UC San Diego

UC San Diego Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

"She Uses They/Them Pronouns": Finding a Non-Binary Voice in a Gendered World

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3z37b04j

Author

Young, Hillary Jean

Publication Date

2019

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

"She Uses They/Them Pronouns": Finding a Non-Binary Voice in a Gendered World

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts

in

Contemporary Music Performance

by

Hillary Jean Young

Committee in charge:

      Professor Susan Narucki, Chair

      Professor Sarah Hankins

      Professor Victoria Petrovich

      Professor Stephanie Richards

      Professor Shahrokh Yadegari

2019

The Dissertation of Hillary Jean Young is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form
for publication on microfilm and electronically:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Chair

University of California San Diego

2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to start by thanking the two people who have had the greatest influence on my academic and creative growth over the past five years: thank you to Susan Narucki for nurturing and inspiring my evolution as a musician, artist, and performer, and thank you to Sarah Hankins for having faith in my potential as a scholar, writer, and thinker.

I am also grateful to the other faculty and committee members who have generously offered me their guidance and expertise during my time at UCSD, namely Stephanie Richards, Liam Clancy, Shahrokh Yadegari, Victoria Petrovich, Holly Bauer, and Karen Gocsik.

I am endlessly grateful to my family; Jim and Jean Watson, Anne Underhill, and Jennifer, Lance, Dina, Allison, and Braden Young for being my most steadfast fans and supporters, and for knowing what I'm capable of long before I did.

Finally, I would like to thank my chosen family, friends, and collaborators, for making the bad times bearable and the good times extraordinary; thank you to Kat Adams, Celia Symons, Ellen Esch, Kyle Adam Blair, Margo Alleman, Justin Murphy-Mancini, Shayla James, Sara Perez, Migueltzinta Solis, Caity Fares, Asa Mendelsohn, Jonathan Nussman, Madison Greenstone, Erin Tracy, Karen Hyland, and especially, Sadie Hochman.

VITA

2012   Bachelor of Music, University of British Columbia

2014   Master of Music, University of British Columbia

2019   Doctor of Musical Arts, University of California, San Diego

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"She Uses They/Them Pronouns": Finding a Non-Binary Voice in a Gendered World

by

Hillary Jean Young

Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music Performance

University of California San Diego, 2019

Professor Susan Narucki, Chair

The guiding question of this dissertation is if a non-binary voice is possible, and if so, how? I address this question by analyzing various facets of my creative practice and how I have navigated the ways in which my non-binary gender identity is in conflict with my instrument (which is, arguably, inherently gendered). As part of my analysis, I offer various theoretical frameworks to clarify and illuminate this conflict as it appears in my work. In the introduction, I contextualize my work by reflecting on Sarah Hennies' *Contralto* alongside my own relationship with my speaking voice and voice feminization therapy. Chapter 1 and 2 consider technological intervention as a means of liberation as well as oppression; Chapter 1

explores the patterns of silencing the female voice by withholding linguistic meaning from operatic madwomen to 21st century electroacoustic music, whereas Chapter 2 explores the possibilities of vocal effects pedals and a post-gender future. Lastly, Chapter 3 analyzes my band's multimedia piece, *Dawson'sCreamo,* and reflects on the early Internet as a queer space.

Introduction: Reflections on Voice Feminization Therapy

```
--------------------
Re: Hillary's voice

Dear
Thanks for dropping me a note. My feeling is that it is time for Hillary to be mindful of her speaking voice. She needs to maintain a forward buzzy
sensation with a mid to moderately high level pitch in her speaking voice and consciously keep her speaking voice out of her throat. I would get cross
at her when she would press her speaking voice and speak right on her cords / folds.I really wanted her to keep the pitch of her speaking voice up in
the range where it is most easily and naturally produced. Hillary speaks continually at the low end of her speaking range which is quite fatiguing and
has become a not so good habit of hers. I know that young women may think that it sounds more intelligent or mature to speak like Kathleen Turner...
BUT not at the expense of her beautiful singing voice. I just think that the singing voice is an extension of the speaking voice and in this way both
should be coming from the same resonant stable and supported place. I was always annoyed to hear Hillary's speaking voice on outgoing
messages...speaking "down in her boots" which has very little in common with with the quality of one of her peak performances ...and so it is simply
time for her to focus on how she speaks and be willing to commit to change here.
It might help her to have a few sessions with                    Registered Speech Pathologist to make a little break through here.

She helped another gifted studentof mine with reflux and could definately provide positive support, expertise and results with Hillary.

Hillary will be just fine.

Coffee next week?

Xo
```

Figure 1: Email from my former voice teacher to my mom, September 2009[1]

For the past year or so, whenever I've told any contemporary music or art-oriented person what my dissertation is about, they've almost always brought up Sarah Hennies work. Maybe I just hate doing what I'm told, but despite multiple people pointing me towards this person, I had never looked her up. However, an opportunity had presented itself: January 14th, 2019 in Los Angeles, Monday Evening Concerts had programmed Sarah Hennies' *Contralto* (2017).[2] Sadie and I read the description on the Facebook event and saw that someone was finally making contemporary classical music for us; this genre that we had seen as antagonistic and unrelated to our work was maybe closer to what we were doing than we

---

[1] Names have been removed.
[2] See Sarah Hennies' personal website (http://www.sarah-hennies.com/contralto) for clips and performance history. Also, information about this specific concert can be found on the Monday Evening Concerts website (http://www.mondayeveningconcerts.org/jan-14-2019--gay-guerrilla--contralto.html).

thought. It felt important that we go to this concert; aside from this piece being relevant to both of our creative and research interests, it felt like something momentous was happening that we should be there to witness. We clicked "Going" and looked at the train schedule.

We got to Zipper Hall and found the handful of still available seats at the nearly sold out show. The strangeness of this scenario – that a contemporary music concert in a 400-seat concert hall was nearly sold out on a rainy Monday night in LA – set the tone for how I would feel during this show and for several days after it. When *Contralto* started, it became immediately clear to me why people kept on telling me to look up Sarah Hennies. *Contralto* is an hour-long video work with live score, using a mixed ensemble who play their instruments, but also play percussion instruments primarily made up of everyday objects like plastic bottles and paper bags. The live score leaves plenty of space for what is the centrepiece of the work; the audio and video of a cast of trans women and transfeminine people doing vocal exercises as part of "voice feminization therapy". These exercises consisted of spoken phrases, vocalizations, and breathing exercises meant to bring one's voice into a higher, more forward, more "feminine" range.

The cast had all met in a class designed for trans women and transfeminine people who wished to learn to speak in a higher vocal range. As Hennies explained at the start of the show, cisgender people often don't realize that estrogen does not effect the voice in the way that testosterone does; when trans men take testosterone, their voices become lower, but for trans women, estrogen does not alter the range of their speaking voices. There are several different reasons why a trans woman or transfeminine person might go through voice feminization therapy; having a voice that doesn't match your identity can cause gender

dysphoria, also, having your speaking voice out you as trans can be inconvenient at best and dangerous at worst.

Seeing *Contralto* and hearing those vocal exercises again was surreal; 10 years earlier I too had been trying to feminize my speaking voice, but under very different circumstances. Barely aware of my queerness, I was a 17 year old opera singer in training; voice teachers heard potential when I sang but heard failure when I spoke. My speaking voice was lower than voice teachers thought a young soprano's speaking voice should be. Worse still, I spoke with plenty of vocal fry, which did not fit into the bel canto technique that classical voice teachers preached.

Between then and now, justifying my speaking voice had become something of an obsession; my research has centered voice, identity, and gender, and vocal fry has become a common feature in my work. I have armed myself with both research and lived experience to prove that how I speak is neither strange nor harmful. *Contralto* had made me rethink the reasons behind this obsession; I wondered if I had any notes or recordings leftover from these early years of trying to "correct" my speaking voice. I came across an email from 2009; in 2009, I had recently started opera school, and my new teacher had given me an ultimatum – fix my speaking voice or be kicked out of the studio. My mom had emailed my former voice teacher asking her for recommendations for a speech pathologist, and my mom had then forwarded me her response. "I know that young women may think that it sounds more intelligent or mature to speak like Kathleen Turner...BUT not at the expense of her beautiful singing voice", my former voice teacher wrote. She continues, "I was always annoyed to hear Hillary's speaking voice on outgoing messages...speaking 'down in her boots' which has very

little in common with with [sic] the quality of one of her peak performances...and so it is simply time for her to focus on how she speaks and be willing to commit to change here".[3]

As I reread this email, I was taken aback by how much I was seen as a voice first and a person second. There was no doubt that my voice teacher was concerned and invested in my success, but the idea that how a person speaks is determined by factors besides vocal health had clearly not even been considered. Furthermore, this email reads like a gut reaction that was, on the surface, about my vocal health, but unconsciously, more about gender. The harshly gendered world of opera didn't yet have space for gender non-conformity; gender-bending was reserved for calculated and contained plot devices and comedic breaks, kept strictly in context as to not seep queerness into the well-established gender roles performed both on and off stage. I hadn't made a conscious decision to speak a certain way, but nonetheless, what I was doing was seen as transgressive.

Since starting at UCSD, reclaiming vocal fry has become a central part of my creative practice. I see this vocal effect as gendered and pathologized, and yet another way that society tries to make women feel bad about themselves. Vocal fry is unbelievably fraught; it is more common amongst women, but it is vocally androgynous, existing in a very similar range for both male and female voices (Wolk et al. 2012, Nassima et al. 2014). Scholarship on the voice indicates that the voice is fundamentally equivocal and shifting. For instance, Freya Jarman-Ivens (2011) claims that the voice is inherently queer because of its in-betweeness; the voice exists because of but also outside of the body that houses it, and it connects bodies and language, which are both gendered sites.[4] In my opinion, vocal fry further exploits this

---

[3] See Figure 1 for complete correspondence.
[4] Freya Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 13.

ambiguity; if the voice is inherently queer, vocal fry is even more subversive still. In my research and creative practice, I keep coming back to these questions: Couldn't vocal fry, theoretically, be a symptom of larger societal misogyny? Are women being blamed for "masculinizing" their voices while trying to exist in a world that still sees men as both the norm and the ideal? What does all this mean for people like me who don't want to participate in the gender binary at all?

My exploration of vocal fry has allowed me to reconcile the expectations that are placed on my voice, my body, and my identity; by unpacking the ways in which my voice is flawed, I've accepted who gets to make these judgements and why. As I reflected more on *Contralto* I thought about how, technically, we had all ended up in voice feminization therapy voluntarily; these trans women wanted to exist in the world more easily, and I wanted my role models to stop talking about my speaking voice more than my singing voice.

This context of who I am in relation to my instrument spurred the larger question that guides this dissertation. The three chapters encompassed in this document each respond to the question of whether a non-binary voice is possible, and if so, how? In considering this question, certain reoccurring themes have emerged, such as imperfection, technological intervention, camp as queer aesthetic, and personal history. Chapter 1 explores how the sexism of the operatic madwoman trope has permeated vocal chamber music outside of the operatic tradition and well into the 21st century, and how language and technology have been used as means of perpetuating this sexism. In addition to my own experience as an opera singer, I contextualize my discussion amidst feminist literature on opera as well as reviews and popular commentary on contemporary operas and chamber music. Finally, I consider larger discourses on the ways in which technology – and specifically, music technology – is

gendered and how that continues to be a roadblock for assigned-female-at-birth musicians.

Chapter 2 aligns vocal effects pedals with cyborg feminism and a post gender future while

considering the voice as inherently imperfect. In addition to discussing Donna Haraway's

"Cyborg Manifesto", I will frame my discussion by considering the intersections of disability

studies and queer theory, and how vocal effects pedals can be viewed as "vocal prosthetics".

Lastly, Chapter 3 reflects on the early Internet as a queer space, and how through these

disembodied, fluid spaces, we can articulate our queer lineage. While I draw on internet

studies and discourses around queer temporalities and camp, this chapter is guided by an in-

depth analysis of my band's multimedia performance piece, *Dawson'sCreamo.*

What *Contralto* made clear to me is how we are forced to balance conformity and

authenticity, and that the voice makes that balance all the more precarious. There is this

assumption that the voice somehow displays our truest selves; we see the voice as the sonic

manifestation of who we authentically are, and yet, how we are permitted to sound is horribly

restricted. These are restrictions of gender, but also of class and race. We police each other

through microaggressions; when we point out an accent, an unusual inflection, or unfamiliar

slang, we are ever so subtly enforcing unspoken rules. *Contralto* forces the audience to see

this conflict; we witness these people trying to have their voices display their authentic selves,

but in learning to voice this true self, they are having to navigate the expectations that are

mapped on to who that true self is.

Chapter 1: Madwomen

The Western operatic canon has an entire subgenre dedicated to vocally depicting female insanity; the madscene and the trope of the madwoman is a common fixture in the operatic tradition. Sending your heroine towards insanity seems to be the plot device of choice for the grand opera composer; not only does mania give composers license to write fittingly "crazy" sounding music full of melisma and coloratura, but it also decenters said heroine's text in favour of vocal fireworks, depriving her character of the ability to convey semantic meaning.

Plenty of ink has already been spilled theorizing madwomen (McClary 1991, Clement 1988, Andre 2006) largely because standard opera repertoire has countless examples of this phenomenon: in her seminal discussion of the topic, Susan McClary (1991) explains that madwoman "are seen but are rarely given the power of language, [and] are almost never given the opportunity to speak their own experiences".[5] In discussing depictions of madwomen from the renaissance through to the 20th century, McClary explains that historically, most other media has silenced the madwoman, but because the nature of opera being a marriage of music, language, and drama, the madwoman cannot be literally silenced; she elaborates, "music delivers a sense of depth and grants the spectator license to eavesdrop upon the character's interiority".[6] McClary suggests that the reason for composers writing more exploratory music for their madwomen is to avoid audiences identifying with these tragic

---

[5] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 85.
[6] Ibid.

heroines; not only must their text be obscured, but the musical language that governs their

role must remain illusive and unrelatable.[7]

When writing madwomen, composers most often prioritize vocal extremes and

musical strangeness over explicit character development or lucidity. Wild coloratura and

ornamentation, the extremes of the singer's range, chromaticism, asymmetrical phrases, and

wide leaps are the musical and vocal qualities that female insanity seems to grant composers

special access to. For instance, I remember first listening to Thomas Adès' *The Tempest*

(2004) in opera repertoire class, with my professor first presenting us with Ariel's aria "Five

Fathoms Deep". Adès' opera is exceptional and has received primarily positive reviews, and

Ariel's aria is a central discussion point for its extremely high tessitura complete with

multiple high Es. I recognize that an ethereal spirit should be given otherworldly music, but

casting your soprano as a feminized mythical creature seems like a very similar plot device to

the madwoman insofar as it allows the composer to write more experimental vocal lines.[8] This

similarity leads to equally problematic results in how people discuss Ariel's music and Cyndia

Seiden's virtuosic performance.[9] For example, *Opera News* critic Joshua Rosenblum

describes Ariel as "a whacked-out coloratura, Mozart's Queen of the Night put through a

blender";[10] popular critic Alex Ross explains that "Cyndia Seiden [subdues] this homicidal

---

[7] Ibid., 86.
[8] In productions of the original play, Ariel is often referred to using male pronouns but was likely at first primarily performed by young boys, and then post-Restoration, performed by women and occasionally boys or men. Cross-gender casting of mythical creatures was a common Restoration practice. For an introduction to ambiguously gendered spirits in Shakespeare, see Amanda Eubanks Winkler's "Sexless Spirits?: Gender Ideology and Dryden's Musical Magic" (2010)
[9] Thomas Adès, *The Tempest,* BBC Broadcast from Covent Garden 2007, released by EMI Classics June 2009.
[10] Joshua Rosenblum, "Adès: *The Tempest,*" *Opera News,*
https://www.operanews.com/operanews/recording/recording.aspx?id=1697.

part";[11] words like "stratospheric", "punishing", and "ear-splitting" show up in multiple reviews. Being credited as taming a role described in such frightening terms is a compliment, but I think it is telling that we are impressed by the perceived suffering of the singer at the hands of an unforgiving vocal line. Adès' *The Tempest* was controversial insofar as it involved rewriting Shakespeare – most reviews mention the successes and failures of Meredith Oakes' libretto, including that iconic phrases like "full fathom five" had to be sacrificed – but as Rosenblum admits, "ninety percent of [Ariel's] words are incomprehensible", which he affirms "is the composer's fault, not hers".[12]

Despite the noteworthiness of *The Tempest'*s libretto, it seems that as soon as the unhinged coloratura soprano role tries to weigh in, whatever she is actually saying doesn't matter provided her vocalizing is terrifyingly impressive enough. In instances like this, it is as if the composer is containing the madness depicted on stage; an important part of exploiting the madwoman trope is alienating her from the other sane characters on stage and making sure she remains difficult for the audience to empathize with. McClary explains this structure of control as follows: "within the confines of the represented scene itself are male displayers of the madwoman. As scientists they are in control. They represent the normal, the bars of reason that protect the spectator from the monster".[13]

It goes without saying that opera has had a profound influence on classical vocal writing overall; among other things, it has shaped vocal pedagogy and technique, which has then shaped how composers write for the voice in other classical genres. Although bel canto

---

[11]Alex Ross, "Rich and Strange: A 'Tempest' Opera by Adès," *New Yorker,* March 1, 2004, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/03/01/rich-and-strange.
[12] Rosenblum, "Adès."
[13] McClary, *Feminine Endings,* 85.

technique may have developed with the salon or small concert hall in mind, as orchestras and opera houses grew in size, vocal pedagogy had to adjust too. How classical singers learn to sing is structured around the assumption that the end goal is a powerful, flexible, and refined sound ready for the operatic stage. Not only that, classical singers themselves often see opera as the primary career path; even among my own voice students I notice an assumption that learning arias is somehow more prestigious or virtuosic than singing art song. Although there are certainly singers who have had fulfilling careers solely as recitalists, it is understood that they are the exception.

In addition, musical priorities found in opera seep into other genres; gendered assumptions about which voices are allowed to do what are maintained. In some ways, this silencing of female voices is also present in 20th and 21st century vocal chamber music; Luciano Berio, Milton Babbitt, and many others fragment text, use phonemes instead of actual words, and incorporate auxiliary vocal sounds.[14] I can think of a handful of contemporary vocal pieces that I have sung or studied that fall into this category. For example, earlier on in my journey as a contemporary vocalist, I had the opportunity to learn and perform the fourth book of George Crumb's *Madrigals*. I still love this piece; its unusual textures and carefully constructed interplay between instruments are exceptional. However, Lorca's incredibly evocative text is simply another texture with little emphasis put on the images the poet has painted. Even as a young artist coaching this music for the first time, I recall my coaches and mentors' discussion of the text being more of an afterthought as if the performance practice itself dictated that the text not be a priority for the performer. Similarly,

---

[14] In her book, *Singing the Body Electric: The Human Voice and Sound Technology* (2015), Miriama Young includes an exhaustive list of electro-vocal works, many of which include vocalizations outside of language with semantic meaning (181).

some 20th and 21st century composers are interested in setting ancient or dead languages; for instance, in Kaija Saariaho's *Lonh,* she sets an epic Occitan poem, and although the average francophone could likely understand some key words, using language as a means of communicating is clearly not the goal in this context.

I am not arguing that composers don't honour their text and their poet's intentions, and I am not suggesting that composers don't choose and set text judiciously and meticulously. Instead, I am illuminating what I see as a problematic pattern; it seems to me that when composers set texts in a way that doesn't prioritize the semantic meaning of the text it is usually when they are writing for female voices. Furthermore, it concerns me that this pattern has prevailed from baroque opera into the present day.

I acknowledge that vocal music that is not centered on conveying semantic meaning sometimes has other goals or priorities; free from linguistic constraints, composers may want to explore the capabilities and expressivity of the instrument itself, and singers may want to explore other expressive facets of their instrument and embrace the technical challenge of executing virtuosic vocal writing. As discussed with Ariel's aria, tackling technically rigorous vocal writing can be a satisfying pursuit for a well-trained singer, and although the precedent behind this kind of vocal writing may be problematic, it is certainly sonically affecting without communicating semantic meaning.

However, I maintain that the hierarchical binary that is at play is harmful; there are very few madscenes written for men for a reason, and even in the 21st century – despite the efforts of several high-profile organizations and institutions[15] – male composers receive more

---

[15] For example, the Hildegard Competition for Female, Trans, and Non-Binary Composers, GRiNM: Gender Relations in New Music (formally known as GRID: Gender Research in Darmstadt), or the fact that in 2017, for the first time ever, all three Pulitzer Prize for Music nominees were women.

recognition than female composers. In general, there is less contemporary vocal chamber music written for male voices, which begs the question: if contemporary composers are so interested in exploring the voice as an instrument without linguistic capabilities, why is the male voice less desirable for this purpose?[16] Even in contexts where there is a female composer writing for female voice – like the above mentioned Saariaho, for instance – the precedent, tradition, and performance practice have already been set: in classical voice, we don't need to understand what women are saying, so we also don't need to listen to them or give them anything to say.

The silencing of the female voice turns the singer into a vessel through which the composer speaks, which further emphasizes how we prioritize certain perspectives over others. I argue that this gendered divide between lucidity and insanity – in other words, who has agency over language versus who doesn't – is further exploited in contemporary electroacoustic music because the gendered assumptions around technology only deepen and solidify the harmful binaries at play. In her article "Bodies of Evidence, Singing Cyborgs and Other Gender Issues in Electrovocal Music", scholar Hannah Bosma (2003) discusses how issues of gender and performer-composer hierarchies manifest in contemporary electroacoustic music. As she explains the standard pairing of female vocalist with male electroacoustic composer "relates woman to body, performance, tradition, non verbal sound

---

[16] To preface her analysis of prominent operatic madscenes, McClary cites Elaine Showalters study of the gendered history of psychiatry and association of madness with the feminine; Showalters explains female sexuality was frequently blamed for causing hysteria, and was therefore more prevalent in women (but, incidentally, male madness was also still blamed on women, as it pointed to there being something "wrong" with the male patient's masculinity) (qtd. in McClary 84). Showalters adds that this connection between insanity and the feminine was then repeatedly represented in various 19th and early 20th century media (including opera), thus reiterating this connection to the public (qtd. in McClary 84).

and singing, and man to electronic music technology, innovation, language, and authority".[17]

To further exemplify this point, Bosma cites Kaja Silverman's highly influential discussion of

the female voice in cinema; Silverman (1988) argues that the acousmatic, disembodied voice

(such as a voiceover, for example) is most often male, while the embodied voice – meaning,

the voice that is emanating from the body we see on screen – is most often female.[18] This

immediately places the women's voice in a more vulnerable role; as viewers, we understand

that if the body that is creating the voice should cease to exist, than the voice will no longer

exist as well, while the omnipotent, acousmatic male voice seems to remain an untouchable

authority. Similarly, Michel Chion (1999), who coined the term "acousmatic", elaborates that

when women scream on screen, it is out of fear or ecstacy, whereas when men scream, it is

out of power and dominance.[19] Bosma explains that this same pattern is mapped onto opera;

while coloratura soprano arias have only become increasingly higher and more unintelligible,

male operatic arias have become more speechlike.[20]

 Although Bosma acknowledges the ways in which this performer-composer

relationship is problematic, she maintains that this abundance of contemporary electroacoustic

music written for and with women's voices is an empowering sharing of authorship. The

electroacoustic music that Bosma is describing usually has a tape or electronics part that

incorporates the singer's voice as a part of the sonic material that is then usually processed

and manipulated as the composer sees fit. This harnessing, controlling, and exploiting of the

---

[17] Hannah Bosma, "Bodies of Evidence, Singing Cyborgs and Other Gender Issues in Electrovocal Music," *Organized Sound* 8, no. 1 (2003): 12.
[18] Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: the Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 48.
[19] Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema,* ed. and trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 78.
[20] Bosma, "Bodies of Evidence", 12.

female voice erases the human behind the voice entirely; the voice becomes nothing more than a material, stripping it of its inherent corporeality.

There is extensive scholarship on the ways in which technology is gendered, and more specifically, masculinized; technology has been historically intertwined with power and militarization, which has then given certain populations more access than others (Everts 1998, Adam and Green 2001). Judy Wajcman (2004) summarizes this conversation as follows: "Feminists have identified men's monopoly of technology as an important source of their power; women's lack of technological skills as an important element of their dependence on men. Whilst there is broad agreement on this issue, the question whether the problem lies in men's monopoly of technology or whether technology itself is inherently patriarchal remains more contentious".[21] Years after discourses around technofeminism have pointed to the potential subversiveness of technology, we are still dealing with its masculine history; for instance, there are still significantly more men than women in STEM fields, presumably as a result of unequal access. In the context of musicmaking, recording studios are still male dominated spaces, and any woman who has ever gone to buy any kind of audio equipment would agree that the condescension is palpable from the moment she walks in the store. In her book, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound*, Tara Rodgers (2010) affirms that electronic music and production have historically ignored women's contributions; she explains that "some of the most important contributions to the study of electronic music and sound have positioned women outside of the scope of study", citing various scholars who have either diminished or completely ignored women participants in the genre.[22] Rodgers

---

[21] Judy Wajcman, *TechnoFeminism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 12.
[22] Tara Rodgers, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 11.

explains that the prevalence of scholarship like this insinuates to society at large that women don't (or might as well not) exist in electronic music.[23]

Naturally, this gendered divide manifests itself in a variety of media. Zoe Sofia (2000) explains that "the technological forms associated both with traditional labors of women, and with metaphors for female organs of storage, transformation, and supply...are regularly overlooked in histories and analyses of technologies".[24] Rodgers' utilizes Sofia's discussion of container technologies to unpack the skepticism around women as producers; she explains, "one obstacle to thinking of women as *producers* of electronic music culture may be that they are always already entwined with a logic of *reproduction*".[25] In other words, women being denied access to means of music production could be based on larger cultural assumptions about femininity representing passivity and maternality, dictating that rather than creating (or producing), women should be facilitating (reproducing). Julia E. Dyck (2016) elaborates that technology is feminized when it is meant to be submissive, harmless, or desirable; she cites the example of Siri having a feminine persona that makes it seem benevolent and accommodating, instead of like a powerful and nuanced technology that has access to a wealth of sensitive information.[26] In other words, because technology falls along gendered lines – meaning, when it is "masculine" technology, it is all powerful, but when it is "feminine technology", it is submissive and innocuous – we feel the need to assert our

---

[23] Ibid.
[24] Zoe Sofia, "Container Technologies," *Hypatia* 15, no. 2 (2000): 185.
[25] Rodgers, *Pink Noises,* 12.
[26] Julia E. Dyck, "Cellphones and Cyborgs," *Julia E. Dyck,* accessed January 1, 2019. http://www.juliaedyck.com/cellphones-and-cyborgs.

dominance over it, and in a patriarchal world, that means affirming both divisions and alliances between humans and machines and men and women.[27]

In essence, technology seems like it could be the neutral ground that could bridge a gendered hierarchical divide, and yet, we map our systems of oppression on to the inanimate. Patterns repeat themselves; what started as the operatic madwoman became the malleable, wordless female voice, both simply a means of expression for the male composer. As this divide develops, technology is used to further separate the voice from the body that created it; the woman's voice no longer belongs to the woman herself, and the supposedly neutral body behind the mixing board is assumed to be male.

What bothers me most about these issues with authorship and agency is that technology is being used as a means of oppression when it could be a means of liberation. What the above examples demonstrate is that the divisions and hierarchies that are at the core of the classical music tradition remain despite how dramatically our tools have changed; I've explained the implications of this in the context of electroacoustic music, but even women composers of acoustic music are likely writing music with software designed by and implicitly for men.

Certain populations have had greater access to learning how to use music technologies to their advantage; despite understanding the potential of using technology in a liberating and empowering way, I am still overcoming my apprehensions about incorporating technology into my artistry. In my training as an opera singer, my assigned tasks were clear and the hierarchies around me were well established; my job was to sing and act while maintaining

---

[27] Recently, there has been a movement to remove gender bias in AI assistants. See https://www.genderlessvoice.com/.

musical accuracy and vocal beauty, and the set or effects that I would need to interact with would be taken care of for me. Executing these specific tasks seamlessly is no small feat, but nonetheless, everything outside of these tasks we are expected to not interfere with. In building my creative practice, I have embraced interdisciplinarity and taking on roles and responsibilities outside of my area of expertise. In doing this, I have also learned to embrace the rough edges; historically, opera has been about perfection and refinement, which my own practice has actively fought against. So much of my work is DIY, which requires me to be a producer, a curator, a collaborator, and a performer, and to therefore both accept the messiness that comes with making something out of nothing and accept the necessity of trial and error.

       I lack a kind of fluency with technology that many of my assigned-male-at-birth colleagues possess, which means that I am often asking for help or making educated guesses. Either way, I am left at a disadvantage and feeling as though I am following a tradition that I don't want to be a part of. Despite this disadvantage, I have found that technological intervention has taken on an irreplaceable role in my work; in the following chapter, I will unpack the ways in which I have found possibility in an otherwise unwelcoming landscape.

Chapter 2: Cyborgs

In the way that vocal fry broadened my view of where voice and gender collide, working with a loop pedal granted me a new kind of freedom and autonomy. As a singer of classical music, I rarely perform unaccompanied. Similarly, I am rarely on stage alone; I am usually sharing the stage with other instrumentalists who are accompanying me or other singers that are singing with me. This never really bothered me; I have always been a fairly social musician, and I have been lucky to always be surrounded by friends who are also talented artists and wonderful collaborators. However, this idea of self-sufficiency intrigued me; it's not that I felt limited by my collaborative relationships, but more that the possibility of performing alone but not being limited to a monophonic line felt new and worth exploring. I wondered, what if I could make a full musical texture or accompaniment with just my voice?

Singers accompanying themselves is nothing new, but it is rare in the classical chamber music and opera traditions that I had been immersed in, and it was certainly new to me. I have never been much of an instrumentalist, but loop pedal allows me to play my voice like an instrument. I can pick apart certain sounds and decontextualize them, or I can make my voice sound like something else entirely. As singers, the only way we can hear our instruments like our listeners do is by recording ourselves, which is essentially what a loop pedal does, but live. What I have found most fascinating about this work is the way it complicates where my voice and my self begin and end by turning the ephemeral into the material. With this tool, what would usually be fleeting takes on a new meaning via repetition; I am able to now make a multilayered sonic object out of my voice, an instrument that is usually only capable of a monophonic line. Furthermore, it has allowed me to challenge

conventions of what classical voices can or should do by blurring the boundaries of the instrument and the genre.

If we consider the most obvious and most human "flaws" of the voice as an instrument – that it is monophonic, that it is idiosyncratic, and that it is tangled up with the body and mind that is creating it, making it impossible for the performer to hear their sound as the audience does – loop pedal has allowed me to mostly correct those flaws in a live setting without the intervention of another person behind a mixing board. In attempting to overcome the restrictions of the voice and its humanness, and, in turn, it's genderedness, loop pedal has allowed me to make my voice less "human"; I can choose to loop parts of my voice that have less human or gendered signifiers, such as unpitched extra vocal sounds or breath.

In unpacking my work with loop pedal, I have found discourses around prosthesis especially relevant. Queer theory and disability studies intersect in how they discuss corporeality and subjectivity; they both question what constitutes normative embodiment. Queer theory is interested in how disability studies challenges what constitutes corporeality overall; although disability studies grapples with its own binary of disabled and non-disabled, there is still an openness to a kind of embodiment that embraces transformation, extension, and reconstruction.[28] The comparison between more fluid modes of embodiment and a queer futurity is clear; both are exploring possibilities outside of normative, capitalist notions of trajectory and conformity. Similarly, both theories discuss how we may explore these possibilities, from the tools we need to address normativity to the ways in which we should

---

[28] Margaret Shildrick, "Prosthetic Performativity: Deleuzian Connection and Queer Corporealities" in *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, edited by Chrysanthi Nigiani and Merl Stor (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 115.

adjust our assumptions (or do away with them altogether). In sum, prosthesis can be seen as a topic that both theories weigh in on.

The term "prosthetics" has been adopted by multiple schools of thought outside of disability studies, but its use remains controversial. Margaret Shildrick (2009) acknowledges Katherine Ott's (2002) discussion of the way in which the term "prosthetics" has been used and reused in sometimes problematic ways; Ott explains that "many scholars use the term 'prosthesis' regularly, and often reductively, as a synonym for common forms of machine-body interface", and although this comparison can be illuminating, it also disregards the history of prosthetics and the people who use them out of practical or social necessity.[29] Ott points out Haraway's cyborg as being an especially complex reinterpretation of prosthesis, but Shildrick maintains that these two definitions of prosthesis can coexist. As she explains, "on the one hand, prosthetic devices are intended to replace or enhance normative function and appearance...but on the other, their use may be radically subverted".[30]

To clarify, scholars see prosthetics in the most basic sense as tools and technologies, but with much greater social and cultural implications; Ott explains that a prosthesis "can be simple or complex, homemade or mass-produced, mechanically engineered or high-tech. Nor is a prosthesis, as is true of every technology, hardware alone. It can serve as a prop or an accessory, a means to accomplish work, indicate gender, and so on".[31] In other words, the material definitions of prosthesis are fluid and personal, but what it means to use prosthetics, either by need or desire, is multifaceted. I explain these various definitions of prosthesis in

---

[29] Katherine Ott, "The Sum of its Parts: An Introduction to Modern Histories of Prosthetics" n *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives: Modern Histories of Prosthetics,* edited by Katherine Ott, David Serlin, and Stephen Mihm (New York: NYU Press, 2002), 3.
[30] Shildrick, "Prosthetic Performativity", 122.
[31] Ott, "The Sum of its Parts", 16.

order to demonstrate that although these definitions are vague and fluid, the purposes of these prosthetics are specific and highly personal.

Similarly, Ott emphasizes that there is an important differentiation to be made between prosthetics for disabilities versus the technofeminist cyborg: choice. When prosthesis are voluntary, society at large sees them as attractive, cutting edge, or sexy, whereas when the wearer has less of a choice in how or why they are using prosthesis, or when prosthesis reference disability, they are no longer seen as appealing.[32] In other words, one side is exceeding the capabilities of the normative human body while the other is trying to meet the expected capabilities of the normative human body. In this case, the cyborg is much more aligned with my work with loop pedal; it is a tool that grants me access to more than what my voice is naturally capable of. Similarly, I am using this tool by choice; although my speaking voice has been a source of contention, my technologically unaltered singing voice is essentially meeting social and cultural expectations about what a voice should do. However, I agree with Shildrick's assertion that these definitions can coexist, and for the purposes of my discussion, Ott's fluid definition of prosthesis will suffice.

As Donna Haraway (1991) defines it, the cyborg is "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction".[33] The image that is conjured for us when we imagine the cyborg is a construction of contemporary science fiction and mainstream representations of futurism. However, this definition is fairly incomplete considering everything else the cyborg represents. Haraway's cyborg is a

---

[32] Ibid., 21.
[33] Haraway, Donna, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149.

manifestation of the incompatible coexisting; for instance, she likens the cyborg to irony because it is an example of the playful and the serious working in collaboration.[34] Additionally, Haraway sees the cyborg as a way of bridging the "border war" between machine and organism; these borders control "the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination", borders that Haraway argues should be overthrown.[35] In other words, Haraway argues "for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction".[36]

Most obviously, the cyborg confuses the boundaries between natural and synthetic, human and technology. In breaking down these divides, it also deconstructs categories encompassed within these oppositional sides; divides between human and animal, male and female, and nature and culture are also brought into question. More broadly, Haraway asserts that technology has grown further and further from the human-made and human-controlled masculinist machine and has adopted more anthromorphic characteristics, such as the ability to learn and develop on their own.[37] Furthermore, the cyborg forces us to face an alternative to the organic whole; instead of favouring what is deemed natural and complete, the cyborg requires us to embrace partiality, patchwork, and contradiction.[38]

The cyborg encourages us to see possibility in what society often sees as deficiency. In other words, what I want to emphasize is Shildrick's claim that the disabled body, with all it's "deformations" and "missing parts and prosthesis" actually make possible new ways of being and desiring that are uninhibited by normative assumptions and conventions.[39] This point –

---

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 150.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 152.
[38] Ibid., 151.
[39] Shildrick, "Prosthetic Performativity", 122.

that the "flawed" body that adopts tools in order to make do, and in so doing, uncovers new ways of being – seems to be where notions of queer futurity and the cyborg meet. Queer futurity is often depicted as favouring possibility over mere pragmatism. Additionally, it also favours non-linear trajectories in a similar way to the cyborg, rejecting totality in pursuit of partiality and multiplicity.

Questioning completeness and incompleteness also complicates the previously discussed definitions of prosthetics; in an attempt to conform, one's prosthetics are actually allowing them to exceed expectations of how to exist in one's body. If our two definitions of prosthetics can coexist, they can also shift and intermingle; prosthetics can represent post-human possibility as well as present-tense uncertainty and necessity both simultaneously and fluidly.

 In regard to the voice, the cyborg is one more lens we can use to examine the posthuman and postgender possibilities of the voice. Vocal prosthetics, such as loop pedals, queer the voice insofar as they expand its possibilities past cisnormative understandings of what certain voices (and, in turn, what certain bodies) can or should do. Using vocal prosthetics can make a plethora of vocal colours and effects available to the performer; the singer can change the range of their voice or obscure it altogether, they can duplicate their voice or distill it down to an unnaturally pure tone, or they can expose and distort gendered vocal signifiers. Most notably, the fragmentation of loop pedal effects mirrors the cyborg's partiality and contradiction; the looped voice can incorporate a vast range of timbres, colours, and effects, but while still holding the sound of the singing voice as well.

Vocal effects pedals are a fairly obvious example of how technological intervention plays out in my practice. However, technological intervention as a means of exploring

multiplicity manifests much more abstractly in how central a role the Internet plays in my

work. In the following chapter, I will discuss how the early Internet was a fluid, queer space

that allowed for exploration and discovery of identity and community, and how in

remembering this space, queer temporalities are activated and queer lineage is articulated.

Chapter 3: MySpace

When I talk to other queer millennials about their adolescent realizations about their identities, they all talk about the Internet. Most of my generation started to have regular (albeit dial-up) access to the Internet in our early teens. For those of us who were queer or questioning, that was where many of us found our first queer communities, often without fully realizing or understanding it. For example, you would often find yourself in these online queer spaces via an interest or obsession that ran much deeper than you could articulate; you would spend the early hours of the morning messaging back and forth with other Tegan and Sara fans, feeling a closeness with people who you knew were far enough away that your real life friends would never find out about them.

That was the other thing about the Internet that made it so appealing: it never slept. Normal rules about time and space seemed to not apply because no matter where you were or what time it was, as long as you had a decent connection, you didn't have to be alone. Nowadays, we take many aspects of the Internet for granted, but back then, virtual communities and self-discovery through online spaces was not only innovative, but an essential part of a generation's queer adolescence.

The temporal and spatial fluidity of the Internet has been a much disputed topic in the field of Internet studies; this shiftiness and spaciousness has inspired scholars to suggest that the Internet could liberate us from systemic oppressions that our society has perpetuated (Turkle 1999). Jessa Lingel (2017) explains that "part of the reason that the notion of collapsing of space has persisted has to do with the ways that spatial metaphors proliferate in common discourses about the Internet. From web *sites* to page *visits*, our language for talking

about online interactions is heavily indebted to metaphors of space".[40] However, scholars affirm that despite the "placelessness" of the Internet – that it lacks the clearly defined boundaries and rules that we use to define and differentiate one physical space from the next – it is still nearly impossible to free ourselves online from the prejudice we experience offline. For instance, in her discussion of how users gender each other in online communities, Jodi O'Brien (1998) explains that "we use existing cultural representations to give meaningful order to uncharted netscapes"; in other words, even though the Internet doesn't have the same violent histories that create systemic oppressions as they exist in our offline world, we continue to map these aggressions and assumptions on to each other online in order to maintain familiar, pre existing societal structures.[41] For example, there has been extensive research that suggests that female gamers frequently experience harassment about their legitimacy and expertise in online gaming not unlike what many women experience in male dominated spaces offline.[42]

In addition to becoming increasingly skeptical about what problems the Internet is actually capable of solving, the once clear lines between reality and virtuality have grown increasingly porous; as Lingel describes, before we carried the Internet around in our pockets, it was much easier to draw a line between our online life and our "real" life, but the omnipresence of our current day Internet makes these distinctions much less clear.[43] Early Internet allowed for a clear divide, which explains why discourses around early Internet are so

---

[40] Jessa Lingel, *Digital Countercultures and the Struggle for Community* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 27.
[41] Jodi O'Brien, "Writing in the Body: Gender (Re)Production in Online Interaction.," in *Communities in Cyberspace,* edited by Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollack (London: Routledge, 1999), 94.
[42] In their article, "Female Gamers' Experience of Online Harassment and Social Support in Online Gaming: A Qualitative Study" (2018), Lavinia McLean and Mark D. Griffiths discuss recent research on the experience of female gamers online.
[43] Lingel, *Digital Countercultures,* 23.

utopian; the ability to identify where reality and virtuality begin and end makes a grass-is-greener kind of perspective quite alluring. In other words, having a clear divide between how we live offline versus online allows us to hold up the parts of our offline realities that we wish were more like our online lives, and vice versa. Lingel elaborates that despite being discussed and problematized by Internet studies scholars, notions of the internet as a means of liberation from time, space, and embodiment are often still touted as the ways in which the Internet is capable of fulfilling our utopian dreams.[44] Early Internet studies saw cyberspace as a place outside of our previous definitions of what constitutes a place (Johnson and Post 1996, Barlow 1995); the Internet was democratically constructed by its users, space on the Internet lacked governance and ownership, and with these two characteristics, users were able to create and curate their online realities free from oppressive, offline systems. Fisher and Wright (2001) explain that this early Internet scholarship saw the Internet as a way to build a community built on communication, affirming Johnson and Post's emphasis on the autonomy and agency of each individual user as a means of liberation.[45] These notions were and still are overly idealistic; Lingel emphasizes that the Internet is far from utopian or innocent, explaining that it, too, is a part of a larger structure of corporations profiting off of the Internet who then look to theorists to perpetuate our positive connotations of the internet as a place of freedom, exploration, and community.[46] Users' total control of their online surroundings and identities is the fundamental quality that made the early Internet seem utopian, but it is also

---

[44] Ibid., 28.
[45] D.R. Fisher and L.M. Wright, "On Utopias and Dystopias: Toward an Understanding of the Discourse Surrounding the Internet," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 6, no. 2 (2001) doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2001.tb00115.x, para 20.
[46] Lingel, *Digital Countercultures,* 28.

the quality that was easiest to take away with the Internet becoming owned and controlled by larger political and corporate bodies.

The early Internet allowed for more malleable and fluid online identities; instead of having all accounts link together to form one cohesive online presence, it embraced having a multitude of online identities attached to disparate communities.[47] Sherry Turkle's "Cyberspace and Identity" (1999) is often named as an influential discussion of the liberating potential of the Internet, however, she is also specifically referring to the Internet's ability to allow the user to explore multiple selves. Turkle argues that multiple online identities are a manifestation of the turn away from notions of a unitary self; as she explains, "online experiences with 'parallel lives' are part of the significant cultural context that supports new theorizing about nonpathological, indeed healthy, multiple selves".[48]

In this vein, I suggest that the liberation that the early Internet provided was a liberation from the assumption of a singular, cohesive self. This then leads me to believe that the hope of an online utopia comes from users' ability to embrace all sides of themselves, which could, theoretically, make users more empathetic to others who also have complex, multifaceted identities.

The change in how we exist on and relate to the Internet has been gradual but, in my opinion, also represents a shift in the queerness of the Internet. In general, we could describe the Internet as queer because it is fluid and hard to define; if we recall Jarman-Ivens' definition, queerness "cannot be and does not want to be contained".[49] The early Internet –

---

[47] Having multiple online platforms linking together is sometimes called "bootstrapping". See Lingel (130) for discussion of the larger implications of bootstrapping on identity exploration.
[48] Sherry Turkle, "Cyberspace and Identity," *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 2 (1998): 647.
[49] Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices,* 16.

what I define as pre-Facebook, so before 2007[50] – was inherently more subcultural because very little was centralized; early Internet users had to uncover their communities over time, as opposed to everything just being a Google search away. Therefore, although the Internet may still be queer in how its boundaries are difficult to define, I suggest that the early Internet favoured multiplicity over centralization, which made it inherently against conformity and normitivity. It is worth saying that the queer ontology of the Internet – the ways in which the Internet is a shifting, boundaryless realm that encompasses diverse identities and experiences – is different than the practices of queer individuals in online spaces, but in my opinion, this is an example of practice and ontology being highly interconnected and reliant on each other.

This early era of online queer community resonates with me, so it is no wonder that my work so often looks back at it fondly. My best friend Sadie and I created a queercore performance project that explicitly deals with this queer early Internet, and more specifically, MySpace. MySpace was important to both of us because it centered around music; your favourite bands would have their own pages, you could customize what music auto-played when others would go to your profile, and you could join groups devoted to various fandoms where you could interact with other like-minded users.

The indie music scene that thrived on MySpace occurred somewhat by accident and was certainly not built into the site's original intention. MySpace was launched in 2003 with the intention of grabbing former Friendster users; Friendster experienced significant backlash

---

[50] According to boyd and Ellison (2007), MySpace had its heyday in 2004-2005, but in July 2005, MySpace had a series of well-publicized privacy and safety incidences which caused its popularity to wain. Facebook was made available to high school networks in mid-2005, and then corporate networks in early 2006, and finally, the general public in late 2006. I also acknowledge that this era of early Internet I am referring to is subjective and personal, and inherently lacks a strict timeline. I am doing my best to speak to a millennial experience of adolescence on the Internet with the understanding that my perception of this experience will be at least partially influenced by nostalgia and my imperfect memory.

from their users when the rumour spread that they were going to become a fee-based service, which then spurred users to jump ship to other up and coming social network sites (SNSs).[51] The most notable subgroup to switch to MySpace were Los Angeles-based indie rock bands, which the Santa Monica-based MySpace quickly took note of; although MySpace was not necessarily designed for bands, Myspace was quick to accommodate their needs.[52] As boyd and Ellison explain, "the symbiotic relationship between bands and fans helped MySpace expand beyond former Friendster users. The bands-and-fans dynamic was mutually beneficial: Bands wanted to be able to contact their fans, while fans desired attention from their favorite bands and used Friend connections to signal identity and affiliation".[53]

This balance between affiliation and anonymity is an important part of the culture of SNSs. boyd and Ellison (2007) explain that SNSs are not usually used to meet strangers, but rather to clarify and articulate their pre-existing relationships, even if these relationships are merely at an acquaintance level.[54] However, as far as MySpace is concerned, there is also an understanding of a demarcation between public and private spaces; for instance, groups were public spaces where you were likely to interact with people you did not know (even as acquaintances) in your offline life, but one's profile was a space reserved for closer affiliations. Users would "friend" people they knew offline as well as bands or artists that they liked. In describing MySpace's growth, boyd and Ellison explain that "three distinct populations began to form: musicians/artists, teenagers, and the post-college urban social

---

[51] boyd, danah and Nicole Ellison. "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 11 (2007), 216. boyd and Ellison "define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (211).
[52] Ibid., 217.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 211.

crowd. By and large, the latter two groups did not interact with each other except through bands".[55]

boyd and Ellison elaborate that articulating friendship links is a crucial part of online identity representation, and MySpace's combination of unidirectional and bidirectional friending lent itself especially well to exploiting this social capital; most personal MySpace profiles were set to "Friends only" by default – meaning that both users would have to be friends with each other in order to view each other's profile – but most artists and bands had public profiles that users could friend without the artist or band friending them back.[56] However, the fact that a user had friended a band or artist was visible on the user's profile, then displaying the fandoms that that user subscribes to, especially if a user chooses to put that band or artist in their "Top 8".[57] These social processes and dynamics demonstrate a kind of queer, unspoken communication; in other words, by advertising your interests and allegiances, you are able to signal the community you are (or want to be) a part of.

The recognition of social nuances involved in SNSs played a central role in how Sadie and I constructed our project, coyly titled "masc4masc". We chose the name masc4masc because it is emblematic of queer online vernacular, but is also critical of what these terms imply. masc4masc harkens back to the terms used on the now outlawed Craigslist personals section, another point of early online queer connection. masc4masc in particular is a controversial term that is still used on present day apps like Grindr to indicate masculine, "straight-acting", muscular men seeking the same. This term is problematic because despite

---

[55] Ibid., 217.
[56] Ibid., 218.
[57] For a more in-depth discussion of taste performance, see Hugo Liu's (2007) data analysis of interest tokens on MySpace profiles

the fact that the queer community contains a diverse range of bodies, identities, and gender expressions, this term perpetuates the notion that the object of desire is normatively masculine and attractive (and implicitly white).[58] Sadie and I chose to name our project after this term because we knew the work we would be making would be in stark contrast to what the phrase masc4masc represents online; our work is imperfect, tender, and far from homonormative, undermining the toxic masculinity encompassed in the name we have given ourselves. Our name is also explicitly referencing the subcultural nature of online queerness; for example, when we tell people what our project is called, most people don't get it, but those who do know exactly what we are referring to.

Along with recording an EP, we decided our project needed a website that looked as close to a circa 2004 MySpace profile as possible, complete with a functional audio player (for our EP) and interactive comment section.[59] Attention to detail was an important part of capturing the spirit of the early MySpace user experience, but another reason we wanted to create an online platform independent from current social media platforms was because we wanted to replicate the underground, subcultural nature of the early Internet. Our website requires you to partake in a quintessential early Internet experience of having to type in a specific URL in order to find a specific website as opposed to finding what you are looking for via social media or Google. It was also important to us that our website be interactive in order to simulate the connections made in comment sections and forums.

---

[58] Duncan Shuckerow, "Take Off Your Masc: The Hegemonic Gender Performance of Gay Males on Grindr," Bachelor's Thesis (Columbia College Chicago, 2014), 4.
[59] Our website URL is as follows: http://masc4mascband.herokuapp.com/bands/1
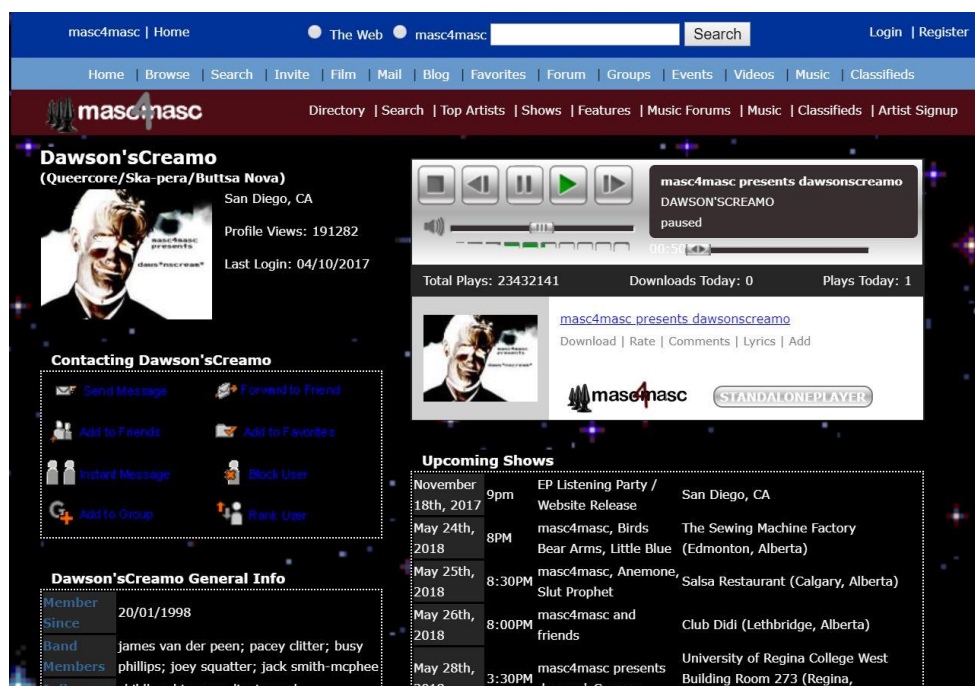
Figure 2: Screenshot of masc4masc's website modeled after early 2000s Myspace

Our website and live show are meant to capture the confessional quality of SNSs, and

the specific way in which MySpace facilitated subcultural communities via customization.

The text-based features of SNSs always include messaging and commenting capabilities, as

well as the ability to blog in varying contexts (updating one's status on Facebook versus

posting to one's LiveJournal, for instance).[60] On our website, we feature blog posts written

from the perspectives of our stage personae as well as exchanges in the comments section

with both real and invented fans. Our Top 8 includes Tom[61] as well as several era-appropriate

artists and actors, signifying social affiliation and community. As far as customization was

concerned, MySpace was exceptional; users were able to add in HTML to customize the

---

[60] boyd and Ellison, "Social Network Sites", 212.
[61] When you would sign up for a Myspace account, "Tom" (Tom Anderson, MySpace co-creator and former CEO) was immediately added as your first default friend. Often, if you didn't yet have many friends, Tom would remain in your Top 8.

background, colour scheme, and cursor of their profiles, which then gave birth to an independent coding culture of websites providing HTML specifically designed for this purpose.[62] Our website fully embraces this aesthetic of customization, complete with a twinkling background and embedded gifs.

In constructing our live show (titled the same as our EP, *Dawson'sCreamo*), we decided that our show should have a film component where the website could be featured as an online meeting place for the film's characters. The visual centerpiece of our show is a recut and reimagining of the pilot of seminal teen drama *Dawson's Creek.* Naturally, our version of the pilot involves queering the story line so that the original heterosexual love triangle becomes a story of unrequited queer romance. Internally queering your favourite pop culture objects and icons – meaning mapping an alternative queer narrative onto the actual existing cisgender or heterosexual narrative – is a standard part of queer adolescence that we then actualized in both the music and the narrative of *Dawson'sCreamo*.

The plot of *Dawson'sCreamo* starts in a similar way to the actual pilot of *Dawson's Creek*; Pacey, Dawson, and Joey are already friends in their small town (in our version: Dawson Creek, British Columbia), and Jenny has just moved there. The four characters realize through a series of online interactions on masc4masc's MySpace page that they are all fans and are all becoming increasingly interested in queerness, pop punk, and the occult. Because of this online discovery, the dynamics and the interests within the friend group change; Dawson and Pacey decide to start a band, with Pacey following Dawson's lead in experimenting with drag, while Jenny persuades Joey to conduct a seance with her in a cemetery.

---

[62] Ibid., 217.

The film is primarily shot from Joey and Pacey's perspective, tracking how their feelings for Jenny and Dawson intensify. The film culminates with a high school talent show where Dawson and Pacey's band perform; by this point, it is clear that Joey's feelings for Jenny and Pacey's feelings for Dawson have become increasingly complex. After the talent show, Jenny and Dawson kiss, followed by a series of flashbacks of them falling for each other, unbeknownst to Joey and Pacey. The final shots of the film capture their heartbreak; Pacey removes his wig in the empty auditorium while Joey cries in the empty high school hallway.

Act 1	Act 2	Act 3

-Soft open: Dawson meeting other characters on MySpace
-Title sequence/theme song
     "I Don't Want to Wait"
-Joey and Pacey conversation about Jenny
-Pacey introduction
-Joey introduction: Joey and Jenny dream sequence
-Pacey introduction: Pacey makes mix CD/Jerk off scene
-Jenny introduction: getting ready/dancing around bedroom
     "Building a Mystery"
	-All characters interacting on MySpace
	-Jenny and Joey hallway conversation about seance
	-Pacey and Dawson band practice
	     "You Learn"
	-Pacey and Dawson at the barbershop
	-Joey getting ready
	-Joey and Jenny seance in the graveyard
	     "Foolish Games"
	-Witch burning fever dream
		-Pacey getting ready
		-Pacey and Dawson hallway conversation
		-Jenny and Joey hallway conversation/Dawson interrupts
		-Talent show: Dawson and Pacey perform, shots of Jenny and Joey in audience
		     "It's All Coming Back to Me"
		-All characters in hallway/Dawson and Jenny Kiss
		-Closing sequence: Pacey in auditorium, Joey in hallway

Figure 3: Screenplay for the film component of *Dawson'sCreamo*[63]

The film is a patchwork of repurposed material from various episodes of *Dawson's Creek* as well as newly filmed material, where I play Joey, Sadie plays Pacey, and a pair of very patient friends played Dawson and Jenny. The film itself is silent; the repurposed material and the newly filmed material have subtitles to move the plot forward, interspersed

---

[63] We decided to keep the pilot TV show episode structure: a first act introducing all the characters, a second act developing their characters and relationships, and a third act adding tension and conflict that remains unresolved at the end of the episode.

with segments without dialogue where, during our live show, we would perform songs or tell stories.

masc4masc's musical output is primarily made up of emo and pop punk covers of early 2000s adult contemporary songs, mostly from the *Dawson's Creek* soundtrack. Additionally, we also queer the lyrics a little bit to riff on plot points and stereotypes about high school and queerness; our version of the iconic *Dawson's Creek* theme song, Paula Cole's "I Don't Want to Wait" (1996), tells the story of four friends meeting over the Internet, for instance.[64] Near the end of Act 1, we perform our version of Sarah McLachlan's "Building a Mystery" (1997) during Jenny's introduction scene. We purposefully shot Jenny as the alt-girl object of desire; in a sweet but edgy blue slip dress, Jenny finishes applying her eyeliner then wistfully dances around her bedroom while singing to her Sarah McLachlan poster.

There are several reasons that Sadie and I continue to perform covers much more often than originals, but I think in the context of *Dawson'sCreamo,* the primary reason is the inherent subversiveness of covers. Covers are rarely considered fine art, and they are almost always considered inferior to the original (or originals in general). However, there is also something youthful and shameless about covers; for example, when I think of covers, I think of teenage fans uploading acoustic covers of their favourite songs to YouTube, or dad bands that form with the sole purpose of playing Steely Dan covers. By performing a cover, you are unabashedly admitting that you really like something, which is a very nerdy thing to do. Additionally, in covering a song, you are admiring the artwork by emulating it, but making an exact copy is not the goal.

---

[64] Paula Cole, "I Don't Want to Wait", recorded in April 1991, *This Fire* (Imago/Warner Bros, 1996), track 11.

Jack Halberstam (2007) argues that covers themselves are not inherently queer, but that in performing covers, we can explore queer notions of time, mimesis, memory, and authenticity.[65] In their discussion of covering songs as a queer act, Halberstam unpacks the cover as a cultural object seen as unexceptional and inferior to the original (while calling into question the nature of originality itself); Halberstam sees the cover instead as a means of tracking queer genealogy via queer artists looking back at queer artists that came before them, or by queering music by cishet artists and reinventing it as a queer artifact. Halberstam uses Montreal-based electronic band Lesbians on Ecstasy's covers of canon 80s and 90s lesbian artists as a case study, suggesting that by looking back at k.d. lang, Melissa Etheridge, and Tracy Chapman, Lesbians on Ecstasy (LOE) is writing queer history.[66] Furthermore, as electronic musicians, LOE elevates the originals by reinventing them in a new genre and subculture.[67]

In their analysis of covers as a vehicle for tracing queer lineage, Halberstam cites Elizabeth Freeman's "temporal drag".[68] Freeman (2010) suggests that one can occupy an emotional understanding of another subject from a different era. Not unlike Halberstam's own theory of queer time, Freeman proposes that a part of writing queer history and building intergenerational connections requires that we look outside of a normative understanding of chronology (or "chrononormativity").[69] In regards to masc4masc's obsession with covers, temporal drag is an especially fruitful theoretical framework; masc4masc feels "the pull of the

---

[65] Jack Halberstam, "Keeping Time with Lesbians on Ecstasy.," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 11, (2007), 52.
[66] Ibid., 53.
[67] Ibid., 57.
[68] Ibid., 52.
[69] Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

past" that is both sentimental and anachronistic.[70] For Sadie and I, "Building a Mystery" and songs like it that evoke the *Women & Songs*, Lilith Fair era of "womyn's music" are emblematic of a lesbian culture that is both dated and limited, but also formative for us and so many other queers; it was a cultural moment that we did not actively participate in at the time, but that we saw at a distance as sharing an otherness that seemed to align with ours. In the early days of developing *Dawson'sCreamo,* we realized that so many of these songs, despite their gentle, feminine connotations, had emo enough lyrics to be in a Hawthorne Heights or Yellowcard song. For instance, "Building a Mystery" has vampires, suicide, and macabre religious imagery in the first verse alone.[71] This unexpected kinship between emo and women-centered adult contemporary was one of our campier discoveries; Freeman explains that "camp is a mode of archiving, in that it lovingly, sadistically, even masochistically brings back dominant culture's junk and displays the performer's fierce attachment to it", so by combining two genres that experience the mainstream (and largely misogynistic) ridicule of being illegitimate and soft, we are illustrating the parallel positions these musics hold in our personal histories via camp.[72]

This discovery guided our whiney, brooding covers, but with Halberstam's criteria of turning an otherwise heterosexual cultural object into a queer artifact; in the context of *Dawson'sCreamo,* we kept the angst-ridden tone but queered the lyrics to paint a picture of a mysterious, bisexual, art school dream girl, ridding the original of its presumed heterosexuality.

---

[70] Ibid., 62.

[71] Sarah McLachlan, "Building a Mystery", recorded in June-December 1996, *Surfacing* (Nettwerk/Arista, 1997), track 1.

[72] Ibid., 68.

She wears fishnets at night That's when her femme comes out Her undercut is tight Her steel toes are chrome A literary dyke wrote a slam poem 'Bout how she cried about a boy who lied and cursed him out in hate You're building a mystery Your bedroom is pink You have a large collection of barbie dolls that you say you use for art About misogyny and Hasbro You wear sandals in the snow, you've got no style anyway But you glare out the window instead of looking my way You're so beautiful with an edge and charm But I can't tell if you want me in your arms 'Cause you're working, building a mystery Leading me on or leading me in Yeah, you're working, building a mystery And confusing me, sexually	You come out at night That's when the energy comes And the dark side's light And the vampires roam You strut your rasta and your suicide poem And a cross from a faith that died before Jesus came You're building a mystery You live in a church Where you sleep with voodoo dolls And you won't give up the search For the ghosts in the halls You wear sandals in the snow and a smile that won't wash away Can you look out the window without your shadow getting in the way? You're so beautiful with an edge and charm But so careful when I'm in your arms 'Cause you're working, building a mystery Holding on or holding it in Yeah, you're working, building a mystery And choosing so carefully

Figure 4: The original lyrics to "Building a Mystery" on the right, masc4masc's queered lyrics on the left

During *Dawson'sCreamo,* when we are not performing covers or verbally moving the plot forward, we are improvising with a sampler, a loop pedal, various vocal effects via Max patch, and electric bass. The samples we use are excerpts from the interstitial music used between scenes in *Dawson's Creek,* as well as snippets of dialogue and diegetic sounds like lockers slamming or hallway chatter. We also have a low drone that is present for most of the show only to finally cut out during the build up to the final talent show.

In a sense, we are acting as a soundtrack for the film, but we are also trying to create a distinct but malleable space visually as well as sonically in an attempt to mirror the early Internet experience. Our stage set is primarily made up of our instrumental setup, but we also situate ourselves next two a freestanding projection screen fashioned to look like an old TV.

Avoiding the film dominating the space was intentional; by placing the screen next to us as opposed to above or around us, we are maintaining an equality between media. As we perform, the film plays next to us; we reference back to the film periodically, but we also are intentionally creating a universe within a universe that bleed into each other. It is obvious that it is us in the film, and although we are in character on stage as well, what is playing out for the characters in the film is present tense, whereas the characters on stage seem to be experiencing these events through memory. To complicate matters further, Sadie and I are inhabiting and distorting these characters that are very far removed from us; when the film cuts from original *Dawson's Creek* footage to freshly filmed material, the connotations the viewer has with the original source material are challenged. Finally, the characters are experiencing some of their most intimate moments via online mediation. Our show attempts to depict these nested versions of reality and identity so often experienced through online experience. In other words, the spatial fluidity of the Internet is manifested on stage, which further displays the Internet as a space of queer sociality. Furthermore, the play between present tense and memory suggest a temporal fluidity or queer temporality.

An additional dimension that further complicates these layers of identity and experience is how me and Sadie's personal histories play a part in the arch of the story. At several key moments throughout *Dawson'sCreamo,* Sadie and I either pause the film or speak over pre-determined instances without dialogue. We narrate the story to move the plot forward, but we also each tell two or three short stories from our own queer adolescence. As the credits roll, Sadie tells the story of her band's performance at their high school talent show, and I tell the story of meeting my first girlfriend at opera camp. We decided to expose the people behind our personae to add yet another layer of identity, but also to further

complicate the time and space in which this narrative is playing out; Sadie and I are divulging parts of our history as adults with the understanding of how these experiences affected us, whereas our characters are having these experiences in the present. The stories we are telling occurred around the same time as the early Internet era that we are referencing; by performing as ourselves, ourselves in character, and our characters, we are blending the real and the imagined.

The multiplicity encompassed within queerness seems to be at the core of *Dawson'sCreamo.* Our work is about containing multitudes and contradictions, and about being content with not having disparate parts make up a coherent whole. In our queer adolescence, online community allowed us to exist through a variety of identities. *Dawson'sCreamo* aims to depict our queer histories in a way that is both relatable and personal, drawing on experiences that are emblematic of queer adolescence. Often audience members are surprised by how moved they are by *Dawson'sCreamo,* but in the tradition of camp, what seems like a ridiculous concept at the outset is actually an incredibly potent way to deliver tragedy.

A common complaint among diehard grammarians is how "they" signifies plural, which then doesn't make sense if you are only talking about one person. It always struck me as strange that people are so unwilling to accept that we do, in fact, contain multitudes. My work, as it has been discussed in this document, speaks to the multiplicity, contradiction, and patchwork that makes up queer experience. Furthermore, it embraces the discomfort that comes with imperfection and failure, and situates it amidst how we connect with and through technology.

Bibliography

Andre, Naomi. *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travasti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Auner, Joseph. "'Sing It For Me': Posthuman Ventriloquism in Recent Popular Music." *Journal of the Royal Music Association* 128, no. 1 (2003): 98-122.

Bosma, Hannah. "Bodies of Evidence, Singing Cyborgs and Other Gender Issues in Electrovocal Music." *Organized Sound* 8, no. 1 (2003): 5-17.

boyd, danah. "Sexing the Internet: Reflections on the role of identification in online communities." Presented at Sexualities, Medias and Technologies: Theorizing Old and New Practices, University of Surrey, June 21-22, 2001.

boyd, danah. "Friends, Friendsters, and MySpace Top 8: Writing Community Into Being on Social Network Sites." *First Monday* 11, no. 12 (2006).

boyd, danah and Nicole Ellison. "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 11 (2007).

Chion, Michel. *The Voice in Cinema.* Edited and Translated by Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Clement, Catherine. *Opera, or the Undoing of Women.* Translated by Betsy Wing. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Dyck, Julia E. "Cellphones and Cyborgs." *Julia E. Dyck.* Accessed January 1, 2019. http://www.juliaedyck.com/cellphones-and-cyborgs.

Feldman, Martha. "The Interstitial Voice: An Opening." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 68, no. 3 (2015): 653-685.

Fisher, D. R. and Wright, L. M. (2001), "On Utopias and Dystopias: Toward an Understanding of the Discourse Surrounding the Internet." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 6, no. 2 (2001) doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2001.tb00115.x.

Freeman, Elizabeth. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010.

Everts, Saskia Irene. *Gender and Technology: Empowering Women, Engendering Development.* Virginia: Zed Books, 1998.

Green, Eileen, and Alison Adam. *Virtual Gender: Technology, Consumption and Identity.* London: Routledge, 2001.

Halberstam, Jack. "Keeping Time with Lesbians on Ecstasy." *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 11, (2007): 51-58.

Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* New York: Routledge, 1991.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Hofer, Sonya. "I Am They: Technological Mediation, Shifting Conceptions of Identity and Techno Music." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 12, no.3 (2006): 307-324.

Johnson, David, and David Post. "Law and Border: The Rise of Law in Cyberspace." *Stanford Law Review* 48, no. 5 (1996): 1367-1402.

Kollock, Peter. *Communities in Cyberspace.* New York: Routledge, 1998.

Lingel, Jessa. *Digital Countercultures and the Struggle for Community.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017.

McLachlan, Sarah. "Building a Mystery." Recorded in June-December 1996. Track 1 on *Surfacing.* Nettwerk/Arista, 1997.

McClary, Susan. 1991. *Feminine endings: music, gender, and sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

O'Brien, Jodi. "Writing in the Body: Gender (Re)Production in Online Interaction." In *Communities in Cyberspace,* edited by Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollack, 75-103. London: Routledge, 1999.

Ott, Katherine. "The Sum of its Parts: An Introduction to Modern Histories of Prosthetics." In *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives: Modern Histories of Prosthetics,* edited by Katherine Ott, David Serlin, and Stephen Mihm, 1-42. New York: NYU Press, 2002.

Robbie, Andrew. "Sampling Haraway, Hunting Bjork: Locating a Cyborg Subjectivity." *Repercussions* 10 (2007): 57-95.

Rodgers, Tara. *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Rosenblum, Joshua. "Adès: *The Tempest.*" *Opera News.*
    https://www.operanews.com/operanews/recording/recording.aspx?id=1697

Ross, Alex. "Rich and Strange: A 'Tempest' Opera by Adès." *New Yorker,* March 1, 2004.
    https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/03/01/rich-and-strange

Shildrick, Margrit. *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism, and
    (Bio)ethics.* London: Routledge, 1997.

Shildrick, Margrit. "Prosthetic Performativity: Deleuzian Connection and Queer
    Corporealities." in *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, edited by Chrysanthi Nigiani and Merl
    Stor. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

Shuckerow, Duncan. "Take Off Your Masc: The Hegemonic Gender Performance of Gay
    Males on Grindr." Bachelor's Thesis. Columbia College Chicago, 2014.

Silverman, Kaja. *The Acoustic Mirror: the Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*.
    Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

Sofia, Zoe. "Container Technologies." *Hypatia* 15, no. 2 (2000): 181-201.

Thelwall, Mike. (2008), "Social networks, gender, and friending: An analysis of MySpace
    member profiles." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and
    Technology* 59, no. 8 (2008): 1321-1330.

Turkle, Sherry. "Cyberspace and Identity." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 2 (1998): 643-
    648.

Wajcman, Judy. *TechnoFeminism.* Cambridge: Polity, 2004.

Weheliye, Alexander G. "'Feenin': Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular
    Music." *Social Text* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 21-47.