



**FACULTY OF ARTS
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*Feminist and Queer Noisemaking: An Exploration of
Gender and Sexuality in Electronic Art Music*

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Program and/or course:	Master's Thesis in Gendering Practices
Level:	Second Cycle
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Supervisor:	Juan Velasquez, Volha Olga Sasunkevich
Examiner:	Selin Çağatay
Report no:	xx (not to be filled in by the student/students)

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Keyword:	Gender, art music, queerness, queer theory, music, composition, musicology, sound studies

Purpose: This qualitative thesis focuses on female and LGBTQ+ perspectives by critically examining how nonheteronormative notions of gender, sexuality and emotion can manifest in these types of music

Theory: Theoretically, this thesis is rooted in feminist musicology and sound studies, the literature of which will be combined with gender studies theories such as performativity, disidentification, queer temporalities and queer subcultures.

Method: Methodologically, interviews were conducted with the Stockholm based noise duos Seroconversion and Sisterloops in combination with the analyses of their pieces and an analysis of *Playground of Yesterday* by Merve Erez. Critical discourse analysis was used to identify feminist and/or queer discourses in the interviews which then went on to inform the piece analysis.

Result: The findings suggest that gender can be present in the process of composing such pieces and the music itself can become an empty signifier upon which the artist is free to add discourses, which sometimes allows for activism to present itself.

Abstract

Men can be said to dominate the music industry, especially when it comes to composers and musicians who create experimental music and sounds which fall outside of mainstream music. Women and members of the LGBTQ+ community remain minorities within these genres, with little research being done on queer and feminist perspectives. This qualitative thesis focuses on female and LGBTQ+ perspectives by critically examining how nonheteronormative notions of gender, sexuality and emotion can manifest in these types of music. It attempts to answer the following research questions:

- a) Are nonheteronormative discourses of gender, sexuality and emotion present in composers' and musicians' creative processes? If so, how?
- b) How do these expressions of identity contribute to the overall diversity of sound art and experimental music?
- c) Can feminist and queer activism be found within these types of music?

Theoretically, this thesis is rooted in feminist musicology and sound studies, the literature of which will be combined with gender studies theories such as performativity, disidentification, queer temporalities and queer subcultures. Methodologically, interviews were conducted with the Stockholm based noise duos Seroconversion and Sisterloops in combination with the analyses of their pieces and an analysis of *Playground of Yesterday* by Merve Erez. Critical discourse analysis was used to identify feminist and/or queer discourses in the interviews which then went on to inform the piece analysis. The findings suggest that gender can be present in the process of composing such pieces and the music itself can become an empty signifier upon which the artist is free to add discourses, which sometimes allows for activism to present itself.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

It was around my second year of music college when I first began to question why there weren't any women composers being discussed in my music history classes. 20th-century composers such as John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen as well as the classical masters Mozart and Bach were often mentioned throughout my secondary school music classes and higher education in music but female composers remained absent. I then came across Tara Rodger's (2010) book *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound*, which in addition to my growing interest in leftist politics and feminism, helped to further my interest in the lack of representation of women in the music industry and in history. This brings me to now, where I wish to explore queerness in relation to these types of music in my thesis, as queer and norm-critical perspectives are seemingly lacking within feminist musicology and sound studies. I feel like this would be an interesting topic to explore given my background in music, having insight into the types of discrimination present in the music industry, and having gained knowledge from studying gender studies.

1.1.1. Introduction to Western Art Music

This thesis focuses on several genres of music located in the broad term of electroacoustic music and experimental music. More specifically, it looks at compositions which can be categorised as noise, sound art and contemporary Western art music. These categorisations are often overlapping and have similar characteristics to each other whilst simultaneously are also different enough from each other to warrant being referred to by different genres of music.

Electroacoustic music is an umbrella term which encompasses computer and technology-made music which do not follow the typical production values or song writing structures of pop and dance (electronic) music (Bosma 2013, p3-4). It is defined in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* as 'music in which electronic technology, now primarily computer-based, is used to access, generate, explore and configure sound materials, and in which loudspeakers are the prime medium of transmission' (Emmerson and Smalley 2001, p59). Noise music and sound art as explored in this thesis, can, therefore, be included in the overarching term of electroacoustic music, as electronic instruments such as synthesizers are commonly found in these genres, with material real-life instruments sometimes being used. Noise music as a music genre is typically characterised by the use of computers and or

synthesizers to produce music which is primarily electronic in nature. It also does not follow the typical notions of harmony, melody, rhythm and timing and is known for its high volume, long-lasting pieces and use of effects (Atton 2011, p325). The volume is what sets it apart as a genre from sound art, with sound art typically opting for fewer effects than noise and having a lesser focus on the volume.

The other music examined in this thesis (see chapter 7) can be loosely defined as Western art music or experimental composition as it typically favours real-life instruments over electronic ones. It more closely resembles classical music as it commonly features the use of scores and the music is often performed by classical musicians. However, there still can be crossovers into electroacoustic music by using aspects of noise or by choosing to utilise electronic instruments and composing techniques. This is what the pieces discussed in this thesis have in common with each other, as despite having specific characteristics, there is no one specific way to create art music. They each can be seen as sharing the common goal of sound exploration and experimentation in music which can lead to unconventional ways of using harmony, melody and at times rhythm, and can at times lead them to be read as somewhat ‘anti-art’ as it is possible to position them as going against the mainstream conventions of music. Therefore, even if the majority of the pieces examined in this thesis do not match the specifics of noise as a music genre, they still can be referred to as noise due to the chaotic and unfamiliar nature of the sound. This creates the divide between sound; noise in a general sense versus mainstream music (Klett and Gerber 2014, p275). Therefore, the term noise will be used interchangeably with Western art music, electroacoustic music and experimental music to describe the music examined in this thesis, as each act can be said to be making noise in a broader sense.

1.1.2. Feminist Musicology and Sound Studies

It has been suggested that historical masculine ideas of mastery are, and continue to be present within experimental music, sound art and musical composition (Rodgers 2010, McCartney 2006, Armstrong, 2003). These ideas can be said to influence ideals within these types of music today (McCartney, 2006) and ultimately shape the way experimental music and sound art is viewed, both inside and outside of music education (Rodgers 2010b, Armstrong, 2003). Thus, producing the idea that men are perhaps more stereotypically interested in technology than women (Armstrong, 2003), and that women, although present within these genres are not regarded as equal. This results in many women and LGBTQ+ musicians, composers and sound artists being erased from history as they may not fit the traditional male archetype of mastery

that has been present within electronic experimental music and sound art for many years (McCartney, 2006) which consists of white and western men being regarded as dominant in relation to music. Within the small but growing research within feminist sound studies and musicology (Bosma, 2013), feminist perspectives can highlight that the importance of women in this field is necessary. (McCartney and Friz, 2014, Rodgers, 2010). However, little advances have been made surrounding the involvement of LGBTQ+ people who create these types of music and with the rise of neoliberalism ‘bearing down on artists and arts organizations in strikingly difficult ways’ and underfunding these programmes (Rodgers 2015, p80), bringing norm-critical and queer perspectives to feminist musicology may now be more important than ever.

1.2 Research Focus

This qualitative thesis aims to dismantle the notions of masculine mastery found within electroacoustic music and experimental composition by focusing exclusively on female and LGBTQ+ musicians, composers and sound artists’ creative processes. These processes will be highlighted through semi-structured interviews with 2 Stockholm based noise duos, Seroconversion combined with analyses of their pieces as suggested by them, and an analysis of the piece *Playground of Yesterday* by Merve Erez, all of which encompass discourses of gender and sexuality. Ultimately, this thesis aims to critically examine how nonheteronormative notions of gender, sexuality and emotion can manifest in these types of music and attempts to answer the following research questions:

RQA. Are nonheteronormative notions of gender, sexuality and emotion present in composers’ and musicians’ creative processes? If so, how?

RQB. How do these expressions of identity contribute to the diversity of sound art and experimental music?

RQC. Can feminist and queer activism be found within these types of music?

Critical discourse analysis is used on two levels, firstly to identify the themes and discourses present in the interviews, and then to inform analyses of the pieces, which are rooted in queer theory and feminist discourse found within sound studies, musicology and music education and are centred around the potential for music to be regarded as an empty signifier.

1.3 Overview of Chapters

The structure of the thesis is as follows: Firstly, a literature review consisting of the material relevant to the thesis topic, as well as an outline of the key theories used is presented; followed by the methodology and methods section; 3 analytical chapters; before final conclusions are made.

The research overview provides insight into the history of feminist and queer musicology, how it as a field of study has developed; what future research could entail and how notions of power and masculine mastery have been defined within western art music. I then go onto offer insight on the use of theory in the following and third chapter, 'Theories' where I explore queer and feminist theory in relation to the thesis topic and show how it can be applied to musicology. The fourth chapter, 'Methods and Methodologies,' covers all of the aspects involved in interviewing the subjects and analysing pieces as well as critical discourse analysis which was used to analyse the findings and the philosophical underpinnings of the study. The following chapters are dedicated to the 3 participants in this thesis. The fifth chapter focuses on the work of Seroconversion and explores queerness in relation to body as well as themes of gay male subcultures, disidentification, queer failure and queer feelings. The Sisterloops chapter (chapter 6) looks at the importance of body in their work and the performativity of gender in relation to performance art. Finally, chapter 7 explores Merve Erez's work in relation to socio-political circumstances in Turkey. After these three analytical chapters, final conclusions are made which suggest that gender and sexuality can be thought of as present within the processes of composition; that activism can be present within any work that challenges the notions male dominance within art music and that queer and women composers can contribute to the diversity of art music and sound art.

1.4. Contribution to Existing Research

This thesis will contribute to the small but growing feminist research within sound studies, musicology and music education. By merging queer theory with existing feminist musicology, the introduction of a queer perspective which critically examines the processes in which composers, musicians and sound artists work and display notions of gender, sexuality and emotion in their work could prove to be valuable to both sound studies and musicology as well as potentially music education. It is my hope that by conducting this analysis I can provide a new and innovative model of analysis in feminist and queer musicology through which aspects of identity such as gender and sexuality as well as emotions are can be considered.

2. Research Overview

Here, I examine the feminist musicology and sound studies literature that is relevant to my thesis subject area. Below I present a history of feminist musicology and sound studies in which I present how these fields have developed before discussing the historic notions of masculine mastery intertwined with audio-tech discourse before moving on to discuss the possibilities of a queer musicology.

2.1. A History of Feminist Musicology and Sound Studies

Feminist research within musicology, sound studies and music education has made significant contributions to the presence of gender within experimental music and sound art, and on a broader level, music technology. Several musicologists, composers and sound artists have made contributions to this field by investigating and criticising the dominance of men in within composition and music technology by attempting to shift the focus onto female composers' perspectives by writing about their compositional approaches and by analysing their pieces in relation to critical gender theory (Ingleton, 2015; Bosma, 2013; Oliveros, 1984; Rodgers, 2010b; McCartney, 2006).

Joke Dame (1994, referenced by Bosma 2013, p16) poses 3 stages of feminist musicology; similarity, difference and deconstruction, all of which can be said to align with different aspects of feminist thought (ibid, p15). According to Dame, the first stage of feminist musicology aimed to discover and promote women composers by profiling their work, publishing scores and recordings and by conducting research about women composers. It focuses on the question: 'why there are so few women in the musical canon?' (Bosma 2013, p16; paraphrasing Dame 1994, p21) and can be considered what Ellen Koskoff (2005, p96) terms a 'women-centric' approach and connects the first wave of feminist musicology to early second-wave feminism (ibid). The second phase, as Dame suggests, features a greater focus on femininity and feminine epistemology. It seeks to discover feminine ways of writing which may be different from the traditional masculine ways, whilst also rejecting the notions of equality where women expected to adopt masculine methods of writing (ibid, p16). Koskoff (2005, p93) suggests this phase is marked by women being regarded as an analytical category, thereby separating them from mankind and creating the category of 'women's music' within musicology. As Ingleton (2015, p335) suggests, there is no one way of doing 'feminist composition' as this would demand the categorisation of 'women's music' or 'feminist music.' These categorisations could have the potential to separate men from women within these types

of music, which could be both beneficial and negative for the calls for a more gender-centric analysis of social-musical histories within musicology that use ethnomusicological fieldwork (Koskoff, 2005 p93) as well as the calls for a greater presence of women in music technology and composition (McCartney and Friz, 2014; Rodgers, 2010).

The third and final phase as described by Dame (Bosma 2013, p16) development, critiques the grouping of women as one homogenous group in the second phase and instead perceives both femininity and masculinity as ‘social-cultural-historical constructions that are interchangeable’ (ibid, p17). Aspects of race, sexuality and class can come into play here as there is less of a focus on ‘difference as a binary opposition’ (ibid) and more of a focus on issues of diversity. This phase saw an influx of feminist explorations in musicology, beginning in the 90s which helped to define the ‘new’ musicology which took third-wave and post-feminist perspectives into account (ibid, p17-18). It is within this third phase of feminist musicology that I wish to categorise all of the texts related to gender and western art music composition in this thesis, as even though the terms ‘woman’ and ‘man’ may appear as homogenous, my desire is not to use them in this way by perceiving gender as a social and historical construct and by utilising queer theory and by perceiving race, sexuality and class as aspects of gender, despite all the interviewees in this thesis being white.

2.2. Power and Mastery in Western Art Music

Ties have been drawn between the dominance of men in art music and masculine mastery (Rodgers 2010b; McCartney 2006; Armstrong 2003; Ingleton, 2015), which typically favours and benefits ‘an archetypal Western, white, and male subject’ (Rodgers 2010b, v). Tara Rodgers (ibid) wonders why this is the case within electronic music as this mastery can lead to anyone who does not fit this archetypal being excluded from western art music, which leads to the question of how the representation of women would have developed within this masculine ideal, had they the chance (Ingleton 2015, p15). To illustrate the notions of masculine mastery in art music, Rodgers (2010b, v-vi) favours the use of two metaphors; western electronic sounds as waves and electronic sounds as individuals. She suggests that;

The wave metaphor, in circulation since ancient times, produces an affective orientation to audio technologies based on a masculinist and colonizing subject position, whereby the generation and control of electronic sound entails the pleasure and danger of navigating and taming unruly waves. The second metaphor took shape over the nineteenth century as sounds, like modern bodies and subjects, came to be understood as individual entities with varying properties to be analyzed and controlled.

This suggests that sounds perceived as waves has and continues to give rise to audio-technologies embedded in masculinist and colonialist thinking. Whereas, the ‘electronic sounds as individuals’ metaphor has ‘provided means by which to critically analyse the concept of the individual as one considered through generative principles of unity derived from part-whole relations within audio-technical discourses’ (Ingleton 2015, p46; referencing Rodgers, 2010b). Rodgers’ use of metaphors, intertwined with neoliberalism which has seen cuts to arts funding and educational programmes (Rodgers 2013, p80), provides new insights into the analysis of power and colonialism in Western art music as well as the individual in relation to sound as on one hand, there is a continuous degree of power present which benefits the Western, white and male subject whilst there is also space created for the individual in which they are regarded as bodies and are analysed in accordance with audio-technical discourse.

These metaphors can be said to mirror notions of sameness and difference within experimental music and sound art where the ‘ideal image’ of a white and Western man becomes the norm and others are excluded (Ingleton 2015, p52; referencing Scott, 1996). Sameness and difference, explored in post-humanist circles by the likes of Barad (2014) and Haraway (1988), also gets touched upon by Victoria Armstrong (2003), who, in a music classroom study, suggests that men typically favour a more hands-on approach when composing as ‘the command and control of technology is one way in which men are defined both materially and symbolically’ (ibid, p13), as opposed to women who can feel alienated or perhaps underrepresented from and within technology due to its masculine marketing and the value placed on analytical thought (Oliveros 1984, p132-137).

By utilising Turkle’s perception of mastery (Armstrong 2003; referencing Turkle and Papert, 1990), Armstrong (ibid) is able to illustrate the differences in composing between the girls and boys in her study, arguing that the boys typically favoured hard mastery in their work versus the girls who displayed soft mastery working methods. Hard mastery is defined by Armstrong as a tightly controlled mode of working in which the subject has complete control of the environment with a highly structured plan detailing specifics of the project. Any mistakes will be fixed under hard mastery and through the controlled use of the computer and process, the aim is met with no occurrences for ‘chance’ happenings throughout the process (ibid, p14). In comparison, soft mastery encompasses less of a structured plan and more of a vague structure which allows for negotiation, compromise, exploration and the development of new ideas, with a lot being left to chance and mistakes sometimes becoming part of the project (ibid, p14-15).

This exploration in styles of working that Armstrong outlines, although very binary and generalised, can provide insight into the processes behind composition and song writing within the music classroom and can potentially help to illustrate ways of working which stem beyond the classroom and into professional compositional modes of working. The idea of hard mastery versus soft mastery gets built upon by Andra McCartney's (2006) text where empathetic knowledge and ecological thinking are outlined in relation to well-known composers. Taking the two concepts from Lorraine Code (1995, referenced by McCartney 2006), McCartney examines composers' creative processes and poses that male composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Boulez typically favoured a well-planned out approach similar in nature to the concept of hard mastery, while many female composers such as Pauline Oliveros and Hildegard Westerkamp use empathetic knowledge and ecological thinking in their work (ibid).

According to McCartney, empathetic knowledge and ecological thought produce knowledge that is always in dialogue with each other rather than being confined to the individual (ibid, p24), thus, creating a discussion between monologue versus dialogue approaches. In a compositional context, this can translate as opting for more of an empathic approach which can allow for chance happenings and negotiations with the working process (ibid, p24). This is somewhat similar to Donna Haraway's situated knowledge where 'knowledge is situated both by attempting to know the place of study as closely as possible, as well as to attempt to understand one's own epistemic position, its particularities and limitations, as clearly as one can, and to make that clear' (ibid, p25; referencing Haraway, 1991). McCartney suggests situated knowledge along with empathetic knowledge and ecological thinking can be located within the works of Daphne Oram and Pauline Oliveros, as both these composers make use of their environments when working by reflecting on interactions with the environment, by paying attention to context and by leaving certain aspects up to chance. Oliveros writes about similar aspects of empathetic knowledge and ecological thought by discussing two creative modes: active analytical creativity and receptive creativity (Oliveros 1984, p132-137). Active analytical thought stems from cognitive thought, whereas receptive creativity is when the artist becomes a medium for creativity. Society, according to Oliveros (ibid), has and always will favour analytical thought as this reflects the male mastery that is common within experimental composition (Rodgers, 2010b). Oliveros' approach along with that of McCartney's (2006) and Armstrong's (2003) can all be said to problematise the notions of masculine mastery within experimental music and sound art, and also serve as tools for analyses of composers and musicians creative processes, which ultimately opens up the

conversation to include women and potentially others who do not fit into the archetypal mould of the white and Western male such as women and LGBTQ+ people.

2.3. Towards A Queer Musicology?

It was in the 90s where queer musicology first emerged (Ingleton 2015, p62). This may have coincided with the third wave of feminist musicology (Bosma 2013, p16; referencing Dame 1994) as this was when social aspects such as race, sexuality and class first started to become parts of feminist musicology as opposed to being considered enquiries within ethnomusicology (Ingleton 2015, p62). The essentialism and omission of race, sexuality and ethnicity, present in some strands of feminist musicology could be seen as why queer musicology and aspects of norm-critical thinking have not taken off within feminist musicology. However, there still remains a small pool of musicology literature which focuses on queerness and favours more of a norm-critical approach. *A Queer Noise Manifesto* (2015) written by Seroconversion, one of the case studies for this thesis (see chapter 5 for an in-depth analysis) is a political manifesto which uses the work of Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva to explore how queerness and noise music can be joined together to create a type of resistance. By equating queerness with unwanted desire and noise with unwanted sound (ibid, p3-4), they are able to suggest that all queers can be positioned as ‘nosicians in a straight society’ and that – to paraphrase the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power’s (ACT UP) message - ‘NOISE = LIFE!’ (ibid, p8). This has connections to the work of queer theorists Jack Halberstam (2005, 2011) and José Esteban Muñoz (1999) (see chapter 4) and can also be connected to activism within art and experimental music, especially when many programmes for this type of music are being cut due to neoliberalism (Rodgers, 2015) which can potentially render neoliberalism as a form of hard mastery. One can then be said to be doing activism simply by composing music, especially if that individual is queer, as queerness ‘offers an opportunity to compose a proliferation of identities beyond proscribed hegemonic norms and performances, sexuality and otherwise’ (Joyce 1997, p54). This suggests that queer composers and musicians can use writing music to explore queerness on a creative level that they may otherwise not get to explore in reality.

In addition to this, composer Pauline Oliveros, often branded as ‘the female composer’ rather than an example as to how different women composers compose (McCartney 2006, p29), wrote that she wonders ‘what an androgynous musical form would be?’ (Oliveros 1984, p112). Which she later answered in an interview in 1994, saying that androgyny would depend on the structure and assemblage of the piece, as music can be linear, non-linear or both (Maus and Oliveros 1994, p185). This suggests that Oliveros, herself, may have been locating androgyny

in her music which doesn't follow a strict structure or straight-line. Thus, it can also be suggested that Oliveros may have been following a queer temporality within her work (Halberstam, 2005), which will be elaborated on later. This is vital to the topic of my thesis, as it has the possibility to bridge the gap between queer theory and feminist musicology and sound studies, as well as reflecting the processes different composers employ (RQA) which will ultimately contribute to the diversity of electroacoustic music and experimental composition (RQB).

2.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a research overview of the feminist musicology and sound studies research that is relevant to my thesis topic. This chapter has unearthed themes of masculine mastery, sameness/difference, the compositional process and the lacking queer perspective. Firstly, I offered a history of feminist musicology and how it can be viewed as having 3 phases; similarity, difference and development. These phases much like feminism, as I have explained, all have different areas of focus within feminist musicology, with the common aim to explore feminine perspectives within musicology. Following this, I gave insight into masculine mastery within western art music, explaining how it can be linked to historical masculine ownership before moving onto exploring possibilities for a queer musicology. These three aspects combined with the main theories explored in the next chapter provide relevant insight into the subject area of exploring femininity and queerness within western art music.

3. Theories

This chapter will highlight and critically examine the key literature and theories that will influence the findings and analysis of this thesis. Having explored the key feminist musicology and sound studies literature in the previous chapter, here I wish to examine the gender studies specific literature with the goal being to connect the theories below with the literature explored in the previous chapter together in a way that is relevant to the scope of the research. The theories explored in this chapter largely reflect different perspectives within the field queer theory such as disidentification, queer subcultures and the queer art of failure. Other relevant literature that does not reflect the subchapter headings will be brought in when necessary to strengthen the arguments.

3.1. The Performativity of Gender

Judith Butler famously suggested that gender is socially constructed by the repetition of norms within the heteronormative society (Butler, 1990). This thesis takes focus on her stances about gender being performative. She suggests that;

Gender is performative insofar as it is the *effect* of a regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized *under constraint*. Social constraints, taboos, prohibitions, threats of punishment operate in the ritualized repetition of norms, and this repetition constitutes the temporalized scene of gender construction and destabilization. There is no subject who precedes or enacts this repetition of norms. (Butler 1993, p21).

This suggests that gender as performance is a result of the repeated heteronormative acts produced by society. Society then punishes and sets limitations for people who do not follow the unwritten gender rules, even though no one can fully act out the norms perfectly as ‘there is no subject who is “free” to stand outside these norms or to negotiate them at a distance’ (ibid, p22).

Butler’s perception of freedom and agency can, however, be seen as gaps in between the norms of the heteronormative society, which is how she defines her definition of agency (ibid, p22). ‘[F]reedom, possibility, agency do not have an abstract or pre-social status but are always negotiated within a matrix of power,’ (ibid, p22). This suggests that agency cannot be radically claimed but must rather be settled upon within the already rooted system of heteronormativity. Butler then wonders if it is possible to rethink the subversive genders which fall outside of the binary and if it is possible to use queerness as a tool for freedom when rethinking performance (ibid). She suggests that ‘if the regulatory fictions of sex and gender are themselves multiply contested sites of meaning, then the very multiplicity of their

construction holds out the possibility of a disruption of their univocal posturing,' (Butler 1990, p43). This is what ties Butler's work to that of queer theorists, in particularly Muñoz and Halberstam's work, which will be visited in the remainder of this chapter.

Butler's ideas about gender have been used within feminist sound art, musicology and music education texts more so than the other gender studies theories discussed and used in this thesis. This could be because Butlerian thought can provide an introduction to queer theory and norm-critical thinking. Ingleton (2015), rooted in feminist sound studies, utilises Butler when analysing feminist pieces to work out whether or not discourses of gender can be found within the music. Whereas Abramo (2009) uses the theory of performativity to look at how children in the music classroom utilise different techniques for creating music, depending on their sex. He then poses the question of whether or not the children in his study could have been said to be performing different gender roles on stage, and if his participants display agency when performing.

It is this particular part of Butler's thinking that inspired my thinking for the analysis of the artist's pieces. By focusing on the traditional and historical aspects of mastery commonly found in experimental music and sound art (Rodgers, 2010b), I am going to examine how discourses of gender, sexuality and queerness exist within electroacoustic music and experimental composition which will ultimately tie in with Butler's notions of the performativity of gender, agency and the matrix of heteronormativity, in which Butler's perception of gender is produced.

3.2. Disidentification

Disidentification is a theory popularised by queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz (1999). Building on Butler (1993), Muñoz's book *Disidentifications: Queers of Colour and the Performance of Politics* (1999) focuses on queer minoritarian subjects who fall outside of the repeated acts of gender heteronormativity Butler (1993) addressed by using case studies of drag queens and performance artists to illustrate how they utilise disidentification in their everyday lives. According to Muñoz, disidentification is a strategy of both resistance and survival that is employed by these minoritarian subjects.

'Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously eludes or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship.' (Muñoz 1999, p4)

This suggests that subjects disidentify with majoritarian culture so that they can navigate and survive it, as it can be harmful and punishing towards members of the LGBTQ+ community and people of colour. Disidentification can at times be a direct action and response, however, it must be careful to disrupt the unwritten rules of society (ibid, p5). This suggests that disidentification can be similar to partial identification as it is about working with the mainstream culture while also working against it and ‘recycling and rethinking coded meaning’ (ibid, p31). This means that minoritarian subjects may disidentify by having the ability and possibility to rework, reimagine or recycle something from the heteronormative culture into something that fits within queer spaces. In this way, disidentification can be seen as an act of performance in a way that is relevant to the topic of this thesis, as elements of performance can be found within people’s music and other creative outlets.

However, as Muñoz points out, disidentification is not the same as assimilation or counter-identification, as both require subjects to not acknowledge parts of their identities in order to fit into the boxes within assimilation and counter-identification. Assimilation is when one conforms to the heteronormative ideals such as straightness and whiteness and counter-identification is when queerness or blackness is radically claimed (ibid, p18). Counter-identification seems like a valid way of relating to identity as it works against assimilation, giving the subject the freedom to identify despite what the heteronormative society dictates, but as Muñoz points out, cross-identification runs the risk of turning the heteronormative social hierarchy on its head, making it so that the marginalised people of society become the dominant subjects (ibid). Therefore, disidentification is the best option according to Muñoz, as it allows subjects to exist within, negotiate with and identify with parts of heteronormative culture whilst at the same time existing in minoritarian spaces and culture, by claiming their identities in response to heteronormative culture.

It is also noted, however, that disidentification might not work for every minoritarian subject (ibid, p5). Muñoz points out that the direct action that disidentification encompasses is not suitable for all minoritarian subjects and that some may require a more conformist method, as perhaps they are not in the situation by which they are able to utilise the direct action and response found within disidentification (ibid, p5). This, I think is important to point out, as neither Muñoz nor I in my current study can speak for all minoritarian subjects. It does, however, remain unclear in Muñoz’s text as to why some subjects may be unable to disidentify with the dominant culture.

Building on the ideas from previous chapters, Muñoz addresses the possibility of disidentification being a practice of freedom by suggesting that ‘disidentification are strategies that are called on by minoritarian subjects throughout their everyday life. [...] My desire is to perpetrate disidentification and offer it not only as a hermeneutic but also as a possibility for freedom.’ (ibid, p179). This suggests that disidentification, as a reoccurring phenomenon should become a better-known practice as it holds potential to be used towards freedom for minoritarian subjects. A way of doing this could be through art. Muñoz suggests that art can allow for subjects to highlight their private disidentification practices, as once the art becomes physical, their disidentification will become a material object which can be viewed by the public (ibid, p177). This ties into the level of performativity involved with disidentification and therefore proves Muñoz’s theory as a relevant for this thesis as I am investigating how minoritarian subjects’ gender and sexuality can manifest within their creative processes and creative outputs by examining the processes in which they write and make their music. Within the field of sound studies and musicology, the theoretical use of disidentification in relation to these fields seems to not be common. I think this is due to the lack of research into queer studies and electronic experimental music. Nevertheless, I will present disidentification as a step forward from the already established Butlerian theories and concepts that are present in feminist sound studies and musicology (Ingleton, 2015) as an attempt to add more of a queer perspective to the current research in these fields as it will help further my analysis.

3.3. The Queer Art of Failure

Intertwined with Muñoz’s theory, Jack Halberstam discusses failure in their book *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011). By examining children’s animated films, Halberstam advocates for failure among queer subjects as it can provide minoritarian people who will always remain the ‘losers’ of capitalist heteronormative societies with an alternative way of living and striving for success in their own ways with goals that may be different from the heteronormative ideals (Halberstam 2011, p88). Halberstam equates failure with ‘the rage of the excluded white male, a rage that promises and delivers punishments for women and the people of color’ (ibid, p92). This suggests that white men and cisgendered, heterosexual people, in general, may feel rage towards people because they strive for different ideals and fall outside of the dominant culture due to their race, gender identity, sexuality or gender identity. This then encourages the rage of minoritarian subjects who feel the need to fight back and fight for their own representation because as Halberstam argues, capitalism presents the notion that queers cannot be capable of love and are regarded as not being real, and thus that a true queer culture will have to reject the

inauthenticity and inappropriateness that is commonly found within modern popular culture to be dominant (ibid, p95).

Halberstam also suggests that queer art has a certain darkness to it which is found in conjunction with failure. 'The queer artist works with rather than against failure and inhabits the darkness. Indeed, the darkness becomes a crucial part of a queer aesthetic.' (ibid, p96). This suggests that there can be a darkness found within queer art which may be an important part of the queer 'image.' Could this darkness be in response to the mistreatment of LGBTQ+ people by the majoritarian culture? Perhaps this darkness can be said to come from a place of rage in response to the heteronormative society? (ibid). In addition to the darkness found within queer art, there is also potential for art to speak to queer temporalities and spatiality as art, according to Halberstam, can resist narrowness and limitations (ibid, p106). This is perhaps the part of Halberstam's writing that is most relevant to the topic of this thesis, as the music being analysed can potentially be regarded as art due to its uncommercial and non-mainstream natures. This can produce an alternative temporality to mainstream music where emotions such as rage and failure can prevail, and activism can potentially be found within music (RQC).

3.4. Queer Subcultures

In addition to the queer art of failure, Halberstam also investigates queer subcultures in their book *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005). Here, they argue that queer subcultures do and will always exist, as LGBTQ+ people can become devoted to subcultures throughout their lives, while their heterosexual counterparts are occupied with heteronormative temporalities and time (ibid, p174), and that academics should pay more attention to queer subcultures as it would ultimately promote these subcultures and spread queer culture more broadly and into academic spaces (ibid, p159). Halberstam suggests we can 'alter our understandings of subcultures in several important ways in order to address the specificities of queer subcultures and queer subcultural lives' (ibid, p161).

Firstly, we must rethink the relation between theorist and subject by recognising that the relationship between researcher and queer subject might be difficult (ibid, p162). Next, they call for subcultural theory to encompass non-heterosexual, non-white and non-adolescent subjects before highlighting the relevancy of archives as a way to document queer subcultures and subcultural lives (ibid, p161). Finally, the importance of queer subcultures is touched upon because they give us the opportunity to redefine the gender binary that produces inequalities within so many subcultures (ibid, p161-162). This is a practical set of points which lend themselves both to Muñoz's theory of disidentification and potentially Halberstam's work with

queer rage, as there is a focus on queer punk music in this text. Queer punk music and queer punk subcultures, although not directly corresponding to the music I will analyse in this thesis, can be useful as much of the rage found in punk music could potentially manifest in electronic experimental music and sound art as well. Halberstam's texts can prove useful to my work by providing insight into queer activism and the Swedish experimental music scene (RQ3).

3.5. Emotions and Queer Feelings

Sara Ahmed (2004) explores the impact emotions can have within social-political contexts and how emotions can present themselves once attached to bodies. In her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* Ahmed examines 'how emotions work to shape the 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies' (ibid, introduction) by tracking how emotions move between bodies and how they can manifest within beings (ibid). According to Ahmed, emotions do not require thought nor can they be caused by objects. They instead can be categorised as 'feeling[s] of bodily change' (ibid, introduction) which are formed through interactions with other people and objects. An example of this is the feeling of disgust. Ahmed posits that 'an object becomes disgusting through its contact with other objects that have already, as it were, been designated as disgusting before the encounter has taken place' (ibid, Ch 4). This suggests that objects do not become disgusting on their own. Rather, an object becomes disgusting when in contact with another, already established disgusting object, thereby shaping other objects by casting disgust onto them. 'Stickiness' also occurs when a body or object is deemed disgusting, as the level of disgustingness sticks to them as they become disgusting (ibid).

Ahmed also points out that feelings of disgust are also intertwined with power (ibid), as objects or bodies which are deemed disgusting in comparison to other bodies are given less power and remain at the bottom of hierarchies but are able to maintain the power relations 'between above and below, *through which 'aboveness' and 'belowness' become properties of particular bodies, objects and space'* (ibid). These power dynamics between the non-disgusting and the disgusting, be them bodies, objects or spaces, can be said to be representative of a heteronormative society and can lend themselves to Muñoz's (1999) ways of thinking about disidentification as well as Halberstam's (2011) queer art of failure, as all three can be regarded as performative acts. Ahmed takes influence from Butler's (1990) perception of performativity to position her notion of disgust as a performative act and claims that disgust can be performative through speech acts as well through interactions with others, stating that 'it both lags behind the object from which it recoils, and generates the object in the very event of recoiling.' (Ahmed 2004, Ch 4).

Building on Butler's (1990) perceptions of norms, Ahmed claims that 'norms surface as the surface of bodies: norms as a matter of impressions of how bodies are 'imposed upon' by the world, as a world made up of others' (Ahmed 2004, ch7), suggesting that norms are imposed upon people and can shape people's perspectives and emotions. In addition to this, compulsive heterosexuality can also shape bodies, according to Ahmed (ibid), as it forces the heterosexual ideal onto queer bodies which can fail queer subjects or render them as failures for not following the ideals, thereby lending itself even more to Halberstam's (2011) perception of queer failure. Ahmed suggests that 'queer feelings of shame are also signs of an identification with that which has repudiated the queer subject' (ibid, ch5), suggesting that feelings of shame can align themselves with a heteronormative society which has already failed queer subjects by rendering them as failures for not living in accordance with the heteronormative scripts of society. However, Ahmed makes the point of stating that there are no clear feelings that all queer subjects experience (ibid, ch7). Queer feelings are instead the feelings that occur in response to the failure society puts on queer subjects for not living their lives in accordance with the dominant society. These feelings may include tiredness from correcting people when subjects are assumed to be living a heteronormative life as well as experiences of shame and perhaps discomfort for living a queer life that does not conform to heteronormativity, which according to Ahmed 'functions as a form of public comfort' (ibid, ch7) as heteronormativity can be perceived as a series of repeated acts carried out by bodies marked by these norms. Ahmed wonders if 'queer moments happen when this failure to reproduce norms as forms of life is embraced or affirmed as a political and ethical alternative?' (ibid, ch7), suggesting that queer moments may occur when queer subjects are able to celebrate their queer lives both in popular and queer culture. However, as Ahmed (ibid) points out that these queer moments might not be representative of all queers as some queer subjects may still feel uncomfortable in queer spaces, suggesting that collective queer feelings can differ from person to person but Ahmed's main points about the expectations and feelings cast onto queer subjects from the heteronormative society will continue so long as subjects continue to assimilate to the heteronormative culture.

3.6. Conclusion: Queering Musicology and Noise

It can be suggested that the theories explored in this chapter can prove relevant when brought to the fields of musicology and sound studies. Noise, in particular, can have ties to capitalism and heteronormativity as it can be viewed partially as a type of anti-signifier (Atton 2011, p325) that is explicit its desire not to conform to standard harmony and compositions found in

Western popular music. 'Instead, Noise speaks to and through our imaginary register of auditory, visual, haptic perceptions, and fantasy creating a chaos of sensations and feelings' (Toth 2009, p28). Therefore, it can be suggested that noise is linked to emotions and feelings which makes it possible to suggest that Ahmed's theorisations of emotions can be found within noise music. The same thing can be said for queerness as both noise music and queer subjects can be said to exist outside of the heteronormative culture and use disidentificatory practices in order to navigate and work with the dominant society. Noise music, according to Toth (ibid, p27-p28), 'disrupts both the performer and listener's normal relations to the symbolic order by refusing to route musical pleasure through the symbolic order,' suggesting that noise can be perceived as a critique against dominant society. This has potential to produce a slight overlap between noise music and queerness, both of which can be said to be pursuing ideals outside of the heteronormative culture, or in other words, western classical music canon. This may be different for art music in a broader sense, however, as art music tends to align itself more closely with Western classical music and has less of a subculture surrounding it which puts less of a focus on critiquing power structures than noise. But, when brought to a feminist musicologist standpoint and for the context of this thesis, both noise and art music as a whole can be said to be navigating power structures that are embedded in the heteronormative which can lend itself to the queer theory discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, both these genres are heavily male dominated as previously explored, meaning that when women or queer bodies create these musics, they are in some ways criticising this masculine male mastery.

In this chapter, I have shown how queer and feminist theory can be applied to Western art music and noise which will inform my analysis later on and help answer my research questions. By examining literature from Halberstam, Butler, Muñoz and Ahmed, my desire is to tie these types of music to queer theory, opening up the potential for more of a norm-critical, queer musicology which can facilitate analyses done in accordance with the model of analysis I am developing in this thesis.

4. Methodology and Method

This chapter will focus on the methodology and method used in this thesis. It will explain the research design, methodology and method of field research. It will also discuss context and ethics in relation to the method, as well as limitations and my own position as a researcher.

4.1 Research Design

With the aim of this thesis being to investigate gender and sexuality within art music, I knew that I wanted to work with interviews from the start, rather than simply analysing compositions, as I felt that this would allow me to gain greater insight into the subjects' work by facilitating discussions around their own work from their own perspectives. The participants of the thesis consisted of the Stockholm based noise duos, Seroconversion and Sisterloops and one Gothenburg based composer, Merve Erez. Initially, the plan was to do around 5 interviews and only choose two pieces from two of the participants, but I decided to refine the method to focus on 2 musicians and composers in addition to an analysis of the piece *Playground of Yesterday* by Merve Erez so that more focus could be placed upon gender, queerness and other discourses that may be present in their music. This allowed for greater insight into the research questions and ultimately a greater analysis and refined method that is built on the participants' own thoughts about their music, the music itself and the use of theory I elaborated on in the previous chapter. Furthermore, by writing about these musicians and composers who are working relatively underground, I wanted to showcase them and their works which can prove valuable to today's society and I also felt that these relatively unknown cultural producers could bide well with the use of queer theory in this thesis as both can be said to represent unseen aspects of society.

4.1.1. Interview Context

2 semi-structured interviews designed to discuss feminist and queer perspectives in relation to pieces by the individuals were conducted with composers, musicians and performance artists in both Stockholm and Gothenburg. Artists were found by looking at the *Queer Noise Fest's* Facebook page, an organisation in Stockholm dedicated to queer electronic music run by Seroconversion (see chapter 4). Other interviewees were found through word of mouth from composition graduates from the Academy of Music and Drama in Gothenburg. The interviews were divided into two parts, the first part being solely about the subjects' pieces and their

compositional processes and the second part focusing exclusively on questions related to gender, queerness feminism and activism.

Sweden and its two biggest cities, Stockholm and Gothenburg were chosen specifically as experimental music and sound art is arguably popular in these cities and in Sweden overall, with the Queer Noise Fest existing in Stockholm, GEIGER, an art music organisation based in Gothenburg, and both Stockholm and Gothenburg having music conservatories that teach modern composition and sound studies as well as music venues which regularly showcase experimental music and sound art live.

4.1.2. Analysis of Pieces

In addition to the interviews and discussions with the participants, analyses of each interviewees' work were also conducted. Each participant was requested to send a piece that they felt were representative of discourses, either queer, feminist or otherwise. These pieces were then analysed in accordance with the literature outlined in chapter 2 in combination with data from the interviews. Both Seroconversion's piece "De Sexuella Avarterna Tycks Tillta i Både Kvantitet och Intensitet" and "Skam," as well as Sisterloops' piece, "Wild Pussy Cat" did not have scores, meaning it was only possible to listen to the pieces and describe the developments. Merve Erez's piece *Playground of Yesterday* does have a score, however, so a greater analysis which reflected the goings on in the score was able to be conducted, making up the entirety of chapter 6. Each piece was firstly discussed with each of the interviewees as we tried to identify any existing or potential discourses that may be present in each of the pieces. Following this, I listened to each of the pieces in my own time and began my analysis.

4.1.3. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDR) inspired by Fairclough is utilised in this thesis as a mode of analysis on two levels. Firstly, it is used to analyse the data from the interviews which then informs the analyses of discourses present in each of the pieces, thus connecting them to one another. I found this branch of CDR relevant for this thesis as it has a strong focus on identity. It focuses on both cultural and social developments, with its overall aim being to examine 'processes of change in late modernity' (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002, p61). Therefore, it can be said that CDR is focused on examining cultural products and the social environments that surround them. In addition to this, I have also employed the concept of empty or floating signifiers, used commonly in discourse analysis as they allow for different meanings and perceptions to be inscribed upon bodies and objects (Jørgensen and Philips 2002, p28). I find

this useful for my thesis because it allows me to develop my own reading of each of the pieces analysed regardless if my reading matches the artists' intentions or not, as by utilising music as an empty or floating signifier, space for multiple readings of pieces can be created. Analysing music can produce and reveal different political messages, feelings and emotions that then become attached to the music. Within this thesis, these may be feelings of rage and disgust or queer and feminist messages. In terms of musicology and sound studies, little literature has explicitly used CDR as a method of analysis. This is possibly because musicology is generally concerned with text-based work as opposed to fieldwork which typically is tied to ethnomusicology and sound studies which can include both, though it is rarely feminist (Ingleton 2015, p65). Holly Ingleton (ibid) however, does talk of feminist discourses in relation to feminist sound studies in her analyses of pieces by feminist composers and the discourses she uncovers can prove relevant to my thesis and analysis

Furthermore, Evengiya Aleshinskaya (2013) discusses a musical discourse analysis based on Fairclough's approach to CDR and the possibility of turning musical discourse into social practice by utilising CDR in a musical framework. Aleshinskaya's approach, therefore, encompasses the initial composing or writing of the piece of music, the musical product itself, the distribution of the product, and finally the perception and evaluation of it (ibid, p472). This is similar to Fairclough's approach in that she is focusing on both the product itself as well as social reactions and discussions that emerge before, during and after the completion of the musical product. By examining both the processes involved in writing the pieces; interviewing the artists and analysing the pieces themselves, this thesis utilises both the Faircloughian inspired CDR and the music discourse analysis outlined by Aleshinskaya, as well as the ability to perceive music as an empty signifier. These 3 aspects of discourse analysis, therefore, provide me with a model that can prove useful within the field of musicology.

4.2. Research Ethics

It was important to consider ethics throughout the interview and analysis process. As a researcher, it was my duty to remain respectful to my interviewees and to have an understanding that the nature of what we were discussing could have been personal for some people, meaning they may wish to withdraw or not discuss certain aspects of the research. Participants were given informed consent forms detailing how the interviews would proceed (see appendix 1); what they would be asked to do; how their data would be used and that they had the right to withdraw, skip questions, stop the interview or stop the recording if they so wished. I was also transparent about the possibility to pull-out of participating at any point,

even after the interviews had been conducted. Finally, by viewing this thesis as a type of collaboration between myself and the interviewees, I did my best to make my work as accessible to them as possible and agreed to share my results with them after the process was finished.

4.2.1. Researcher Positionality

Researchers should reflect on their positionality in relation to their participants so as not to create unequal social relations of power. I tried to do this by reflecting on my identity as a foreigner in Sweden with limited Swedish language skills despite my familiarity with Sweden and Swedish culture. Having lived in Sweden for almost 2 years and having visited regularly for 2 years prior, I didn't feel uncomfortable in any of my research environments and felt comfortable interacting with the participants. Furthermore, as a musician myself, I hoped that the interviewees feel comfortable with my presence and talking to me due to our common interests. Nevertheless, it was still important for me to understand that some of the discussion could have been uncomfortable for some of the participants, as gender and sexuality are sensitive topics. I tried to create a safe space for these discussions to take by holding them in private study rooms so that outside and potential disruptive noises could be minimised. I also asked for each individual's pronouns before the interviews began and gave them the option of changing their names for the purpose of the study, as well as giving them the option to read the final thesis once completed.

4.2.2. Limitations

I would have liked to have had more in-depth discussions with the participants about the majority of their pieces and the different processes involved in creating them, but this was not possible due to the size of the thesis and the timescale. I also had concerns about the possibility of bias in the interviews, as the participants could have provided a one-sided view about feminist and queer discourses in experimental music, especially as this thesis is a small-scale analysis and it is not possible to speak for all musicians and composers who present feminist and queer discourses in their music. It was also possible that the participants would give answers that they thought I wanted to hear and not speak honestly, or that they didn't think any feminist or queer discourses existed in their music in the first place. On the other hand, the participants had academic backgrounds, with most of them having studied musical composition, meaning they likely had an understanding of the discourses under analysis.

4.2.3. Language

All participants spoke English as a second language and despite all of them having proficiency in English to conduct the interviews and correspondences in English, I was concerned that issues of translation may be a problem in this research and that limited English could potentially affect the transcripts of the interviews, and ultimately the final results and discussion of the thesis. Several instances did occur when I missed some of what was being said due to the quality of the audio recordings or the unclarity of voices, but fortunately, this did not affect the overall data and I was able to decipher intended meaning due to my knowledge of the Swedish language. Out of respect to the interviewees, I have not doctored any of the material gathered from the interviews to reflect proper English language which is why some of the quotes chosen from interviews may differ from standard English. I chose to do this as I feel it's important to only highlight what was originally said by the participants and to view this thesis as a collaborative work between myself and the participants interviewed.

4.3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided information about the methods and methodological framework I will use in this thesis. I have explained CDR and how I plan to use it on two levels; firstly, to analyse the interview data which then informs the analysis of pieces which are read in conjunction with CDR. This is combined with the use of empty signifiers and Aleshinskaya's (2013) perceptions of a musical discourse analysis which makes up the methodological framework for the thesis. I have also offered insight into ethics such as the limitations I faced while carrying out my research; my positionality as a researcher conducting research in Sweden and how language was a factor in my research. By utilising this framework, I hope to be able to provide new insights into the analysis of music and offer discussions around queer and feminist perspectives in musicology and show how gender, sexuality and emotions can potentially be present within western art music.

5. Queer Noises

‘Queer = unwanted desire

Noise = unwanted sound’

(Queer Noise Manifesto 2015, p3-4)



Seroconversion (2015)

Seroconversion is a queer noise project based in Stockholm. Made up of noisicains Birt Berglund and Johan Sundell, they aim to create queer noise by equating queerness with unwanted desire and noise with unwanted sounds by utilising stereotypical queer objects and their bodies to during their performances. They have released two EPs in addition to having done exhibitions, installations and performances and having collaborated with authors, historians and artists. They also have written two texts, *Queer Noise Manifesto* and *Piss drone/Drone piss* which are centred around queer perspectives within noise and drone music (Seroconversion, 2020). In addition to this, both of them have their own solo projects, *Deviations* and *Male Bondage*, which like Seroconversion, also explore different gay male and queer aesthetics within noise music.

“Seroconversion” is also the medical term in immunology for when the body's autoimmune system starts producing antibodies in response to an HIV-infection. It is often characterized by flu-like symptoms (swollen lymph nodes, headache, rashes and fever). (Queer Noise Manifesto, 2015).

Two pieces by them which can be said to reflect the queerness located in their work are analysed below in accordance with an interview conducted with them in March 2020. Their *Queer Noise Manifesto* (Seroconversion, 2015) will also be closely looked at as it has relevant links to gender theories. The remainder of the chapter will then be broken up into themes are relevant to queerness located within Seroconversion's work.

5.1. Queerness as Unwanted Desire, Noise as Unwanted Sound

The *Queer Noise Manifesto* interprets queerness as a noise that disrupts heteronormativity (Queer Noise Manifesto 2015, p6). This has links to Butlerian thought as by characterising the binaries of 'man' and 'woman' (Butler, 1990), Butler is able to suggest that agency along with freedom and possibility can be 'negotiated within a matrix of power' (Butler 1993, p22). Despite no subject being free to situate themselves outside of the norms or to negotiate them from a far, instances of agency, possibility and freedom can still emerge and be utilised by queer subjects in addition to notions of resistance and disidentification which occurs in direct response to the heteronormative society (Muñoz, 1999). This resistance can be located within queer noise as the noise being created because as Seroconversion write in their manifesto, 'queer = unwanted desire and noise = unwanted sounds' (Queer Noise Manifesto 2015, p3-4), which ultimately suggests that queerness and noise can go together because both get labelled as unwanted by society which favours heterosexuality and can often hurt queer subjects for identifying otherwise (Ahmed 2004, ch 7). In addition to this, Sara Ahmed suggests that an object can become disgusting when it is in contact with another object that has already been rendered as disgusting (p204). Can this be applied to the intersection of noise and queerness? With queerness often being threatened with views of disgust due to it often not conforming to the 'boxes' of masculinity and femininity (Butler, 1990) and rebelling against the dominant heteronormative society, this is perhaps another way to read this joining of queerness and noise, as well as art music in general, as it is a common assumption that music genres such as noise, electroacoustic music as well as other experimental art forms of music should not be considered music. Ahmed suggests that 'bodies that are degusted are also bodies that feel a certain rage' (Ahmed 2004, ch7). This can also be applied to the type of resistance exhibited in Seroconversion's work as it can closely be linked to rage, disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) and the queer art of failure (Halberstam, 2011).

It can, therefore, be suggested that the noise Seroconversion creates produces some kind of resistance as, according to *A Queer Noise Manifesto* both noise and queerness can be thought of as things which are unwanted by society. This reflects what Paul Hegarty suggests about noise as in the genre of music being able to embody contradiction as it can be viewed as a music genre but also simultaneously not a genre (Atton 2011, p325; referencing Hegarty 2008, p133). This contraction can be said to represent the uniqueness of noise music as it can be hard to categorise into a genre because it is so characteristically different from mainstream music. It can also be suggested that noise can be linked with queerness regardless of whether or not a queer perspective is tied to it, as Hegarty seems to be alluding to a sense of resistance present within noise music (ibid). This resistance, however, may simply be presented by itself in more of an anti-art and conventional music sense without any sort of political standpoint, as noise allows for musicians to defy the boundaries of mainstream music and make sound explorations and experiments which can then be interpreted by critics, the artists themselves or audiences as having some kind of political standpoint (Klett and Gerber 2014, p282). Therefore, the queer noise that Seroconversion creates can be said to have a double resistance in it, as by labelling their project as queer they are effectively putting queerness on top of noise which is acting as an empty signifier.

5.2. “De Sexuella Avarterna Tycks Tillta i Både Kvantitet och Intensitet”

“De Sexuella Avarterna Tycks Tillta i Både Kvantitet och Intensitet” (The Sexual Deviations Seem to Multiply in Both Quantity and Intensity) is the first track from Seroconversion’s 2015 self-titled EP¹. It begins with a reverb heavy drone type sound which is closely followed by a high-pitched sound that echoes. These two sounds combined come to make up a kind of motif in throughout the piece which gets repeated several times, sometimes being followed by a higher sound and an echo. This sort of motif develops slightly after the initial repetition of it at around the 1-minute mark, with a slightly lower sound coming in and being echoed in conjunction with the echo from the motif. This pattern gets repeated a couple times before becoming slightly more aggressive sounding around the 1.30 mark, where several lower sounding sounds come in, with the echoes once again becoming intertwined with each other. This makes the music sound somewhat tonal even though that was not the goal of the piece. Then, around 2 minutes in, the initial motif gets altered slightly, sounding much more distorted and perhaps

¹For more information visit: <https://seroconversion.bandcamp.com/album/seroconversion>

messy with a long gong-like sound being played every so often. This makes the overall piece sound slightly more upbeat when compared to the beginning, perhaps due to the choppiness of the echoes or the effects used which almost seem to be creating some type of beat or melody as many sounds are now interacting with each other. A gong-type sound which is much louder in volume then comes in over the top of everything else around 3 minutes in which seems to vary in pitch, making it sound like a short melody. This is then met with a percussive like sound which echoes on top of all the other sounds for the remainder of the piece, which seems to give the piece more power. Towards the end, the sounds seem to become slightly more distorted before everything gets quieter and eventually fades out. This piece was conceived out of a 3 hour-long improvisation session which they then selected parts from to create their self-titled EP which suggests that some of the process for this EP was left up to chance without a strictly detailed plan of what the pieces would sound like, echoing the notion of soft mastery (McCartney, 2006).

JS: Yeah, but I mean, it always... it depends on mood, I guess. And the setup like, maybe you bought a new pedal like last month that you didn't have half a year ago and you have to try it out också

BB: and then you maybe don't really know that pedal yet. So, it's kind of... I mean, sometimes you get lucky, but some sometimes it's really frustrating because you did something but you... And it f***s up the sound and then you get kind of confused. That's how I feel sometimes. [Stockholm, 1/3/20]

This confirms that soft mastery (McCartney, 2006) can be said to be located within the majority of Seroconversion's work as the quotation above makes it seem like they like to experiment with their sounds until they find something they want to use. This also has connotations of 'getting lost' (Halberstam, 2005), something minoritarian subjects employ to navigate through the heteronormative society and to negotiate their own sense of queer failure in practices that may be deemed by the dominant society as failing. Their use of sounds, especially in this particular piece also reflects the 'sounds as individuals' metaphor (Rodgers, 2010b). In this piece they used contact microphones to record the sounds by using them in conjunction with objects and their own bodies. This metaphor is reliant on sounds being 'individual entities with varying properties to be analysed and controlled' (ibid, vi). This is fitting for Seroconversion as they used their bodies as well as objects in this piece by attaching contact microphones to their bodies and objects, which can suggest that the sounds were being treated more as

individuals, especially as this piece came out of several improvisational sessions, with sections being selected to make up each piece on the EP.

The build-up of sounds in the piece can be said to reflect the title of the piece, “The Sexual Deviations Seem to Multiply in Both Quantity and Intensity.” The increases in volume throughout the piece; the development of the small motif first heard at the beginning; the use of effects as well as the harshness of the noises presented in the piece overall can be said to help the piece develop a certain sense of uncomfortableness that may be felt towards the greater representation of LGBTQ+ people in recent years. This uncomfortableness may be felt by the dominant heteronormative society because as the first half of the title, “The Sexual Deviations” suggests, someone is going against the norm of heterosexual desire and perhaps disidentifying with the dominant culture by claiming heterosexual or queer desire (Munoz, 1999). It’s also possible to imagine that the overlapping and intersecting of sounds, especially towards the end can represent the quantity and intensity of the queerness that is located within the piece itself as well as in general, as it can be perceived as queer people claiming their identities perhaps sometimes in a subversive way that is not seen within popular culture. The same thing can be said for the small instances of tonality within the piece which can be found within the first 2 minutes and again at around 3 minutes in, as whether intentional or not in this piece, they can also potentially represent the claiming of identity within a heteronormative society as well as the queer temporalities located within queer subcultures (Halberstam, 2005) and also the acceptance that is at times found within these subcultures.

5.3. “Skam”

“Skam” (Shame) is the 2nd piece from Seroconversion’s 2016 EP *Territorial Pissing*² which was originally made as an audio-walk for the art app *Tempus Fight*, in which the listener was asked to walk around specific places in Stockholm while listening to the specific tracks. This work was a collaboration with poet Kristofer Folkhammar and sociologist Arne Nilsson, a prominent figure in the research of gay male subcultures. The piece was designed to explore ‘public bathrooms as queer spaces’ (bandcamp.com, 2016) by requiring the listener to listen to each of the pieces in the EP, described by the duo as chapters, at specific public bathrooms in Stockholm. Each of the chapters are titled to reflect ‘a very dense summary of different experiences of cruising,’ meaning the different bathrooms are representative of places

²For more information visit: <https://seroconversion.bandcamp.com/album/territorial-pissing>

homosexual males might frequent in order to pick up potential partners. The titles of the chapters “Begär” (Desire), “Skam” (Shame), “Polis” (Police) and “Heterotopi” (Heterotopia) were all chosen to reflect the feelings as well as fears people may experience when practicing cruising in these locations. Each chapter also features text written by Seroconversion and read aloud by Kristofer Folkhammar designed to reflect the themes of each piece. Parts of the texts are inspired by or are direct quotes from poems and books which focus on practices of homosexuality and queerness in public spaces. “Skam” was chosen specifically for this analysis as it can be thought of as the most prominent emotion when practicing cruising which can potentially encompass the other three titles on the EP, as one might feel shame when encountering the police, acting on homosexual desire and simply by entering one of the spaces where cruising takes place. “Skam,” at just over 8 minutes long, begins with minimal sounding tones layered on top of a continuous drone which sounds throughout the piece. These sounds continue throughout with the text starting to be read out at the beginning and continuing throughout, thus becoming the main focus of the piece. The reading of the text pauses every couple of seconds to reveal the sounds of water being poured. These sounds represent the sounds of men peeing and in addition to the text, help to remind the listener that this piece is centred around public bathrooms and that entering these bathrooms for the purpose of sexual desire may invoke feelings of shame and of disgust.

I feel heaviness from the blindness that is forced upon me, the acrid smell of piss smothers me and I move back [...] the guy beside me mumbles in my ear "what is it? Are you ashamed?" He might as well have said "are you ashamed, comrade?"

Yes, I was ashamed, but I was ashamed over my shame.

(“Skam” by Seroconversion, 2016. Own translation)

This words enforce the feelings of shame felt by the people who frequent these bathrooms looking to share intimacy with strangers in unfamiliar and unclean places and describes the smell and feeling within the overall environment, helping the listener to imagine what it would be like to be in that environment and to practise cruising. ‘He might as well have said “are you ashamed comrade?”’ suggests that these feelings of shame may be specific to the individuals who practise cruising in these spaces and that there is an inner circle of homosexuals who practise cruising. This inner-circle is hidden from the public eye for fear of being shamed by the heteronormative society and may be somewhat tight-knit, with the word ‘comrade’ suggesting that they might feel a connection to one another because they are able to acknowledge each other’s shame and are aware that they are in the bathroom for the same purpose.

Shame can be felt by many members of the LGBTQ+ community especially in public spaces such as public bathrooms, which can predominately be thought of as spaces where cruising be assumed not to take place. Ahmed (2004) suggests that there is a sense of comfort that comes with heteronormativity in which bodies are able to extend in spaces which have already been defined by heteronormative bodies and practices. To this end, it can be suggested that the shame located within the practices of cruising overall occur as people go to practise cruising in spaces that have already been defined by heteronormativity where queer people may feel uncomfortable acting on their desires, and may feel shame as a result of that.

‘I become depressed when those who have decided to come out still live out their desires in the horrible places where the system has designated them to and where the police abuse them’ (“Skam” by Seroconversion, 2015. Own translation)

This can be said to reflect the comfortableness in heteronormativity that Ahmed (2004) discusses as, despite having come out, members of the LGBTQ+ community will be met with shame from people who feel uncomfortable with their presence. This shame then has the potential to be internalised and turned into the individuals own sense of shame. Seroconversion are able to locate these feelings of shame in “Skam” by including feeling of disgust and uncomfortableness in this piece. This piece and the overall project of *Territorial Pissing* has quite a large contrast from their self-titled EP as it doesn’t feature the same noisy build-ups and loud volumes. Instead *Territorial Pissing* as a whole, focuses more on text that is read aloud with minimal synth sounds which they borrowed from an earlier piece of theirs titled *Piss Drone/Drone Piss*. “Skam” can however, still be thought of as noise since noise as a music genre is so diverse and gives artists the ability to project whatever they choose onto it.

5.4. Masculinity, Queerness and Androgyny

Seroconversion’s *Queer Noise Manifesto* (2015) positions queerness as unwanted desire and noise as unwanted sound. This is something the duo wishes to materialise through the noise they create. They are able to do this by concealing their identities by having pink plastic bags or veils over their faces when they perform. This puts a focus on their bodies when performing and allows them to position themselves as primarily a queer noise project rather than simply a homosexual one, despite both of them identifying with masculinity and both being white. Their use of porn in their earlier performances also presents them as more queer than simply

homosexual, as it features a gay 'bear' man interacting with objects rather than other humans. This is another thing Seroconversion purposely chose so as to empathise the queerness of their project, because as touched upon in the interview, they could have chosen to use regular homosexual porn, as this would still be considered queer, but that's not what they intend to do with this project. Choosing to have a man whose desire is inanimate object not only promotes the queerness in their project but also comedy in some ways, as well as a level of disgust which may be felt by and get stuck to the audiences at the performances, regardless if heterosexual or not (Ahmed 2004, ch4). Ahmed suggests (ibid) that an object or body must have been in contact with something that has already been deemed as disgusting for it to be deemed disgusting, thereby suggesting that the homosexual man depicted in the video could have already been deemed as disgusting before his interaction with the object which in turn was marked with disgust and can potentially render Seroconversion's piece as disgusting.

The queerness in their work can be said to transcend the notions of masculinity, as by taking influence from Butler (1990), it can be suggested that the queerness located in their work falls between the poles of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, perhaps it isn't leaning towards any particular gender or sexual orientation especially as Seroconversion prefer to focus on specific queer moments which according to Ahmed (2004, ch7) occur 'when this failure to reproduce norms as forms of life is embraced or affirmed as a political and ethical alternative,' indicating that these moments can be regarded as a celebration of queerness in a broader sense with spaces being made for anyone who identifies as queer. Is it in this way that I think Seroconversion is able to be a queer noise project that doesn't focus exclusively on homosexual subcultures but, instead on queer subcultures, as by taking noise, an empty signifier, and placing a fairly obvious theme of queerness on it, they are able to showcase a type of queerness that can possibly also be read as non-binary.

BB: and, maybe my relation to noise in some ways, also is that it's... I mean partly it's this empty kind of signifier, but it's also what I find maybe interesting about it like, both literally but also conceptually is that it's also maybe full at the same time so it's, and that's kind of the difference between noise and like...

JS: yeah, yeah for sure.

BB: like an empty paper, because it's, it's obviously something there, still so it's, it's kind of neither full or empty, it's kind of both at the same time so it's eh it's a really something it's neither or and maybe that's why, I mean what I think maybe is, we have these kind of different tag-lines we've used sometimes but it's like noise is non-binary, for example, which I kind of feel points to that thing also. [Stockholm, 1/3/20]

This positions noise in general as something that can be turned into whatever the artist wants it to be, leaving it open for interpretation from both the artist and listener. By positioning their noise as non-binary, Seroconversion are able to make it so that their work should be read as queer by their audiences. This can be another way in which the duo is able to materialise their slogan, queerness as unwanted desire and noise as unwanted sound and can also potentially have ties to Oliveros' writing about androgyny in music (Maus and Oliveros 1994, p185). Whether or not Seroconversion see themselves as being androgynous or non-binary when creating music rather than queer in a general sense remains unclear. However, it seems like by following a non-linear structure with their composition and by including instances of improvisation, in their self-titled EP for example, it can be argued that there are similarities between their process and the androgynous non-linear, not strictly planned out process of Oliveros (ibid). It can then be argued that one can locate queerness in pieces and in artistic process which do not follow the 'typical' styles of composing that the aforementioned feminist musicologists have written about. However, it is not clear whether or not this non-linear way of working is something which is inhabited by many composers, as in Oliveros' case, she was only talking about herself in relation to her music. With regards to Seroconversion, much of their work can be said to be connected to the more 'feminine' styles of writing (McCartney, 2006; Ingleton, 2015) rather than the typical notions of male mastery found so commonly in experimental or art music (Rodgers, 2010b). It remains unclear however, whether or not these ways of composing are tied down to the gender identities of the composers or if it would depend on the composer in question, as it doesn't seem like Seroconversion display their male mastery to a great degree, except from them both being knowledgeable about the equipment and technology they use. As a queer noise project, Seroconversion seem to be more concerned about the spaces they may or may come to occupy as queer noisicians, which may or may not in fact, position them as being outside of these notions of mastery, as the project is focused more on queerness than on masculinity. The queerness and the ways of composing as well as the harshness of the noise itself can be located in Seroconversion's work as queer temporalities (Halberstam, 2005), as it doesn't follow the typical gender binary ways of composing as outlined by the musicologists and is considered noise music which can be considered by some as being similar to punk as both can reject the traditional notions of music and of high art.

5.5. Failure

Halberstam speaks of a darkness located within queer art. ‘The queer artist works with rather than against failure and inhabits the darkness. Indeed, the darkness becomes a crucial part of a queer aesthetic’ (Halberstam 2011, p96). This can have links to the work of Seroconversion who wish to explore the lesser seen parts of queer identity which are often overlooked by mainstream culture such as the practices of cruising explored in *Territorial Pissing* and the subversives that can be found in their work overall. When discussing the public’s perception of Seroconversion during the interview it was suggested that when audiences can’t make sense of their ideas they wish to convey or the noise presented in their performances, the duo feel that they have won anyway.

BB: I feel like I've also like won in that... that way too [...] especially if they perceive it like “I can't listen to this this is just some weird noise” and then it feels like, that's [...] that's also queer noise because I feel it's queer noise and they don't understand it then I've like kind of won in some way. Even though I also of course, maybe partly want them to... I want to like politically... I want to like... also deliver a message so it's a bit complicated [...] [Stockholm, 1/3/20]

This can reflect the definition of queer failure as provided by Halberstam (ibid) in which queer subjects reshape the heteronormative examples and definitions of failure into success. The same thing can be said for the genre of noise in general, as many critics dismiss it as not being music and perhaps failing mainstream music as it does not conform to it (Klett and Gerber 2014, p277). By having this combination of queerness (unwanted desire) and noise (unwanted sound) in their work, Seroconversion are able to express the darkness Halberstam speaks of and above all exhibit notions of queer failure. This suggests that the combination of queerness and noise can in addition to disgust, can also have connotations of failure from the heteronormative society, as within a capitalist society someone will always win, and minoritarian subjects will lose and be forced to define success in their own way (ibid, p95), with the heteronormative society feeling rage against the failure of queer people and people of colour (ibid, p92).

5.6. Naming

JS: But I mean I think it happens... something happens. Give just a title to something very abstract.

BB: And then you, maybe the listener also kind of hears those things in a different way and also with our performances that they, that are physical actions, maybe also they interpret it in other ways. [Stockholm, 1/3/20]

Naming is also a vital part of Seroconversion's identity as a queer noise project, as the titles of their pieces and the project overall help to enforce the resistance located in their work and also helps shape their pieces as queer and lets people know that seroconversion is strictly a queer noise project and not anything else. If they had a different title for the two pieces analysed above, the queer connotations that arise when listening might not be as apparent or it would get lost completely. The same thing can be said for the medical meaning of the name Seroconversion which promotes a sense of uncomfortableness and unwantedness and can reflect the attitudes towards homosexual and queer individuals that were present during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, as well as today. However, Seroconversion seem to favour the bodily connotations of the name due to the use of their bodies in their performances as well as the objects they used to give their noise queer connotations by suggesting that:

JS: I mean, it would be one thing to do something very bodily. And we thought this medical description of the state of seroconversion sort of alluded to resistance. Like bodily resistance.

BB: but also, to diseases and like contamination so it's eh...

JS: yeah. I mean specifically HIV AIDS. Like so... eh yeah [Stockholm, 1/3/20]

The resistance they are striving for with this queer noise project can again be linked to disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) as by labelling themselves as a queer noise project and by choosing a name like Seroconversion, they can be said to be sharing their own private disidentifications through their music similar to that of the artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres as discussed in Muñoz's book. Gonzalez-Torres is said to be navigating his own private disidentification practices and showcasing them to their world by allowing his work to be viewed by a public audience, thus creating a type of queer icon and opening possibilities for disidentification as freedom (ibid, p177). Can the same be said about the work of Seroconversion? The noise and queerness combo that the duo wish to material in their work is certainly something that has not been explored to a great degree by previous musicians.

By making use of stereotypical homosexual and or queer objects and imagery such as dildos and obscure homosexual porn in their earlier performances, Seroconversion are not only able to showcase their music as queer and create queer resistance but also they are able to showcase the subversives of homosexual and queer culture and what these cultures mean to them. They are able to do this by painting on an otherwise blank canvas of noise whilst simultaneously working within the heteronormative matrix in which noise is not considered music as it does not follow the structure of typical mainstream music. The same thing can potentially be argued for other types of art music as they typically also do not follow mainstream formats and whichever perceptions of feminism, queerness or any other type of topic the artist explores in their piece can be projected onto it. In this particular case though, the type of noise Seroconversion create can become an empty signifier where they have the ability project queer subversives on to their work.

Another way of looking at the naming of something was also touched upon in the interview, in which the point of Seroconversion in the medical sense can be viewed as ‘like a threshold point or something tips over to another side [...] like tipping and how it's maybe it's unclear if it's on one side or another’ [BB, Stockholm 1/3/20]. This suggests that there is a level of intensity in the medical term Seroconversion which can potentially transfer to the noise duo. This intensity also has the potential to become something else by tipping over, perhaps to expose the subversives of homosexuality and queerness that Seroconversion aim to do in their work. This is reflected in the intensity of the noise in “De Sexuella Avarterna Tycks Tillta i Både Kvantitet och Intensitet.”

5.7. Activism and Diversity

It also was hinted throughout the interview that Seroconversion are conscious of the positions they occupy as white homosexual males within the Stockholm queer community, as while they do not claim to represent all LGBTQ+ people through their noise they do wish to showcase a type of bodily resistance in their work by exploring ‘specific queer moments which isn't connected to specific individuals or types of people in that sense’ [Stockholm, 1/3/20]. They, therefore, are able to create a sense of resistance and activism through their work which has ties to the phrase ‘all queers are noisicians in a straight society’ (Queer Noise Manifesto, 2015). However, Johan rejected the use of this phrase as nothing more than an activist slogan in the interview, saying that it can promote the idea of there being ‘such a thing as like “these are queer people, and these are not.” [...] I don't think we think of queerness in that way.’

Seroconversion can be said to be promoting queer activism with their intentional use of naming and their overall goal of creating an explicit queer noise project which explores the lesser-seen aspects of queer culture. The resistance established in Seroconversion's work can also be connected to rage which can be seen as a part of their queer activism. Their piece "Sonic Mourning / Sonic Resistance" was touched upon when discussing the possibility of rage in their work.

BB: I think the rage is in both those works because we talked about like, I mean, it's also about making noise and, and making your voice heard so it's that kind of resistance but also like eh noise as in, as in like mourning something, maybe like not hiding your, your like pain or like taking space with, with actually feelings also and it also like in connecting to like maybe like an sort of everyday struggle, within yeah. It doesn't have to be like a struggle but it's like acknowledging the situation for queers in everyday life, but also and that kind of pain and those things that you might encounter in different ways. But also, historically like for all, all those generations. So, it's a... this kind of double thing eh and also with the resistance is also this kind of double with the noise has like. Maybe in some way a kind of... maybe one of the harder music genres to get into it's this resistance in the sound in some way but also as a political resistance. I think. [Stockholm, 1/3/20]

This suggests that there can be a sense of resistance or activism in the music itself, possibly without the queerness. This echoes what Rodgers (2015) suggests about there being activism in all types of art and experimental music, as many artists, musicians and composers continue to produce their work despite funding getting cut from projects and institutions with the rise of neoliberalism (ibid, p80). Therefore, in a way it can be suggested that activism is potentially present in all forms of art and experimental music regardless of the queer or feminist discourses, especially if the artist(s) is female, queer or a person of colour. As by making and performing music that is not typically commercialised or profitable when compared to popular music (ibid), and as Seroconversion suggested in their interview, noise is not the easiest genre to get into, but it can also act as an empty signifier meaning different kinds of discourse can easily be cast on to it. I got the impression from my interview with Seroconversion that the experimental art music scene in Stockholm is somewhat small and lacking in female and queer perspectives.

Nevertheless, Seroconversion are still able to make contributions to queer culture and the queer community in Stockholm whilst being aware of the spaces they occupy or may come to occupy as white men. By labelling themselves as a queer noise project they are able to follow queer temporalities and exhibit some the lesser-known aspects of queerness, that haven't seen the public eye. In this way, ties can be drawn between them and the punk subcultures explored by Halberstam (2005). Their annual event *Queer Noise Fest* also provides a space for queer artists who create noise in a broader sense, including pop, electronic and experimental music

that doesn't necessarily need to have a clear queer or feminist message in it. However, they did say that they wished the music being played at queer spaces in Stockholm wasn't so generic and that it matched the radicalness of the politics many queer Stockholmers share. This is something they have been trying to change with their queer noise project, *Queer Noise Fest* and both of their solo projects *Male Bondage* and *Deviations*. The link Seroconversion are able to create between noise and queerness is interesting both politically and with regards to activism. If more queer people were to be interested in the possibility of political activism by combining noise, or in a broader sense experimental music, and queerness, I think the current experimental art music scene would eventually become more tolerant of views that differ from the masculine mastery found so commonly in these circles and perhaps dismantle it all together. However, as Johan pointed out during the interview, the heteronormative society cannot demand queer people to produce music or art for them, as it not queer subject's duties to produce cultural objects for anyone but themselves.

5.8. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the music of the queer noise duo Seroconversion. In doing so it has explored the combination of queerness as unwanted desire and noise as unwanted sound (*Queer Noise Manifesto*, 2015), something the duo wishes to materialise in their pieces. Two of their pieces "De Sexuella Avarterna Tycks Tillta i Både Kvantitet och Intensitet" and "Skam" were analysed in accordance with an interview conducted in March 2020. Themes such as shame and disgust were explored as well as aspects of queer failure, queer temporalities, masculinity and androgyny. This chapter has attempted to showcase how Seroconversion's queer noise and the themes researched in queer theory can be brought together as part of a potential queer musicology. By exploring the work of Seroconversion in particular, I have been able to show how queerness and homosexual subcultures can be present within noise music and also collaborative projects like "Skam" can bring new approaches to noise that can also serve as important socio-historical projects within the field of queer studies.

6. Feminine Noises

**‘Sisterloops are nasty academics,
strictly wild, brutally feminine,
we are amplified knives’**

(Sisterloops, 2020).



Sisterloops live at Fylkingen, Stockholm 2018

Based in Stockholm, Sisterloops is a performative sound art duo made up of Marie Gavois and Alexandra Nilsson. They explore sounds in combination with movement, action and image by using choreography, themes of brutality and aggressiveness with the aim to ‘make the extremely strict become wilderness’ (ibid). To date they have six works which have been performed both inside and outside of Sweden and are currently working on two EPs. Describing themselves as ‘nasty academics, strictly wild, brutally feminine’ (ibid), Sisterloops are able to create a sense of uncomfortableness or brutality in their work. This chapter analyses the piece “Wild (Pussy) Cat before examining the use of body in their work, as well as themes of agency, power and androgyny.

6.1. “Wild (Pussy) Cat”

Taking parts and inspiration from other piece of theirs titled “Hospis,” “Wild (Pussy) Cat”³ is a piece for 2 vocals which explores different vocal sounds such as growling and hissing. The piece is split into 3 parts and begins with the ‘Morr’ (growl) section which features a series of growls which cut in and out of each other, creating a crashing sound each time a new one is introduced. These growls then intensify around the 1-minute mark with more growling sounds being introduced more frequently than before, allowing for different sounds to become apparent in the piece. Then, towards the end more vocalised growling sounds come in, giving this section an eerie feel and reminding the listener that it is two voices which are the producers of these sounds. The second part “Purr” is similar to “Morr” in that it starts off with sounds, in this case purring, which then builds up towards the end. These purrs become screams towards the end of the piece which give the piece overall a more dramatic and emotional feeling. Following this, the final part of the piece, track 3 on the EP, titled “Fizz” focuses on hissing sounds at various frequencies which are layered on top of each other. In a similar fashion to the other tracks on the EP, the track starts off as very quiet with minimal sounds and a focus on high frequency sounds before moving on to explore sounds which are lower in pitch and layered under other sounds. Then, around 3 minutes in the sounds begin to intensify and sound more cat-like with the last 2 minutes of the piece sounding the most intense with more sounds being layered on top of each other sounding like a vacuum and revealing high-frequencies every now and then before the piece fades out at the very end. Combined, these 3 tracks on the EP help to create the image of a cat due to the different noises being explored in them. The intensity of the noises also helps to solidify the title of the EP “Wild (Pussy) Cat,” the wild part of the title being representative of the uncomfortableness and the range of sounds present in the material.

MG: The title says something very clear too. Wild (Pussy) Cat, it’s like a little innocent joke and to add pussy in there and to... yeah, to mention that it’s wild. I mean of course it gives some direction. [...] I think it fits very well together with Sisterloops, Wild (Pussy) Cat. It both says a little bit like a teenage band even if we are not teenagers. I like too to have this band but it’s noise, yeah noise sound art thing. [1/3/20]

³ For more information: <https://vimeo.com/319206400>

The naming of the piece, as with Seroconversion, is yet again important with this piece. As Marie suggests, the title can have connotations of Sisterloops being some sort of teenage band despite them not being one, with both the words ‘wild’ and ‘pussy’ alluding to themes of punk or riot grrrl subcultures and potentially feminist views. The ‘joke’ of the title, as Marie describes can be thought of as present in the word pussy which stands in parentheses as it promotes some kind of nastiness or uncomfortableness, both of which are key to the image of Sisterloops. In addition to this, the majority of sounds within “Wild (Pussy) Cat” can be deemed as uncomfortable sounding which also reflects the title of the piece, whilst also allowing the listener to imagine a cat.

6.2. Androgyny and Body

Sisterloops’ use of noise and non-traditional vocals in their work can potentially blur the gendering of voices that often occurs when first heard (McClary 1991, p139). The nature of the vocals on “Wild (Pussy) Cat” in particular do this, with the noises in the pieces being more bodily than anything else and the vocals not being clearly linked to feminine voices, masculine or otherwise. This bodily-ness, that was also found in Seroconversion’s work, can potentially allude to a type of androgyny within people’s work. It can therefore be suggested focusing on the body Sisterloops are in, some cases possibly able to get rid of any preconceived notions of gender, be they feminine or otherwise. When discussing if there is femininity or androgyny in the work, they suggested that;

MG: [...] I mean for me it’s very much... I can refer to it, yes because I have a dance background and there it was clear very early that, that eh gender is skipped somehow in the performing body what, what my body is representing as in movement or so. And I can very much connect to it in making sounds like this too. It also has an androgyne representation or so I would say. [...] But I mean I can’t say that straight because I have very feminine output [...] so it’s not, not really physical maybe? [...] I would say that it’s on another level maybe [...] I love art pieces that go that way or performers also. Like my role models. [...] it’s very much like the edges gets blurred then. And I would say that I like that very much and that happens when we perform. [1/3/20]

This suggests Marie isn’t aware of her body when performing, alluding to a level of androgyny existing within Sisterloops work that is not something that they are explicitly aware of, nor is it something they are striving for in their work. ‘I wonder what an androgynous musical form would sound like’ poses composer Pauline Oliveros in her essay “Rags and Patches” (1984, p112), only to touch upon it again several years later in a discussion with Fred Maus (1994, p185), stating that;

Well, I think it would certainly be in the deep structure of how the music is played and assembled. You can have music as linear process, and music as nonlinear process. And you can also have music that's both, and that would probably do it.

This suggests that it is perhaps more about the process of composition than the sound itself, with there being both linear and nonlinear ways of composing music. Linear relying more on planned-out approaches and nonlinear being more about the exploration of ideas and the possibility of chance when composing. This reflects what musicologists and composers have discussed with the notions of hard mastery vs. soft mastery (Armstrong, 2003); empathetic knowledge and ecological thinking (McCartney, 2006) and analytical thought vs. receptive creativity (Oliveros 1984, p132-137). These approaches, despite being slightly different from one another, all describe a well-planned out approach typically associated with the dominant notions of historic masculine mastery (Rodgers, 2010b) and more of an experimental approach with room for exploration in sound, which typically gets associated with femininity due to its intuitive nature (Oliveros, 1984) and nature (McCartney, 2006). However, as pointed out by Oliveros (Maus and Oliveros 1994, p185), it is possible for composers to utilise both approaches. Can it therefore be suggested that by using a mix of these approaches one is able to create an androgynous process similar to what Oliveros (Maus and Oliveros 1994, p185) describes?

By working very intensely and planning in detail and carrying out research for each of their pieces, Sisterloops can be said to follow more of a hard mastery approach, though it does seem like they do welcome a level of experimentation in their work. Describing their typical writing process in the interview, they suggested that;

MG: We work quite intuitive I would say with the konst... I mean aesthetics of sound and performances. Very... We make things, I mean we try out things. We sit for many hours and try and try and try and do you know, and then we come to a composition and choreography and all this after a while.

AN: We love when like something a very, very strict just explodes into like some wild and as some chaos or like uncontrolled as like yeah, so [...] in some way it's like it's extremely controlled we don't work with improvisation anything. it's like totally improvised everything nej, totally composed, everything and the choreography. Even though maybe if I put that leg there or that leg there, could be like, like within a improvisation but it's very clear like 'in this section we move like this we stand like this' [1/3/20]

This shows that they have elements of controlled working and a working style that is freer and more open to exploration and experiments suggesting that there may be a level of androgyny in their compositional process, at least according to Oliveros (ibid).

However, since Oliveros talks primarily from a composing standpoint, little is said about the importance of performance in relation to androgyny, an important aspect of the Sisterloops identity. 'One of the principle features of performance art is the instance on the artist as a performing body [...] In performance art, artist and performer are usually one, and the piece is that which is inscribed on and through the body.' (McClary, 1991, p137). This suggests that the body of the performer is not separated from that of the composer in performance art (ibid), oftentimes allowing the body to become a focal point of performances. This can at times confuse theorists according to McClary (ibid, p139) especially when it comes to female performance artists as they typically use their bodies in ways which differ from that of the mainstream media, but still are able to evoke the male gaze and objectification as 'no woman who has ever been on stage, or even in front of a classroom, can escape them' (ibid, p138). The importance of the body in performance art can therefore be suggested to distort any perceived notions of femininity or masculinity one may have of a performer as when the body becomes the main focus of the performance a person's gender identity may become obsolete. This, as well as the aforementioned methods of composing can be viewed as ways in which androgyny can become present in music. However, 'it is not at all obvious how to make gendered differences audible in music, nor is there a single theoretical position on this matter' (ibid, p139-140), suggesting that one cannot find discourses of gender from simply listening to music, it is more about the processes of composing as Oliveros (Maus and Oliveros, 1994) suggests or the importance of body when it comes to performance and sound art.

It can therefore be suggested that Sisterloops are able to locate androgyny in their work due to their use of bodily sounds and the importance they put on their bodies as well as their working style that mixes the stereotypical masculine compositional methods with feminine ones. This opens a possibility for Sisterloops' work to be read as queer despite having no clear queer agenda in their work like Seroconversion, and both identifying as women and continuing to present themselves in a feminine way by wearing pink during performances and by planning their choreography so that often times they are sitting with their legs apart. Being read as queer is something the duo do not object to however, suggesting in the interview that;

AM: Many people who like in some way defines themselves as queer actually like really like us. [laughs] I would say it's true! yeah and, and... So, something there has to be there that they see that they are in some way... like connecting to or relating to. so yeah that's very interesting actually [laughs] and we're... I'm very glad about that because yeah, then it's also this thing that we said about that like we like when it's like, like it's out of gender sometimes super super like we play with it and then sometimes it just like totally not interesting or there at all so... Yeah this differences we play with, we do. [1/3/20]

The combination of women and technology is another aspect that can potentially blur the readings of femininity and masculinity in western art music as technology is typically associated with masculinity (ibid, p138) and Western society values active analytical thought (Oliveros 1984, p132) which is commonly associated with technology. Talking specifically about composer Laurie Anderson, McClary suggests that Anderson is able to promote a sense of anxiety or uncomfortableness in her work since she is a woman working with performance art (McClary 1991, p139), and is defying the traditional and historical masculine roles associated with technology (Rodgers, 2010b). The same thing can be said for Sisterloops as despite the fact that they use hyper-feminine imagery in their performance they interact with the masculine-defined sound technology, suggesting that there is a level of androgyny in their work, which can almost be perceived as a third space (Borgström Källén, 2011). This combination of the femininity they present on stage and the masculine mastery they express through their interaction with technology can also be said to provide a sense of anxiety when watching them perform, as their output when performing may be considered nasty or uncomfortable in some way due to the importance they put on their bodies and the sounds they create. McClary (ibid) suggests that composer and performance artist Laurie Anderson evokes anxiety in a similar way to Sisterloops, as the vocals present in Anderson's performances are often presented many audible layers stacked on top of other, thereby making it hard to locate the source of the sound despite being able to see Anderson performing. A similar thing can be suggested about Sisterloops as sounds get layered on top of each other in "Wild (Pussy) Cat." In addition to this, the movement they showcase during their performances such as sitting down with their legs open can also bring a level of uncertainty to the duo's performative output. This uncertainty is something that the duo seems to strive for along with nastiness, uncomfortableness and the brutal-ness that comes from the nature of the sounds they create.

6.3. Brutality and Nastiness

The brutality and nastiness located in Sisterloops' work is much like the work of Seroconversion as examined in the previous chapter which can be connected to Ahmed's (2004) perceptions of emotions. It can be suggested that both duos utilise the noise they make as an empty signifier to project different expressions onto it. Seroconversion are able to project queerness whereas Sisterloops appear to project notions of nastiness and brutality. This brutality and nastiness can be read as somewhat feminine in Sisterloops' work despite the duo stating in their interview that they do not wish to appear stereotypically feminine in their work or in their image even though they both identify as women, wear pink during their

performances and often perform with their legs purposely open. These acts can also be read as androgynous as by putting more focus on their bodies they are able to signify more of the nastiness and brutality. Their desire to create elements of uncomfortableness, nastiness and whatever else seems to come from a place of curiosity to explore these sorts of sounds, rather than from a stance to show the different sides of femininity.

AN: We like that very much yeah, yeah, we like it. So, I mean, so, that is not like from a conceptual like okay now like 'we are women, and can we do this? How do we feel about it?' No, no we just love it. We just have to do it, you know, it's like 'yes, we love these sounds. We love this kind of output.' [1/3/20]

This suggests that unlike Seroconversion, Sisterloops do not have any specific viewpoints or activism they wish to make clear in their work. However, they do remain open to interpretations about their work, be it feminist or otherwise, which can be said to confirm this idea of noise and potentially sound art manifesting itself as an empty signifier. This means that nastiness and uncomfortableness of Sisterloops paired with the duo's deliberate use of choreography and pink clothing during their performances can in some ways be deemed as feminine, even if it is not intentionally feminine. This raises the question of whether or not femininity can be located in Sisterloops work, as since the pair both identify themselves as female, does this mean the sounds they produce can be rendered as feminine as well? (Bosma, 2013).

6.4. Agency and Power

The sounds present in "Wild (Pussy) Cat" as well as Sisterloops' other pieces can be said to express some kind of agency due to the uncomfortable nature of them. The same thing can be said for the choreography used during their performances. The acts of sitting with their legs apart and wearing pink when they perform appearing somewhat radical, despite not being explicitly tied to any particular feminist or political viewpoints. In this way, these acts can potentially be linked to Butler's ideas about agency, in which one is able to negotiate their agency within the overarching system of power (Butler 1993, p22). These acts of agency, when brought to a musical context can match with Cecilia Björck's theory of claiming space (2015), in which female musicians are encouraged to claim the space that would otherwise belong to their male counterparts. Can Sisterloops therefore be said to be claiming space in addition to power when they perform? The actions and choreography utilised by Sisterloops, whether connected to notions of power and claiming space intentionally or not, can be said to have some connotations of power as they are asserting themselves dominantly on stage. Furthermore, they are both the composers and performers of their pieces which gives them full

control of the environment and allows them to embody power when they perform (Bosma 2013, p76), suggesting that the duo is in control of their work at all times. Their use of knives in another piece of theirs titled *Crash Ride* give off a dominance of power, the teaser trailer for the piece showing them scraping at cymbals with knives. Whether intentional or not, this, in addition to the choreography and pink dress code, has definite ties to power, agency, and claiming space, especially within Western art music which at times can render women as powerless (Bosma 2013, p80). Can it be suggested that Sisterloops are able to challenge the silencing of women within electroacoustic music through their music?

Butler suggests that structures are paradoxical (Butler 1997, p1-2), meaning that power is an external force whilst simultaneously being present within the subject as a social being. When applied to music, it can be suggested that female vocalists have power ‘because of their subordination to social-musical conventions’ (Bosma 2013, 80), meaning that they remain subordinate to the language, history and material of western classical music, as women have historically been silenced in this musical sphere. Bosma also suggests that no one vocalist is able to exist without having gone through the vocal training of western classical music (ibid). This is similar to Butler’s perception of agency, with no one person being able to transcend the heterosexual matrix in which gender is performative (Butler, 1990), however, this may not be the case for Sisterloops as, even though their music is largely vocal in nature, meaning they can be regarded as more of a noise duo or performance artists rather than an electroacoustic act.

6.5. Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has focused on the work of Sisterloops, an electroacoustic noise performance art duo from Stockholm. Discussions around gender, specifically androgyny, power and agency have been explored in this chapter along with an analysis of their piece “Wild (Pussy) Cat,” all of which were done in accordance with an interview done with the pair in March 2020. Butler’s perceptions of agency power helped to strengthen the arguments made in this chapter in addition to the work of feminist musicologists. Ultimately, this chapter has managed to position Sisterloops and their work as feminist and potentially queer which can be connected to feelings of uncomfortableness or disgust and the importance of one’s body, thereby showcasing a different side to feminism and queerness in western art music when compared with Seroconversion.

7. Feminism in Western Art Music

‘[Merve Erez] is passionate in sounds of daily life, and field recording, which she thinks are inseparable from the profession.’

Merve Erez (2020)



Merve Erez (2015)

This final chapter explores femininity in Western art music by analysing Merve Erez’s piece *Playground of Yesterday*. Merve Erez is a Turkish composer currently based in Gothenburg. She is currently pursuing her master’s degree in composition at The Academy of Music and Drama (Högskolan för Scen och Musik) in Gothenburg. Her piece “Playground of Yesterday⁴,” made up of three parts to explore the child marriages of Turkey and the importance noise can have in society.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8i8Qr9aQHE>

7.1. *Playground of Yesterday*

‘Often in societies, there are authorities that decide what should be classified as music or sound. We can see this "this is music - this is not music" segregation in all micro and macro structures of the society. In this regard, noise is also the sound of the opposite, rebellious, anti system, or misfit. Noise also has a one-to-one relationship with the act of listening, it is the same as hearing the other.’ (Merve Erez, 2019)

“Playground of Yesterday” is a piece for string orchestra consisting of 8 violins (4 first and 4 second), 4 violas, 2 ‘cellos and one double bass. This piece is dedicated to the child brides of Turkey and elsewhere in the world. It is approximately 8 minutes long and is divided into 3 distinct parts; childhood, marriage and after marriage, each of which can be said to represent emotions which may occur within a child marriage. Elements of noise are used in this piece to represent the voices of child brides as discussions surrounding child brides are often silenced in Turkey. In this way, this piece can be regarded as a response from Erez concerning the lack of awareness surrounding child brides in Turkey.

I perceive the development of this piece to be as followed:

Part 1 (Childhood):

The piece starts with 10 seconds of silence. Each instrument is then introduced gradually by the use of *col legno*⁵ on tailpiece⁶ of violas and violins, creating hitting sound against the wood. The ‘cellos play *col legno* on the bridge⁷ while the double bass plays *col legno* but by placing wooden part of the bow on vibrating strings, creating a loud hitting sound before fingers tap the body⁸ of the instrument, creating a sound similar to someone walking. The use of *col legno* on the strings gets introduced to create an eerie sound whilst the other instruments continue as before. There are then switches between *sul tasto*⁹ and normal playing on the violins, creating high-pitched scraping sounds. *Pizzicato*¹⁰ is then introduced by the violas, which brings in a sense of suspense, with the other instruments using the same technique in the couple of bars to follow. There are also hints of a melody here, perhaps giving a sense of what’s to come in the

⁵Common technique used by string players which involves using the wooden part of the bow to play the strings

⁶Part of violin located beneath the strings and tuning mechanisms

⁷Device that supports the strings and allows for them to vibrate when played

⁸ Large wooden part of the instrument

⁹ Playing with bow close to the neck and fingerboard of the instrument

¹⁰ Playing by plucking the strings

next part of the piece. Following this, the instruments once again switch between sul tasto and normal playing once again, with the occasional switch to col legno. The part ends with the violins and violas switching between sul tasto and playing normally, with the double bass and ‘cellos shifting in dynamics and building up momentum towards the end.

Part 2 (The Wedding):

This part begins quite dramatically with the violins playing sul tasto, this time sliding between the notes to increase momentum. There is then several bars of pizzicato before more glissando¹¹ and a chord made up of all the instruments except from the bass. Following this, there are high-pitched notes played by the violins followed by several instances of pizzicato which add drama to the piece. Here there are phrases where all the instruments are playing different parts, which adds to the dramatic feeling of this part along with the high-pitched violins which continue to add an eeriness throughout this section. There is then a lot of pizzicato followed by many long notes played by all the instruments which get met with the high-pitched violins and pizzicato coming from the lower string instruments once again. After this there is a pause and all the instruments begin to play in triplets and fast rhythms, giving the piece a lively feel featuring polyrhythms, making it feel like the wedding has started and giving the listener hints of Turkish wedding theme “Kasap Havası.” After this, the rhythms get augmented, bringing us to the end of the wedding section.

Part 3 (After Marriage):

This, the final and shortest part of the piece starts with an eerie chord followed by the glissando violins once again, sliding between one note to another, creating dissonance as well as a sense of danger. Following this there appear to be more elements borrowed from the Turkish wedding tune heard earlier, which gets combined by more glissando that switches between instruments, as well as high-pitched sounds from the violins. The piece then ends with triplets being played over 3 bars by 2 of the violins, 1 of the violas and one of the ‘cellos, gradually getting quieter and eventually fading out with one quiet note to finish.

¹¹ Sliding between notes

7.2. Music as an Empty Signifier

Working with noise and the large topic of child marriage for this piece, it can be suggested that Erez favoured a more linear approach for this piece in particular, as it seems like she had the theme in mind before starting the composing of the piece. However, she does seem to value and utilise a sense of empathetic knowledge and ecological thinking in her work (McCartney, 2006), stating on her website that ‘she is passionate in sounds of daily life, and field recording, which she thinks are inseparable from the profession,’ therefore suggesting that an intuitive nature might be present in her work. This intuitive approach seems to bide well with the theme of the piece, however, as Erez is able to utilise noise as a tool as a direct response to the child bride phenomenon which often remains unspoken about in the countries that it happens in. According to Erez, ‘basically all the noises that we hear represent the children that we ignore their sounds as a society.’ In this way, it can be suggested that Erez, much like Seroconversion and Sisterloops in the previous chapters, also utilises noise as an empty signifier upon which a meaning can be created, despite the fact that Erez’s piece only has elements of noise present in it and therefore cannot be defined overall a noise piece. The use of string techniques throughout the piece help to solidify the noise in the piece and create a contrast between it and the more melodic parts.

The noise parts are very prominent in the first part, “Childhood” as they can be said to be representing the voices of the children who wish to have their voices heard. This can be seen especially in bars 11-13 (see ex. 1) where all the violins play *col legno* with accents on all of the notes indicating them to play short but emphasised notes. It is also written in the score for them to play as loudly as possible, giving more importance to the voices of the children affected by child marriage, who are otherwise regarded as noise in the dominant society. Later on, in the piece the noises can be regarded as interruptions to the melodies played by other parts, which can be said to represent the voices of children or of protesters or possibly Erez herself trying to be heard over the mainstream voices of society. In addition to this, the noise also works to build up suspense and momentum in the piece especially towards the end of part one, as whether intentional or not, the noise helps to create build-up for the next part of the piece.

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Childhood" by Merve Erez. It consists of eight staves of music. The first four staves are for the instrument "c.i. bastarzo" (likely a clarinet or saxophone), each starting with a first finger (1) fingering and a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic. The last four staves are for the instrument "IV" (likely a violin), each starting with the instruction "as loud as possible" and a piano (p) dynamic. The music is written in a complex, rhythmic style with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and it spans across three measures.

Ex 1. Representation of noise in part 1 of the piece, “Childhood”
 Merve Erez *Playground of Yesterday* (2019)

The use of the Turkish wedding tune “Kasap Havası” as a theme in this piece is another example of how Erez is able to utilise her music as an empty signifier. By using this particular piece as a theme in the piece, she is able to suggest that a wedding is taking place as well to as offer a commentary on child brides in Turkey. This theme seems to appear for the first time in part 2 of the piece only then to be drowned out by the other instruments, noises and high-pitched violins and use of glissando, as if voices of objection are trying to be heard. The theme is then played in full at the end of the 2nd part, suggesting that a wedding has taken place and child marriages will continue to happen despite the calls for them to stop. It can therefore be suggested that Erez is able to utilise her music as an empty signifier upon which she places the issue of child marriage in Turkey. This is unlike the work of Seroconversion and Sisterloops, as while they can also be suggested to use their work as an empty signifier, Seroconversion render the noise they produce as queer and Sisterloops strive for a type of brutality and nastiness which can also at times be read as queer or androgynous. It can be suggested that Erez has no obvious feminine or queer output in her work. This could be because Erez doesn’t perform her pieces so cannot embody the performances in a similar way to the other two, but nevertheless is able to utilise noise as an empty signifier to give child brides a voice in her piece.

7.3 Activism

This piece has strong ties to activism and feminist issues due to its subject matter. Erez uses noise to signify not only this but also the struggles encountered by child brides. Rodgers (2015) suggests that one can be doing activism simply by producing art music, especially under neoliberalism where art music isn't typically valued. This may be even more of a political act for women composers as historically women have been excluded from the masculine mastery commonly associated with technology (McClary, 1991). Since Erez is taking a stance in this piece by having turned it into a political response from herself, it can be suggested that she is establishing power in this composition both by using noise in this way and simply by composing the piece, although a certain amount of power gets passed onto the musicians when they perform the piece (Bosma 2013, p78). A level of agency can also be said to be present in this piece, as Erez is able to give child brides a voice by representing an otherwise silenced part of society. Emotions may also be present as feelings of rage, sadness and pain can be said to be represented again by the use of noise throughout the piece. These emotions can also commonly tie in with activism and feminism (Ahmed, 2004) and although the Turkish context stretches beyond the scope of this thesis, it is clear that the emotional connotations of the piece are felt by Erez herself and are representative of the children's voices. The collective emotions of pain and possibly also fear can be suggested to stem from the children themselves and are then experienced and given meaning by Erez in her piece, giving Erez the ability to take an important stance on an issue concerning her home country that she might not have been able to make had she not moved to Sweden. By choosing to analyse this piece specifically, I recognise the difficulties and hardships that can emerge from the issues encountered in the piece but nevertheless wanted to include my analysis as I feel that it deals with an important issue.

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined *Playground of Yesterday*, a piece by Turkish composer Merve Erez. This piece explores the issue of child marriage in Turkey and can be viewed as Erez's direct response to the matter. Through the use of noise and string techniques and by focusing on the issue of child marriages, Erez is able to repurpose parts of the piece to represent the voices of children as well as her own voice as an activist, thus suggesting once again that noise can be an empty signifier and that Erez's piece can be representative of another side of feminism and queerness in musicology, this time one that focuses on children and young people.

8. Conclusion

This thesis has examined feminist and queer discourses within western art music. It aimed to highlight feminine and queer perspectives within art music by giving space to queer and female art music composers and performers. Interviews were conducted with 2 Stockholm based noise duos Seroconversion and Sisterloops. This was combined with an analysis of pieces by the duos which provided insight into feminist and queer musicology from gender theory perspectives. Critical discourse analysis was used on two levels, firstly to analyse discourses from the interviews which then went on to inform the analysis of the pieces.

The introduction, literature review and theories chapters highlighted the overall aims of the thesis; reviewed the literature relevant to feminist sound studies and provided an overview of the theories used. The methodology and methods chapter offered descriptions of the interview processes and the analyses as well as information about the ethics and limitations that were intertwined with this study, which included language and positionality. Both Seroconversion and Sisterloops were then dedicated their own analytical chapter in the thesis. The pieces “De Sexuella Avarterna Tycks Tillta i Både Kvantitet och Intensitet” and “Skam” by Seroconversion as well as “Wild (Pussy) Cat” by Sisterloops were analysed. Following this, I offered discussions surrounding the discourses that I felt were present in each of the pieces and attempted to make a link between each of the pieces, feminist and queer theory and feminist musicology.

8.1 Research Questions Answered

RQA. Are nonheteronormative notions of gender, sexuality and emotion present in composers' and musicians' creative processes? If so, how?

Having explored the definitions of masculine mastery in relation to technology (Rodgers, 2010b) as well as the various composing techniques which musicologists argue can be gendered (McCartney 2006; Oliveros 1984), it can be concluded that gender can potentially play a part in compositional processes of pieces rather than the overall sound. The interviews conducted with the three participants suggested that these notions of masculine mastery and analytical thought are not exclusive to masculinised bodies, just as intuitive thought and notions of soft mastery are not exclusive to feminised bodies. Rather, it seems as if each composer has their own approach, which can be perceived as a mix of both compositional methods as defined within feminist musicology. Despite both of them presenting as masculinised bodies,

Seroconversion seem to enjoy experimentation and improvisation in their work in order to find sounds they wish to use in their pieces, though they are knowledgeable about what type of sounds they are creating and the equipment they use which can be said to promote elements of mastery and control in their work. Whereas, a larger level of control seems to be present within Sisterloops' work as it features elements of performance art combined with noise. Their use of choreography and how they present themselves while performing therefore seem to be meticulously planned out, thus conforming to masculine styles of mastery with some space being left for the duo to explore sounds they wish to use in their compositions. Merve Erez, on the other hand, seems to mix both methods more consciously by blending both elements of mastery and experimentation in her work. Therefore, it can be suggested that the participants in this thesis favour androgynous approach over the stereotypical gendered approaches as defined by musicology.

Notions of femininity, masculinity and queerness are not lost in these processes, however. Instead, they relate to the imagery and ideas surrounding each piece, with Seroconversion focusing exclusively on queerness and homosexual subcultures and Sisterloops wishing to convey a nastiness rooted in femininity and androgyny. This, therefore, makes it possible to suggest that the music examined in this thesis can work as an empty signifier upon which social-cultural aspects of gender, sexuality and emotions such as rage and nastiness can be placed.

RQB. How do these expressions of identity contribute to the diversity of sound art and experimental music?

The artists interviewed in this thesis can each be said to contributing to the art music culture in Sweden in their own ways. Seroconversion's project is unique in that it is an explicitly queer noise project that is specifically focused on queer moments and homosexual culture and history thereby bringing noise to queer culture and queer culture and thus producing new and interesting perspectives around noise and the subversives queerness that are rarely seen in popular culture.

The same thing can be said for Sisterloops, who are able to create a type of dialogue between femininity and androgyny in their work by blending the hyper-feminine imagery of pink and performing with their legs open with the importance of the body in their performances. By doing this their project can potentially be read as queer despite not identifying as such or in the same way as Seroconversion. It can therefore be suggested that both Seroconversion and

Sisterloops are both directly contributing to the diversity of Stockholm's experimental art music scene as well as helping to diminish the notions of historical male mastery and power simply by continuing to create their music.

RQC. Can feminist and queer activism be found within these types of music?

The participants interviewed in this study can be thought of as doing activism simply by creating their music as they can be said to be directly working against the masculine archetype that has long been present within electroacoustic music and sound. Seroconversion's use of queerness in their noise can be thought of as direct activism as they are advocating for queers to make noise with their slogans from their manifesto "SILENCE = DEATH" and "all queers are noisicians in a straight society" (Queer Noise Manifesto, 2015). This alignment with queer theory and queer activism combined with the noise they produce works as a direct response to the silencing of queer subjects by calling on queer subjects to mobilise, make noise and take up space in society.

Similarly, the importance put on bodies in Sisterloops' performance art can be indicative of feminist activism as it in some way can give an androgynous quality to the music. This, combined with the somewhat uncomfortable sounds they produce; the wearing of pink clothes and pink lipstick in their performances and the way they position themselves when performing all have potential to create something new in performance art which can potentially be read as activism as it's not common to see such an act that blends femininity with androgyny. It can be suggested, in that case that activism does exist within experimental art music be it simply by attempting to work against the masculine archetype of mastery or more of a direct form of activism like Seroconversion.

8.2. Recommendations for Future Research

Further research that builds on the themes discussed in this thesis could be carried out within the fields of feminist and queer musicology. Applying a norm-critical approach to feminist musicology would serve as an interesting approach to future research as it would allow for feminist musicology to become more closely aligned with gender studies perspectives and for queer musicology and sound studies to define themselves as inquiries that are partially separate from feminist musicology and sound studies. More work centred around interviews with composers and musicians, much like this thesis could also bring queer musicology forward and perhaps bring a greater level of diversity to musicology.

Finally, by providing a new mode of analysis which takes into account critical discourse analysis and music as an empty signifier to analyse emotions, sexualities and gender identities within art music, it can be suggested that method could arguably be applied to any sort of music, art or any other visual medium especially as the ways of listening to and interpreting music change and develop. The method could also be broadened to include aspects of race and class and be stretched to consider global contexts, all of which unfortunately were beyond the scope of this thesis but could be developed in a future thesis which again would be routed in queer and feminist musicology.

8.3. Reflection

This thesis has been a positive and rewarding experience for me as it gave me the opportunity to work within feminist and queer musicology and to interact and collaborate with the subjects of this thesis. It is my hope that further research can be built upon the themes and discussions I have offered in this thesis and that more light can be cast upon non-western contexts within musicology such as the Turkish context touched upon in the final analytical chapter.

8.3. Concluding Remarks

This thesis has successfully contributed to queer and feminist inquiries within musicology and sound studies by examining gender and queer discourses within western art music. Two Stockholm based noise duos, Seroconversion and Sisterloops were interviewed combined with an analysis of two of their pieces in addition to an analysis of *Playground of Yesterday* by Merve Erez, all of which were routed in feminist and queer theories. By asking each of the participants to provide pieces which they felt were representative of queer or feminist discourses, my own interpretations were made of each piece, concluding that gender can exist within the processes employed in composition and that activism, emotion and sexuality can all be present within these types of musics.

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Appendix 1: Informed Consent Form



FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL SCIENCES

Electronic Discourses: Gender and Sexuality in Electroacoustic Music and Experimental Composition

Consent to take part in research

I _____ Pronoun(s) _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that I can withdraw at any time, refuse to answer any question or stop the audio recording at any time, without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use my data from the date of the interview until the 29th of May 2020.
- I understand that participation involves a semi-structured interview/discussion about how gender and sexuality can present themselves within my music.
- I agree to allow the researcher to analyse my own piece(s) of music and trust that they will not use it for distribution purposes.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that I have the right to conceal my identity for the purpose of this study if I so wish.
- I understand I may be asked by the researcher to give a short bio about myself and my music for the purpose of the study.
- I understand that extracts from my interview may be used in the researcher's MA thesis.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in Gothenburg until the 29th of May 2020.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time before the 29th of May 2020.
- I understand that I have the right to ask to read the thesis after completion.
- I understand that I am free to contact the researcher any time concerning any further questions or details.

Contact details of researcher: Mollie Ruck, gusrucma@student.gu.se, tel. +46724493503

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of researcher: _____ Date: _____