

Reading and Theorizing Medieval Music Theory: Interpretation and Its Contexts

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Several of Sarah Fuller's most significant publications are essentially reactive. Her 1986 article "A Phantom Treatise of the Fourteenth Century?" questioned the "traditional view" of the status of the so-called *Ars Nova* treatise and its authorship, and took as its starting point the edition of Gilbert Reaney.¹ In 1998 Fuller published two separate responses to publications by Peter Lefferts and Christian Berger respectively, critiquing the former's 1995 attempt at a total tonal taxonomy of medieval song, and the latter's 1992 book proposing that fourteenth-century polyphony took its tonal basis from the ecclesiastical modes.² Her 2011 article "Concerning Gendered Discourse in Medieval Music Theory" reacts to Leach (2006a) in her now-familiar mode and asks specifically whether the semitone was gendered feminine. In the course of answering this question, Fuller raises many objections to the very principle of reading "neutral" medieval music theory texts for what they might say about gender, as well as questioning Leach's standards of accuracy, choice of context, level of knowledge, and understanding of Latin.

What follows here will refrain from restating the main arguments of Leach (2006a), which interested readers may read for themselves. This response will also continue to refer to Leach in the third person as the author of Leach (2006a), without regard for the fact that the authors of the present work and of Leach (2006a) supposedly share an identity. In part this rhetorical move is designed to depersonalize the potential polemic: Leach and Fuller are scholars whose sole contact has been through the reading of each other's work, since they have never met.³ The arguments here are about texts, contexts, and scholarship. But the potential absurdity of an author referring impersonally and objectively to her own work will additionally serve to flag one of the central issues at stake here—the impossibility of impersonal scholarly objectivity. In separating the author of Leach (2011) from that of Leach (2006a), I do not mean to disown or disavow the work (which I still find scholarly, imaginative, and stimulating), but rather to emphasize that my defense of it here is based on exactly what Fuller has access to—that is, the text of Leach (2006a)—rather than any additional knowledge to which I might be privy. Using such a rhetorical strategy may also be read as indicative of my current acceptance of the illusory substance of the subject, a critical feature in more recent gender and psychoanalytical theories of the self (e.g., in the work of Judith

Butler and Slavoj Žižek).⁴ It thereby has the specific purpose of foregrounding the several acts of reading around which this current colloquy revolves.

Fuller's argumentation in all her reactive articles revolves around matters of reading and interpretation on several levels: first, Fuller presents her own reading of the work of the modern musicologists in question; then, she objects to the way in which she reads that person to have read the medieval texts with which they deal, especially in terms of the contexts within which they place them; as a result she offers her own readings and specific context. Rarely, however, does she thematize or even acknowledge that these acts of reading are an *interpretation*.⁵ Instead she claims that her "relatively comprehensive investigation of a broad range of treatises from various regions and chronological periods" obeys "norms regarding comprehensive investigation of the surviving evidence" and her interpretation of their Latin represents the "probable original sense."⁶ But given that Fuller's claims are supported in precisely the same way as the claims of her opponents—by reading texts and selecting contexts—the questions remain: how is the variety of evidence from the Middle Ages to be selected and read, how is the appropriate context within which to read it to be chosen, and—of course—how are those contexts in turn to be read?

The assessment of how well a scholar reads requires in turn an act of reading. However, this hermeneutic circle does not prevent such readings being made and published for others to read. Assessing someone's reading of medieval sources is difficult, since it relies on one's independent knowledge of a range of medieval sources with their attendant practical difficulties. But assessing one scholar's reading of another's article should be relatively easy—both texts are readily available and one can compare one's own reading of Leach (2006a) with the reading presented in Fuller (2011). At the outset of the present article, therefore, Fuller's reading of Leach—especially in the details of its rhetoric and argumentative strategies—will be used as a case study in Fuller's own reading strategies. If her representation of Leach (2006a) can be shown to be distorted by its own agendas, assumptions, and misunderstandings (not to mention a fair amount of intemperate pique), one might assume that so too are her readings of medieval theorists (although without the pique). And moreover, one might easily argue that none of these

1 She reserved additional fire for Ernest Sanders; see Fuller (1985–86, esp. 23).

2 See Berger (1992) and Fuller (1998a); Lefferts (1995) and Fuller (1998b).

3 Two emails were exchanged in the late 1990s when Leach invited Fuller to contribute to Leach (2003), and Fuller declined.

4 See, for example, Butler (2006, 22–34, "V. Identity, Sex, and the Metaphysics of Substance").

5 Fuller's rather individual understanding of the word "interpretation" may be at the root of this problem. Her 2007 review of Leach (2003) questioned the appropriateness of the volume's subtitle "New Interpretations," "given that many chapters seem more to extend previously launched lines of study than to initiate really new directions of interpretation" (Fuller [2007, 187]). Fuller clearly understands "interpretation" to be synonymous with something more global (methodology?) rather than about the making of an individual reading. With one exception (Leach-Wilkinson [2003], which translated an earlier French publication), the essays in Leach (2003)—all offering interpretations of single works—had never before appeared, and were thus, by most dictionary definitions, "new" interpretations.

6 Fuller (2011, 84, 80).

strategies are different from—or more reliable than—those that she critiques in Leach (2006a).

What follows will first focus on a few small details in Fuller's lengthy text, specifically showing that the charge of rhetorical imprecision that she levels *against* Leach applies equally to her own argumentation *about* Leach. The subsequent sections will investigate whether these misreadings are symptomatic of systemic problems in Fuller's reading strategies that also pertain to her readings of the medieval texts themselves. The final section will argue that Fuller remains enclosed in a pre-1980s musicological estrangement from her own ideological position, palpable in her ultimate call for scholars to allow texts to speak for themselves "with minimal imposition of pre-formed ideology," as though such a position does not clearly reveal its own ideological bias.⁷

FULLER READING LEACH: (IN)ACCURACY AND RHETORIC

Fuller clearly believes that Leach has compromised both the "standard of accuracy" for scholarship on the subject of medieval music and the "norms regarding comprehensive investigation of the surviving evidence." Those norms—together with what Fuller means by "comprehensive"—will be treated further below. This first section will merely give a few short examples that question the accuracy of Fuller's reading of Leach. Space and a wish not to try the reader's patience when he or she has already waded through an article in excess of 20,000 words (and perhaps the one of nearer 8,000 on which it was based) forestall a comprehensive account.

Fuller is keen to fault Leach's factual accuracy, but often additionally adds to the idea of Leach's fallibility by implying rhetorically that Leach has made an error or omission that she has in fact *not* made.⁸ A few examples will suffice:

1. Fuller notes of Johannes's citation of the cross-dressing Phrygian men that "Rhetorically this is not a simile but an *exemplum*." Because she doesn't merely state "Rhetorically this is an *exemplum*," Fuller's own rhetoric implies that she is correcting an inaccurate description of Johannes's explanation as a simile. However, the word *simile* is used nowhere in Leach's article.

⁷ *Ibid.*, (83).

⁸ My original response pointed out how, despite her emphasis on standards of factual accuracy, Fuller consistently failed to get Leach's name right, referring only once to Leach by her correct full, published name (Elizabeth Eva Leach), and only five times to her by surname alone (although the latter is standard in the notes). The many other invocations were originally to "Elizabeth Leach," the name of a gallery in Portland, Oregon. After reading the original version of the current note, Fuller agreed to emend her text to give Elizabeth Eva Leach in all running text. Fuller's other *contra hominem* articles cite the author's surname alone far more frequently than the full name and never give the published name in shortened form. It would be possible to read this feature as indicative not only of Fuller's terminological accuracy but also of an attitude to naming that is significantly inflected either by gender or by age, depending on the reading that one wanted to make.

2. In discussing those treatises that use the "semiviri" *exemplum*, Fuller seems to correct Leach, noting that "Adam's treatise should not be counted among them. His commentary on the semitone provides the parallel of 'semivocalis,' not 'semiviri Phryges.'" But Leach has not claimed that Adam's treatise uses this exemplum. Leach's note referring to Adam is appended to a sentence that merely says "The definition of 'semi' as meaning 'incomplete' continues to provoke reference to cross-dressed Phrygians well into the fifteenth century." No claim is made here by Leach (2006a) that Adam specifically incorporates this into a discussion of the semitone, merely that he uses it to define "semi," which he does, as Fuller herself then notes in her Note 24.
3. In the version submitted to this journal for publication, Fuller's Note 23 originally stated that Leach "erroneously transmits a misidentification in Le Roux (1965)," identifying Martianus Capella rather than Macrobius as the source for Regino of Prüm's juxtaposition of "semitone" and "semivowel." My response pointed out that a more correct statement would have noted that Leach "transmits an erroneous identification" or "transmits a misidentification," since Fuller's adverb (erroneously!) attributed the error to Leach's transmission of Le Roux, rather than to Le Roux's text. After Fuller read this response (but before publication), she changed her wording accordingly. Although the published version now no longer contains this wording, which gives the reader the idea that Leach misrepresents her sources, when she in fact accurately relays what she has read, it should be noted that such rhetoric would have gone to press were this not a direct colloquy in the same journal issue with otherwise "final" drafts being shared before publication.⁹

Beyond such lexical moves, the subject coverage presented in Fuller's text often implies that Leach has neglected to discuss an important issue by presenting a lengthy exposition of it as if this is necessary to remedy the lack in Leach (2006a). For example, a reader finding Fuller's opening discussion of the problematic nature of the semitone in medieval music theory—billed as the first of two "core problems" with the semitone in medieval pedagogy—might assume that Leach had failed to recognize or discuss this important issue. Away from the main text, however, Fuller's Note 6 records that Leach *does* in fact treat this point, although Fuller stresses only her single inaccuracy (actually a typo of "semitone" for "tone").¹⁰ By having her main text

⁹ See also the points about Leach's name in Note 8 above and the ascription of the translation of Boen to Leach below. While ideally one would return to primary sources in all cases, reliance on secondary editions is often the only practical solution (if it were not there would be little point in scholars making editions). Provided secondary sources are correctly cited (as they are in Leach), this should not be deemed in itself an unscholarly practice, as Fuller's comment implies it to be.

¹⁰ This error was spotted soon after the article was published and emended by hand on authorial offprints.

present a longer, music-theoretical exposition of points made more succinctly but—with the exception of a single typo—accurately by Leach, Fuller is able to imply that Leach's article fails to discuss a central point.¹¹

SELF AND OTHER: THE CHOICE OF WITNESSES

A large part of Fuller's critique relies on the argument that the theorists Leach discusses represent minority views within the broader field of music theory. Leach's "highly selective profile"¹² of the record of medieval theory means for Fuller that Leach's conclusions are invalid. But Fuller wrongly imputes to Leach the desire to present the mainstream view of monolithic music theory in an unchanging Middle Ages. Instead, as even Leach's abstract notes, the article is self-confessedly selective precisely because the particular theorists discussed have different attitudes to their material and are rather individual—even eccentric—within the general run of medieval music theory. Despite Fuller's final claim that we must respect "the diversity of their [theorists'] voices,"¹³ it is Leach who specifically delineates the different kinds of agendas in the theorists she discusses; Fuller by contrast cites her theorists to spotlight the lack of diversity in what she considers the main tradition.

Leach's particular aim is to use the rather specific and unusual theoretical statements of a carefully selected but small number of theorists. Both Boen and Marchetto transmit views from the first half of the fourteenth century, which seems to have been just the period in history during which what modern terminology calls the "leading tone cadence" seems to have become part of the musical language.¹⁴ Listening to these relatively unusual voices provides a counterpoint that can in turn shed light back on the mainstream tradition, especially in terms of what it fails to say. This strategy follows a specific kind of critical approach to a textual tradition, especially to a didactic tradition, which is more common in literary scholarship, although it is not unknown to musicology that deals with periods in history later than the Middle Ages. Since texts within a tradition, particularly a didactic tradition, will overwhelmingly say similar and principally orthodox things, if minority voices are treated not as peripheral (and thus unimportant), but as a functional Other to the orthodox Self, it is possible to see them as having a necessary and mutually defining relationship with the core tradition. In this kind of reading, the anxieties about gender that Leach (2006a) diagnoses in the few texts she considers might indeed be posited as having been "written out" of the majority of texts, which aspire to be what Fuller terms "neutral in tone" and "straightforward." And lest anyone think that this

is some post-Freudian reading of too much into silence on a subject, Fuller inadvertently gives the clearest example of just such a procedure in practice when she points to Jerome of Moray's "suppression" (Fuller's word) of the "semivires" exemplum in a passage that he is otherwise copying verbatim from Johannes.¹⁵ Despite calling it suppression, Fuller reads Jerome's omission rather differently: she sees it as evidence of the peripheral—dispensable—nature of the exemplum.¹⁶ This certainly serves the course of her argument here. But it might equally be read as an act of deliberate Bowdlerization, a way of weeding out a troublesome reference to an effeminate behavior that was rather less troublesome when Johannes wrote it ca. 1100, but far too racy for the rationalizing and legitimizing project of Jerome in the 1270s.¹⁷

MISUNDERSTANDING GENDER AND ITS CONTEXTS

Fuller is not beyond adducing minority voices when it suits her argument, however. She claims that "the various positive appreciations of the semitone expressed *in some treatises*—all these call into serious question the gist of the claim that medieval music theorists collectively viewed the semitone as gendered feminine" (italics mine).¹⁸ She then cites several theorists who make positive comments about the semitone. None is from the mainstream tradition, two are from what her critique of Leach's later use of Hollandrinus characterizes as the Eastern European periphery, and one is cited by Leach herself (Marchetto). It is difficult to see how any of these citations undermine Leach's point about the

11 Leach (2006a) conforms broadly to the usual word limit for *Music Theory Spectrum* articles; Fuller does not, so it is no surprise that she is able to treat subjects at greater length. However, her discussion of the issue of the semitone here adds nothing substantive to Leach's more succinct treatment.

12 (Fuller [2011, 82])

13 (Fuller [2011, 84])

14 On this see Crocker (1962). Given that Fuller castigates Leach's use of "leading tone" and "directed progression" (Fuller [2011, 83, Note 160] and see below) it is difficult to know how best to refer to this readily identifiable musical formula.

15 Fuller (2011, 69). Although Fuller calls this theorist Jerome of Moray in parentheses after first mentioning him as Jerome of Moravia, she thereafter only calls him by this latter (incorrect) name. Huglo's identification seems compelling (see Huglo [1994]), and it seems a reflection of medieval music theory's conservatism that the old name has persisted in published work. Even Dyer (2009, 186) puts "(Moray?)" after the older name.

16 Here we have another measure of Fuller's disregard for the implications that words carry (which might in turn explain her inability to read subtexts). Another writer wishing to explain Jerome's actions in the way she does might carefully have written "omission" rather than "suppression," or at least placed "suppression" in scare quotes so as to show that the implications of this word for Jerome's motivation are being specifically rejected.

17 Attitudes toward male friendship underwent a significant change in the twelfth century, after which they were increasingly considered as potentially effeminizing; see Kuefler (2003). In the context of the University of Paris, an institution that did not admit women, Jerome might well have wanted to guard his texts against the potential for misunderstanding. See Karras (2003, 67–108 [Chapter 3: "Separating the Men from the Beasts: Medieval Universities and Masculine Formation"]).

18 Fuller (2011, 70–71). Her haul includes Englebert of Admont, Grocheio, an anonymous cantus planus treatise, a late (ca. 1450) East European anonymous, Marchetto, and Jacques of Liège. None of these can be considered part of the "mainstream tradition." Two could be critiqued in similar terms to her dismissal of Leach's characterization of the Hollandrinus tradition as a "widespread tradition," which she doubts because "they date from the mid to late fifteenth century, and . . . nearly all are of Eastern European provenance"; others nearly fall foul of Fuller's own suspicion of *unica*, a charge that can be leveled at Jacques of Liège (three MSS) and Grocheio (two MSS), leaving only Marchetto, whom she sees—within her own debatable definition of center and periphery—as eccentric.

semitone's femininity: Englebert praises the semitone as "soft" [*mollis*]; Grocheio notes it as imperfect (explaining the prefix "semis"); both anonymous writers praise its sweetness [*dulcedo*] (one after invoking the womanish ways of cross-dressing Phrygian men); Jacques of Liège notes its necessity in music; and Marchetto invokes the beauty that it brings to "colored dissonances" (i.e., imperfect consonances). This shows one of Fuller's most fundamental misunderstandings of the issues involved in diagnosing the construction of gender within texts. The aspects that construct femininity (in the Middle Ages as, *mutatis mutandis*, in any period) are given their ethical inflection dependent on the specific contexts to which they are applied.¹⁹

Fuller seems to see feminine gendering jeopardized by what she reads here as positive comments, as if femininity was an entirely negative category in the Middle Ages. However, as Leach points out, gendering can draw on positive and negative aspects, depending on the particular ethical point being made. One of the points of Leach's article, as I read it, is to show the range of rhetorical strategies deployed by the theorists discussed, "resulting" as she says "in condemnation, theoretical legitimation, or a mixture of the two."²⁰ If read in this way, Fuller's citations on this point serve to strengthen the reading of the semitone as feminine, since the positive characteristics are all those that are part and parcel of feminine gendering in the Middle Ages. Women are beautiful, colored, about surface, necessary, imperfect. Leach makes this very point in citing the same comment by Marchetto with which Fuller's section on the semitone ends, although Fuller cites it as if Leach had never mentioned it and as if it invalidates Leach's case.

Fuller's next section's critique of the role of the Greek genera nomenclature in its ethical valorization refutation deploys exactly the same strategy as her rejection of the feminization of the semitone. Because she assumes that feminization, eroticism, sexualization, and gendering are about a negative valuation, she seeks to counter Leach's arguments by adducing positive theoretical evaluations of the chromatic genus. In short, Fuller's strategy here shows that she misunderstands what gender is, how one might diagnose its construction in a text, how it interfaces with ethical concerns, and how it may—or may not—be related to notions of sex and sexuality.

Fuller's unwillingness to read texts as relating to the category of gender is also apparent in the way in which she consistently seeks to downplay the presence of gendered language by assigning it a purely "lexical" function, or declaring it to be "neutral in tone." For example, of the "semiviri" example, Fuller goes on to say that "John does not say the semitone is *like* a Phrygian *semivir* but presents the word 'semiviri' as another lexical instance of 'semi' in the meaning of 'imperfect' or 'incomplete,' and shows his erudition by assigning the phrase *semiviri Phryges* to Vergil"²¹

Her reading of this text minimizes the presence of men in women's clothing—just "another lexical instance" of the prefix—and diagnoses the theorist's motivation as showing "his erudition." There is no reason, of course, why we need to choose between these various implications, and different readers would surely have understood the texts in different ways. But any critical theorist will maintain that language is never neutral but always already reflective of the cultural conditions that created it and that it goes on to re-create; and if it is possible for a modern reader to read a given subtext, there is little reason to suspect that a medieval one could not (unless we want to view medievalists as more primitive thinkers than moderns).

Given what is known about medieval erudition and theories of language, we might even propose that there is a good likelihood that literate medieval readers would have been highly unlikely to miss the gendering implied by the Phrygians here since the fundamental school subject of grammar in the Middle Ages was not then a matter of the purely lexical because it came under ethics in the curriculum. "Because grammar was basic to learning, grammatical metaphors became widespread in literature from the twelfth century onwards with, for example, conjugation also standing for the act of sex, the genitive for the testicles or a love affair, the declension of a woman's ending for coitus."²² Alan of Lille's brilliant *De planctu Naturae* (probably written in the 1160s) eloquently outlines what Jan M. Ziolkowski has characterized as "The Meaning of Grammar to a Twelfth-Century Intellectual," for whom grammar was far more intimately bound up with ethical and sexual matters than Fuller's understanding of the purely "lexical" allows.²³ Alan's book was widely read by Latinate intellectuals in the succeeding three centuries, influenced via the *Roman de la Rose* broad swathes of vernacular literature, and was even used as the model for a music theory treatise—that of Arnulf of St. Ghislain—at the end of the fourteenth.²⁴ Alan's prosimetrum—a pessimistic response to Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*—uses an extensive grammatical metaphor to chronicle the sexual deviance of mankind. Nature's lament tells how God had delegated Venus to assist her by ensuring reproduction through sex; Venus, who has learned the trivium (grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric) and the art of forging, perverts grammar to use the hammer and anvil awry.²⁵ At the end, Nature's priest, Genius, intercedes and excommunicates all those engaged in unnatural acts. Both barbarism in grammar and sexual deviance are linked in being "against nature."²⁶ In the later Middle Ages, to invoke the grammatical and the lexical was already to ask basic questions about the relation between humans and nature, questions that pertained specifically to both linguistic and sexual spheres.

19 Recent introductions to the topic include Connell (2009) and Bradley (2007). See also Butler (2006) and Treitler (1993). On the Middle Ages, see Bitel (2008); Brozyna (2005); Farmer (2003); Stafford (2001); Partner (1993); and Bullough (1996).

20 Leach (2006a, 17).

21 Fuller (2011, 67).

22 Ziolkowski (1985, 1–5).

23 See *ibid.* and Häring (1978). See also Greene (1956) and Burgwinkle (2004, 170–99 [Chapter 5: "Writing the Self: Alan of Lille's *De planctu naturae*"]).

24 See Leach (2006b, 4) and Leach (2007b, Chapter 5).

25 Ziolkowski (1985, 10).

26 *Ibid.* (23).

A FULLER CONTEXT VS. THE FULLER CONTEXT

Fuller frequently faults Leach for missing the “guiding intellectual context” of the theorists Leach reads and claims that she (i.e., Fuller) alone “explicitly takes context into account.”²⁷ This seems unfair since Leach’s work cites a plethora of contexts—far broader than those adduced by Fuller. What Fuller is really claiming is that the *proper* context for music theory is not those contexts, but the “specific and generic contexts” that relate solely to music theory itself.²⁸ But why allow music theory texts separated by geography and chronology to provide a greater context than widespread contemporary ideas that belong to the varied Latinate communities that produced music theory? Again, depending on the specific definition of context chosen (and it is the scholar’s choice—not something mandated by the material) it is possible to read Fuller’s own examples in a manner entirely opposite to her own. For example, in trying to counter Leach’s assertion that theorists thought the chromatic genus dropped out of use for ethical reasons, she argues that Johannes de Muris provides a better—more central and widely known—witness than the *Quatuor Principalia*, which Leach cites. Even passing over the unexamined assumptions that underlie this claim, what Johannes de Muris says can readily be read as amplifying rather than countering Leach’s point.²⁹ In giving a reason for the modern neglect of the chromatic and enharmonic genera, Johannes de Muris comments, “I would nevertheless conjecture that it might be as though these divisions of song were against the natural inclination of the human voice.”³⁰ The Latin here talks about these genera being “quasi contra naturalem inclinationem humanarum vocum.” The idea of something being “against a natural inclination” or “against nature” has a powerful negative resonance in the Middle Ages, in which natural law was viewed as part of God’s

plan for the world.³¹ It features, for instance, as Thomas Aquinas’s very definition of sin, and the most usual recipient of being “contre nature” in vernacular texts in Johannes de Muris’s day would be certain sexual practices, notably those between men.³² We have already seen how at the end of *De planctu naturae*, Nature’s priest, Genius, excommunicates those who act against nature.³³ It thus seems odd to claim, as Fuller does, that “There is no trace here [in Johannes de Muris’s *Musica Speculativa*] of moral laxity for either the chromatic or the enharmonic.”³⁴ I would argue that a Latinate medieval reader would have understood exactly how such genera were deemed to relate to the “ecclesiastical song—which the holy fathers, doctors and men of good remembrance, and pleasant and worthy minds devised” and “all cantus measured by a fixed tempus, as in conductus, motets, organa, cantilenas, and other sorts [of song], and all songs of the laity, of men and women, young and old, and all song for each of our instruments.” Johannes de Muris can be read as making a rather clear—if subtextual—move of legitimation, lumping the secular and instrumental traditions with the unassailable goodness of ecclesiastical chant as being part of the same musical world.

Ziolkowski noted in the mid-1980s that earlier writers in medieval Latin studies had been squeamish in their discussions of links between grammar and sex.³⁵ Nearly three decades later, Fuller seems similarly reluctant to connect Latin music theory with contexts that are erotic. While Fuller accepts that music theorists treat the imperfect sonorities that semitone inflection generally achieves as unstable, she asserts that “the actual discourse in the treatises does not invite an erotic construal of this instability.”³⁶ But this depends, surely, on how one reads the invitation. There is exceptionally good evidence that instability as a quality was gendered feminine in the Middle Ages as epitomized in the figure of Fortune from Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* onwards.³⁷ And in music theory, Boethius himself identifies instability not just with the feminine but specifically with feminine *music*. What more powerful invitation does one need? Again Fuller reads as if the “actual discourse” of music theory takes place in a hermetically sealed world of its own.

27 Fuller (2011, 79, 80).

28 Her footnote clarification of these kinds of context notes “the particular textual environment in which a statement is situated—the chapter, topic, or argument of which it is a part” and the “complex combination of intellectual style, social function, institutional situation, and musical repertory addressed.” (Fuller [2011, 84, Note 167]). However, while Fuller provides ample discussion of the former, narrower context, she offers little in the way of contexts for “intellectual style” and “social function.” Leach’s contextualization of Boen’s invocation of the Great Year within the thought of Nicole Oresme (which Fuller mentions nowhere in her article) seems to be just such an intellectual context; the organization of gender is, of course, a social context.

29 Fuller’s unexamined acceptance of a medieval European geography in which France is central and England peripheral is a feature not of the situation on the ground in the Middle Ages but of the modern historiography of medieval music and music theory. One might also note her assumption that the modern survival of a larger number of manuscripts is unquestionably a measure of wider medieval readership for a text. Given that most literary sources (for example, the *Roman de la Rose*) survive in far more sources than any music theory text, this notion would have serious implications for Fuller’s idea of context. Given the oral nature of practical musical instruction throughout this period, the higher number of manuscript copies of a speculative treatise should not necessarily be taken as evidence that the practical treatise was more widely known.

30 Muris, cited in Fuller (2011, 73).

31 Nature functions as a moral middle term in so far as it can be less valued compared to art (which requires human reason); see White (2000). Nevertheless the phrase “against nature” is always negative.

32 “Peccatum est contra naturalem inclinationem” (Aquinas, *Summae theologiae*, I, 63, 9); see <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/aquinas/q1.63.shtml> (accessed 16 December 2010).

33 See Häring (1978) and Jordan (1997, 69 and passim). For an etext translation, see <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/alain-deplanctu.html> (accessed 16 December 2010).

34 Fuller (2011, 73).

35 Ziolkowski (1985, 2).

36 Fuller (2011, 75).

37 One might note that instability continues to form a part of femininity in the West to this day. In noting the fairly stable gendering of instability as feminine in European thought, I do not mean at all to suggest either that this is a constant, or that biological women are in essence unstable. That a binary or “mindset” is “ingrained” does not make it “essentialized” as Fuller claims (*Ibid.*, 83). The contingency of gender categories and their constructed nature is fundamental to the kind of (critical) theory on which Leach’s article draws and seems to be taken by her as axiomatic.

For Fuller, context is set extremely narrowly and means the direct context of the treatise in question and, at best, other music-theoretical discussions of the same terminology. For Leach it means reading far more widely, as her bibliography shows. This difference in the construction of context—essentially between an introversive mode and a more critical extroversive one—explains why in her final section Fuller can assert that the feminine parts of the binaries Leach diagnoses as gendered (*falsa/vera, ficta/recta*) are “not usually presented in a negative light” when mentioned by theorists. Leach, however, does not claim that music theorists use them negatively, but rather that the reading environment within which their writings were being generated and read would have resulted in the implicit gendering of terms that pertained to particular constructions of masculinity and femininity in a broad variety of other sources: medical, legal, theological, literary, and so on. In countering Leach’s construal of the *falsa/vera* binary, Fuller makes her sole effort to broaden her notion of context by citing the *Roman de la Rose* and *Roman de Fauvel*. These texts, she claims, establish “a ‘Middle Ages’ that regarded things false, or *falsitas*, as human failings equally applicable to men as to women, by no means inherently ‘feminine.’”³⁸

Fuller’s claims here are again hampered by poor comprehension of what reading a text for gender entails. The fact that male and female *characters* might equally exhibit certain *traits* does not necessarily affect the ascription of masculinity or femininity to those traits. If it were to do so, there would be no need to treat gender as different from biological sex or to view it as a contingent and constructed category—it would merely reflect biological essence.³⁹ So the *Rose* certainly depicts male characters as false, but the relational mapping of masculine/feminine in the context of the binary “false/true” is unaffected. If individual counter-examples were sufficient to challenge the powerful construction of gender, no Westerner who had ever seen a Scotsman at a black-tie dinner would continue to consider the skirt a feminine garment. Or, to use a medieval example, in medieval physiognomy men were deemed to be hot and dry, women cold and moist. The gendering of moistness as feminine was jeopardized neither by male laborers sweating as they worked in a forge, nor by the existence of men with chronic hyperhidrosis.⁴⁰ It would be more likely for the latter to be considered unnaturally effeminate than for the basic construction of gender to be affected. In the *Rose*, the moral opprobrium attaching to the falseness of male characters in literature would have been exacerbated by the general gendering of falseness as feminine since such a man would not only be doing something wrong in absolute terms but additionally acting against his (masculine) nature.

38 Fuller (2011, 83).

39 Lacan antagonistically uses man and woman as terms that can equally refer psychoanalytically to people of the opposite biological gender, since he believes (for what Žižek diagnoses as essentially Hegelian reasons) that these categories lack substance. See, for example, Žižek (1994, 155). Biological essence itself can be seen as constructed (see Butler [2006]).

40 Hyperhidrosis can be caused by other underlying conditions, but primary hyperhidrosis has been estimated to affect up to 1% of the population. See www.hyperhidrosisuk.org/about.htm. (accessed 17 December 2010).

LOST IN TRANSLATION: FULLER READING LATIN

The extent of wider relevant contexts, the meanings they lend, and how they construct their meanings are clearly all major points of disagreement between Leach and Fuller, but so too is the manner of reading the immediate music-theoretical content. In particular, Fuller objects to the translations that Leach’s article provides for Boen’s discussion of the semitone. Leach’s translations were provided, as she clearly notes, by Leofranc Holford-Strevens, and thus represent the considered interpretations of someone whose level of Latinity is arguably higher than that of either musicologist. However, in the original “final” version of her paper (after responding to both readers’ reports but before seeing the present reply) Fuller repeatedly referred to these as Leach’s translations. Although the published version has now emended this reference, it should be noted that Fuller’s inaccurate reading of Leach would have gone to press were it not for Fuller’s pre-publication access to the present response.

Fuller’s particular problem with the translations again results from a resistance to seeing erotic subtexts in what she reads as the purely technical discourse of music theory: “the translations Elizabeth Eva Leach presents consistently render the word *lascivia* (and its various lexical mutations) as ‘wanton’—a word that in English carries conventionally negative moral connotations.”⁴¹ In fact, Leach both carefully *notes* the possibility of the range of readings for *lascivia* and places all the occurrences of the word in square brackets *within* the translations she presents. There is no sense in which she is attempting to deceive the reader; instead she is making a reading. Fuller, however, offers her own reading—a translation in which “sport” replaces “wantonness” and “playful merriment” replaces “wanton merriment.” She then comments imperiously: “This is not a matter of both translations being equally valid. An apt translation—one that captures the probable original sense—is one that explicitly takes context into account.” But one must ask who assesses that “probable original sense.”⁴² Does the fact that it is only “probable” and not “certain” rather undercut the idea of admitting only one apt translation? And is Fuller seriously alleging that Leofranc Holford-Strevens cannot make an apt translation from Latin to English just because she does not happen to agree with it? One might make many further points. The first is that although “wanton” is negative it is not always sexual—in the phrase “wanton destruction” it merely signals that the action is lacking due thought and reason. Second, in italicizing the differences between her translation and Leach’s, Fuller does not italicize her replacement of Holford-Strevens’s “pant after” with “eagerly desire.” These both translate the verb “*inhyarunt*,” which literally means “gape on”; Holford-Strevens’s translation subtly introduces the picture of the young men being open-mouthed for the *lasciviis* in the practical performance of these songs with their extra-manual pitches.

One might equally argue that Fuller’s revised translation in fact does nothing to take away the potential for a sexualized reading. Musical references in literary texts use ideas of sport

41 Fuller (2011, 80).

42 Ibid.

and play euphemistically for more sexualized contact. Geoffrey Chaucer, for example, (to choose someone extremely close to Boen's own Anglo-French tradition), presents characters who sport and play in bed, often in close proximity to musical performance.⁴³ Fuller argues constantly for the reader to take context into account, but the question is which context? The only one she admits is the one given by her own contemporary disciplinary placement: that of twenty-first-century music theory. Nowhere does she consider the wider contexts of fourteenth-century culture (mostly because she is too keen to protect music's innocence and to keep music theory clean). The miscegenation that might result from crossing music theory with literary theory and studying it alongside other contemporary literatures clearly bothers her.

UNWRITING FULLER? THE VOICES OF THE MIDDLE AGES

In a 1986 publication, Fuller wrote of analysis of medieval music that

On the one hand, it needs to be firmly grounded historically, rooted in the thought of the fourteenth century. On the other hand, it should respond to twentieth-century concerns and deal with concepts about classification, relationship, function and syntax that were not formally articulated by fourteenth-century musicians. . . . Fourteenth-century writings do not furnish, and should not be expected to provide, a ready-made vocabulary geared to a twentieth-century conceptual view. They do, however, supply indications of contemporary thought that are indispensable to any modern attempt to fathom the arrangement and functions of sonority in fourteenth-century polyphony.

Despite the silence of the theoretical and pedagogical sources on this point, I share with others the opinion that sonority was a significant structural resource in the advanced polyphony of fourteenth-century France and, in particular, in the music of Guillaume de Machaut.⁴⁴

A common thread in Fuller's more recent articles is her wish to ground modern readings in her own readings of medieval theoretical texts and her distaste for those moments where "the modern voice . . . ends up quite overwhelming the medieval voice."⁴⁵ Fuller clearly believes that the medieval voice is not ventriloquized by the modern voice and that she is allowing medieval voices to "be heard . . . with minimal imposition of pre-formed ideology."⁴⁶ Given Fuller's general rejection of modern interpretations of medieval phenomena (and her insensitivity—even blindness—to her own strategies of interpretation qua interpretation) this seems logical. To paraphrase Ruth Solie's reply to Pieter van den Toorn in a similar colloquy about the role of gender in music theory, "maybe it is already enough to say that [she] thinks such a thing possible."⁴⁷

One of the ironies of her later approach is that Fuller (2011) attempts to limit the usefulness of a term that her earlier work originated and promoted—the "directed progression." For Fuller, the fact that the directed progression had no medieval name means that medieval people can't have attached any importance to it.⁴⁸ Given that the term itself is her own coinage, proposed and used extensively in a number of analytical articles on fourteenth-century polyphony, may one assume that she now believes that these articles analyze something that was of no significance to medieval singers? Similarly, she refutes Leach's connection of Boen's "letters outside the nature of the manual monochord" with *musica ficta* simply because Boen does not use the term *musica ficta* (or *musica falsa*). However, what Boen describes is precisely such a phenomenon: not only is it not necessary to have a further name to know precisely what the "letters outside the nature of the manual monochord" refer to, but *musica ficta* was a widely used medieval name for just this phenomenon. That Boen himself does not use the term cannot invalidate Leach's understanding that this is what he is in fact talking about. No one would query a historian discussing Machaut's description of the Black Death in the prologue to *Le jugement dou Roy de Navarre* just because he talks of the "great mortality" and not of bubonic plague. Not to allow Leach to ascribe a synonym to "letters outside the nature of the manual monochord" is merely arbitrary, but Fuller's subsequent description of Boen discussing them "as naturally occurring phenomena" flies in the face of Boen's *specific* definition of them as *claves* that are *extra naturam*.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

If, in a number of interdependent but chronologically and geographically dispersed texts, the idea of imperfection could summon up something as unexpectedly exotic and transgressive as some Eastern men dressed in women's clothing, doesn't scholarship have to pause for at least a moment to consider whether such kinds of thoughts are lurking in texts where they are *not* explicitly mentioned, but where the theorist tries hardest to be neutral and restrict discussion to lexical and grammatical matters like the semivowel? And shouldn't scholarship also contextualize the lexical and grammatical in medieval rather than modern terms? How much consideration we give this will depend *not* on the strength of the medieval voices but, as Fuller so patently reveals, on the strength of our own tastes and convictions. Her token terminal invocation of diversity and Dominick LaCapra does nothing to hide Fuller's basic assumption that music theory is a technical discourse, albeit not abstract when dealing with practical matters, but certainly rather matter-of-fact, which can best be dealt with in its own context and its own terms (meaning neutrally and "with minimal imposition of pre-formed ideology"⁵⁰—ideology

43 See, for example, the comments on Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale* in Boenig (1990) and Gellrich (1974).

44 Fuller (1986, 36, 38).

45 Fuller (1998a, 85).

46 Fuller (2011, 83).

47 In response to van den Toorn's wish for an unmediated aesthetic experience of music, Solie (1991, 400) notes "maybe it is already enough to say that he thinks such a thing possible."

48 "[T]hey had no specific term for the phenomenon denoted by the locution 'directed progression.' One must seriously question whether the theorists could have experienced or expressed much sense of 'desire and satisfaction' or 'moral panic' about something for which their language offered no name or specific identifying label." Fuller (2011, 75).

49 Ibid. (79).

50 Ibid. (83).

is, for Fuller, what the other guy has). Leach's starting assumption is that all texts are related to many other texts and that they reveal traces of their production in the broadest sense—sometimes as much in what they do not say as in what they do. Fuller appears particularly bothered by the attribution of bodily, sexual, and erotic meanings to medieval music theory, seeming to want to keep it respectable. For Leach, respectability will result from instead reinserting a moribund area of musicological study within the central critical concerns of the modern discipline. That the New Musicology's initial orientation was in large part a reaction to the centrality of early music in the post-war musicology curriculum prompted two kinds of response: many scholars left the area of early music to work on later periods; those already securely in jobs often maintained that the critical/linguistic/etc. turn would pass (although they did not call it that) and battened down the hatches to ride out the storm. The gap left, into which Leach (2006a) throws music theory, is for musicologists dealing with the Middle Ages to absorb the ideas not so much from musicology of later periods (which still seems rather conservative) but rather from the vibrant medieval studies in disciplines of literature, history, and art history.

If there is one thing that might make readers think that Leach has a point about orthodox music theory being rather anxious about the issue of gender, it is the fact that a short article on the subject could provoke one of over twice its length. Whether our modern anxieties on the subject replicate those in the Middle Ages is, of course, open to debate. But as the Middle Ages itself is now forever closed for answers, our own repeated questioning is the only honest answer we can now provide.

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