If pictures can be sexist, can analyzing sound reveal sexism, too? Where is the language to discuss sexism in music? LJ Müller tackles these important questions in their 2018 German book titled *Sound und Sexismus*, which was awarded the IASPM 2019 book prize. Analyzing the voices of Kurt Cobain, Kate Bush, Björk and others, Müller demonstrates how gender is performed vocally and interacts with gendered aspects of embodiment and affect. The book is written from a strongly positioned and personal feminist perspective and is appealing to readers from various backgrounds – singers, producers, music lovers, as well as academics and anyone with an interest in feminist takes on pop culture.

LJ Müller (they/them) studied musicology and cultural studies at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin and works on their Phd. Their first book »Sound und Sexismus« published in 2018 by Marta Press was awarded the 2019 book prize of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM). Müller works on topics of voices, gender, sound, popular music and affect.

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Dear reader,

This book has its own peculiar history. Most of this is based on an M.A. thesis written in the summer of 2013. I was able to publish it in a revised form in 2018 with a feminist publisher from Hamburg, Marta Press. The book received the book prize of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music in 2019. It also stirred some debate in German popular music studies, and I got much encouraging feedback and interested questions from non-German scholars. I therefore decided to try and publish an English translation. Which, I have to say, was much harder, than I thought ...

But instead of moaning about difficulties I would much rather like to acknowledge the experiences I made in this process and the contacts and support I got to enjoy. It was a great adventure!

Best of all, there was the collaborative work with Manu Reyes as translator. I enjoyed our regular digital meetings and discussions on style, wording, theoretical and associative subtexts, feminism, politics and academia throughout the last years. Overall, I understand this translation as our collaborative work. I am very grateful for their thoughtful and precise reading, that gave me the wonderful experience of having to answer questions as about why I used this word instead of that (which most of the time I did not reflect on before). I learned a lot about my own (unconscious choices while) writing, especially because Reyes took all my words very seriously and discussed with me possible subtexts of different translation options. This was particularly helpful,
as we developed a shared vision and voice of this book as academic as well as political. Also, I feel, we found a good route between pragmatism and perfectionism, that allowed us to write a good book in a reasonable span of time as well as enough time for ourselves and our respective care work responsibilities. And especially I am so happy about their enthusiasm for this project! It kept me going, when at times I felt like giving up.

I am also very glad to have had Jana Reich and Marta Press at my side, who always reacted very supportively and quickly to all my questions and requests for confirmation letters and the like. As I am aware that they are a very small publisher that aims more for ideals of fairness and feminism, than for profit I appreciated this very much.

I am also very grateful for the repeated encouragement and critical final reading of John Mullen, who was one of the first (and most persistent) people asking for a translation, and for the support of Julio Mendivil and Susan McClary in search for potential publishers and funding.

Several people from the female:pressure list volunteered for reading and giving feedback and I am glad I could include the thoughts and remarks of Margarethe Maierhofer-Lischka, Meloncholyland/Octavia Beazley (artist and therapist), and Meg Wilhoite (M.M. in music theory), who gave this book a very thorough reading, and whose very valuable feedback (on content as well as on style) made sure we were able to reduce not only typos, but also potential misunderstandings and clear the text-flow in many places.

Further the Mariann Steegmann Foundation enabled this project with their generous financial support. Thank you all So Much!

All this help is greatly appreciated as doing a translation is quite a curious task. First of all, there are many hurdles and questions, especially for me as a rather inexperienced author. For instance: What do I do first? Where do I get funding? How should I approach a different book market? How do I ask my former publisher for permission? And so on, and so on. I had to learn a lot while doing, simply trying and asking. Of course, at times I was close to giving up, such as in the moment I realized the following conundrum: No publisher pays for translation-costs, most funding opportunities for translations (and there are very
few) have a publishing-contract as a precondition, but most publishers want to have at least a partial (rather the whole) translation done before they even think about it ...

During this process, I also learned a lot about differences in book markets and publishing procedures in German and English academic or semi-academic publishing. For example, I got the astonished feedback from non-German scholars several times, that it is completely uncommon for an M.A.-thesis to be published. In Germany this is not a common practice either, but it is also not entirely uncommon. I enjoyed reading several books that originally were M.A.-papers or “Diplomarbeiten” during my studies and publishing my own M.A.-paper was in my mind always a possible (although not probable) option.¹

Actually, I would say, there is even a separate genre of published “Abschlussarbeiten” (Magister and Diplom) particularly in the humanities and social sciences in Germany, that I assume the English reader will be completely unfamiliar with. It is a great genre! Not only because it enabled me to read great books in the past, but also because it always felt very encouraging and empowering to know that a student's work might be published, quoted from, and used for further study. Such works more often than not focus on political questions in a very engaged manner. They aim to bring about change or to emphasize neglected topics and also often take up questions that might not be all that welcome to the majority of established disciplines.² Stylistically there is a certain ‘DIY-character’ (as there is normally no budget and authors have little experience) and while this genre definitely consists of really good student works (of course you can only aim for publishing with a top

¹ Is it really that rare in US-American or English academia? I am still wondering. – Please tell me that there are actually an abundance of works that I just couldn’t find from my outsider perspective.

² Especially the important issue of racism and the adaption of critical Whiteness Studies in Germany, was a field in which I encountered many books of student authors, such as the “Diplomarbeiten” of Kien Ngih Ha (1999) and Anette Dietrich (2001) and the “Magisterarbeit” of Moritz Ege (2007) (next to the frequent student-organizing of autonomous reading circles and student-led classes in the 2000s.)
grade), they are of course not expected to be perfect or show the depth and scope of dissertations. Still, such books are taken seriously in the German academic context, as they invite to take on new perspectives, ask serious questions, and often take important risk.³

I suppose this book is a quite typical example of this genre, which I as a byproduct like to introduce you to.

But this is not the only difference in book market structures that I got to observe. For me academic books are not so much polished versions of past work written from a position of achieved knowledge to teach the unknowing reader; they are much rather personal journeys towards that knowledge, that readers are invited to share. I suppose that is because in Germany all dissertations are generally published without mayor changes. In my mind therefore, the theoretical preconditions as well as the work and the struggle of academic writing are not to be hidden, and a map of the traversed area is much more the result, and not the preconditional of this adventure. This, for me, is not only a stylistic difference but has an ethical dimension to it: An academic book for me is sharing the struggle as well as the knowledge. This sharing carries a commitment to equality between reader and writer and to the original sources and processes of thought. Especially as I have thought most of this book in the position of an enthusiastic student, it would feel wrong for me to give it now the voice of a distinguished scholar.

In the process of translation, we, that is Manu Reyes, as translator, and me, still adapted parts of this book, so that they might fit better

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³ There is also the German legal construct of “Wissenschaftsfreiheit” (= freedom of sciences) which extends to the academic work of students. This freedom of sciences grants students (albeit contested) spaces of and resources for autonomous academic work. Further, there is a strong tradition of student teaching and student participation in and production of edited publications independent of supervision. This is tied quite directly to student’s protest movements going back in Western Germany to the 1960s. The existence of such spaces and resources have always been subject of political fights and discussions. For me, this participation of students in academic discourse is an important part of an ongoing academic as well as political history which is often forgotten and which I also intend to honor by emphasizing this context of the formation of this book.
into English reader’s probable expectations. For example, the original first chapter was reduced to five introductory paragraphs, most of the introduction was rewritten and we added several footnotes, to reflect on the changes that happened in the field over the years, and to include more English resources. At times, we also decided to add some more sentences for better orientation within the text. But overall, this is a translation and not a book written specifically for the English book market. And I like that it bears the traces of its own history and keeps its original voice.

The whole idea of this translation, as my motivation for the original publication, for me is about sharing: I see the content of this book as a toolbox, that hopefully will help others who struggle with similar questions. I want to make those tools available, because I searched for them throughout my own studies of musicology and I felt the need to invent them, to address topics that seemed to fall outside the realm of musicology and cultural studies again and again. I hope these tools prove useful for others and not only invite to their use, but also to their improvement and adaptation.

*Just like the German original, this book thus is dedicated to all, who fought, fight and will fight against sexism. I am deeply grateful for your thoughts, your power and your courage.*
Introduction: What Does Sexism Actually Sound Like?

This book stems from a sense of dissatisfaction with the lack of a vocabulary to describe sexism and gender in sound. Language is not merely a device that describes reality. Rather, it is an instrument that helps us make sense of the world and that fundamentally also structures our perception of that world. This lack of vocabulary creates a hurdle for a feminist analysis of sound because it limits our capacity to give expression to experiences of sexism in sound. Listeners are then confronted with potentially violating sonic experiences without the capacity to put that experience in verbal form. To forge a language that allows to raise awareness and effectively criticize subliminally mediated sexisms in the sound of popular music is thus a crucial goal of this book.

This lack of language, that I try to tackle, seems to enlarge the problem of unaddressed sexism in sound. When I mention at parties or other small talk situations that I am working on engravings of gender or sexism in the sound of popular music, I often encounter two types of responses: The first one bypasses the sound topic all together and focusses on the lyrics, images, and visuals of (far too often Black or PoC) male artists, often assuming as soon as I mention sexism and music, that I must be a HipHop expert (which I am not, and this book is not about HipHop!). The second response is that sexism in music must be instantly recognizable and is always an attribute of ‘bad music’. Especially music by or with female singers is often judged on these grounds and their voices are said to sound “sexy”, “suggestive”, “available”, “bitchy”, “weak” or “cheap”.
As long as there is no vocabulary to discuss sexism in sound, it seems to be easy to exclude particularly White male musicians and their music from scrutiny. Somehow it always seems to be the ‘others’ (that is, those, who are already always Othered), who produce sexism in sound, and ‘other music’, which in those discussions normally is the music oneself would never enjoy listening to. But is such an assumption plausible? Can we assume that most of popular music – and particularly White male rock and mainstream popular music – does not contain implicit messages of male privilege and normativity, which is what I would call ‘sexism’? Why do female voices seem to come into focus first for many people, when they think about sexism and sound? And does it not sound a bit simple to neatly separate ‘good music’ from ‘sexist music’, as if sexism in music would mean the same as ‘bad sound’?

I want to question such views: The position I will argue for throughout this book is that popular music, as an interwoven cultural and social complex, is structured and organized around sexist assumptions and gendered paradigms.¹ As I will explain in chapter one, music has to relate to other music to become understandable. Therefore, even the most feminist and empowering music will not simply be free of those implicit patterns, that it aims to deconstruct. Rather, it may even draw a lot of its power from deconstructive relations to sexism in sound: It still will be dependent on sexism to create its affective impact, and thus also takes part in its (albeit transformed) reproduction. Understanding this also makes much more visible the aesthetic work done by many female (and other non-cis male) singers and musicians. They deal with popular music from a completely different position, which differs not only in terms of privileges in resources and relations, but also in terms of implicitly gendered aesthetic paradigms, assumptions about sonic personae, and possible vocal images.² There will probably never be some-

¹ The same is of course true for racism and classism in popular music. Sexism is not the only basal background structure here, but my focus is sexism in this book.

² This problem of gendered differences in aesthetic paradigms I mention here will be present throughout the book. A well-researched paradigm for this prob-
thing like sexism-free popular music for as long as we do not live in a sexism-free world.\(^3\) Instead, there is music, that deals with sexism in one way or another, and some of these ways might be more empowering or damaging than others.

Thus, this book is not about particularly sexist examples of music, but about examples, that could be replaced with many others. I do not want to say that the songs of Nirvana, Robbie Williams, Kate Bush, Kylie Minogue, Björk or Birdy discussed in this book are particularly problematic examples, and even less, that any of this is ‘bad music’. Instead, I will carve out that the aesthetic presentation in each example is based on implicitly sexist gender images which have damaging effects (but which does not necessarily exclude them form having empowering potentials as well, as the reproduction and deconstruction of sexism might take place on different levels within the same song). My examples have been chosen to show that sexism in popular music is normalized and pervasive. Thus, it does not make sense to call out individual singers

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3 Or to put it more exactly: As long as there is sexism, all articulations of gender will relate to sexism. While some articulations of femininity or masculinity can be empowering within the overall structures of sexism, they still cannot be without relation to the sexist underpinnings that give femininity and masculinity their meaning in the first place. See also Misha Kavka’s discussion of the phrase “I’ll be a postfeminist in a postpatriarchy” (Kavka, 2002, p. 29f.).
or artists. Rather, in this book I question and expose the widespread, underlying aesthetic paradigms and listening habits that take part in the construction of sexism in sound.

**Approach**

A discussion of sexism in sound has to face another problem that is implicit in the problems described above: The way that meaning in sound of popular music (or any music) is contained and produced is an ongoing academic debate. There are two extreme positions, that either see music as pure art without relation to the ‘real world’ or as being completely determined by context, so that the sounds themselves seem to be completely interchangeable.\(^4\) Both positions make it impossible to even imagine sexism in sound as it either cannot be there at all or will only be a mirroring effect of sexism in other places. While I agree that there is no ‘pure music’, I also believe that there would not be a reason for music to exist at all, if it had not its own share in the reproduction of culture and society, that cannot be reduced to the mirror-effects of language or social interaction. Thus, I see a need to develop theories of how music (as music!) is involved and plays its own part in cultural and social reproduction.

Of course, I will not solve this riddle in this book and offer a pronounced theory of how music produces socio-cultural meaning as a side product. At the same time, I do not intend to stay quiet about something possibly being wrong with music and gender while I wait for such a theory to come along. My way to deal with this problem is to suggest **tools** for music analysis, that I believe are helpful to detect sexism in

\(^4\) Of course, this is a reduced description of an ongoing discussion. A polemic summary of this problem can be found in the statement of the network for the inclusion of music into music studies (NIMiMS). But of course, many scholars also aim to transcend this dualism and work on new ways to analyze and discuss particularly popular music. About this discussion see Helms/Pfleps (2012), McClary/Walser (2007), Papenburg (2008) and Brackett (1995).
the sound of popular music. These will enable me to argue that popular music transports gendered embodiments.

I will present my tools in chapter one. There, I also discuss the academic context from which those tools emerge. This chapter will involve already established methods, like semiotic or homological analysis, but will further establish methods that enable to discuss gendered dimensions of affect and embodiment by applying theories that are not yet established for musical analysis. These include the adaption of psychoanalytic theory (which in the past was very fruitful for feminist analysis of film theory, which is why I explore its potential in music), genotextual lyrical analysis, and especially sonic and vocalic embodiment – the structuring of the listening and the image of the listened-to body.

An important focus of my music analysis will be on the sound of voices. But this does not mean, that I will discuss singing techniques or analyze voices as isolated phenomena. Instead, I understand voices as transporting information about bodies and subjects. Thus, in this book the voice is encountered only as the final product presented in a recording. I will thus not discuss what pre-edited or ‘original singing’, so to say, would be. Instead, I will argue that the (most probably heavily edited) voice as presented on recordings will contain information about a singing body, that might not be at all the real singing body of the real singer, but some sonic construct, that is only created in the context of other surrounding sounds and as a result of editing.\(^5\)

These embodiments are, as I will show in the two following chapters, able to construct normative positions, which are linked to (White) masculinity (chapter two) and position the analyzed female singers as Others (chapter three). Overall, I will argue that sexist Othering takes place in sound.

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\(^5\) E.g., Steven Connor (2000), who calls this phenomenon “vocalic body” which he develops in his book on ventriloquism. I will discuss this in detail in the subchapter on the “vocalic body” in chapter 1.
Limitations

What this book is not about: I assume, that many readers will already have picked up on the fact that I am only discussing White singers in this book. This is a conscious choice, and it is not the only exclusion, which I need to explain: I decided to take examples only from able-bodied White cis hetero\textsuperscript{6} singers. This is of course not because I would not acknowledge that Black people and PoC, queer people, and people with disabilities are not important to popular music in the past and present. Nor do I want to contribute to a view that again privileges (able bodied, heterosexual, cis ...) Whiteness as a norm, while excluding everything else without any acknowledgement. My exclusion is particularly due to my structural approach to Othering in sound and based on several considerations:

- First, as there is little theory on structures of Othering in the sound of (popular) music until now,\textsuperscript{7} limiting the reflection on only one type of marginalization reduces complexity. In difference to other media (for example film or literature) there is no established method

\textsuperscript{6} Of course, I cannot know for sure about the singers’ private lives or feelings. Particularly heterosexuality and able-bodied-ness are assumptions, that I cannot check for sure. But at least none of them particularly foreground marginalized identities in their public image. I therefore believe it is valid to assume that their voices are all consumed as expressions of normative, White, heterosexual, able-bodied, cis masculinity or femininity.

\textsuperscript{7} Some groundbreaking texts, such as Rose (1994), or Weheliye (2005), have paved the way for an analysis of relations between power structures and sound. Particularly in recent years, theories of racialized Othering in sound have been published by Jennifer Stoever (2016), Nina Sun Eidsheim (2018) and Dylan Robinson (2021). Related to gender I would like to highlight the works of Susan McClary (2002 [1992]), Suzanne Cusick (1994a, 1994b 1999, 2009) and Barbara Bradby (1993, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2016) who suggested and developed feminist approaches for the analysis of (popular) music. The field, as it seems, is developing now and I hope to contribute with my writing to the ongoing development of theories of listening and music, that counter implicit naturalization of hegemonic power structures.
for analyzing positions of normed perspectives in music. Therefore, in this book I develop my own strategies to tackle this problem. For this reason, it seemed necessary for me to reduce the complexity of the task and focus for the moment on only one mostly homogenous group and only discuss one pattern of discrimination.\(^8\)

- This focus was also necessary to discuss all my examples at length. I am only able to present a very limited sample of songs in this book. For the inclusion of any other form of discrimination, a considerable extension would have been necessary. And again, at one point or another, a line would have been necessary, that would have excluded

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8 As, for example, Kimberly Crenshaw (1989) argues in her famous intersection metaphor, it is not always possible to decide on which of two (or on both) discrimination patterns a violation is based, when we think about intersectional positions. Moreover, research on this matter suggests, that Black gender images are much more complex in their relations to hegemonic (= White, cis) gender images (cf. Avery et al., 2017, Collins, 2006, p. 97ff. and hooks, 1981, p. 65ff.). For example, when Black women are excluded from White-hegemonic femininity, they might because of this share some attributes of White hegemonic masculinity, which is not a sign of privilege, but only becomes understandable as a particular form of discrimination in relation to hegemonic gender representations of White men and women. On the other side, it is to be assumed that presentations of Black masculinity in sound would also include signs of Othering, which may or may not differ from the sonic Othering of sexism and may or may not relate to racialized images of Black masculinity as either feminized or hypermasculine (cf. Avery et al., 2017, Djupvik, 2014). This is to show how the analysis of (sexist) discrimination in sound becomes far more complex by including more patterns of discrimination. While I do not want to suggest that there is pure or neutral sexism or racism (of course, all sexism is implicitly or explicitly racialized), discussing only examples of otherwise privileged women allows the attribution of the found forms of Othering to sexism, as the singers (in their public image) are not facing other forms of discrimination. But this sexism must not be understood as ‘universal sexism’. It is one form of sexism, and it is an open question whether Women of Color, lesbians, trans and/or disabled women face the same, similar, or completely other forms of sexism in music. For now, I only intend to prove that sexism (and more generally discrimination) in sound exists. Further research is needed to determine exactly the attributes of this or that particular sexism.
some forms of discrimination. It was thus necessary to set a narrow focus and decide for a sample.

- Since I understand Othering in a structural way, I see it related to an implicit process of norming. Because of this, understanding Othering for me is closely related to understanding how an implicit norm comes into being, naturalized and endowed with some seemingly ‘natural’ and ‘invisible’ power. Therefore, one of my main arguments will be about how White masculinity in popular music gains such a powerful position. I will argue how this is related not only to different presentations of vocals, but as also to a different listening-relation towards voices.

- I thus decided for my sample to focus on the most privileged group. As (heterosexual, cis, able-bodied, ...) Whiteness is very often an implicit normative ideal, which also extends its hegemonic power to those that are excluded from it at the same time, I thought it would be the most fruitful starting point to look at the production of hegemonic gender notions. As long as these norms stay in power, all performances of masculinity and femininity, that are excluded from this norm, will still have to deal with the implicitly normative position of White able-bodied cis-gendered heterosexuality in one way or another. Knowing more about this will hopefully also enable further critique of normative positions as well as an acknowledgement of the alternative strategies developed and used by PoC and/or queer and/or disabled singers.  

- Finally, as this is a book that mainly aims to criticize the reproduction of sexism (and not to celebrate empowerment strategies), it simply did not feel right, as a White German able-bodied scholar to scrutinize e.g., Black/PoC singers for reproducing sexism in sound. I see that accusations like these are very often placed on People of

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9 Even when one attempts to build and secure one’s own autonomous space, extra work is done by all those that have to undertake it in hegemonic contexts that privilege normative White, able-bodied heterosexuality. The extent of this work tends to be invisible, unless we know about the extent of hegemonic positions.
Color, where they tend to feed into racist narratives and deflect debate about changes in the most dominant domain of White hegemony, as sexism, then again from a White perspective, tends to become the problem of ‘others’. I instead aim to argue against this narrative and to point out that sexism is mostly naturalized by the normative position of White masculinity, which thus in my opinion needs to be further scrutinized to find suitable tools for its deconstruction.

While I believe that I have good reasons for my selection and restriction of focus, I still do not want to suggest that this restriction does not have its own problems. First, the exclusive focus on White able-bodied hetero singers tends to reproduce this group as the implicit norm. Thus, all those, that are excluded from this norm already, are taken out of sight again. To counter the danger of reproducing an implicit and unnamed norm, I will mention the privileged position of the singers and use “(White)” or other forms of privilege in parentheses before words like “masculinity” or “femininity” and/or elaborate on options for more intersectional readings in footnotes.

Second, while this book only includes White, able-bodied, heterosexual singers, it does not address any of these privileges themselves. I am not able to tell, how or whether at all, these privileges play a role in the songs I analyze. This also stays outside of my focus (although I am afraid that all privileges very probably do play important roles!). This also might give the impression, that I am arguing for one form of ‘neutral sexism’ in this book, which in fact only reflects on the experience of White hetero cis women. My argument is limited to the conclusion, that sexism, understood as the implicit privileging and centering of male perspectives, can be found in the sound of White cis heterosexual able-bodied singers. The differences, similarities, and connections between forms of sexism aimed at White, PoC, lesbian, heterosexual, dis-/abled, cis or trans women as well as questions of whether, and if so how, PoC, queer, trans, and/or disabled men can or cannot share in the hegemonic (= White, cis able-bodied, ...) male privileges, are beyond the scope of this book.
While I believe it is necessary to emphasize the limitation of this book again and again, marking the particular patterns of sexism in this book as distinguished “White, cis, hetero, and able-bodied” (without parentheses) seems questionable to me. Such an explicit labelling would suggest that I would know what separates this as White (and so on) sexism from other forms of sexism, which due to my limited sample of songs I simply cannot answer. Thus, the parentheses are intended to not only point to the privileges of the discussed singers, but also to point to the fact that whether a particular form of sexism, masculinity or femininity is restricted to Whiteness (able-bodied-ness, heterosexuality ...), remains an open question.

Feminist (Popular) Music Studies

A general knowledge of pop music’s context as a whole and particularly the manifold marginalization of women in popular music is an important basis and background for this book. In this paragraph I position this book in the context of preceding feminist and anti-sexist scholarship in popular music studies, to which I am deeply indebted.10

For example, in their essay “Gender and Cultural Consecration in Popular Music”, Vaughn Schmutz and Alison Faupel take stock of the dynamics that exclude women’s music from being written about in music journalism and how, in cases where their music is written about, journalists often assign attributes to their music that emphasize femininity.11 Marion Leonard also describes in her book Gender in the Music Industry how in a variety of promotional practices (marketing, photos, image-building), indie rock is naturalized as a genre with male con-
notations. Ann Werner and Sofia Johansson have also documented the reproduction of an equally male connotated music expertise in discourses on online music reception, so that, unfortunately, fundamental changes can hardly be expected at present.

It is also now well documented that women are hindered in building successful careers as pop musicians: From learning the instrument, to sharing knowledge in insider networks and arranging performance opportunities, to normative expectations of gendered behavior on stage: women are hindered from entering the field and becoming professionals, and are often limited to the role of a singer. As a result, there are now women-centered or women, lesbian, trans and intersex* (FLTI*) networks that work to break down such barriers. Nevertheless, Anna Gavan and Rosa Reitsamer, for example, have documented the problems of female DJs in a present characterized by neoliberalism and post-feminist discourses: Women are still treated as a separate group and experience being received not as individuals but as representatives of femininity. They see themselves forced to align their career plans with such external categorizations. Furthermore, the network female:pressure proves in its biannual FACTS survey the still striking underrepresentation of female and nonbinary acts in the electronic music scene. The knowledge of these contexts is a necessary background for my work, which nevertheless will focus on the sonic consequences and preconditions of these still very stable asymmetries.

15 For example: female:pressure, Pink Noises, Melodiva, and the Girls Rock Camp Alliance; see also Bayton (1993). FLTI* is a common German abbreviation. The F stands for Frauen = Women.
While there has thus been a considerable volume of critical work on gender dynamics in various parts of popular music as a context of work and cultural production,\(^\text{19}\) particular attention to sexism in sound has been rather scarce.\(^\text{20}\)


\(^{20}\) Lack of research in this area, for example, is explicitly named by Bloss (2006), p. 314, Binas-Preisendörfer (2015) and Jens Papenburg (2018). Further, many texts, that promise a musical analysis in their titles, like for example “Representations of Femininity in Popular Music” by Nikola Dibben, although very insightful, do not address patriarchal ideology as a musical trait. Instead, close reading reveals that in Dibben’s analysis, the sexist content is transported through lyrics and visuals alone, while the music (only) suggests the affirmation of these contents. Such analysis of course is still correct and points to a problem that deserves addressing in itself, but the prevalence of such analysis of popular music clouds the lack of means for a critical analysis of music on its own terms.
Works that focus on the sonic representation and construction of gender or sexuality in popular music, mostly do so at an associative level. Association is therein predominantly established with attributes, such as ‘feminine softness’ or ‘masculine hardness’. Philip Tagg and Bob Clarida prove in their semiotic analysis of “Ten Little Title Tunes” the multifaceted connotative links of masculinity and femininity with particular sonic attributes. They provide evidence of musical mediation of and linkage with profoundly conservative ideas about gender. This evidence gives an impression of how big the problem of musical reproduction of sexism probably is. Still, despite these clear results, Tagg and Clarida’s work shows that with this approach, sexism cannot be grasped as an entrenching structure: In semiotic analyses, music takes on the function of mediating already established roles of gender, only reiterating previously established gendered connotations. Ultimately, in such an interpretation gender is only understood as a (in principle malleable) conglomerate of characteristics. However, this type of analysis makes it nearly impossible to conceptualize sexism as a discriminatory structure and music as a potentially productive force in the asymmetric construction of gender.

Nevertheless, the results of Tagg and Clarida’s research allow for interpretations beyond the semiotic realm. Anahid Kassabian, who worked with Tagg and Clarida during the production of their book, concludes in her reading of their results that women are more frequently associated with their surroundings whereas men appear as actively engaged heroes. In her own book *Hearing Film*, Kassabian points towards the dependency on sound to aid identificatory processes

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22 Tagg and Clarida come to the following list for probable musical attributes related to masculinity: Quick, active, upwards, hard, sharp, modern, sudden, dynamic, outwards, jagged, urban, and strong. And to this list for femininity: slow, passive, downwards, soft, rounded, old times, gradual, static, inwards smooth, rural, and weak. Cf. Table 11.2, ibid., p. 670.

in film. This suggests that the (potential) relations between listeners and music might also be relevant for a deeper understanding of the ideological machinations of music. This suggestion, of how music enables or disrupts processes of identification, will be explored further in this book.

To understand such sonical workings of gender outside semiotic coding, there are only a few other sketchy conceptions for a study of the production of gender-based structural discrimination in the music itself. Many of these can be found in works from more traditional fields of music theory and musicology: Various authors, including Suzanne Cusick, Susan McClary, Eva Rieger, Fred Maus and John Shepherd criticize particularly the lack of consideration of the body in classical music analysis as an expression of a patriarchal world order. Based on this critique, a few analytical approaches have been crafted, which consider more carefully the relationship between bodies and music. Regardless, many of these approaches are bound to a classical understanding of music that limits itself to tonality, composition, notation, and interpretation. These approaches are rather unfit for an analysis of popular music, wherein the materiality of recorded sound ought to be at the center of attention.

Furthermore, a positive reference to the body can lead one to uncritically body-related sounds and perception practices with subversion, femininity or queerness. While the mere presence of the body in music theoretical discourses on classical western music might have indeed a strong, subversive potential, a direct application of the same principle to popular music would have severe consequences: After

27 See for an elaborate critique: Bloss (1993). The ‘fitness’ or maybe rather unfit- ness of such an approach to ‘classical’ music is also discussed by Danielle Sofer (2020).
all, in a music where danceability and emotional resonance are of central importance, the body takes on an entirely different role. Instead, as I intend to show, in popular music contexts the quarrel lies much more in the specificity of the body that is involved and the particular relationship it has to sound.

In specific relation to popular music, probably the first paper to discuss sexism was written by Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie. Their influential 1978 essay “Rock and Sexuality” developed the hypothesis that gendered ideas of sexuality (male sexuality as expressive, female as personal yearning for a stable partner) are transmitted through music, which in turn reproduces and naturalizes gendered difference:28 “The recurrent theme of this essay has been that music is a means of sexual expression and as such important as a mode of sexual control.”29

While Frith and McRobbie’s suggestions are quite far-reaching and raise the question of the extent to which sound (and rhythm) mean something sexual, they unfortunately only sketch out a broad theoretical context for a possible answer. I will nevertheless take their thoughts as point of departure especially in my analysis of Kate Bush in chapter three, where I will follow up on the claim, that listeners are placed in a ‘voyeuristic position’ vis-à-vis the singer. This claim by Frith and McRobbie is quite suggestive and, as I will show, not based sufficiently on a musical analysis. I will therefore start from this omission to discuss possible understandings of ‘sonic voyeurism’.

Building on the work of Frith and McRobbie, Barbara Bradby has further analyzed gender in popular music since the 80s.30 Her case studies of selected songs, bands or genres are noteworthy, not only because of their historical relevance, but also because of her unusual methodology, which at times discusses in depth the materiality of rhythms or nonverbal ‘texts’. To do so, Bradby draws from Julia Kristeva’s language theory, that ties embodiment to speech, and thus is used to target the mediation of unconscious subtexts. Bradby’s use of

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29 Ibid., p. 387.
this for lyrical analysis can thus be understood as a decidedly feminist approach to popular music analysis. While I am not following her in all details, I am particularly grateful, for her example of creative method-development from a feminist perspective and bringing into focus, what most often remains outside analysis.

In addition, the essay “On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex” by Suzanne Cusick introduces a theoretical adaptation of performativity theory to singing in the analysis of two pop songs. From this she develops hypotheses about the sonic mediation of gender in the voice, which also consider gendered codifications of the singing bodies and their social reception. This approach can also be understood as a feminist-motivated popular music analysis that, with the help of Butler’s performativity theory, applies feminist theory to music and at the same time includes the body in a way that I found particularly productive for popular music analysis.

Finally, I would also like to point to voice-centered music analyses which have slowly become more common in the last ten years. A reference should be made here to the work of authors such as Laurie Stras, Veronika Muchitsch, Jaqueline Warwick, Diane Pecknold, Alison McCracken and of course Nina Sun Eidsheim, who all contribute to political readings of gendered vocal sounds. All these authors further contributed to the development of vocabularies and theoretical concepts for the discussion of voices, and encourage reflection on the participation of listeners and the agency of (not only female) singers in the construction of voices in popular music.

The list of works on gender and popular music is now growing at a remarkable speed, making it impossible to create a conclusive list. I am deeply grateful to the works of so many scholars, who have taken and continue to take this issue seriously and I look forward to a hopefully further growing future of this field.

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Introduction of Basic Concepts

Before I turn more closely to music analysis, I now briefly introduce five concepts (Popular Music, Othering, Performativity, the Body and the Sonical), which serve as the basis for my argument.32

Popular Music

In the context of this text, as already described, I do not consider popular music only as a specific contemporary music form that might be reduced to its sonic appearance. Pop music related discourses and practices of music consumption are already inscribed in the music. An understanding of music without this context is therefore not possible. Consequently, this means that pure music without context does not exist, or cannot exist, since any understanding of music presupposes a context (which is not the same as reducing music to its context). Therefore, I see popular music, as an edifice that also includes discourses, concerts, images, media (CDs, radio, music stations, YouTube, ...), etc. Critical voices (like Adorno, Shepherd and many members of the CCCS33) have attributed the role of ideological mediation to popular music early on;34 and while I am wary of oversimplifying imaginations of this process as 'one-sided indoctrination of passive victim-listeners', I am particularly interested in popular music because I still assume

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32 This introduction to basic concepts section is a very condensed version of the original first chapter, which can be downloaded from my academia page, for those who are interested in more theory.
33 CCCS stands for Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, founded 1964 in Birmingham; an important research center for the development of cultural studies. At the CCCS many scholars worked with a focus on popular culture, media and popular music. There was also a sensibility for issues of sexism and racism early on. See on this: Butcher et al. (1974), Critcher et al. (1975), Green (1979), Hall (1921 [1981]), Lawrence (1981), McRobbie (1978), Taylor (1976).
that it plays a role in naturalizing, but also adapting to a currently highly problematic world order.

Many people look to popular music to find out about themselves or about others. Popular music has a strange position somewhere between fantasy and reality, which allows it to blur the line between fiction and real life and allows fantasies to spill over into daily life. Thus, it can give some sort of ‘sense’ to our positions in the world and place us and others in difference and in relation to each other.\textsuperscript{35} All this is related to the rule of the seemingly natural law of digital capitalism, which dictates the reinforcement of that which sells, or which can be used for selling (as in advertising, product placement and data mining).\textsuperscript{36}

To grasp theoretically popular music as a globally operating system of socialization and complex edifice, I draw on Michel Foucault’s concept of power and on his concept of the dispositif.

For Foucault, power is not a repressive-restrictive but a productive concept: For him power refers to the force that motivates and enables subjectivation, but also directs it along certain paths and thus restricts it.\textsuperscript{37} Importantly, this power does not emanate from individual people and cannot be ‘possessed’ by anyone either. It is not based on conscious human intentions that might direct, plan and control its effects. Nev-


\textsuperscript{36} The connection of popular music and advertisement is well known. Cf., for instance, Buxton (2007 [1983]), p. 436f. or the famous quote by Martin Richard (=Dick) Asher, former head of CBS International and president of PolyGram USA: “if the people who like certain sorts of music are not the people who want to buy soap then their music won’t get played.” Qtd. In Malm/Wallis (1992), p. 206. Also, the widespread use of product placement in music videos and lyrics (especially in hip-hop) is discussed by Hampp (2012) and Kimpton (2015).

ertheless, power produces effects that tend to stabilize themselves and protect its results even in the face of social change.  

A dispositif denotes a strategic formation of power that consists of a multitude of heterogeneous elements that interlock and mutually support each other in order to achieve an overall goal sought by the dispositif. These can be discursive as well as non-discursive elements. Foucault himself names, for example:

a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid.

In the context of pop music, this might include, for example, the music industry, radio, charts, popular and academic discourses, dance, fan communities, stars, various music platforms on the internet, music-centered subcultures and their value systems, clubs, pop songs, pop music genres, the structures of the music market and of the so-called ‘mainstream’. All these diverse elements function within the pop music dispositif as tactical moments.

Understanding popular music as a strategic power complex, thus, makes it possible to relate the various very heterogeneous aspects to each other as parts of a whole that mutually support each other in their function. Individual elements can only really be understood by taking

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38 Cf. ibid., p. 94f.  
40 Ibid.  
41 Foucault differentiates between tactics and strategies: A strategy pursues a global goal with the help of various temporary and local individual tactics. A strategy and its goal can be inferred from the effect of the tactics from their “calculation” (Cf. Foucault (2014 [in Fr. 1976]), p. 95). In the “rule of double conditioning” Foucault (1978 [in Fr. 1976]), p. 99f), Foucault further elaborates on how tactics and strategy are mutually conditional. Therein, a strategy consists of individual tactics and individual tactics can only develop their power within a strategy. Individual tactics may well be temporary or seemingly contrary to the strategy. Cf. Foucault (1978 [in Fr. 1976]), p. 101f.
the whole into account and as the theory of the dispositif assumes a reciprocal relationship between popular music and society, both society and popular music, with all their various institutional, discursive, practical, and musical aspects, are continuously changing.\footnote{Cf. also Willis (ca. 1973), p. 18f.}

This background is important for my study. I see the individual songs as taking on relevance in this overall context, which makes it necessary not so much to criticize individual songs but to lay bare the underlying structures and mechanisms which reproduce sexism and other discriminations.

Othering

Othering is an important theoretical tool for understanding discrimination. It was most prominently developed by Simone de Beauvoir in her book \textit{The Second Sex}. Already the title hints at her core thesis that sexist discrimination cannot (only/primarily) be reduced to unequal access to resources. Instead, sexist discrimination denotes above all a hierarchy between the sexes produced by cultural ideas, in which some (men) have the privilege of seeing themselves as the \textit{norm} with regard to gender, while the others (women) are excluded from this position and negatively demarcated against it:

\begin{quote}
the man represents both the positive and the neuter to such an extent that in French \textit{hommes} designates human beings [...]. Woman is the negative, to such a point that any determination is imputed to her as a limitation, without reciprocity.\footnote{De Beauvoir (2012 [in Fr. 1949]), p. 25.}
\end{quote}

Even if this division at first seems very abstract and only metaphorical, it has far-reaching consequences. For one, social consideration of the interests of the respective genders are either considered as self-evident norms or seen as special interests. Furthermore, the formation of a gendered subjectivity which is oriented to this different evaluation
of one’s own social position as one or the other is encapsulated in this division.

For example, De Beauvoir speaks of a “male naiveté”. By that she means some sort of positioned blindness towards one’s own privileges, as from an (unquestioned) male perspective, male subjectivity appears as normal, self-evident and objective. The fact that there is or could be another world view at all is blanked out from this position: “He [= the man] grasps his body as a direct and normal link with the world that he believes he apprehends in all objectivity.” From such a privileged male perspective, one’s own position appears so self-evident that it becomes downright invisible, just like the possible legitimacy of other perspectives.

The Othered position (in this case femininity) is, on the contrary, constantly confronted with its own otherness, which makes it impossible to take on the position of supposed neutrality. Beauvoir sees female subjectivity thus as having to deal with a constant inner conflict “between the fundamental claim of every subject, which always posits itself as essential, and the demands of a situation that constitutes her as inessential.” While I believe it is possible to get to a more positive reading of the experience of being Othered, I also believe that Beauvoir makes an important point here, that subjectivities are developed in relation to their experiences of Othering or internalized normativity.

Othering thus is a core concept of discrimination theory and has also been used for and further developed in the analysis of racism, ableism, heteronormativity and so on. In feminist theory it has been further used to discuss sexism in most diverse areas. Most important for this book is the use in the feminist analysis of other medias. For example, feminist film analysis has criticized the privileging and normalization of the male in many films. According to this theory, depending

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44 De Beauvoir (2012 [in Fr. 1949]), p. 25.
46 See, e.g., Said (2019 [1978]), Fanon (2008 [in Fr. 1952]).
on one’s gender one is addressed differently or rather positions oneself differently in relation to a film.

In the following, I will show that such an Othering also takes place in the sound of popular music and that the different subjectivations and self-relations that can be derived from this are reflected in the sound of voices. Music thus contributes to the social production of gender.

**Performativity**

Performativity is by now a theoretical tool that makes the illusion of naturalness understandable as the constant adaptation to socially mediated norms. As Judith Butler has argued, being made a woman (or a man) by social realities is not only limited to the psyche and identity (that is, gender), but generate every idea of gender overall, including the gendered body (that is, sex). After all, language precedes and influences the perception of the categories according to which people are seen as male or female.\(^{48}\)

Thus, performativity is defined as the successful illusion of naturalness according to cultural norms, which are contained in a framework of intelligibility. This framework can be understood as a set of quotable behavioral patterns which are socially intelligible and which encourage the constant reproduction of oneself as male/female in everyday interactions. In this way the individual (quoting the framework) as well as the framework (relying on those quotations) are constantly reproduced in interaction. As Butler argues, this dynamic works in a repressive manner as it punishes identities that are not intelligible according to the framework, but it also contains a political potential, as the framework may change in the processes of reproduction.

To particularly understand the repressive functioning of performativity, Butler further refers to psychoanalysis and argues that the seemingly naturalness of femininity, masculinity and heterosexuality

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is based on the suppression of homoerotic desires.\textsuperscript{49} As she argues, this desire is erased or prevented from emerging even before it can be repressed. This prevents the loss of an (im-)possible desire from being processed linguistically, so that meaning cannot be assigned to such loss. Through this process, “the object is not only lost, but the desire fully denied”\textsuperscript{50}.

Referring to Freud's concept of melancholia, she explains that the process that denies homosexual desire (that is, making half of all humans impossible objects for desire, thus creating a loss) is the same as the one which creates an investment into one’s own gender, as the lost object (= same sex bodies/subjects as lost objects of desire). It cannot be mourned through language, and is preserved in the body as “radically unnameable”\textsuperscript{51}:

Some parts of the body become conceivable foci of pleasure precisely because they correspond to a normative ideal of a gender-specific body. Pleasures are in some sense determined by the melancholic structure of gender whereby some organs are deadened to pleasure, and others brought to life.\textsuperscript{52}

This process of “incorporation”\textsuperscript{53} does not take place once in early childhood, but, according to the theory of performativity, happens repeatedly. To reproduce gender, homoerotic desires have to be suppressed continuously, which explains the repression and hatred\textsuperscript{54} that people face if they are unwilling or unable to conform to the reproduction of gender according to the framework of intelligibility. At the same time,

\textsuperscript{49} More accurately: These desires are neither homo- nor heterosexual but predate the separation of humans into two sexes. Thus, it is exactly this process of suppression which forecloses one part of humans for desire, that produces the separation of two sexes and motivates the identification with one of these sexes at the same time.

\textsuperscript{50} Butler (1993), p. 69.

\textsuperscript{51} Butler (1993), p. 68.

\textsuperscript{52} Butler (1993), p. 70.

\textsuperscript{53} Butler (1990), p. 68.

The theory of performativity can be also used for the understanding of other seemingly natural categories or experiences, and I find it very productive to think about music with this theoretical tool. With performativity theory, I understand my impressions of singers or their messages as performative, that is, they are recognized by me as such, because they correspond to already internalized patterns, but their performativities again may (re-)shape those patterns. Further, in my own affective relations to those songs, I may invest into certain self-images and my experiences might be enabled through patterns that already materialized within my body. I will further develop these thoughts in my chapter on theoretical tools.

**Body**

The body is an important site for the reproduction of gender/sex, and it is also relevant in (popular) music. For example, feminist musicologist Susan McClary suggests seeing music as a “technology of the body”. Music thus teaches us “how to experience socially mediated patterns of kinetic energy, being in time, emotions, desire, pleasure and much more.”

Also, popular music scholar Simon Frith sees the cultural production of identity mediated through embodied experience of popular music:

> Music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers of the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives.

But knowing that the body is relevant is not the same as knowing how it is relevant. I will now give a short introduction to two approaches,

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which will carve out a more complex understanding of the body and its possible relations to music.

Dance scholar Gabriele Klein understands the body as twofold: An inner somatic body (Leib) can be differentiated from an outer surface (Körper).\textsuperscript{58} She further applies Christoph Wulf and Gunter Gebauer’s understanding of the concept of mimesis to dancing in pop music, providing an approach to understanding the somatic inscription of cultural values through music.\textsuperscript{59}

Gebauer and Wulf describe mimesis as a creative re-forming of the world within the individual.\textsuperscript{60} While this process makes reference to the given world, it does not passively repeat it, but generates something of its own. It makes the individual fit into the world. Mimesis thus is not a cognitive concept but rather a form of inhabiting one’s own body and subjectivity that ultimately establishes an inhabiting of the world. There is therefore a mimetic relationship between a found external world, which is already coded by the actions of others, and an embodied world modeled after it inside the subject.

This can be used as a model that establishes mediation between a world presented in pop music and the understanding of this world by individuals who relate to it from different perspectives, recreate it within themselves with deviations, and thus locate themselves in it, align themselves with it, and fit into it. For Klein then the body is the medium of musical experience but at the same time also the result of those experiences that inscribe themselves through repetition. At first the world is reshaped somatically in the inner body (Leib) which then enables social agency of the outer body (Körper) in a second step.\textsuperscript{61} This

\textsuperscript{58} This is a common differentiation in German scholarship.
\textsuperscript{59} Klein (2004), pp. 244-262.
\textsuperscript{60} Gebauer/Wulf (2003), p. 7. “In mimetischen Akten erzeugt das Subjekt durch seine eigene Formgebung die vorgefundene Welt noch einmal.”
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid. Translated from German original: “Da der Habitus leiblich strukturiert ist wird es zudem möglich, den Vorgang zu verstehen, wie leibliche Erfahrung sich körperlich darstellt und nach ‘außen’ getragen wird. Auch dieser nach ‘außen’ gerichtete Prozeß ist ein mimetischer Akt, ein Angleichen der ‘inneren
model can also be linked to performativity, as in both theories, an embodied subjectivity is produced and continuously updated through the preconscious appropriation of socially given patterns.\footnote{62}

This can be particularly seen in another example: Suzanne Cusick offers an approach to the (gendered) body in popular music in her 1999 article “On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex”, where she is particularly concerned with the question of what kind of body is produced in vocal sound.

Like Speech, too, it [=singing] is often taken to express or represent an interior truth: the truth from within the body’s borders is moved by the breath (which originates outside the body) beyond those borders. One might well argue that Song, like Speech, is always a performance of the idea of subjectivity (in the sense of inner life). Both are certainly performances of the body’s interior, performances situated in the interior.\footnote{63}

In this process, the boundaries of the body and thus the body itself are produced performatively not only as a surface, but as a three-dimensional space. The voice thus produces not only a supposed biological difference as externality (that is, high female and low male voices, etc.), but moreover ideas about the subject that is located in this body.

In discussing two examples (Pearl Jam and the Indigo Girls), Cusick formulates the thesis that performativity of gender in the voice is constructed primarily through an audible adaptation (female) or,
indeed, non-adaptation (male) of the vocally performed body-subject
to cultural norms of beautiful singing. \footnote{Cf. Cusick (1999), p. 38.} Cultural norming penetrates
more (female) or less (male) deeply into the body, which becomes
audible through the open or closed resonance chambers. Male and
female singers thus demonstrate in their voice their willingness to
submit to cultural norms to a greater or lesser extent. \footnote{Cusick's thesis underpins the analysis of vocal timbre as a performative moment for corporeality and subjectivity and shows how this can bring sexist social relations into view. Her understanding of singing, however, is based on rather traditional notions (stable pitches, little noise, and the greatest possible use of bodily resonance spaces as an ideal), which cannot be presupposed as normative for pop music in this way: There are, for example, numerous female singers whose singing style clearly deviates from this traditional ideal – such as Britney Spears' creaky voice. They are nevertheless, and perhaps precisely because of these deviations, clearly recognizable as female. Furthermore, Cusick captures masculinity only negatively, as non-adaptation. This does not, however, explain the existence of an almost typical male rock voice, which is also the basis of Cusick's analysis (Eddie Vedder from Pearl Jam). Here, apparently, norms also have an effect, to which this sound submits. While I would agree with Cusick that demonstrating non/adaptation or non/sovereignty to culture plays a role in the performativity of gender, there is obviously another level at play here that dictates the ways in which this non/adaptation can or must be performed. Culture thus encounters on the one hand as an object (traditional singing ideal), but nevertheless acts productively on another more hidden level as a framework of cultural intelligibility that sets the rules for the successful performativity of masculinity or femininity and escapes the analysis here.}

Cusick's paper particularly points to the performative emergence
of interiority and subjectivity in the voice. Furthermore, her approach
brings the borders of the body into focus of music analysis. This differ-
etiation is reminiscent of Klein's separation of a somatic inner body
(Leib) and an outer surface (Körper). In conclusion, it becomes clear
that there will be several bodies that we will encounter in this book and
all of them I understand as results of performativity:

There is the body of the listener that emerges performatively in the
process of listening, as well as the body of the singer, which also only

\footnote{Cf. Cusick (1999), p. 38.}
exists as a projection in the process of listening, and both bodies can be differentiated into inner (Leib) and outer bodies (Körper).

**Listening, Sound, and the ‘Sonical’**

Finally, the notion of sound as culturally embedded material (the sonical) needs to be introduced. As I have already elaborated on, music is only understandable in and through its cultural context as a dispositif. But this does not mean, that the effects and meaning of music can be reduced to this context. Rather I suggest understanding sound as enriched by contextual uses. Specific sounds are placed again and again in specific context and/or are used for certain purposes. Furthermore, specific sounds have specific properties and characteristics and are, especially historically speaking, dependent on the material preconditions of their productions (e.g., before recording technology, there was no bell-sound without a bell). Thus, not all sounds are good for all purposes (e.g., a very soft short “ping” will not make a good emergency alarm to arouse everyone’s attention and a pipe organ is not very mobile so its sound will not be useable for a parade – at least not before the advent of recording technology). For this reason specific sounds are not empty signifiers, even if the understanding of sound is culturally organized. Sounds are not arbitrarily available for any meaning or function ascribed to them.

Acknowledging the material background of sound is not the same as seeing sound as something natural or neutral in relation to human reception. There is no neutral reception of sound, because all past experiences have an impact on future expectations.\(^{66}\) Thus, the reception of specific characteristics and properties of a specific sound is shaped by past experiences. In the process of listening, for example, one may

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66 My understanding here stems from phenomenology (e.g., Merleau Ponty, 2002, p. 178ff.). Also, I see phenomenology and performativity theory as interrelated: Performativity theory was developed by Judith Butler in close relation to phenomenological thinking of Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. See: Butler (1988).
focus on certain properties of a sound and in doing so not perceive others, depending on which properties have been learned as meaningful. This can be understood similarly to the performativity of the body according to Butler: There is no reception of pure sound (as there is no pure body or subject), but only reception of sound as already shaped by experiences and expectations.

To account for the culturally embeddedness of sound, Peter Wicke developed the German term ‘Das Sonische’, which will be translated as ‘the sonical’ in this book and will be used as a basic term for my thinking of sound in popular music. The ‘sonical’ describes the sonic material of popular music as already culturally shaped: Sound in popular music is “culturalized sound”. In this concept, music as sound itself is linked to its recipients: Any understanding of music can be understood as a kind of linkage between sound and the listening subject. The listening subject is already culturally pre-structured such that it can encounter sound in an appropriate way (as ‘sonical’), just as sound is adapted to the expectations of the listening subject. Both adaptations are dy-

67 Daniel Villegas-Vélez also recently discussed a similar point in “The Matter of Timbre: Listening, Genealogy, Sound” (Villegas-Vélez, 2021, p. 13). Villegas-Vélez further argues that this cultural encoding in Western music history that privileges pitch and rhythm over timbre can be related to colonialist ideologies.

68 While Wicke probably had the English word ‘sonic’ in mind, when he introduced the German “Sonisch”, we decided to translate it into English as ‘sonical’, because the sonic has become a debated term in the context of sound studies. Especially wordings like Christoph Cox’s “sonic materialism” (2011) or “sonic realism” (2018) as well as the use of the term in Steve Goodman’s monograph “Sonic Warfare” (2010) have been criticized by Brian Kane (2015) as reproducing a nature-culture dualism. Furthermore, Marie Thompson (2017) has criticized in this context the so called ‘ontological turn’ as re-naturalizing some sort of a neutral or universal sonic material. As she argues, the related separation of ontologically orientated and culturally orientated sound studies is de-politicizing sound in the service of White supremacy. As the concept of the sonical in this argument refers to something quite different from the sonic in all these contexts, we choose to use the rather unusual word ‘sonical’, to avoid misunderstandings.


namic, that is, it is not a once completed process but a constant parallel development. While the sound of a recording may remain unchanged, the ‘sonical’, as the cultural understanding of this sound, may shift over time.

Wicke elaborates on a related topic with John Shepherd in their joint book *Music and Cultural Theory*. Therein, they develop a theoretical concept for meaning in music in which they give up on de Saussure’s sign theory and his separation of signifier (word/sign) and signified (what the word/sign means) for music,71 and propose “a performative semiological model”72 instead. Meaning in popular music, for Shepherd and Wicke, emerges in and through the moments of the coupling of internal “states of awareness”73 and music as sound experience. The possible sound experience depends on the states of awareness present in the subject. These states are finally invoked and confirmed by the music.

This is a performative process because only through this process the experience of music is produced and made possible in the first place. The states of awareness are thereby already pre-present in the subject and can be understood as citable patterns in the sense of the framework of cultural intelligibility. In this process, states of awareness do not have a referential effect (of something absent), but produce their own presence. Musical experience as signifier and states of awareness as signified can thereby only be separated theoretically. In other words, the signified is automatically called into consciousness by the signifier and thus becomes present, as opposed to being only referential, as it happens in linguistic communication.74

Thus, the ‘sonical’ can be understood as the place of this linkage: the ‘sonical’ couples certain “states of awareness” to specific sounds in music.

71 To be exact: Shepherd and Wicke argue that the signifier and the signified can be separated in theory, but there is no separation possible in the actual reception of music where the experience of music is the experience of a related ‘state of awareness’ at the same time.
73 Cf. ibd., p. 173.
74 Nevertheless, a sign-based reference is possible through this material basis. Cf. Shepherd/Wicke (1997), p. 205ff.
It further cannot be placed neither on the side of the listener, nor on the side of the sound alone. Much more, the ‘sonical’ can be understood as structuring the encounter of music and listener, enabling the process of experiencing music in the first place.\textsuperscript{75}

**Method and Structure**

In the following I will start with the development of this book’s “Tools of Analysis” (chapter 1). In it I will present various ways (associations, homologies, the genotext, auditory pleasures, the sonical body, and the vocalic body) of thinking about and examining the complex relationships we all entertain with music and sounds. In the context of this book, these are tools for music analysis that will be applied in the closer examination of the six musical examples. However, they can also be used beyond that as tools for reflecting on one's own music listening. It is, however, not my aim to provide an overarching theory of 'how music works'. I do not want to pin 'music' down in this form, but rather to open possible approaches that can be expanded or adapted as needed.

Then, I will use my toolbox to analyze the effect and production of gender in my examples of popular music. Here, I will start with two examples of male (White, cis, hetero, able-bodied ...) voices. I will show that such privileged voices are also (often unmarked) at the center of many music descriptions and further, that this centrality not only plays a role in discourses about music, but is also produced in the sound itself.

\textsuperscript{75} I see this idea of coupling as closely related to the concept of listening as it is used in “the listening ear” by Jennifer Stoever (2016), as “listening to listening” by Nina Sun Eidsheim (2018), or as “hungry listening” by Dylan Robinson (2020). These authors argue that in the process of listening, pre-shaped culturalized expectations and desires of the listeners limit and focus and thus co-produce what can and will be heard. Thus, particularly Whiteness is produced and naturalized in practices of listening that focus on the sounds of racialized Others as materials for consumption. Most of this great work was not available, when I developed my own theories as I present them in this book, which is why I will point to it in footnotes, but not in the main text.
This production of centrality in sound is dependent on certain aesthetic notions, which I will refer to as the ‘real’ voice. This is a style of singing connected to aesthetic paradigms of emotional truthfulness, spontaneity and authenticity. This ‘real’ voice as I will show, also contains an invitation to identification, which further fosters the privileging of a hegemonic White male concept of the body.

To contrast this, the four examples of White female voices, that I will deal with in the third chapter, cannot be understood according to the same aesthetic model. As I will show, sexualizations and a positioning of female singers as counterparts to the listener, instead of identification figures, can be analyzed and determined in sound. These ‘other’ vocalizations contain aesthetic potentials beyond the aesthetic paradigm of the ‘real’ voice. While this may also have potentials for empowering listening strategies for (White, heterosexual, able-bodied) female listeners, it is nonetheless problematic that overall different concepts of the body are conveyed which tend to either make the body of the analyzed female singers disappear or turn into an object.

Overall, I will be concerned with naming different musical experiences, to achieve a more nuanced understanding. In affirmative modes of music consumption, individuals relate on an intimate and affective level to musical pieces, which thus move listeners physically and emotionally. In current discourses, such inner movements are usually only discussed in general terms, but not in their specificity. However, I am interested in exactly who is moved how and where, and how these movements interact with, or rather, play their roles in overarching social structures such as sexism.

All in all, I hope to make sexism actually audible in my examples and beyond them. In the conclusion, I would like not only to summarize my results, but also to reflect on possible political consequences of my findings.