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The Power of the Virtual in Music Scholarship: Composing a Women's Musical Future as a 'Becoming-Other-Than-Itself'

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Introduction

Without question, feminist research into music, which began in earnest in the 1970s, has had far-reaching and transformational effects. The unthinkable has been actualised: the study of women's music and that of other music excluded from the musical hierarchy have coalesced to form a legitimate field of knowledge.¹ Its multi-disciplinary and multi-theoretical approaches are vividly captured in Pendle's resource and information guide ([Pendle 2005](#)).² Some of the research in the field, such as the historical retrieval project (research commencing in the 1970s that retrieved information about women composers from the history of music), tends to be positivist and to work with a straightforward conception of difference in which women's music is polarised against men's music. Other research unsettles the positivist paradigm, drawing on post-structuralist approaches to re-theorise identity, such as male and female, showing that these are fluid and ever-changing constructs. Like its counterparts in other disciplines, post-structuralist feminist research in music resists the idea of the discipline as a structuring principle.³ This work, characterised by eclectic research interests, is far from imagined as part of a finite, coherent system. Rather, to draw on Colebrook, post-structuralist feminist work is a sub-field mapping flows of intensity ([Colebrook 2002: 44](#))⁴ and events that lie beneath, pass through, and interact with other events.⁵ In a Deleuzian sense,⁶ the feminist post-structuralist work in music is marked by a multiplicity of singular creations.⁷ It is an assemblage continually under construction, expanding and contracting, connecting and interacting, an actuality eventuating from an 'infinite virtuality of moments' ([Wyatt, Gale, Gannon and Davies 2011: 6](#)). There is 'no finality, end or order that would govern the assemblage as a whole: the law of assemblage is created from its connections' ([Colebrook 2002: xx](#)).

In this article, I review some of the empirical research that has examined women's music composed for the concert hall and demonstrate that the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995), and Deleuze with Félix Guattari (1930–1992), enables a new way to think about this research. Deleuze has had a significant and wide-ranging impact on disciplines as diverse as mathematics, architecture, law, science, education, economics, and the arts, prompting new heterogeneous visions of the world. His philosophy is intended not to impose a counter-order but to revitalise the thinking that



has become old and outmoded in the academy, and to bring a fresh, dynamic perspective to the research domain. Deleuze generates concepts, such as territorialisation, molar and molecular lines, lines of flight, difference, event, becoming, and minoritarian, so as to cut loose from established ways of thinking. I introduce these concepts below. More recently, Deleuze inspires researchers in music, impacting the discipline in infinitely diverse ways (see [Bogue 2001](#); [Buchanan and Swiboba 2004](#); [Hulse and Nesbitt 2010](#)).

Like all research, work on women's art music responds to the reigning paradigms. These drive different kinds of questions and different approaches to dealing with those questions. The contribution of liberal feminism to music research, specifically to the research that aims to improve the visibility of women composers in the concert hall, for example, is well-intentioned.⁸ It fails, however, to find a way of changing the continuing emphasis on music by men. Nevertheless, it is important and painstaking work and should not be dismissed, for it is a significant indicator of the extent of the problem. A wealth of research on women's art music became available in the 1990s. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, however, all that was previously achieved faded away. Scholars seemed to lose interest in this music and turn their attention to the representations of women in popular music, performance art and virtual media ([Cusick 1999: 87–98](#)).⁹ It could be argued that this was a political move that was motivated, on the one hand, by the economic slumps threatening the survival of classical music ([Johnson 2002](#); [Fineberg 2006](#); [Hewitt 2003](#); [Kramer 2007](#); [Letts 2009](#)) and, on the other hand, by the resistance of feminist researchers to studying music associated with the elitist concert hall tradition ([Cusick 1999](#)). The model of authorship in the concert tradition reverses the masculine figure of the composer which is conceived as the uniquely originating heroic master of the text. Women composers fit awkwardly into this model of authorship.

The research on women's music has been conducted in a static way. The paradox of this work is its unavoidable replication of the past by envisioning the future from the standpoint of the present. Such work inevitably reinforces the status quo. From a Deleuzian perspective, it encourages us to get closer to the way things are and sets in train endlessly recurring patterns of the same kinds of thought images that deny any possibility for difference ([Carfoot 2004: 10–29](#)).¹⁰ Given this, I argue that the empirical strand of feminist musicology has had little impact on the amount of women's music being performed. If anything, the situation is worse now than it was in the 1990s. While acknowledging that it is impossible to generate new ways of thinking that are entirely disconnected from the old, the work of Deleuze, in consort with feminist theory, offers new possibilities for thought and action. Such thinking envisages women's music as the 'becoming-imperceptible' of music, as Braidotti puts it. It is the process of 'becoming-other-than-itself', suspended between the no-longer and the not-yet ([Braidotti 2006: 156](#)).

Statistical Matter and the Liberal Feminist Research

Liberal feminist research situated in the positivist paradigm aims to overturn the disempowerment of women and to achieve social justice by confronting those who hold the power. In music, among a range of research interests, this takes the form of first acquiring and then monitoring the data for the performance of women's music in the concert hall. Such work is guided by the assumption that statistical evidence is factual evidence. The research draws on established evidence-based models to determine the extent to which women composers are excluded from the concert hall (see, in particular, [Adkins Chiti \(2003\)](#); and [Hirsch \(2008\)](#)).¹¹ It gathers evidence and quantifies it, and then monitors to see if the representation of women's music is rising or falling. Such research has an idea of what a utopian future looks like. In the empirical paradigm, however, it seeks to control how that future will look, engineering it from a set of predetermined goals. In Grosz's view, because the future arises out of a pre-existent reality, the outcomes will inevitably conform to the conditions of the present reality ([Grosz 2000](#)). Grosz cites the revolutionary feminist movement of the 1960s as a case in point, showing that it conformed to the regulations of the prevailing orthodoxy and therefore failed to overthrow patriarchy.

Empirical research, from the dictionary meaning 'based on, or guided by, or employing observation and experiment rather than theory' ([The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 1973: 809](#)), assumes that the evidence will speak for itself. Davies makes the point, however, that empirical researchers are 'captured inside the already thought, and in the repetition of existing relations of power and taken-for-granted assumptions' ([Davies in press: 10](#)). Such research relies on pre-specified variables and those variables are chosen only because they are measurable and quantifiable. It is unlikely that such research will produce new insights. The work examining the representation of women's concert music proceeds from what is already known – in this case, that women's music is under-represented in the concert



hall – and concludes with what was known before the research was conducted – that women’s music is, in fact, under-represented. In the following section, I will offer some thoughts about the work in this strand, reviewing some of its major findings.

The Presence of Women Composers in the Field

The presence of women composers in the field of music was established through the work of the historical musicologists who discovered that women composers have existed in all the major historical epochs (see a summary of this research in [Wood \(1980\)](#); [McClary \(1993\)](#); [Pendle \(2005\)](#)). An explosion of information was unearthed and was vital for establishing a critical mass for women composers. Since the mid-1980s, women composers in Australia have been steadily increasing in number, a claim that is supported by data acquired from the Australian Music Centre (AMC). According to the AMC, their number has risen by approximately 10 per cent per decade. In the late 1980s, they constituted approximately eight per cent of the composer population; in the 1990s, this increased to approximately 15 per cent. Currently we witness another growth period with their representation at approximately 25 per cent or one quarter of all Australian composers.¹² In a much earlier survey that I conducted, drawing data from the catalogues at the AMC, I found that the number of works composed by women was almost the same as the number of composers who were represented ([Macarthur 1997](#)). In a recent study, Rusak found that the representation of women’s notated works remained at around 20 per cent ([Rusak 2010: 558](#)). This suggests that, although the percentage of women’s notated works available for performance is slightly lower than the number of composers represented, women’s music is, and always has been, a viable alternative to the contemporary music available for performance on the concert platform.

The idea that women’s music is a viable alternative is vigorously championed by the 363-strong membership of the International Alliance for Women in Music (IAWM).¹³ Inside this almost all-female organisation, whose members come from all over the world and the majority of whom are composers, we would be forgiven for thinking that composers are exclusively women. The advocacy work takes many forms, in particular, using the list-server to impart information about matters relating to women’s music: the composition, publication, performance and broadcast of women’s music; entrepreneurial activities relating to women composers; and the publicising of competitions. The list discusses pertinent issues that might be seen to be hindering the performance of women’s music and, as they come to hand, feeds statistical data into these discussions.

Molar Lines, Territorialisation and the IAWM

Despite the predominantly female membership of the IAWM, its ability to increase the visibility of women composers could arguably be impeded by two factors. The first is its branding as a woman-only organisation, which would perhaps work against its aim to have women’s music mainstreamed. The second factor is that the organisational structure of the IAWM is hierarchical, mirroring the typical structure of the conventional organisation.¹⁴ In the hierarchical world of music creation, women have been shown to be subordinated to men ([McClary 1991](#); [Citron 1993](#) and [2004](#); [Macarthur 2010](#); [Appleby 2012](#)). The hierarchy is composed of what Deleuze refers to as ‘molar lines’, which divide a space into rigid, over-coded segments. Molar lines could be understood to territorialise the hierarchically structured IAWM, which in turn, regulates the ways in which it mobilises political action on behalf of women composers. A territorialisation of a space, as Hickey-Moody and Malins suggest, is created when bodies relate to the space in particular, habitual ways, designing the space so that it resembles a ‘home’ ([Hickey-Moody and Malins 2007: 11](#)). The repetitive, organising feature of the home inhabited by the members of the IAWM emerges from the role of the refrain. The refrain for Deleuze and Guattari marks a territory, much as a bird sings to mark its territory ([Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 311–340](#)). The distinctive identity of the space inhabited by the IAWM emerges through the habitual behaviour and work of its members, work that is both politically activist and mutually supportive.¹⁵ While the IAWM readily acknowledges the diversity of the women it represents, it arguably invokes a conception of woman that is restrictive, ignoring the idea that bodies are not static entities but that they exist in a state of continuous change.

According to Kylie Message, ‘the concept of “territory” evades easy categorisation because rather than being a sedentary place maintaining firm borders against outside threat[,] the territory itself is a malleable site of passage ... it continually passes into something else’ ([Message 2005: 275](#)). Message goes on to say that as an assemblage, a territory is in a state of process and a necessary component of the territory is its capacity to be deterritorialised. For Deleuze and Guattari, the moment a territory is established it is already in the process of changing and transforming itself ([Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 311–340](#)). It begins to be composed of molecular lines which,



as Woodward comments, 'organize in a more supple way, interlacing segments in a non-hierarchical fashion' ([Woodward 2007: 69–70](#)). A deterritorialisation, to speculate about the IAWM, might come about if the members were to reorganise or destabilise the structure so that it eschewed the dominant, hierarchical model. Or, as I discuss shortly, the IAWM is more than likely already in the process of being deterritorialised by the composition of its fluid and ever-changing membership. Many of its members have musical leanings that avoid institutionalised definitions of music. A changing IAWM organisation would then drift away from the dominant structure.

The Absence of Women Composers from the Field

In the positivist paradigm, the proposition that the gender gap is widening in the concert hall, or that women composers are largely absent, relies on the power of numerical evidence. The research in this area tends to prove what is already known, that women composers do not have their music performed as often as the music composed by their male counterparts. The overall conclusions for this research might seem disturbing. My study shows that of a total of 15,316 works performed between 1985 and 1995, only 324, or two per cent, were by women ([Macarthur 1997](#)). More than a decade later, Hirsch's survey of the 2004–2005 concert season of approximately 300 League of American Orchestras shows that women's music accounted for only one per cent of all music performed. This statistic was boosted the following year (2005) to two per cent, which she attributes to the widely performed *Made in America* by Joan Tower ([Hirsch 2005](#)). A survey of European orchestras and music festivals by Adkins Chiti finds an even worse statistic: for the period 1997–2003, women's music constituted only 0.5 per cent of all the music performed ([Adkins Chiti 2003](#)). From this, it could be depressingly concluded that women's music is unlikely to be performed. In contrast to the information dredged up from the research commencing in the 1970s that retrieved information about women composers from the history of music, the AMC's databases and from the IAWM membership, these statistics would seem to suggest that women composers are virtually absent from the field of music.

Considered from the perspective of the empiricist however, these dismal findings, though statistically significant, are somewhat misleading. The compounding factor ever-present in the performance of chamber and symphonic music is its bias towards the music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which, in turn, skews the performance of music to male composers. In my own study, I eliminated the effect of this earlier music by separating it from the Australian music performed. The result of this manipulation was remarkable: instead of women's music barely signifying, it then constituted 263 works, or 12 per cent, of the total of 2,191 works performed ([Macarthur 1997](#)). Hirsch's study similarly eliminates the canon effect by targeting new music groups in North America from which to retrieve data. She finds that some individual ensembles are worse than others for their exclusion of women's music ([Hirsch 2008](#)).¹⁶ On the strength of her evidence, Hirsch concludes that women composers today are in a much better situation than they were in the past. She suggests that the number of women studying composition in American colleges makes up around 30 per cent of all composition students, with the inference that they will have an impact on the performance of women's music in the future.

In my own study, some individual groups, like those in Hirsch's study, were exemplary, representing women's music well above the national statistic provided by the AMC. In 1993 the national statistic was around 15 per cent. In that year, of all the Australian music performed by the Sydney Alpha Ensemble, a group which has since disbanded, 40 per cent was by women ([Macarthur 1997: 418](#)). Sydney Alpha Ensemble's performance of women's music overall was also above the national statistic. In the period 1992–1995 inclusive, women's music, as a category of the Australian music performed, constituted 24, or 16 per cent, of a total of 63 works ([Macarthur 1997: 415–416](#)).

Adkins Chiti does not seem to unhook the data retrieved for the two music festivals from the six mainstream orchestras. Instead, she draws comparisons between the 11 European countries, showing that some countries perform better than others. The Ukraine is singled out as exceptionally good with 11.5 per cent of its programming devoted to women composers. She does point out, however, that in the Ukraine women composers constitute 30 per cent of the country's composers ([Adkins Chiti 2003](#)).

In 2011, a monitoring of the statistical data of two new music groups in Australia suggests that, on the one hand, there is an attempt to include more women, while on the other hand, women's music continues to struggle to find a place in the concert repertoire. In the period from 2003 to 2011 inclusive, women's music constituted 29, or 10 per cent, of a total of 285 works performed by Ensemble Offspring, a figure which compares unfavourably with the national average of 25 per cent. In contrast, the data retrieved for Chronology Arts, a



contemporary ensemble whose primary focus is on emerging artists, suggests a more favourable outcome for women. From 2007 (the year of its inception) to 2011 inclusive, women's music comprised 30 works, or 23 per cent, of a total of 130 works performed. This is a little below their representation at the AMC of 25 per cent.¹⁷

The Presence and Absence of Women Composers

It could be concluded from liberal feminist research that women composers are both present in and absent from the field of music. On the one hand, the statistics given for women's music measured against men's in the standard concert repertoire are so bleak that the only interpretation to be offered is that they are largely absent from the field. From this it could be inferred that discriminatory patterns are in evidence. On the other hand, these grim statistics are misleading: discriminatory patterns may be in operation among some contemporary music ensembles, and certainly among mainstream ensembles, but among other groups there is a strong sense that positive discrimination is used as a tool to include women composers. Furthermore, the comparison between women's music with men's music as a category of Australian music – in which all other music is eliminated – produces a very positive image for women's music, suggesting that, if groups were to perform only Australian music, women composers would benefit enormously. New music groups in Australia, however, do not confine their repertoire to music only by Australian composers; the measurement of women's music against men's as a category of the total repertoire performed in new music ensembles is therefore biased to music by male composers.

These studies attempt to map the numerical distribution of classical music performance to show that women's music tends to be overlooked in the concert hall. On the strength of the research, women composers are inscribed as excluded subjects. As presented, however, the positivist research paradigm fails to give a more rounded interpretation of women's music. The research is unable to show why some ensembles are more women-composer-friendly than others. It simply observes that this is the case. It is unable to confidently predict a better future for women composers: indeed, it seems to predict the opposite. If, as the research seeks to demonstrate, the present time is worse now than it has ever been, then the evidence as presented would suggest that this trend is likely to continue. The research is unable to explain why, on the one hand, the number of women composers is increasing, while on the other hand, the performance of their music seems to be diminishing. By naming the problem – that women's music is virtually non-existent – the impact of this research is likely to have a counter effect, perpetuating a negative image for women's music into the future.

The positivist, empirical framework which produces the percentages for the performance of women's music, leaves no space in which to think about why women are unable to break into the concert hall tradition and to have their music performed equally alongside the music of men. The one-dimensional research hypotheses, which are already aligned to the findings the research will produce, confirm what we already know; and the research carried out confirms the hypotheses. The research problem in the positivist framework is narrow and self-evident. As McClary observed long ago, positivistic research is limited to questions that can be answered factually. Such research avoids posing different kinds of questions for fear of venturing into the territory of 'forbidden speculation' (McClary 1985: 152). The research framework is based on old and established ways of thinking; it produces thinking which forecloses thought. It constructs a conclusion that is locked into a circular pattern and which has no way of moving forward. Positivist work leaves no room to pose new questions which may shed new light on the problem. According to Badiou, 'the vast majority of empirical political orientations have nothing to do with truth ... They organize a repulsive mixture of power and opinions' (Badiou 2005: 53).

In the next section, I explore a different way of thinking about the research problem by decomposing this positivist narrative through which the empirical research on women's music has been filtered. My aim is to shift from the portrayal of women's music as excluded from the concert hall to thinking about how these findings could be couched in positive terms, drawing on the philosophy of Deleuze. Deleuze offers a context in which to move beyond the 'accurate' representations of women's music as a series of statistical events to thinking about the utopian task, as Patton puts it, 'of helping to bring about new Earths and peoples' (Patton 2010: 41). In Patton's view, the practice of thinking differently, brought about by the creation of concepts, serves 'the larger goal of making the future different from, and in some sense better than, the past. ... New concepts provide new ways of describing the problems to which philosophical thought is a response, thereby pointing us toward new forms of solution' (Patton 2010: 41).



From Accurate Representations to Utopian Political Becomings

Deleuze's work does not have an underlying program, for it is not a systematic philosophy. Rather, Deleuze understood his work to be like a series of encounters and its goal, as Patton comments, is 'to create philosophical concepts that could be of use in non-philosophical ways of thinking' (Patton 2007: ix). Deleuze's philosophy does not subscribe to representational thought and its illusion of transcendence. Instead, it argues for the power of immanence in which life is itself a process of creative power. In Colebrook's pithy comment this means that, 'to think is not to represent life but to transform and act upon life' (Colebrook 2002: xxiv). Wyatt, Gale, Gannon and Davies put this idea more fulsomely:

Immanence derives from the Latin, meaning 'to remain within'. In Deleuzian philosophy this does not mean within the bounded individual self, but *within* life; not just human life, but all life, organic and inorganic, which Deleuze refers to as Being. Deleuzian immanence indicates a conceptual space in which one seeks to dissolve all binaries, and the categorizations that divide one from another ... The question is never this *or* that, but always this *and* that. 'Or' becomes 'and' in what Deleuze called stuttering: and and and. Deleuze struggled to find a way of bringing together this idea that we are all part of the same Being, *and at the same time*, that we are multiple and emergent (Wyatt, Gale, Gannon and Davies 2011: 1–2).

The results of the empirical indicate that a problem still exists, that is, that women's music remains polarised. However, Deleuzian streams of thought offer a new way to think about the problem. My contention is that this new way of thinking, drawing on Deleuze's concepts of difference, minoritarian, event, and becoming, releases new possibilities and potentialities that are not tied to the predictable and known but to futures beyond the already known.

Difference and Identity Politics in Deleuzian Thought

Liberal feminists working on women's music have tended to mobilise the group identity, 'woman composer', for political purposes. While the conception of woman used for such work is useful on one level, on another level it is limiting. As Hickey-Moody and Malins point out, the arrangement of subjects into rigid, grid-like categories, such as sex, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, fails to acknowledge that women traverse many identities simultaneously and that these identities continually change over time (Hickey-Moody and Malins 2007: 5). For Deleuze, difference is a dynamic and an internal process, rather than external or relational (Deleuze 1994: 20–27). As summarised by Hickey-Moody and Malins, Deleuze's conception of difference is:

first and foremost, an internal – rather than relational or external – process. A body is produced through an internal differentiation (as when cells differentiate) and, over time, continually differs from itself. This view presents difference as positive and productive, rather than negative and subtractive; difference is that which produces life itself, and enables the production of the new. (Hickey-Moody and Malins, 2007: 5)

For Davies, that process of differentiation, 'of becoming-something-new, becoming different, is an emergent, ongoing process' (Davies in press). In order to take further this idea of becoming, Deleuze generates concepts that activate the possibility of engaging in the ongoing politics of becoming. As Davies continues, 'opening ourselves to difference and to differentiation in ourselves and in the other, "the other" being not just other human beings, but the physical objects, landscapes and other materialities with which, and in which, we take up our existence' (Davies in press).

The statistical data produced in the liberal feminist work was intended to demonstrate the need for positive change but, as I am arguing, it has failed to bring about the change that had been hoped for. Indeed, the production of more and more statistical information is more than likely to continue to reinforce endlessly the present reality in which women's music is positioned negatively against men's music. Deleuze offers a way out of this bind, suggesting that thinking is an effective tool for changing the status quo. Such thinking moves out of hierarchical conceptions of identity, focusing less on identity per se and more on what a body can do. As Albrecht-Crane and Slack put it, 'Deleuze and Guattari do not begin with the question *What is a body?* but *What can a body do?* and *Of what affects is the body capable?*' (Albrecht-Crane and Slack: 100). In order to move beyond politics based on identity, we need to move towards the politics of becoming. According to Hickey-Moody and Malins, becomings take place 'when a body connects to another body and in so doing, begins



to perceive, move, think, and feel in new ways' ([Hickey-Moody and Malins 2007: 6](#)). A becoming strives for an infinite opening. It allows me to consider the power of minoritarianism, in which we might imagine women's music as the creation of a new kind of music, and a music to come, to adapt Deleuze and Guattari's idea of 'people to come' (see [Patton \(2007: ix\)](#); [Deleuze and Guattari \(1994: 218\)](#)).

The Becoming-Minoritarian of Women's Music

The positivist work of the liberal feminists measures women's music against an assumed standard or norm. When women's music is measured as a category against all the music performed, it is shown to be significantly skewed and deviating in ways that render it almost invisible against the norm. The research that separates the music of men and women is concerned with how the minority differs from the majority. In the general population, women are more numerous than men, yet they are considered the minority. According to Deleuze, this minority status arises because the difference between the majority and minority is not quantitative, given that, as Patton puts it, 'social minorities can be more numerous than the so-called majority' ([Patton 2005: 74](#)). While it is the case that women composers happen to be less numerous than men, male composers are considered to be the majority because they belong to a group which opposes the other group, and they also belong to a category – the majority or the norm – to which they are compared. Male composers therefore appear twice: as Deleuze and Guattari put it, 'once in the constant and again in the variable from which the constant is extracted. Majority assumes a state of power and domination, not the other way around' ([Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 105](#)).

It is possible that some women composers may aspire to become part of the majority. To do so, they would compose music in ways that are recognisable to the majority – such as having aesthetic and stylistic qualities like those of the majority – which, in turn, would accord it majoritarian status. However, if the statistics are to be believed, women's music does not, by and large, conform to the majority. In the minoritarian position, women composers have the power to destabilise the norm. Colebrook explains that 'minoritarian' is an identity that is 'constantly transformed by the events of its grouping or assembling' ([Colebrook 2002: 61](#)).

In my earlier discussion, I suggested that the IAWM is more than likely in the process of becoming deterritorialised through its membership, which represents an ever-changing set of interests. These interests vary according to the kinds of music the members represent, and these are different from year-to-year according to the new members who join the organisation and members who depart the organisation.¹⁸ The IAWM represents the interests of a minority group but it can also be understood as a becoming-minoritarian. To make this explicit, I will now draw on Deleuze's concept of the virtual, suggesting that the IAWM's membership can be understood as a multiplicity opened up by the virtual. The document that lists the members of the IAWM is an inert object, which is posted to the IAWM website each year. This conception of an actual document, to draw on Grosz, does not reveal more of itself in any given year, or in any given time ([Grosz 2000: 225](#)). The virtual brings the membership list to life where it exceeds itself. It differs in every entrepreneurial email exchange, in every affirmative action it makes, and in every political confrontation it has with musical organisations and performance groups. The movement of the virtual triggers what might be possible, and opens up the question of futurity for women's music.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the becoming-minoritarian is a deterritorialised variable of the majority. As they state, 'there is no medium of becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of the majority' ([Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 292](#)). In this view, the term 'becoming-minoritarian' is a creative process involving a divergence from the majority. It has a transformative potential. It invites us to think of difference positively: as Colebrook puts it, 'not as the difference between distinct terms, but as a constant, ungrounded and unbounded process of differentiation ... [of] differentiating forces' ([Colebrook 2002: 63](#)). The politics of emancipation in the IAWM, gives rise to political subjects in what I want to suggest is a becoming-minoritarian of the organisation, which is inseparable from a becoming-woman. The IAWM affirms itself in the process of becoming. In this conception, it is like an event within a field of singularities.

Women's Music, Becoming and Event

Deleuze's concept of 'event' is a dynamic attribution, constituted by events underlying it, and marked in every moment as a state of transformation ([Stagoll 2005: 88](#)). The event is a moment of dynamic change – a 'becoming' – a moving through an event, 'with the event representing a momentary productive intensity' ([Stagoll 2005: 88](#)). For Deleuze, an event is not what might evidently occur. An event is a potentiality or a possibility, constituted as always in between one thing and another thing. Events are moments of dynamic change – like a 'becoming' – and events pass through other events. The concept of the event affirms rather than reacts against possibility and becoming.



This description of an event is different from the positivist-realist perspective which would attribute a singular cause to an event, and which would see the event as a finite whole, defined by a beginning and end.

To illustrate this point, I will briefly revisit the statistics gathered for the Sydney Alpha Ensemble. In 1993, Sydney Alpha Ensemble produced a statistical anomaly by performing a repertoire, 40 per cent of which was music by women composers, (the figure that compared favourably with the national average of 15 per cent). Is there a cause that would explain this rare event for women's music? The tendency for the liberal feminist researcher is to find an explanation that satisfies the positivist framework in which the research is grounded. Its aim is to show a cause-and-effect relationship between the performance of women's music in 1993 and the activist intervention into music-programming in 1991 by the Australian Women Composer's Network (AWCN).¹⁹

In its inaugural (and only) year, the Network had been lobbying federal government representatives to intervene in the programming of performance groups which received public funding. The government ministers approached the performance administrations with questions about the absence of women composers. The administrations responded by commissioning more music by women composers and, in addition, by providing two residencies for Australian women composers with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. With the three-year lead time required for most performance groups to establish their future concert seasons, it might be argued that the higher visibility of women's music in 1993 is directly linked to the activities of the Network in 1991. Similarly, the closing of the Network in 1992 could explain the commensurate drop in the percentage of women's music being performed in 1995. Such explanations appeal to the argument that positive discrimination and activist intervention are effective tools for advancing women's music. However, positive discrimination needs to be adopted long term. What tends to occur, otherwise, is that women's music returns to its previous low visibility. Furthermore, attributing the sharp rise and fall in the amount of women's music performed by Sydney Alpha Ensemble to a single cause provides only one of many possible explanations that might be proffered.

Responding to the research in this way attempts to make conclusive statements in which this 'stand-out' statistic is artificially reduced to a set of specific causes from which we would be able to learn in the future. Such an approach is limiting and obstructs future thought about the problem. Thinking about the statistic in terms of Deleuze's conception of event, however, allows me to consider the possibility of imagining women's music as becoming-music. Events give rise to becomings. The actualisation of women's music as a 40 per cent statistical event in the repertoire of Sydney Alpha Ensemble might then be summed up in Patton's words, as '**moments at which the untimely and the historical coincide**' (Patton 2005: 89). Perhaps this was an accident or an anomalous event, a set of circumstances and conditions that produced a moment of recognition for women's music. But to draw a simple connection between one event and another emphasises the meaning rather than the connective forces that enables such a transformation.

Women's Music as a Becoming-Other-Than-Itself

In some ways this article is a post-structuralist-feminist event of its own passing through a number of other events including the research in the field. I have endeavoured to open up a critical position, drawing on the philosophy of Deleuze, in which to conceive women's music as an infinite multiplicity of becomings. In the hardened and sedentary spaces of the liberal feminist research women's music is enclosed by molar lines, reduced to a negative image in relation to the positive image for men's music. Thinking on the plane of immanence with Deleuze, however, allows me to conceive of women's music as positive and productive, as an opening onto the infinite world of possibility in music.

It is not my intention to offer a solution to the problem that women's music is barely discernible in the minefield of descriptive statistical evidence; nor is it my intention to transform women composers from their minority status to that of majority. Rather, I am suggesting that with a different mindset, we can view women's music as a potentiality, as a becoming-music. To draw on Grosz, women's music is its own '**history of singularity ... that defies repeatability and generalisation**' (Grosz 2000: 225–226). The liberal feminist, positivistic work restricts itself only to the factual and to that which can be measured. A Deleuzian approach enables the movement beyond these immutable representations that lock women's music into a replication of the present reality. The infinite potential of the virtual describes different kinds of assemblage for the woman composer in which her relationship to the music world is defined by its deterritorialisation of that world.



My aim, in this paper, has been to suggest that women's music is best understood in terms of becoming, for a becoming, to draw on Colebrook, 'refuses to know what or where it is; a becoming embraces all those questions and problems that have precluded thought from being at home with itself – including the thought of women' (Colebrook 2000: 17). In effect, the becoming-minoritarian points to the becoming-imperceptible of women's music, but not in the sense that it drifts into oblivion. To follow Papadopoulos and Tsianos, the more audible women's music becomes, materialising the processes of its becoming, the more it becomes a target for regulation and control (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2007: 223–235). Becoming-imperceptible, therefore, must be an act of resistance which makes it impossible to conceive of women's music as a fixed category.

The concept of becoming-imperceptible is imagined as a tool to oppose the individualising, quantifying and representational aspects of the stable system of music creation. The twenty-first century is opened up by new musicians and audiences but this does not necessarily mean that there is a guarantee or a preordained destination for women's music. Rather, on the plane of immanence, women's music is rethought as multiple singularities within what Deleuze called the One-All. The concept of One-All, or univocity, is encapsulated by the statement 'A single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamour of Being for all beings' (Deleuze, 1994: 304). Such an idea composes an image for women's music as the 'music to come', as a future that entails becoming-other-than-itself.

ENDNOTES

1. I argue that second-wave feminist scholarship in music since the 1970s has actively sought to transform women's experiences. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy, the feminist research that emerged in the wider academy in the 1970s understands feminist work as 'a complex process that intimately links theory, epistemology, and method ... it is not one thing, nor is there a feminist methodology per se ... [It] is a window onto the social reality and encompasses a wide range of perspectives and practices', and is multi-theoretical and multi-disciplinary (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007: ix). Importantly, feminist work seeks to establish equal opportunities for women in the social worlds they inhabit, including education and employment. Some of the scholarship since the 1970s in music is concerned with equal opportunities for women in music and, as I will demonstrate in this article, undertakes this work by providing statistical information about the representation of their musical works on the concert platform. The other branch of work, which became much more visible in the 1970s and 1980s than it had been in earlier periods of history, is the retrieval project which establishes that musical composition is not solely a male domain. Wood's review essay is the first to provide comprehensive evidence for an increased feminist activity in music in the 1970s and, resonating with the second-wave feminist agenda writ large, to establish that a woman's music history exists (Wood 1980). This is not to say that women's music has not been considered before the 1970s. Indeed, an extensive literature dating from the nineteenth century investigates the kinds of contributions women have made to music, some of it debating whether women composers have the ability to write 'great' music. This work, however, is not necessarily feminist research because it does not aim to elevate the status of women, or to establish equal opportunities for women, nor does it draw on feminist theoretical models in order to understand the nature of inequality by examining women's experiences and roles in their musico-social worlds. With some exceptions, such as Drinker's *Music and Women* (Drinker [1948] 1977) and its critique by Solie (1992), which examines the kinds of musical activities with which women were predominantly associated, the earlier literature tends to justify the dominance of men in musical composition, using a deterministic biological argument as the basis for this claim. This literature spans the period from the late nineteenth century to the early 1970s (see, e.g. Stratton (1882–1883); McArthur (1902); Ladd (1917); Seashore (c.1947); Rubin-Rabson (1973)).
2. This very useful resource is a vivid demonstration of the multi-theoretical and multi-methodological approaches to the study of women in music, and its related categories of gender, lesbian, gay and queer studies. While the 'book makes no claim to completeness' (Pendle 2005: ix), it divides the field into sections such as: reference works, women in the United States; music histories of women; collections of essays; feminist theory and cultural studies; feminist methods and viewpoints in music; issues of sexuality; music education and training; careers in music; women's financial support of music and musicians; historical periods; ethnomusicology; countries and geographical areas; music for the stage; women in rock and pop music; women in blues and jazz; country, folk and gospel; and individuals.
3. The post-structuralist orientation is more inclined to challenge the boundaries around one discipline and another. It borrows tools from other disciplines, such as philosophy, which are actively engaged in testing boundaries whenever and wherever they appear. Post-structuralist work challenges the boundaries around disciplines by disrupting the traditional principles by which or through which knowledge is possible.
4. For Deleuze, intensities do not describe systems that are hierarchically arranged but rather, to draw on Colebrook, they are 'directly desired or perceived qualities which then allows us to form the distinct differences of a system' (Colebrook 2002: 44).



5. I draw on Deleuze's understanding of event, which suggests that a multiplicity of highly divergent factors give rise to an event and prompt a multiplicity of responses or outcomes. I pick up on this idea in the third section of this article to advance a different way of thinking about the research on women's music.
6. Some of the significant publications by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995), and Deleuze with Félix Guattari (1930–1992) include Deleuze (1983; 1994; 1995) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987; 1993; 1994).
7. Some of the research in this new field has positivist leanings and tends to homogenise thought in its quest to establish an accurate picture of the world. A Deleuzian approach, however, does not have a fixed way of studying music. Rather, such an approach would argue that different images of thought open the field to difference. Deleuzian difference is not grounded in anything else. It refuses the comparison of itself to something outside itself. The concept of 'difference-in-itself' allows us to focus on the singular instantiations of its production.
8. The pioneers of the feminist historical narrative in music were often labelled 'liberal feminists'. Liberal feminism has at the heart of its agenda the desire to demonstrate that women are equal to men. The liberal feminists undertaking the historical recovery project, then, were eager to establish that women composers existed in the significant stylistic periods in the history of Western art music. They wanted to determine whether the women's music they discovered was on an equal footing with men's music of the given historical period. The liberal feminist approach, however, creates rigid boundaries and polarises women's music against men's music. Radical feminism, which introduces the notion that women are different from men, differs from liberal feminism in its endeavour to heighten the categorical difference between men and women, arguing that women have been misunderstood because of their differences from men. Post-structuralist feminism shifts from thinking about men and women in terms of their categorical differences – which is at the heart of both the liberal and radical feminist endeavours – to seeking to dissolve the boundaries that separate women from men, arguing that these are fluid and ever-changing constructs.
9. While I have not located recent examples that substantiate the claim that the study of women in the art music tradition has tended to become marginalised and scholars have drifted away from studying it, I respond here to the idea that one of the perceived problems of studying women in art music is that it is an elitist tradition and the historical precedence suggests that women composers are considered inferior to their male counterparts. McClary, for example, makes this point somewhat explicit in her review article when she says that as important as the recovery work has been, its quest to establish equality in the greatness stakes has probably affirmed what the discipline has always known and says: 'if there were women composers, they are not worth knowing about' (McClary 1993: 406). Furthermore, I am not suggesting that work on women in art music has completely ceased. Indeed, there are some outstanding monographs on women composers and it is worth noting that among them is Cusick's own work on the composer Francesca Caccini (Cusick 2009).
10. Carfoot discusses the ways in which representational philosophy differs from Deleuze's philosophy of immanence, which maintains that thought and music are immanent aspects of life and experience. The tendency in representational thought, which imagines the world as a mirror of some higher order, is to homogenise thought and, in so doing, to produce repetitive thought images which, in turn, shut down the possibility for the new.
11. I have contributed, and continue to contribute, to this strand of research despite more recently realising that while the numbers are useful for giving an indication of the extent to which things have improved, or not, that on its own the empirical approach fails to solve the problem.
12. This data has been sourced by the author from the Australian Music Centre (AMC). The statistic of 25 per cent was provided by the AMC in July 2011.
13. The membership of 373 is taken from the list compiled by Deborah Hayes, April, 2011. However, this number represents individual members. The membership is significantly increased by institutional memberships. The website claims that it has 500 members: <http://www.iawm.org/>, accessed 11 September, 2011.
14. The IAWM has a board of directors, consisting of a president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary, and 11 ordinary members. There are nine other committees, which oversee various portfolios, including the membership portfolio, and 13 advisors. Although all these positions are voluntary, the way in which they are organised is hierarchical.
15. The space associated with the IAWM is not in itself a territory but the activity associated with the space is. Members do not occupy a literal space, but I am invoking the notion of space to suggest that, regardless of which part of the globe composers inhabit, their behaviour in the virtual space of the IAWM is repetitive, in the same way that people's behaviour in their actual homes is repetitive: the kitchen is used for cooking, the bedrooms for sleeping, and so on.
16. In the 2007–2008 concert season, she cites New York's ensemble Either/Or as listing no women composers, and Cygnus Ensemble as performing the music of only one female composer (or less than 0.5 per cent). She suggests that other ensembles are better: counter)induction, performed 13 works, or 16 per cent, by women, out of a total of 80; San Francisco's Other Minds Festival presented 29 works, or 25 per cent, by women, out of a total of 115; and Bang on a Can People's Commissions, commissioned eight women, or 22 per cent, out of 36 composers.



17. It is also worth considering whether a pattern of improvement or progress is identified in these data. An analysis of the gender representation reveals that there is no improvement for women composers. Rather, a pattern of regression seems to be in evidence. In the 1990s, women composers constituted approximately 15 per cent of the composer population. In that decade, Sydney Alpha Ensemble performed 16 per cent of women's music overall, and 40 per cent of their music as a category of all the Australian music. This achievement compares favourably with the national average of 15%. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, however, the percentage of women composers represented by the AMC increased to 25 per cent of the composer population. In that decade Ensemble Offspring performed only 10 per cent of music by women which is an achievement that compares unfavourably with the national average of 25 per cent. These data would therefore suggest that the situation is much worse now for women composers than it was in the 1990s.
18. Currently, there are a number of composers in the IAWM membership whose music crosses the boundaries of various arts practices, from members who work with electroacoustic and acoustic music, to those who combine popular music styles with their concert music, to those who predominantly confine their work to music for the concert hall. See the membership for 2011 in the IAWM at http://www.iawm.org/aboutMembers_memberPages.htm, accessed 18 September 2011.
19. The Australian Women Composer's Network came into existence in 1991. It was a lobby-group, consisting mostly of composers but including some performers, musicologists, and arts administrators. A number of men joined the organisation. There were no membership fees and the organisation was not formally constituted. I was a member of this group and surmise that it eventually disbanded the following year, not for the reason which is anecdotally suggested (that 'Australia does not have a problem with programming music by women'), but because the composers heading up the organisation found it involved too much work taking them away from their own creative work as composers.

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ABSTRACT

The feminist research endeavour in music, among other political agendas, aimed to improve the visibility of women composers in the concert hall. In the 1990s, a wealth of research became available. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, however, all that had been previously achieved faded away: scholars seemed to lose interest in women's music destined for the concert hall. Any number of reasons might be given for this situation but overriding any single factor is the static way in which the research on women's 'new' music has been conducted. The paradox of this work is its unavoidable replication of the past by envisioning the future from the standpoint of the present. Such work inevitably reinforces the status quo. While acknowledging that it is impossible to generate new ways of thinking that are entirely disconnected from the old, I draw on Deleuze, and feminist-Deleuzian scholarship, to offer new possibilities for thought and action. In particular, I explore the idea that some women's music might be understood as the 'becoming-imperceptible' of music, in Braidotti's interpretation of this idea, as the process of 'becoming-other-than-itself'.

Keywords: Women's music, feminist theory, Deleuze, post-structuralist philosophy.

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