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Listening Technology and The Gay Male Body in Azerbaijan*

Steven Moon**
Adriana Helbıg***

Abstract
This article asks how listening is employed as a tactic of identity preservation and cultivation for young gay men living in Azerbaijan. Drawing on work in sound studies, queer phenomenology, and ethnographic data, I argue that listening devices such as the cell phone functionally alter how the individual is phenomenologically oriented within the city of Baku through directed listening practices. Through what I call "affective exodus," gay men living in Azerbaijan tap into their bodies' affective potential and purposefully alter their psychosomatic modes of 'being' in Azerbaijan, fostering a gay space within the confines of violence.
Key Words: Azerbaijan, Gender Studies, Phenomenology, Listening, Sound Studies

Introduction

Listening has become an eminent site of musical inquiry, particularly alongside the rise of sound studies. Across disciplines, authors have balanced large-scale phenomenological work on listening, music and sound (Ihde, 2007; Dolar, 2006) with highly localized ethnographic projects (Feld, 1996; Bull, 2007), but are often unable to strike a balance between the two, opting instead for an ontology of listening rooted in either universalism or relativism. Recent studies on aurality privilege the latter, insisting upon an excavation of listening that understands it as historically constituted under colonial economies of power (Ochoa Gautier, 2014). This study, based upon ethnog-

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** University of Pittsburgh, srm117@pitt.edu.
*** Prof. Dr., University of Pittsburgh, anh59@pitt.edu.

raphic data collected in Baku, Azerbaijan, proposes yet another phenomenology of listening in order to understand how listening is specifically deployed as a tool of the body which reorients the listener.

Following a brief overview of the history of anti-sodomy law and LGBT rights in the former-Soviet country, the first section of this essay titled 'Listening Elsewhere' argues for the consideration of 'space' as a negotiation between the individual and surroundings, rendering 'space' necessarily multiple in its iterations and allowing for the individual to gain agency. I refer to this as 'affective exodus,' or the intentional (re)creation of particular affects and emotions as a tool for withdrawal from pathological conditions and the preservation of non-normative identity. One interlocutor, Anar, demonstrates this through his targeted consumption of American black femininity via the music of Nicki Minaj. Understanding 'race' as a technology attributed to bodies through the biologizing narrative of African colonization, 'race' circulates as a commodity, and the purchase of race simultaneously perpetuates an exploitative notion of blackness.

Cell phones have become the dominant listening device in much of the world, and their importance to gay men in Azerbaijan is explained in the second section, titled "Technical Manifestations Of Affective Exodus." Karen Barad's agential realist ontology is used in this section in order to explain the embodiment of technics such as the cell phone. Rather than thinking the body as fixed and inherently separate from the objects with which it engages, the body-phone relationship is one of reciprocity and agency, wherein touch, listening, and affect become linked through the repetitive use of the cell phone. In this way, the cell phone-body relationship is critical to the negotiation of space between the individual and the surrounding city.

Homosexuality & Law

The state of affairs for LGBT+ individuals in Azerbaijan has been static since the institution of a new Penal Code in 2001. Prior to Azerbaijan's independence in 1991, it was a state of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and subjected to union-wide legal administration. According to the Penal Code that was in place from 1960-2000, consensual sexual acts between two men were criminalized, punishable by up to three years in prison (Azad LGBT, n.d.). No such laws existed for sexual acts between women, and non-binary conceptions of gender were not considered. According to the country's primary LGBT rights organization, AZAD LGBT Azerbaijan, it is widely considered that the Penal Code was changed 9 years after independence only in order to gain access to the Council of Europe, whose requirements dictate certain legal reforms, such as the eradication of anti-sodomy laws (Azad LGBT, n.d.).

Such reform has not changed public opinion, however. In 2010, it was reported that two members of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Council of Europe refused to engage in discussions of LGBT discrimination, asserting that "national and culture values" must be upheld, despite their desired integration into Europe (Azad LGBT, n.d.). As such, Azerbaijan has no legal protections for same-sex couples—whose marriages not recognized under the Family Code of Azerbaijan—nor for LGBTQ individuals in the workplace (Van der Veur, 2007, p. 27). Further, Azerbaijani law differentiates between 'rape' and 'violent acts of sexual nature,' with the prior requiring vaginal penetration. It is thus considered not legally possible for men to be 'raped,' only victim of a 'violent act of sexual nature.' Azerbaijani legislation is vague in its criteria for these categorical decisions, and thus many sexual assaults go unreported or uninvestigated.

The Azerbaijani legislature and president maintain significant power and influence over public opinion. The dire social circumstances, combined with widespread nationalism channeled through the presidency, causes for few dissenting voices. Azad LGBT Azerbaijani has been relatively inactive since the 2014 suicide of its chair İsa Şahmarlı, who hung himself with a rainbow flag. Only twenty years old, Şahmarlı was the center of the LGBT rights movement in Azerbaijan, and his death brought much public work to a halt. While Azad LGBT Azerbaijani is still active, little political advocacy takes place in the public sphere due to fear of shame, ostracization, and violence.

Listening Elsewhere

I stand at the Sahil metro station in Baku waiting for a potential interlocutor to arrive, leaning against the cement wall and anxiously fidgeting with the strap on my backpack. A rather tall young man wearing sunglasses approaches me, smiling, followed closely by a friend. He says my name aloud, confirming who I am before reaching out to take my hand. I exhange hellos with Fazil—a handshake and simultaneous kisses on the cheek—and I turn to the young man accompanying him. He simply waves, saying in English "Hello, I'm Anar. It is nice to meet you." Fazil says that he brought Anar along because he studies English at the university, and he would like to meet an American. Spending the rest of the day together and finding our musical tastes to be quite similar—Anar is a devout Nicki Minaj fan—Anar became a close friend and interlocutor for the remainder of my summer in Azerbaijan.

Through Anar's love for Minaj, as well as other American celebrities, I argue that directed listening practices reorient the body in both local and transnational spaces. Through the purposeful alteration of their acousteme, my interlocutors in Azerbaijan such as Anar consume music from foreign countries in order to sonically know their city surroundings differently, thus reorienting themselves towards others, towards material spaces, and towards

their own gay-Azerbaijani identities. I refer to these directed listening practices affective exodus, or the intentional (re)creation of particular affects and emotions as a tool for withdrawal from pathological conditions and the preservation of non-normative identity. Taking both comfort and discomfort to be affective economies that circulate between bodies, my analysis explores how 'space' and 'place' are constituted through sound, and how such creations are made conducive to specifically-oriented bodies. That is, how does sexual orientation sonically figure into space?

Space, Place, Sound

The study of "space" and "place" within music studies—largely following the vast sociological literature on the subject—burgeoned in the 1990s and early 2000s alongside the advent of sound studies. Michael Bull has been a leader in the study of sound's spatial qualities and ability to form "place" out of "space," or perhaps to eliminate distinctions. Bull notes that technology such as the iPhone causes "space and place [to] lose their cultural specificity" (Bull, 2013, p. 30). David Beer notes that as technology advances, especially following the creation of Apple's iPod and iPhone, the individual holds more power over their auditory sense of place. Much work by Beer and others has specifically focused upon the city and an urban "acoustic ecology," to use William Mitchell's term, to discuss how "these devices allow for a more self-aware construction of the virtual mis-en-scene, as we use these technologies to cultivate linkages between the physical city and our *thinking* of the city" (Beer, 2007, p. 854). Others such as Nicola Dibben and Anneli B. Haake have examined the uses of music as "a tool by which people reconfigure their auditory environment" within an office space, bridging work and leisure, nesting a private auditory place within a public space (Dibben & Haake, 2013, p. 158).

These analyses of listening practices allude to escapism from public spaces through auditory control. The human body's spatial perception is equally comprised of visual and auditory capabilities, although we often rely upon and thusly privilege the visual as being our primary mode of making sense of the world. Jonathan Sterne notes—and writes against—the significant differences that have been constructed between seeıng and hearing, which he calls the *audiovisual litany*. This litany, as deconstructed by Sterne, "idealizes hearing (and by extension, speech) as manifesting a kind of pure interiority," asserting that vision takes us out of the world while sound places us within it (Sterne, 2003, p. 15). The sonic acts equally in demarcating space, and acts upon our bodies and minds as a force of locative power. This section follows on the trail of this sonic power, and examines the agency of sound and materiality in forming space. As many have argued, the individual makes use of

music as a tool for "reflexively stimulating and regulating particular memories and emotions," that is, shaping and perpetuating one's own subjectivity through the agential manipulation of the sound environment (Beer, 2007, p. 854). I assert that queer individuals exercise this agency as a form of affective exodus from the hegemonic 'hum' of the city (Atkinson, 2005, as cited in Beer, 2007, p. 859).

Affective exodus draws upon Tobias van Veen's analysis of exodus in rave culture, which asserts that an "exodus explores alternative unfoldings of being-with-others" (van Veen, 2010). His use of exodus as a model for studying raves is particularly helpful in illuminating the ephemerality of this affective exodus. Van Veen writes,

> "Exodus, though flight, is not to be mislabeled as a phantasmatic escape from a de facto reality. If anything, the ideological imperatives to enjoy and consume are precisely such an escape, serving as the cathartic performance of approved excess that maintain, through consumption and exhaustion, the economic imbalances of the social order. If anything, it is the belief that sovereign forms of political order represent the precarious subject that is fantasy"(van Veen, 2010, p. 41).

Without falling into the trap of social constructivism, affective exodus helps to reconfigure what this 'de facto reality' means for the individual, and one might alter that reality rather than existing within or outside its rigid bounds. I am interested in where these bounds lie, who creates them, and where exodus seeks to take us. Van Veen notes that "exodus abandons assigned destinations; it errs away from wherever it should be; it ends up customizing its place with new customs" (van Veen, 2010, p. 41). His use of words such as 'assigned' and 'should' seems to further assume a hegemonic power even in exodus—the power exodus seeks to escape—that affective exodus subverts. Further, as van Veen notes, such an exodus highlights the subject's ongoing precarity, their inability to escape such conditions. As such, affective exodus is an engagement with precarity to recontextualize the self.

Listening As Knowledge

Through Stephen Feld's 'acoustemology' and corresponding 'acousteme,' we find that 'space' isn't merely what we can see. Feld argues for what space to be understood through sound in what he refers to as the 'acousteme,' and the study of 'acoustemology.' He writes;

> "I am adding to the vocabulary of sensorial-sonic studies to argue the potential of acoustic knowing, of sound as a condition of and for knowing, of sonic presence and awareness as potent shaping forces in how people make sense of experiences," defining acoustemology as "an exploration of sonic sensibilities, specifically of ways in which sound is central to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth" (Feld, 1996, p. 97).

To hear is *also* to know. As those with vision can see to know, so too can the blind or visually impaired, or those who close their eyes and listen to the space around them.

The acceptance of 'hearing to know' is critical to affective exodus. Affective exodus in the case of gay Azerbaijani men refers to a manipulation of the acousteme—here done through directed music listening practice—in order to (re)create affects of safety and comfort, reconfiguring the surroundings saturated with anti-gay rhetoric and threat to physical safety. This affective exodus imbues conception with emotion, thought with sensation. It is self-induced, called upon through the agential "tuning out" of the heteronormative *hum* of Azerbaijan, to use Beer's terminology. It functions as sensorial excess, or the 'affect' of affective exodus, overriding discomfort with what my interlocutors perceive to be the sounds of a more gay-friendly "elsewhere."

Black Femininity and American Popular Media

As Anar and I walk into Port Baku Mall, I ask him about his musical tastes.

"Well, I like all types of music," he says to me, seeming to think quite hard as to what answer he should give me. Following a moment of silence, he says "but Nicki Minaj is definitely my favorite." I cannot help but smile as a Minaj fan myself. The rapper dominates conversation between us for the following two months—his posts on social media and messages to me constantly quote her newest album, *The Pinkprint*, but also works as old as her 2007 and 2008 mixtapes. When I (repeatedly, to this day) ask Anar about this love for Minaj, he often acts surprised by the question; "Why would you even ask this?" he asks, laughingly. "She's flawless. Her songs have so much power, they make me feel powerful" (Anar, personal interview, June 28, 2016). He tells me that he likes the masculine edge of not only her lyrics but also her personality. Despite being born in the Caribbean and raised in the city, despite being a black woman living in the midst of American racism, she demands respect and enacts a power usually held by men. Minaj's black femininity, accessible sonically through her albums but also gesturally in her videos and live performances, becomes a technology for the enactment of power, and the right to demand respect. The act of listening to Minaj is one of self-empowerment, one that reminds him that while the material conditions around him approach pathology, he can sonically reconfigure the city.

American black femininity can be taken as a tangible cultural artifact that is significant worldwide as capital commodity through the body of Nicki Minaj. I find this particular racialized assemblage of gender expression particularly potent in the study of culture broadly, and of other, perhaps more expected artifacts. How is American popular media, especially that of a Black

female performer, consumed by gay men living in Baku, and how do such consumption practices simultaneously reify spatial distance and create local ephemeral spaces or intimacies? In a world of seemingly infinite readily available media, how do these particular performers become so crucial in the personal lives and identity formation of gay men living in a country these artists have never visited? The following analysis asserts that celebrities such as Minaj embody a specific (commodified) brand of black femininity that, as a tangible artifact for purchase and consumption, evokes abstract notions of and subsequent affective experiences tied to the marginalized individual becoming powerful and self-fulfilled.

Cultural artifacts can be understood as a snapshot or "freeze-frame" of cultural processes as they normally flow. This does not, however, insinuate stasis. Rather, it refers to the temporal differentiation of the tangible artifact as removed from its exact moment of production. Constantly reproduced in new temporal and spatial locations, and in new sociopolitical contexts, the cultural artifact indexes its genesis and each subsequent moment since its abstraction as singular, individual. This is to say artifacts exist both ephemerally—they disappear almost immediately following their creation through cultural flow—and permanently—through differentiation as singular artifact and carried across time—and are thus both tied to and free from temporal bounds.

In studying black femininity as such an artifact, the body is crucial to discussing race and gender as they relate to sound. The surfaces of the body, the skin, are a particularly potent site of examination. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey note, "not only is skin assumed to be a sign of the subject's interiority…but the skin is also assumed to reflect the truth of the other and give us access to the other's being" (Ahmed & Stacey, 2001, p. 4). It is thus through the flesh that we experience the world, know one another, know ourselves.

Beginning a fleshy analysis, the ontologies and technics of race are paramount to conversations about music and race, which remains a complex and contentious topic. Race has become biologized in the west, particularly through the colonization of Africa, since the late eighteenth century. Alexander Weheliye writes;

> Consequently, racialization figures as a master code within the genre of the human represented by western Man, because its law-like operations are yoked to species-sustaining physiological mechanisms in the form of a global color line—instituted by cultural laws so as to register in human neural networks—*that clearly distinguishes the good/life/fully-human from the bad/death/not-quite-human.* This, in turn, authorizes *the conflation of racialization with mere biological life*, which, one the one hand, enables white subjects to "see" themselves as transcending racialization due to their full embodiment of this particular genre of the human while responding antipathetically to nonwhite subjects as bearers of ontological

> cum biological lack, and, on the other hand, in those subjects on the other side of the color line, it creates *sociogenically instituted physiological reactions against their own existence and reality* (Weheliye, 2014, p. 27-28, Emphasis added).

This is to say that the category of race is a creation of power that turns phenotype (here, skin tone) into a sociogenic phenomenon (race). The function of race, according to Weheliye, is "to create and maintain distinctions between different members of the Homo sapiens species that lend a supra-human explanatory ground (religious or biological, for example) to these hierarchies" (Weheliye, 2014, p. 28). Racism is built into the ontology of race, imbuing skin with social and hierarchical difference.

Race is thusly not biological. In his discussion of race as technics, Julian Gill-Peterson writes that "if race is 'merely' a bodily function, it follows that it must eventually be subtracted from the human, that antiracist and postcolonial projects must share the goal of restoring the body to an unraced form" (Gill-Peterson, 2013, p. 410). Citing Latour's understanding of humanism as purified of technology and race, which resonates strongly with Agamben's notion of 'bare life,' Gill-Peterson draws our attention to the technologies of race, and its importance to talking about bodies, skin in particular. "Race as a technology," he writes, "entails an affirmation of the capacity wielded by all subjects to retool the future of racialization in a less exploitative, less violent, and less racist way than humanism offers in its zero-sum game of subtraction" (Gill-Peterson, 2013, p. 410). In discussing race and music, and in this case, blackness, the black body must remain central to scholarship. As Anar makes musical choices, his consumption is inextricably bound to the bodies of the artists, to the way those bodies have been marginalized throughout history. In consuming music by black artists, we consume the history of racism in the United States. Black skin carries the history of African colonialism and American slavery, of the Jim Crow South and lynching. It is imbued with the death administered by police, the poverty dispensed by the state, the anxiety induced by whiteness.

Anar's purchase of black female subjectivities includes associated affects of safety and empowerment, of defiance and strength. While conceptions of race differ greatly in Azerbaijan, and the white/black dichotomy of American racial politics does not reflect the realities of Baku (where there is very little racial/ethnic diversity), Minaj's gender politic, which balances a hyper-sexual femininity with queer undertones, demands an intersectional approach, one that might affectively shatter the heteronormative hum of Azerbaijan. For Anar and others, Minaj's black femininity remain an important technic in the preservation of gender identity.

Nicki Minaj was signed to Young Money Entertainment, founded by Lil' Wayne, in 2009 following the success of three mixtapes. Her first two studio

albums, *Pink Friday* and *Pink Friday: Roman Reloaded* were huge commercial successes, with radio hits such as "Super Bass" and "Starships" allowing Minaj to cross the lines of genre and censorship, maintaining residence in both pop and hip hop. "Radio" and "censorship" as used here both reference the politics inherent to the delineation of genre in the American music industry in particular. Such lines are highly racialized, demarcating the music of white musicians as acceptable and viewing that of black musicians with suspicion and caution. Rap and hip hop, born in 1970s and 80s in the Bronx, is largely understood to be a black genre, a music for youth and black audiences. Contrarily, 'pop' music remains whitewashed and benign, void of politics (read: race) and is thus considered more radio friendly. Through creative use of genre and tactful writing, Minaj bridges these genres to gain airtime, an exposure that translates directly into economic gain.

Questions regarding 'black sound,' or 'sounding black,' and inevitably their answers, can risk falling victim to both social constructivist and biologizing arguments, as outlined above in relation to black skin. But scholars such as Nina Eidsheim have noted the reiterative performativity of timbre and style that create the category of black music. Eidsheim refers to the process of vocal timbre's racial socialization as 'vocal choreographies.' She writes, "people seen as belonging to a certain race are thus assigned particular vocal choreographies; and in performing these choreographies, these persons' voices sonically align with the racial categories that society assigned them" (Eidsheim, 2012, p. 20). Such studies reveal that black sound, albeit 'constructed,' must be taken seriously as a marker of difference and a delineation of genre that results in significant disparities in economic gain between black and white musicians.

If we take Minaj as an example of such differences, particularly her crossover hits such as "Super Bass" or "Starships," one notices a distinct difference between the fast, heavy-hitting flow of the verses and melodiousness of the sung choruses. Vocal style aside, there is a significant timbral and shift in pitch space between the two structures. The rapped verses, especially in Super Bass, play with accent and vocal timbre to create multiple characters and weave a narrative, yet the inflection retains a masculine edge that Minaj fosters later in her career. But this melodious, sing-songy chorus is largely absent from the albums' tracks not tailored for the radio. Minaj's other tracks, especially on her newest album *The Pinkprint,* are representative of her brand of black femininity, a black sound that is dominant, aggressive, and makes claims to masculinity through overt sexual power reserved for the male body.

> When I ask Anar about this shift in Minaj's work, about these distinct stylistic differences, he recalls the first time he heard her music.
> "I saw her on the TV at home, the 'Superbass' video," he says. "And I was like…'who's this silly bitch out there that's just about the pink,' you know, the cute stuff, and I was like 'yeah, fuck her.'"

> I couldn't help but laugh as I heard this. "So you don't know the 'pink' kind of Nicki Minaj?" I asked.
> "I don't like her pink style," he replied immediately. "I like her original, like black [style], because it really indicates her as a…true feminist figure." Anar refers to "Roman's Revenge," "Beez in the Trap," and "Did It On 'Em," songs from Minaj's early career that fit within her 'masculine' style, as those which attracted him.
> "I was not really aware of [her second album] Roman Reloaded…[but] it was Roman's Revenge and stuff like that [that I liked.] I was like 'you know, I like the way she sings,' because it was my first time listening to a female rapper, and I was like 'you know, she's really better than the male counterparts'" (Anar, personal interview, January 6, 2017).

Minaj's brand of black femininity, imbued with masculine qualities, resists embodiment by women under normative notions of sex and gender. But Minaj's use of a black masculine edge *disrupts* male/female binaries regarding behavior and sexuality, and (re)creates a black femininity that is no longer biologized, but rather acts technically (in the capacity outlined by Gill-Peterson), as an artifact in Sterne's formulation of the term ("a crystallized set of social and material relations"). Anar's association of pink and black with Minaj's stylistic shifts, as seen above, isn't rooted necessarily in his own gendered conceptions of color. Rather, on Minaj's early albums and in public appearances she often wore pink head to toe, sporting brightly colored hair. Her most recent album, *The Pinkprint,* and its associated videos depict Minaj in darker tones, most often in black. This is not to say the change in wardrobe is not influenced by the shift to a more masculine, hard-hitting style. On the contrary, I find Anar's perception to be astute. Minaj's shift towards blackness, broadly construed, raises concerns regarding the masculinization of the black female body, as well as the gendering-male of hip hop.

This masculinization, as Anar perceives it, is precisely why he consumes Minaj's work. Through directed listening practices, the specific brand of black femininity Anar sees in Minaj becomes a technic for embodiment. This works to functionally alter how Anar sees himself in relation to the city around him. His sonic knowledge of space is changed through a purposeful alteration of the acousteme through which he knows the environment, and thus, is able to make an agential move that renders the city again multiple and, now, conducive to non-normative sexuality, if only for a moment.

Technical Manifestations of Affective Exodus

The cell phone is omnipresent in the lives of young Azerbaijanis, much in the way it is for American millennials. In addition to being a primary mode of communication for all, the cell phone is perhaps the only tool finding other gay men. LGBT organizations are few and far between, and marginalized as niche interest groups deemed as lacking political merit. And without gay bars

and clubs, mobile applications become their only way of meeting one another. This section takes the cell phone as an irreducible unit for conducting social analysis in Azerbaijan, and with gay men in particular. Used music streaming, the cell phone is essential to the negotiation of identity through directed listening. Through the music streaming site YouTube, as well as the cell phone used to access it, the first section below asks how technology creates the conditions for an affective exodus. By investigating the relationship between technics, the body, and materiality, this section explicates the ways in which technics contribute to the preservation of a gay identity under an oppressively heteronormative government. Of course, the ability to enact an affective exodus through such technics requires economic capital and access to expensive electronics. My use of affective exodus here reflects only the experience of those with such access. But affective exodus does not require Internet access or an expensive phone/listening device. The alteration of one's acousteme in favor of an affective exodus does not necessitate technical intervention, but can be achieved through spatial relocation, the dampening of one's acoustic environment, or simply singing to oneself. Such directed activities might achieve the same effect/affect. Of course, the use of musical listening technologies is the simplest method for enacting an affective exodus, but this model is not hinged upon a technical reliance.

Affective exodus grants sound itself agency rather than reducing it to the position of passive tool, guided by the human hand without inherent affective capabilities. This "intra-action," in the Karen Barad's sense of agential realist ontology, allows for a more nuanced understanding of "listening" as neither a passive force on the body nor as passive action on behalf of sound. Rather, both act with specific agencies that "intra-act"; "Relations do not follow relata, but the other way around" (Barad, 2007, p. 136-137). This is to say that sound and the body exist together, in constant negotiation: sound requires a body (human or otherwise) to be perceived, while bodies are constantly touched and shaped by sound. Viewed in this way, it is impossible for sound to renounce agency, or rather, have its agency stripped away by human intellectual exceptionalism. Sound demands that it be heard, that it be felt.

The second section examines the body as both a medium and matter. The body is the primary site of affective exodus, as this model does not alter one's spatial location but rather one's orientation towards that space. Here I rely upon Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, which theorizes "orientation" as how we reside in space, and how our "bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, that are available within the bodily horizon" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 1-2). I make use of Ahmed's queer phenomenology in conjunction with Bernadette Wegenstein's conception of the body as medium. Through a critical reading of Wegenstein's definition of the body as medium, I question *where* and *how* reality is constructed during affective exodus, exploring the role of the body

and its intra-actions with technics.

Technics must be considered not external to the body, but rather, considers technics as bodily prosthetics. I ask *what* and *where* the body is, and how cell phones become integral to the body's negotiation of and orientation within space. By understanding the listening device as embodied rather than additive, I expand upon Michael Bull's work on the iPod, wherein the device acts *upon* the body rather than *as* the body. In combination with the technical analysis from the first section, this section's discussion of bodily orientation grounds affective exodus as a materialist epistemology. Our flesh, our ears, the plastic and metal of cellphones and headphones, brick walls and streetlights: this is the matter of affective exodus, the convergence of media, technics, and the gay male body.

This line of inquiry seeks to answer how such enactments assist in the (re)creation of reality. "Reality," of course, becomes slippery and difficult to pin down. I move away from the social constructivism that surrounds "reality" as being both singular and created by the human mind. While spatiality is perceived and processed through mind and body as one, to reduce it to mere constructivism undermines the material (a/e)ffects that reality has on the body. The assumption of a de facto reality undermines the agency of both human bodies in creating reality and of non-human bodies in acting upon the human and one another. Such a formulation falls under Barad's sense of the *posthuman*, which references not the death of the human, but rather "taking issue with human exceptionalism while being accountable for the role we play in the differential constitution and differential positioning of the human among other creatures (both living and nonliving)" (Barad, 2007, p. 136). In this way, affective exodus is a posthumanist epistemology. This is to say that by taking sound and technics as agential beings that intra-act with the body, the human being is displaced, both ontologically and affectively, from its arrogant centrality within the world.

In relation to Feld's acousteme, affective exodus, as applied here, relies upon the able-bodiedness of my interlocutors. Feld writes that he is "adding to the vocabulary of sensorial-sonic studies to argue the potential of acoustic knowing, of sound as a condition of and for knowing, of sonic presence and awareness as potent shaping forces in how people make sense of experiences" (Feld, 1996, p. 97). The acousteme, then, is the world we come to know through experiencing sound. By framing my model of affective exodus within Feld's notion of the acousteme, I challenge the marginalization of sonic perception and uphold sound as being equal to vision in the human perception and construction of the world.

Throughout the paper, ethnographic material gathered during fieldwork in Baku during the summer of 2016 illuminates my theorizing on the body, cell phone, and affective exodus. This section focuses on Fazil, who studies in Turkey during the academic year. Because he spends the majority of the

year living somewhere he perceives to be more gay-friendly, his uses of affective exodus as self-preservation during the summer months is particularly illuminating for the analysis at hand. Further, his families' wealth, which allows him to study in a foreign country, enables transience unavailable to other interlocutors, such as Anar (above). As such, this section presents differentiating uses of affective exodus, or listening-as-preservation.

Technics and Embodiment

YouTube is a primary service used for music consumption in Azerbaijan. While YouTube functions primarily as a video streaming site, artists and record labels use the platform for posting music videos, and will often upload videos containing a still images and audio tracks. Fans make use of the site to share audio as well, although the legality of this practice under copyright law is questionable. In Azerbaijan, YouTube is very important for streaming music and enacting affective exodus. As a free service available in most countries, YouTube does not require a subscription to use. Streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music are not widely used in Azerbaijan, as limited financial means make it difficult to purchase monthly subscriptions. Many make use of third-party apps and websites to illegally download audio files from YouTube, which has very little protection against such actions.

Fazil frequently would send me messages on WhatsApp—the primary way we communicated—with YouTube links to his favorite Italian artists. He would tell me that I didn't need to know Italıan, that I would enjoy the song anyway.

"Italian music is very beautiful. You don't need to understand the words." For Fazil, Italian sonority enacted this sort of affective exodus. Carrying Italian music wherever he went, Fazil never failed to smile when the word "Italian" left his mouth. Fazil spends the majority of his free time listening to Italian pop artists and dancing in his room. Italy and its language for him is a signal of freedom, of gay salvation, of beauty and aesthetic value. When I ask Fazil about his love for the Italian language in particular, he is often overcome with adoration, unable to find the words to describe it. He just repeats the word *güzel*, "beautiful" until I laugh and tell him I understand: *anladım.* Fazil tells me that from Turkey, it is much easier to travel to Europe than from Azerbaijan, where flights are mostly limited to Germany and England. But in Ankara, he can go to a gay club and dance without feeling threatened. "Bence Ankara daha rahat" ("For me, Ankara is more comfortable"). But as school ends for the summer holiday, Fazil must return home and stay with his family. It is during these moments that Italian becomes even closer to his heart. YouTube serves as his primary access to Italian music and what it represents to him, and such access is dependent upon the cell phone.

Using cell phones for most downloading and listening activities, the consumer interacts in a reciprocal relationship with their devices. A touch on the screen is met with a positive or negative reciprocity—that is, something happens, or nothing happens in return. Like the injured neural pathway that can cause loss of a specific body part's function, the cell phone is essentially just matter, prone to failure; it fails as the body fails. Farman writes;

> If successful, the haptic reciprocity engages the users in a feedback loop that produces sensory-inscribed embodiment. When it fails (i.e., when I press the button and there is no response), this again points toward a kind of reciprocity: negative or asymmetrical reciprocity. My touch confirms that I made contact with the device; however, the device refuses to acknowledge my touch. This is still reciprocity (Farman, 2012, p. 65).

The cell phone, touched by flesh and provoked to respond, becomes re-inscribed and embodied with every use, just as the smooth surface of the screen against one's finger embodies that user.

As Fazil searches YouTube and clicks on Italian videos or songs, his engagement with the virtual interface acts not only to re-inscribe himself and phone as embodied, but makes use of this reciprocal embodiment to enact an affective exodus. Through his interaction with this medium, Fazil enacts an affective exodus as an embodied epistemology—that is, his way of differently being-in-the-world—that begins at the flesh and ends at cognitive perception. YouTube works in service of achieving this *differently being* as an embodied act of merging the virtual and the material, overlaying the senses with intentionality in order to alter one's acousteme.

As gay men in Azerbaijan navigate their daily lives, the edges of their body *feel* particularly apparent. His body does not fit here, his skin pressed upon by heteronormative governmentality and social shame. Ahmed writes, "the skin that seems to contain the body is also where the atmosphere creates an impression… Bodies may become orientated in this responsiveness of the world around them, given this capacity to be affected" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 9). The body's responsiveness to touch is precisely the granting-power for affective exodus. As one feels the surfaces of their body, capitalizing on this affective openness is exactly how to counteract it. In her earlier book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* Ahmed describes discomfort as that affect which brings one's attention to their surfaces. Comfort then is "to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 148). The world's beginning, as a spatial referent, is determined through the embodied subject's perception. As one changes their perception, that beginning can be moved. For the gay man, the alteration of his orientation towards the heteronormative space through intentional listening and the embodied device can push that beginning away from his flesh, placing the world's beginning outside of himself. This is the

importance of affective exodus. This is the importance of the cell phone as technic and prosthetic.

Body: Medium & Matter

I have outlined above how affective exodus might be considered an embodied posthumanist epistemology. But for a moment we must consider the materiality of the body, of the technics involved in enacting affective exodus, of the end result. Until now, I have used the term "material" to refer to the "real world," or the physical world. At this point I invite a reconsideration of that materiality/virtual binary in relation to 'reality'. If we recognize the materiality of virtual spaces, and consider the body—skin and cell phone joined as one—the medium of affective exodus, how might our orientation shift? In what ways must we rethink the body?

Noted above, the body is the primary site of affective exodus—that is, its '*where*' is the body. A phenomenological perspective asserts that all experience is based in, upon, around the body. Bernadette Wegenstein writes, "the body is always our most fundamental medium of knowledge and experience" (Wegenstein, 2010, p. 34). Experience always refers back to the body: its position, orientation, or lack thereof. Knowledge as a process of knowing refers to the body, as does learning; the body must be present, and if it is not, that is perhaps more significant. The body is centered within affect and phenomenology because it is *fundamental*; it is the site of experience.

The danger of focusing upon the body is biological determinism. Critics of materialism and phenomenology reduce processes such as experience and cognition to mere biological matter. It of course cannot be refuted that our biological body is important here: the eyes are necessary for sight, as the eardrum is for hearing. The difference to be drawn though is the difference between the body and embodiment. Wegenstein explains this in the following way:

> The specificity of human embodiment can thus be expressed via the phenomenological differentiation between "being a body" and "having a body": the former, insofar as it designates the process of living body, and first-person perspective, coincides with dynamic embodiment; the latter, referencing the body from an external, third person perspective, can be aligned with the static body (Wegenstein, 2010, p. 21).

Saying that one 'has a body' merely comments on the scientific truth that bodies exist. To describe one as embodied, on the other hand, refers specifically to the experience of that body's being-in-the-world. Human interaction cannot be biologized. The body's biology merely enables experience: it doesn't define it. This is not to say, however, that the body's materiality does not matter. As Barad uses the term, matter is what *matters.* Matter *isn't*, but it *does*.

When we take the body as material, its fusion with the cell phone as appendage *feels* differently. Without the soapbox of human exceptionalism, flesh and metal, the material and virtual merge much more easily. This merge is crucial to the cell phone as sensory ability. Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes, in his ubiquitous exemplification,

> The blind man's stick has ceased to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight…To get used to a hat, a car or a stick is to be transplanted into them, or conversely, to incorporate them into the bulk of our own body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 143).

Through its repeated use, its embodiment through a reciprocal-touch relationship, the cell phone is incorporated into the body. As prosthetic of the body that enables interaction in the world, cell phones warrant consideration as a sense in and of themselves. But to move one step further, I suggest that performing gay identity in Baku is dependent upon the cell phone.

Living in a country without gay spaces, where non-normative identity is grounds for complete social shame and ostracization, cell phones are the primary method for finding other gay men. Very few websites or chatrooms exist for people to share information or discuss gender issues in Azerbaijan, perhaps due to government regulation and surveillance. And while the cell phone is not protected against surveillance, many apps use encryption or location 'fuzzing' to hide their users (Hoang, Asano, & Yoshikawa, 2016). Thus, the cell phone is the only option for find other gay men (often through dating apps) and is the primary tool for effecting affective exodus. To be gay in Azerbaijan without access to the gay scene-qua-cell phone is to resign oneself to the heteronormative pressure that reveals one's edges, making him constantly aware of himself.

As such, the embodied gay male's cell phone is crucial to his sexual orientation. Ahmed writes, "if orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as 'who' or 'what' we inhabit spaces with" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 1). As a materialist, posthumanist, phenomenological epistemology, affective exodus relies upon the body and its orientation in space as crucial to its experience and enactment. The body as the primary medium of affective exodus is also the locus of experiencing such an exodus. The medium does not give way to the result, but rather becomes enveloped and reoriented within it. The body *matters*, constantly and without end, in an endless state of becoming and negotiating with space and proximal objects. For the gay body, this must include the cell phone.

Conclusion

For Anar and Fazil, as well as many others not named here, cell phones are tantamount to life in Baku. In addition to finding romantic and sexual partners through dating apps, free and open communication via encrypted third-party apps and music consumption allow them to carve out space conducive to a gay identity. Through Barad's agential realist ontology and Farman's mobile interface theory, there is no delineation between 'real' and 'virtual' space, or between individual versus public space. All space is constantly becoming, influenced by and influencing the individual at every turn. So while space is often constructed and perpetuated as heteronormative, it is not such by default. Much in the same way that Judith Butler suggests gender is performed, and prescribed through repeated action, space is made straight, gay, or otherwise through the purposeful labor of performance (Butler, 1990). Through the specific uses of the cell phone, my interlocutors form their own space, a process which I have called affective exodus. The repetition of these actions continually reinforces specifically-gendered spaces that one inhabits, and thus require perpetual enactment of alternate-space-making.

So much of our lives is organized through the cell phone: it is our calendar and our primary mode of communication with others. It holds our memories in photographs, and it serves as entertainment. But the frivolity of such technology is frequently overstated. Michael Bull notes that through the use of cell phones in public, "transforms representational space into a very specific form of vocalic space—a space of potential intimacy and warmth whilst all else that occupies that space is recessed, transcended" (Bull, 2007, p. 84). Bull points to the potential of technics to create connection between bodies and the world, or between bodies and other bodies, and to transform how space is used and experienced in the process. Beyond transcendence, however, the supposed objectivist construction of 'space' can be rethought, however, as an ongoing process that engages each individual that passes through it. Listeners need not 'transcend' some de facto reality in favor of a sonic escape, but rather can reconfigure 'reality' through directed listening. There is little to say that the world beyond headphones is any more real than that within them.

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