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The Future is Female! Trans(human) Voices of Cher and Anohni

Introduction

This article shows two different musical examples of trans-femininity. I want to show how the pop star Cher's *Believe* song from 1998 and more recent songs of transgender singer, Anohni, redefine the meaning of a woman's body and voice. Those two examples show different feminist approaches: Cher, a powerful, spectacular, and futurist female entity and Anohni, a non-binary, calm, and angelic singer, represent two different dimensions of trans(humanity). Analyzing their performances with scrutiny we can see that either cosmic wigs and high heels or a white robe with minimalist scenography allow female subjects to occupy spaces created and dedicated for men, especially when the voice is the main source of the female power. By combining the theories of cyberfeminism proposed by Donna Haraway and the idea of vocality presented by Roland Barthes, I would like to examine the critical potential of both singers. The main aim of this article is to show how trans(human) female corporeality can be understood as a critical tool useful to deconstruct social discourse and aesthetic principles. Because trans(human) bodies are not so easily entangled in binary oppositions, it escapes unambiguous categories and redefines conservative cultural contexts. Thanks to this, the materiality of trans(human) voice becomes the purest and most corporeal audial form possible. I want to show how the musical performance of Cher's revolutionary *Believe* song and Anohni's albums: *Antony and the Johnsons*, *I am a Bird Now* and *Hopelessness* are possible to understand as a critical intervention in the classical (sometimes preclusive particular groups) femininity discourse. Such musical interventions are subversive ways of becoming visible and hearable by female subjectivities within and beyond the patriarchal order.

Do You Believe in Life After Human?

In 1998 the music world changed forever. The American pop singer Cher, known for her particular voice which Nicholas Tawa described as "bold, deep, and with a spacious vibrato" (Tawa 2005: 217), stretched her vocal capabilities even further. A new intriguing aesthetic was presented in the single *Believe*. In exactly 36 seconds

of audio, where Cher sings “And I can’t break through” listeners could hear a specific sonic event, a sound structure that fits between glitch and noise of outer space. Something that Simon Reynolds described as the voice which has “turned crystalline, like the singer suddenly disappeared behind frosted glass” (Reynolds 2018). That was the very first time when the pitch-correction technology Auto-Tune was presented openly and somehow radically. Even if the Antares Audio Technologies’ invention had been on the market for about a year before *Believe* hit the charts, its previous appearances had been discreet. The Cher’s song, according to Reynolds:

was the first record where the effect drew attention to itself: The glow-and-flutter of Cher’s voice at key points in the song announced its own technological artifice—a blend of posthuman perfection and angelic transcendence ideal for the vague religiosity of the chorus, “Do you believe in life after love?” (ibidem).

In his short history of the Auto-Tune revolution, Reynolds fully insists that only “a few innovations in sound-production have been simultaneously so reviled and so revolutionary” (ibidem). This futurist aura is only emphasized by a music video directed by Nigel Dick where Cher is presented as a cosmic/religious figure in a nightclub. Although she stays in the dark and she is surrounded by people, she glows inner light like some kind of “love prophet”. Her headdress looks like a futuristic crown and she is wearing a white suit that makes her look androgynous. When she sings her words of advice she uses gestures typical of Jesus Christ’s visual representations so that her appearance seems even more ambiguous and queer. She teleports herself in a ray of light on the stage where she performs the second part of the song dressed in a more typical way, transforming herself from a supernatural entity into a human form. Transfiguration and shapeshifting is the main motive in this visual narration. In the last part, she follows and stops the heartbroken girl that we see in the whole video by becoming her and giving her strength to being an independent woman. Cher is presented not as a real human but rather as a supernatural cosmic power. Both corporeal and virtual form of her own words: “Well I know that I’ll get through this / ‘Cause I know that I am strong”. Despite the undoubtedly feminist character of the whole song, where female agency is described in the lyrics mentioned above, Cher’s performance highlights also the idea of cybernetic humanism, where the matter is “not to leaving the body behind”, as Nancy Katherine Hayles would say: “but rather extending embodied awareness in highly specific, local, and material ways that would be impossible without electronic prosthesis”. (Hayles 2008: 291).

While Auto-Tune’s voice processing is now considered a form of musical kitsch and an expression of bad taste (Wilson 2014), Cher’s decision was an example of deliberate (post)modern artistic practice. The aesthetics proposed by the singer was founded on the technological expansion of the possibilities of the human body, which is closely related to the transhumanist trend. Transhumanism, according to Monika Bakke, is “an absolute form of humanism” (Bakke 2010). It is a belief in the infinite potential of humanity and the endless development of the idea of man. Although the prefix “trans-” refers to fluidity and change, the human, in a process of constant self-evolution, remains the focal point on the map of this biotechnological

philosophy. While the concept itself has a rich history, its new meaning introduced in 1990 by Max More still seems to be the dominant doctrine of this modern trend in the humanities: "Transhumanism differs from humanism in recognizing and anticipating the radical alterations in the nature and possibilities of our lives resulting from various sciences and technologies" (More 2003).

Unlike posthumanism, which relinquishes the central figure of the human being, transhumanism is an anthropocentric trend in which the most important task of humanity is to develop technologies that enable the expansion of body and consciousness. Starting with contact lenses, limb prostheses, and plastic surgery, ending with smartphones and chips that extend the brain's capabilities. Anything that can improve humans can be regarded as part of the transhumanist project of mankind. According to Rozalia Knapik, "transhumanism is usually associated with this »trans«, that is, the glorified moment of transition to evolution made possible by the potential of science and technology" (Knapik 2018: 17). Therefore, Auto-Tune technology, used consciously and openly, can be regarded as an auto-evolution of the human voice and a transhumanistic extension of human aesthetic possibilities. As part of the project of "humanity of tomorrow", it gives the opportunity to obtain new, previously unknown aesthetic properties and provokes to redefine the artistic potential of the human voice. Thus Cher's glitchy singing is an early, perhaps unconscious, transhumanist project in the field of popular music, and the bodily and technological spectacle she presented in the late 1990s was a harbinger of new forms of human creativity.

Transhumanism served as a set of ready-made metaphors, ideal for research into new media and feminist theories. The critical dimension of transhumanism was one of the first to be discovered by Donna Haraway in her works on cyberfeminism. In her most famous text, *Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway included the most important thesis about the female subject as the absolute Other. In her words:

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction (...) Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility (Haraway 2006: 104).

Haraway understands these possibilities as a vehicle of potential social change, possible thanks to the intersection of the axis of imaginary phantasms and material reality in the figure of a cyborg – the transhumanist culmination of the human project. Cyborgs appear in contemporary culture as highly dense symbols that deconstruct the tradition of Western technoculture dominated by masculine capitalism, by the tradition of progress, and by the appropriation of nature as a means of creating culture, including the tradition of reproducing one's "I" through its mirror image in the Other. The cyborg defies the capitalization of its own otherness. It is the final embodiment of the "I", finally freed from any dependence, it is an entity that moves freely in space. Haraway sees contemporary subjectivity in the human body not so much biologically but rather as a historical structure, or as the next stage of dehumanization on the way to absolute non-human subjectivity. On the following pages

of the "Cyborg Manifesto", the author continues her ethnographic description of this intriguing figure, pointing out that the cyborg is:

resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the *oikos*, the household (ibidem: 105).

The cyborg, like any Other (female, homosexual, non-white, Jew, Muslim, etc.) can be interpreted as an artificial product of a patriarchal white homonormative society – a stranger necessary to draw the line between norm and aberration. That is why it is in the Other's experience of reality (and especially the female experience) that Haraway perceives a tangle of facts and fictions thoroughly saturated with political meanings because it is the existence of the Other that is most involved (negatively) in the political matrix of law. In her opinion, feminist liberation is possible only when we realize (understand imaginatively) what subjugation is and when we manage to imagine some other possibilities and choices. That can be achieved by playing the role of a cyborg, this condensed symbol and figure marked by internal oppositions. The voluntary recognition and acceptance of the role of cyborgs will, in her opinion, enable the final struggle to begin the emancipation of the Other and, as a result, the final line between science fiction and social reality, which is only an "optical illusion", will be broken (ibidem: 104). Haraway's manifesto presents a futuristic vision of deconstructing the gender difference and eliminating inequalities caused by the artificial I/Other opposition.

It is not difficult to notice that the song *Believe*, as well as the entire stage image of Cher, is a modern encounter between American disco music and the proposals of transhumanism in the cyberfeminist approach. Cher somehow becomes a symbolic cyborg in popular music discourse where almost all papers dedicated to *Believe* are sustaining this metaphor. It is hard to disagree with that interpretation, especially when we combine her voice processed into Auto-Tune, as well as the dozens of plastic surgeries the singer underwent during her stage career and her long struggle against the classical understanding of the concept of authenticity. All of that makes Cher the best example of cybernetic entity. Like Joseph Auner suggests:

That the act of shedding a human skin and adopting a posthuman persona can have considerably divergent implications for those whose essential human has already been put into question is evident in the ways technology has been used to create alternative representations of gender and race in a range of musical styles (Auner 2003: 105).

Cher has proved that the voice of a cyborg/non-human/queer/woman can start the aesthetic revolution and become a biopolitical form of protest. As Orquídea Cadilhe notes, the campy performance of Cher "is engaging in gender parody and raising questions of authenticity" (Cadilhe 2016: 114). Cadilhe comments on Cher's natural voice, which is impaired by the Auto-Tune effect and thanks to such technological intervention "takes her further away from traditional associations of women with »naturalness« as opposed to that of men with science" (ibidem). Cher, in the

terms of Susana Loza, exposes herself as a “performative posthuman, the diva deviates from the heterosexual script with her gender-bending loop” (Loza 2001: 354). Loza stresses the way the cyborg: “melts binaries, crosses gender slips into other species and genres, samples multiple sexualities, and destabilises dance music with her stammered replies. He haunts humanism with his regenerated and denatured vocals” (ibidem: 350–351). According to Kay Dickinson, there are two contradictions in the figure of Cher. On the one hand, her use of Auto-Tune distracted the female voice from the stereotypical duo of femininity and nature and made it possible to identify female singers with modern technology, previously reserved only for men (Dickinson 2001). On the other hand, we know that Cher was not involved in the production of *Believe*, since Mark Taylor and Brian Rawling were “the real fathers” of this pop charts hit. Is it fair to say that Cher gave her voice over to male professionals, just like plastic surgery, where men were “moulding her into something which cannot help but represent masculine dominance and the male resuscitation of a waning female singing career?” (ibidem: 342). Dickinson has a negative answer. She thinks that Cher’s fetishization of plastic surgeries has “encased her in a kind of armour – she has been »technologised«”.

That means that the transhuman value of her audio-corporeality gave her agency for creating her own femininity beyond a misogynistic and masculinist glance. She has created the camp version of ambiguous femininity and because “camp, after all, is not a sexual practice” (ibidem: 344) her gender identity is released from the patriarchal order. Thus even if Cher is a metaphorical cyborg created by a man, she deconstructs rather than sustain conservative music discourse and gendered social structures in general. Thanks to that, *Believe* becomes a form of queer and transhuman utopia, in which the main role is played by a female cyborg announcing the times of a revolution full of non-human and non-normative subjectivities. Although Cher’s transhuman attempt was still more in the realm of fiction than in reality, there are entities that truly embodied and fulfilled transhumanist ideas. As I would like to show in the next section, the prefix “trans-” has a queer potential, not for nothing.

The Grain

Trans refers to motion and change. That is why the letter “T” (like transgender) in the acronym LGBTQ stands next to the letter “Q” denoting the Queer. Both terms account for subjectivities that fall outside the classical understanding of biological sex. Queer is not only a fluid identity, it is primarily a form of emancipation, community care and a style of non-normative existence. It is the product of a historical process in which an initially offensive term has become a “fighting word” (Butler 1996). After all, it binds social groups that identify with this term and have the opportunity to create their own safe spaces of expression. Queer, as a utopia, also proposes a vision of a human who is not yet among us, as José Esteban Muñoz emphasizes: “Queerness as utopian formation is a formation based on an economy of desire and desiring. This desire is always directed at that thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise” (Muñoz 2009: 26). Therefore,

a figure that realizes alternative forms of time and space and foreshadows a new vision of human identity, as well as embodying the queer utopia, becomes a transgender human who, according to Jack Halberstram, has become a promise of "gender liberation and transgression" (Halberstram 2005: 21). In the introduction to his book about transgender subjectivity, Halberstam wrote that trans^{*1} can be a:

name for expansive forms of difference, haptic relations to knowing, uncertain modes of being, and the disaggregation of identity politics predicated upon the separating out of many kinds of experience that actually blend together, intersect, and mix (Halberstam 2017: 5).

The transgender personality denaturalizes the notions of time and space of life, presenting with its entire existence an alternative to cultural, and thus capitalist, norms. It is paradoxically the most human form of transhumanism. A human being in the process of biological, technological and legal change. The result of the never-ending process of transition, which may include (but are not necessary): experiences of identity change, dozens of plastic surgeries and the act of sex correction, and lifetime hormone intake (Preciado 2013). Although Nikki Sullivan makes a distinction between trans-subjectivity and trans-practices. In her own words: "it is nevertheless crucial that we pay close critical attention to the differences between such practices, the bodies they transform or inform, and the ways in which these are interpreted, evaluated, situated, and lived" (Sullivan 2006: 553). She highlights differences between those two types of trans(human) body ideas, she understands them as different forms of "transmogrification". According to Sullivan it is a „process of (un)becoming strange and/or grotesque, is both transgressive and conformist and simultaneously, is neither of these things" (ibidem: 561). The contact with the trans-body thus becomes an encounter with the foreshadowing of the future; it is the experience of absent or not yet fully developed new forms of gender and cultural identity. Nevertheless Transhuman cyborg and trans* subjectivity, even without gender reassignment surgery, stay in constant transition and oscillation between classical gender essence. This vagueness, fluidity, and understatement make the encounter with the trans* body an experience requiring a mental reconfiguration of the (only apparently stable) idea of somatic sex difference. Thus, I would like to use term trans* in broader sense, similar to Susan Stryker's definition of transgender:

I use transgender not to refer to one particular identity or way of being embodied but rather as an umbrella term for a wide variety of bodily effects that disrupt or denaturalize heteronormatively constructed linkages between an individual's anatomy at birth, a nonconsensually assigned gender category, psychical identifications with sexed body images and/or gendered subject positions, and the performance of specifically gendered social, sexual, or kinship functions (Stryker 1998: 149).

¹ The way of writing the word trans with the asterisk was proposed by Jacek Halberstam in his book *Trans: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* in order to show a broad sense of this term. According to Halberstam the asterisk: "embraces the nonspecificity of the term »trans« and uses it to open the term up to a shifting set of conditions and possibilities rather than to attach it only to the life narratives of a specific group of people" (Halberstam 2017: 52).

Much has been written about the visual aspects of the trans* body and its media representation. I suggest you to think about the “body of tomorrow” through the prism of the voice emanating from it and its “grain”. The “grain of the voice” idea was presented in 1981 by Roland Barthes in an essay with the same title. In this short text, Barthes suggests dismantling the adjectival language of music criticism in favor of a somatic (almost phenomenological) description of the experience of musical expression, in this case singing. To put his idea into practice, he decides to analyze the voices of two artists in a context of pleasure caused by their singing voices. Referring to the theoretical opposition of Julia Kristeva’s pheno-text and geno-text, Barthes creates a doublet of pheno-song and geno-song, thanks to which it becomes possible to indicate significant differences in the voices he analyzes. In his proposal, pheno-song:

covers all the phenomena, all the features which belong to the structure of the language being sung, the rules of the genre, the coded form of the melisma, the composer’s idiolect, the style of interpretation: in short, everything in the performance which is in the service of communication, representation, expression, everything which it is customary to talk about, which forms the tissue of cultural values (Barthes 1977: 182).

Pheno-song is, according to Barthes, the cultural context of a vocal work, which becomes a form of “alibi of a given time”, that is, the historical context of a specific work. In other words, Barthes considers the categories of subjectivity, expressiveness, drama or artistic personality to be established primarily by the cultural context, and not as natural vocal predispositions and qualities. Their power can significantly influence the voice of the singer, muting their pure somatic sound. Whereas geno-song is:

the volume of the singing and speaking voice, the space where significations germinate ‘from within language and in its very materiality’; it forms a signifying play having nothing to do with communication, representation (of feelings), expression; it is that apex (or that depth) of production where the melody really works at the language – not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sounds-signifiers, of its letters – where melody explores how the language works and identifies with that work. It is, in a very simple word but which must be taken seriously, the diction of the language (ibidem: 182–183).

The grain of the voice that can be experienced during musical experience becomes the “materiality of the speaking body” (ibidem: 182), but it is not an ordinary quality in the form of timbre (which are marked by pheno-song), but rather the idiomatic ability to transform language into a melody. This is how the grain of the voice, according to the author of *The Pleasure of the Text*:

is not—or not merely—its timbre; the significance it opens cannot better be defined, indeed, than by the very friction between the music and something else, which something else is the particular language (and nowise the message). The song must speak; must write (...) The “grain is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs (ibidem: 185).

To put it simply: the grain is the body in the voice or the bodily dimension of the voice. The transparency of Barthes' text may, however, raise doubts. As Jonathan Dunsby noted, the idea of grain "has become paradigmatic, floating free from its aetiology, possibly too even from its empirical justification" (Dunsby 2009: 118). The popularity of Barthes' proposition comes from its metaphorical structure, detached from factual musicological analysis: "»The grain of the voice« has become almost everyday language, yet this »grain« as Barthes himself illustrated and elucidated it has barely been discussed" (ibidem: 119). Although I agree with Dunsby that Barthes avoids a typical analysis and due to that his text gives more sophisticated pleasure rather than intellectual struggle, however the real power of this text lies in its ability to change the perspective on the voice now understood as a somatoesthetic tool. Just as Barthes concludes, it is only thanks to the experience of granularity that a truly individual assessment of the relationship with a musical work becomes possible, in which the theoretical values assigned to it become less valuable, and the most important turns out to be listening and enjoying an intimate relationship with the listened body. According to Dunsby Barthes':

distinction between geno-song and pheno-song, open to scrutiny and development, is a vision that has been taken up informally for decades in citations and quotations, but which merits evidence-based exploration in the twenty-first century, not least, and relevantly, in the area of analysis and interpretation (ibidem: 130).

Inspired by that thought that I can see another problem with *The Grain of the Voice*. Even if corporeality of the voice and intimate relation between a singer and a listener is so crucial for Barthes, the materiality of the body remains beyond his attention. This matter raises the question: is it possible to experience the grain of the voice completely free from technological and cultural mediation? A pure experience of a body liberated from its social context? The negative answer comes almost immediately. After all, just listening to an audio recording is a barrier to this, by definition, phenomenological process. As Philip Auslander has rightly pointed out, even live concerts, thanks to the use of amplifiers and microphones, mediate this experience (Auslander 2008). Auto-Tune problematizes this issue even more. The technologically transformed voice of Cher acquires a new kind of paradoxical digital materiality. Auto-Tune expands the grain of the vocals, making virtual a sonority that was once corporeal. It becomes queer futurity, something that is not yet here, something that is still more fictional than real. Cher's undoubtedly transhuman voice is impossible to attribute to a classically understood female or male body. It is beyond that opposition and thanks to this, it expands its own potential for cultural transgression. Thus, there is a paradox inscribed in Barthes' idea. A voice absolutely mediated through technology has a possibility to achieve the graininess similar (or even more dense) than the biologically pure one. Thanks to that Cher's digitally improved voice deconstructs her biological gender and her body becomes more fluid and her corporeality opens for new possibilities. But what if there is a body that can produce pure non-binary vocal grain without using Auto-Tune technology? A body

in constant transition, a body “in-between”, a body with double voice – neither female, nor male.

The Trans(Female) Voice

By listening to the albums of trans* singer Anohni (previously known from the group Anthony and the Johnsons²), not only it is difficult to identify the genre in which the artist creates (some critics have difficulty locating Anohni’s works in the field of popular music), but also, if not primarily, to determine the characteristics of her vocals. Her voice eludes all gender and racial categories. Although the owner or possessor of this voice can be absolutely anyone – a black woman or a white man – its graininess is reminiscent of a female vocal more pop than a rock and roll male voice. Where does this association come from? The male way of singing (used in masculinist musical genres) comes out from a much more constricted throat than in the way female divas sing. Therefore, some music genres force singers to perform vocal styles that remain in the vocal register and never turn into actual singing (hip hop, rock and roll, hardcore, heavy metal, etc.). A feminist musicologist, Suzanne Cusick, rightly notices that singing emanates much deeper from within the body than the spoken voice, which comes from the mouth and throat. Singing requires a long passage of air from the diaphragm to the mouth. The air (and thus the sound it carries) fills the performer’s body. In this way, the body is penetrated with sound, and penetration, according to Cusick, generates an association with feminization. That is why (seemingly) male musical genres, especially those entangled in patriarchal domination, do not allow for dynamic singing (Cusick 1999). According to Shana Goldin-Perschbacher, Anohni’s vocal characteristics are beyond the rules of musical genres, gender categories, sexuality and race. Anohni, with her musical and gender identity, places herself entirely against the phenomenon of singing. Anohni consistently opens her body to singing, thereby eliminating all somatic vocal rules intended to tame and imprison her body in terms of gender, both biological and cultural (Goldin-Perschbacher 2008). Thus, her voice eludes the culturally entangled body that generates it and becomes the pure vocal grain. When Cher used Auto-Tune to expand her vocal possibilities and to make her gender more ambiguous, Anohni uses her own vocal possibilities and “biotechnology” of singing to create the same gender-bending effect.

On the first album, *Antony and the Johnsons* from 2000, there were songs that prove that the singer’s aeronautical vocal extends the somatic boundaries of the individual body. Let an excerpt from the song *Cripple and the Starfish* serve as an illustration of this audio-somatic phenomenon. The whole song is a snapshot from a science fiction movie and talks about the adventures of a masochistic relationship between Mr. Muscle and Crippled Piglet. In an interview for Magnet magazine, we learn that the piece tells a post-apocalyptic scenario in which the human world has ended (Amorosi, Anohni 2016). The terrestrial lands were sunk and the only heroes of the piece landed on a polystyrene island, somewhere in the middle of nowhere.

² The band’s name refers to transgender activist Marsha P. Johnson, who was active in the LGBTQ rights movement in New York City after Stonewall Inn riots.

The intimate relationship that is established between the survivors – Mr. Muscle and Crippled Piglet – is based on violence and sexual harassment. Despite the moral ambiguity, this relationship works and both characters seem to be interdependent. They complement each other in a disturbing way and support each other in sadness and loneliness. This queer utopia (though perhaps also a dystopia?) is sung from the perspective of Piglet, who in the first part of the piece explicitly expresses his almost schizophrenic desire for love directed at himself and at Mr. Muscle: "It's true I always wanted love to be / Hurtful / And it's true I always wanted love to be / Filled with pain / And bruises". It is at this point that the singer's voice begins to build its own vocal space, in which the source of the voice and the voice itself begin to interpenetrate and complement each other. During this musical event, two bodies are formed: one is purely vocal and the other is completely material. However, it is only in the phrase that ends the last verse that you can hear the pure grain of Anohni's voice, which fills the entire possible space of the piece, as a result it merges with the sounds of the instruments and in the grand finale, "destroys" its source-body and crystallizes into pure geno-song: "I am very happy / So please hit me / I am very, very happy / So please hurt me / I am very happy / So please hit me / I am very, very happy / So come on and hurt me / I'll grow back like a starfish / I'll grow back like a starfish".

It becomes practically impossible to determine if it is a voice / body filled with bliss or with pain. As Shana Goldin-Perschbacher noticed, it is difficult to indicate any other properties of this voice. Its characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, etc. become absolutely translucent (*ibidem*). The only thing that can be heard, almost without any doubts, is that the material body cannot contain the voice that comes out of the singer's larynx. Skeptics would assume that this is the result of working hours in the studio, already in the post-production stage of the album, but live concerts prove that this effect has its source in the body, not in technology. The concert recordings of the song *Cripple and the Starfish* (especially those from the tour with the orchestra at the turn of 2008/2009) only emphasize the uniqueness of the singer's voice, the best proof of this being the material recorded by Dutch television during a concert at the Royal Theater Carré, Amsterdam. Here we see a singer wearing a long, ankle-length white gown that is slightly tucked up over her breasts. Long black hair falls freely around her shoulders, and although a bit disheveled, it only accentuates the round features of the artist's face. Even though Anohni does not practically move around the stage, her voice seems to emerge from almost every nook and cranny of her body. Although the successive words of the piece can be heard from her lips, they seem to be controlled by her gestures. The following phrases change her face, which sometimes seems innocent like a child's, only to take on a grimace of pain or pleasure that is difficult to define in the most exciting moments of the song. The artist's hypnotic gestures and body motions leave the viewer with the question of whether the face they are staring at (and listening to) belongs to a woman or perhaps to a man? This question reveals Anohni's secret – her voice is more than one body and definitely more than one gender. It is as if this amazing voice both affectively precedes and linguistically expresses the desire to become the real "self".

This desire is present in all songs from the debut album, but it is automatically suppressed in a double way. At the level of the voice, Anohni employs falsetto ornamentation, which admittedly allows for short-lived moments of absolute tonal ambiguity, but never fully resonates all the time. On the other hand, at the language level, desire is suppressed by words that become self-commentaries on one's own identity. These are negative terms that orbit around feelings of want. Anohni often uses terms like incomplete, crippled, and ashamed. However, the desire for transformation is still extremely strong, and although it is suppressed, it is the leitmotif of the next works in the artist's output. The desire for femininity is particularly visible in the album released six years after the debut: *I Am A Bird Now*. It was here that the stage in which the singer sabotaged her own needs ended. Anohni decided to present to the world a new vision of herself, this time expressed completely directly, without the need to resort to subtle metaphors straight from fictional stories and unpleasant comments about herself. The song *For Today I Am A Boy* is especially important here. It is not only an announcement of a real queer change of identity, but also becomes a manifesto and manifestation of the trans* body:

One day I'll grow up, I'll be a beautiful woman / One day I'll grow up, I'll be a beautiful girl / One day I'll grow up, I'll be a beautiful woman / One day I'll grow up, I'll be a beautiful girl / But for today I am a child, for today I am a boy / For today I am a child, for today I am a boy / For today I am a child, for today I am a boy.

Anohni sees being a man / boy as an essential stage in growing up to her true female / girl form. Queer feminism (a part of the Third Wave of Feminism which presents more inclusive and anti-categorical sexualities) appears on an invisible horizon here, but its strength influences the perception of a future, finally complete self. Although the lyrical part is obvious here, only the vocal expresses this desire in a pure way. The lines about the coming femininity are sung with a single strong voice, there is no swing or "shameful" ornamentation in it that would inhibit the singer's fantasy. However, the parts that tell about the present male form of the body vibrate with polyphony. Anohni wants to prove once again that her singing resonates from more than one body, both the present one and the coming one – yet unnamed. In one of the polyphonic verses the core of the trance identity appears, because Anohni sings that she knows that there is already a womb inside which she will feel clean and full when she finally grows up to be a girl or a woman: "I know a womb within me / One day I'll grow up / Feel it full and pure". Perhaps it is this symbolic womb that becomes the bodily (though immaterial) source of the singer's desire? Filled with air, it vibrates and sings from inside her, expanding the potential of her body. Is this what a queer utopia sounds like? With a polyphonic voice and a desire greater than one body?

Her last album does not sound like an individual desire anymore. The 2016 premiere of *Hopelessness* marked the official moment when Antony publicly gave way to Anohni. It is difficult to find the intimate confessions and the need for transformation on this album, so well-known from the singer's previous projects. *Hopelessness*, according to the singer herself, was an expression of anger at social injustice and at the waste of world resources. Eleven songs, forty-one minutes of music. Each

path touches upon the most contemporary problems facing humanity. It all begins with *Drone Bomb Me*, in which the artist describes the drama of wartime death. In *4 DEGREES*, which is a direct wish for the destruction of humanity as a result of the climate crisis. Obama song, in which the singer expresses disappointment with the rule of the former president of America – the country, which is also the target of criticism in the song named *Execution*. It is here that Anohni sings about the death penalty as the ultimate desire and fulfillment of the American dream. Even the love song *I Don't Love You Anymore* tells of the sadness of lost trust and buried hope for a caring interpersonal relationship (reciprocity that also resounds in Anohni's words as a connection with the political system). As you can see, the choice of the title *Hopelessness* was not entirely accidental. An interesting solution was the introduction of accompaniment in the form of electronic music, the stylistic span of which presents sound solutions typical of trip-hop, electro and trap. By abandoning classical instruments, the vocalist's singing seems even more detached from its real source. It is also much more spacious and vibrant. The pulsating electronic sounds of the title track *Hopelessness* perfectly complement the regretful voice of Anohni, who sees a virus devastating the planet in humanity. For the first time, Anohni's voice is actually aimed at us and not inside her. It is as if solipsism and her journey to the symbolic womb of femininity ended with gender transgression. In the light of the ecological crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, the project *Hopelessness* seems to be an even more current and still extremely critical commentary on the present day from the perspective of queer femininity.

Conclusion

Cher has changed the rules of the patriarchal game which was crucial for next generations of female singers, although the real embodiment of radical trans-music-identity belongs to Anohni. Cher and Anohni present modern and radical forms of femininity that do not yield to the yoke of patriarchal law. Cher's transhuman body is a form of expanding aesthetic possibilities and acquiring new techno-vocal qualities. Anohni's body and voice interrupted classically understood dichotomy between what is ascribed to men and what is reserved for women. Cher has introduced transhuman revolution for broader audience but it was Anohni who took this aesthetic to the next level. Both Cher and Anohni present forms of transmogrification. They are representations of the Other due to make otherness more familiar. They became Others because of their trans(human) voices. Otherness which was caused by technological improvement (trans-practice) and individual personality (trans-subjectivity). Thanks to that those vocals cannot be easily categorized and drowned out. To quote Jack Halberstam, like any other transhuman and trans* body, Cher and Anohni: "represent the art of becoming, the necessity of imagining, and the fleshly insistence of transitivity" (Halberstam 2017: 136). Their voices expand gender meanings and provoke to redefine modern identity. Cher and Anohni represent trans(human) femininity which is a critical symbol of queer utopia – necessary for reparative thinking about the still misogynistic present reality. Thanks to their examples we can experience how trans(human) corporeality has taken a turn

from fiction to reality but not necessarily on the visual level but rather a sonic one. Nevertheless if transhuman or transgender, the sonorous body expands division of sex and therefore social and cultural expectations and stereotypes about gender roles not only in the music industry.

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Abstract

In this article, I want to present trans(human) Cher and Anohni's voice qualities. Both singers represent ambiguous and queer forms of femininity that denaturalizes the concept of gender and entangles the listener into a transgressive aesthetic experience. By using the cyborg metaphor proposed by Donna Haraway and the concept of the grain of voice by Roland Barthes, I want to show how a female voice can become a critical form of resistance to the patriarchal and misogynistic conception of femininity.

Przyszłość jest kobietą! Trans(ludzkie) głosy Cher i Anohni

Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule chcę zaprezentować właściwości trans(ludzkich) głosów Cher i Anohni. Obie piosenkarki reprezentują niejednoznaczne i queerowe formy kobiecości, która denaturalizuje pojęcie płci oraz wkłada odbiorcę w transgresywne doświadczenie estetyczne. Przy użyciu metafory cyborga zaproponowanej przez Donnę Haraway oraz koncepcji ziarna głosu Rolanda Barthesa chcę pokazać, jak kobiety głos mogą stać się krytyczną formą oporu wobec patriarchalnej i mizoginistycznej koncepcji kobiecości.

Keywords: femininity, transgender, voice, grain, transhumanism

Słowa kluczowe: kobiecość, transgender, głos, ziarno, transhumanizm

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