaker and my daughter and I were learners. Later, Ibby joined my graduate seminar on music and disability, videoconferencing with us on the topic of academic accessibility (building on an essay on the topic she had written for *The Feminist Wire*).⁷⁸ In the weeks that followed, Ibby and I began to discuss the intersection of Christopher Small’s theories of musicking and the work being undertaken by Autistic activists to stake out cultural significance.⁷⁹ Our overlapping interests brought about the project we describe here.

75. For a concise discussion of the importance of this practice, see O’Toole, “Disclosing Our Relationships.” We are intentionally citing primarily web-based resources to make our back-theory available to those who do not have access to paywall-limited journals or academic libraries.

76. On what defines Autistic identity, see Sinclair, “Why I Dislike ‘Person-First’ Language.”

77. Grace, “Autistethnography” and “Autistic Community and Culture.”

78. Grace, “Cognitively Accessible Language.”

79. “Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. . . . *To music* is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by

Ibby: Music is the closest thing I know to my internal language. Before I had knowledge that there was Autistic culture, it was also one of my two most trusty interfaces into social understandings (theater being the other).

Andrew: There have been a number of academic publications on autism and music in contemporary culture. Most focus on a deficit model and propose therapeutic approaches to “rectifying” behaviors, but some provide more positive, or at least value-neutral, considerations of autism as a cognitive difference that might facilitate particular creative or receptive approaches to sound.⁸⁰ All these academic authors have examined autism from the outside, usually emphasizing the ostensibly solitary, inward nature of the Autistic individual; conversely, we are most interested in what Autistics have to communicate to each other—and to neuronormate folk—about their own musicking.⁸¹

Ibby: Michael Bakan has been doing a dialogue-based ethnography of Autistic musicians, in which some of the same people are involved as in our study (including myself); this is reflected in his essay for this colloquy. Our choice to talk about other ways of relating to music, too—even the *prima facie* passive ways—may be in the same key as Autistic resistance of productivity norms. As a complement to Michael’s crucial and culturally sensitive work, our project dwells in our conviction that a marginalized group should have a pivotal role in defining its own identity and agency within a dominant culture.

Andrew: More and more academics are “coming out” as Autistic, deciding to risk the stigma of being associated with a diagnosis of “mental disability” partly in order to embrace the discursive strengths that their neurology empowers and partly in order not to have to direct all their intellectual energy toward “passing” as neurotypical.⁸² More importantly, some of the most articulate theorizers of neurodivergent culture (using strategies similar to those employed by the culturally Deaf artists whom Jessica Holmes describes in this colloquy) operate outside the traditional frameworks of academia.⁸³

rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing”: Small, *Musicking*, 2, 9.

80. Examples of the latter include Joseph Straus’s contribution to this colloquy; Bakan, “Ethnomusicological Perspectives on Autism”; and CJ Shiloh’s “Neurodiversity, Community Music Therapy, and Sensory Friendly Concerts,” an online course for music therapists that privileges cognitive difference over therapeutic remediation, sponsored by MTNED (Music Therapy & Neuro Ed), accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.mtned.com/courses/neurodiversity-sfc/>.

81. “Neuronormate” is my own portmanteau of “neurology” and “normate,” the latter term having been introduced by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in *Extraordinary Bodies*, 8.

82. Two noteworthy examples are Yergeau, “Clinically Significant Disturbance,” and Ry-skamp, “Autistic Academic.”

83. For example, Neurodivergent K (<http://timetolisten.blogspot.com>), M. Kelter (<http://theinvisiblestrings.com>), and Nick Walker (<http://neurocosmopolitanism.com>).

Thus, we believe that those of us who want to include and honor Autistic voices need to move outside of mainstream academic sources to gather information, and find ways to communicate with them through media and spaces that are accessible to their cognitive and communicative strengths.

Ibby: Yes. Even those of us who are academics are often discouraged from talking about our own phenomenological experiences of life, being told things like we are “too close.” Accepted mainstream discourse about Autistics is largely conducted by scientific method (“scientific method” here amounting to quasi-experimental observations yielding arbitrarily quantified anecdotes) that generates studies created about us without us. But who knows more about what it is like to be a certain kind of person than people who in fact are that kind of person? I think the “too close” argument is misguided. When I was about to become a parent, I asked people who had been parents to let me know what to expect, what it was like. The fact that they were not put into trials with controls (or even pseudo-controls) did not lead me to believe they knew less about how their lives had been.

Andrew: Ibby and I have been approaching Autistic informants by sharing Small’s definition of “musicking” (and its applicability to any cultural group) as our point of departure, then asking them about their thoughts concerning musicking as a component of Autistic experience and culture. Our informants are not only leaders in the theorizing of neurodiversity, neurodivergence, and neuroqueer, and themselves diagnosed/identified as Autistic, but also our friends, which complicates the process in ways we find fruitful.⁸⁴

Ibby: We believe and hope that our teaming can create a scenario that is the fruitful marriage of what is good about autoethnography with what is good about a form of ethnography in which the querent is not directly a member of the set of people studied.

Andrew: For the format of our study, we have settled on asynchronous “dialogues” involving both of us and our interviewee; in the flow of interaction, Ibby shifts her subject position between scholar-interviewer and coneurodivergent-interviewee, building discourse around a neurodivergent culture of musicking together with those with whom we converse. The following are some examples of the outcome of this approach.

84. On neurodiversity and neurodivergence, see Walker, “Neurodiversity.” On the concept of neuroqueer, see Walker, “Neuroqueer: An Introduction.”

Ibby: Hip-hop has shown us that language choice is a way of musicking. Because of this, we are using our voices in mixed registers on purpose, understanding our project as a way of neurodivergent meta-musicking.

BA: Singing was a gateway to speech in my childhood. I could often sing thoughts even if I couldn't speak them. Many weekends, there was a house rule that all communication was sung.

Ibby: Whoa, me too . . . I do still now sing to extend linguistic time when I'm going to be nonspeaking.

BA: We could go a good forty hours in operetta mode, usually laying our own words on show tune music.

Ibby: I mean, to extend the time before I am nonspeaking.

BA: Me too.

Ibby: I did not know we had this in common!

Andrew: The mixing of registers and Ibby's identity shifts also pull me (not a "properly trained" ethnographer) into stumbling across the blurred line of subject and scholar. (Our reader may have noticed that I purposefully stumble back and forth across that line in this very essay.) As I do so, I can observe how my ethnographic inexperience makes me less "able" to mask my process of scholarly engagement as authoritative, disciplined, objective—less able to rationalize it as more legitimate than the "mentally clouded" processes of advocacy:

Ibby: Many people do not realize that I can storytell and simultaneously create theory. "I understood you clearly so your scholarship didn't happen." Lol.

Andrew: Yes. And that also fits with theory of musicking—which everyone does in plain language or not—but some people might think needs fancytalk . . . your perspective helps to "queer" the notion that my acquired scholarly language is even a stable thing . . . we're building a theory of musicking that gives the lie to a normative scholarly discourse.

As we engage in the shifting dialogue, some insights arise that might point to specifically neurodivergent musicking practices, such as experiences related to synesthesia, or to ways of engaging with language that are marked as "deficient" by contemporary Anglo-American society:

NW: My sensory channels aren't separate, it's all part of one complex multifaceted experience, so the soundtrack has to work in harmony with everything else.

Andrew: Can you say more about the "complex multifaceted experience"? Does it involve synesthesia?

NW: Yes, it's all about synesthesia. . . . And, hard to draw a clear boundary between "inspired and emotionally stirred by the music" and "sound/concept/emotion synesthesia." I find that terms like "sound/color synesthesia" don't

really do justice to the complexity of my experience. I have “everything/ everything else synesthesia.” Just one big gestalt experience.

MM: Everything, for me, centers around the touch. . . . I need to use music, both to replace words as an organizational method and also to give myself a feeling that can be used to channel the memories and the patterns back out into language. . . . Music has a positively reinforcing sensory feedback for me. Grammar does not, at least not if I’m conforming to regular standards of it. I have to bypass the need for grammar by composing in cadence in order to bypass the language problem.

Ibby: I am wondering about the linguistic need for music. I have it too, but for me the music must be inside my imagination ear, not in my real ears, or I will just listen to it and not do other stuff. So even though MM and I do opposite actions outwardly, it comes from a relatable place.

Other insights underline the contributions of disabled folks to discourses and “theories of musicking” that are more broadly constitutive of cultural diversity, emphasizing the shared humanity of an individual who might otherwise be dehumanized through the pervasive rhetoric of autism as deficit and loss, or by less negative but still stereotypical notions of autism as inherently isolating (since our dialogues are all about eagerly Autistic interpersonal communication).⁸⁵

BA: Music was introduced to me by neurodivergent people. . . . These people, my uncle and father, are [those from] whom I learned to be still within myself. To be my divergent self and make friends with the inner turbulence. . . . I was older before I learned that this immersive connection to music was not how *everyone* musicked. I feel much of why I want to reclaim that real connection with music is that I feel somewhere in there, I can find my template. I feel somewhere within music is that template. That connection. Somewhere in there is my lost faith, and if I could just let go again like I used to, I could find it.

Ibby: They say we live alone “in our own little worlds.” I think our world is vast and fabulous, and full of dance.

Andrew: As we build our purposefully accessible methodology, we expect that at least some of our scholarly approach could be helpful for musicology in general, since a core principle of neurodiversity underlines the arbitrary parameters of “normal” cognitive and discursive strategies, which we argue are designed to reinforce established cultural norms rather than truly broaden the possibilities for knowledge, interpretation, and aesthetic engagement. Perhaps it is impossible to envision a truly universal-access approach to scholarship that would be equally transparent and meaningful to all levels

85. On resisting pathological framing of Autistic identity and opening up discursive spaces for Autistic voices, see Yergeau, “Circle Wars.”

of expertise; we nonetheless believe that one of the potential benefits of a disability-informed aesthetics and rhetoric is to open up access to scholarly debate to people not privileged by normative status, whether academic or bodymind.⁸⁶

Ibby: If we are hard to understand, let us be so like poets, where you can understand us many ways, and not be sure, but we are glad you care to try.

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86. In *Mad at School*, Margaret Price coins the term "bodymind" "to emphasize that although 'body' and 'mind' usually occupy separate conceptual and linguistic territories, they are deeply intertwined. . . . If it weren't so unwieldy, I would be tempted to use something like *psychobiosocialpoliticalbodymind*" (11n9).

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