

**Dr. Ian Biddle (Newcastle University): Masculinity, Creativity and the Ethics of Writing: Towards a Critical Account of Musicology's Gender Politics**

*At his first encounter with the unknown upright beings, the dog in Franz Kafka's "Investigations of a dog" (1922) is overwhelmed by the music that seems to come "from the air", even though the beings (who he thinks are dogs as well) are neither speaking nor singing. What is this music? Where does it come from? Kafka's ironic and disturbing short story deals with cultural encounter, with learnt assumptions about cultural hierarchies, and about the dizzying charm of the exotic. In this presentation, I discuss these three ideas (encounter, hierarchy and the exotic) from the perspective of what Blanchot calls the "ethics of writing". I want to ask, in other words, how musicologists think about the ethics of writing in relation in particular to gendered assumptions about creativity.*

*In each of the three elements of Kafka's story an unspoken (but ever-present) set of assumptions about masculine creativity are at work: men do not speak of themselves, but of others (they are subjects, not objects); men stand for the epistemological machinery of encounter, for its knowledge and its dissemination; men are exemplars, from which others, we are asked to assume, deviate. By uncovering these hidden or embedded masculinist structures in our thinking, Kafka asks us to rethink them: we might thereby, he leads us to believe, be able to unsettle them, disturb them or ameliorate their effects. But a very particular problem emerges in this taxonomy of masculinist attitudes: how can we be sure that the diagnosis does not have the effect of a canonisation or entrenchment of these ideas? How, in other words, do we avoid a potential re-masculinization of our gender-critical discourse just at that moment that we are trying to unseat that masculinization?*

*By asking how we are able to speak of men and creativity without, as Bryce Traister puts it, enacting a "a restoration of the representations of men", I suggest, we might get to understand something of the ethical demands of writing about men. Traister notes in particular that, "where a history of masculinity as construct may contest the transcendental male, it also returns our critical view to the domain of the unquestionably male". Responding to this provocation, then, I ask how are we to proceed with a gender-sensitive musicology without restoring men to their central position of discourse.*

*I approach this question through an examination of three short case studies, the work and writings of flamenco singer Antonio Mairena, the last album Blackstar by David Bowie, and the theoretical writings of music theorist Heinrich Schenker. My approach is deliberately pluralist, and the paper seeks to query our relationship with music and masculinity by challenging musicologists to think more rigorously and critically about the political, ideological and ethical effects of their writing.*

**Vita:**

*Ian Biddle is senior lecturer in music at the International Centre for Music Studies (ICMuS), Newcastle University. Author of *Music, Masculinity and the Claims of History: the Austro-German Tradition from Hegel to Freud* (Ashgate, 2011) and *The Flamenco Effect: Authenticity, Community and Tradition in the South of Spain* (Routledge, 2017), he is a cultural theorist and musicologist, working on a range of topics in music- and sound-related*

*areas. He has interests in memory studies, Holocaust Studies, Yiddish-language cultures, musics of the Soviet Union and music and trauma.*