

## A queer phenomenology of furniture music: A case study of Alvin Lucier's *I am sitting in a room* (1969) as musical furniture

Lara Balikci

Schulich School of Music, McGill University, Canada

**Disciplinary background A.** *I am sitting in a room*: a statement famously pronounced by the American experimental composer, Alvin Lucier (1931-2021). Perhaps we have not yet fully considered how the room, in some way, also sits with us. How did we come to take up the room in which we sit, how was the room already ready for our arrival, and what do we hear and/or listen to in these spaces? These are some of the questions regarding furniture music (music that is heard but not listened to) that are prompted by feminist scholar, Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology (Ahmed, 2006), which is not a phenomenology of queer experience (which is the philosophy of experience or consciousness as it relates to queerness), but rather, a queering of phenomenology. Like Gavin Lee (Lee, 2020), I foreground queer phenomenology as disorientation.

**Disciplinary background B.** Inspired by Erik Satie's (1866–1925) *musique d'ameublement*, I redraw conventional genre boundaries for furniture music to create a theoretical space for music like Muzak, ambient music, chairs that speak, among other things, to come together. In this paper, I argue that music theory can address disorienting experiences of sonic objects, bodies, spaces, and the relationship between them through an analytical case study of Lucier's *I am sitting in a room* (1969): a recording of multiple generations of re-recorded spoken text repeated into a room.

### Abstract

I argue for a queer phenomenological interpretation of this composition as a piece of (meta-) furniture music.

First, I argue that Lucier is best regarded as a composer of furniture music. Second, I investigate how Lucier instrumentalizes sameness and difference in *I am sitting in a room* (1969). Third, I present two analytical visualizations of the transformational process of *I am sitting in a room*: (1) a bar graph and (2) a collection of analytical images. The bar graph maps the various formally differentiated sections that result from Lucier's compositional process, what he calls generations, over the resonance, or sonic diffusion, of the resulting music. The collection of analytical images reflects the poetic transformation that occurs in the composition. I apply a comparable visual process as Lucier's sonic process to generate 32 images that make for a productive visual representation to understand the queer phenomenology of the piece as furniture music.

**Interdisciplinary implications.** Finally, I conclude that Lucier's utilization of space through time instrumentalizes a sense of 'the room' in which any given instantiation of the piece exists.