

Lipsynching: Popular Song Recordings and the Disembodied Voice

Merrie Snell

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School of Arts and Cultures

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration and problematization of the practice of lipsynching to pre-recorded song in both professional and vernacular contexts, covering over a century of diverse artistic practices from early sound cinema through to the current popularity of vernacular internet lipsynching videos. This thesis examines the different ways in which the practice provides a locus for discussion about musical authenticity, challenging as well as re-confirming attitudes towards how technologically-mediated audio-visual practices represent musical performance as authentic or otherwise. It also investigates the phenomenon in relation to the changes in our relationship to musical performance as a result of the ubiquity of recorded music in our social and private environments, and the uses to which we put music in our everyday lives. This involves examining the meanings that emerge when a singing voice is set free from the necessity of inhabiting an originating body, and the ways in which under certain conditions, as consumers of recorded song, we draw on our own embodiment to imagine “the disembodied”. The main goal of the thesis is to show, through the study of lipsynching, an understanding of how we listen to, respond to, and use recorded music, not only as a commodity to be consumed but as a culturally-sophisticated and complex means of identification, a site of projection, introjection, and habitation, and, through this, a means of personal and collective creativity.

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Chapter 3: Diegetic Lipsynch Numbers

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YouGhost – installation documentation, Sage-Gateshead 2010

Introduction

[After choir practice I] go home in disgrace and go to my room and lie on my bed and wonder why God was so cruel to me, when what I most want to be in life is a singer. To be like Elvis, or be like Ezio Pinza, or be like George Beverly Shea! And stand up on stage somewhere, with light all over me, and sing to people in a marvellous voice that would tell people that life was full of magnificent surprises! And instead, he gave me a voice that tells people to ‘look out!’, ‘be careful!’. And so, to make myself feel better, I do as I always do and put on a record of Ezio Pinza from *South Pacific* ... and pretend it’s me singing before a vast audience of people who’ve come to hear me. And I close my eyes as the music starts. And I face the dresser and the window, and I throw my head back. And I open my mouth and I mouth the words; just as my mother walks into the room with a load of socks in her hands and walks in front of me—between me and the footlights—puts the socks in the drawer, looks at me, walks out.¹

Lipsynching: Approaches and Perspectives

- Lipsynching
- Miming
- Dubbing
- Doubling
- Playback
- Ghosting
- Impersonation
- Picturization
- Ventriloquism
- Plagiarism

These are some of the terms we use to describe the practices and processes by which a voice is severed from its body and made to inhabit a new body, producing a hybrid, a composite that can call into question the authenticity and integrity of both. This thesis is an exploration and problematization of the practice of lipsynching to pre-recorded song in both professional and vernacular contexts, covering over a century of diverse artistic practices from early sound cinema through to the current popularity of vernacular internet lipsynching videos. In this thesis I shall be examining the different ways in which the practice provides a locus for discussion about musical authenticity, challenging as well as reconfirming attitudes towards how technologically-mediated

¹ Garrison Keillor, ‘Me and Choir’, transcribed by M. Snell from Keillor, G., *The News from Lake Wobegon: Spring*, audio CD released by High Bridge Company, 1998.

audio-visual practices represent musical performance as authentic or otherwise, as well as relating the phenomenon to the changes in our relationship to musical performance as a result of the ubiquity of recorded music in our social and private environments,² and the uses to which we put music in our everyday lives.³ What does it mean when a singing voice is set free from the necessity of inhabiting an originating body? How, under certain conditions, as consumers of recorded song, do we draw on our own embodiment to imagine the disembodied? This last question leads the way to the main goal of my thesis: an understanding of how we listen to, respond to, and use recorded music, not only as a commodity to be consumed but as a culturally-sophisticated and complex means of identification, a site of projection, introjection, and habitation, and, through this, a means of personal and collective creativity.

I take a two-fold approach to the methodologies I use to investigate lipsynching. The first is a scholarly treatment—a cultural-historical and hermeneutic approach—by which I examine lipsynching in a variety of historical contexts along with the interplay among them, as well as examining instances of lipsynching (and related issues) in commercially released films, TV broadcasts, and the user-generated lipsynching on YouTube, as primary sources. Secondly, I include practice-based research in which I create works that explore, test, or illuminate the theories and observations detailed in my scholarship. In order to theorize a way of thinking about lipsynching, I am forced to consider the interdependence of thinking-ness and doing-ness of what is I believe is at its most basic level a musical activity. I draw upon Christopher Small's concept of "musicking" where he insists that music is not a noun but a verb, not a thing but an activity.⁴ Seen in this light, the project of gaining insight into lipsynching depends upon establishing a dialogue between scholarship and practice. Utilizing this approach I was able to form my contention that lipsynching, for all the controversy surrounding its use and the doubts as to its artistic worth throughout its history, is, at the end of the day, a *creative* practice, which is therefore best understood through artistic and participatory means.

² See Kassabian, Anahid, *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013).

³ See DeNora, Tia, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴ Small, Christopher, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening* (Hanover/London: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), passim.

Since 2005, there has been what we might call a lipsynching “craze” which is being played out through social networking and file-sharing sites on the internet, in large part facilitated by affordable digital audio-visual technologies. Lipsynching, while regarded as a mortal—though increasingly ubiquitous—sin against authenticity for professional popular music performers, has become a leisure pursuit and, as I shall argue, a genuine mode of expression for vast numbers of the new PC (personal computer) practitioners. (The “craze” has also extended to television programs, such as *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*, in which Fallon has staged a number of “Lipsynch Offs” with his celebrity guests; the popular competitive drag-queen show, *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, in which each week the elimination of one of the two lowest scoring contestants is decided by a lipsynch performance introduced with the phrase “And now, it is time to *Lipsynch for your Life*”. Sitcoms such as *The Office* (American version) have featured lipdubs and advertisers, such as Cadbury’s, are also using lipsynching to sell their products, products with no prior relationship to the song being lipsynched.) These practitioners draw on lipsynching’s drag show forerunners, along with the conventions of music video, and the heretofore “private” world of bathroom- or bedroom-mirror performance to re-imagine, re-appropriate, and share experiences and creativity in connection to (usually) commercially available, recorded music. It is perhaps the bathroom- or bedroom-mirror mode of performance that is most often invoked when we watch YouTube lipsynchs; watching many of these videos there can be a feeling of voyeurism, a sense that we are watching something private, an unguarded moment often revealing some personal vulnerability. For all the posing and mugging, for all the calculated silliness, we can find something “authentic”, something “felt” and “human” being communicated through this practice.

I find this aspect particularly interesting, for the bathroom- (or bedroom) mirror lipsynch, once a closely guarded secret and source of potential embarrassment (which is the subject of the Garrison Keillor excerpt at the start of this chapter), is now captured on camera by the performers themselves and distributed for consumption by potential millions. And though many of these videos are marked by a degree of exhibitionism, I see the practice as also having a strongly dialogic function, in which relationships, both real and idealized, are formed and displayed. The mask of identification with a particular song or singer affords the lipsyncher a degree of protection that allows for relaxation of other social masks and affords the viewer a glimpse of something genuine, perhaps even essential. Even the most playfully parodic lipsynchs provide access to

more private areas of identity and identification. Despite its playful and even crass aspects, however, or maybe even because of them in some instances, lipsynching is a site at which much more is being worked through than just the uncomplicated imitation of an admired star. As I will argue in later chapters of the thesis, lipsynching can be seen to situate many of the concerns attendant upon the phenomenon of sound recording, its ambiguous relations to “real life”, even the extent to which there is an entirely *uncanny* dimension to the disembodied voice with which lipsynching, in some of its forms, plays.

Crucial to my investigations is the extent to which recorded song has affixed itself to our everyday lives through a gradual process of assimilation. With the introduction of each new technology we have moved a step closer to our current condition in which recorded music has become what Annahid Kassabian has termed, “ubiquitous music”,⁵ a condition resulting in what I will call the “soundtracked life”, an idea which I shall articulate in detail in Chapters three and five. The soundtracked life did not occur overnight nor was it “born yesterday”. The ways in which we now *use* music have in many ways changed dramatically over the course of a little over a century. At the turn of the twentieth century recorded sound had existed for over two decades, but recorded music at that time did not accompany the daily activities of most people, as it does now, nor form any sort of backdrop to their lives. I argue that it is the pairing of music with the cinematic image that began what I might call a “sonic pedagogy” which changed not only the way we listen to music, but the way we listen to our own lives. We live now in an age in which it is not uncommon to perceive ourselves as moving through a musical soundtrack. The movies, from the very beginning, have taught us this. Even the “silents” were teaching audiences to pair the moving image with musical accompaniment, the origins of which can be found partly in the mood-setting music of melodrama. There were also, however, practical, technological aspects to the introduction of musical accompaniment in the silents. Music was used to mask the sound of the projector, and to keep the audience interested during transitions, filling in the gaps left by the image and smoothing scene transitions. What started, then, as a rather awkward necessity of silent picture “performance”, has by the twenty-first century taken on an *almost* natural quality in that our ears have grown accustomed, through repetition and layering of experience, to the pairing of music and image, have, in fact, in a number of daily circumstances, come to *expect* this. Our sonic environment

⁵ Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, passim.

has been changed dramatically by recorded music, and, along the way, our increased identification with it—a move from the “our song” of romance and the “our music” of self-identifying groups to the “my music” of the personal stereo as a means of communication and self-identification of the individual - in other words, the soundtracked life. In some cases, particularly among youth and young adults (who are more likely to have grown up in this environment), the absence of “soundtrack” is felt to be intolerable.⁶

Also important in theorizing the vernacular practice of lipsynching is the effect of the professionalization of musical performance in Post-Enlightenment western society. The late eighteenth and especially the nineteenth centuries gave us the star system and with it a hierarchical system of musical production which created the conditions for the downgrading or peripheralization of the amateur. Music became less of a self-produced activity of amateurs and more of a commodity, produced and controlled by an emerging commercial music industry. One could argue that in the twentieth century recorded music became the fundamental cultural commodity to infiltrate daily life, at least until the widespread dissemination of television. More than television, however, recorded music also became a more flexible commodity; television requires a different kind of attention, more intentionally focused, and located, whereas music is in a sense more mobile, something that has made it possible for people to put it to their own uses, whenever and wherever, with whomever they choose. In short, television is “over there”; musical recordings are “here”. Recorded music makes possible a more participatory relationship, its flexibility and transportability creates an *invitation* to use recordings in new, novel, and *personal* ways. It is the “other side” of the commodification of musical entertainment: the feeling of ownership conferred on the consumers of its products. This thesis is in part an attempt to trace a media education that has led to the widespread practice of lipsynching in vernacular contexts by first looking at the ways it has been used in commercial contexts.

Participant Observation / Creative Practice: Fredasterical and *YouGhost*

What will become clear in this thesis is my contention that lipsynching is above all else a creative practice and an example of musicking. As I have already stated, it requires participatory forms of research to be fully understood. Under the user name,

⁶ See Williams, C., “Does It Really Matter? Young People and Popular Music”, *Popular Music*, 20/2, (May, 2001), 237-8.

“Fredasterical”, I have therefore produced my own lipsynching videos in an attempt to orient myself towards the practice by way of a kind of participant-observation process. Through this activity, I was able to try out ideas and intuitions about the experience of re-embodiment of the voice of another while also, through posting the results to youtube.com and vimeo.com, to become part of an online community of lipsynching performers, fans, and detractors. The experience of making the videos public—of performing and being judged—was an important and illuminating part of the practice. While gaining valuable insight into the makers of these videos through observation and my own efforts, I also gained a much better understanding of the audience, the consumers who watch and rate, download and comment on these works.

My original intent was to make videos in a variety of different styles—from the simple straight-ahead, direct-address approach popular with many YouTube vloggers and lipsynchers to those that are more inventive, more “produced”, if you will. Constructing Fredasterical as an alter-ego, or *egos*, I was able to explore issues that shall be addressed throughout this thesis, such as ambiguity, gendering, assuming a persona, the resultant bleed-through of an authentic “self”, “camp”, issues of ownership and copyright, censorship, and the appropriation of a DIY practice by the culture industry.

By way of an example, I will briefly detail Fredasterical’s “hit”, a lipsynched performance in paper masks to M’s 1979 recording of ‘Pop Muzik’, which soon after its appearance on vimeo.com was chosen as a vimeo “staff pick” and featured on their home page.⁷ The result of the promotional boost from vimeo was that the video “went viral”. It has garnered over 50,000 views on vimeo, over 20,000 on YouTube, and has also been downloaded and embedded into new contexts on personal and company blogs⁸ and other video-sharing sites, making it hard to tabulate the exact number of views it has actually received. For instance, through a Google search I found that it had been posted to a Turkish video-sharing site, vidivodo.com, where it has been viewed over a million and a half times and was listed as tenth most popular video on the site at the time I discovered it.⁹

⁷ YouTube version available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLnycVa20ts>. vimeo.com version available at: <https://vimeo.com/2522502>.

⁸ See Appendix 1, fig. 2, 3, and 4, for example.

⁹ See Appendix 1, fig. 1.

Part of the video's popularity can be traced to the paper half-masks I wore as I performed the song. I filmed myself lipsynching to the lead vocal and then again to the backing vocals wearing twelve different masks, usually doing multiple takes of each mask for each vocal line (I did over seventy complete takes in all). In the process of repetition Fredasterical assumed and refined different identities to suit each mask, and in turn each mask and each performance afforded new ways of listening. My experience of the song, in other words, changed with each change of identity. For example, in the Geisha mask Fredasterical always smiled. The smile was itself a mask (garnered perhaps from some awful stereotyped portrait of a Geisha hauled out of my subconscious from an old TV show or film). Yet as Fred-as-Geisha mouthed the words and projected the composite into the camera the song never fully penetrated her. M's voice came out of her but wasn't *of* her; she floated on the surface (Interestingly, while my experience of Geisha-Fred was distancing, one commenter wrote, "I really love the 'little you' in the top left corner [the Geisha]... who smiles more than the rest. May I presume that is your personality sneaking, giggling through?"). None of this was planned. Fred donned a mask, pressed "play" on iTunes, and a persona appeared as if from central casting to fill a role not yet conceived. The other characters formed through a similarly spontaneous, intuitive process. Sailor-Fred became one of the strongest characters, and in the final edit served as the primary site of embodiment for M's leading vocal. He appeared before the camera as a whole personality, and when he opened his mouth it felt that M's voice was already in it and of it. My experience as sailor-Fred was the most penetrative; it felt like the most truthful embodiment, if you will, of these many rounds of *listening*; lipsynching is, if nothing else, an intensified form of listening, and when a video is shared you, the performer, are not only saying "Look at me!" but also "Listen to this!" (See *DVD 1 > Introduction: Fredasterical Portfolio > Track 1 -- 'Pop Muzik'*).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect to the on-line life of the 'Pop Muzik' video was its reception—seeing who its viewers were and the various uses to which they put it. Many viewers observed that the different incarnations had "different personalities". Some comments expressed feelings of gratitude for "brightening my day": one viewer wrote, "I still come back to this video when I need a smile"; another, "I've watched it 50 times". Among the positive comments the video received, some called it "an inspiration" to their own creativity. I was contacted by a schoolteacher in Spain, for instance, who told me that her students were inspired to make their own lipsynching

video after watching mine. Some negative commenters were disconcerted by the gender ambiguity caused by a woman lipsynching to a man's voice. The masks compounded the ambiguity leading some to assume that Fred was in fact a man in lipstick. A viewer on one site wrote that he liked the song but that the video was "a little too effeminate" for him. Discomfort with the androgyny was expressed in no uncertain terms on one Chinese site, on which a commenter wrote, "Is it a man or a woman?", to which another responded, "He disgusts me". (On another video, commenters asked, in a derogatory manner, if I was a man and if I was gay. Somehow that was important information for them to have). On the other hand, the 'Pop Muzik' video was posted on many LGBT sites, and was received, in the words of one viewer, as "more camp than a row of tents. Fab! Fab! Fab!".

In addition to viewer responses, I had some surprising offers from professional entities. An ad agency in London, for instance, contacted me about using this and another of Fredasterical's videos—'Love Is Like a Bottle of Gin'—to inspire her staff; after viewing the 'Pop Music' video, a Senior Vice President for A&R at Warner's (which, ironically, was at the time a chief pursuant of copyright-violation litigation targeting social media) was briefly interested in hiring me to direct a music video for a new group he was signing (for better or worse, this came to nothing in the end); an advertising agency in Israel contacted me about potentially using the 'Pop Muzik' video in a televised ad campaign. It was fascinating to see first-hand how the various industries that fight the practice of user-generated lipsynching videos on copyright grounds by filing lawsuits against video-sharing websites are also busy finding ways to appropriate this material for their own ends.¹⁰

The overriding feeling I have about Fred's work is multi-layered. Fred is a construction, as are the recorded voices she appropriates; and like the recordings, she ultimately does not *belong* to any one person (me, for example) to the exclusion of anyone else's claims on her. She enters into social relations that I do not, existing on screens and playing in rooms that I have never seen, for people I know nothing about. She began life as an *activity*, an active engagement between my body, the voices of the song recordings, the camera, the screen, and my immediate environment, but now has an existence beyond the instance of her making. Recorded songs have a similarly social existence, regardless

¹⁰ As a precaution against my own videos being targeted for violations, I chose songs that were not owned by Warner's or any of the other corporations actively pursuing litigation at the time. This was a form of self-censorship, an issue that I will probe in depth in Chapter 5.

of the originating artists and the legal copyright holders. Each listener actualises the song, draws meaning from it, but also invests meaning in it, a process which I contend leads to a culturally-potent shared ownership, even if the legal representatives of the recording companies disagree. The lipsynchers on YouTube serve as a particularly vivid concretization of this.

The creation and dissemination of these videos was a key factor in some of my later theorizations about the disembodied/re-embodied voice, and especially the strength of the investments and identifications that people experience through popular song recordings. In addition to ‘Pop Muzik’, I posted videos in which I lipsynched to Willy Nelson singing ‘Always On My Mind’, The Magnetic Fields’ recordings of ‘How Fucking Romantic’ and ‘Love Is Like a Bottle of Gin’, Kate Rusby’s ‘My Young Man’, Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders’ ‘The Game of Love’ and Frank and Nancy Sinatra’s duet, ‘Something Stupid’. In conjunction with the thesis I am submitting these seven videos, which can be found on the DVD included herein (*see DVD1 > Introduction: Fredasterical Portfolio > tracks 2-7 – titles follow the above order*).

My ongoing engagement with the population of YouTube lipsynchers and the kind of relationships that develop, have significantly informed my approach to this material as a kind of lived (and lived-in) form of musical practice. In a different artistic vein—a different kind of creative intervention—I composed and built *YouGhost*, a sound and video installation piece which was exhibited at the Sage Gateshead in 2009 and 2010.¹¹ As a site where many of the ideas explored in the thesis coalesce, the piece will be described in detail in the section, “Reflections: Lipsynching as Art” (pages 208-12). Documentation will also be included (*see DVD3*).

Summary of Thesis Contents

Any understanding of lipsynching needs to be contextualized by looking at the relationships that arise when the voice is disembodied from its originating body through the process of recording. In the first chapter of this thesis, I engage with issues of the recorded, hence disembodied, voice, particularly Steven Connor’s idea of the “vocalic body” and Rick Altman’s “sound hermeneutic”, along with various other theorists, such as Ingold, Lastra, Clayton, Crary, Chion and Schaeffer, whose insights on sound-image

¹¹ Snell, M., *YouGhost*, exhibited in 2009 and 2010 at The Sage-Gateshead performing arts centre, Baltic Keys, Gateshead, UK.

relationships provide crucial background to my theorizing of voice/body relationships. I also discuss the problems of configuring “the Live” in a mediatized age, with particular attention to the views of Philip Auslander and Steve Wurtzler, and how this relates to the practice of lipsynching. In the second chapter I present a brief history of sound in cinema, the development of lipsynching as the standard technique for representing singing on screen, with a detailed hermeneutic treatment of the film *Singin’ in the Rain*, the iconic text to thematize lipsynching in cinema. I also begin to explore a kind of sonic pedagogy that informs our ideas about lipsynching and authenticity that resonate today in recent lipsynching “scandals” concerning its use in live concerts and television appearances. In the third chapter I address cinematic lipsynching that is fully diegetic and foregrounds the activity as an expressive practice of “regular people”—a tacit acknowledgement of the important uses to which people put popular song in their everyday lives. I also argue that this acts as the next step in the process of “sonic pedagogy” that I began to outline in chapter two. The fourth chapter is more specific, dealing with the prominent use of lipsynching in the works of Dennis Potter and David Lynch. Through a hermeneutic study of some key works, I expand on four important ways in which lipsynching is configured: lipsynching as a modernist device to create distance in a viewer; as occasion for an Adornian critique on the value of popular song; as a reclamation of its value in the meanings it helps its audience to express; and as a carrier of the Uncanny. In the final chapter I examine the vernacular practice of lipsynching, represented by internet lipsynch and lipdub videos, particularly as seen on YouTube. In this chapter, I explore the ideas of the soundtracked life and the role of the amateur in greater depth, and the passion with which many performers and viewers defend the practice as one of artistic and social value. I conclude the thesis with a description of my installation piece *YouGhost* and the various meanings gleaned through the process of creating it that informed, and were informed by, the rest of the thesis.

A Few Final Notes

No comprehensive treatment of lipsynching as a creative practice exists. Indeed, there is relatively little written about lipsynching in any form, vernacular or otherwise. Some areas of exception include works referring to *Singin’ in the Rain* and the Bollywood practice, which is termed, in a fascinating upending of Hollywood notions of sound-image relationships, “picturization”. Yet even in these cases lipsynching is seldom the primary focus. Much of my research, therefore, was conducted through study of primary

sources—YouTube videos and commercially released films and television—and the rest involved a process of “stitching together” scholarship from a number of different disciplines. Of these film studies and musicology were the most prominent, but I also drew from psychology, sociology, communication studies, and art history. The scattershot approach was necessitated by the need to invent my own frame in which to contain an under-theorized, large and rather unwieldy topic within the frame of a single doctoral thesis; as a result, some omissions were necessary. Drag performance, for example, while an important site of engagement is only mentioned in passing, and while it would be crucial to a complete treatment of lipsynching, it is in itself an enormous area for investigation, one which I hope to address in future research. Similarly, Bollywood is absent save for a brief footnote that I include to demonstrate the significant differences between how Bollywood and Hollywood approach lipsynching. Lipsynching (as well as related practices and sites of intervention involving, for instance, audio delay and recorded music as found object) has also been used in interesting ways in the last four or five decades by video and sound artists, and there is a growing body of work¹² that complicates ideas of the original versus the copy, the dissociation of voice, and the appropriation of and reuse of sonic objects and materials in new contexts and bodies. While too large a topic to include in this thesis, I intend to study it in depth for later work. The very different, but not unrelated, practice of karaoke—it occupies similar territories and similarly transgresses the amateur/professional divide—is also left out of the present work. Finally, the volume of ethnographic data I came across in my engagements with primary sources would have been too cumbersome to present in their enormity while, at the same time, also having the space to encompass the various theorizations and insights about the practice as they emerged through the primary research and the participant observation/artistic practice aspects. Therefore, the case studies presented represent a tiny fraction of the potential and had to be carefully selected.

Finally, There are a number of different spellings for the term in common usage, including “lipsynch”, “lip-sync”, “lip-synch”, “lipsync”, “lip sync”, and “lip synch” (not to mention the many synonymous terms, such as “lip-dub”, “lip sing”, and “playback”). I propose the adoption of the non-hyphenated compound “lipsynch” as the correct form,

¹² A few notable examples include, Bruce Nauman: *Lip Sync* (1969); Steina Vasulka: *Let It Be* (1970); Richard Serra and Nancy Holt: *Boomerang* (1974); Luis Gispert: *Can't It Be That It Was All So Simple Then* (2001) and *Block Watching* (2002); Christian Marclay: *Video Quartet* (2002); Robert Lepage: *LipSynch* (2007); Candice Breitz: *Working Class Hero* (2006); Sam Taylor-Wood: *Prelude in Air* (2005) and *Sigh* (2008).

as it retains the ‘h’ of the parent word, “synchronization”, and also, by de-hyphenation, simplifies the spelling of a word that needs simplification, as it has now come to be used as verb, noun, and adjective (You can “lipsynch”, you can watch a “lipsynch”, and you can download a “lipsynch video”). I use this spelling throughout the thesis except where found in direct quotation, in which case I reproduce the spelling as given in the source material.

Chapter 1

The “Problems and Astonishments of the Dissociated Voice”¹³

By offering itself up to be heard, every sound event loses its autonomy, surrendering the power and meaning of its own structure to the various contexts in which it might be heard, to the varying narratives that it might construct.¹⁴

Although it has been a human fascination and preoccupation for millennia, the disembodiment and re-embodiment of the voice has become a particularly acute site of discursive activity and debate since Edison’s invention of mechanical sound recording in 1877, and the various technological developments and cultural practices that have proceeded from this. Though public experience of the recorded voice was initially restricted to the demonstration of the technological phenomenon itself,¹⁵ and though Edison initially imagined many and various ways in which the recorded voice might be utilized in industry and the domestic sphere,¹⁶ the wholesale appropriation of sound recording by what was to become the phonographic industry was instrumental in giving recorded song a ubiquitous place in modern culture. It is arguable that this ubiquity has itself contributed strongly to the cultural significance of the disembodied/re-embodied voice, affording the means through which such voices come to occupy a significant and central place in culture, and drawing the attention of critically and ethnologically minded scholars from across a range of disciplines.¹⁷

¹³ Connor, S., *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

¹⁴ Altman, R., “The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound”, in Altman, R., (ed.), *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 19.

¹⁵ See, for example, the Vicomte de Moncel’s account, (du Moncel, T., Vicomte, *The Telephone, The Microphone and The Phonograph* (London: C. Keegan Paul and Co., 1879), 310-311); Anon, “The Phonograph”, *Journal of Science* 58 (April 1878), p. 245 reproduced in Wile, R. R., “The Wonder of the Age—The Edison Invention of the Phonograph”, in *Phonographs and Gramophones* (Edinburgh: Royal Scottish Museum, 1977), 22, fig. 10.

¹⁶ Edison imagined, among other possible uses, letter writing, speaking books for the blind, elocution teaching, preserving family sayings and last words of the dying, music boxes, speaking dolls, clocks that announce the time, preservation of language, preserving the instructions of a teacher, spelling lessons, and “the perfection ... of the telephone’s art”, as well as the reproduction of music (Edison, T. A., “The Phonograph and its Future”, *The North American Review*, 126 (January-June 1878), 525-536).

¹⁷ For example, in addition to Connor’s *Dumbstruck* already referenced, are works such as the psychoanalytical theory-oriented *Dolar, M., *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), *Zizek, S and Salecl, R., *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), *Poizat, M., *The Angel’s Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), and Rosolato, G., “La Voix: entre corps et langage”, *Revue Francais de Psychoanalyse* 38/1 (1974). A far from exhaustive list from a range of other perspectives would include Ihde, D., *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1976), Peters, J. D., *Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), *Sconce, J., *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to*

The fascination with disembodied voices can, in part, be ascribed to the asymmetry of our culturally-mediated experiences of sound and image. We know that seeing and hearing, image and sound, are experientially intertwined and complementary but we also inhabit a culture that separates them from one another and even—philosophically—sets them at odds. It is worth examining this phenomenon in some detail, in order to ground some of the discussions that follow. We would, for instance, agree that a comprehensive representation of the world should include its sound; the inclusion of the so-called “Golden Record” on the Voyager 1 and 2 spacecraft is eloquent testimony to this. Alongside 115 images from the earth, “a variety of natural sounds, such as those made by surf, wind and thunder, birds, whales, and other animals” along with “musical selections from different cultures and eras” and greetings to the finders of the spacecraft in fifty-five different languages¹⁸ are inscribed into a 16 rpm analogue disc, inside an aluminium sleeve that contains a record stylus and graphic instructions as to how to play back the sounds. We also know that a sound does not exist without something to make it, that it is not separate from its cause, and the quasi-philosophical conundrum “if a tree falls in the woods and no one is there to hear it does it make a sound?” almost always carries the common-sense answer, “of course it does”. We might just as well ask “if no one is there to *see* it... what then?”, but significantly, I think, we don’t usually ask that question, and this outlines one of the key differences between how we culturally experience sound and image. If we came across the tree later and saw it lying on the forest floor, we could recreate the event in the imagination; we can imagine ourselves witnessing the event in absentia, as it were, but the ephemerality of sound makes the original question both more viable, and less resolvable in our minds. To know a sound, or a sonic event, we often have an urge to locate its source, even if only to confirm what we imagine has taken place. If we view a fallen tree and it is now silent we do not ask of it, what sounds *did* you make? We accept that it is both there and silent. But if we have heard the sound of a tree falling in the distance, we will want—need—to know what made the sound, we will want to “see for ourselves”.¹⁹

Television (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), Chion, M., *The Voice in Cinema* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999). With the exception of those texts that are asterisked above, the theoretical positions taken in these works are included in the present thesis.

¹⁸ Twenty seven pieces of music are included which, alongside sample recordings of the musics of traditional cultures of the world, includes *three* pieces by Bach, and two by Beethoven, but only one piece of (relatively) contemporary popular music, “Jonny B. Goode” by Chuck Berry, with an example of blues (Blind Willie Johnson), and a recording of New Orleans jazz by Louis Armstrong. (<http://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/music.html>)

¹⁹ We say that “seeing is believing” but, as I shall discuss presently, this is not the only story.

There is also, however, an important difference between hearing a sound and visually identifying its source, and a significant factor in this is attributable to our ability to experience sounds as being separate from their causes through sound recording. We can see something of this expressed in Pierre Schaeffer's notion of the *objet sonore*, itself arrived at through attempts to apply Husserl's phenomenological bracketing out (*epoché*) to sound. Though there are crucial differences between Husserl's phenomenological method and the objectifying methods of "hard" science (those that strive to suppress the so-called subjective aspects of perception), scientific objectivity and early phenomenology share something of the urge to isolate and reduce the elements of our perceptual worlds in the avowed interest of greater understanding of those worlds. As carried forwards into Schaeffer's researches, the bracketing out of the phenomena of perception, in order to know them "as they are" uses sound recording to isolate the physical manifestation of a sound from its source and re-present it to the listener on loudspeakers, with no visual confirmation of the actual source possible. In terms of understanding sonic perception this is a marker of an aspired-for control in which the sonic is isolated from the visual in order to understand the specifically *sonic* attributes of sonic perception. Schaeffer chooses the term "acousmatic" to refer to sounds that have been dissociated from their sources, after Pythagorean philosophy where, allegedly, the speaker would address the listeners from behind a screen so that their physical presence would not distract from the significance of their speech²⁰. In Schaeffer, this acousmatic approach makes it more viable that the listener exercise what he calls "reduced listening" (*l'écoute réduite*)—effectively a Husserlian bracketing-out—in which any instinctive attempt to try to identify the origin of the sounds heard is elided in favour of listening to "the sound itself". For Schaeffer this is not so much about any inherent mystificatory properties of sound as it is about its mutability, the ways in which its abstract qualities, once it is dissociated from its indexical relations to the visual world, can be made, in the interests of a "concrete music" (a *musique concrète*) that plays across an apparently paradoxical cultural sensibility of the sensual encounter with sound and its abstraction into music.²¹

²⁰ Yoko Ono and John Lennon would famously enact this in their performance of "baggism" in which they answered questions from the press from inside a large bag in order to have their ideas heard without the distraction of their celebrity as manifested in their physical image.

²¹ Chion, M., *Guide des Objets Sonores: Pierre Schaeffer et la recherche musicale* (Paris: Editions Buchet/Chastel, 1983) in the English version by John Dack and Christine North, 2009, available at <http://www.ears.dmu.ac.uk/IMG/pdf/Chion-guide/GuideSectionI.pdf>

But, as Philip Auslander notes, the separation of sound from image that phonographic recording effects does not necessarily mean that this split is absolute and irreversible, and that “listening to recordings may always be a visual as well as aural experience”.²² The separation of sound and vision is, however, culturally strongly maintained, and in this “cultural work” it is possible to trace long-standing attitudes to seeing and hearing that inform the more general philosophical context within which the present thesis is situated. Though sound recording has arguably been a strong force in drawing attention to the separability of the senses of seeing and hearing there is, as Tim Ingold puts it, “a long tradition in the history of Western thought ... of distinguishing between vision and hearing along the lines that the former is remote and objective, cutting the viewer off from things seen, whereas the latter is intimate and subjective, establishing a kind of interpenetration or resonance between the listener and the world”.²³ Seeing and hearing, then, are not simply discreet sensory activities, but bring with them epistemological and ideological implications. This is widely acknowledged to be manifest in the fact that science is a visually-dominated discourse in which objective “truth” about the world is sought—scientists take “readings”, they draw, photograph, film, map, and illustrate phenomena in order to study them. The role of sound in scientific research, though never completely absent, is relatively restricted in comparison. The very term Enlightenment, to name the decisive turn towards a modern, scientific epistemology, is a visually-oriented term evoking, as it does, the shining of the light of reason onto our understanding of the world. Though vision and hearing are both forms of knowing, there is little doubt that for the modern West, vision is the culturally and epistemologically dominant of the five senses.²⁴ Jay Clayton notes “the absence of sound technology from most models of modernity”,²⁵ and in what is recognized as one

²² Auslander, P., *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1999), 73.

²³ Ingold, T., *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 105.

²⁴ For example, in one of the classic texts dealing with film and the conditions of artistic production in the technological age, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, Walter Benjamin mentions phonography in only two sentences, despite the fact that the essay was written almost ten years after the introduction of sound into the cinema and nearly sixty years since Edison's invention of the phonograph (Benjamin, W., “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in Arendt (ed.), *Walter Benjamin, Illuminations*, (London: Pimlico, 1999 [1936]), 214-215). Rick Altman notes that as relatively recently as 1980, “[m]ore than a half a century after the coming of sound”, that “film criticism and theory remain resolutely image-bound. Early filmmakers’ skepticism about the value of sound has been indirectly perpetuated by generations of critics for whom the cinema is essentially a visual art, sound serving as little more than a superfluous accompaniment” Altman, R., “Introduction: Cinema/Sound”, *Yale French Studies* 60, (1980), 3.

²⁵ Clayton, J., “The Voice in the Machine: Hazlitt, Hardy, James”, in Masten, J., Stallybrass, P. and Vickers, N., (eds.), *Language Machines: Technologies of Literary Production* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 212.

of the most thorough-going analyses of the visual in modern culture, Jonathan Crary writes about how the autonomization of sight in the nineteenth century, “unloosened” the eye, as he puts it, “from the network of referentiality incarnated in tactility and its subsequent relation to perceived space”. This process “enabled the new objects of vision (whether commodities, photographs, or the act of perception itself) to assume a mystified and abstract identity, sundered from any relation to the observer’s position within a cognitively unified field”.²⁶ In Crary’s account, sight becomes more abstracted, more autonomous, and therefore more in tune with the objectifying and abstracting cultural tendencies of modernity. Jacques Attali also points to the dominance of vision in the West when he says “[f]or twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for the hearing. It is not legible, but audible”.²⁷ Finally, Douglas Kahn poses the question, “[How]... can listening be explained when the subject in recent theory has been situated, no matter how askew, in the web of the gaze, mirroring, reflection, the spectacle, and other ocular tropes?”²⁸

Though Schaeffer’s work was initially conducted as experiments in sonic perception it has arguably done important work in offering alternative possibilities for knowledge to the West’s visually-dominated epistemology. Nevertheless, and as Tim Ingold has argued, we must question whether it is ultimately productive to replace one artificial (and arguably misrepresentative) separated sense modality with another.²⁹ Ingold insists on the inter-relatedness and interdependence of the senses, refusing the temptation to simply turn the tables on the visual and valorise the sonic in another instance of quasi-scientific isolationism.

Ingold accepts, initially, the culturally and historically embedded notion that vision, more than hearing, is affiliated most closely with objectivism and science.

²⁶ Crary, J., *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1990) cited in Connor, S., “Voice, Technology and the Victorian Ear”, 12th September 1997, <http://www.stevensonconnor.com/phones.htm> - accessed 12th July 2014.

²⁷ Attali, J., *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.

²⁸ Kahn, D., “Introduction: Histories of Sound Once Removed” in Kahn, D. and Whitehead, G., (eds.), *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1994), 4.

²⁹ Ingold, T., “Against Soundscape”, in Carlyle, A (ed.), *Autumn Leaves: Sound and the Environment in Artistic Practice* (Paris: Double Entendre, 2007), 10-13.

Of all the implications of the contrast between vision and hearing, the most consequential has been the notion that vision, since it is untainted by the subjective experience of light, yields a knowledge of the outside world that is rational, detached, analytical and atomistic. Hearing, on the other hand, since it rests on the immediate experience of sound, is said to draw the world into the perceiver, yielding a kind of knowledge that is intuitive, engaged, synthetic and holistic. For those who would celebrate positive scientific enquiry as the crowning achievement of the human spirit, vision is undoubtedly the superior sense.³⁰

However, the tidiness of this allocation of relative value to sight and hearing cannot be sustained without a high degree of dissimulation. Sight, despite its alleged objectivity and suitability as the dominant mode of scientific enquiry, is ultimately “not to be trusted”.

The visual path to objective truth, it seems, is paved with illusions. Precisely because vision yields a knowledge that is indirect, based on conjecture from the limited data available in the light, it can never be more than provisional, open to further testing and the possibility of empirical refutation. But while we can never be certain of what we see, there is no doubt about what we hear. Since sound speaks directly to us, hearing does not lie.³¹

Of course this last statement is debatable and is not given as gospel but as a flip-side to the dichotomous fissure in thinking which Ingold ultimately seeks to heal. He goes further in his account, drawing on Don Ihde’s writing where he notes that “there is a tradition which holds that sound ‘personifies’”, even going so far as to speculate that the modern noun “person” might originate in the Latin verb *personare*, whose literal meaning is “to sound through”. Regardless of how factually “true” this etymology is, Ingold is intrigued by “the reasons that make it so compelling”.

These, I contend, lie in its concordance with a widely held notion that behind the visible aspect of the person, above all the face, lies an inner being that reveals itself through the voice.³²

So, as Ingold asserts, within an epistemology that seems to valorise the visual as “objective truth” vision is also the very sense most susceptible—according to this parallel epistemological tradition—to illusion (itself a visually-derived term) and deception. What is key, here, is an acknowledgement that seeing and hearing are senses that are *deployed* to do cognitive work, according to ideological and epistemological

³⁰ Ingold, *Perception*, 245-6.

³¹ Ingold, *Perception*, 246.

³² Ingold, *Perception*, 246.

frames that condition them from the culture at large. The opposition between vision and hearing has “nothing natural or pre-ordained” about it; “as often as it is reasserted in academic books, it is belied by our own experience”.³³ This is an experience in which seeing and hearing, along with the remaining three senses, mediate one another, interact, inter-relate, and reciprocally determine one another. Those philosophical voices who criticise visualism, then, “offer ... not an account of visual practice, but a critique of modernity dressed up as a critique of the hegemony of vision”.³⁴

There is then, taking Ingold’s cautionary words into account, always a danger that accounts of technologized sound come to us already pre-framed by ideas such as those of Schaeffer, or, from very different quarters, received notions of technological determinism, and that we do not adequately question some of the assertions made. This is not to disregard or deny useful insights made under the separatist episteme, which we can take as one of several different ways of comprehending what is a complex cultural phenomenon, but, as Ingold’s critique makes clear, we need to take a holistic view where the human sensorium is concerned. A key thinker whom I draw on extensively in the present thesis, Steven Connor, would be an advocate of this.³⁵ What we see and hear are one. The technologically disembodied voice behaves in ways that the embodied voice can’t, but this cannot be reduced to, or explained away by recourse to epistemological binarisms—the voice does not *need* to be put into an oppositional relation to seeing or the seen body. Ingold is clear on this: “It is as unreasonable to blame vision for the ills of modernity as it is to blame the actor for the crimes committed, on stage, by the character whose part he has the misfortune to be playing ... the responsibility for reducing the world to a realm of manipulable objects”—in other words, the objectifying of an otherwise phenomenologically involved and engaged world—“lies not with the hegemony of vision but with a ‘certain narrow conception of thought’”.³⁶ Indeed, as I shall now go on to discuss, the very transferability of voices with bodies that sound recording in part facilitates points away from reductive binarisms where the visual and the aural are concerned, with, in Connor’s words, “the voice itself ... ambivalently positioned between hearing and sight”.³⁷

³³ Ingold, *Perception*, 287.

³⁴ Ingold, *Perception*, 287. See also Ingold, *Against Soundscape*.

³⁵ See for example Connor, S., “Modernism and the Writing Hand”, March 26, 1999, <http://www.stevenconnor.com/modhand.htm> - accessed 11th July 2014.

and Connor, S., “Voice, Technology and the Victorian Ear”, 12th September 1997 <http://www.stevenconnor.com/phones.htm> - accessed 12th July 2014.

³⁶ Ingold, *Perception*, 287.

³⁷ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 43.

What is perhaps most interesting for the later parts of the present thesis is to observe the intensity and creativity with which these ambivalent relations and imaginative possibilities are played out in lipsynching. With the aim of deepening the contextual background to my investigation of the particularities of lipsynching, I would now like to outline the ways in which I understand two key conceptual frames, Connor's "vocalic body" and Altman's related concept of the "sound hermeneutic".

The 'Vocalic Body' and the 'Sound Hermeneutic'

Steven Connor, writing about ventriloquism specifically, and voice more generally, discusses the pleasure we feel when we encounter the "idealized voice": "[i]dealized voices of all kinds derive their power, prestige, and capacity to give pleasure from [a] willingness to hear other voices as one's own" [emphasis mine].³⁸ He identifies sound and cinema scholar Rick Altman's idea of "the sound hermeneutic"³⁹ which determines that a "disembodied voice [in film] must be habited in a plausible body"⁴⁰. Connor observes that "the voice seems to colour and model its container"⁴¹, to give it meaningful form, whether seen or unseen. Both Altman and Connor argue that it is a human imperative to locate the source of a sound. In Altman's words, "the sound [in cinema] asks where? and the image responds here!"⁴², regardless of the sound's true (unseen) source. The spectator-auditor "would rather attribute the sound to a dummy or shadow than face the mystery of its sourcelessness or the scandal of its production by a non-vocal (technological or 'ventral') apparatus".⁴³ We consequently "fit" the voice to the most plausible container on screen or in sight; we make this imaginative leap, and *believe* in it, rather than face the consternation of the mystery.

At the same time, as Connor observes, the voice has the power to *conjure* a body:

This [idealized, disembodied] voice ... conjures for itself a different kind of body; an imaginary body which may contradict, compete with, replace, or even reshape the actual, visible body of the speaker.⁴⁴

³⁸ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 32.

³⁹ Altman, R., "Moving Lips: Cinema as Ventriloquism", *Yale French Studies*, 60, Cinema/Sound (1980), 74.

⁴⁰ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 35.

⁴¹ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 35.

⁴² Altman, "Moving Lips", 74.

⁴³ Altman, "Moving Lips", 76-7.

⁴⁴ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 31.

The voice is subject to the source image to which we assign it, but is also master of the image, altering and adjusting our perception of both. It functions as authenticating object and productive agent, a figuration that makes the voice a contentious site of meaning. It also gives the voice a power to construct its own reality, a reality of which we are collaborators and co-conspirators. The special agency of the voice—in contrast to Ingold’s idea of the truth-telling quality of sound—allows for alternate realities, fictions, creative juxtapositions, mundanity and idealization. Voice in this sense can be viewed as causing—or itself being—an “*event*”. Connor further asserts that voice is something we do; “[m]y voice is not something that I merely have,” he writes, “or even something that I, if only in part, am. Rather, it is *something that I do*. A voice is not a condition, nor yet an attribute, *but an event* [emphasis mine]”.⁴⁵ Christopher Small, in his seminal work *Musicking* proposes that we change the noun, “music”, into the verb, “musicking” or, in its infinitive form, “to music”—as primarily *something people do*—and that we regard performance not as thing but *as event*.⁴⁶ For Altman, sound “initiates an event”. “Every hearing,” he states, “concretizes the story of that event. Or rather, it concretizes a particular story among the many that could be told about that event”.⁴⁷ John Peters historicizes and then qualifies this idea, observing that “[s]ound is fundamentally an event; it was at least until the phonograph, always historically *embodied, particular, and performative*”.⁴⁸

Voice for Connor is that part of ourselves that we can send out into the world, but it also forms a site of ambivalence between our internal and external bodies through time and space.

the voice *is* space. ...the voice may be grasped as the mediation between the phenomenological body and its social and cultural contexts. ... Vocalic space signifies the ways in which the voice is held both to operate in, and itself to articulate, different conceptions of space, as well as to enact the different relations between the body, community, time, and divinity.⁴⁹

If voice is space it can also be construed as body, and vice versa. Connor calls this the ‘vocalic body’ and explains:

⁴⁵ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 4.

⁴⁶ Small, C., *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 43.

⁴⁷ Altman, *Heterogeneity*, 23.

⁴⁸ Peters, John Durham, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), 164.

⁴⁹ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 12.

Voices are produced by bodies: but can also themselves produce bodies. The vocalic body is the idea—which can take the form of dream, fantasy, ideal, theological doctrine or hallucination—of a surrogate or secondary body, a projection of a new way of having or being a body, formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice.⁵⁰

Altman’s sound hermeneutic provides a useful illustration of how these “autonomous operations of the voice” function:

an image without a sound differs from a sound without an image in that the former is a perfectly common situation in nature (a person standing quietly), while the latter is an impossibility (sounds are always produced by something imageable). Thus the completion of the former paradigm depends on the object within the image (the person may choose to say something), while the completion of the latter depends on the auditor (who must look around and find the source of the sound).⁵¹

This functionality frees the voice and it is this freedom which produces anxieties as well as possibilities. The stability of the image, with or without an accompanying sound, renders it resistant (though certainly not immune) to the kind of creative intervention to which we may subject the voice. What you see is indeed what you get, even at its most surprising or incongruous. “I can’t believe my eyes!” is predicated on the certainty that we must and usually will. It is the exception that proves the rule. Altman explains: “By virtue of its ability to remain sourceless, sound carries with it a natural tension. Whereas images rarely ask: ‘What sound did that image make?’ every sound seems to ask, unless it has previously been categorized and located: ‘Where did that sound come from?’ That is, ‘What is the source of that sound?’”⁵² It is in our efforts to answer these questions and locate a sound’s source that we exercise creative agency and, certainly in the case of lipsynching, creative control that changes the nature of the sound and the image, real or imagined, with which we choose to associate it.

In the case of the ventriloquist’s dummy, for instance, or the lipsynched/dubbed voice in musical film, audiences are typically thought to “suspend their disbelief” in order to accept the transfer of voice as naturalistic. To suspend one’s disbelief, however, is—whatever the positive outcomes for the unity of the experience of the spectator-audience—too negative a concept for my purposes. It assumes a kind of cynicism as the natural state against which the spectator-auditor must struggle, instead of the more

⁵⁰ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 35.

⁵¹ Altman, “Moving Lips”, 73.

⁵² Altman, “Moving Lips”, 74.

productive idea of the *creative act*. It might be better to say instead that one “*expands one’s belief*”—our natural inclination to enact connections, however contradictory to conventional expectations, in order to imaginatively and collaboratively assemble something newly formed, or latent, or uncanny, comic, or highly pleasurable in the transfer of voice.

The vocalic body, the experience of a voice “conjuring” a body, and our predilection to imagine or create a body in which to locate a sourceless voice, one that is determined by our own perceptions of that voice’s quality and perceived context, history (and other associative criteria), and its “autonomous operations”, is commonplace and nearly invisible. By way of an example, we hear birdsong in the woods and we do one or more of the following: we look into the trees and try to locate the exact bird out of, perhaps, many choices, that is responsible for the sound based on its spatial coordinates. Or we imagine the species of bird that we know to make this particular sound (for example, we hear a tuneful call, liquid and improvisatory, and we conjure in our minds the generic image of a blackbird; we hear the ratchety, tuneless scrape of what we know through experience to be a pheasant). In this case the type of body is known yet non-particular (we are not able to say it is “*that bird, there*”), still a production of imagination and memory. Or, having no knowledge of birdsong attributions we recognize only that the sound has been produced by a bird and we conjure for ourselves our own image of “bird” or birdness (in quasi-Platonic terms). Or, having located a number of birds in our immediate surroundings we make an arbitrary guess based upon a feeling of “likeliness”, a subjective idea of what kind of body might produce such a sound. Or, in the unlikely event that we have never heard birdsong or have never seen a bird, we cast our imagination to an unknown entity, the outlines of which may be fuzzy or absurd, but that nevertheless are based on other sounds we have heard from other bodies in other contexts: a baby, a flute, a soprano, a squeaky pram, an imagined spirit or demon. In each of these cases we are engaged in an act of imaginative sense-making. We are creating a body out of all we know and don’t know—all our beliefs and prejudices and fancies—in which to locate the sourceless voice. Connor puts it this way:

the voice that is securely ascribed to its source knits together hearing and seeing, enabling their cooperation to be verified; but the capacity of the voice to put its source in question also keeps apart the different orders of seeing and hearing. Finally, the origin of the voice in the magical exercise of power establishes the

need for it to be integrated within the spatial and sensory fields even as it possesses the power to reopen and reintegrate those fields.⁵³

An idea similar to this is articulated by Philip Auslander in his discussion of the ideological issues surrounding “the mediatized” and “the live” and the technologies that (re)produce them. According to Auslander: “when sound is divorced from sight by virtue of technological mediation, the aural experience nevertheless evokes a visual one: ‘every mode of record listening leaves us with a need for something, if not someone, to see and touch’ [Eisenberg, *Recording Angel*, 65]⁵⁴.”⁵⁵ With today’s easy access to creative audio-visual technologies with which to combine images of oneself with the voices of others, it is not only someone or something “to see and touch”, but also something or someone to *be* (at least for a while, in what seems somewhat more concrete than “just” the imagination—such potential temporary transformations of the subject through assuming the voice of another, or allowing the voice of another to inhabit the body through lipsynching is strongly suggestive of play with identity—its inversion, even—in Carnival and other folk practices. I shall draw on this in other parts of the present thesis with particular reference to the theorizations by Bakhtin on Carnival). In part, it is this that makes the act of lipsynching so compelling when seen as a natural outgrowth of record listening and the resultant dis-articulation of “live” and recorded—or, in Auslander’s terms, “mediatized” - music.⁵⁶

Evolving Conventions of Sound Recording and Cinema

James Lastra cites five classic theorists of cinema (Balazs, Cavell, Baudry, Mast, Metz) who variously assert that recorded sounds in cinema are materially identical with the live sound they are supposed to represent.⁵⁷ According to Gerald Mast, for example, “There is no ontological difference between hearing a violin in a concert hall and hearing it on a soundtrack in a movie theater”. Lastra contrasts such ideas with more recent critics such as Altman, Williams, and Levin, who raise the relationship of the recorded sound to its putative original to a more complex and problematic level. Lastra quotes Altman:

⁵³ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 43.

⁵⁴ Eisenberg, E., *The Recording Angel: Music, Records, and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005, second edition). Although Eisenberg is writing specifically about the advent of stereophonic listening and the spatialization of sound, Auslander extends this to monophonic recordings as well.

⁵⁵ Auslander, *Liveness*, 73-4.

⁵⁶ Auslander, *Liveness*, passim.

⁵⁷ Lastra, J., “Reading, Writing, and Representing Sound”, in Altman, R., (ed.), *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 65.

Revealing its mandate to represent sound events rather than to reproduce them, recorded sound creates an illusion of presence while constituting a new version of the sound events that actually transpired. ... [recordings have] only partial correspondence to the original event.⁵⁸

Lastra emphasizes the social aspects to this correspondence: “the simple fact that something can be identified as *a* sound, as a particular *type* of sound, necessarily involves some social or cultural dimension—the very possibility of its having an identity presupposing its social character”.⁵⁹ In one—limited—sense, listening to recorded music need not be phenomenologically different to listening to the live event. According to Altman,

We hear recordings with the same ears we use for live sound. We reach conclusions about the evidence provided by recordings in the same way that we interrogate and evaluate live sound. We constitute apparent sound events just as we perceive live sound events.⁶⁰

And yet there are notable differences. There is information missing. As we have seen, Connor and Altman both emphasise the visual aspects of listening to recordings; the auditor fills the “sound-image gap”⁶¹ between the absence of image and the sound being heard. There is an urge to find a suitable body for the invisible and dissociated voice to occupy, in which to, in a sense, visually confirm itself. It is a process of imagination that draws on cultural knowledge, memory, and associative experience.

Rick Altman writes about the “evolving conventions” of sound recording and recording technologies to which our ears have become accustomed. As our ears adjust to each new technology, each new production technique, we begin to hear what we soon believe to be a *reproduction*—unadulterated and faithful—of sound events, a documentation rather than a construction—or, in his words, a “representation”—of events for which no original, unified event exists. He calls this the “reproductive fallacy” and states:

Recordings do not reproduce sound, they represent sound. According to the choice of recording location, microphone type, recoding system, postproduction manipulation, storage medium, playback arrangement, and playback locations, each recording proposes an interpretation of the original sound. To be sure, one

⁵⁸ Altman, quoted in Lastra, “Reading Writing”, 66.

⁵⁹ Lastra, “Reading Writing”, 68.

⁶⁰ Altman, “Heterogeneity”, 30.

⁶¹ Altman, “Moving Lips”, 79.

of the common strategies involved in this process is an attempt to convince the audience that they are listening not to a representation but to a reproduction.⁶²

Like Altman, Steve Wurtzler describes the recording as construction rather than documentation. He calls the construction that we nonetheless hear as if it were documentation the “pseudo-event” and states:

After [the] initial synchronous sound films, Hollywood conventions of sound recording and reproduction involved a shift in emphasis, *from recording thought of as the documentation of a pre-existing ‘event’ toward recording conceived of as the creation and construction of a pseudo-event* [emphasis mine].⁶³

In film, sounds, diegetic sounds primarily, have a causal relationship with the images on the screen. A vase is dropped and we hear the sound of breaking glass; a car careens around a tight corner and we hear the squeal of rubber against pavement; a person blows into a horn (or, in actuality, mimes the playing of the horn), and we hear the sound of a horn; we see a flash of light in the sky and listen for the inevitable sound of thunder. We may in fact be hearing a Foley artist’s simulation of thunder—a metal sheet, perhaps, manipulated in a recording studio—but the sound still appears to have an indexical quality, a conceit we rarely question. We accept that what we hear is causally linked to what we see. Even in the case of a lipsynched or mimed performance, we attribute the sound to the image on the screen. Despite the fact that sound and image in narrative film (as opposed to documentary footage) are constituted separately, they have been, according to Kahn, “coordinated through various realist conventions in such a way that the audio is in support to the visual”.⁶⁴ Even non-diegetic film sounds, like an original Philip Glass, Danny Elfman, or Bernard Hermann score, or a popular song from a compiled score,⁶⁵ seem to have an emotional or atmospheric relationship to the narrative and visual components.

⁶² Altman, R., “Introduction: Four and a Half Film Fallacies”, in Altman, R., (ed.), *Sound Theory, Sound Practice* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 40.

⁶³ Wurtzler, S., “She Sang Live, But The Microphone Was Turned Off”: The Live, The Recorded and the Subject of Representation”, in Altman, R., (ed.), *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 96.

⁶⁴ Kahn, D., “Digits on the Historical Pulse: Being a way to think about how so much is happening and has happened in sound in the arts”, *Pulse Field*, 2002, http://cara.gsu.edu/pulsefield/kahn_essay.html (22 March 2005).

⁶⁵ Kassabian, A., *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (New York/London: Routledge, 2001), 3.

Until the advent of sound recording, musical performance was spatially and temporally co-present. With the exception of certain displacing activities, such as puppetry and ventriloquism, a body could be identified in close proximity to the sound of the voice issuing from it. Even in the case of ventriloquism, the dummy served the purpose of physically locating the sound, of manifesting a material presence. Complicating the situation was the unseen yet spatially proximal vocal source: the offstage voice in theatre, the voice from another room (or even another “dimension” as conjured through spirit mediums and other nineteenth-century spiritualist practices).⁶⁶ The vocal source may have been in question or obscured, but even the unseen voice had the assurance of some physical (or spiritual) embodiment in these contexts. Voice was neither *represented* (to use Altman’s terminology) nor *reproduced* but was inseparably bound to an abiding physical and temporal presence. People knew that, however remote, the source of a voice *could* be revealed. By entering the room, turning the corner, summoning the spirit through the body of the spirit medium (this, of course, dependent upon how fervently one believes in the existence of the supernatural), or moving an actor out of the wings and onto the stage, we were assured of contact. The conventions of musical performance, where both audience and musicians are gathered together in a particular location at a particular time—whether informal (as in people passing a busker on a busy street or seated around the family piano) or formal (ticket holders to a symphony concert)—made spatial-temporal co-presence a certainty.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century sound recording, along with its near contemporary telephony, changed these circumstances. For the first time a voice could exist entirely independent of its original embodiment, removed in time and location from the moment of its production. Famously, Edison announced his invention of the phonograph with the phrase “Speech has become, as it were, immortal”,⁶⁷ and so the phonographic voice in this sense became, implicitly, the voice of the future dead. As Michel Chion states, “[e]ver since the telephone and gramophone made it possible to isolate voices from bodies, the voice naturally has reminded us of the voice of the dead”.⁶⁸ Though not expressly intended for the purpose of remembrance by future

⁶⁶ See Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 362-393; Sconce, J., *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 1-91 *passim*; Peters, J. D., *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), 63-108, 137-176.

⁶⁷ Johnson, E. H., “A Wonderful Invention - Speech Capable of Indefinite Repetition from Automatic Records”, *Scientific American*, 17th November, 1877.

⁶⁸ Chion, M., *The Voice In Cinema*, edited and translated by Claudia Gorbman (Columbia University Press: New York, 1999), 46. See also Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 362-394.

generations, the wax grooves were, almost from the very beginning, understood to allow the voice to persist through time in a way that would not be possible for the body.⁶⁹ Thereafter, the voice could, in ghostly fashion, meander from place to place and through time; a purely mechanical presence yet capable of “outliving” its corporeal source; set loose, and therefore able to inhabit bodies, contexts, and histories to which it never until this time belonged.

While parallels exist between the photographic/cinematic image and the phonographic voice, in the sense that they are all manifestations of past moments captured and preserved—all three are the product of processes that, according to Bazin, “mummify” experience—there are crucial differences between our culturally conditioned experiences of recorded image and recorded sound. The recorded image has a fixity and what at least feels like a materiality that sound lacks. The objects of vision are located. As “viewers” we hold the photograph in our hand or view it in an album or on a gallery wall and it can be no other place than the one in which we encounter it. We watch a film in the theatre or on DVD or even transmitted via television or streamed on the internet, and inasmuch as it is an ocular event it occurs there, in front of us (and nowhere else), fixed to the screen. “Sound” as Altman says, “will always carry with it the tension of the unknown until it is anchored by sight”,⁷⁰ but even anchored to an image, sound has the ability to travel, to come and go. We can also “pick it up”—pluck it from one situation—and move it to another place, another body.

In his book, *Liveness*, Philip Auslander observes:

Historically, one consequence of the reification of music in recordings is the century-old separation of the musical experience from live performance, and, particularly, the aural experience of music from its visual experience. The critical impact of the gramophone when it became widely available in the 1890s was ‘a vital shift in the experience of listening to music: the replacement of an audio-visual event with a primarily audio one, sound without vision [Laing]’⁷¹ and it is from this originary point that the culture of popular music, and its emphasis on the aural aspects of music performance, has evolved.⁷²

⁶⁹ Although Edison’s attempts to build “spirit batteries” is one of the more bizarre attempts to do for the physical body what phonography did for the voice—see Kahn, D., “Death in Light of the Phonograph”, in Kahn, D. and Whitehead, G., (eds.), *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde*, (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1994), 76-78.

⁷⁰ Altman, “Moving Lips”, 74.

⁷¹ Laing, D., “A Voice Without a Face: Popular Music and the Phonograph in the 1890s”, *Popular Music* 10/1 (1991), 7-8.

⁷² Auslander, *Liveness*, 73.

Sound recording, sound cinema, wireless, television, transistor radio, home video, the Walkman (and all its descendents, e.g., the iPod, etc), computers, the internet, the last one hundred (and twenty-odd) years have introduced us to the development of new sound technologies of production and dissemination. Each was first seen as novel, or a novelty, but as they became widely used, they were each in turn absorbed into daily life, naturalized, unquestioned, unavoidable. They have embedded themselves so completely into the aural landscape that we now must rely on historians and scholars to understand what life may have been like—what *the world sounded like*—before their introduction⁷³.

Reality: Recorded *and* Live.

One result of our assimilation to recorded sound is an acceptance of the disembodied voice as a ubiquitous fact of life, a disembodiment that, as I have discussed above, gives it a high degree of mobility. Another is both the acceptance of, and anxiety around, a newly dichotomous relationship between what we now refer to as “the live” and the recorded, and the “divided spectator/auditor”.⁷⁴ For instance, in silent film what the audience sees is neither spatially nor temporally present yet the sound—usually but not always a live piano—is temporally and spatially co-present, combining the live (sound) and the recorded (image). Wurtzler suggests that “[t]he shift to synchronous sound reproduction might thus be seen as a re-inscription of a unified subject position (the linguistically unwieldy ‘spectator-auditor’) spoken by a representational form (sync sound films) in which sound and image posit an event characterised by spatial absence and temporal anteriority”.⁷⁵

This works without challenge in cinema, yet where recorded voices and live action are combined, this hybridization leads to a “disjunction between spatial co-presence and temporal anteriority” which “reveals the artifice of representation and shatters the posited ‘unity’ of the live event”.⁷⁶ It is the intensity of this “disjunction” and consequent revelation of artifice that is one of the factors, I believe, that marks out the “live” lipsynched performance for the vitriolic criticism of music critics and fans it so often provokes, and which I shall be looking at in more depth later in the next chapter. I shall also be exploring lipsynching in cinema both in terms of its own history and

⁷³ See, for example, Picker, J. M., “The Victorian Aura of the Recorded Voice”, *New Literary History*, 32/3 (2001), 769-786; Picker, J. M., *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷⁴ Altman, “Moving Lips”, 71.

⁷⁵ Wurtzler, “She Sang Live”, 95.

⁷⁶ Wurtzler, “She Sang Live”, 93.

practices, and also of an evolution of viewers' experiences with its conventions, with particular emphasis of the film musical and the Hollywood preoccupation with finding the ideal voice for the ideal body.

Chapter 2

Realism, Authenticity, and Otherwise: Lipsynching on Screen and Stage

Education: Moving Lips and Loud Speakers

Lipsynching and voice dubbing have long been the standard techniques of representing musical performance in cinema and television. Recent “scandals” involving the revelation that pop artists have lipsynched to recordings on television shows treat these “discoveries” as instances of a relatively new and aberrant practice, when in fact lipsynched musical performance has been standard operating procedure since long before the advent of television. From the early cinema’s efforts to produce synchronized “all-talking” sound to the reign of the Hollywood musical, the television variety show, music video, and so on, the lipsynched song has been standard practice. When an actor/performer is seen to be singing on screen, whether the voice is her or his own or a “ghost” singer hired for the job, the song is usually being lipsynched to a pre-recorded track—known as “playback”—which is then synchronized with the visual track in post-production (or in some cases actors’ voices are dubbed by other voices in post-production, which in the finished product amounts to the same thing). The same is true for instrumental performance (“lip”synched to playback, for example, Louis Armstrong’s band in *High Society*⁷⁷) and the sounds of tap dancing (dubbed post-production), even down to handclaps and other sorts of movement, rhythmic or incidental. Indeed, lipsynching and the dubbing of voices, particularly in musicals, is still Hollywood practice.⁷⁸ This is due in part to the technical difficulties (still) encountered when recording music on a film set: the difficulties of mixing the voices of actors/singers in motion with instrumentalists, band or orchestra *in situ* and making a seamless recording, a situation only made more difficult by the later advents of out-of-doors and location filming. But it is also due to expectations of audiences accustomed to the seeming-perfection of studio recording and the intimacy afforded by the invention of the microphone. With microphone singing, the voice was brought “closer” to the auditor. As Connor writes, “Such a voice promises the odours, textures, and warmth of another body. ...[M]ost of all, perhaps, the imaginary closeness of such voices suggests

⁷⁷ *High Society*, dir. Charles Walters, MGM, 1956.

⁷⁸ A notable exception is the recent adaptation of *Les Misérables*, dir. Tom Hopper, Universal Pictures, *inter alia*, 2012, in which the actors own voices were recorded on set.

to us that they could be our own”.⁷⁹ Distance between singer and audience was foreshortened, and the best method to maintain this new sense of intimacy was, perhaps ironically, to have actors lipsynch to studio recordings.

In this chapter I take a closer look at the conventions of sound in cinema, beginning with a brief review of “the sounds of the silents”, and how they have influenced our experience of and relationships to vocal embodiment, particularly in relationship to musical performance. I will show a progression of increasing acceptance of lipsynching that has developed alongside an abhorrence of the practice, focusing first on its use in cinema and second on the aforementioned recent “scandals” involving popular music performers.

“Silent” Cinema

[T]he world did not wait until *Don Juan* and *The Jazz Singer* to discover the entertainment (and financial) value of synchronized sound.⁸⁰

Much has been written on the “sound of silent pictures”,⁸¹ particularly within the last 30 years, when, from out of a critical environment that treated the film soundtrack as subordinate to the image, a project of re-ordering the sound-image relationship in cinema studies came initially as something of a revelation. That the “silents were never silent”⁸² is now common knowledge even among non-scholars, despite the fact that only a very few people are alive today who would have experienced the silent era first hand. Contemporary audiences have at least a limited grasp of the musical accompaniment to the silents, at the very least the knowledge that they were accompanied (due to the many films set in the early years of the twentieth century, parodies, etc.) by the pianos and Wurlitzers in the front-of-house, playing the clichéd musical motifs associated with silent cinema—the low, staccato creeping-villain theme, the “Hearts and Flowers” theme for pathos, the rousing theme of the hero, and so on. The ultimate triumph of

⁷⁹ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 38.

⁸⁰ Altman, R., “Fallacies”, 36.

⁸¹ See, for example, the collection by Abel, R. and Altman, R., (eds.), *The Sounds of Early Cinema* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001). Annette Davison at Edinburgh College of Art and Julie Brown at Royal Holloway led an AHRC-funded Network Project, “The Sounds of Early Cinema in Britain” from 2009 to 2011, out of which Brown, J., and Davison, A., *The Sound of the Silents in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) was subsequently published.

⁸² Altman, R., “The Silence of the Silents”, *The Music Quarterly*, 80/4, (Oxford University Press, 1996), 658.

synchronized sound in the latter half of the 1920s, the time during which the modern soundtrack is born, is also widely recognised as a cultural moment characterised by its own sets of characteristic sounds, and sound-image relations.

Many films set in the early decades of the twentieth century have featured silent-era cinema theatres and audiences (*The Artist*,⁸³ is perhaps the most notable recent example), usually portraying a small-town or regional theatre in which a single pianist, organist or small combo provide musical accompaniment to the on-screen action.⁸⁴ Early efforts to bring sound accompaniment to the silent screen were many and varied. As early as 1888, Thomas Edison began work on what he conceptualized as the “optical phonograph”.⁸⁵ He produced the Kinetograph as “an extension of the phonograph, trying to link film images with recordings on cylinder”.⁸⁶ Other experiments to synchronize sound and image started around the 1890s. In 1886, Villiers de l’Isle Adam, who was one of the first to produce “imaginary films” (as opposed to documentary), created a “music clip”⁸⁷ (what we might today call a music video). By 1903, Edison was providing musical “programs” to accompany his films.⁸⁸ Other studios followed suit and well-known composers began writing film scores. Saint-Saëns, for example, wrote the score to *La Mort du Duc de Guise*⁸⁹ in 1908; and in 1915 and 1916 respectively Joseph Carl Breil wrote the scores for D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*⁹⁰ and *Intolerance*⁹¹.⁹² Charlie Chaplin wrote scores for many of his silent films, and in the teens and twenties, popular songs were being written specially for use in silent films. Among the songwriters providing these were luminaries such as Jerome Kern and George Gershwin and Victor Herbert. Songs became identified with the films for which they were written (or in which they were popularized) and sheet music sales were often linked to the films in which the songs appeared. The “tie-in”, then, is not a new marketing strategy, the popularization of songs through cinema being an early version of the now ubiquitous marketing tactic of the soundtrack album and the concept

⁸³ *The Artist*, dir. Michel Hazanavicius, Studio 37, *inter alia*, 2011.

⁸⁴ Fehr, R. and Vogel, F. G., *Lullabies of Hollywood* (North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1993), 9.

⁸⁵ Brenez, N., “Clip, pamphlet, subversion”, in Hergott, F. (ed.), *Playback* (Paris: Paris Musées, 2007), 141.

⁸⁶ Fehr and Vogel, *Lullabies*, 23.

⁸⁷ Brenez, N., *Playback*, 141.

⁸⁸ Fehr and Vogel, *Lullabies*, 11.

⁸⁹ *La Mort du Duc de Guise*, dir. Charles le Bargy and André Calmettes, Pathé Frères, 1908.

⁹⁰ *Birth of a Nation*, dir. D. W. Griffith, David W. Griffith Corp./Epoch Producing Corp., 1915.

⁹¹ *Intolerance*, dir. D. W. Griffith, Triangle Film Producing, Wark Producing, 1916.

⁹² Fehr and Vogel, *Lullabies*, 35.

that separate branches of the entertainment “industry” profit from the tie-in (everyone feeding from the same trough, as it were).⁹³

Less commonly known are early efforts in silent cinema to produce synchronized *speech*. Some intriguing, and relatively short-lived, practices were employed in the first two decades of the twentieth century which synchronized *live* voices with silent film in order to provide spoken dialogue and narration. Altman explains:

From 1908 to the early Teens, the human voice commonly accompanied film projections. During the late Aughts, films were often supplemented by carefully rehearsed actors speaking lines in sync with the image. Indeed, there were enough “talking picture” troupes... to support a New York academy dedicated to training behind-the-screen actors. For theaters unable to afford the full troupe, a live narrator was often used to secure the narrative coherence of films longer on spectacle than clarity.⁹⁴

“Human-voice-behind-the-screen companies” proliferated during this period—“Humanovo, Actologue, Humanophone, Humanscope, Natural Voice Talking Pictures, Ta-Mo-Pic, and Dram-o-tone”⁹⁵—and in the absence of reliable mechanical synchronization flourished in sites that could afford them as well as accommodate them within the physical constraints of the theatre architecture. In essence, the mixing of the live voice and the mechanical image (having its roots in the “lantern shows” of the nineteenth century⁹⁶) constituted the first instance of lipsynching “on screen” (or dubbing, depending upon which side of the screen you were on). Voice actors were tasked with interpreting and providing the voices of “image actors” based not only upon narrative concerns but the screen actors’ looks, mannerisms, even star personae. In the case of Natural Voice Talking Pictures—a company based in Newark, New Jersey—the reverse may have been true: by employing recognizable local actors⁹⁷ the reputations and vocal signatures of the live actors were in some cases more important and pleasurable to audiences than the melding of voice with image.

These early efforts, however, were usually conceived as the means to *supplement* the visual experience, or in some cases *complete* the visual experience. In either case, the

⁹³ Indeed, the “tie-in” is even older. In the nineteenth-century the illustrations on sheet music covers for popular songs often featured the singers, musical hall stars, dance teams, etc., who popularized them.

⁹⁴ Altman, R., “The Sound of Sound: A Brief History of the Reproduction of Sound in Movie Theaters” Vol. 21, *Cineaste*, 68. <http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Academy/4394/altman.html> (Sept 6, 2008).

⁹⁵ Altman, *Fallacies*, 36.

⁹⁶ Fehr and Vogel, *Lullabies*, 9.

⁹⁷ New York Times: Natural Voice Talking Pictures (1908)

<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/241543/Natural-Voice-Talking-Pictures/overview> (Sept 6, 2009).

visual experience was generally considered to be the main attraction, in which the novelty of the moving image remained no small part. The possible exception to this was the development of the musical short. In 1923 Lee DeForest (known as the “father of radio”, he invented the three-electrode vacuum tube, or “triode” in 1906) introduced the first sound-on-film technology, which he called “phonofilm”. With this new technology he recorded political speeches but also short vaudeville and musical acts. Just as Villiers de l’Isle Adam had done in 1886 with his “music clip”, DeForest discovered that musical acts were well suited to the film medium, providing short, concise subject matter and songs with which audiences were already familiar, and the chance for an increasingly mass audience to view popular performers whom they might not otherwise have had the opportunity to see and hear in person. Similarly, a newer technology, Vitaphone, was used from 1926 to 1928 to produce shorts that were “filmed records of musical performances”.⁹⁸

Although phonofilm was short-lived and ultimately unsuccessful due to its instability, by 1926 two systems, the aforementioned Vitaphone (used by Warner Brothers) which synchronized the filmed image to sounds recorded on a disc and played on a phonograph, and Movietone (used by Twentieth Century Fox), which was the first technology that successfully placed the sound directly onto the film stock as a separate *and* synchronized “track” lying adjacent to the image track. Although *The Jazz Singer*,⁹⁹ the first “talking picture” to be widely distributed and hailed, was produced with Vitaphone technology (as well as, in 1926, the lesser known, *Don Juan*,¹⁰⁰ which didn’t actually “talk” but had synchronized sound effects and orchestral music), by 1932 only Movietone remained¹⁰¹. It boasted an increased stability of the sound to image relationship. Moreover, sound-on-film technology brought much greater precision and flexibility to film editing, particularly with the invention of Moviola, which allowed for slow-motion editing. It is here, in the editing room, that the story of lipsynching as a cinematic technique takes hold. It was in the editing room that “playback” technology—the ability to synchronize image track with *pre-recorded* sound in *post-production*—

⁹⁸ Feuer, J., *The Hollywood Musical*, (Basingstoke and London: The Macmillan Press, 1993, second edition), 1-2.

⁹⁹ *The Jazz Singer*, dir. Alan Crosland, Warner Brothers, 1927.

¹⁰⁰ *Don Juan*, dir. Alan Crosland, Warner Brothers/The Vitaphone Corporation, 1926.

¹⁰¹ Fehr and Vogel, *Lullabies*, 28.

was first introduced (in 1928) and subsequently became the most common means of representing music, even diegetic musical performance, on film.¹⁰²

The history of pairing music with the filmic image and the compatibility of the musical short, the popular song “tie-in” and the concomitant popularity of music hall, vaudeville forms and Broadway opened the way for the proliferation of backstage musicals and operettas produced between 1928 and 1933 (in the years 1929 and ’30, musicals were the “most lucrative form” of talking picture)¹⁰³ and the post-’33 developments of what is commonly referred to as “the Golden Age” of the Hollywood musical. Before further discussion of the critical consequences of the transition from silent to sound cinema, I will, however, first provide some background and contextualization through a discussion of realism in Hollywood cinematic practice as it relates to ideas of sound and image representations and how these affect our expectations in terms of authenticating the cinematic experience.

Realist Conventions in Hollywood Sound Cinema

The fundamental scandal of sound film - and thus the proper starting point for a theory of sound film - is that sound and image are different phenomena, recorded by different methods, printed many frames apart on the film, and reproduced by an illusionistic technology. Voices are uttered by cardboard cones, by mechanical instruments, by machines designed to meet the challenge of a world in which cities are too populous to be addressed by a single unaided human voice. Cinema's ventriloquism is the product of an effort to overcome the sound-image gap, to mask the sound's technological origin, and to permit the film's production personnel to speak their sub-conscious mind—their belly—without fear of discovery.¹⁰⁴

The goal of realist conventions in Hollywood filmmaking, conventions which predominate still, is to produce seamless representations of “reality”, even if that reality, as with science fiction, for instance, may be phantasmic in nature. In other words, whatever the subject matter of the narrative, the medium must not call attention to itself. The constructed nature must be concealed, at least for the length of the viewing, and the

¹⁰² Doane, M. A., “The Voice in Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space”, in *Yale French Studies*, No. 60, *Cinema/Sound* (1980), 34.

¹⁰³ Bradley, E. M., *The First Hollywood Musicals: A Critical Filmography of 171 Features, 1927 through 1932* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1996), ix.

¹⁰⁴ Altman, “Moving Lips”, 79.

audience must be saturated in the constructed world as if in life. Particularly since the sound era, this cinematic verisimilitude has generally been the hallmark of Hollywood filmmaking. The evolving conventions of sound recording and playback technologies, as already discussed, and the producers' search for "fidelity" to a never-existent "original" developed (continues to develop), as Altman argues, in sympathy with culturally potent ideological formations such as "realism," "morality," or "beauty",¹⁰⁵ which Hollywood, in the demands it makes upon itself, must uphold. This is an important observation for it has lasting implications on why our judgements of "inauthentic" sound practices such as lipsyncing contain a sense of moral outrage that isn't found in, say, our attitudes towards no-less-inauthentic visual (or "special") effects.

We can "read" fidelity-as-reproduction (Altman's "reproductive fallacy") as the partner, or even condition, of a "realism" on which our sense of "morality" depends in the age of mechanical reproduction. Thus, when the manipulations—the so-called "tricks" of sound, as well as cinema, recording—are revealed we experience a sense of disturbance that is simultaneously both phenomenological and ideological in nature. When we are made aware that the visual and the sound track, though running in parallel, are constituted separately, the illusion of reproduction—of simultaneity and documentary verisimilitude (what André Bazin calls "sacred contact")—is shattered and, along with it, a sense of balance which can be construed as a loss of faith. We feel, momentarily or enduringly, cheated. In a well-worn phrase, "the man behind the curtain" is revealed and we are left to question our very senses. The platitudes crumble: what you see (or hear) is *not necessarily* what you get; seeing is *not* believing. The sound of footsteps is not those of the actor on screen; in fact, feet may not have created the sound we hear at all. The beautiful singing voice we hear comes not from the body of the woman we are viewing but the unseen body of a playback singer or "ghost voice"; the musical accompaniment, even the sound of a dancer's taps, are created elsewhere, neither temporally nor spatially co-present. When the disjunction is revealed to us, the disorientation of our senses disturbs at a basic level. When the indexical relationship between sound and image is merely a conceit, audience compliance is therefore necessary to maintain the fiction.

¹⁰⁵ Altman, "Fallacies", 40.

Just as the first film audiences reacted with fear as they watched the train arrive at the station,¹⁰⁶ the advent of talking pictures created a sense of credulity, a belief in the unity of sound and image, that we maintain to this day. But this compliance is not applied or maintained equally to sound and image where the speaking or singing voice is concerned. Manipulations of the voice-image relationships have the power to disturb or offend in a way that visual tricks on their own (CGI, for example) do not. Why is one acceptable to us and the other suspect? We accept that without visual effects (including scene dressing and building, makeup tricks, etc.) every film would have to be about ordinary people and take place in the present day. Visual effects allow filmmakers to go anywhere, portray anything. Audiences accept that what they are seeing is not actually nineteenth-century London; and the castle on screen is not the legendary Camelot (as Terry Gilliam, ‘Patsy’ in the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* says, “It’s only a model”¹⁰⁷). There is no such place as the “Matrix”. Robbie Coltrane, the actor who plays Hagrid in the Harry Potter films is not a hairy giant in real life, but we accept his dimensions on the screen. The twins in *The Parent Trap* are not played by actual twins but by one actress with the magic of split-screen (or, in the remake, digital) technology. Lassie was played by a series of male dogs in drag, and that wasn’t the real top of the Empire State Building onto which Kong clung. Nearly any film you can imagine tricks the eye in one way or another, even if only by an editor tightening a scene through strategic cuts or building a single scene out of multiple takes. In fact, audiences love special effects, and many films trade on the believability of the effects to attract viewers. For example, the promotional slogan for the 1979 film *Superman* was “You’ll believe a man can fly”. Audiences thrill to the chance to see how fictional worlds will be presented on film. Even the “bad” special effects of earlier years have become objects of camp affection.

But pity the poor actor who is revealed not to be singing for herself. It is commonly believed that Audrey Hepburn lost her chance for an Oscar when the press revealed that Marni Nixon had done most of her singing in the film version of *My Fair Lady*.¹⁰⁸ The plot of *Singin’ in the Rain* revolves around the shaming of an actress whose own voice is replaced by a ghost singer. Of course, one possible explanation for this sense of shame is that Hollywood studios for many years kept the practice of voice synching and

¹⁰⁶ *L’arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat*, dir. Lumière, A., Lumière, L., Société Lumière, 1896.

¹⁰⁷ *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, dir. Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones, Michael White Productions/National Film Trustee Company/Python (Monty) Pictures, 1975.

¹⁰⁸ *My Fair Lady*, dir. George Cukor, Warner Brothers, 1964.

dubbing secret. “You’ll believe a man can fly!” is great advertising copy, “You’ll believe Joan Crawford can sing!” somewhat less so. Ghost singers were bound by contract to conceal their work from the public. It wasn’t until the latter half of the twentieth century—nearly four decades after the first talking pictures—that the practice became known to the public (largely due to the *My Fair Lady* incident), though individual instances remained concealed. As just one of many examples, the singing voice of Oliver Twist in the film version of the musical *Oliver!*¹⁰⁹ was not that of Mark Lester, the boy who played him, but was supplied by Kathe Green, the daughter of *Oliver*’s music director, Johnny Green,¹¹⁰ a fact that until very recently was kept secret and about which most audiences remain unaware.

Studios maintained the star myth at all costs. The female star—or that terrible term, starlet—for instance, was usually filmed in soft focus, her blemishes concealed, and it is perhaps the idea of concealment that creates the problem for audiences. People know Camelot isn’t real—that Camelot is “only a model” comes as no surprise. But the revelation that the actress with whom we fell in love because of her marvelous singing voice was not in fact singing marks a betrayal. There is more to this than a wish for unified, authentic “reproduction” (as opposed to “representation”). There is something in the nature of the voice itself and its relationship to identity—its proximity to ideas of the soul—that troubles us. It is not only a question of “talent”, of whether the actor or actress can *do it themselves*; Christopher Reeve (who played Superman) could not actually fly; Nicole Kidman, who in reality looks nothing like Virginia Woolf whom she played in *The Hours*, wore a prosthetic nose, yet most audiences (even those that found the prosthetic poorly made or distracting on the iconic face of the actress) were not inclined to wonder why the filmmakers didn’t cast an actress with a nose to match the character. Audiences tend to feel strongly, however, that the voice of the character—especially the *singing* voice—should belong to the actor who plays him or her.

¹⁰⁹ *Oliver*, dir. Carol Reed, Romulus Films/Warwick Film Productions, 1968.

¹¹⁰ *Ghost Voices: Secret Voices of Hollywood*, dir. Guy Evans, BBC, 2012. Another interesting interview in which Kathe Green describes her ghosting of Mark Lester can be viewed on YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKm_4c2n4_k.

The Hollywood Musical - Practices and Conventions: Concealment and Authenticity

Hollywood filmmakers, thus, are in the business of producing a constructed naturalism or realism that audiences allow themselves to believe—to believe that what they are seeing and hearing is not a construction but a reproduction of reality—in the dream space of cinema. The film *musical*, however, presents a number of problems, as the carefully constructed sense of “the realistic” is disrupted by insertion of the equally carefully constructed “unrealistic”: the fanciful “break into song”. In fact, a common complaint of people who dislike the genre is that it is unrealistic: “People don’t just break into song”, they say; “Where’d that orchestra come from?”, etc. But of course the conceit behind the musical number is not realism but transportation: it takes us—temporarily—outside of the narrative and inside the characters’ emotional lives. We hear what we are supposed to experience as diegetic music—after all the characters we see on screen are singing the music that we hear (their mouths move in synchronization with the vocal, they move in time to the music, etc.), yet the music may not be completely diegetic in a conventional sense. There is some ambivalence as to whether or not we are supposed to accept at face value that the characters are *actually* singing to one another. The musical accompaniment is heard, for example, but no musicians are present; the setting is unsuitable, even absurd (e.g., street gangs singing and dancing on the streets of New York City in *West Side Story*¹¹¹). In other words, the songs are diegetically unbelievable, and may leave us wondering whether or not we are expected to believe the characters are really singing to each other or if what we are seeing is a stylized version of what is really speech, or the externalization of inner states that are being *communicated* by other means during the presentation the audience sees as the musical number. The performance may be a stylized unveiling, staged for the benefit of the film audience, of interior states—a phantasmic, or poetic representation—which mere dialogue can less-effectively express, or only do so banally. Feuer identifies two “modes” of narrative presentation in the musical, which she refers to as “dual registers”, constituting a shuttling back and forth between a third-person mode of storytelling in the “primary level” of the narrative (dialogue, etc.) and a first-person mode in the “secondary level” of the narrative (the musical number). She writes:

Musicals are built upon a foundation of dual registers with the contrast between narrative and number defining musical comedy as a form. The dichotomous

¹¹¹ *West Side Story*, dir. Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise, Mirisch Corporation/Seven Arts Productions/Beta Productions, 1961.

manner in which the story is told—now spoken, now sung—is a very different mode of presentation from the single thread of the usual Hollywood movie. The narrative with its third-person mode seems to represent a primary level. But unlike other kinds of movies, a secondary level, presented in direct address and made up of singing and dancing, emerges from the primary level. The first-person interruption disturbs the equilibrium of the unitary flow of the narrative but, as we have seen, in an entirely conventionalized manner. Proof that the break into song does indeed exist at a different level of reality may be seen in the way present-day audiences (if out of tune with the conventions) may greet with nervous laughter any transition between modes in the classic musical films.¹¹²

Contrast a character professing his feelings in mere speech, for instance (“I love you, I always will”), to a character expressing his love through a Gershwin melody (“The way you wear your hat / The way you sip your tea / The memory of all that / No, no! They can’t take that away from me”). Is Astaire *actually* singing to Rogers on the New York ferry¹¹³ or is the song a distillation—impressionistic, poetic and therefore more directly accessible—of his feelings for her? In Feuer’s words, “the break into song does indeed exist at a different level of reality”. Perhaps *they* only talk, but *we* hear music. Yet however ambivalent the situation may be, most audiences have come to accept the convention.

Peter Wollen, writing about the films of Godard, refers to the idea of “multiple diegesis”—the “interlocking and interweaving plurality of worlds”¹¹⁴—which he describes in terms of modernist practices of distanciation, such as direct address, that disrupt the flow of a realist narrative. According to Feuer, “multiple diegesis” can also find application in musical film. Feuer writes:

‘Multiple diegesis’, according to this view, takes its meaning in antithesis to the ‘single diegesis’ of the classical narrative cinema. Both Hollywood musical and modernist cinema use dual worlds to mirror within the film the relationship of the spectator *to* the film. Multiple diegesis in this sense parallels the use of the internal audience. Yet, as with the use of the distancing techniques... the musical and Godard are worlds apart in their goals. In a Godard film, multiple diegesis may call attention to the discrepancy between fiction and reality, or fiction and history. In the Hollywood musical, heterogeneous levels are created so that they may be homogenized in the end through the union of the romantic couple. In the Hollywood musical, different levels are recognized in order that difference may be overcome, dual levels synthesized back into one.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Feuer, *Hollywood Musical*, 68-9.

¹¹³ In the film *Shall We Dance?* dir. Mark Sandrich, RKO Radio Pictures/A Pandro S. Berman Production, 1937.

¹¹⁴ quoted in Feuer, *Hollywood Musical*, 68.

¹¹⁵ Feuer, *Hollywood Musical*, 68.

In other words, both modernist cinema and musical cinema use the “interlocking and interweaving plurality of worlds”¹¹⁶ of multiple diegesis but to different ends, the former atomizes, the latter synthesizes, usually, as Feuer states, in the “union of the romantic couple”.¹¹⁷

Another way in which the musical number punctures the seeming reality of the narrative is the uniformity of the sonic space of recorded song. Recorded song placed into a scene lacks spatial sensitivity to the “natural” acoustics of the space and setting, “room tone”, and character placement (whether the characters are pictured close to the camera or stand at a distance, turn their backs, dance, or perform other actions that in the natural environment would cause a stationary auditor to hear dynamic variations in the sound of their voices). As Altman notes, the technical refinement of pre-recorded music lends to a scene “an eerie, far-off effect, an injection of the ideal world into the real”.¹¹⁸ This effect, while disconcerting to audiences—revealing, as it were, the “man behind the curtain”, disrupting the realist cinematic dream—became, through repetition, an accepted convention. This blatant distance between pre-recorded voice and temporally present body would affect our future relationship, for better or worse, to lipsynched performance.

Cinematic truth is, after all, constructed through artifice; it is representational rather than reproductive, even—in the studio era especially—down to the private lives of its stars. Unless what we are watching is billed as documentary, concert footage, etc., we are aware of the multiple fictions and the scores of people who contributed to bringing them about. It is a fact well known by audiences that cinema is a collective art form, produced through the cooperation and collaboration of many hands, as the opening and closing credits attest. But it is the representational quality of voice that produces the most hand-wringing in authenticity debates. That the voice and body on screen are not one, that the integrity of the voice/body connection might be shattered through the collaborative efforts of two different individuals (and a host of production personnel) is one form of collaborative practice that remains controversial. As I shall argue in the final section of the present chapter, the sense of distrust engendered by the collaborative

¹¹⁶ quoted in Feuer, *Hollywood Musical*, 68.

¹¹⁷ In chapter 4, I shall touch on ways in which the work of Dennis Potter and David Lynch might effect something of a synthesis between—or at least draw on both of these traditions: the Hollywood musical, and modernist techniques of distanciation.

¹¹⁸ Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987), 64.

aspects of cinema's constructed worlds also inform negative criticisms of "pop", as music made "by committee" (a collaboration, therefore, that is also entirely corporate and "inauthentic"), in opposition to the trustworthy, authentic, "lone genius" produced in the myths used to validate the status of the rock "author".

Singin' in the Rain and the Ideal Voice

It has been well documented that in the transition from silent to talking pictures speaking with the "wrong" voice ended the careers of some prominent silent film stars. Even far from the Hollywood soundstages and boardrooms, the "wrong" voice became a subject of nattering critique. A 1929 article in *Scribners* explained:

Many delightful young women lose all their charm the moment their voices are heard; stalwart 'he-men' may shed their virility with the first sentence they speak; the rolling Western 'r' gives the lie to an otherwise excellent 'society' characterization, and uncultured enunciation destroys the illusion created by beauty [Scribners, 1929, quoted in Crafton 1997, 450].¹¹⁹

Similarly, critic George Nathan, writing colourfully in 1929 for *American Mercury*, commented:

The yokel who once imagined that the Mlle. X., were she to whisper to him 'I love you,' would sound like a melted mandolin, now hears his goddess speak like a gum-chewing shopgirl. The worshipper of the Mlle. Y.'s seductive girlishness now beholds her, in the grim, hard light of the talkies, to be a middle-aged woman with the voice of a middle-aged woman. The farmhand who once dreamed of the Mlle. Z. as an exotic and mysterious dose of cantharides will now see her simply as a fat immigrant with deradenoncus and over-developed laryngeal muscles assisting in the negotiation of pidgin-English. Valentino died in time. Think what would have happened to his flock of women admirers if the unsparing lighting of the talkies had betrayed his imminent baldness and the movietone his bootblack voice [American Mercury, 1929, quoted in Crafton 1997, 451].¹²⁰

Those first years of sound film taught the industry about the importance of the "right" voice, a voice that ideally suited the physiognomy of the actor and the character he is playing and whatever mythologies surrounds his on- and off-screen persona. Perhaps Valentino did indeed die in time, but a professional death-by-voice was assured not for any real vocal deficiencies but because of a kind of narrow vocal hegemony which developed in Hollywood during this time. Barring some prominent exceptions—Garbo and Chevalier are the first to come to mind—"exotic" or "ethnic" accents were weeded

¹¹⁹ Crafton, D., *History of the American Cinema: The Talkies (1926-1931)*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 450.

¹²⁰ Crafton, *American Cinema*, 451.

out, even given the fact that the silents had thrived on “exotic” stars and stories. Upper-class English and mid-Atlantic “society” accents found favour, and elocution departments were formed in the studios to train the twang or drawl from actors’ voices. While “lower class” and “ethnic” accents were still heard, especially in comedy or gangster films (Chico Marx or James Cagney, for example), increasingly they were used to signal lower intelligence in a character or the dubious possession of “street smarts”.

It is impossible to address the issue of the “wrong” and the “ideal” voice in the early years of sound cinema and the development of playback singing in Hollywood without discussing the 1952 musical, *Singin’ in the Rain*.¹²¹ As the most oft-cited example of the practice of lipsynching and one of the best-known playings-out of its perceived inauthenticity in Hollywood cinema, it has come to serve as the principal text of cinematic fakery. It also provides a succinct, though perhaps disingenuous, portrayal of the transition from the silents to sound cinema. Although *Singin’ in the Rain* is familiar territory, in both the popular imagination and in the discipline of film studies, I will examine the plot in some detail, as it reveals as many myths as it does truths about filmmaking and the interdependency of image and sound.

The film, set in 1927, tells the story of Hollywood’s bumpy transition to “talking” pictures that followed the popularity of *The Jazz Singer*,¹²² and the dire consequences this had on the silent-film stars whose voices were deemed unpleasant to the ear, or seen to be mismatched to their screen personae. As noted earlier (see p. 41), the crisis of this transition is regularly cited as causing the abrupt endings to the careers of certain high-profile stars, most famous among them John Gilbert, who was said to speak with a high, nasal twang thought unbecoming to his leading-man image, and Norma Talmadge, who after making only two talking films, both unenthusiastically received, retired from filmmaking despite her enormous popularity as a star of the silent cinema.¹²³

At the centre of *Singin’ in the Rain*’s plot are film studio Monumental Pictures’ “sweethearts of the screen”, the dashing Don Lockwood and beautiful Lina Lamont (played by Gene Kelly and Jean Hagen respectively). Lamont, already a star in her own

¹²¹ *Singin’ in the Rain*, dir. Stanley Donan and Gene Kelly, MGM, 1952.

¹²² *The Jazz Singer*, dir. Alan Crosland, Warner Brothers, 1927.

¹²³ Smith, G. M., “Silencing the New Woman: Ethnic and Social Mobility in the Melodramas of Norma Talmadge”, *Journal of Film and Video*, 48/3, (Fall 1996), 3.

right, is paired with stuntman Lockwood when the head of Monumental Pictures, R.F. Simpson, spots his star quality and hires him to become her new leading man. The two are successfully teamed in a string of silent pictures, and at the outset of the film are already a celebrated Hollywood institution, complete with a “cooked up” off-screen romance for publicity purposes, which Lina, who reads the fan magazines herself, confuses with their real-life relationship which is cold at best. Already Lina is being ridiculed in the film as someone who credulously believes the products of the Hollywood dream factory, even down to believing that she and Lockwood are in fact a couple because she reads it in the magazines.

At the outset of the film we see Don and Lina arrive at Graumann’s Chinese Theatre in Hollywood for the premier of their latest film, *The Royal Rascal*. From the red carpet outside the theatre, Don delivers a speech to his adoring fans in which every assertion about his early life and career, his rise to stardom, and his relationship with Lina, is a fabrication—an eloquent fiction to match the “dignity” (a word he repeats throughout the speech) of his onscreen persona. With each lie, the film cuts from Don’s theatrically sincere face speaking to his rapt audience to flashback scenes that (comically) contradict the things he says. He speaks of entertaining his parent’s “society friends” while we see a young lad in breeches, tap dancing in a smoky pool hall from which he is promptly evicted. He tells of his rise to success with his friend, Cosmo Brown, their “conservatory training” (we see them bashing out tunes in a noisy bar), and their success on the vaudeville circuit in “all the best music halls in the country” (we see a montage of the last-hope towns where the two actually performed). He describes his warm, mutually supportive relationship with Lina while we see the antagonism that marked their first encounter. We quickly become privy to various forms of Hollywood’s institutional fakery: stuntmen who stand in for film stars; a phoney off-screen romance between the stars; silent film actors whose words spoken on set bear little resemblance to the written text on the inter-titles of the finished product.

Inside the theatre, we see the premiere screening of the “sweethearts” new swashbuckling period drama, *The Royal Rascal*. When Lina comes on the screen, bedecked in white wig, her skin glowing alabaster on black-and-white film, a young woman in the audience sighs, “She’s so refined. I think I’ll kill myself”. Such is the power of Lina’s screen image, which is indeed luminous. Yet up until now, we, the audience of *Singin’ in the Rain*, have yet to hear her speak. She is as silent as the films

in which she appears. Out on the red carpet, Don has done all of the talking for the pair. As they take their bows on stage after the premier, Lina steps forward and opens her mouth as if to make a speech but Don stops her, deftly ushering her from the stage before she gets the chance. Backstage, an angry Lina finally speaks. “What’s the big idea?!” she shrieks, “Can’t a girl get a word in edgewise?!”. And we finally understand the problem. Lina’s voice is comically atrocious, an exaggerated, squeaky whine issued in the cadences and vocabulary of a stereotyped lower-class Brooklyn accent—a “voice that could strip wallpaper”¹²⁴; in fact, a voice which is meant to signal “bimbo” to the audience, just as it clearly does to her male colleagues. Lina is placatingly told that she is a beautiful woman but that “audiences think you have a voice to match”. With this, the final form of fakery and concealment, and the central theme of the plot, is introduced.

Of course there is also a love story, that of Don and aspiring actress Kathy Seldon (played by Debbie Reynolds). Samuel G. Marinov echoes Feuer’s definition of the genre as one that is always concerned primarily with the love story, *Singin’ in the Rain* being no exception to the rule. He writes:

Singin’ in the Rain... tells a sentimental story of two beautiful young people who have to overcome seemingly ‘insurmountable’ obstacles to their happiness, which they of course eventually do. Semantically, the film... employs a linear narrative with a few subplots that are completely subordinate to the main story.¹²⁵

His arguments draw on Feuer’s definition of the Hollywood musical which states that either figuratively or literally the musical revolves around and resolves in “the marriage of the couple”. For Feuer the marriage of the couple must also coincide with the “success of the show”, in the case of the backstage musical (which *Singin’ in the Rain* in some respects is), and the successful reconciliation of cultural “forces of entertainment with forces opposed to entertainment”, wherein “values associated on the one hand with rational cognitive thought or even Puritanism (the reality principle) and on the other hand, the world of the imagination, the world of freedom, impulse spontaneity, values which underlie the pleasure principle and entertainment”.¹²⁶ But, while it is true that *Singin’ in the Rain* follows this formula in the sense of the

¹²⁴ Amy Herzog, interviewed in *Ghost Voices: Secret Voices of Hollywood*, dir. Guy Evans, BBC, 2012.

¹²⁵ Marinov, S. G., “Pennies from Heaven, *The Singing Detective* and *Lipstick on Your Collar*: Redefining the Genre of Musical Film” in Gras, V. W., and Cook, J. R., (eds.), *The Passion of Dennis Potter: International Collected Essays*, (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 2000), 196.

¹²⁶ Feuer, *Hollywood Musical*, 71.

simultaneous victories of the romantic couple (Lockwood and Seldon) and the show, I take issue with Marinov's characterization of the "few subplots" that he considers "subordinate" to the love story, however much the film itself might appear to support this idea. Indeed, as I will argue below, it is one "subplot" in particular—that of Lina's plight—that is the main plot of the film.¹²⁷

From the start we see the romantic formula reflected in the actual star billing: Reynolds (Kathy) shares the above-title credit with Kelly and Donald O'Connor (who plays Cosmo Brown, Don's best friend), while Hagen (Lina), whose name appears after the title, shares equal billing with Millard Mitchell (who plays R. F. Simpson, Head of Monumental Pictures) and Cyd Charisse, who performs in only one sequence (the 'Broadway Ballet'). By these measures the Kelly-Reynolds (Lockwood-Seldon) love story is indeed the main plot of the film. But I would like to turn the tables on *this* example of Hollywood mythologizing and argue that the love story is in fact subordinate to the main story, which I believe is *Lina's*, and, by extension, Hollywood's. Although Lamont is portrayed as the film's antagonist, the obstacle to the lovers' eventual happiness—stupid, vapid, vain, a character undeserving of her fame which she can only secure through bribery and subterfuge—she is by other counts a sympathetic character. We are asked to believe that by dint of her unfortunate voice any talent she possesses is superficial, skin deep. The "personalities" of the silent screen, Kathy tells Don in their first meeting, are not true actors like those of the stage who "say those glorious words". Silent film actors, according to Kathy, are mere "shadows", not flesh and blood, "just a lot of dumb show". From the safe distance of 1952, the filmmakers pass judgment on not only the acting standards of the silent era—and by extension Lina—but the legitimacy of the entire form. Before sound, they seem to imply, movies were mere spectacle; after sound they were art. This is 50s Hollywood disavowing its silent, black-and-white past in order to promote an all-singing all-dancing Technicolor.

As the plot of *Singin' in the Rain* unfolds the success of Warner Brother's talking picture *The Jazz Singer* spurs Monumental Studios to switch to sound format for the new Lamont-and-Lockwood film, *The Duelling Cavalier*, already in production, a

¹²⁷ While I cannot say with complete confidence that I am the only person to articulate this argument, I have never come across it in any literature on the film, which to the last portray Lina as the antagonist. Carol Clover (see page 48) comes closest in her discussion of the production's hypocrisy in the employment of ghost voices and the issue of "stolen talent".

process fraught with the then unfamiliar challenges of sound recording (in one take, for example, the microphone concealed in Lina's dress records her heartbeat) and Lina's unsuccessful elocution lessons. At the preview screening for *The Duelling Cavalier*, the audience jeers at the clumsy sound recording (for example, when Don's character casts aside his staff in order to woo Lina, it lands with a loud clatter; when Lina gently taps her fan on Lockwood's shoulder—where there is presumably a hidden microphone—the heavy thud prompts one audience member to call out, “Hey Lina! What are you hitting him with? A black jack?!”). Predictably, and most damaging to the team, the audience members are disillusioned by the clash of Lina's grating voice against the idealized image of her as a lady of great beauty and refinement. After the preview all appears lost for the careers of Lockwood-and-Lamont until Kathy and Don's friend Cosmo (who is the studio's new music director) hatch the idea of turning *The Duelling Cavalier* into a musical (renamed *The Dancing Cavalier*) with Kathy's voice substituting for Lina's, thus saving the Lockwood-Lamont team and Don's movie career.

All seems to go well at first. A scene in which we see Kathy in the studio recording the love song, ‘Would You?’, cuts to Lina standing before a Victrola horn dutifully learning to lipsynch to Kathy's recording. However, unbeknownst to Lina, Kathy is also overdubbing her spoken dialogue. When Lina discovers that not only is Kathy “doing the talking” for her in the film but that she, Kathy, will receive an onscreen credit for her performance and a full promotional campaign afterwards, Lina strong-arms R. F. Simpson into removing Kathy's screen credit and forcing her to continue providing her, Lina's, voice “and nothing else”. In the end, of course, all is revealed. Lina is publicly shamed and Kathy takes her “rightful place” as Don's leading lady (on and off the screen), an outcome that is as problematic as it is disingenuous. According to Carol Clover:

Singin' in the Rain's morality tale of stolen talent restored is driven by a nervousness about just the opposite, about stolen talent unrestored, and that one reason for its abiding popularity is the way it redresses our underlying fear that the talent or art we most enjoy in movies like *Singin' in the Rain* is art we somehow ‘know’ to be uncredited and unseen. The question is what talent and who it belongs to.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Clover, C. J., “Dancin’ in the Rain”, *Critical Inquiry*, 21/ 4 (Summer, 1995), 725.

In the making of the film, the “talent unrestored” is, ironically, that of Jean Hagen (the actress playing Lina). In production, Debbie Reynolds lipsynched to Hagen’s pre-recorded dialogue in the scene where her character, Kathy Seldon, is supposedly providing the speaking voice for Lamont. Furthermore, Kathy’s singing voice, to which Lina lipsynchs in the making of *The Dancing Cavalier*, was provided by another “unrestored talent”, that of singer Betty Noyes. The actor, Reynolds, lipsynchs to Hagen’s and Noyes’s voices as her character, Seldon, supposedly provides her own voice in order to conceal Lina’s vocal shortcomings. For today’s audiences the filmmaker’s slight of hand is common knowledge, a now-familiar bit of trivia and, in the words of Peter Wollen¹²⁹, “an endearing irony... which subverts its own appearance of authenticity”.

But even without knowledge of the film’s own subversion (of which audience members in the 1950s were unaware) the triumph of the final scene, in which Lina’s lipsynching is revealed and Kathy’s talent “restored”, comes off as disingenuous. Lina, her ego primed by the opening-night success of *The Dancing Cavalier* and her newfound litigious power over studio head, Simpson, finally appears centre stage to make her own speech in her own voice. Naturally, the audience hears the vocal discrepancy between the screen- and the live-Lina and entreats her to sing for them “like she did in the film”. A microphone is set up behind the curtain and Kathy is duly placed behind both so that Lina, standing in front of the curtain, can lipsynch the song, ‘Singin’ in the Rain’, to Kathy’s voice. Partway through, Don, Cosmo, and Simpson raise the curtain to reveal Kathy—and the ruse—to the laughter of the audience. Lina, confused by the laughter, only catches on when Cosmo comes on stage, pushes Seldon aside, and continues the song. We see the horror on Lina’s face as she hears Cosmo’s baritone apparently issuing from her own lips (*See DVD1 > Chapter 2: Singin’ in the Rain – Lina’s Final Speech*).

Both Kathy and Lina run from the stage: Kathy broken hearted by Don’s apparent complicity in the effort to save Lamont-and-Lockwood “at all costs”; Lina, shame-faced, her career presumably over, herself a laughing-stock. Finally, Don pulls Kathy back onto the stage (we never see Lina again), announcing to the audience, “Hers is the voice you heard and loved. She’s the *real* star of the picture!”. The final shot in the film is Don and Kathy standing somewhere in the Hollywood hills admiring a billboard

¹²⁹ Wollen, P., *Singin’ in the Rain* (London: BFI Publishing, 1992), 56.

advertising their first picture together, *Singin' in the Rain*. Talent is restored. Hollywood is redeemed, all her sins washed away.

It is my view, however, that the ultimate lie in *Singin' in the Rain* comes not from Don's fictions or Lina's lipsynching, or even the "endearing irony" of the film's own reliance on ghost voices, but from the mouth of Monument Pictures studio boss R.F. Simpson. When Lina demands that Kathy's screen credit be removed and that she continue providing Lina's voice, "and nothing else", Simpson replies, "Why you'd be taking her career away from her! People simply don't do that!". The truth, of course, is they do and have always done. While at times an open secret (at others well concealed), the lipsynched voice is almost never credited. The screen truth—the authenticating fiction—is the *composite* of body and voice, no matter from where or from whom they originate. Ultimately, as we have seen, it seems to be the *image* that has primacy and to which we attribute the source of the voice. In other words, Kathy Seldon is not the star of *The Dancing Cavalier*. That "voice you heard and loved" is actually not the star of the show. In the "reality" that is cinema, it is the Seldon/Lamont composite that the audience loves (or, outside the world of the film, the composite of Noyes's singing voice with Hagen's body and speaking voice), and, further to that and most importantly, the fictive matching of the ideal voice to the ideal body. This is not to say that sound is subordinate to image, but neither is it true that the voice absented from the image is the only marker of authenticity. The two exist together, each nuancing the other. The image, however—the container out of which the voice is sounded—is the anchor in a medium that privileges sight over sound. Neepa Majumdar, citing Seifert, writes:

Related to the question of the authenticity of the song performance in Hollywood cinema is the question of the primacy of the image over sound. According to Marsha Siefert, 'the illusions that the voice belongs to, as well as emanates from, the image on the screen requires [the] assumption of an image's natural authority.'¹³⁰

While it is true that some highly bankable stars of the silent era lost out to the talkies, it is also true that in some cases it was not the voice alone that destroyed careers, but other factors such as already-fading star power, or sabotage by studios that for any number of

¹³⁰ Majumdar, N., "The Embodied Voice: Song Sequences and Stardom in Popular Hindi Cinema", in Wojcik P. R., and Knight, A., (eds.), *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 167, citing Seifert, M., "Image/Music/Voice: Song Dubbing in Hollywood Musicals", *Journal of Communication*, 45/2, (1995), 46. This relation of sound and image is close to Altman's theorisation of the sound hermeneutic that "determines that a disembodied voice in film must be habited in a plausible body" (Altman, "Moving Lips", 74).

reasons were no longer interested in supporting an actor's career. In the famous case of John Gilbert, there is doubt as to whether his voice was actually "too high and nasal" or if studio manipulation—intentionally speeding up his dialogue, etc., to produce a higher pitch and thinner timbre—was used in order to oust the difficult and unpopular employee Gilbert was purported to be.¹³¹

In the case of *Singin' in the Rain*, the lie of the "voice as the star", and the film audience's complicity in believing the lie, points to the real problem with Lina: she is *unlikeable*. Not only unlikeable, but cheap, blonde, and dumb, and therefore seen to deserve her comeuppance. In truth, and certainly by the standards of the silent era, Lina is in fact a marvellous actress, a point that is seldom made in scholarly accounts concerned with the questions of authenticity raised by the film. The actress Lina is able to communicate vulnerability, passion, and refinement (to the point of inspiring suicidal thoughts in her fans). This is even more remarkable given the complete lack of refinement in her off-screen character. During a cut in the filming of the ill-fated *Duelling Cavalier* in which the pair has just been filmed in a clinch, a visibly aroused Lina exclaims, "Oh, Donny! You couldn't kiss me like that and not mean it one teeny weeny bit!" to which Don replies, "Meet the greatest actor in the world!" For Don, performing contrary to character is proof of great acting, but the same observation is never made regarding Lina for whom, by Don's standards, every scene should be considered an acting triumph. Lina's lack of talent, however, is taken for granted by many critics writing about *Singin' in the Rain*. Peter N. Chumo, for example, writes "the untalented Lina . . . whose movements are a series of poses for the camera, suitable for the silent films she is accustomed to, but hopelessly inadequate for the birth of the sound film".¹³²

Seen in this light, Lina's talent is stolen just as surely as Kathy's is. The focus on the successful conclusion of the love story (Feuer's "marriage of the couple") and the dramatic moment in which Don lifts Kathy up on to the stage, raises her star, as it were (while they sing 'You are my Lucky Star'), is actually just as disingenuous as any of Lina's failed machinations. Generally, audiences buy the love story (the musical numbers in particular compel us to do so), and we also buy the myth of Hollywood—a

¹³¹ Crafton, D., *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 498.

¹³² Chumo II, P. N., "Dance, Flexibility, and the Renewal of Genre in 'Singin' in the Rain'", *Cinema Journal* 36, No. 1, Fall 1996, 40.

Hollywood that “simply doesn’t do that to people”—that corrects its own inauthenticity, that exposes its sins only to redeem itself. However, if we accept Lina as protagonist instead of Don/Kathy/Cosmo, *Singin’ in the Rain* actually tells a more truthful story about Hollywood.

The “Quest for the Perfect Fake”¹³³

Over the years, the Hollywood studios employed playback singers who worked, like Kathy Seldon, uncredited and contracted to silence, for a flat sum. Most famous among these is Marni Nixon, a soprano who in the middle years of the twentieth century was known primarily in art-music circles (she worked with modernist composers such as Schoenberg and Stravinsky) but is now widely acknowledged as providing the voices for, among others, Deborah Kerr, Natalie Wood, and Audrey Hepburn in *The King and I*, *West Side Story*, and *My Fair Lady* respectively.¹³⁴ Nixon’s contribution to film was first revealed to the general public after she ghosted for Audrey Hepburn in *My Fair Lady*, who, though at the peak of her popularity, became the victim of a backlash (fueled in part by lingering resentment that the producers had cast her—the “movie star”—in the lead instead of Julie Andrews, who had originated the role on Broadway).¹³⁵ Nixon, in an autobiography and interviews, has talked about the challenges of “becoming” the actresses she ghosted, of acquiring their inflections, accents, the way they’d tense their throat muscles and form their vowels, the individual grain of their voices: to mimic their entire vocal stamp while also hitting the high notes. For Hollywood executives she was the “ideal voice” that could be inserted into an “ideal body”. In the 1960s, *Newsweek* Magazine dubbed her the “Ghostest with the Mostest”, but there were other singers who were also staples in the industry, among them Bill Lee, India Adams, Betty Wand, and Jimmy Bryant. While, according to Nixon, some actors welcomed the collaboration (Deborah Kerr and Nixon formed a close partnership in developing the voice of Kerr’s character, Anna, in *The King and I*), Nixon also talks about the darker side of the practice, especially when studios tried to conceal it from the actors themselves. For some (Natalie Wood is the primary example she cites) there were lingering detrimental emotional effects. She explains, “[Some actors] don’t want to be told that someone is coming in to do their [singing]. After all,

¹³³ Herzog, Amy, interviewed in *Secret Voices of Hollywood*, dir. Guy Evans, BBC, 2012.

¹³⁴ Nixon, Marni, *I Could Have Sung All Night: My Story*, (New York: Billiard Books, 2006), passim.

¹³⁵ Nixon, *I Could Have Sung*, 84-100.

your voice is part of your persona, and it's a very hard thing to take".¹³⁶ Both Rita Moreno, whose singing was dubbed by Betty Wand in *West Side Story*, and Rosanno Brazzi, who lipsynched to the voice of Giorgio Tozzi in *South Pacific*, complained about what they perceived as a mismatch between their acting and the performance of their ghosts. Moreno complained that Wand's "voice [was] not hard, not emotional enough, not guttural" to match Moreno's acting and the emotional tenor of the scene. Brazzi was petulant, complaining, "I cannot sing to that goddam shit voice".¹³⁷ Amy Herzog, however, allows that *audiences* derive pleasure from hearing the ideal voice in the ideal body. She describes Hollywood's "quest for the perfect fake" as being

central to Western and particularly American culture [in] that we want to create a hyper-real world. Only attainable through fabrication, what we see on the screen is a Frankenstein monster. It's a false image but one that is entirely satisfying as well.¹³⁸

As recently as 2013 Nixon defended the practice, in comparison to recent film musicals in which the actors sing for themselves (in *Les Miserables* and *Mamma Mia!* most particularly) along similar lines, commenting that filmmakers had "gone overboard" in their search for authenticity by allowing actors who were "questionable vocally" to destabilize the "satisfying" image (to use Herzog's descriptor) to the point of distraction. Nixon firmly states, "I would have rather had it dubbed".¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Nixon, Marni, Interview, *Chicago Tribune Web Edition* (24 January 2008), viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gk2dur2wn>.

¹³⁷ *Secret Voices of Hollywood*, dir. Guy Evans, BBC, 2012.

¹³⁸ Herzog, A., interviewed in *Secret Voices of Hollywood*, dir. Guy Evans, BBC, 2012.

¹³⁹ Nixon, Marni, interviewed in Catlin, R., "Stand-in for the stars—the art of the dubbing singer", *The Guardian*, 25 June 2013. A look at the Bollywood practice of playback singing, known as "Picturization" (providing a picture for the voice), provides a sharp contrast to Hollywood methods and attitudes. In Hindi cinema, the playback singer is given credit for her contribution and, what's more, is celebrated. Lata Mangeshkar and her sister, Asha Bhosle, for example, are celebrities in their own right and their singing is as much an attraction to audiences as the actors on screen. This raises interesting cultural questions about relationships of sound and image, as it suggests the absence of dominance of one over the other. Cory Creekmur states, "Although they provide the music for diegetic performances, Bombay songs are recognized to also be nondiegetic sound, music whose source is elsewhere even as it supports visual responses in the story space, a seeming contradiction that in fact illuminates recent Hollywood practice." (Creekmur, C. K., "Picturizing American Cinema: Hindi film songs and the last days of a genre", in Wojcik P. R., and Knight, A. (eds.), *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 397). The same questions of authenticity, therefore, do not arise in this complementary setting. "Song performances" Neepa Majumdar observes, "are authenticated precisely through the knowledge of the star persona of the singing voice. *The morality of vocal substitution becomes irrelevant when the dual star reference makes it equally a question of borrowing a body as of borrowing a voice.* [emphasis mine]" (Majumdar, "Embodied Voice", 168-9).

Entertainment as Utopia

Whatever sins we can attribute to the film musical—whatever anxieties we might have about production practices and the unreality of the “dual registers” and the “perfect fake” of the playback singer/actor composite—we may also view the genre in a more positive light. Richard Dyer proposes five categories which form what he defines as the “utopian sensibility” of entertainment: Abundance (elimination of poverty for self and others; equal distribution of wealth), Energy (work and play synonymous), Intensity (excitement, drama, affectivity of living), Transparency (open, spontaneous, honest communications and relationships), and Community (all together in one place, communal interests, collective activity).¹⁴⁰ These categories represent solutions to inadequacies found in society, inadequacies that audiences, for better or worse and however temporarily, seek to correct. Society’s ills are numerous and vary from person to person. The challenge of entertainment is to offer *general solutions* for a complex of societal inadequacies and cultural tensions that will resonate with the vast majority of viewers. The classic Hollywood musical, he argues, is as a genre particularly adept at providing these solutions and effects/affects. It is worth having a detailed look at Dyer’s arguments in order to situate into a wider context the role that lipsynching plays in film musicals and how it relates to our needs, expectations, and culturally-formed assumptions and desires. He charts the categories of specific inadequacies in society with their utopian solutions thusly:

Social tension/inadequacy/absence	Utopian solution
Scarcity (actual poverty in the society; poverty observable in the surrounding societies, e.g. Third World); unequal distribution of wealth	Abundance (elimination of poverty for self and others; equal distribution of wealth)
Exhaustion (work as grind, alienated labour, pressures of urban life)	Energy (work and play synonymous), city dominated... or pastoral return...
Dreariness (monotony, predictability, instrumentality of the daily round)	Intensity (excitement, drama, affectivity of living)
Manipulation (advertising, bourgeois democracy, sex roles)	Transparency (open, spontaneous, honest communications and relationships)
Fragmentation (job mobility, rehousing and development, high-rise flats, legislation against collective action)	Community (all together in one place, communal interests, collective activity)

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¹⁴⁰ Dyer, R., ‘Entertainment and Utopia’, in Altman, Rick (ed.) *Genre: The Musical* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 183-4.

¹⁴¹ Dyer, R., ‘Entertainment and Utopia’, in Altman, R. (ed.), *Genre: The Musical* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 183-4.

“The advantage of this analysis”, he explains, “is that it does offer some explanation of why entertainment *works*.”:

It is not just left-overs from history, it is not *just* what show business, or ‘they’, force on the rest of us, it is not simply the expression of eternal needs—it responds to real needs *created by society*. The weakness of the analysis... is in the give-away absences from the left-hand column—no mention of class, race or patriarchy. That is, while entertainment is responding to needs that are real, at the same time it is also defining and delimiting what constitute the legitimate needs of people in this society.¹⁴²

Dyer contends with the familiar charge of entertainment as mere spectacle and escapism, in part by building on Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s theories of media which question and nuance the familiar Marxist/Adornian critique of mass entertainment as expressed in ideas such as “manipulation” and “false needs” created by capitalism, while also replacing Enzensberger’s “appeal to [essentialist] ‘elemental’ and ‘physiological’ demands” of “deep social needs” with his (Dyer’s) categories of “specific inadequacies in society”. Dyer quotes Enzensberger on this at length:

The electronic media do not owe their irresistible power to any sleight-of-hand but to the elemental power of deep social needs which come through even in the present deprived form of these media...

Consumption as spectacle contains the promise that want will disappear. The deceptive, brutal and obscene features of this festival derive from the fact that there can be no question of real fulfilment of its promise. But so long as scarcity holds sway, use-value remains a decisive category which can only be abolished by trickery. Yet trickery on such a scale is only conceivable if it is based on mass need. This need—it is a utopian one—is there. It is the desire for a new ecology, for a breaking-down of environmental barriers, for an aesthetic which is not limited to the sphere of the ‘artistic’. These desires are not—or not primarily—internalized rules of the games as played by the capitalist system. They have physiological roots and can no longer be suppressed. Consumption as spectacle is—in parody form—the anticipation of a utopian situation.¹⁴³

While agreeing with the complexity of Enzensberger’s account as far as it goes, Dyer further complicates such arguments by delineating the circular nature of capitalist strategies. He states,

The categories of the [utopian] sensibility point to gaps or inadequacies in capitalism, but only those gaps or inadequacies that capitalism proposes itself to deal with. At our worse sense of it, entertainment provides alternatives *to* capitalism which will be provided *by* capitalism.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Dyer, “Entertainment”, 184.

¹⁴³ Enzensberger, H. M., “Constituents of a Theory of the Media” in McQuail, D., (ed.), *Towards a Sociology of Mass Communications*, (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), quoted in Dyer, “Entertainment”, 183.

¹⁴⁴ Dyer, “Entertainment”, 185.

Through this and other observations, Dyer takes pains to provide an account of “our worse sense” of entertainment as practicing and reinforcing the hegemonic (white, male, bourgeois, capitalist) values that dominate society (and its inadequacies) and produce and populate forms of mass entertainment. Yet despite the validity of such arguments, which he acknowledges, his aim is to complicate the situation of entertainment by giving priority to what he deems its legitimate and productive uses.

It may be fruitful to compare Dyer’s categories of entertainment with Jane Feuer’s “myths” of entertainment by which musicals (particular those of the MGM Freed unit, which produced *Singin’ in the Rain*) can be seen to function as “folk art”. She proposes three inter-related “myths”: the myth of spontaneity, the myth of integration, and the myth of audience, with which she argues for a reassessment of the Hollywood musical-as-mass-art away from something imposed on an audience by professionals for passive consumption, to one that includes aspects found in folk art, such as participation and identification. In short, her project is to identify the *uses* to which an audience *puts* musicals as something separate from the goals and functions of the musical as a commercial product. She concludes:

Both the myth of integration and the myth of audience suggest that the MGM musical is really folk art, that the audience participates in the creation of musical entertainment. The myth of integration suggests that the achievement of personal fulfilment goes hand-in-hand with the enjoyment of entertainment. And the myth of spontaneity suggests that the MGM musical is not artificial but rather completely natural. Performance is no longer defined as something professionals do on a stage; instead, it permeates the lives of professional and non-professional singers and dancers. Entertainment, the myth implies, can break down the barriers between life and art.¹⁴⁵

The notion that entertainment may be used in ways that are liberatory, that it can offer something approaching a concrete answer to ideas of scarcity, exhaustion, or dreariness (Dyer), does not ring true if one’s critical perspective is centred on exposing the socio-economic forces at play behind the work. A commercially produced work designed for consumption that leaves open the possibility that we, the audience, might get involved, that “when a performance is a spontaneous one taking place in the realm of the narrative, we may experience a strong desire to sing and dance in the rain ourselves”,¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Feuer, J., “The Self-reflective Musical and the Myth of Entertainment”, in Grant, B. K., (ed.), *Film Genre Reader II*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995), 453.

¹⁴⁶ Feuer, J., *The Hollywood Musical*, (Houndmills: The Macmillan Press, second edition, 1993), 31.

is something that has often been disavowed as false consciousness or plain gullibility. Yet if, as Feuer suggests, and with whose analysis Dyer's position is strongly congruent, the musical is better understood - from the point of view of those who *use* it - as folk art, the situation is very different. The audience that is often included in musicals frequently transcend their given consumer roles as audience by "joining in"; for example, the street kids who gather round Gene Kelly in *An American in Paris*,¹⁴⁷ the Iowa townspeople who Robert Preston galvanises into song in the number 'Trouble' in *The Music Man*,¹⁴⁸ or James Cagney stirring up patriotic and participatory fervour in 'Over There' in *Yankee Doodle Dandy*¹⁴⁹. As Feuer states, "the contagious spirit inherent in musical performance" means that "the audience must be shown as participating in the *production* of the entertainment".¹⁵⁰ This spontaneous, inclusive and participatory feel is then projected through the musical to "us", the cinematic audience, who are "encouraged to identify with a spontaneous audience which has actually participated in the performance".¹⁵¹ The folk art attributes of the musical render ambiguous and unstable the elsewhere heavily policed distinctions between the professionals on stage, and their adoring but essentially passive audience. Watching such scenes the idea that "I could be part of that" seems not only plausible but desirable. In terms of opening spaces in the cultural monolith of industrialised entertainment through which "consumers" might find creative roles, or participative—and even liberatory - experiences, such readings of the Hollywood musical are productive in allowing for a shift of emphasis in critical approaches towards how people *actually* use this material. The musical number, therefore, opens the possibility of, as Martin Sutton puts it, a "space for play",¹⁵² and I believe that this feeds into the future conditions of possibility out of which explicitly diegetic lipsynching in cinema, as well as amateur, vernacular lipsynching to pre-recorded music emerges.

Scandals: When Musicians Lipsynch and the Authenticity Debate

Though I have argued that the conventional interpretation of lipsynching in *Singin' in the Rain* is in fact entirely in keeping with the constructed nature of the Hollywood film, and maintains rather than critiques exactly those aspects of the Hollywood myth it

¹⁴⁷ *An American in Paris*, dir. Vincente Minnelli, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1951.

¹⁴⁸ *The Music Man*, dir. Morton DaCosta, Warner Brothers, 1962.

¹⁴⁹ *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, dir. Michael Curtiz, Warner Brothers, 1942.

¹⁵⁰ Feuer, "Self-reflective Musical", 170.

¹⁵¹ Feuer, *Hollywood Musical*, 34.

¹⁵² Sutton, M., "Patterns of Meaning in the Musical", in Altman, R. (ed.), *Genre: The Musical* (London: BFI, 1981), 191. 190-196.

appears to expose, the attitudes articulated have remained extremely persistent even up to the present day. If the myth of *Singin' in the Rain* is that, as Don Lockwood says, the “real” star resides in the owner of the voice, and that Lina is thereby exposed as an object for ridicule, a very similar dynamic informed the reception of Milli Vanilli’s hit ‘Girl You Know It’s True’, when it was revealed that “the singers” not only lipsynched in live performances but that they were not even lipsynching to their own voices (the pair won a Grammy Award for Best New Artist in 1990, which was rescinded by the Academy later that year). As of this writing (2014), the same attitudes that caused the shaming of Milli Vanilli persist in more recent scandals involving performers as diverse as pop star Britney Spears, operatic tenor Luciano Pavarotti, and Lin Miaoke, the young girl who became the object of controversy in the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing when it was revealed that she had lipsynched in the opening ceremonies to the voice of another girl, Yang Peiyi. Despite the feelings of surprise implicit in the outrage surrounding these and other incidents, “[t]here was nothing particularly novel about what Milli Vanilli had done”, as Auslander writes:

the possibility of passing off one voice as another was implicit from the moment music was first recorded. Substitutions of this kind have been quite typical in the recordings of popular music for several decades, and there are many well-known cases of groups having been formed by producers specifically to exploit recordings made by other voices.¹⁵³

And, as I presented previously, the practice had been normal procedure in cinema for decades. What was different, and what resonates so strongly with the fate of Lina in *Singin' in the Rain*, was that Milli Vanilli “were discovered to be transporting these techniques from the studio and television screen [they lipsynched at the televised Grammy Awards, like many others] to the concert stage”.¹⁵⁴ The moment at which Lina is revealed as lipsynching is also in what *should* be a live performance.¹⁵⁵ The subsequent scandal of 1989-90 led to the practice of lipsynching, which had long been a staple of musical performance in a mediatized age, being officially identified as *the* cardinal sin against musical and artistic authenticity; a lie, a cheat, a breach of public

¹⁵³ Auslander, *Liveness*, 94.

¹⁵⁴ Auslander, *Liveness*, 94.

¹⁵⁵ Another anecdote, in which “faking it” live, even if not actual lipsynching recalls the conditions in which Lina is revealed, concerns the myth that Hendrix toured with the Monkees—one of the most celebrated and vilified of the “invented” groups of the sixties—as their guitarist. He in fact did tour with them, but as opening act, not as one of the band. The story goes, however, that Hendrix played from behind a curtain which at one point fell down, “revealing Hendrix and unmasking The Monkees as frauds. Though the story is false ... it is very revealing of rock ideology and the premium it places on the ability to perform one’s music live” (Auslander, *Liveness*, 80).

trust, the shame and embarrassment of an increasingly cynical and image-obsessed music industry, and even a legal issue. Yet in the two-decade wake of the -- still palpable -- furore over Milli Vanilli, lipsynching has become standard practice in the music industry, with more investment of money and technological expertise supporting the lipsynched performance than ever before. Today, lipsynching features in the news on a weekly -- sometimes daily -- basis, and its high-profile practitioners are endlessly exposed and abhorred by critics and participants of web communities, in forums, blogs, and social networking sites, to the extent that a kind of witch hunt is taking place among fans and critics of popular music, one marked by a paranoia, centred around being “duped”, in partnership with an almost gleeful self-righteousness.¹⁵⁶

I do think it is worth noting how vitriolic the discourse has become over the question of whether lipsynching is or is not acceptable in professional performance settings. The question of authenticity inevitably arises when talking about lipsynching, and the lipsynching witch hunts of recent years which target professional musicians have become increasingly vicious, especially if the performer in question works in an already “suspect” and “inauthentic” pop tradition as opposed to “authentic” genres such as rock and hip hop, or attracts an audience that is seen to be primarily young and female, or, most commonly (and attracting the most venomous attention), a performer who happens to be young and female herself. Male performers are also taken to task, but generally with less scathing judgment and with more voices in support of the artist, especially if the artist falls into the rock rather than pop camp.¹⁵⁷ Male lipsynching -- in certain genres, anyway -- is often characterized in public commentary as an unfortunate but basically anomalous occurrence.

As an example of this it is instructive to examine a fairly recent Britney Spears lipsynching “scandal” (on her 2009 *Circus* tour) which contrasts disturbingly with responses to a near-contemporaneous lipsynching scandal involving Scott Weiland, singer for the grunge group, Stone Temple Pilots (STP). A fan video taken at a STP concert in Cincinnati in August 2010 caught the moment when Weiland took a spectacular fall from the stage while his voice could still be heard in the mix, singing without a hitch. A study of comments left on YouTube and other social media and

¹⁵⁶ While there is significant recent coverage of the scandal aspect of lipsynching in the popular press and social media, the study of lipsynching is an area that, with the exception of cinema scholars addressing its use in musical film, is largely uninhabited in recent scholarship.

¹⁵⁷ Milli Vanilli, of course, fall into the latter category.

networking sites expose gender and genre biases that assume female pop performers to be automatically inauthentic, while giving male rock performers the benefit of the doubt. Comments also show how these biases are applied to the differently gendered musical genres themselves, Pop (female) and Rock (male). To identify musical genres as gendered can be a high-risk undertaking, inviting criticisms of essentialisation, stereotyping, and putting square pegs in round holes. However, it is widely acknowledged that much pop, on the basis of what is often a predominantly female, teenage fan base, draws negative valuation from some quarters, particularly from individuals who identify with what has become called a “rockist” ideology. Kembrew McLeod has undertaken an empirical research project collecting adjectives used by rock critics, separating them into those which are applied as positive or negative assessments, and then examined them for implications of gendering. The correlation between negative valuations and adjectives associated with the feminine, juxtaposed with positive valuations in masculine terms, suggests very strongly that rock criticism’s assessment of rock and pop are very strongly gendered, exposing through the language used, an institutionalised misogyny. As McLeod says, the discourse of rock criticism “is thus one way in which rock criticism helps sustain gender inequality in the music industry, even beyond the relatively small world of rock criticism”.¹⁵⁸ In order to attain some degree of cultural plausibility rock criticism must tap into a set of ideological frames that ground its observations in the culture at large; this is implicit in McLeod’s analysis. He is also clear that these genderings do not work immanently, but are discursive: “the *way* critics employ these ideas within the discursive space of reviews tells a story. For instance, the concept of simplicity is not inherently gendered, but the way in which it is used in rock critic discourse is. Critics damn the Carpenters’ ‘saccharine simplicity’ and praise RUN-DMC’s ‘brutal simplicity’”.¹⁵⁹

Although my case study revealed messages of both support and disdain for Weiland and Spears alike, the following quotes are characteristic of the critiques I encountered in my research overall, and strongly correlate with a predominant “rockist” ideology such as it is exposed through McLeod’s research. Monikers and pseudonyms of YouTube commentators are italicised.

Comments on Weiland:

¹⁵⁸ McLeod, K., “Between Rock and a Hard Place: Gender and Rock Criticism”, in Jones, S., (ed.), *Pop Music and the Press* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 95.

¹⁵⁹ McLeod, *Rock and Hard Place*, 108.

- *The Noble Vision*: Scott disappeared under the stage for a solid minute in a half, and finally reemerged and continued to sing without missing a beat. Weiland, being the true rock star frontman he is, pushed through the pain and continued the show.
- *VegasCrackerman*: Um, there is no way in hell that Scott is lip-synching. Get it right. This is Scott Weiland.
- *dani*: There is no Milli Vanilli here for you sir ... only one of the greatest rock bands of our generation.
- *Jack k*: Scott Weiland may be a wild man and over the edge (literally) often, but hes [sic] no POPSTAR. He is a singer by profession, entertainer second. He knows this and his band is legitimately talented musicians--they don't care to fake it. Yes, the video looks odd, but numerous people close to the incident said he was singing the whole time.
- *CTGraphixGuy*: So what if he's using some backing tracks. ... try living the life these guys live. ... sleeping very little, and in tiny uncomfortable beds, and all the while expending every ounce of natural and artificial energy you have night in and night out. And still putting out a high-end recorded and live product. From where I'm sittin [sic], it's a miracle these bands can play live at all.
- *Gh*: Scott is a pro and he does his job like a pro, deal with it.
- *Anjohl*: Unless this is disproven, I will never support this band again.
- *Saverain*: They're just picking on him because he's been through a lot of shit.

Comments on Spears:

- *Gizmo359c*: ok let me start with this ... britany [sic] spears sucks, its [sic] not actually music, kmart started selling portable cd players to tweens then realized they needed something to play on them. its [sic] not actually real. shes [sic] not talented the only thing she can do is be told what to do by eager record companies wanting money. let this sink in.
- *JamesTKirkCobain*: I think the real mystery here are the assholes who pay to see this shit. I mean seriously, who are these people? As a guy in my 20's [sic] I would never in a million years. If I want to see a chick jumping around on stage I would go to my local strip bar... So that leaves faggots and little girls ... They are the ones responsible for this shit. Like Noel Gallagher says; They should be banned from buying music.
- *Italianny23*: a singer lip syncing? thats like a guitarist pretending to play the guitar
- *folly4444*: any "singer" who lip synchs is a fraud!
- *crazyazncentral*: Give her a break! dont act like shes [sic] the only one who lip-synchs. 50 cent, R - Kelly & SClub 7 all lipsync. plus most of her songs are fast paced that require a lot of dancing.
- *pxboxrange*: she brought all her shit on herself if she wasn't such a crap mother i.e. driving with a baby on her lap with no seat belt ... and didn't marry any man who will sleep with her
- *Quipper*: People pay good money to see her sing, lip syncing is just showing disrespect to all her fans. She shouldn't even be aloud to be called a singer.
- *jonywoodfansite*: she needs to die

Regardless of whether or not Weiland was "guilty" of lipsynching, the comments above serve to reify the hegemony of a rockist ideology in opposition to "pop", and that

expresses a strongly implied misogyny that targets not only female performers, but their female fans as well.¹⁶⁰ The gullibility of Lina's female fan who wants to "kill herself" because Lina is so beautiful and refined, and Lina's own gullibility in believing the constructed romance between herself and Lockwood in the magazines that are predominantly consumed by women and girls, anticipates these kinds of attitudes (even as their origins go much further back in history than the era of the Hollywood musical).

Live vs. Mediatized

There are a number of issues, then, that are always already present in the critical denigration of pop when it is compared to more "authentic" forms, such as rock or hip hop. I have reduced the main themes in this to three binary oppositions; authenticity versus commercialism, autonomy versus collaboration, live versus mediatized, as follows.

Greater value is assigned music derived from experience, i.e., the musical expression of the genuine life, emotional and intellectual, of an artist, as opposed to music made specifically for the marketplace. In other words, an *authentic* artist or song is *born*, not *made*, and there is greater cultural value in authentic art than in songs produced solely in the interests of commercialism.

Strongly related to this is the valuing of creative autonomy over collaboration: critical approval is awarded to songs or albums that are created, or perceived to be created, through the singular, autonomous efforts of the artists themselves—a singer-songwriter, perhaps, or the collaborative work of band members—not by collaborations between professional songwriters, producers, image-makers, and A/R people, in which the performers are the last, and possibly the least, members in the production chain. The romantic notion of the artist as "lone genius" is the standard by which songs that are said to be "factory-produced" are devalued. As we have seen in relation to the film industry, the collaborative nature of the production of the illusion of realism marks a site of doubt and inauthenticity, of what we see having been "invented" or "made up".

In keeping with the ideals of authenticity and autonomy outlined above, a music that seeks to claim authenticity for itself should be performed, or performable, live (with no

¹⁶⁰ In the case of Britney Spears, in particular, this misogyny gets partnered with a strong thread of homophobia coming from the same masculinist intolerance.

lipsynching). This is a key claim, as we have seen in the case of Scott Weiland, that rock makes for itself, and is a site at which the perceived triviality and inauthenticity of pop is articulated. Furthermore, the bodies of performers along with related extra-musical factors, such as the persona of the performer or biographical details of his personal life/legend, are in many cases as important as the music itself in creating a sense of musical authenticity and artistic integrity. Even a “recording artist” must be able to inhabit a corporeal performing body. An authentic performer is an *identifiable* performer who is able to control the material of performance. In contrast to this, the pop star need only be physically attractive and wear the right fashions, need have no biography to speak of beyond celebrity scandals or intrigues (like Lina Lamont’s), and have their music produced for them by a team of professionals (Stock, Aitken, and Waterman, for example).

However convenient these categories might be, though, in terms of presenting a coherent picture of the situation, they cannot be as neatly separated out as the listing above suggests, but remain closely intertwined with one another. For the “scandal” of live lipsynching it is the third binarism, “live and performable” versus “studio-produced” that is central. That said, “the live” and “the produced” maps very strongly onto “the autonomous” (doing it oneself) and “the collaborative” (being the product of a team of professionals),¹⁶¹ which is then implicit in the social productive structures of art that is “authentic” (individual and live) or merely “commercial” (produced in a studio by a corporate structure and in the financial interests of that structure).

Like Benjamin’s “aura”, which is conceived only in response to the advent of mechanical reproduction, the concept of “the live” only comes into being after recorded music made the alternative to live possible. If, as Peters puts it, “[s]ound was fundamentally an event”¹⁶² the nature of that event, what a musical event can be, has been utterly transformed by sound recording, impinging on not only the transformations in the social and cultural modalities through which sound might be experienced, but also on what we might term the ontological status of sounds themselves. Auslander recognises that there is a widespread and “common assumption ... that the live event is ‘real’ and that mediatized events [such as recordings] are secondary and somehow

¹⁶¹ The complication of collaboration is that many “authentic” rock bands also work collaboratively, though this is generally seen as being intra-group, rather than in terms of “outsiders”, teams of producers, managers, marketing people, etc.

¹⁶² Peters, *Speaking*, 164.

artificial reproductions of the real”.¹⁶³ He is, however, highly suspicious of any claims that propose a hard and fast, absolute distinction between live and recorded/mediatized, noting that despite its superficial similarity to cinema, TV was, for its first decades, “live”. This is complicated further by the use of enormous TV screens at live events, which for the majority of a stadium audience are the only way they will see the stars playing live on stage.¹⁶⁴

Relations of the live and the recorded/mediatized (Auslander prefers the second term) are thus never quite as simple as we might wish them to be. Theodore Gracyk, for example, notes that:

The vast majority of the time, the audience for rock music listens to *speakers* delivering *recordings*. Exploring the limitations and possibilities of the recording process, crafting music in those terms, rock’s primary materials are often the available recording and playback equipment. ...[S]tudio recordings have become the standard for judging live performances... [M]usicians are usually re-creating music [in live performances], not making it.¹⁶⁵

To many fans, really good musicians will sound “just like the record” in concert, thus authenticating their true musicianship. Interestingly, this position was reversed in the ideology of some punk bands where “sounding like the record” was an indicator that a band was simply playing along with the record industry. Joe Strummer of The Clash, in a filmed live performance from the late 70s asks the audience “Who wants it to sound like the record, then?” and when met with a wall of jeers answers his own question with “me neither!”.¹⁶⁶ Strummer’s position not only voices a refusal to conform to the slick demands of record company values, but also implies something of Théberge’s observation that “[t]he simple positing of ‘live’ music as the essential mode of musical production and reception inevitably leads to the portrayal of technology as a corrupting force, falsifying both musical performance and the experience of music”.¹⁶⁷ Gilbert and Pearson, in a detailed critique, trace a long history to this attitude, noting, as one

¹⁶³ Auslander, *Liveness*, 3.

¹⁶⁴ Auslander, *Liveness*, 94.

¹⁶⁵ Gracyk, T. A., *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 75, 77, 84.

¹⁶⁶ *The Way They Were*, Channel 4 Television.

¹⁶⁷ Théberge, P., “Technology”, in Horner, B., and Swiss, T., *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture*, (Malden, Oxford, Victoria: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 210.

instance, the violent reaction to Bob Dylan “going electric” at Newport, despite the fact that he had been playing through electric microphones and loudspeakers for years.¹⁶⁸

As with lipsynching, though, the argument whether live or recorded is more or less authentic is ultimately a fruitless one. As Auslander notes,

Gracyk argues that live performance and recordings are “two different media,” and goes on to claim that “recording facilitates a certain indifference as to whether the music can be re-created in live performance”.¹⁶⁹

This position effectively disables the dichotomy. Connor goes further in squaring the “live-or-produced” circle when he asserts that, like the recording, the live event is also a construction.

The live is always ‘produced’ as an artificial category of immediacy, and is always therefore a quotation of itself; never the live, always the ‘live’. Paradoxically, this desire for the original and the authentic exists alongside the recognition that there never can be such a thing, at least in contemporary rock music.¹⁷⁰

Such a position implicitly acknowledges the fact that multi-tracking, separation, cutting in, and other studio and editing manipulations produced recordings for which no original exists, and that with popular music forms post-1955 what we have are constructions. It seems plausible that this fact, within an ideology that sees the collaborative, produced, commercial, and trivial aspects of pop that is *also* constructed in the studio, at least informs those measures taken to either disavow, or perhaps compensate for the fact of rock’s also being a construction. Auslander, for instance, proposes that “[t]he idea that live performance establishes the authenticity of the rock recording suggests a particular relationship between live and recorded music in that cultural context”,¹⁷¹ and Andrew Goodwin lists, as one of the three reasons why popular music audiences continue to attend live concerts, “the authentication of musical competence”.¹⁷² Auslander expands this:

¹⁶⁸ Gilbert J., and Pearson, E., *Discographies: Dance Music, Culture and the Politics of Sound* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1999), 69.

¹⁶⁹ Auslander, *Liveness*, 82.

¹⁷⁰ Connor, S., “The Flag on the Road: Bruce Springsteen and the Live”, *New Formations*, 3 (Winter 1987), 130.

¹⁷¹ Auslander, *Liveness*, 80.

¹⁷² Goodwin, A., “Fatal Distractions: MTV Meets Postmodern Theory”, in Frith, S., Goodwin, A., and Grossberg, L., (eds.), *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 45.

The visual evidence of live performance, the fact that those sounds can be produced live by the appropriate musicians, serves to authenticate music as legitimate rock and not synthetic pop in a way that cannot occur on the basis of the recording alone; only live performance can resolve the tension between rock's romantic ideology and the listener's knowledge that the music is produced in a studio.¹⁷³

Again, though, the situation is far from simple. Rather than occupying some pure and authentic space determined, somehow, by "the music", for many rock fans, according to Auslander, "a concert feels real only to the extent that it matches its TV reproduction", a result of rock's "ubiquitous simulation" on television.¹⁷⁴ Wurtzler similarly notes, "While the video authenticates the sound recording by replicating the live production of the sound, live performance authenticates the video by replicating its images in real space".¹⁷⁵ We need to question whether "authenticates" is, however, the correct term. Warner, for example, suggests that adding visuals to a music recording mediates its unperformability, rather than actually authenticating it as "real"; effectively, replicating the illusion of cinematic realism, albeit in an often fantastical setting.

The use of engaging and illustrative moving images in the pop music video [which includes rock, in this figuration of "pop music"], by drawing upon some of the conventions already established in film, provides a means whereby the difficult issue of live performance of pre-recorded music can be avoided. And, as a result, a new slant in the relationship between music and moving image is established and artistically explored.¹⁷⁶

The issue of "the live", though, does not disappear; positions such as Warner's are not typical, and the interdependence of live rock and television is still frequently articulated through the idea of "the live". Quoting Dick Clark, host of the long-running popular-music "hits" music program, *American Bandstand*, Simon Frith writes:

For both television and rock the concept of live music is aesthetically crucial; both media use recording devices to give their audiences a sense of something happening here and now. In the ideology of rock lip-syncing is anathema, indicating the essential inauthenticity of TV pop. But as Dick Clark observes: 'Every musical motion picture ever made has used the lip-sync technique. I explained the process to the kids and they learned to distinguish between a good lip-syncer and a bad one. We used lip-sync primarily because it was cheaper, but also because it was

¹⁷³ Auslander, *Liveness*, 79.

¹⁷⁴ Frith cited in Wurtzler, "She Sang Live", 93.

¹⁷⁵ Wurtzler, "She Sang Live", 93.

¹⁷⁶ Warner, T., "Narrating Sound: The Pop Video in the Age of the Sampler", in Powrie, P., Stilwell, R., (eds.), *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 169.

impossible to duplicate the sound of the record - and it was the record that kids wanted to hear'.¹⁷⁷

One view of what is ultimately at stake here rests in the repeatability, the reproducibility, and the consequent Benjaminian “withering of the aura” of the unique artwork. A Benjaminian approach—at least one modelled in his ‘Work of Art’ essay¹⁷⁸—would celebrate the way that mechanical reproduction instantiates an entirely new form of art, without the disproportionate fetish value that attaches to “the original”. Against this, rock’s ideology as I have outlined it in the three-fold binarisms above, consisting of individual musical expression, artistic autonomy, and negative attitudes to the technologies of reproduction,¹⁷⁹ seems to hang on to the outmoded value systems of the pre-recording era. However, we need to exercise caution in deploying Benjamin’s theories. For one thing, he is talking almost exclusively about silent cinema, and makes only one passing mention of the gramophone.

Auslander notes that rock music, “[a]s a cultural form based in mass production ... both illustrates and complicates ... Benjamin’s account of authenticity and the disappearance of aura”. Though in Benjamin’s words “the whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical ... reproducibility”, and as Auslander insists, this puts mass produced rock music outside of the truly “authentic”, live performance has been appropriated within the rock ideology as a means through which to “ratify” authenticity.¹⁸⁰ Aura is reclaimed from the reproducible commodity form, in which each copy is the same as the next with no “original” to attach auratic value to, in what Auslander refers to as “a dialectical relation between two cultural objects—the recording and the live performance”. Rather than being understood as “a property inherent in a single object”, Auslander suggests this dialectical “relation of mutuality” is the means through which both

¹⁷⁷ Frith, S., “Look! Hear! The Uneasy Relationship of Music and Television”, in *Popular Music*, 21/3, (October 2002), 284. Frith quotes from Clark, D., *Rock, Roll & Remember* (New York: 1976), 71.

¹⁷⁸ Benjamin, W., “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in Arendt, H., (ed.), *Walter Benjamin, Illuminations*, (London: Pimlico, 1999 [1936]), 211-244.

¹⁷⁹ As Thèberge, Gilbert and Pearson, and Gracyk have shown, technologies of reproduction are thought to undermine authenticity, by one side of the rockist ideology, in the name of repeatability and in opposition to “the live”.

¹⁸⁰ Auslander, *Liveness*, 83-4.

objects—the live performance and the studio recording—“derive their authenticity”.¹⁸¹

There are those, however, for whom the obsession—the neurosis, even—of authenticity is of scant interest or value. There is a strong current within popular music that celebrates inauthenticity as an alternative to the circular, and ultimately delusional, arguments of the rockist position. Neil Tennant, for example, of The Pet Shop Boys, unapologetically claims a place outside of rock’s neurosis about itself: “It’s kinda macho nowadays to prove you can *cut it* live. I quite like proving we *can’t* cut it live. We’re a pop group, not a rock and roll group”.¹⁸² Stevin Merritt, the highly influential American songwriter and creative force in groups such as The Magnetic Fields, The 6ths, and Gothic Archies (a reference to the late 60s manufactured band fronted by cartoon characters whose major hit was ‘Sugar Sugar’, a bubble-gum pop anthem), talks about how he “learned to write songs almost entirely by listening to ABBA”. A paradigmatic instance of everything the rockist critic would find offensive, ABBA were one of the most enormously successful acts of all time, but Merritt refers to reading, in a punk rock magazine in the late 70s, “how terrible ABBA was, how it was something your *little sister* would listen to, and so on. So I instantly realized that ABBA was something my big brother probably wouldn’t like, but I didn’t have any big brother so I didn’t worry about that” [emphasis mine].¹⁸³ The lightness with which the pretensions of rock criticism are dispensed with by Tennant and Merritt, performatively sidestepping the imperatives to demonstrate authenticity and realism, put forward alternative valuations of the musics.

Critics who bemoan musical taste in superficially Adornian terms as something people are sold and told to like—“the public wants what the public gets” as Paul Weller puts it

¹⁸¹ Auslander, *Liveness*, 84-5. In chapter 5 of the present thesis I shall draw on Auslander’s idea of such a dialectical “relation of mutuality” that can be deployed to ground a sense of authenticity/originality/aura in relation to vernacular lipsynch performances/recordings disseminated on YouTube. I shall argue that although lipsynching may have been represented as the paradigm of inauthenticity by the rockist ideological camp, it nevertheless can be recuperated with recourse to Auslander’s “relation of mutuality” through which original, creative, and authentic work is produced by amateur “nobodies” who are “faking it”.

¹⁸² Neil Tennant quoted in Auslander, *Liveness*, 79.

¹⁸³ Stevin Merritt quoted in Page, T., “Songwriting of Merritt—and Distinction”, *The Washington Post*, 7 May, 2000, G12.

in the punk classic ‘Going Underground’¹⁸⁴—make plausible and critically productive connections between a capitalist base and a popular culture superstructure. But this critique refuses the fact that taste groups often form out of “real” enjoyment, despite commercial manipulation; it is only that the motivational structures of “enjoyment”—its authenticity, if you like - are difficult to prove. Relying solely on the various critical voices originating in the Adorno/Horkheimer position¹⁸⁵ dismisses the experiences and musical lives of a vast proportion of the population, especially those who identify themselves as “pop fans”. Like Tennant and Merritt, is it not possible that fans know, yet accept and engage with, the conditions of “pop” without being completely manipulated? Might we see, in the case of much amateur lipsynching, drag queen acts, karaoke, and similar “inauthentic forms”, a re-appropriation of the commodity form as being paradoxically filled or completed by the “authentic” and “individual” uses to which the music is put?

In analysing the lipsynching scandals that have occurred apace since Milli Vanilli returned their Grammy, it becomes important to question the standard, “rockist” critique.¹⁸⁶ Even if, as Goodwin states, one of the three reasons why popular music audiences continue to attend live concerts is to have the musical competence of their idols authenticated,¹⁸⁷ is this what is really at stake in the poison and hate thrown at a figure like Britney Spears? Bruce Horner claims that “the discourse of disdain for popular musics is no longer seen as a response to the lack of value those musics possess but an active construction of them as lacking in value”,¹⁸⁸ might we then suggest that lipsynching offers one very tangible site where such an active construction might take place? Baudrillard offers a cultural and ideological context for such constructions which can be applied to the case of lipsynching pop stars.

When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a plethora of myths of origin and signs of reality—a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity. Escalation of the true, of lived experience, resurrection of the figurative where the

¹⁸⁴ Weller, Paul, ‘Going Underground’, The Jam, single issued 10 March 1980 (Polydor).

¹⁸⁵ see Adorno, T. W., and Horkheimer, M., “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”, in Doring, S., (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 29-43. The essay is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 5.

¹⁸⁶ Christopher Martin, for example, questions the validity of “traditional criticism of popular music” that values (authentic) rock genres over (inauthentic) pop in the handling of the Milli Vanilli scandal. Martin, C., “Traditional Criticism of Popular Music and the Making of a Lip-Synching Scandal”, *Popular Music and Society*, 17/4, (1993), 71-3.

¹⁸⁷ Goodwin, “Fatal Distractions”, 45.

¹⁸⁸ Horner, B., “Discourse”, in Horner, B., and Swiss, T., (eds.), *Key terms in Popular Music and Culture* (Malden, Oxford, Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 22.

object and substance have disappeared. Panic-stricken production of the real and of the referential, parallel to and greater than the panic of material production: this is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us—a strategy of the real, of the neoreal and the hyperreal that everywhere is the double of a strategy of deterrence.¹⁸⁹

Baudrillard puts the real and the (truthfully) referential on the same footing as fantasy and the imagined, and this is on the basis of a constructedness in modern/postmodern culture of which we have already seen many instances. The vitriolic denunciation of Britney Spears' lipsynching is one response to the panic to which Baudrillard refers. *VegasCrackerman's*¹⁹⁰ "Um, there is no way in hell that Scott is lip-synching - Get it right - This is Scott Weiland" belief in the impossibility that Weiland, as rock god, could be "guilty" of such dissimulation, though, is also a response to the same panic, through an insistence on the unthinkability of Weiland as being anything other than "real and referential". Lipsynching, then, rather than being a source for the devaluing of pop, and an unthinkable possibility in rock, is nothing more than a convenient target at which to throw the "lack of value" in pop that critics already feel,¹⁹¹ and which is constructed through multiple cultural and ideological registers. Lipsynching, though, also offers a space for reappropriation and *detournement* in which individuals and communities—both pop and rock—can play out the enjoyment, significance, emotional attachments (real and fantasized), and personal creativity (through re-imaginings and restagings) that a wholly negative critique of popular or mass culture would render unattainable.

In chapter 4 of this thesis I will examine how in taking on such a role, lipsynching becomes a powerful artistic tool in the work of Dennis Potter and David Lynch. In the final chapter of the thesis, how contemporary amateur lipsynchers on YouTube play out and articulate a complex range of negotiated meanings, meaningful re-appropriations, purely entertaining parodies, and genuine personal expressions through miming to already existing songs. Having discussed in the present chapter the cultural valuations and devaluations associated with lipsynching, as they have been played out over the

¹⁸⁹ Baudrillard, J., *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 6-7.

¹⁹⁰ *VegasCrackerman* is one of the You Tube commentators I cite earlier in this chapter.

¹⁹¹ Kembrew McLeod asserts that valuations of pop and rock in the form of dominant rockist ideologies closely follow larger hegemonic value systems, which are at their core masculinist in the nature. McLeod, K. "Between a Rock", *passim*. Another useful discussion on rockism can be found in Sanneh, K., "The Rap Against Rockism", in Cateforis, T., (ed.), *The Rock History Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 351-354.

past 60 years, or so, and recording the extent to which they continue to impact upon contemporary ideologies and practices, I shall now move on to examine the functions of diegetic lipsynching—lipsynching that is explicit and happening within the constructed “real” of the cinema frame. Along with the material presented above, this constitutes a significant cultural phenomenon informing attitudes to, and facilitating the emergent creative possibilities of, lipsynching as an artistic practice on its own terms.

Chapter 3

Diegetic Lipsynch Performance

Of Mouse and Man

A man is standing on a stage before an audience. An announcer has introduced him as the “musical guest” in the evening’s program. Beside the man is a small table upon which a record player and a glass of water sit. The stage is otherwise empty. The man places the needle on the record and the *Mighty Mouse* cartoon theme song is heard through the scratches and hiss of the old recording. The song is sung mainly by an operetta-style male chorus; the lyrics are a third-person narrative about the wonders of the mouse. There is, however, one first-person exclamation repeated in each verse, a sort of passing refrain—“Here I come to save the day!”—which is sung by the solo tenor voice of Mighty Mouse himself. The man on the stage stands stationary as the male chorus sings. Apart from small shifts of balance from one leg to the other and twitching fingers, movements that indicate nervousness and preparation, anticipation, he looks straight ahead some distance above the heads of the audience. This is a shy man, apparently devoid of personality, or at least incapable of projecting one; an awkward performer; in fact, a non-performer who is—nevertheless and through, we can only presume, questionable advice—performing. And then something remarkable happens. When the solo voice of Mighty Mouse is heard the man lipsynchs to it, and as he does his face and body become animated. He stretches out his arm, palm-up, in a parody of a heroic, operatic stance; his face lights up as he mouths the words, ‘Here I come to save the daaay!’; he smiles confidently; his pelvis moves authoritatively in rhythm. He *becomes* Mighty Mouse, but only when the voice of Mighty Mouse is heard. In other words, his transformation occurs only for the duration of his appropriation of the singing voice. Otherwise, there is no hero, no embodiment of the mouse on stage, only the listening, voiceless man (*see DVD1 > Chapter 3: Diegetic Lipsynch Numbers > track 1, Andy Kaufman – ‘Mighty Mouse’*).

This is perhaps the most iconic performance of Andy Kaufman’s short career (he died in 1984 at the age of 35). It took place during the inaugural episode of American sketch-comedy program *Saturday Night Live* in 1975, and has come to epitomize Kaufman’s performed character of the “strange little man”. Yet the wonderful surprise in the Mighty Mouse sketch is the way in which Kaufman steps out of his “strange little man”

character the moment he assumes the singing voice of the cartoon hero. The power of the tenor voice, as identified with the character of Mighty Mouse, transforms the man. He comes alive, and however phantasmic the transformation may be, it allows for the *externalization* of a hidden—or longed-for, idealized—aspect to his personality. The voice, and the character of Mighty Mouse, form a mask behind which the nervous, tick-ridden man is cured, freed.

Chief among the reasons that audiences enjoy this performance is the incongruity between the little man and the heroic tenor voice, but of equal pleasure is the corny old theme song and the idea that of all the heroic voices that one might inhabit, Kaufman's character chooses the voice of a cartoon mouse. He is a child-man, and as such, his adult audience members are able to identify with his fantasy at a safe distance. But, importantly, they *do* identify with it. They have done it themselves. The guilty little secret they share is finally out, and through recognition of the childlike fantasy world expressed in the grown man, they are able to take an affectionate attitude towards their own un-lived, unexpressed fantasies, which, like Kaufman's little man, have found expression in music.

As quirky as Kaufman's performance was to audiences in 1975, it exploited the by-then routine coupling of comedy and diegetic lipsynching in films. Wojcik cites the example of the film *Miracle of Morgan's Creek*,¹⁹² in which Betty Hutton's character Trudy Kockenlocker "takes a break from her work in a retail record store and delights her male suitors, a group of soldiers on leave, by lipsynching to a basso profundo rendition of 'The Bell in the Bay'".¹⁹³ Donald O'Connor's mock-baritone voice coming from the lips of the unsuspecting Lina Lamont in *Singing in the Rain* is another example of the lipsynching device used as comic hijinks. In such films the lipsynch is played as a joke, bi-sociative,¹⁹⁴ usually either trans-gendered or mocking of operatic (or "high-culture") forms and attitude, or both.

¹⁹² *Miracle of Morgan's Creek*, dir. Preston Sturges, Paramount Pictures, 1944.

¹⁹³ Wojcik, P. R., "The Girl and the Phonograph, or the Vamp and the Machine Revisted", in Wojcik P. R., and Knight, A., (eds.), *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 443.

¹⁹⁴ Smith, J., "Popular Songs and Comic Allusion in Contemporary Cinema" in Wojcik P. R., and Knight, A., (eds.), *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 418.

Kaufman's Mighty Mouse performance shares some of these comic features but goes deeper. Historically, it occurs at what I see as a pivotal point between diegetic lipsynching depicted as absurd hijinks and the diegetic lipsynch as something more integral to plot and, most strikingly, character development. While Kaufman's sketch is indeed silly, it takes the performance of the song very seriously within its own logic. The character Kaufman plays is *not* joking, and as a result, we, the audience, are privy to deep, perhaps even heretofore hidden, aspects of character brought to the fore through the character's identification with the recorded voice. The little man is not only transformed, he is *revealed*.¹⁹⁵

The 1980s saw a number of films in which characters, like Kaufman's, lipsynched as part of the diegesis. Leading the trend were the films of John Hughes, most notably *Pretty in Pink*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, and *Home Alone*. On television, a popular episode of *The Cosby Show* portrayed the tightly knit Huxtable family as they celebrate a (grand)parents' wedding anniversary by lipsynching to Ray Charles' 'Night Time is the Right Time'. In the film *Dirty Dancing*, a flirtation between Johnny and Baby, the two main characters, is enacted through the lipsynching to Mickey and Sylvia's 'Love is Strange'.¹⁹⁶ David Lynch's characters famously lipsynch in the film *Blue Velvet* and the television mini-series *Twin Peaks*. Some prominent examples from the 1990s to the present include *Muriel's Wedding*, *Priscilla*, *Queen of the Desert*, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *The Boat that Rocked*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Roderick Rules*, *The Best Friend*, and Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*.¹⁹⁷ In these works there is a tacit acknowledgment of lipsynching as a normal practice in the characters' everyday lives. In the words of John Champagne, the lipsynch performances in such films are "constructed as a plausible response to 'real' events and opportunities in their lives".¹⁹⁸

In this chapter I will explore some of the implications of the fully diegetic lipsynch performance as it relates to the appropriation of the disembodied voice of popular song recordings and its role in the everyday lives of characters, and the relationships that

¹⁹⁵ I shall devote more space to examining the ways in which lipsynching might allow for the uncovering of otherwise hidden aspects of the personality within a specifically psychoanalytic/psychotherapeutic frame in chapter 4.

¹⁹⁶ *Dirty Dancing*, dir. Emile Ardolino, Great American Films Limited Partnership/Vestron Pictures, 1987.

¹⁹⁷ Lynch's *Blue Velvet* and *Mulholland Drive* will be considered in detail in Chapter 4.

¹⁹⁸ Champagne, J., "Dancing Queen? Feminist and Gay Male Spectatorship in Three Recent Films from Australia", *Film Criticism* 21/3 (1997), 66-88, 70.

arise between song recording and film character in terms of identity formation/revelation.

To start, I will first look at developments in film scoring that occurred in the latter half of the twentieth century. I argue that it is the shift from originally composed, mainly instrumental score to the pre-existent materials of the mainly song-oriented popular music score—what Annahid Kassabian terms the “compiled score”¹⁹⁹—that prefigures the emergence of the diegetic lipsynch as a narrative element in Hollywood films. Beginning in the 1950s with *The Blackboard Jungle* and its iconic use in the opening credits of Bill Haley and the Comets’ 1954 recording of ‘Rock Around the Clock’, through to the almost exclusive use of popular recordings in some films of the later 60s and early 70s—to cite a few celebrated examples, *The Graduate*, *Easy Rider*, *Zabriski Point*, *Harold and Maude*, and *American Graffiti*—the use of pre-existing recordings as score music (as an alternative to the originally composed score) was a well established practice by the 1980s. Becoming an almost defining marker of some film genres, teen and romantic comedy especially, the practice infiltrated all film genres to some extent. The development of the compilation score is important for the purposes of this thesis because of its merging of the filmic image with popular recordings in such a way as to normalize the idea of the popular song as “backing track” to the everyday (and sometimes also extraordinary) actions of daily life. John Travolta strutting down the Brooklyn streets, for example, is accompanied by the Bee Gees’ song ‘Stayin’ Alive’ in *Saturday Night Fever*²⁰⁰; Robin Williams (in drag) vacuuming the floor in *Mrs Doubtfire* has Aerosmith’s ‘Dude Looks Like a Lady’²⁰¹; riding a bicycle becomes inseparable from ‘Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head’, sung by B J Thomas in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*.²⁰² Less everyday actions, like taking a heroin overdose, for instance, is represented by Lou Reed’s ‘Perfect Day’ in *Trainspotting*,²⁰³ or

¹⁹⁹ Kassabian, A., *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), *passim*. Other common terms are the soundtrack film or the popular music or popular song score but I prefer Kassabian’s “compiled score” as it underlines the bricolage nature of such constructions; eschews the emphasis on the commercial aspects of the tie-in; and more fully differentiates the popular music score from the traditional composed score, many of which (*Star Wars*, for example) have also been made into successful soundtrack albums.

²⁰⁰ *Saturday Night Fever*, dir. John Badham, Paramount Pictures/RSO, 1977.

²⁰¹ *Mrs. Doubtfire*, dir. Chris Columbus, Blue Wolf/Twentieth Century Fox, 1993.

²⁰² *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, dir. George Roy Hill, Campanile Productions/Twentieth Century Fox, 1969.

²⁰³ *Trainspotting*, dir. Danny Boyle, Figment Films/The Noel Gay Motion Picture Company/Channel Four Films, 1996.

transforming into a werewolf to Sam Cooke's version of the song 'Blue Moon' in *An American Werewolf in London*.²⁰⁴

The compiled score achieves a number of effects, some shared with the composed score and some unique. While the originally composed (usually orchestral) score established the pairing of non-diegetic music with the filmic image in service to a number of dramatic functions—"it underlies character traits, suggests elements of character development or point of view, reinforces aspects of the film's setting, and supports the film's structure by bridging spatial and temporal gaps between sequences"²⁰⁵—the compilation score serves many of the same functions but with the added dimension of the found, already existent object: one might say the "used" or "previously owned" object. "The popular song score," writes Gilbert Rodman, "lies in the realm of the recycled, lived-again experience of postmodernism".²⁰⁶ Estella Tincknell writes, "The soundtrack film has been part of a wider cultural process whereby the canon of classic pop has been raided and redeployed as part of postmodernism's voracious approach to the past".²⁰⁷

By contrast, the composed score appears as an organic part of the cinematic world. Think, for instance, of John Williams' leitmotivic theme music for the shark in *Jaws*. With two notes, "daaah-duh", Williams evokes for us the presence of the shark. The shark and the score are written together—or appear to be written together—one existing organically within the context of the other. The camera goes beneath the water and one can almost feel the music, like the shark, lurking there, somewhere in the murk. The song of the compiled score, on the other hand, has a life outside of the filmic world: its own historical, extra-musical and individual associations.²⁰⁸ Imagine, for instance, a version of *Jaws* with a compiled score. When the shark is near we hear, say, 'Mack the Knife' ("Oh the shark has pearly teeth dear") or, if David Lynch is directing something more akin to Roy Orbison's dreamy 'Blue Bayou'²⁰⁹. Through repetition, we can read

²⁰⁴ *An American Werewolf in London*, dir. John Landis, Lycanthrope Films/Polygram Filmed Entertainment, 1981.

²⁰⁵ Smith, "Comic Allusion", 414.

²⁰⁶ Rodman, R., "The Popular Song as Leitmotif in 1990s Film", in Powrie, P., and Stillwell, R., (eds.), *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 119-136, 135.

²⁰⁷ Tincknell, E., "The Soundtrack Movie, Nostalgia and Consumption", in Conrich, I., and Tincknell, E., (eds.), *Film's Musical Moments*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 132-145, 142.

²⁰⁸ Of course, it is also true that something as iconic as the *Jaws* cellos very quickly acquires a cultural life outside of the film even if it doesn't originate outside of the film like a pop song does. It is referred to and used elsewhere in the same manner as any pre-existing recording or motif.

²⁰⁹ After all, the shark came from "Southern waters"

the music, as we do with the Williams score, as shark-evoking leitmotif but in addition we will inevitably apply other readings that have their origins elsewhere. In the case of ‘Mack the Knife’ (let’s imagine the Bobby Darin recording), the song may at first evoke an image of Darin, and in turn lend the shark a cool, though highly incongruent, sense of swagger. The song stimulates a complex trail of associations in the viewer.

Each viewer’s associations will be different, of course, informed as they are by memories of past auditions. For instance, while I may have bad personal associations with ‘Mack the Knife’, you may have danced to it on the happy night of your engagement. Our different readings will colour our experience as auditors, but as the film continues our experiences may begin to align more closely when the song begins to accumulate new readings as it is repeatedly paired with the horror of the shark’s attacks. Nevertheless, the extra-cinematic and extra-musical readings will remain with us; we can never completely achieve the integration of the shark with the music in the way that Williams score does, there will always be the imprint of the song’s previous lives. Thus the songs in the compiled score are often used to create ironic readings and humorous or uncanny juxtapositions (in my hypothetical example, the peppy swing of Darrin’s ‘Mack the Knife’ would almost certainly give the shark attacks a rather brutal black humour). In other words, the musical artefact introduces extra-narrative associations that may compete with the meanings of the narrative. The sound one hears is always and necessarily mediated by its former associations, which are capable of complimenting or disrupting the narrative in ways that are intended by the filmmakers but at the same time out of their control. Gilbert Rodman notes how the compiled score works to “decentre the role of the unique musical work, and draw upon discourses around the musical work such as *style and celebrity*”.²¹⁰ Scott Henderson similarly notes that “[t]he meanings drawn from the music and the identities constructed through music are based on relations that exist outside the filmic text (unlike the fully diegetic use of music and performance in so many classical Hollywood musicals)”.²¹¹ While Henderson differentiates the resonances of songs from a compiled score to the numbers in Hollywood musicals, he sees both as constituting moments of cinematic excess.

Excess provides potential for meaning to escape the bounds of the filmic system, and the less rigidly coded or structured a text is, the more potential there is for

²¹⁰ Rodman, “Leitmotif”, 121.

²¹¹ Henderson, S., “Youth, Excess and the Musical Moment” in Conrich, I., and Tincknell, E., (eds.), *Film’s Musical Moments*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 146-157, 153.

this escape. Youth films, with their use of popular music with both a textual function and extra-textual resonance, are as likely a place as any for these moments of excess. As John Hill has noted, ‘the “meaning”, then, of a film is not something to be discovered purely in the text itself (into which the spectator may or may not be bound) but is constituted in the interaction between the text and its users’.²¹²

Estella Tincknell describes how in films using compiled scores “narrative expectations that have been set up by the filmmakers [have] an ideological trajectory... constructed that way ultimately for the purposes of the overall narrative of the film”. She continues:

soundtracks [of compiled scores] are available to a wide range of cultural investments on the part of the audience, investments that may diverge quite radically from the ideological trajectory of the narrative. The representational strategies of narrative may even be destabilised through the soundtrack because of the significant discursive difference between the rhetoric of narrative and textual affect. ... The affective power of the music may offer a source of resistance to the meanings offered by the narrative by escaping the discursive practice of storytelling, or may even work to transform its significance through the soundtrack equivalent of the musical’s moment of performance.²¹³

I’d like to gloss Tincknell’s ideas here by noting that the filmmakers may be intentionally disrupting an expected ideological trajectory with certain kinds of juxtapositions. However, with any use of pre-existing materials, there will be disruptions to the text that the filmmakers cannot anticipate. There is a looseness to this approach. The director of a film will make connections and disjunctions through the use of the pre-existing recordings, writing them, as it were, intentionally into the works to produce very specific effects, while also giving up a certain amount of control over how an audience interprets them. The idea of a “disrupting voice”, whether intentional or incidental is thus important when considering the nature of the compiled score music. Mark Kermode even goes so far as to assert that “[i]n the right hands (and indeed the right place) a pop soundtrack can lend a movie a depth and resonance which no other medium can achieve”.²¹⁴

To cite an iconic example: Ben and Elaine in *The Graduate*, having escaped her wedding to another man, sit in the back of a city bus. We view them head-on: she in her white gown and veil, he sweaty from his long sprint to reach the church in time to stop

²¹² Henderson, “Youth, Excess”, 153.

²¹³ Tincknell, “Soundtrack Movie” 144.

²¹⁴ Kermode, M., “Twisting the Knife”, in Romney, J., and Wooton, A., *Celluloid Jukebox: Popular Music and the Movies Since the 1950s*, (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 8-19.

the wedding. An unlikely duo—in more ways than one—their expressions shift between happiness, relief, and a dawning realization of uncertainty as the soundtrack plays Simon and Garfunkle’s ‘The Sound of Silence’. Even more incongruous than the couple, who for the other travellers are an object of curiosity, is the filmmaker’s juxtaposition of their final coupling with a song about alienation. The juxtaposition transforms a scene that in classic Hollywood terms should have been the concluding triumph over adversity—the boy gets the girl—into an ambivalent *dénouement*. The song in this instance destabilizes the expected narrative. It undermines conventions established through sixty years of romantic comedies, and thus in fact deepens and enriches the narrative.

‘The Sound of Silence’ also serves a leitmotivic function for Ben, just as ‘Scarborough Fair’ works as leitmotif for Elaine. More than this, ‘The Sound of Silence’ is Ben’s (and our) entrance-music-into and exit-music-from the film itself. At the end of the film Ben has come full circle; with the repetition of the song we have the sense that nothing has, in existential terms, really changed for him. Significantly, however, I would like to suggest that ‘The Sound of Silence’ can also be read as a separate *voice* in the film, the voice of a narrator whose “reading” of Ben’s existential condition opens and closes the film.

In *The Voice in Cinema*, Michel Chion builds upon Schaeffer’s idea of the acousmatic and extends its definition in order to theorize the unseen, off-screen—diegetically detached—voice in cinema: what he calls the *acousmètre*.²¹⁵ For Chion, the *acousmètre*, depending on its status in the film, carries with it one or all of four distinct “powers”. The first is the ability to be everywhere (ubiquity and omnipresence): the voice comes from an immaterial and un-localized body (he uses the voice of computer, Hal, in *2001: A Space Odyssey* as one example, also citing the telephone and radio as vehicles for vocal ubiquity). The second is the ability to see all (panopticism), such as in the case of an all-seeing God who has “total mastery of space through vision” (he again cites the voice of Hal as well as the telephone voice in thrillers in which the unseen person heard through the phone is watching the victim from some hidden location). The exception is the case of the *acousmètre* “who does not see all... the panoptic theme in negative

²¹⁵ Chion, *Voice In Cinema*, *passim*. *Acousmètre* is a conflation of the French terms *acousmatique* and *être*, (being). Chion uses the terms to denote a being whose existence is never visually confirmed as that being within the diegesis and whose “body” is an impossible body; the body and that voice are never conjoined.

form” (Chion cites Josef von Sternberg’s *Ana-ta-han*²¹⁶ in which the “we” who narrate the film don’t see everything that is on the screen and must imagine what is obscured from their view). Third and fourth are omniscience and omnipotence: respectively, the ability to know all, and the occupation of a position of complete power. In these last two cases the *acousmêtre* has no place, “belongs” nowhere, and may be construed as the voice of the dead. This voice “takes us back to an archaic, original stage: of the first months of life or even before birth, during which the voice was everything and it was everywhere (only nameable retrospectively)”²¹⁷.

I would like to propose that the popular song recording acts as a kind of *acousmêtre* in some films, commenting on the scene from outside the diegesis, from a ubiquitous “everywhere”. In *The Graduate*, ‘The Sound of Silence’ acts as a kind of omniscient narrator at the opening and closing of the film—a musical voice that speaks for Ben but also speaks the detached words of, “Once upon a time” and “happily ever after” (though in this particular story the closing sentiment is followed by a question mark instead of a full stop). As leitmotif, the song speaks for Ben but, and this is crucial, as *acousmêtre* it exceeds him. The *acousmêtre*’s attributes of omniscience exist in parallel to Ben’s plausible internal lipsynching to the words (his lived experience). In other words, Ben at the start of the film could plausibly identify with the words sung by the *acousmêtre*, but unlike the *acousmêtre*, cannot know from the position of the diegesis their full import.

A lovely example of the pre-existing song object serving the function of the *acousmêtre* (it is also an excellent example of the “negative panoptic”, as described above), the 1999 film *The Virgin Suicides*²¹⁸ occupies a position somewhere between the extra-diegetic functioning of the compiled score and the fully diegetic lipsynch performance of the films I will discuss below. *The Virgin Suicides* concerns the foreshortened lives of a group of sisters living under their parents’ abusively repressive rules, and the group of boys who try to get to know them. Set in the 1970s, the story is narrated by a present-day *acousmêtre* (the boys as adults), spoken by one voice but identified as a collective “we” who are still trying to make sense of the sisters and their chosen fates. In this sense the *acousmêtre* is a negative panoptic: unable to “see all”, it must imagine what was, and will always be, hidden from view. The story it tells is as puzzling to the boys

²¹⁶ *Ana-ta-han*, dir. Josef von Sternberg, Daiwa, 1953.

²¹⁷ Chion, *Voice in Cinema*, 24.

²¹⁸ *The Virgin Suicides*, dir. Sophia Coppola, American Zoetrope/Eternity Pictures/Muse Productions, 1999.

(and their adult incarnations) as it is tragic. After the youngest sister commits suicide, the parents seek to protect the remaining four daughters through increasingly oppressive measures, eventually imprisoning them in their own home. The boys—semi-in love with the sisters, or at least fascinated by the mystery of their reclusive lives—look on, powerless, from a distance. In the end the remaining sisters also commit suicide, each employing a different method, in a final act of rebellion and bid for freedom. The acts are choreographed by the girls for the boys—by invitation—to discover. The boys are chosen by the girls to serve the function of witness.

Music plays a central role in the narrative. The parents destroy, as a bad influence, the rebellious hard rock and proto-metal records that the girls love (that serve as a lifeline, especially for “bad girl” Lux), leaving them only with music that the parents deem safe: soft-rock and easy-listening records from the mellow end of 1970s radio pop. In a pivotal scene, the boys devise a way to reach out to the girls. They call them on the phone, but instead of talking to them they play the song ‘Hello, It’s Me’ by Todd Rundgren while holding the telephone receiver to a speaker. The sisters then return their call in similar fashion, playing ‘Alone Again (Naturally)’ by Gilbert O’ Sullivan. A “conversation” continues between them conducted through the sharing of songs over the phone, in which the boys play songs that speak of yearning and support, and the girls play songs of despair, loneliness and resignation.²¹⁹ As the camera cuts back and forth between the boys and the girls we see they are all equally still, listening thoughtfully with wistful expressions. The girls cuddle with each other on a bed in one of their floral, sweetly “girly” bedrooms and the boys sit close to each other in its masculine counterpart. All appear emotionally involved by the messages expressed in the songs, the relief of finally having contact, and ultimately, with melancholy, by the gulf that still lies between them. The records in a sense are like waves sent from opposite shores; they make contact, caressing each distant shore in turn, but then retreat. It is a beautiful scene. The songs as used by the teens carry weight and meaning that is heartbreaking in its futility.

Although their lips don’t move, the youths are actively ventriloquizing the songs. Even the girls, whose tastes are not necessarily reflected in the choices now available to them, are creating their own soundtrack through which they nevertheless articulate deep

²¹⁹ Others include the Bee Gees’ ‘Run to Me’ (the boys) and Carol King’s ‘So Far Away’ (the girls). Although we only view the playing of these four songs, the editing of the sequence indicates that more songs are exchanged and that the conversation lasts a very long time.

feeling. Yet as disembodied “voices” the songs can also be seen as *acousmètre*, the recordings having a life outside the diegesis which both pre-exists and intersects with the filmic world. As Chion states, “In cinema, the voice of the *acousmètre* is frequently the voice of one who is dead”,²²⁰ as recordings they are already, if not actually dead, then nevertheless inhabiting an incorporeal other world. If nothing else, the songs are an extension of *presence* of the bodiless girls, already ghosts at the time the story is being told. “Particularly in the cinema,” Chion writes, “the voice enjoys a certain proximity to the soul, the shadow, the double—these immaterial, detachable representations of the body, which survive its death and sometimes even leave it during life”.²²¹ The songs, in fact, are multiply distanced, originating from a world outside the diegesis, then played over the phone, existing in what we might call a diegetic-off-screen, and then, in the film’s unseen present, recalled by the boys from the perspective of adulthood. Here, Chion’s “voice of the dead” turns another corner: recalled by the boys, the girls live on in those records just as surely as the voices of the original musicians do. As a voice standing outside of the diegesis, the *acousmètre* in this instance possesses all the hallmarks defined by Chion—Ubiquity, Panopticism, Omniscience and Omnipotence—and marks a place in which forbidden meetings are possible, where normal relations could be imagined. In fact within the scenes in which the boys and girls “converse” through popular song, such a normalcy would be the gift of an omnipotent *acousmètre*, a benign god. The songs as *acousmètre*, then, reach far beyond the powers of the negative-panoptic of the narrator’s voice. Within the narrative, however, the powers of the *acousmètre* last only for the duration of their sending and receiving. The *acousmètre*, when withdrawn, is rendered powerless. The music is once again a mute inscription on the physical body of the vinyl record, no longer an active voice in the lives of the characters; it is not, for example, a character who implicitly continues behind the scenes to bring about narrative change, to emerge and “save the day” just when we think all is lost. Yet, as seen above, a trace of the character’s “voices” remains. If only in the form of the boys’ memories, it is inscribed onto the music and carried into their futures. And yet again, the record as medium is more than a container. Writing about the meanings inscribed in the recordings as “ritual objects” in the case of Lux, Robynn Stillwell states:

the record is inscribed with power, but it is an ambivalent power. Since it is more than an item to possess or a weapon to wield, its use is individual ... The

²²⁰ Chion, *Voice in Cinema*, 46.

²²¹ Chion, *Voice in Cinema*, 47.

importance of records, as artefacts to venerate and relics of sound and self with which to resonate is central to the symbolic narratives of girls finding their voices.²²²

Although Stillwell is speaking about the physical record as a kind of fetish object, her point can be applied to an idea of the recording as “ritual object” and the importance of popular music recordings as a means of “finding one’s voice” through the voices of others. Recordings as cultural objects often serve a communicative function and, as we saw with Kaufman’s little man, can allow an authentic voice to sound in an individual who may be otherwise—culturally or pathologically—silenced. I will be expanding on this point in the final chapter of this thesis.

The *acousmètre* in *The Graduate* is not omnipotent, but it nevertheless forms a place outside of Ben’s entrapment by the meaningless suburban values of his parents and the expectation that Ben will uphold them. It also prefigures his relationship with Mrs. Robinson as the furtive step he takes outside the comforting fantasy of suburban respectability, which as it happens is doomed to only repeat it, although subversively, covertly. For Ben, though he does not know it, ‘The Sound of Silence’ is both a caution and a destiny. The song is “performed” for us, the audience, and we come to share its omniscient, acousmatic position, and we in turn form new associations with the song that are carried into our own lives. Our future auditionings of ‘The Sound of Silence’ (or ‘Hello It’s Me’, or ‘So Far Away’, in the case of *The Virgin Suicides*) will undoubtedly include new traces of meaning through their associations with the films.

Tincknell views pre-existing songs as constituting a kind of fragmented musical performance that is peculiar to the use of pre-existing music in films. She states:

In the soundtrack movie the meaning of ‘performance’ is thus transformed and fragmented. Instead of the ‘real’ visible and immediate presence of the ‘author’ or performer of the music—the singer or group—we are offered ‘*absent performances*’ that, in their uncoupling of originary production and authentic meaning may also recast the connotations produced by the music.²²³ [emphasis mine]

²²² Stilwell, R., “Vinyl Communion: The Record as Ritual Object In Girls’ Rites-of-Passage Films”, in Powrie, P., and Stillwell, R., (eds.), *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 166.

²²³ Tincknell, “Soundtrack Movie” 137.

Even when an “absent performance” has some diegetic representation (for instance, in the case of *The Virgin Suicides*, a record and playback device are seen) it retains the absent voice. But when the absent performance is then re-embodied in the diegetic body of a character lipsynching and performed on screen, the situation of the pre-existing song changes yet again. It may be likened to what John Champagne, referencing Jane Feuer, terms the “post-modern incarnation of the musical, in which characters perform lip-syncing and/or dancing routines to diegetic music”.²²⁴ The recording becomes dissociated, and like the ventriloquist’s voice described by Connor can migrate into other bodies and contexts, opening even greater possibility for transformations of the putative original’s intended meanings.

Returning to the example of *The Graduate*, imagine for a moment not the omniscient presence of ‘The Sound of Silence’ as it follows and comments on (engulfs, clings to, smothers, illuminates) Ben and Elaine’s escape, but that the couple actually lipsynch to the song. Along with his idea of the *acousmêtre*, Chion proposes the process of *de-acousmatization* in which the *acousmêtre* enters—suddenly becomes embodied within—the diegetic frame, thus losing its powers. “The *acousmêtre*,” he states:

has only to show itself—for the person speaking to inscribe his or her body inside the frame, in the visual field—for it to lose its power, omniscience, and (obviously) ubiquity. I call this phenomenon *de-acousmatization*. Embodying the voice is a sort of symbolic act, dooming the *acousmêtre* to the fate of ordinary mortals. *De-acousmatization* roots the *acousmêtre* to a place and says, ‘here is your body, you’ll be there, and not elsewhere’. Likewise, the purpose of burial ceremonies is to say to the soul of the deceased, ‘you must no longer wander, your grave is here.’²²⁵

If we can legitimately say that, as I am proposing, the pre-existing song of the compiled score constitutes a kind of *acousmêtre* in cinema, we must conclude that the interaction of recorded song with the body of the lipsyncher constitutes the *de-acousmatization* of the voice. Yet while losing the “powers” of the *acousmêtre*, the newly embodied “voice” of the lipsyncher becomes a powerful site of dialogue between popular song as commercial product, object of contemplation, tutelary presence, site of play, identity creation, and its *embeddedness* in daily life and consciousness. As such it can be put to many different purposes as it contains both external and internal motivations. In other

²²⁴ Champagne, “Dancing Queen?”, 70.

²²⁵ Chion, *Voice in Cinema*, 27-8.

words, in the case of the lipsynched performance a quality, if not the omnipotence, of the *acousmêtre* is retained in the *de-acousmatized* voice that is lipsynched. For Chion:

De-acousmatization, the unveiling of an image and at the same time a *place*, the human and mortal body where the voice will henceforth be lodged, in certain ways strongly resembles striptease. ... The Great Oz is nothing but a man, who enjoys playing God by hiding his body and amplifying his voice. At the moment his voice is “embodied”, we can hear it lose its colossal proportions, deflate and become a wisp of a voice. ... “I am a very nice man, but a very bad magician”²²⁶

Imagining, again, how the meanings of the final scene of *The Graduate* might change if Ben and Elaine lipsynched to ‘The Sound of Silence’, it is important to ask what power might be lost in the de-acousmatization of the song, and what, if any, power might be *gained* in the transfer. Chion bears repeating here: “Embodying the voice is a sort of symbolic act, dooming the *acousmêtre* to the fate of ordinary mortals ...root[ing] the *acousmêtre* to a place and say[ing] ‘here is your body, you’ll be there, and not elsewhere’”. We can say that ‘The Sound of Silence’ as *acousmêtre* is now “doomed to the fate of ordinary mortals” as it enters the diegesis as lipsynch: in this case, the ordinary mortals are Ben and Elaine and so the surrender of power is acute; as ordinary mortals go, the couple are particularly hapless and their fate is unknown. Yet the song must retain *some* of its *acousmêtr*-ic qualities, even if it has also lost some of its power. As pre-existent recording, it remains *acousmêtre* even as it is *de-acousmatized* by the lipsynching body. Here we can see with some ambivalence the process Chion describes²²⁷, but we can also see new possibilities that are, in the case of ‘The Sound of Silence’, perhaps ridiculous, perhaps productive, yet by any reckoning shift the power relationships between the recorded voice and the bodies it inhabits. I would like to argue, however, that the authority of the original song as *acousmêtre* is neither diminished nor jeopardized. The lipsynch performance does not “compete” with the original performance of the song but rather enlarges, subverts, celebrates, abandons, and contains it. It is not *reproduction* but an *activity*. Rather than distance, it seeks to absorb, redefine, and re-animate the cultural artefact, the “dead” voices of the recording. The song, were it to be thus embodied by Ben and Elaine, would fulfil a dual function, and

²²⁶ Chion, *Voice in Cinema*, 28-9.

²²⁷ Of course it is important to remember that Chion was talking about spoken voice, not score music. It would be a misrepresentation of Chion to suggest that what I am proposing here is covered in his theory. I am *making a case* for the application of Chion’s ideas of the *acousmêtre* and de-acousmatization to the pre-existing voice of the recorded song as it is used in compiled scores and diegetic lipsynch performances.

Ben and Elaine would share in the residue of the *acousmètre*'s power. Further, the song's familiarity—its existence as cultural object—allows it to serve as shorthand for a myriad of cultural meanings and readings, yet the *particularity* of its re-embodiment in the lipsynching body reflects back onto those meanings something of the individual encounter: a singular, limited, and grounded presence.

With these ideas in mind, I turn now to a few representative examples of diegetic lipsynching performance in four films. The lipsynch performances in these films form multiple loci of meaning of narrative and affective consideration through a variety of means. Like the recordings in *The Virgin Suicides*, the diegetic lipsynch can be seen to incorporate both the *acousmètre* and the *de-acousmatized* voice.²²⁸ It also serves many of the functions of the compiled score, such as intertextuality, various and shifting cultural investments, nostalgia, characterization, narrative commentary, etc. And it can function like the traditional number in the classical film musical in the sense that the characters use song rather than spoken dialogue to express and communicate internal states and desires (Feuer's "post-modern" musical). Thus the diegetic lipsynch inhabits three intersecting and divergent functional layers. It combines 1) the effects of the performed number of the film musical with 2) the extra-cinematic associations of the compiled score's pre-existing song with 3) its own *a priori* existence as a social and private behaviour common to many people. The songs are *lived* by the characters, embodied and acted, sometimes for the self alone and sometimes staged for the benefit of others; the performance of the songs involves projection as well as introjection. Yet they also contain the "absent performances", as described by Tincknell, of the original singers, which become located in the body of the lipsyncher on screen but retain all the associative and extra-cinematic meanings of (the perception of) an absent performance. Finally, the lipsynched songs in these films are chosen—"scripted" as it were—by the characters themselves as part of the narrative action, not imposed as commentary from "on high" like the songs of the compiled score.

In addition, there is a contradictory element whereby the characters in these films exert *personal* ownership over materials that circulate and are available for appropriation

²²⁸ Another film that straddles the *acousmètre*, *de-acousmatization* divide is *Christine*, in which an old 1950s Plymouth Fury becomes sentient and goes on a killing spree during which it plays early rock and roll hits on its radio. I think of the car as lipsynching to the old recordings. In any case, the disembodied voice of music is re-embodied in the body of the car and put to uses never dreamed of by the original performers. *Christine*, dir. John Carpenter, Columbia Pictures Corporation/Delphi Premier Productions/Polar Film, 1983.

within a more *general* culture that is always already encompassed by a fictive reality constructed by the conceit that cinema (as well as the music industry) presents the *real* to the viewer. As *acousmètres* these songs are in fact cultural commodities—found objects generated by and for commercial means—yet through the processes of *de-acousmatization* they can also speak a personal truth. This is the fascinating paradox of all lipsynched performance.

For simplicity I have categorized each example below into a phenomenological and/or affective category, but it is important to note that the examples are not exclusively linked to one specific category but function across them, and also draw on categories not mentioned here, some of which will, however, be discussed in the final two chapters. In other words, diegetic lipsynching performances serve many functions for the characters and audience, some of them contradictory, some shared. The four categories I discuss here—the Interior Externalized, Possession, Identity Formation, and Community Bonding—are among the more frequently encountered functions of diegetic lipsynch in cinema and television.

The Interior Externalized: *Bridget Jones's Diary*²²⁹

Bridget Jones, alone, drunk and lonely, sits on her laundry-strewn sofa and holds a rolled-up magazine to her mouth like a microphone while lipsynching to a recording of ‘All By Myself’ by Celine Dion. We are meant to view the performance as evidence of her empty, man-less life. We are viewing—she is *expressing*—rock bottom. At the beginning of the lipsynch she is holding an empty wine glass in one hand and we can see in her face and body the effects of her inebriation. Her movements are imprecise, her eyes droop, her face is puffy and lax. Dion is singing softly at the point where Bridget joins in. Her voice could be described as vulnerable, and, true to the sentiments expressed in the lyrics of the song, self-pitying. It is a close, interior voice of pain; its dramaturgy does not only fit the staged narrative but also Bridget’s body. This is not voice and body juxtaposed, but mated.

Interestingly, the song enters the film as score music. We hear it as the opening credits roll over a montage of clips that follow Bridget’s evening activities as she shuffles around her flat and lies idly on her sofa. The song plays uninterrupted as the image

²²⁹ *Bridget Jones's Diary*, dir. Sharon Maguire, Miramax Films/Universal Pictures/StudioCanal/Working Title Films/Little Bird, 2001.

shifts time and place. She channel surfs, checks an empty answering machine, drinks. As *acousmètre* the song is introducing us to Bridget, telling us how to interpret the images we are seeing—this is not a cozy evening at home, it tells us, but a lonely, empty one. The voice of Celine Dion is the omniscient voice which comes from everywhere and nowhere. And then, seamlessly, it enters the diegesis. We see Bridget mime the short guitar lead-in to what is the final reiteration of the song’s chorus. It is no longer score music; the character of Bridget Jones hears it, too, presumably listening to it on a CD player or other playback device.

At first resigned and tentative, her lipsynching becomes more committed, more passionate as the song reaches its climax. The song takes hold. It captures her—or she captures it—and she projects it outwards from her body. What she hears, we *see*. It is her interior state externalized. The embodiment of song allows her to articulate its affective power over her, even as it is—within the diegesis—performed only for herself. The performance also represents, within the film’s overall narrative, her moment of resolve to change her life. The authority she experiences through the performance, her mastery of the song, stand as metaphoric externalizations of her arriving at a solution to her inertia (*see DVD1 > Chapter 3: Diegetic Lipsynch Numbers > track 2: Bridget Jones’s Diary – ‘All By Myself’*).

Possession:²³⁰ *Beetlejuice*²³¹

A sweet, young couple dies in a car crash and haunt the house where they formerly lived. When a dysfunctional family move in, they attempt to scare them away, trying various methods, one of which is to possess the bodies of the family members and their guests with the Harry Belafonte recording of ‘The Banana Boat Song (Day-O)’. While the new couple are hosting a small dinner party, Belafonte’s voice, singing the opening phrase—“Day-O! Day-ay-ay-o! Daylight come and me want a go home”, suddenly disgorges from the wife’s mouth to her and all the assembled’s surprise. Soon they are all possessed, each rising from the table in bewilderment, even fear, dancing jerkily like marionettes as their mouths and bodies are controlled by the song. This is not a lipsynch as in the other films discussed, chosen and acted out by the performers to a playback device. In this narrative, the disembodied voices of Belafonte and the other musicians

²³⁰ It would be interesting to explore lipsynching in terms of the particular sense of possession experienced by those religious groups who engage in glossolalia. Though beyond the scope of this thesis, it might be an area for future study.

²³¹ *Beetlejuice*, dir. Tim Burton, The Geffen Company, 1988.

who sing and play on the recording *literally* inhabit and animate the corporeal bodies of the characters. In essence, each character becomes playback device *and* performer. At first the song comes out like a purge: the stomach clenches, and with a small convulsion the foreign body of the voice is expelled from a character's mouth. But as the song continues, the characters—to the ghosts' dismay—begin to enjoy the possession. The recording maintains its basic control over their bodies, but by giving in to it, they are able to achieve a volitional integration. A reciprocal arrangement emerges. In the process of possessing them, the song also confers individual power, enlarges them and provides, at least for the duration of the song, an alternative to their earthly, corrupt and scheming ways. In other words, while the song possesses them, they eventually come to possess the song (*DVD1 – Chapter 3: Diegetic Lipsynch Numbers > track 3: Beetlejuice – 'Day O (The Banana Boat Song)'*).

This performance builds upon an idea of the song as “excess” and the pleasure of allowing such excess to become bodily. It also draws upon the idea of the young ghosts' nostalgia for the music of Harry Belafonte, which leads them to choose this particular song for the possession, and is also transferred to the dinner party. The fact that the song is from *back there*, itself already distanced from its originary moment, allows the song to sooth rather than upset. It is nostalgia in its sweetest form, drawing on the extra-musical and intertextual discourse that links the performer, Harry Belafonte (humanitarian and by all accounts a kind person), with the sweet, dead couple who are unable to frighten the disturbingly urbane and unpleasant new inhabitants. As *acousmêtre* the song comments on the characters, passes judgments. It is the “ghost”—the recording's “voice of the dead”—outside the diegesis who knows and sees the ghosts within. De-acousmatized, it soothes and tames the “savages” at the party. But the full embodiment is necessary for the transformation. The song must be *lived*. It must be written onto the skin and into the breath.²³²

Identity Formation: *Muriel's Wedding*²³³

Muriel and Rhonda win a lipsynching competition where they perform ABBA's ‘Waterloo’. The performance is a bonding ritual for the young women whose lives

²³² The film *The Mask* also contains a lipsynching performance which turns into a possession when the “The Mask”, surrounded by scores of police who have finally cornered him, possesses them with a rendition of ‘Cuban Pete’. As they dance and lipsynch, involuntarily at first, they lose their inhibitions along with their officious police personae and become free spirits. They lower their guns and The Mask escapes. *The Mask*, dir. Charles Russell, NewLine Cinema/Dark Horse Entertainment, 1994.

²³³ *Muriel's Wedding*, dir. P. J. Hogan, CiBy 2000/Film Victoria/House & Moorhouse Films, 1994.

become intertwined from this moment on. The performance is also the making of Muriel's new identity. The film takes place in the present-day of 1990s' Australia where Muriel is a lost soul. Out of work and out of step with her peers, repeatedly receiving the message from her father that she is "useless", she consoles herself by closing the door to her bedroom and listening to ABBA recordings on a cheap portable tape player. When her friends—the vain and self-satisfied "cool" girls from her old high school—reject her she steals a large sum of money from her father and "follows" her former friends to an island-resort for a holiday from which they have excluded her. There she meets Rhonda, another former attendee of the snobbish, clique-ruled high school where both Muriel and Rhonda were outcasts and from which they both dropped out.

In support of Muriel, Rhonda reveals to the cool girls that one of them had sex with another's husband on their wedding day (an act Muriel had witnessed). The next scene shows Rhonda and Muriel lipsynching to 'Waterloo' at the resort's lipsynching contest. They are costumed and bewigged as the female singers from the group: the dark one (Rhonda) and the blonde one (Muriel). The cool girls are seated with their male pick-ups at a table in front of the stage, angry and pouting, as Muriel and Rhonda perform. At the start of the song Muriel is clearly uncomfortable in the spotlight. She performs the choreography awkwardly and self-consciously while she watches her former friends watching her. Their sneering attitude intimidates and yet from her position on the stage Muriel is the elevated presence. As the performance continues and she observes how miserable the cool girls have become with one another, Muriel becomes more confident. Bolstered by Rhonda's strong, affectionate presence, she relaxes and allows the song to take hold of her body. By the end of the number the cool girls are brawling on the floor and Muriel and Rhonda are dancing for a standing, cheering audience. Their lipsynching is perfect. The performance, which was at first tentative, is exuberant, joyous, and wins them a magnum of champagne (*DVD1 – Chapter 3: Diegetic Lipsynch Numbers > track 4: Muriel's Wedding – 'Waterloo'*).

Muriel is no longer the lonely girl listening to 'Dancing Queen' in her bedroom. She *is* a dancing queen; no longer dreamily absorbing, but *unleashing* the voices of her pop music heroes. The active embodiment allows for a creative departure, transferring the voice from the ear to the entire musculature. From here on out she is able to assemble for herself a new identity. The performance signals an escape from her old life and the beginning of a new one in which she will ultimately take control of her destiny.

Of significance is Muriel's relationship to the music of ABBA. In John Rayner's words:

The first example of Muriel's use of the music for personal escape and mood management is seen when, following allegations that she has shoplifted the dress that she later wears to a wedding, Muriel hides in her bedroom and puts 'Dancing Queen' on her stereo. ...Muriel's retreat to her bedroom and recourse to music for solace are the first indications of her dissatisfaction with 'Muriel Heslop' and her obsession with the transformation of her identity. ...[H]er emancipation is signalled by dancing in costume and lip-synching to the ABBA song 'Waterloo'...²³⁴

Although emancipatory, the imaginative departure from her old identity is not an instance of escape only. By performing to ABBA—in other words, through the continuity of her love of ABBA, which she carries throughout the film—she is integrating the old and the new. Lipsynching for the audience enables her to *read herself* differently. In the active embodiment of song Muriel *feels* (in her body as well as imagination) possibilities as yet undiscovered that the song facilitates. In her bedroom, the song has remained for her somewhere distant. The integrative power of lipsynching allows for closer contact with cultural objects that have become distant through recording and the processes of mass dissemination and consumption.

The iconic nature of ABBA as a group, and the meanings, particularly in gay culture, that have arisen around their music, facilitates varied, extra- and counter-textual readings among the film's viewers. Jill A. Mackey demonstrates this by applying a Lesbian reading to Muriel's relationship with Rhonda:

Extra-textual information regarding Abba helps in this lesbian appropriation. Abba was a 1970s era popular music group made up of two married couples. The "Abba" group presented by Muriel and Rhonda is one half of this pair of married couples: the female half. Knowledge of the intimate relationships of Abba helps to eroticize the half of Abba made up of Muriel and Rhonda.²³⁵

Following Mackey's reading, we can easily imagine the disembodied voices of ABBA as *acousmêtre*, omniscient in their knowledge of the characters, seeing them as they truly are (even as they cannot see themselves). In the *de-acousmatization* of the lipsynched performance of 'Waterloo', the knowledge the voices possess is in a sense

²³⁴ Rayner, J., "Stardom, Reception and the ABBA 'Musical'" in Conrich, I., and Tincknell, E., (eds.), *Film's Musical Moments*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 99-112, 106.

²³⁵ MacKey, J. A., "Subtext and Countertext in 'Muriel's Wedding'", *NWSA Journal* 13/1, (2001), 98.

actualized in the bodies of Muriel and Rhonda. The *acousmètre* extends its power, or rather, Muriel and Rhonda acquire some of its power—some of the knowledge it imparts—through appropriation.

Community Bonding: *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*²³⁶

Ferris Bueller, a high school student taking a “sick day” from school, lipsynchs to the Beatles’ ‘Twist and Shout’ from atop a parade float that he has commandeered. The performance shows his power and audacity and his peculiar ability to make people love him. It also becomes an occasion for the entire community in the parade’s path (in a busy section of Chicago) to unite. All the parade participants, the bands, and the spectators, join Bueller (and the re-embodied voice of John Lennon) in a spectacle of shared *joie de vivre*. Even people with no connection to the parade join in. Window washers, construction workers, and office workers in the surrounding highrise buildings sing and gyrate. A group of people appears at the top of the stairs of an elevated city plaza and performs a synchronized dance. All the citizens of Chicago, it would seem, “catch” the infectious Beatles recording, and yet their sudden over-the-top response to it connotes a feeling that they’ve never *truly* heard the song until embodied in this young man. We see young and old, rich and poor, black and white, blue collar and white collar share a moment unprecedented and otherwise impossible if not facilitated, the filmmakers would have us believe, by Bueller’s charismatic incarnation of John Lennon’s iconic vocal performance (*DVDI > Chapter 3: Diegetic Lipsynch Numbers > track 5: Ferris Bueller’s Day Off – ‘Danke Schoen’ / ‘Twist and Shout’*).

John Champagne compares the utopian characteristics of the classical Hollywood musical number as outlined by Richard Dyer—energy, abundance, intensity, transparency, and community—to the lipsynched numbers in such films. Writing about the film *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*²³⁷ he states, “[the lipsynched numbers] take the form of a series of either formal or spontaneous drag show rehearsals and performances”.²³⁸ We can continue this line of thinking to include Feuer’s writings on the Hollywood musical as “folk art” as marked by inclusion and spontaneity. Both Dyer’s and Feuer’s formulations can be applied to *Ferris Bueller*. Bueller’s re-

²³⁶ *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*, dir. John Hughes, Paramount Pictures, 1986.

²³⁷ *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, dir. Stephan Elliott, Polygram Filmed Entertainment/AFFC/Latent Image Productions Pty. Ltd./Specific Films/New South Wales Film and Television Office, 1994.

²³⁸ Champagne, “Dancing Queen?”, 71.

embodiment of Lennon's voice initiates a spontaneous utopian response in the crowd and a feeling of inclusion.

And yet, while the scene is drawing heavily on these features of the Hollywood musical number, our experience of the song is also subject to the extra-textual resonances contained in its prior existence and its current function as absent performance. The star persona of Lennon and the Beatles is ever present in the way the song is read, or rather, the star performer in any pop recording, according to Rayner, can confer a sense of the extra-ordinary into the ordinary lives of its listeners. Citing Simon Frith and Richard Dyer, he writes:

Just as 'pop song is ordinary language put to extraordinary use', [Frith, *Performing Rites*, 1996, 160] stars are 'embodiments of *typical* ways of behaving' [Dyer, *Stars*, 1998), 22], and both represent resources for the fabrication of individual status and derivation of private significance, conferring stardom on their consumers within limited parameters.²³⁹

Both Bueller and the crowd avail themselves of this star presence. Bueller allows it to inhabit him and then the newly formed dual star presence of the Lennon/Bueller confabulation exerts its influence over the crowd.²⁴⁰

Diegetic lipsynch, then, carries a number of functions that are particular to the ways that it can play across the boundary of the cinema screen, bringing pre-existent cultural artefacts, with their gathered cultural and personal connotations, into the diegesis and the narrative. This can enrich character and narrative, enable closer identification on the part of the audience, and/or disrupt our conventionalised expectations of cinematic convention (at the same time that new conventions are being formed). As cultural objects existing in our real world, outside of the diegesis, recorded popular songs embody attributes of the *acousmêtre*, but in what should, according to Chion, be the *de-acousmatization* and thereby the diminishing of the *acousmêtre*-function when such

²³⁹ Rayner, "Stardom", 110.

²⁴⁰ In another 1980s film written by John Hughes, *Pretty in Pink*, the character of "Ducky" dances and lipsynchs—air-microphone in hand—to Otis Redding's 'Try a Little Tenderness' in order to impress the girl he unrequitedly longs for. (See *DVDI* > *Chapter 3: Diegetic Lipsynch Numbers* > *track 6: Pretty in Pink – 'Try a Little Tenderness'*). Similar to Bueller, he is imbued with the power of the absent performance as he confidently steps into its glow. Unfortunately for Ducky, this wonderful lipsynch performance doesn't get him the girl. (A common topic of discussion for fans of this film—just a glance at comments on the film's IMDB.com page confirms this—is *why* the girl chooses the boring stiff Blaine over the fabulous Ducky. Such is the power of his performance and the view it provides into his likeable, eccentric character). *Pretty in Pink*, dir. Howard Deutch, Paramount Pictures, 1986.

materials are diegetically lipsynched, the disempowerment is not absolute, and significant residues of the *acousmêtre* adhere. In the next chapter, I will discuss lipsynching performances in the works of Dennis Potter and David Lynch, which draw on diegetic lipsynch, but which also complicate and extend the scope of a hermeneutics of lipsynching in cinema and television. Elements from the present chapter and the next will then be deployed in the final chapter of this thesis, which, in examining the phenomenon of self-produced lipsynch videos on the internet will draw on theories of diegetic lipsynching as one in a series of pre-conditions informing this vernacular practice in the lives of “everyday” people.

Chapter 4

Going Deeper, Going Darker:

Lipsynching in the Works of Dennis Potter and David Lynch

Dennis Potter: “The Dramatist Who Made an Art Form Out of Plagiarism”²⁴¹

Throughout his career Dennis Potter challenged the realist/naturalist traditions of film and television story-telling—the goal of which is to create a seamless narrative that closely mimics “real life” and seeks to convince audiences that what they are seeing is not a construction but natural, “as it really happened” in time and space. The tricks of realist narrative seek to obscure or conceal its constructed nature so that audiences may experience an unobstructed verisimilitude, never jolted out of the cinematic dream. An exponent of “non-naturalism” throughout his career, employing devices such as, for example, direct-address (breaking the “fourth wall”), and adults playing the roles of children, Potter is perhaps best remembered for putting lipsynching at the centre of three of his television mini-series. In this chapter I shall investigate the ways in which lipsynching and popular song in the first two works of his so-called “musical trilogy”, *Pennies from Heaven* (1978)²⁴² and *The Singing Detective* (1986),²⁴³ can be understood from a variety of analytical perspectives.²⁴⁴

I propose that a hermeneutics of Potter’s work is only really possible if one is willing to occupy several (often conflicting) analytical perspectives simultaneously, and that this is in fact one of its distinctive strengths. Lipsynching in his dramas can be seen from at least three perspectives: as akin to the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*; as a way of acting out a high-modernist denigration of popular song; and as a technique that pushes for a more redemptive relationship with the (apparent) idealist and Utopian emotions carried by these same songs. This is not the popular song as autonomous artwork (judged negatively by the standards of “high” art) but the popular song and its relationship to the individuals who make use of it, its involvement in people’s lives and their involvement in it. It is to be appraised not through the application of aesthetic criteria but through experience. In John Mundy’s words, “Potter had established the importance of popular

²⁴¹ Steyn, M., *The Times*, quoted in Stead, P., “The Public and Private in Dennis Potter”, in Gras, V. W., and Cook, J. R., (eds), *The Passion of Dennis Potter: International Collected Essays*, (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 2000), 18.

²⁴² *Pennies from Heaven*, dir. Piers Haggard, BBC, 1978.

²⁴³ *The Singing Detective*, dir. John Amiel, BBC/Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1986.

²⁴⁴ The third, *Lipstick on Your Collar*, will receive only brief mention here due to space limitations.

song as a dramatic device capable of delivering a range of complex effects, ... an important acknowledgement of the recurrent importance of popular music within contemporary culture”.²⁴⁵ It is in part through this reading of lipsynching as the concretization of the personal significance of popular songs, as well as the particular dislocations attendant upon sound recording, that opens up the psychoanalytical as a *fourth* analytical perspective, in particular lipsynching in certain cultural or dramatological contexts as a site of what Freud termed the Uncanny [*das Unheimliche*]. That this can be generalized beyond Potter’s work will be shown by also considering the lipsynching performances in David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet* (1986) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001), and then further elaborated as a significant factor in lipsynching *per se* in my final chapter on vernacular lipsynching on YouTube.

That Potter’s musical trilogy is legible in broadly Brechtian terms is attested to by many of the academic commentators on his work. As Feuer notes, direct address of actor to audience is one way in which the so-called “alienation” or “distancing” effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) of Brecht’s (and other forms of modernist) theatre is achieved, bursting through the so-called “fourth wall” of the conventional proscenium.²⁴⁶ Other means used by Potter to achieve similar dramaturgical goals include song, dance, and other non-realist forms of performance; Samuel G. Marinov, for example, draw parallels between Potter and Brecht, the latter also using “song and dance extensively to achieve what he called *Verfremdung* or ‘alienation’ effects, a process of making events, actions, and characters ‘strange’ by sufficiently distancing spectators from the action so that they can watch it critically”.²⁴⁷ These are, in Feuer’s words, “techniques whereby the spectator is lifted out of her transparent identification with the story and forced to concentrate instead on the artifice through which the play or film has been made”.²⁴⁸ Alongside these techniques, and related to them, is the practice of deliberately separating out the different elements constituting a stage work—i.e., music, text, action, set—and Feuer, writing about the film version of *Pennies from Heaven*, notes that the relationships that are set up between image and sound “exemplify the ‘distancing effect’ that comes from separating the elements.” Feuer cites Brecht’s critique of conventional opera, in which he argues the logic for this separation, at some length:

²⁴⁵ Mundy, J., “Singing Detected: Blackpool and the Strange Case of the Missing Television Musical Dramas”, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 3/1, (2006), 60.

²⁴⁶ Feuer, *Hollywood Musical*, 35.

²⁴⁷ Marinov, “Redefining”, 202.

²⁴⁸ Feuer, *Hollywood Musical*, 35.

The great struggle for supremacy between words, music and production [in opera] ... can simply be by-passed by radically separating elements. So long as the expression ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ ... means that the integration is a muddle, so long as the arts are supposed to be ‘fused’ together, the various elements will all be equally degraded, and each will act as a mere ‘feed’ to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator, who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art. Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against. Whatever is intended to produce hypnosis, is likely to induce sordid intoxication, or creates fog, has got to be given up. Words, music and setting must become more independent of one another.²⁴⁹

In many respects the absurd, parodic, and anti-realistic techniques that Potter uses in both *Pennies from Heaven* and *The Singing Detective* are a gift for any analyst looking for a Brechtian reading of these TV series. Marinov takes up a strong position in which these stylizations and non-naturalist devices serve only “a *narrative intransitivity*” a term he takes from Peter Wollen, “aimed to ridicule the type of relationships typically present in the musical genre”.²⁵⁰ While, as Marinov puts it, some of the “layers of ... colliding and convoluting narratives ... are semantically similar to the traditional musicals ... and evoke in the audience an empathy for the characters involved. Others achieve exactly the opposite goal, namely they destroy any emotional bond that may have been built between the audience and the characters”.²⁵¹ Invoking a specifically Brechtian agenda, Marinov writes that “[m]usic and lyrics in songs [in Potter’s films] as well as dance style are customarily used to mutually discredit emotional realism rather than complement it”.²⁵² There can be little doubt that Potter himself was invested in this critical aspect of his use of lipsynching. Writing on the decision to include lipsynching in *Pennies from Heaven*, he uses the term “alienating”, though significantly, and as I shall discuss presently, he uses this term in a kind of dialectical relationship to “putting the music right smack dab in the middle”.²⁵³

Following on from the statement above that Potter does not wholly reject the conventions of the musicals, retaining “semantically similar” qualities such as “the familiar function of helping to create romantic links between the characters”, Marinov nevertheless focuses on the ways in which, as he claims, “most musical numbers in *Pennies* produce the opposite effect. They destroy any possibility of romantic or

²⁴⁹ Feuer, *Hollywood Musical*, 126-7

²⁵⁰ Marinov, “Redefining”, 201.

²⁵¹ Marinov, “Redefining”, 199-200.

²⁵² Marinov, “Redefining”, 202.

²⁵³ Fuller, G., and Potter, D., *Potter on Potter*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 85.

realistic perception of the scenes”.²⁵⁴ The example he gives is of the scene where Joan and the detective who is searching for the disappeared Arthur lipsynch and dance to the song ‘Anything Goes’, Cole Porter’s paradigmatic catalogue of risqué and suggestive observations on the morals of “today” (the 30s) that ironically feigns shock but is clearly *of* the “anything goes” culture. Marinov, though, sees this scene as exemplifying Joan and the detective “not as real-life individuals but as archetypes, representatives of certain categories of people, stylistically similar to those found in the theatre of Vsevolod Meyerhold and Bertold Brecht”.²⁵⁵ This is one reading, but too formalistic, and seems to be forcing one theoretical paradigm at the expense of the semantic richness of the scene as it is staged. On the one hand there *is* a Brechtian ridiculing of the respectable pretension of the characters; whatever “real” diegetic sexual tension there might be between Joan and the detective (and there is some, awkward and ugly as its representation is), the stilted dance moves and repressed body language show us something about the hypocrisy and artificiality of these would-be respectable, bourgeois characters trying on ‘Anything Goes’ and failing dismally to attain anything like the sexiness, transgressivity, or genuine *fun* that the song suggests (although Joan seems to have a good go at it) (*see DVD2 > Chapter 4: Potter and Lynch > Potter: Pennies From Heaven > track 1 – ‘Anything Goes’*). From a different critical perspective, though, the scene can be read through an Adornian lens as exemplifying the paucity and triviality of romantic love, sex, and hedonism as it is *represented* in popular song.

There is ample evidence that Potter himself was critical of the ways in which much popular song short-changes the listener, as it were, offering standardized and ultimately anodyne stand-ins for what ought to be transcendental experiences of love, abandon, and *joie de vivre*. Despite Eckart Voigts-Virchow’s assertion that Potter “rejects Adorno’s view that ‘music standardization is pseudo-individualization’”,²⁵⁶ there is a consistent and antagonistic thread to Potter’s relations with popular song that, if not Adornian in origin, is nevertheless similarly concerned to query the value of a musical form that is so thoroughly subjected to the forces of commercialism and standardization. For Potter some of the songs he uses are “ludicrous and banal”, even as they claim to deal with the fundamentals of life, love, and fate,²⁵⁷ and through much of *The Singing*

²⁵⁴ Marinov, *Redefining*, 198-9.

²⁵⁵ Marinov, *Redefining*, 199.

²⁵⁶ Voigts-Virchow, E., “‘Cornucopia of Tinsel’: Dennis Potter and the Culture of Advertising”, in Gras, V. W., Cook, J. R., (eds), *The Passion of Dennis Potter: International Collected Essays*, (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 2000), 77.

²⁵⁷ Potter, *on Potter*, 86.

Detective, both Philip Marlow and his fictional counterpart, the eponymous Singing Detective (also called Marlow), express contempt for the songs.

As an example of this attitude, it is worth looking at two crucial points in *The Singing Detective* where someone actually “sings” within the diegesis, as opposed to lipsynching. The very first time we see the fictional detective-Marlow he is rehearsing with his band in the dance hall where they regularly play, and it is the actor Michael Gambon’s voice that we hear singing ‘Cruising Down the River’. During the middle eight, “The birds above all sing of love”, he breaks off at the words “like softly falling [rain] . . .” and addresses the band: “OK Fellas, that’ll do, the words break my heart, we won’t say like softly falling what, though”. His tired cynicism towards the song is here staged in a more “realist” filmic language, his own voice a candid chink in the emotional armor generally offered by the lipsynch. According to Steve Brie, Potter “vehemently disliked most of the music he used in his work” and his “views on the nature and value of post-World War II popular music often echoed those of modernist critics such as Adorno, Hoggart, and Leavis ... the popular music ‘product’ as a form of ‘catharsis for the masses,’ seducing listeners into ideological passivity”.²⁵⁸ Accordingly, Brie notes that “[s]uch a view sees “a voraciously commercial music industry [setting] out to colonize ‘the emotional life of the petit-bourgeoisie’ with its ‘cheap songs’”²⁵⁹ and also echoes the Brechtian caution against the “sordid intoxication” of realist theatre experience. But whereas Adorno found no grounds for any sort of redemption of the debased and crass nature of popular song, Potter, “[i]n spite of his prejudices, ... did understand the dramatic potential inherent in the popular tune. ... In the words of his character, Nigel Barton, Potter was rather like ‘an atheist who is fond of hymn tunes,’ being simultaneously fearful of and fascinated by the inherent power of the popular song”.²⁶⁰

Potter’s reclaiming of popular song takes two forms beyond the obvious one of using lipsynching to re-embody recorded songs into the bodies of his characters (proliferating and complicating the relations of these characters to popular culture). One of these reclamations concerns the very different relations of artist to audience that characterizes

²⁵⁸ Brie, S., “‘Yesterday Once More’: Thoughts on the Relationship Between Popular Music, Audience and Authorial Intention in Dennis Potter’s *Pennies from Heaven*, *The Singing Detective* and *Lipstick on You Collar*”, in Gras, V. W., and Cook, J. R., (eds), *The Passion of Dennis Potter: International Collected Essays*, (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 2000), 205-6.

²⁵⁹ Brie, “Yesterday”, 206-7.

²⁶⁰ Brie, “Yesterday”, 207.

“entertainment”, as opposed to “art”. Feuer discusses Al Jolson’s relations to his cinematic audience in terms of his not being “an object for contemplation” in a distanced, aestheticized, “high” art sense but an artist concerned, as she puts it, with “the art of dialogue, not monologue. Musical entertainment concentrates on breaking down any perceived distance between performer and audience”.²⁶¹ There is a long cultural history to such established and valued dialogic relations of artist and audience that no amount of high art critique can gainsay. However commercialised and driven by profit, there is still scope for artists and their audiences to recuperate something of value and meaning from the “popular” scenario. Potter sees what he terms the “sugary banalities of those tunes and lyrics” as:

unspecific—bad art is unspecific. Popular art in general is unspecific. But the unspecific nature of it allows you to put in the specific. Now good art, if there is such a thing, is specific. You write a scene and you feel, if it’s good, that it’s actually, concretely, the only way those people could have behaved in that situation—but it also has some of the openness or looseness of popular art.²⁶²

This openness and looseness, this inherent structural value of popular art, opens up another register of meaning in Potter’s work that cannot be reduced to Brechtian dramaturgical technique or Adornian cultural criticism. When Arthur, in *Pennies from Heaven*, says, “If life could only be like the songs”, Potter the modernist evaluates this as “the remark of a stupid man” but he goes on immediately to affirm that this is nevertheless “a fundamentally true yearning”,²⁶³ a stupid remark, perhaps, naive and gullible, perhaps, but a truthful *desire* nonetheless, though an Adornian might well see the desire itself as deluded. Here we see the critical uncertainty, the ambiguity, the richness, ultimately, of the project Potter is engaged in. The materials he works with may be “cheap”, “banalities”, “bad art”, the techniques he deploys may be reasonably interpreted as belonging to a critical, modernist, engaged politics, yet, as Pauline Kael, the film critic of *The New Yorker* put it in 1981 in her review of the film version, “[d]espite its use of Brechtian devices, *Pennies from Heaven* doesn’t allow you to distance yourself”.²⁶⁴ Something powerful and authentic of popular culture—and song in particular—seems to be retained by Potter that works against whatever ironizes,

²⁶¹ Feuer, *Hollywood Musical*, 35.

²⁶² Potter, *On Potter*, 29-30.

²⁶³ Evans, D., “‘Grasping the Constellation’: Dennis Potter and the Mythologies of Popular Culture”, in Gras, V. W., and Cook, J. R., (eds), *The Passion of Dennis Potter: International Collected Essays*, (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 2000), 67.

²⁶⁴ Feuer, *Hollywood Musical*, 126.

parodies, and ridicules that same material. Arthur's "stupid remark/true yearning" dichotomy that Potter himself articulates finds confirmation in writers such as Glen Creeber:

Potter's work paradoxically presents popular culture (despite its banal commercialism) as fulfilling an inherent need within the human subject to transcend the basic realities and inequalities of everyday life. Where once those utopian aspirations and dreams were channeled through an older working-class tradition or through religious or quasi-religious narratives and images, they are now firmly claimed by the commercial forces of contemporary culture.²⁶⁵

It would probably be overstating this side of the argument to say, as Eckart Voigts-Virchow does, that Potter "poses as popular culture's and mass media's chief philistine, waging war against the excesses of high modernism and its academic life-support machinery", given his critical perspectives on the popular materials he uses. Nevertheless, as Chris Lippard writes, "[a]gainst the dominance of systems, Potter advocates individual creativity", leaving open the possibility that despite everything, it is still possible to arrive at a personal and meaningful encounter with "the popular" that can encompass irony, critique, self-awareness, *and* some form of authentic identification.²⁶⁶ Lippard quotes Potter as saying:

The overwhelming thrust of contemporary critical ideologies, whether Marxist or Structuralist, whether in the fractured syntax of the semiologists or the muted Woolf and Warp of intertextuality, et al., is consistently away from the singular or individual and in lumbering, flat-footed, tongue-tied motion towards the universal and the systematic.²⁶⁷

In *The Singing Detective* in particular, as I shall argue in some detail, the personal relations to the songs transcend the cynical or critical positions outlined, and through

²⁶⁵ Creeber, G., *Dennis Potter Between Two Worlds: A Critical Reassessment*, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997), quoted in Evans, "Grasping the Constellation", 68.

²⁶⁶ Lippard, C., "Confined Bodies, Wandering Minds: Memory, Paralysis and the Self in Some Earlier Works of Dennis Potter" in Gras, V. W., and Cook, J. R., (eds), *The Passion of Dennis Potter: International Collected Essays*, (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 2000), 111. This concurrent holding of conventionally opposed positions is noted by other writers dealing with Potters "trilogy". Vernon Gras, for example, sees Potter as "a postmodern writer" who "concur[s] with his modernist predecessors" (Gras, V. W., "Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective*: An Exemplum of Dialogical Ethics", in Gras, V. W., and Cook, J. R., (eds), *The Passion of Dennis Potter: International Collected Essays*, (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 2000), 101-2). If the modernist, "Brechtian" Potter "utilizes many defamiliarizing techniques to interrupt any passive habitual consumption" and thereby to "bring viewers to self-awareness that their own predicament/possibility parallels that of Marlow ... it is when posing an alternative ending, especially, that Potter reveals the necessity of breaking the hold of the past in order to control one's future." Gras, 105).

²⁶⁷ Potter quoted in Lippard, "Confined Bodies", 111.

what might be termed Marlow's "individual creativity" offer something of real personal transformation. This is explicitly played out in the series through Marlow's psychoanalytic treatment at the hands of Dr Gibbon, a central narrative thread in which lipsynching offers a medium through which some of Marlow's personal "working through" is effected. Key psychoanalytical categories of self and other, memory, repression, repetition compulsion, and psychosomatic illness are played out through the lipsynching scenes, as well as in the diegetic encounters between Marlow and Dr Gibbon. Though psychoanalysis is arguably another of the "universal and systematic" ideologies of which Potter is critical, the closeness of psychoanalysis to modern and postmodern senses of self—as well, it may be added, as its widespread use as a cultural theoretical paradigm²⁶⁸—means that it is difficult to talk of "the individual" and "the personal" without touching on the at least implicitly psychoanalytical. Given its centrality in *The Singing Detective* and the applicability that I shall later argue of Freud's theory of the Uncanny to lipsynching as a phenomenon, it seems appropriate, therefore, to include it as a hermeneutic perspective allied to the personal, alongside those more socio-cultural critical perspectives originating in the writings of Brecht and Adorno already noted.

Potter's work, then, and in particular the position of lipsynching to popular song within it, occupies several conflicted registers of social and cultural practice, hermeneutic perspectives, and systems of value. From the above critical and theoretical contexts I would now like to look briefly at some of the particulars of the lipsynching itself, as it is presented in the two TV series, before moving on to look at specific case studies based on these series in more depth.

Dennis Potter's Lipsynching Trilogy

From 1978 to 1993, Potter produced *Pennies from Heaven*, *The Singing Detective*, and *Lipstick on Your Collar*, three television mini-series in which the characters lipsynch to popular song recordings of the 1930s, '40s, and '50s respectively. Much like the diegetic lipsynching performances in the films discussed in the previous chapter, the recordings are recognizable to audiences, who are aware that the voices don't belong to the characters lipsynching but to popular performers such as Al Bowly, The Mills Brothers, or Fats Domino. While some of the narrative strategies of the multiply-

²⁶⁸ Turkle, Sherry, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon & Schuster; Touchstone, 1997), 48.

diegetic musical performance of the traditional Hollywood story or folk musical are recognizably present—the characters “break into song”, for example—the real voices of the actors (or the conceit thereof) are absent, replaced by voices that explicitly pre-exist the narrative (you might say, in a derogatory sense, “canned voices”): the voices of popular recorded song, or, in Tincknell’s words, the “absent performances” of the original recording.²⁶⁹ Potter relies on the convention of the multiple-diegesis in the Hollywood (story) musical to create the sense of ambiguity, the stylistic break in the otherwise naturalistic presentation of character and setting. In this sense the lipsynching in his work differs from the unambiguously diegetic lipsynching performances of films like *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* or *Muriel’s Wedding*. In these stagings of diegetic lipsynching we do in fact see the characters “break into song”, as in the conventional Hollywood musical forms, but it is a breaking into song that is explicitly an act of lipsynching, happening inside the diegesis. We, the audience, know that there is a playback device inside the diegetic space that is producing the music. In Potter’s work, the source of the music is clearly non-diegetic; there is no gramophone or phonograph in evidence within the *mise en scène*. Though Potter, as already stated, draws on the multiple-diegesis of the Hollywood story musical, he also avoids confirming the status of the “breaking into song” moments as merely comic/surreal commentaries on this tradition. For example, in having the characters lipsynch he sidesteps the possibility that they could be taken as fully original songs arising out of the narrative situation (as in the story musical), but thereby raises the question posed by almost every instance of song and dance inside that tradition, which is “Am I supposed to believe that they are *really* singing?”. That this is not the case is of course confirmed by the fact of the singing pre-existing its appearance on the screen. However, the convention that the singing we witness in the story musical is an externalisation of emotions or feelings that the figures on screen really *are* experiencing is something that Potter continues to rely on; the lipsynching is a convenient and graspable emblematisation of inner states and experiences. The song sequences in *Pennies from Heaven* and *The Singing Detective* exist, then, within a set of conventions that includes the dual registers of the multiply diegetic story musical and the explicit borrowing of pre-existing voices of the diegetic lipsynch number without ever being reducible to one or the other.

To dispel any doubt as to whether the actors should be read by the viewer as singing or lipsynching to their “own” voices (that is, their actual own voices, or voices assigned to

²⁶⁹ Tincknell, “Soundtrack Movie”, 137.

them by the director to be credibly their own), Potter makes the device clear in the opening number in *Pennies from Heaven*—the first series in the “trilogy”—by putting the female voice of Elsie Carlisle (singing ‘The Clouds Will Soon Roll By’ with Bert Ambrose & His Orchestra) into the male mouth of anti-hero, protagonist Arthur Parker (played by Bob Hoskins). The jarring incongruity of the gender mismatch settles from the outset any question that the aim of the lipsynching is verisimilitude. Joshua Walden writes: “because there is no attempt at deception, and no need to reveal performance trickery... the voices that Potter’s characters embody come to be perceived as their authentic modes of personal expression, despite the incongruity that results from merging unmatched voices and bodies”.²⁷⁰ At the same time:

The popular singer’s voice becomes separated from its original source and takes on a life of its own, to be appropriated and shared by the lip-synching characters in Potter’s dramas. Regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, and professional rank, characters assume the voices and thereby the personas of popular music singers.²⁷¹ ... [M]eaning emerges from the friction between voice and body: The disjunction between the actor and the original source of the voice we recognize reveals unexpected meanings in the songs’ lyrics and the characters’ development.²⁷²

Naturally, we, the audience, partake in the “unexpected meanings”, while adding our own associations into the mix. Dave Evans states:

At the center of these associations are the songs. In *Pennies* Potter uses the songs as emblems of the past to draw out a range of emotions, memories and yearnings that, while not attempting to represent the past historically, as they might if they were merely nostalgic, nevertheless allow the audience to share in the emotions, memories and yearnings they themselves may experience in the present.²⁷³

At the time *Pennies* aired in 1978, Potter explained how he wanted to explore the ways in which we “perceive [our] desires through the filter of what is in the general culture”.²⁷⁴ The lipsynching device invites the audience to use their own “cultural” and experiential “filters”, to bring hermeneutic tools and techniques from “outside” into the experience of the artwork. The musical numbers, incorporating as they do pre-existing cultural artifacts, therefore work in multiple registers. This perspective builds on

²⁷⁰ Walden, J., “Lip-sync in Lipstick: 1950s Popular Songs in a Television Series by Dennis Potter”, *Journal of Musicological Research*, 27/2, (2008), 176.

²⁷¹ Walden, “Lip-sync”, 171.

²⁷² Walden, “Lip-sync”, 176.

²⁷³ Evans, “Grasping the Constellation”, 65-6.

²⁷⁴ Potter, quoted in Evans, “Grasping the Constellation”, 66.

Feuer's "dual registers" and Wollen's "multiple diegesis" of the traditional story musical, some of which are internal to, and some external to the diegesis. Some aspects belong to the characters, some to the audience, and some exist in the separate world of the original recording—the world of the singers and musicians who perform on the recording (also construed as "the voices of the dead"), and, if you like, the recording's own "personal history". What they achieve is something I'd like to call supra-diegesis ("supra", from the Latin, meaning above, before, beyond) to describe the situation in which the characters embody voices that are part multiply-diegetic, as with the Hollywood story musical, but that also have lives of their own that *pre-exist and continue to exist* outside of the narrative and the cinematic world. We might call these ambiguous relationships intertextual, or we might speak in terms of "breaking the fourth wall", but it goes beyond that. By embodying singing voices and song recordings that have their own separate histories, associations, and affiliations, the characters "break" not the fourth wall but a fifth. To put it another way, when Potter's characters lipsynch to pre-existing recordings we might propose that they break the *ceiling* of naturalistic verisimilitude.

Potter's own words support this idea of a breaking through to something "higher"; he talks about how the songs are a way of "puncturing reality". "Singing," he states, "is in a line of descent from the psalms [with which he associates popular song, at least in the uses to which it is put in people's lives], a way of puncturing reality, the ordered structure of things as they are."²⁷⁵

There's a huge gap, obviously, between the psalms and those songs, but their function is not dissimilar. It's the idea of the world shimmering with another reality, which is what 'Button up your Overcoat', or 'Love is Just around the Corner', or 'Down Sunnyside Lane' are saying with their cute, tink-tink-tink syncopations. They are both ludicrous and banal, reducing everything to the utmost simplification, *but also, at the same time, saying 'Yes, there is another order of seeing, there is another way, there is another reality.'*²⁷⁶ [emphasis mine]

The "numbers" in *Pennies from Heaven* and *The Singing Detective* clearly are there to access this other reality (perhaps most faithfully in *Pennies from Heaven*), and as supra-

²⁷⁵ Potter, *on Potter*, 22.

²⁷⁶ Potter, *on Potter*, 86. Herein Potter provides perhaps the most succinct explanation that I have yet discovered in my research for the place of the "break into song" of the conventional musical film, as well as the place—we might even say the use-value—of popular music in people's everyday lives. The musical number gives us a glimpse into "another order of seeing... another reality" as defined within the act of a character's consumption and performance.

diegesis they abandon all pretence of naturalism. The songs are recordings that in part ventriloquize their voices onto the dummy characters. Walden finesses this argument, invoking Steven Connor's work on ventriloquism (he is writing specifically about *Lipstick on Your Collar*, but the same can be said about *Pennies* and *The Singing Detective*):

In Potter's lip-syncing, the characters' identities are formed and altered by the voices they embody. Connor writes that ventriloquism is 'a medium for exploring the relations between selves and their voices.' In *Lipstick on Your Collar*, there are arguably two ventriloquists at work. Potter, as screenwriter, employs his characters as puppets, giving them life by synchronizing the recognizable voices of popular songs to their moving lips.²⁷⁷

Walden's other ventriloquist is the song itself or the singers on the recordings. Yet to talk of Potter's characters only as dummies misses something crucial in his work; unlike the ventriloquist's dummy, Potter's characters are not mere objects—destinations for the playacting ventriloquist's voice, however animated they may be—but equal players, *receiving* and animating, puppet-like, the voice of the recording, while also *projecting* themselves as dramatic characters into the recording in a reciprocal dynamic. In both of these works, the recordings to which the characters lipsynch reside in their fantasy lives, hallucinations, or memories. They are commodities that, once consumed, are threaded into the characters' constructions of reality, whether projected inwards, into private states of being, or outwards, onto relationships between themselves and other characters, expressions of their motivations, actions, and their encounters with the world at large. Further, Potter's audience members encounter each recording already possessing their own individual associations, histories, habits of taste and cultural experience of either the songs themselves (as, for example, recorded by a different performer or sung with schoolmates or sung to them by a parent, etc) and/or the specific recordings to which the characters lipsynch (this phenomenon is also discussed in some detail in Chapter 3).

If I may use myself as an example, in *The Singing Detective*, Marlow's father (long "dead and buried" in Marlow's present) lipsynchs to the Mills Brothers recording of 'Paper Doll', a song that I associate with my own father, who died in 1989. My father taught the song to me, along with many other Mills Brothers songs (and, in fact, much of the music used in *The Singing Detective*). It was the music of his youth and he was

²⁷⁷ Walden, "Lip-sync", 189-190.

passing it to me, just as I was passing the Beatles to him. Coincidentally, ‘Paper Doll’ was our favourite and we used to sing it together. He, like the singer of the first refrain, also had a sweet falsetto; the song was ideally suited to my father’s voice. The pairing in *The Singing Detective* of this particular song with Marlow’s dead father resonates, of course, very strongly with my own loss, my own memories. The song as used in this context serves to increase my identification with the character of Marlow (in both his childhood and present-day forms) and lends a particular and acute pathos to my experience of the narrative that in a newly written, original number would be impossible. My associations with this particular song takes me out of the narrative (to my own life and memories)—perhaps creating something of a distance, seen from one perspective—but also brings me closer into the *emotional* narrative that Potter creates. It is the resonances associated with the song as cultural artefact that allows for this deeper level of identification. Of course, this may be a singular experience for me, many viewers will have different connections to the songs, or none at all, but by using pre-existing materials Potter, like, for instance, a director using a compiled score, is *inviting* a potential multiplicity of associative readings, some peripheral, some meaningful. When the connections run deep, however, Potter is able, through *song*, to map emotional territories that a pure Adornian critique cannot allow for, but which are central to this thesis.

The themes and issues outlined above will now be examined in greater depth through closer readings of specific parts of *Pennies from Heaven* and *The Singing Detective*. A key issue that will emerge, not yet outlined, is the uncanniness (in the Freudian sense) of the lipsynch, which is present in *The Singing Detective* in particular, and which is then also explored in a reading of David Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive* and *Blue Velvet*.

Pennies from Heaven: Soul (and Body)

In *Pennies from Heaven* (1978), Potter foregrounds popular song in the character of Arthur Parker, a down-on-his-luck sheet music salesman. Arthur’s crisis begins with his frustrations about his wife Joan’s frigidity and his mounting failures as breadwinner. He turns to the songs that he sells and loves for meaning and solace, in particular ‘Roll Along Prairie Moon’, the song that he has identified as a hit song but has yet to convince the shopkeepers to buy. But the songs also haunt him. They provide escape and protection from his reality, yet as unfulfilled promises the songs torture him. They act in a talismanic fashion yet they intrude even as they are conjured; they impose even as they protect.

In fact, both Arthur and Joan are unfulfilled, she in her aspirations to middle-class respectability which are thwarted or, she hopes, merely delayed by Arthur's non-conformity to the *petit-bourgeois* standards of behaviour that she is trying to instill and uphold. She corrects the eccentricities and grammatical "mistakes" of his lower-class London accent, his "effing and blinding", the eradication of which she prioritizes to an absurd level. In the middle of a serious conversation, for example—in which their marriage, and Arthur's sanity, is at stake—she chides him for pronouncing "everything" as "everyfink". She also implores him to find a more respectable line of work. Arthur, in turn, is frustrated by his inability to live up to her standards and by her inability to understand his belief in the songs. Perhaps most of all he is frustrated by her frigidity. For Arthur sexual fulfillment is the main purpose of marriage, while marriage for Joan is about establishing a place in polite suburban society. In the clinically suburban world in which they live—clean, sexless—a "nice cup of tea" is preferable to the expression of passion, even between married partners, and financial success and the elimination of crude language is the mark of a "good man". As soon as Arthur opens his mouth to speak, Joan sees him as the person who is always failing to live up to the standards set by her Methodist father. Despite Arthur's efforts to conform, Joan struggles to eliminate what she sees as his lower-class vulgarities of speech—significantly, his *voice*—while Arthur struggles to bed Joan. Arthur also struggles to express himself regardless of the linguistic shortcomings that Joan identifies in him, and there is a strong sense (as I shall discuss presently) that the songs he peddles provide an outlet for his otherwise inarticulate—inarticulable—yearnings and hopes. Yet Arthur and Joan are not always unkind to each other. Despite her misgivings, she tries to nurture his latent ambition and even, reluctantly, indulge his sexual fantasies. He in turn is desperate to prove himself to her by making a success of his sheet music business. But in the dawning realization of their passionless marriage and the meaningless demands of respectability, Arthur becomes increasingly dispirited and desperate. The only things in which he still fervently believes are sex and romance as articulated in the songs he treasures.

As the story unfolds, Arthur has three fateful meetings. The first is with the "Accordion Man", who hitches a ride with Arthur on a sales trip to Gloucester. He is an indigent drifter who makes a subsistence living busking hymns (rather incompetently) on street corners. When he speaks he stutters and stammers. Like Arthur, any eloquence he possesses comes solely through his music. The second meeting is with Eileen, a shy

young schoolteacher from a miner's family in the Forest of Dean.²⁷⁸ Arthur's infatuation with Eileen begins when she enters the music shop where Arthur is trying to sell 'Roll Along Prairie Moon' (among other songs) to a reluctant shopkeeper. It is love at first sight. He sees her again in the town square where she has stopped to watch the Accordion Player in a scene in which, unbeknownst to the three characters, a strange kind of bond is formed. Over Arthur's next few business trips, he pursues and finally seduces Eileen. On one of these trips, happy and in love, he happens to stop his car at the same spot where he'd previously picked up the Accordion Man. Standing at the edge of a farmer's field where he has just emptied his bladder, he has the third of his fateful meetings, this time with a blind girl walking along a path with whom he strikes up a conversation. Though their meeting is brief, he forms an instant infatuation with the girl. Later, when she is found murdered in the same place where they met, Arthur is linked to the scene of the crime (through scanty evidence) and placed under suspicion.

From this point onwards the narrative sees Arthur abandon, in seesaw fashion, Joan then a pregnant Eileen then Joan again, finally reconciling with Eileen. Eileen loses her teaching job due to her pregnancy by Arthur and moves to London to reunite with him (another of Arthur's empty promises) and make a new start. Meanwhile, Arthur and Joan continue their marital "negotiations" and he opens his own record shop after convincing Joan to invest her father's money in the venture. A starving Eileen meets with the pimp, Tom, who bankrolls her abortion and entrance into prostitution. Arthur and Eileen finally meet again by chance and together escape from Tom and Joan. Eileen, determined to raise them from their impoverished state, continues to work the streets.

All the while, the Accordion Man mysteriously—one could say "uncannily"—shadows Arthur.²⁷⁹ We see him playing his accordion in Arthur and Joan's neighborhood. Joan spots him on her way to a local teashop and momentarily mistakes him for Arthur even though they look and sound nothing alike (she explains to Arthur it was "something you can't put into words, like a shadow or—oh, it made me shiver!"). The Accordion Man appears in London, seemingly dogging the steps of Eileen. There is no explanation for the coincidental appearances, but when the blind girl is found murdered by, it is later revealed (to the viewers, but not to the authorities), the Accordion Man, Arthur is

²⁷⁸ Which, not insignificantly, was Potter's childhood home.

²⁷⁹ In fact the Accordion Man can be read very directly as Arthur's uncanny *Doppelgänger*, as I shall be discussing in more detail later in the present chapter.

accused of the crime, and is ultimately convicted and hung for it, partly with the help of a scorned (and later regretful) Joan. Throughout Arthur's ordeal, Eileen remains loyal to him.

Popular Song in *Pennies From Heaven*

In Steve Brie's words, Potter was "simultaneously fearful of and fascinated by the inherent power of the popular song"²⁸⁰. In his typically equivocal manner, Potter often drew comparisons, as noted earlier, between popular songs and the Psalms of David and hymns, and in *Pennies from Heaven* he sets them in opposition and in sympathy in the characters of the Accordion Man (hymns) and Arthur (popular song). In an interview with Graham Fuller he explains:

[Popular songs] are our diminished *nod-back* to the psalms, but they are only *like* them in the sense that most popular tunes are saying the world is other than it is, or simpler than it is, or are bemoaning lost love. The Psalms of David can sound very paranoid even when they are aching with love for God. There's a huge gap, obviously, between the psalms and those songs, but their function is not dissimilar.²⁸¹

In the scene in which we first see Eileen in her schoolhouse surroundings, Potter makes explicit reference to the Psalms of David. We see her at morning assembly where the headmaster asks her to read Psalm 35. She takes the podium, but instead of the psalm we hear Elsie Carlisle's recording of 'You've Got Me Crying Again' to which Eileen lipsynchs. When the song is finished she reads the last lines of the psalm, indicating that what we have just heard and seen is a kind of interior monologue taking place during her reading of the psalm (*see DVD2 > Chapter 4: Potter and Lynch > Potter: Pennies From Heaven > track 2 -- 'You've Got Me Crying Again'*). The insertion of the musical number here works on many levels. Although the song is about heartache and loss, the singer's voice is more wistful than sad; bent, not broken. As Eileen "sings" the words, "You've got me cryin' again / You've got me sighin' again", her face remains that of the demure schoolmarm addressing the assembled children. The warmth it exudes also stands in contrast to the stern cruelty of the headmaster, Mr. Warner. By means of the song Eileen has been transported elsewhere, deep into an interior life, but, crucially, a life that is also reactive, embedded in the exterior situation and surroundings. The wistful nature of the song serves not as an escape from her immediate reality—its vague

²⁸⁰ Brie, "Yesterday Once More", 207.

²⁸¹ Potter, *on Potter*, 86.

sense of unfulfilled desires for “another reality”, as yet unknown to her—but a resignation to it. The song deftly introduces us to Eileen’s character and predicament. Yet the “borrowed” voice is also a separate force, animating her from without as well as from within. It is the world of the psalms, “shimmering with another reality”. And at the same time the psalms—and their connection to the hypocrisies evident in the cruel religiosity of Mr. Warner—stymie any sense of this other, better reality.

The song also works prophetically to foreshadow Eileen’s future heartache and troubles, as does its pairing with Psalm 35. The song gives a portrait of a character in need of escape to a different kind of life (though as it turns out one with an unhappy outcome); Psalm 35 provides a counterpoint to this compulsion. Viewers familiar with the psalm will understand its aggressively defensive nature. It is a call to fight the attacking enemy, and as the plot unfolds, Eileen is surrounded by enemies: a job and family that stifle her; the hunger and poverty which await her in London; Tom, the pimp who “buys” her into prostitution; the conservative MP who becomes her John; the police who pursue Arthur; the old army captain whom she shoots and kills in his barn while Arthur and she take refuge there; the courts; even her pupils. But the most significant threats come in the forms of Arthur (and indirectly Joan) and Eileen’s subjection to an avaricious and sexist society, which she must measure against the impossible promises expressed in the products of popular culture and its mythologies, both old (psalms) and new (songs). As Eileen lipsynchs to ‘You’ve Got Me Cryin’ Again’, the Psalm which she is supposedly reciting in parallel carries these sentiments:

Contend, O Lord, with those that contend with me;
Fight against those that fight against me.

...

Let those who seek after my life be shamed and disgraced;
Let those who plot my ruin fall back and be put to confusion.

While functionally the reference to Psalm 35 is perhaps an inside joke between Potter and those select viewers who are biblically literate, it is also, on its surface, conflating the biblical voice with the voice of popular song, both of which, in Potter’s words²⁸², are “ludicrous and banal” yet tapping into deeper areas of human desire. Would Eileen in this instance be better off listening to the voice of the Bible or the voice of popular song (and its avatar, Arthur)? Or are they—Arthur and God—two sides of the same

²⁸² Which reflects Potter’s complicated relationship with religion as well as with popular music.

cultural predicament? Potter's answer is characteristically ambiguous but what is clear is the idea that Eileen—and by extension, all of us—is “sung”; that is, activated, propelled and controlled by “other voices”: all the opposing, relentless, insidiously utopian claims of our cultural, religious, and commercial encounters.

Whatever arguments one could make for the alienating effects of popular recordings and the musical interludes in these works, Potter uses song to get closer to his characters. The songs enable them to express ideas and feelings which they are unable to articulate through spoken dialogue. They give his characters a means of transcending the limitations by which their own inarticulacy fixes and stunts them. They allow them, if only momentarily—if only in their own minds—a direct, a truer, expression of life as they wish to see it, what John Mundy has called “Utopian imaginative spaces... at odds with the harshness of the naturalist world”.²⁸³ In a moment of sudden clarity, Arthur, trying to explain to his friends what the songs express for him, sums it up this way:

it's looking for the blue, innit? And the gold! The patch of blue sky and the gold in the bleedin' dawn or the light in somebody's eyes! It's—ha!—It's pennies from heaven! And we can't see 'em! Clinkin' and clinkin' all over the place... all you gotta do is just bend down and pick 'em up!

Richard Dyer's formulation is useful here: Arthur addresses societal inadequacies through the products—the *voices*—of entertainment, which, re-embodied, speak his Utopian yearnings for a better world with a potency and articulacy that is otherwise unavailable to him.

Potter makes the commodified product of mass consumption—the popular music recording—intimate and “authentic” by allowing the recorded voices to inhabit the bodies of his characters. The voices of popular song are no longer something completely external but are assumed by the characters; taken, as it were, and put to personal uses. The songs are neither mindlessly consumed nor are they personally assumed, but through lipsynching these uses are combined. They are cultural artefacts with which people formulate and express their innermost desires. In Potter's words, the songs “were genuine artefacts from the past that had been cannibalized and transformed into the workings of the head. ...[The music] was in the head of the character, and

²⁸³ Mundy, “Singing Detected”, 60.

although it might have been Al Bowly's or Sam Browne's voice, it was actually that character's thoughts".²⁸⁴

Popular Song as Surrogate Voice in *Pennies From Heaven*

Throughout *Pennies from Heaven* Arthur gropes for words to articulate his feelings, not only to himself, but also in order to express his belief in the songs: first to Joan, then to the fellow salesmen whom he meets in his travels, to Eileen, the courts, and ultimately directly to us, the audience. One of his most fervent attempts to articulate these beliefs is in a scene that takes place in a pub following his first promising overtures to Eileen. During a chance meeting with a trio of acquaintances, fellow commercial travellers Alf, Ted, and Bert, he becomes increasingly agitated by their prurient reactions to what he sees as the perfection and purity of his new infatuation. The scene encapsulates Arthur's struggle, to the point of desperation, to articulate his emotions in words, and his reliance on the songs to give voice to his dreams and anguish—to give him, in essence, an authenticating voice with which he can express both his love for Eileen and the songs, and, perhaps most significantly, his philosophical position on the meaning of life: “shimmering with another reality”. It also shows the contrast between Arthur's idealism and the harsh realism of the world at large expressed in the world-weary sentiments of his compatriots.

The scene begins just after Arthur has introduced the subject of his new conquest to Alf, Ted, and Bert. He tells them, “It's hard to explain. It's not the sort of thing you can put into words,” and the three men lean in toward Arthur comically and say in Pantomime fashion, “Oh yes it is!”. A musical number, ‘My Baby Said Yes, Yes’, begins, and Arthur lipsynchs, performing the song mostly to camera (direct address). The salesmen lipsynch the backup voices, also to camera, and all three “dance” in their seats, making stereotypical hand gestures and arm movements in the cutesy style of 1930s chorines. Arthur “sings”:

Yes, yes!
My baby said yes, yes!
I'm glad she said yes, yes,
Instead of no, no!

²⁸⁴ Potter, *on Potter*, 85.

As with many songs of the era, ‘My Baby Said Yes, Yes’ uses innuendo and double meanings, which can in this case be interpreted as “Yes, I’ll be your girl or I will marry you”, but can also, more subversively, mean “Yes, I’ll have sex with you”. At the conclusion of the number, the salesmen (as avatars of the subversive meaning) make sexually explicit comments about “the lady in question” to which Arthur reacts in a manner that, ironically, echoes Joan’s responses to Arthur’s sexual advances and preoccupations. His voice flares with anger:

You filthy—! You dirty bastards! ... You disgust me! ... Everything I’ve—
Everything I’ve ever dreamed! Everything I’ve ever hoped for, *longed* for,
deep inside. Right inside me here [clutches his chest]. In my heart!
Everything!

The other salesmen avert their gaze as if embarrassed for Arthur. Bert (the most thoughtful of the three) says in a placating manner, “We didn’t know, Arthur, now did we?”. “No,” Arthur replies, “and you never will”. Ted (the most cynical one), in an obvious effort to avoid more of Arthur’s high emotions, starts to rise from the table but Arthur’s next words stop him:

Yes, but couldn’t you hear yourselves, though? Can’t you see the faces on the street or on the doorstep? What’s wrong wif ‘em? Somefin’ is, it must be. There’s somefin’ wrong. We weren’t put here for all this woe and bellyachin’ and—and—Oh, God, I wish I was good with words! It’s—[he notices his briefcase and picks it up]. Yes, of course, yes. Yes! It’s all in here! [laughs] Months and months I’ve been carrying this stuff around. All these songs. All these lovely songs! But I’ve never—. I always believed in them. Well, ‘faith in the goods’, like you, your crockery and you, your brushes—you’ve got to believe in what you’re sellin’. I’m a salesman. I’ve always wanted to be. I never wanted to be anything else. But, somehow, for some reason, I never knew why it was, or how it was, that I did believe in what’s in here. [indicating again the briefcase and the sheet music therein] But this thing’s too big and too important. And—too bleedin’ simple to put in all that la-de-dah poetry and stuff, an’ books an’ that. But everybody knows it. Everybody *feels* it. Well, they *ought* to. And they know it, they bloody well know it when the chance comes along.

Ted, incredulous, says, “What? Them... *songs*?”. He is clearly bemused, but Arthur, still groping for words, continues trying to make himself understood. He talks about his experience in the First World War; how the soldiers kept their spirits up during the long and arduous days in the trenches through singing. He says, “They were worth more than a dry blanket, they was, them songs,” but even this doesn’t explain just why or how important the songs are to him. He stammers and fumbles for words—“I can almost

taste it!” . Bert tries to insert some calm into Arthur’s demeanour, giving him a very English, “Steady on, old man”. Arthur continues in a slightly less agitated voice:

Yeh, but, somewhere, you see, somewhere the sun is shining. And do you know where? It’s inside yourself! It’s inside your own head! Well, that’s what I found out last night. As soon as I saw her, it’s sort of, it’s [he stammers again for words]. She’s sort of got a way of [pause] hesitating with her look and her walk. D’ya know what I mean? ... She’s put the meaning into these songs, the *real meaning*. And I always knew that they told the truth. And they do! They bloody well do!

There is another possible reading of the ways in which inarticulacy—an inability to put “deep feelings”, desires, fears, into words—could be figured, a reading that in the case of the psychoanalytical journey of Marlow in the *The Singing Detective* is underlined in Potter’s work. This is the action of the unconscious, which will be dealt with in greater detail later—with specific reference to *The Singing Detective* and Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive* and *Blue Velvet*—but which it seems worth flagging up at this point. One of the phenomena that participates in the same constellation of cultural practices as lipsynching is puppetry, and the puppet, or ventriloquist’s dummy, can frequently be a site at which a “vocalic body” forms.²⁸⁵ As such, it can simply be an instance of play or projected imagination for the entertainment of (usually) children. In the 1960s, for instance, Shari Lewis had a successful TV career ventriloquizing what was patently visible as a sock on her hand, called Lamb Chop. However, the puppet or doll can also become a body through which the unsayable—whether due to fear, insecurity, or repression—can be said, can be *enacted*. In the 1950s film *Lili*, the eponymous character is a troubled and lonely late-adolescent woman who has lost her father and her job. Hopeless and destitute she feels driven to suicide, but is talked down from throwing herself from a circus high-dive platform by the puppet master of the circus, ventriloquizing the puppet character Carrot Top. The puppet master is a highly repressed and emotionally withdrawn man who can only express himself fully—or reveal the crucial hidden aspect of himself—through the voices of the puppets. Lili, the suicidal girl, is so persuaded by Carrot Top that she should not carry out her intention to commit suicide that she comes down from the ladder she is climbing. Through the skills of the puppet master she is able to submit, childlike, to the other reality of the puppets’

²⁸⁵ As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the Vocalic Body, as defined by Stephen Connor, “is the idea—which can take the form of dream, fantasy, ideal, theological doctrine or hallucination—of a surrogate or secondary body, a projection of a new way of having or being a body, formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice”. (Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 35).

“lives”; yet on the other side of the puppet show the puppet master is speaking what he dare not speak to her, which is that he loves her. For both of them, the puppets mediate their encounter, allowing Lili to hear and the puppet master to communicate his feelings in ways that are “safe” for both of them.

In lipsynch, both positions are in play. The body of the lipsyncher can be seen as the puppet, the ventriloquist’s dummy, animated by an unseen, off-scene voice/intelligence, in Potter’s case the voice of popular song. At the same time, the voice/song itself is animated by the body of the lipsyncher, the unseen, off-scene, sourceless voice is assigned a body, a context, a particularity, and is thus transformed, rendered approachable, unthreatening, accessible. That which lies beyond the possibility of being articulated directly, for whatever psychological reasons, becomes “sayable” when the voice saying it is able to migrate into a different body. There is a strong sense, then, that the songs in Potter’s works, when they are lipsynched, offer something like a pre-recorded “talking cure”. Of course, in a “real” psychoanalytical encounter the idea that one’s words were pre-recorded would stand in the way of the therapeutic process. What we have, though, in *Lili*, *Pennies from Heaven* and *The Singing Detective* are what we might term “stagings” of therapeutic efficacy. At the same time that these are cinematic conventions they are also plausible readings of the ways that re-embodied voices might articulate that which cannot be articulated by the characters concerned. In *The Singing Detective*, as we shall see, this aspect of the lipsynched songs is made extremely explicit.

In Arthur’s case, “somewhere the sun is shining”, and that place for Arthur can be found in the songs. To use Dyer’s terminology, Eileen, and more consistently, the songs, form temporary answers to inadequacies of society. Indeed, Dyer’s categories of Utopian sensibility (see Chapter 2, pages 53-4)—scarcity and abundance; exhaustion and energy; dreariness and intensity; manipulation and transparency; fragmentation and community²⁸⁶—neatly map onto Arthur’s predicaments. In answer to Scarcity, Arthur has ‘Life Can’t Go On Without That Certain Thing’; in answer to Exhaustion, he sings ‘Pick Yourself Up’; Dreariness, ‘You and the Night and the Music’; Manipulation, ‘Roll Along Prairie Moon’; Fragmentation, ‘The Glory of Love’. And so on.

²⁸⁶ Dyer, *Entertainment*, 183-4.

Yet as Potter sets the songs in counterpoint to the realism/naturalism of the “straight” aspects in *Pennies from Heaven*, Potter also plays the tensions between Arthur’s idealism and the realism of the other characters. Their realist attitudes are usually expressed in spoken dialogue and then often contradicted by the lipsynching performances. It is easy to see these performances as parodic commentary by Potter on the banality of the songs, as when Joan lipsynchs to Greta Keller’s slow, romantic recording of ‘Blue Moon’ wearing a glamorous evening dress while vacuuming and scrubbing the floor. But there is also the sense that the songs and their sentiments belie repressed feelings and desires that, given a different set of circumstances—an ideal world—these characters might recognize and actualize. Or, alternatively, they may reveal ulterior motives, which are in fact concealed by the sheep’s clothing of popular music; the characters appropriating idealized voices for the purposes of manipulation, as is the case with the pimp, Tom.

But the transcendent realities expressed in the popular songs of the 1930s are, after all, commodities, formulaic and derivative. Certainly in salesman Arthur’s case, they are the cynical products “dreamed up” by men in back offices (as Ted asserts) for mass consumption, produced through an industrial process, devoid of authenticity. Arthur’s belief in the songs torments him as well as “expressing” or “revealing” his core values and dearest aspirations. In this sense the songs constitute the false promises, the placating lies of Capitalism in its most pernicious sense. To repeat Dyer, “At our worse sense of it, entertainment provides alternatives *to* capitalism which will be provided *by* capitalism”.²⁸⁷ The songs can be seen, then, as Adorno’s “catharsis for the masses” and as such they trap Arthur with their addictive qualities. Marinov puts this kind of reading in unambiguous terms:

The musical numbers in Potter’s works do not become expressions of what Altman calls ‘Personal and communal joy... or signify a romantic triumph over all limitations...’; on the contrary, they highlight the personal misery of the individuals trapped in the fictional world of their impossible dreams and unfulfilled desires.²⁸⁸

Potter uses certain characters in the drama to voice these tensions. The obsequiously oily salesman (played by Nigel Havers) who, in episode 1, sells Joan a dubious

²⁸⁷ Dyer, “Entertainment”, 185.

²⁸⁸ Marinov, “Redefining”, 201.

cosmetic device called Pitter-Patter, “a scientifically designed suction pad which creates a small vacuum when ... applied all over the lady’s face and neck”. He tells her:

Salesman Songs deal in dreams. Correct me if I’m wrong, dreams and make-believe. My goodness me, we couldn’t live without them, but—

Joan My husband can’t.

Salesman But *I* don’t deal in dreams

Of course, the Pitter-Patter salesman *does* deal in dreams and make-believe, just not in the form of song. And by way of contrast, there is a sense that Arthur’s belief in his goods is, at the very least, authentically felt by him. Meanwhile, dialogue between Joan and Arthur consistently stages the distinction between dreams (his songs) and reality. For example, in the same episode:

Arthur Don’t you ever listen to the words in the songs, in these songs?!

Joan That’s not real life.

Arthur Real life? Well you tell me what real life is then! ...

[...]

There’s a new moon on Thursday.

Joan It’s the same old moon, really.

Arthur tries to articulate the “other reality” that the songs express for him, encapsulating their “moon/June” sentiments. At the end of the same episode, we see the couple in bed after what we are to be led to believe was a rather coldly received and begrudgingly bestowed copulation. Arthur, nearly in tears, pleads with Joan:

Arthur Listen Joan... it’s not meant to be a duty or anyfink like that.

Joan [clearly ashamed] Let’s get some sleep, shall we?

Arthur It’s supposed—Joan! Joanie, Angel! It’s—it’s paradise! It’s supposed to—like in the songs!—and, and...

Joan lies facing away from him, her eyes closed, and Arthur, realizing the futility of his communication, falls back onto his side of the bed. We hear the first strains of ‘Down Sunnyside Lane’ and Arthur, visibly anguished, lipsynchs:

I can remember when most every night at ten we sang an old refrain,
As we wandered in the moonlight down Sunnyside Lane.
We heard the merry lark and if the night was dark I'd steal a kiss again,
As we wandered in the moonlight down Sunnyside Lane.

Hey ho!
Around you my arms would be curled.

At this point, Arthur stops lipsynching. While he stares at the ceiling, suppressing tears, the song—the “old refrain”—continues as Arthur “listens”:

Hey ho!
We hadn't a care in the world.

Some day if luck is kind I'll leave my cares behind to be with you again,
And we'll wander in the moonlight down Sunnyside Lane.

As the music cuts out we are left with only the sound of the ticking clock on the bedside table. Arthur remains still, staring into the dark, the emptiness of the moment accentuated by the sudden absence of music and the sound of time passing in its unassailable though cursory way. For Arthur, the song acts as a prayer in the night. A prayer that, having stopped his lipsynch, he seems to abandon, the voice no longer produced from within, but left hanging—useless—in the darkness of the bedroom (*see DVD2 > Chapter 4: Potter and Lynch > Potter: Pennies From Heaven > track 3 – 'Down Sunnyside Lane'*).

Conversations with Eileen cover some of the same ground. At first Eileen is sympathetic to Arthur's romantic ideals. After all, she reads fairy tales to her pupils (most notably Snow White and Rapunzel). Later in the series, after his many betrayals and failures, she begins to see the futility in his belief in the songs. But she remains his champion, and thus a champion of the songs, even repeating to others Arthur's lie that he is a songwriter (and she, a songwriter's wife). The pair have rediscovered each other in London—Arthur, still groping after and failing to reach his elusive dreams of success and sexual fulfilment with Joan, and Eileen, “sadder but wiser”, beholden to the pimp, Tom, to whom she owes £50. At this point in the plot Eileen, once the innocent, becomes the realist. But rather than cajole Arthur through empty condescension, she chooses to join in his hapless path, even as she now knows life to be very different from

the worlds expressed in her fairy tales and in the promises of the songs. She respects Arthur's beliefs *for his sake*, even as she rejects them for herself.

Taking refuge from Tom in Arthur's shop, the couple renew their love and plan their escape. Once again, we see Arthur trying to articulate his now rather shaken beliefs.

Arthur I know this sounds daft, Eileen, but I want to live in a world where the songs is—

Eileen Where the songs come true.

Arthur Yes.

Eileen Poor Arthur.

Arthur [in frustration] I'd like to smash up every record in the shop, tear up every song that's ever been written.

Eileen They still wouldn't come true.

Arthur They're truer than this, I bloody hope!

Eileen and Arthur proceed to vandalize his shop, dropping the records out of their sleeves, devil may care. The records are reduced to their materiality: they are voiceless residue, mute objects. The musical imprint they carry is inert. In fits of laughter they stomp on them, kick and punch the shop fixtures. But when Eileen tries to smash 'Roll Along, Prairie Moon' Arthur intervenes. The devil may indeed care: Arthur cannot renunciate his beliefs. Whatever the potential the songs carry for misery, they carry equal promise for joy and redemption. In fact, we see perhaps more clearly than at any other point in the series (up until this moment) Arthur's absolute love of the songs, but more, we see self-preservation. In a sense, the song 'Roll Along, Prairie Moon' *is* Arthur. In an earlier scene we see Arthur's image transformed into the picture of the cowboy on the sheet music. In protecting 'Roll Along, Prairie Moon', he is saving that last part of himself that remains unsullied by the "real" world. This love leads ultimately to his ruin, yet, crucially, he goes to his ruin with his soul intact. The songs, if not his living breath, are never cast out from his body.

Michel Chion writes about the "assimilation of religion's promise of an eternal paradise (or hell) to the forever of sentimental love song. ...One hears 'For ever' a great deal in

love songs, but it can also resound in the vaults of a church”.²⁸⁹ *Pennies from Heaven* ends not with Arthur’s hanging, but with a peculiar coda taking place after his execution in which Arthur and Eileen are brought together, possibly “forever”, in an afterlife (his at least). Eileen is standing on Hammersmith Bridge, listening to the clock strike 8:00 so that she can jump to her death at the same moment that Arthur is hung. Just as the final chime strikes and she climbs onto the railing, Arthur suddenly appears on the bridge and says to her, “We couldn’t go through all of that without a happy ending”. The couple embrace and turn to address the camera. In unison they quote the title of Irving Berlin’s 1927 standard, ‘The Song is Ended (But the Melody Lingers On).’²⁹⁰ Has Eileen gone ahead with the suicide? Is the reunion of the lovers taking place “on the other side”? Or is the coda another Brechtian device with which Potter interrupts the narrative, shows his hand, invoking the “happy ending” as a nod to the tradition of the Hollywood musical (Feuer’s “marriage of the couple”) and the popular love song? We are left to answer these questions for ourselves. Finally, the couple lipsynch to ‘The Glory of Love’ as they dance across the bridge. Love conquers all. Potter delivers transcendence. We know that Arthur is dead, and possibly Eileen, too, yet they live on. In the end Potter allows the *songs* to have the final word, persisting through time, still alive in bodies that are dead (*see DVD2 > Chapter 4: Potter and Lynch > Potter: Pennies From Heaven > track 4 – ‘The Glory of Love’*).

The Singing Detective: Body (and Soul)

For Arthur Parker in *Pennies from Heaven* the songs are “these lovely songs”, which he believes are capable of offering salvation. For Philip E. Marlow, the protagonist of *The Singing Detective*, they are “the bloody, bloody songs”. Yet each character in their different ways—Arthur’s credulous Utopian outlook, Marlow’s embittered world view that is suspicious of and resistant to expressions of sentiment, particularly those found in popular cultural forms (of which, ironically, he himself is a purveyor in the form of pulp *noir* fiction)—makes potent use of the songs through a combination of identification and manipulation. While Arthur projects himself forward into new and longed for territory though his identification with the recordings, Marlow is transported backwards into a troubled past. *Pennies from Heaven* has been cited as the more

²⁸⁹ Chion, M., *David Lynch* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 175.

²⁹⁰ This phrase is also quoted in the Gershwin’s 1930s standard ‘They Can’t Take That Away from Me’—“The song is ended, but as the songwriter wrote, the melody lingers on”. Potter later references ‘They Can’t Take That Away from Me’ in *The Singing Detective*.

“optimistic” work in Potter’s trilogy²⁹¹ while *The Singing Detective* is considered to be the darker work. I argue here for the opposite. It is true that *The Singing Detective* more explicitly traffics in darkness: the graphic display of Marlow’s gruesome skin disease (by which he is rendered immobile and is in constant pain), the depiction of Marlow’s *noir* detective novel which runs in parallel to (and sometimes intertwines with) Marlow’s real life experiences both present and past, a succession of drowned women seen pulled from the Thames, Marlow’s anger, misogyny, and the contempt he directs at all cultural norms, the people who try to help him, and most of all himself. It is true that *Pennies* contains plenty of dark themes and materials—after all, it contains murder and suicide, just as in *The Singing Detective*, and Potter kills off his protagonist - but compared with the sincerity and sweetness that Arthur finds in his songs, Marlow’s sardonic view of the songs that haunt him, and the black-comedic presentation of them that takes place in his fevered mind, do indeed seem bleak. Steve Brie writes:

In contrast to... *Pennies from Heaven*... where liberational music is deliberately evoked and orchestrated by the protagonists, Potter casts Marlow as a victim of intrusive, often emotionally debilitating melodies. In *Pennies*, argues Potter: ‘Arthur Parker, believing in the songs in his simple-minded kind of way, had license, as it were, to inject those songs everywhere and in any way and make them seem real.’ But in *The Singing Detective*: ‘Marlow... was resisting them, didn’t believe in them... they were hard little stones being thrown at [him].’²⁹²

Yet Marlow’s salvation via the songs and their various psychoanalytical re-workings is real, actualized in a way that Arthur’s utopian dreams can never be (except, perhaps, as the coda suggests, in the idea that the songs/hymns promise preservation of an immortal soul in an afterlife). Marlow’s solution involves not only soul, as in Arthur’s case, but body as well; not an afterlife, but a *life* is saved. Through the songs Marlow experiences a kind of “emotional reclamation”²⁹³ that facilitates his healing and allows him to integrate the past with the present. If, as I have suggested earlier, Arthur’s inarticulacy and over-reliance on the lyrics of the songs to put his feelings and desires into words parallels a psychoanalytical grasping at straws, the songs in *The Singing Detective* are ultimately a means to articulate and then work through the forces from Marlow’s past that paralyse him, literally as well as figuratively, in the present.

²⁹¹ Graham Fuller, for example, in conversation with Potter, notes “Your use of songs in *The Singing Detective* was more knowing, the songs themselves less optimistic” (Potter, *on Potter*, 86); see also Evans, “Grasping the Constellation”, 56.

²⁹² Brie, “Yesterday Once More”, 211.

²⁹³ Mundy, “Singing Detected”, 60.

The plot, in brief, revolves around Philip E. Marlow (pen name, P.E. Marlow), a writer of pulp, Chandler-esque detective novels, who is laid up in hospital suffering from an extreme flare-up of psoriatic arthropathy, a condition from which he has suffered for twenty five years.²⁹⁴ As a result of this current flare-up, his hands are clubbed, his joints frozen, his entire body immobile and covered in psoriatic lesions. He suffers from dangerously high fevers that are difficult for the medical staff to control and which induce hallucinatory states. While he lies festering in his hospital bed, “a prisoner in his own skin and bones”, he begins to “revise” one of his old novels, *The Singing Detective*, now long out-of-print, in order both to occupy his mind and to rewrite the story as a screenplay at the urging of his estranged wife, Nicola. As he is incapable of holding a pen in his crumpled hands, the rewriting can only take place in his mind. He re-imagines the story internally (we hear it as recorded voiceover: the acousmatic voice of the author), and in this way he lives the action of the novel—moves within it from the stasis of his hospital bed—as a reader might. But the internal storytelling and his fevered hallucinations intersect. The membrane between the fictive world of the detective novel and the “real world” of the hospital ward becomes porous. The hospital staff and Marlow’s ward mates enter the *noir* narrative; characters from the novel bleed into the boredom, pain, and abject humiliation of hospital life. At the same time, Marlow is also transported to scenes from his boyhood in the Forest of Dean, which take place in 1945, in the final days of World War II.

What links these worlds together (at least initially) are the “bloody, bloody” songs, “the hard little stones” that are “thrown at” Marlow during his hallucinatory states. Hallucinations come in the form of song recordings from his 1940s childhood that then animate (in his mind) the real-life inhabitants of his hospital surroundings as well as his fictional characters, but also lead him back into his childhood—to their originating source. Jon Amiel, the director of the BBC series, explains that the music:

is like a series of elevator shafts that shuttle you up and down, backwards and forwards, between the four different levels of the story. Those four levels basically are: the fictional story of *The Singing Detective*; the true account of Marlow’s childhood; the present day story set in the hospital; and a place where all of those three other elements meet, which is the hallucinatory fantasies that go on in Marlow’s mind. And the music is like

²⁹⁴ Potter himself suffered from the same condition.

the elevators that shuttle you up and down between those four different levels.²⁹⁵

Ultimately, the songs function therapeutically and lead to a reprieve from Marlow's physical as well as psychological predicaments. Marlow is placed, at first reluctantly—petulantly—in the care of hospital psychotherapist Dr Gibbon with whom he gradually “solves” the real “who-done-it”, unravelling the hard case that is P.E. Marlow himself. In the final scene, his psychological traumas resolved and physical symptoms alleviated, he is finally discharged from hospital. We see him leave the ward, walking of his own accord, a loving arm around the shoulder of his heretofore but now no longer estranged wife, Nicola.

While the songs in *Pennies from Heaven* are presented in “straight” musical fashion, with one or two exceptions as discrete performances, the songs in *The Singing Detective* are staged more intricately, more cinematically, utilizing techniques of fragmentation of time and setting, point of view shifts, cut-aways, voice-over, the acousmatic voice, or other foregrounded action that shifts a song temporarily into the background. There is a lot of information packed into the space of each number, and some numbers are interrupted by dialogue scenes, then repeated—a kind of layering of information or signification. Only one song is performed as a discrete musical number without interruption (apart from a few cut-away shots of Marlow reacting to the rather nightmarish scene). ‘Dem Bones’ is choreographed in (small-scale) Berkeley-esque fashion, complete with a bevy of dancing nurses (see DVD2 > Chapter 4: Potter and Lynch > Potter: *The Singing Detective* > track 1: ‘Dem Bones’). This is Marlow in full-blown hallucination, transforming the doctors and nurses into song-and-dance men and women and in the process making a mockery of both the music and the medical profession. This is Potter in Brechtian form, creating distance, removing us from the realism of the experts’ consultation with Marlow to a phantasmic space in which the conservatism of the doctors, depicted in conservative realist fashion, becomes a frenzy of song and dance and religious fervour. We, and Marlow himself, may have been lulled into a scientific “fog”, especially given the “authority” of the expert doctors, if not for the “intrusion” of the non-naturalist hallucination to which we are privy.

²⁹⁵ Amiel, J., and Trodd, K., verbal commentary on DVD release of *The Singing Detective*, 2 Entertain Video, 2004.

In the words of actor Patrick Malahide (who plays the roles of Mark Binney/Ray Binney/David Finney, Marlow's fictional nemesis, historic real-life antagonist, and paranoid creation respectively), *The Singing Detective* is "a psychological case history told as a detective story and set to music"²⁹⁶. At the outset we see Marlow as a difficult, unlikable man. Soured on life (not without good reason), he is caustic, sarcastic, belligerent, with a heavy load of misogyny and misanthropy. He rails against the medical establishment, religion, sex, Nicola, and anything that smacks of sentiment. He targets his ward mates and the medical staff for verbal abuse. His ferocious intelligence has led him in the opposite direction from Arthur in *Pennies from Heaven*. Marlow is not the starry-eyed dreamer, the "stupid man" who nonetheless expresses legitimate quasi-religious yearnings for a world "shimming with another reality", but the cold realist. Marlow is the atheist to Arthur's true believer.

But then there are the songs. In a revealing conversation with Nicola, we see the complexity of Marlow's relationship to his personal (internal) "repertoire":

Marlow [appraising Nicola's beauty] The way you sit, the way you— no.
 Those are the words of a song almost.

Nicola You and your songs.

Marlow Yeah. Banality with a beat.

Of course the song Marlow is alluding to here to is the Gershwin classic, 'They Can't Take That Away from Me', in which the singer describes the love object's little behaviours that he will miss when they part ways: "The way you wear your hat, the way you sip your tea". An oblique reference to this song appears in *Pennies from Heaven*, in which the final spoken words of Arthur and Eileen are "The song is ended, but the melody lingers on" (this is the title of Berlin's 1927 song, which is paraphrased in the opening verse of the Gershwin's song [see page 121]). This is a wonderful bit of intertext, as it stands, but serves as another example of how certain songs have a way of re-issuing themselves in people's lives. The double referencing of 'They Can't Take That Away from Me' and 'The Song is Ended' underlines the hold that these particular songs have on Dennis Potter himself. As Marlow catches himself paraphrasing the song, we see that neither Marlow nor Potter can get the song out of his head. They both carry

²⁹⁶ Quoted by Amiel, J., and Trodd, K., verbal commentary on DVD release of *The Singing Detective*, 2 Entertain Video, 2004.

it around in the proverbial bag of tricks from which it is naturally drawn and employed. This is a rather small observation—a fleeting moment in the script—yet it underscores deep preoccupations of its author, who then transfers them to his characters. Marlow, like Potter, has to disavow as soon as he evokes. He sloughs it off. Banality with a beat.

Yet, as we have seen, Potter was fascinated with the way that we “perceive [our] desires through the filter of what is in the general culture”²⁹⁷ and the ways in which we then go about putting these perceptions into action, embodying them. In the two works discussed here, Potter exemplifies this through the lipsynching device. Interestingly, however, the one character who never lipsynchs in *The Singing Detective* is Marlow himself. But as the one who animates—is author to—the lipsynching performed by the other characters, Marlow is perhaps transferring “responsibility” to others. Yet the songs are his—they are *his* “filters”—and the need to locate them in bodies is an important process in his working through of the psychosomatic part of his illness. Indeed, as Steven Connor has suggested in his notion of the “vocalic body”, disembodied voices, such as those of traditional ventriloquists, produce bodies, and, as with Altman’s “sound hermeneutic”, recorded voices “need” to be re-embodied. In Marlow’s case the disembodied voices of the popular recordings that plague him find new bodies in the other patients in the ward, in the characters Marlow imagines during his “revision” of the novel, and figures remembered from his childhood life. There are powerful psychic forces driving these re-embodiments, of course, but as Connor suggests there is also something inherent to the phenomenon of the disembodied (recorded) voice that seeks a body in which to exist.²⁹⁸

There are two “true” performing singers in *The Singing Detective*—singers, that is, who perform for audiences as part of the diegesis. The first is the eponymous hero of Marlow’s detective novel, whose name, as it happens, is also Philip Marlow. The fictitious detective-Marlow makes his primary living as a dancehall bandleader who sings “for people who dance”. His other vocation is private dick in the mould of Chandler’s Philip Marlowe. The second singer is Marlow’s father whom we see in flashback (sometimes as part of a hallucination, sometimes consciously evoked). Mr Marlow sings in the local miners’ club to the rapt attention of his fellow pitmen and their families. Detective-Marlow and Marlow’s father share the same repertoire, and

²⁹⁷ Evans, “Grasping the Constellation”, 66.

²⁹⁸ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 35.

Marlow has written his detective alter-ego to share the same vocal range (literally and figuratively) as his father. But in the body of detective-Marlow the singing can be seen as slick or cynical (or taken as such by the character himself), whereas in the body of Marlow's father, the singing is performed lovingly, with sincerity, and consumed just as sincerely by his audience. By contrasting the two embodiments Potter presents the professional-at-work set in opposition to the amateur who, true to the etymological root of the word, sings for love. Yet the same songs—the very same *recorded voices*—are heard issuing from the mouth of each figure. They are gentle, crooner's voices, often displaying a sweet falsetto (as in the recordings of Al Bowly, the Mills Brothers and the Ink Spots) or the casual eloquence of Bing Crosby, or Dick Haymes' wistful baritone. Detective-Marlow's audience waltzes smoothly—as smooth as the songs themselves—beneath the sparkle of a mirror ball. Mr Marlow's audience listen raptly and with abundant pleasure, sometimes singing along, in the intimate surroundings of friendship and collegiality of the small mining village.

The issues formed out of this dichotomous coupling of cynicism/sincerity that Potter creates in the two singers - detective-Marlow (cynical) and Mr Marlow (sincere) - is played out in other interesting ways in the song 'Cruising Down the River'. In the first section of the current chapter I outlined three critical approaches that seem productive in responding hermeneutically to lipsynching in *Pennies from Heaven* and *The Singing Detective*: lipsynching as theatrical technique (Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*); as site of implicit critique of mass culture (Adorno); and as a model of personal creative appropriation and meaning production (Freud).²⁹⁹ Because in *The Singing Detective* there are only two points at which an actor sings in his own voice in the diegesis as opposed to lipsynching, it seems productive to look into these instances in relation to lipsynching as, on first viewing, it would be easy to imagine that such moments might lie outside of the lipsynched world in a more "realist" and "personal" space. The fact that these two instances (both sung by actor, Michael Gambon, playing detective-Marlow in one and Marlow in the other) are renditions of the same song, a song that in a third instance *is* lipsynched (again by Gambon as detective-Marlow) indicates that the song, 'Cruising Down the River', is worthy of focussed hermeneutic attention. As will become clear, the lyrics of the song, and the action associated with it inside the

²⁹⁹ This latter single category is something of a conflation of convenience as there are instances throughout of "the personal" that are not subject to an exclusively Freudian interpretation.

multiply-layered cinematic language, are indeed of central significance not only to the plot but to the crucial role that lipsynch plays in the series as a whole.

Present-day Marlow is the only character in the series who never lipsynchs, and it is possible to read this, within the context of the series, as marking a locatedness for the primary diegetic space within which the narrative is played out. Marlow is, so to speak, the nearest to realist television drama that we get. But, as we have seen, Marlow has built himself an alter ego, an uncanny double, detective-Marlow, the protagonist in the novel he is “revising”, who is imagined as a “real” nightclub singer. Throughout the series, however, detective-Marlow always “sings” by lipsynching except for one scene, which, oddly enough, is the introductory scene for his character. Here, in the viewer’s first encounter with detective-Marlow, we hear his “real” voice, i.e., the voice of actor Michael Gambon, actually singing, on screen, the song ‘Cruising Down the River’ (see *DVD2 > Chapter 4: Potter and Lynch > Potter: The Singing Detective > track 2: ‘Cruising Down the River’ – detective-Marlow diegetic voice*). The scene is set in the dance hall out of hours, with detective-Marlow and his band rehearsing for the evening show. As already mentioned, detective-Marlow’s belittling of the words of the song in rehearsal—“the words break my heart, we won’t say like softly falling what, though”—puts into the mouth of Marlow’s double the mistrust and cynicism directed at popular song to which Potter himself was far from immune. As we have also seen, though, Potter’s relationship with popular song is almost never unequivocal, and ‘Cruising Down the River’ reappears at the end of the same episode in circumstances that signal that detective-Marlow’s cynicism regarding the song does not exhaust its significance. We see a confused and distressed Marlow sitting up in bed during visiting hours, screaming a furious, abusive rant directed at his wife, Nicola, as she is leaving the ward. When Staff Nurse White (played by Imelda Staunton) scolds him, snapping him out of his rant and back to his surroundings, he is chastened. With the eyes of the other patients, nurses, and visitors upon him he sings the first four lines of ‘Cruising Down the River’ to them in a weak, cracking voice, hesitant, vulnerable (see *DVD2 > Chapter 4: Potter and Lynch > Potter: The Singing Detective > track 3: ‘Cruising Down the River’ – Marlow diegetic voice*). It is a puzzling non-sequitor for his “audience” in the ward, but for Marlow the song clearly has a deep significance and there is psychological continuity in the repetition, as well as what we might read as the first genuine realisation that the song, and the holding of it at a distance through his double, has psychoanalytical significance. Yet between detective-Marlow’s rehearsal singing at the

start of the episode (Gambon's own voice), and Marlow's conciliatory croaking at the end (again, Gambon), is a scene in which we see detective-Marlow performing at the dance hall, executing a slick, professional rendition of the same song, lipsynched to Paul Rich's recording of it with Lou Preager and his Orchestra (1946) (*see DVD2 > Chapter 4: Potter and Lynch > Potter: The Singing Detective > track 4: 'Cruising Down the River' – detective-Marlow lipsynching*). In this instance, as opposed to the first and last, he appears fully committed to the song, enjoying it even. In contrast to Gambon's own rather gruff voice as detective-Marlow in rehearsal and his humbled voice as a broken Marlow in the ward, the voice to which detective-Marlow lipsynchs on stage is sweetly smooth, typical of 1930s crooning, pitched high and full of feeling. Detective-Marlow smiles at the audience of dancers and wallflowers; the singing is, as he describes in a later episode, "easy: syrup in my mouth".

Tracing these three instances of 'Cruising Down the River', then, we can see the centrally-placed lipsynch not just as a Brechtian distancing device but as the crucial pivot point between a cynical attitude towards the song, holding its emotional connotations at a distance, and the discovery, almost, of a deeply-felt personal investment that had been concealed behind a mask of cynicism. Detective-Marlow's two versions of the song (one sung, one lipsynched) play out an ambivalence about the value of the songs, yet the exact location of this ambivalence is hard to place. On the one hand, we have the actor singing for himself, authentically, we might say. Yet this is also the point at which detective-Marlow condemns the words he is singing as treacherous excrement ("We won't say like 'softly falling' what"). Then we have the lipsynched version—the voice belonging to "someone else"—which we must construe by its status *as* lipsynch as inauthentic. The lipsynched performance can be read, however, in two ways. First, as the point where the song, held at a distance by Marlow through his projection of it into the person of detective-Marlow, his fictional alter-ego, is also the point at which a bitter *Weltschmerz* and rejection of emotional feelings is made to be internalised in the alter-ego and then re-emerges in Marlow himself. And second, as a celebratory point, in which the performance is (if only professionally) sincere. Rendered sensitively by detective-Marlow's "performance", the music is made whole, is *enjoyed*. Potter places his critique in the midst of the "authentic", "live" performance by Gambon, and hints at the possibility of an authentic experience of the music in the lipsynched—"inauthentic"—performance. Both performances become the set-up for the final repetition, in which we read no distance between the song and Marlow, marking

the beginning of a therapeutic function which all of the songs will increasingly acquire from this point onwards. There is a further important narrative detail connected with this song, articulated in an acousmetric voice-over by detective-Marlow during the lipsynched performance, which I shall return to later in the present chapter.

In other contexts, Marlow puts his father's/detective-Marlow's songs into the mouths of people he comes into contact with in the ward, the "non-singers". But even Marlow's improbable imaginative/hallucinatory pairings of real body and recorded voice in his hospital surroundings blend into recollections of Dad who in essence takes up a song where the others leave off, as with 'It Might As Well Be Spring' and 'You Always Hurt the One You Love'. In each case Mr Marlow is revealed as the source of the musical memory.³⁰⁰

We are first introduced to Mr Marlow, Marlow's father, in his singing element during the song, 'It Might As Well Be Spring', in the second episode, *Heat*. On the ward, a helpless, feverish Marlow asks his current bed neighbour, George, to call a nurse for him. But as George turns to face Marlow he is lipsynching to Dick Haymes' 1945 recording of 'It Might As Well Be Spring'. This performance by George, an elderly heart patient, is, perhaps at first, comically incongruous. But there is pathos in this, coming unexpected from a man with a choleric nature and a wife who occasionally hits him—"gives 'im one"—to keep him acquiescent. Marlow, in his feverous state, is transfixed by the sight of the song emerging from George's haggard face. In Potter's words:

With something like 'It Might as Well be Spring' you have an old man singing a young man's love song, but it closed an awful lot of gaps between the old man and the young. You saw him as a young man, and you also saw, in a sense, how ludicrous the young man's falling in love was. All love has its own shape, and everyone ages and sickens and dies, and love, too, does the same, in that romantic sense. So a romantic song coming from the very old man's slack mouth tells you something about the old man, tells you something about romantic love. But it's also a good song, so you get a bonus!³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ In order to make distinct the various Marlows in the story, I will refer to the fictitious hero of Marlow's book as, "detective-Marlow", Marlow himself as, simply, "Marlow", and the boy-Marlow and Marlow's father (both seen in flashback) as "Philip" and "Mr. Marlow" respectively.

³⁰¹ Potter, *on Potter*, 87.

As George continues, we, the audience, see further into Marlow's mind, and the hospital scene yields to the miners' club in the Forest of Dean in 1945, and it is Mr Marlow who is singing the song for his little community while Mrs Marlow, Philip's mother, "accompanies" him (you might say handsynchs) on piano. The crowd, displaying their "radiant dowdiness"³⁰², sings along. The child Philip is there as well, listening, admiring, himself singing along through bites of potato crisps. It is the same recording as before, different only in time, setting, and body. But what is sad and disturbing in George's mouth is charming and lyrical in Mr Marlow's.

In the second-to-last episode, *Pitter Patter*, Marlow again starts a song in the hospital ward—starts a "record playing", you might say—that melts into a vision of Mr Marlow singing in the club. And once again Marlow puts the voice into the mouth of his nearest neighbour. This time it is "Noddy", an elderly man with advanced Parkinsonism (George as well as the first inhabitant of the bed neighbouring Marlow's, the kindly Ali, have each in their turn died of heart attacks as Marlow looked on). The device of folding his father into a figure in the ward through lipsynching is repeated a number of times, and it becomes clear to the viewer that all the songs which Marlow conjures from his bed "belong" to his father and, thus, to him, as both child and adult. The child loves them; the adult tries to disavow them while at the same time invokes them at every turn. The more he projects the songs outwards onto the others in the ward, the more he is able to "write" the "feelings" into an emerging narrative, and through putting the feelings into words—albeit in the surrogate form of lipsynching to recorded songs—is able to effect a kind of "talking cure".³⁰³

As the story continues, the songs become more personal, the nightmare aspects more equivocal, finally yielding to a more sympathetic, reassembled attitude on Marlow's part. Marlow is no longer "staging" a number, but making deep associations, some painful, some achingly beautiful and ultimately healing. Given Marlow's eventual redemption and recovery, we can read the illusory hope for redemption and the promise of better things that never actually come to fruition in *Pennies from Heaven* as a more pessimistic story in which the unfulfillable promises—the "catharsis of the masses"—of the Adornian view of popular song and the Brechtian caution against "sordid

³⁰² Amiel, J., and Trodd, K., verbal commentary on DVD release of *The Singing Detective*, 2 Entertain Video, 2004.

³⁰³ "The talking cure" is the name that Anna O. (real name Bertha Pappenheim), one of Josef Breuer's (a close colleague and mentor of Freud) patients, gave to the psychoanalytical process.

intoxication” are illustrated. Though like *Pennies from Heaven* there is a continuum of critical and hermeneutic perspectives in evidence from Adorno and Brecht to Freud, *The Singing Detective* more accurately, perhaps, and with greater complexity, illustrates the associative power and the embeddedness of popular song in people’s lives, and the reciprocal nature of its animating force.

Perhaps the clearest example of this is in Potter’s treatment of the song ‘Paper Doll’ (*for the entire scene as discussed below see DVD2 > Chapter 4: Potter and Lynch > Potter: The Singing Detective > track 5: ‘Paper Doll’*). The Mills Brothers hit—a song in which the broken-hearted narrator vows to give his affections to a paper doll who won’t be able to leave or hurt him - begins with the chorus sung slowly in a solo falsetto voice, then shifts gears (on the verse and final chorus) becoming a peppy number sung by the full group in a punchy, almost staccato manner. The presentation of this song on screen is spread over several minutes, shifting bodies and locations, and interrupted by straight dialogue scenes. Through this editing, cutting, and shifting, the narrative advances. In fact, the sequence is packed with information; information that has been triggered, dredged from its buried depths, through Marlow’s attempt to put the song in detective-Marlow’s mouth. In flashback we learn of the separation of Mr and Mrs Marlow and the train journey that takes Mrs Marlow and Philip away from dad and the Forest to live with her family in London. We see Mrs Marlow as the object of lascivious desire, Mr Marlow as the homely, tragic figure, standing in the rain watching their train leave the Forest of Dean, and young Philip trying to make sense of all that is hidden from him.

The scene—and indeed the episode (the third, *Lovely Days*)—begins with a train pulling away from a platform upon which Mr Marlow stands watching, holding up a hand in a frozen, mournfully stoic goodbye as Philip waves back to him from the window of the moving train. The figure of Mr Marlow is motionless. Holding his pose, his eyes never leaving the waving boy until the train is well out of sight. Yet his face bears unspeakable pain. The scene then cuts to present-day Marlow in bed. It is night time, the ward is dark, and Marlow is alone, in a sense, with his thoughts, which we hear dubbed over the image of his face. Joining his thoughts are the sound of the train and a softly played acoustic guitar playing the introduction to ‘Paper Doll’. As the singing begins, the camera cross-fades to show the feet of ballroom dancers, then pans upward to reveal detective-Marlow and his band performing the song above the heads of the dancers. He softly croons, “I’m gonna buy a paper doll that I can call my own, a doll

that other fellows cannot steal”. As the performance continues we hear detective-Marlow’s concurrent thoughts as voice-over:

There are songs to sing, there are feelings to feel, there are thoughts to think. That makes three things, and you can’t do three things at the same time. The singing is easy, syrup in my mouth. The thinking comes with the tune.

The song continues (as detective-Marlow continues singing) but the scene in a jump-cut changes back to Mr Marlow on the platform, hand raised, watching the train. It is at this point, watching the forlorn body of Mr Marlow that we hear the final line of detective-Marlow’s voice-over:

So that leaves only the feelings. Am I right or am I right? I can sing the singing, I can think the thinking, but you’re not gonna catch me feeling the feelings. No, sir.

The train clears a bend in the tracks and is gone from view, but Mr Marlow remains frozen in position, as if lowering his hand will sever his connection to the boy and the confused, wayward Mrs Marlow bound for London—a world away from the Forest of Dean. Then the scene cuts to the inside of the train compartment. Philip closes the window and as we hear it snap shut the music—what is in essence, as we shall see, Mr Marlow’s *voice*—stops abruptly. Mrs Marlow sits across from Philip, her face hidden behind a newspaper. A sextet of war-weary soldiers shares the compartment. Suddenly Philip speaks: “Mum, dad was wavin’. He was wavin’ all the time. All the time, mind, mum”. Mrs Marlow shields herself from Philip’s words behind the newspaper, resolutely deaf-eared. As Philip looks around the compartment he sees the soldiers appraising Mrs Marlow’s crossed legs and the bit of lacy slip showing. They exchange lecherous, sidelong glances, laughing conspiratorially. The newspaper headline reads: “War rushing to an end! German armies surrendering on all fronts”. We hear young Philip’s thoughts:

That’s old Hitler done for, then. So everything will be all right. That’s what ‘em do say, innit? It’ll be a lovely day tomorrow. What’s its? Bluebirds and that, over the—. Everybody says when the war is over: lights and flowers, butter, eggs, the lot! Comics, sweets, everything. It’ll be all right. *All right. All right.*³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Young Philip is quoting two iconic wartime songs: ‘Tomorrow is a Lovely Day’ and ‘White Cliffs of Dover’.

Philip watches the rushing landscape out the window and sees a scarecrow in the distance. Static, arms spread wide, in typical scarecrow fashion, it suddenly shifts position, dropping one arm to its side and bending the elbow of the other in order to raise its hand. It has assumed the posture of Mr Marlow, as if it, too, were waving farewell. After a cut back to Marlow in the ward “writing”, the scene fades once more to Mr Marlow on the platform, hand raised (now, metaphorically speaking, *he* is the scarecrow—a semi-man made out of dust and straw), but this time he, and not the detective-Marlow, is doing the lipsynching. A heavy rain starts to fall, which manages to awaken Mr Marlow from his vigil. As he begins to turn away, the scene shows the exterior of the speeding train, once again, making its way across the countryside, but this time it is shown from atop the hill where the scarecrow is standing—in fact almost from the scarecrow’s point of view, as if it were watching, reinforcing a sense of doubling between Mr Marlow and the scarecrow.

The song continues and we are back with Mr Marlow—still lipsynching to the falsetto voice—as he pulls his coat across his body, against the rain, turns, and walks towards the camera. His eyes are unfocused, inward looking, appearing lost. He walks automatically, one arm swinging to the gentle rhythm of the song. As he leaves the platform, he is lipsynching the resolving lines of the first chorus (and the end of the slow part of the song): “I’d rather have a paper doll to call my own than have a fickle-minded real live girl”.

As the song shifts from the tender beginning to the faster, rougher verse, we see first a brief shot of Marlow, still in bed, still animating his memories through the song: “I guess I had a million dolls or more”. On the next line of the song the scene cuts back to the inside of the train compartment where the soldiers are now lipsynching as they continue to leer at Mrs Marlow’s legs. “I guess I played the doll-game o’er and o’er”. We now see that there are more soldiers peering at Mrs Marlow’s legs through the glass of the train compartment, joining in the lipsynch, which has changed from the poignancy of Mr Marlow’s pain to the jolly banter of the soldiers. The song is cut off in the middle of a line, mid-thought, as it were, and in the silent compartment Philip sneaks glances at what are revealed to be only the original six tired, bored, napping, thoughtful, or otherwise inert men. As Philip looks out the darkened window, the music resumes acousmatically—this time distant, as if played through a phonograph trumpet. As the scene cuts back to the hospital ward a final time, the song continues but slowly

fades until it is heard no more. The only other sounds are of the rumbling, whistling train and the beeping of some patient's heart monitor.

You won't catch detective-Marlow "feeling the feelings". There are too many feelings it seems—hurt, conflicted, guilty, loving, lost—for one man, or boy, or for one song, to carry. As Marlow in bed both "listens to" and orchestrates these various performances of 'Paper Doll' (and the other songs in the series) we see him doling out the feelings, sharing the load among his characters, real and fictional. Thus he begins the process of "feeling the feelings", and in doing so—in allowing the songs to infiltrate his conscious mind, his contemplative mind, and becoming vulnerable to the associations they carry—his physical symptoms begin to subside. The "thick skin" that he gives detective-Marlow no longer offers protection. It is in fact the permeable and vulnerable body—the *feeling* body—that brings relief.

Throughout *The Singing Detective* it is the repeatability of the recordings that is crucial to their effectiveness in the therapeutic process, allowing them to persist and reappear through time (from the fictional detective-Marlow, for example, to the activation of Marlow's childhood memories, to Marlow lying in his hospital bed) and to occupy real and phantasmic bodies (such as those just described in the song 'Paper Doll'), through which the psychoanalytic narrative can become articulate. The same song, instruments, arrangements, note for note, the same phrasing and the grain of the singer's voice and inflection are repeated but rendered new with each new audition. The lipsynching device serves in part to make this explicit. The characters transcribe the music onto their own bodies, each time in a different setting, from a different angle, even though the song is the same. This is also a primary aspect of the psychotherapeutic process; psychodynamic therapy, for example, is conducted in part through repetition. In psychoanalysis, the "talking cure", a patient repeats himself, retelling the same past events, dreams, obsessions. With each repetition the story is transformed in the mind of the patient until the psychological states that it represents are understood. Potter explains:

The purpose is not to *illustrate* with a song, but to use the song as though it had just been written for that occasion—in other words, to turn the song into quasi-autobiography, as though I *had* written the song, which is to re-see, re-hear what may be an extraordinarily banal tune and nonsensical

lyric. In other words, to give the song the meaning of the emotional and physical surround out of which you are made to re-hear it.³⁰⁵

We see popular songs tapping into emotions and areas of both resistance and identification that remain with Marlow—and by extension Potter and, indeed, “us”—long after their initial auditions. In Amiel’s view:

Some people may think the use of the period songs is a gimmick, but it’s not at all. If you watch the way in which the songs are used they are absolutely, unmistakably the product of an intense emotional response to the material. Dennis listened, and continued to listen, to the songs over and over ... [H]e finds in those songs elements of grotesquery and some deep poignancy that nobody but someone who’d had an intensely intimate relationship with the material could have found.³⁰⁶

Potter’s use of the songs reveals “genuine emotions out of ordinariness”³⁰⁷, but goes deeper in its depiction of ordinariness to include ordinary states of being and meaning, the cultural artefacts that are naturalized, primitive. That it should be *recorded* song that functions in this manner speaks to its repeatability, as well as to its status as cultural object; borrowing from Sherry Turkle, the songs in *The Singing Detective* are “objects to think with”,³⁰⁸ or perhaps more acutely, to *feel with*.

Potter also foregrounds the virtues of repetition in Marlow’s process of “revising” his novel. Throughout the series, Reginald, a young man in the same ward as Marlow, is coincidentally reading *The Singing Detective*. A slow reader, he moves his lips while he reads and on occasion we hear what is on the page. Though not as explicit as most of the sung lipsynchs in the series, we can legitimately see Reginald’s reading aloud as another instance of lipsynching. Here, Marlow’s fictional text is rearticulated in another’s body which, though not a projection of Marlow’s psyche (as seems to be the case with the sung lipsynchs), nevertheless plays out rewriting as repetition, and lipsynching to recordings as repetition, that parallels the psychoanalytical process that Marlow is going through. In the fifth episode Potter begins to insert clues that reveal to us that Marlow’s revision of the novel in which he seems to be engaged is not revision in the usual sense. In fact, not a word is changed from the original; the revision is in

³⁰⁵ Potter, *on Potter*, 96.

³⁰⁶ Amiel, J., and Trodd, K., verbal commentary on DVD release of *The Singing Detective*, 2 Entertain Video, 2004.

³⁰⁷ Amiel, J., and Trodd, K., verbal commentary on DVD release of *The Singing Detective*, 2 Entertain Video, 2004.

³⁰⁸ Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 47.

effect a repetition of itself, like a song recording. As detective-Marlow (shown in Marlow's "re-imagining" of the book) sings 'The Umbrella Man', the scene cuts mid-song back to the hospital ward where we see Reginald reading the exact lyrics of the song, folding the musical lipsynching into the lipsynch of the novel, and underlining the important affinities between the lipsynching in general, and the rewriting/repetition of the novel/psychotherapy. Later in the episode we see him reading the description of Marlow's drummer's shooting death that we have just seen played out in Marlow's imagination in precise detail, matching what we have seen exactly.

So Marlow's revision is not a revision at all in the usual sense. The words haven't changed, nothing has changed. And, of course, everything has changed. By the end Marlow knows the "other" text of the story, he knows, finally, who really "done it" and who should "get it" in the end.³⁰⁹ Potter viewed his use of the songs in the same way:

The inclusion of those songs had to be *written*. In one of his pieces Jorge Luis Borges has an imaginary author rewriting *Don Quixote* word for word, *but it's still a different book*. That's the way I felt. [emphasis mine]³¹⁰

Like Borges's author, Marlow writes the same book word for word but in the process it becomes a different book *to him*. Like Borges's *Don Quixote*, the song recordings are transferred from one page, one medium to another, one body to another, from Marlow's past to his present, from his fictive creation to his creation of an authentic self. Just as a psychiatric patient may retell the same story a hundred times in as many sessions, each iteration carries new meaning. We begin to see that Marlow is rewriting his own novel word for word and yet it is in fact a different book. In the "re-writing" process a new meaning is revealed to Marlow. In the act of "revising"—not only the book but the details of his past in the psychotherapeutic process—Marlow is able to make connections, to dig deeper, to begin engaging with his "real" problems.

Throughout my discussions about *The Singing Detective* I have foregrounded the Freudian therapeutic work that lipsynching does for the character of Marlow. However, this almost prosthetic function of lipsynching to bring the songs and repressed emotions

³⁰⁹ In the final episode it is the author-Marlow who is killed by detective-Marlow (his creation) but author-Marlow stands in this situation as Marlow *as he was*. His own, lipsynching creation, in other words, is the means by which his dysfunctional and ill former self is eliminated, and his recovery completed.

³¹⁰ Potter, *on Potter*, 86.

close through their re-embodiment in a fictive double of the self raises a more pervasive matter where lipsynching is concerned. The figures through which this is played out can be understood as instances of Freud's Uncanny, which, I shall argue in the next section, is an important aspect of the lipsynch phenomenon.

Freud's Uncanny

As I shall argue in this section, Freud's theory of the Uncanny [*das Unheimliche*] with its themes of the return of the familiar in unfamiliar form, and the figure of the Double, or *Doppelgänger*,³¹¹ outlines a set of theoretical insights that can be deployed to further explore lipsynching. The disembodied/re-embodied voice, and, arguably, sound recording itself, stage uncanny "returns" and materialize "doubles" that make lipsynching legible as a paradigm case of the Uncanny. As a vehicle within *The Singing Detective*, lipsynching, as I have discussed, where recorded (repeatable) songs inhabit different bodies in different circumstances (narrative and psychological) sets up the conditions in which Marlow's repressed feelings about his father, for example, can find an uncanny corporealisation in detective-Marlow who is Marlow's own double, in some respects, but also the double of his dead father in others.

In Potter's case, the Uncanny—particularly in the form of the *Doppelgänger*—is implicated in, or used as a device to confront, a number of thematic materials, including the interplay of the authentic and the clichéd, the sentimental and nostalgic, mourning and impermanence, alienation and absorption, and the merging of religion and sex and the death drive. While most of these thematics suggest familiar binary oppositions, such a reading is subverted and complicated in these works (and, indeed, by Freud's original treatment of the Uncanny). Potter employs the familiar cultural—and theoretical—dichotomies in order to deny their simplistic reductions and the resultant organization of scientific and aesthetic categories, which he sees as a trap, a mistake of modernity. The device of lipsynching upsets these reductions, calls them into question and provides, to quote Potter's description regarding his use of songs, "another order of seeing... another way... another reality"³¹².

We see some of the same themes explored in David Lynch's work, but put to different uses. In Lynch, the uncanny most explicitly reveals illusion, alienation, and repression.

³¹¹ Freud, S., "The Uncanny", in Phillips, A., (ed.), *The Uncanny*, trans. McLintock, D., (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 121-162.

³¹² Potter, *on Potter*, 86.

He uses the device of lipsynching sparingly, but places it at pivotal moments. However, where almost all of Potter's lipsynching in *The Singing Detective* takes place in Marlow's mind, the two lipsynching performances in Lynch's work that I will consider here each belong—as with the diegetic lipsynching numbers discussed in Chapter Three—explicitly within the “real world” diegesis of the films. In the numbers in question—Roy Orbison's ‘In Dreams’ in *Blue Velvet* and Rebekah del Rio's recording of Orbison's ‘Crying’ (sung a capella in Spanish) in *Mulholland Drive*—his characters' investment and participation in the illusion, and their willing suspension of disbelief, allow the audience (if not always the characters) to see past illusion into deeper and perhaps more troubling aspects of character and motivation.

Freud begins his discussion of the Uncanny, or, in German, *Unheimlich* (un-homely), from an etymological perspective. For Freud, the *Unheimlich*, while antonymic of *Heimlich* (homely) retains the full sense of *Heimlich* within its parameters. Each term, in fact, contains its opposite. He defines *Heimlich* as both what is familiar and hidden, like a house that to its inhabitants is safe and familiar and yet contains their private lives and secrets, which remain unavailable to the outside world. The *Unheimlich*, then, can be said to turn this configuration inside-out by making the familiar strange, through revealing repressed secrets, and the strange familiar, as the familiar is itself called into question. Extending the example of the house, the uncanny uncovers secrets (which can be events from the past or character traits, repressed desires, etc.) *within the presumed safety of the house* that the inhabitant has long-since forgotten or repressed. In other words, it brings to the indoor space secrets which the house ostensibly protects. ‘[W]hat is called *Heimlich* becomes *Unheimlich*.’³¹³ He states:

this word *Heimlich* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which are not mutually contradictory, but very different from each other—the one relating to what is familiar and comfortable, the other to what is concealed and kept hidden.³¹⁴ ... *Heimlich* thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until finally it merges with its antonym *Unheimlich*. The Uncanny (*das Unheimlich*, ‘the unhomely’) is in some way a species of the familiar (*das Heimlich*, ‘the homely’).³¹⁵

The Uncanny, therefore, merges the familiar and the hidden of the *Heimlich*. In the case of the hidden aspect to the *Heimlich*, the Uncanny changes the subject position from the

³¹³ Freud, *Uncanny*, 132.

³¹⁴ Freud, *Uncanny*, 132.

³¹⁵ Freud, *Uncanny*, 134.

outside observer, who has no access to what is concealed “inside the house”, as it were, (who is held at a distance and thus defines the safety within), to *he who dwells within* but is nevertheless also alienated or has alienated himself from—is even fearful of—what is concealed within (*Unheimlich*). We feel the Uncanny through changes to the familiar and/or resurrection of a familiar subsequently repressed experience or desire. It is the familiar defamiliarized, but also the “return of the repressed”, the defamiliarized brought to the fore.³¹⁶ There is no *Unheimlich* without a *Heimlich* destabilized from within.

One of Freud’s chief locations for the Uncanny—a place where it finds the means of its delivery or its embodiment—is in the idea of the *Doppelgänger* or double, an idea that he relates to notions of the self, repetition, and the merging of self with the other (the substitution of an insecure self, unsure of its “true self”, with the double); a double which contains that which is hidden from the self. In the Uncanny, the subject and its double “share knowledge”. Freud calls it a kind of telepathic relationship: “the one becomes the co-owner of the other’s knowledge”.³¹⁷ In fiction the double can be made manifest and concrete, externalized, whereas in real life, the double is a construction of the subconscious and repressed fears and desires. For example, in *Mulholland Drive* Lynch makes explicit the doubling of Diane and her fantasized alter ego, Betty, through the conventions—but also the meta-narrative freedoms—of narrative cinema. We, the audience, are privy to identity constructions of which the characters on screen are unaware, either in themselves or in those around them. Even when the truth behind the double is explicitly introduced to the characters of Diane/Betty and Camilla/Rita in the lipsynching performance by Rebekah del Rio at Club Silencio, the characters remain steadfast in their belief in the illusion or illusionistic merging, in this case, of singer and disembodied voice, just as they, physically and psychically, hold onto one another and give themselves over to the uncanny moment to which they are witness. (This scene will be described later in some detail).

Freud links the double to a “primordial narcissism” of the child and of pre-modern, or, “primitive man”. Referencing Rank’s study of the *Doppelgänger*, he discusses the evolution of the motif of the double, beginning with animistic ideas that “link the

³¹⁶ Often referred to simply as “repetition” or the “repetition compulsion” Freud’s most extensive exploration of this idea would be in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* published in 1920, and thus more or less contemporaneous with *The Uncanny* of 1919.

³¹⁷ Freud, *Uncanny*, 141-2.

double with mirror-images, shadows, guardian spirits, the doctrine of the soul and fear of death”. The double was “an insurance against the extinction of the self”; in Rank’s words, “an energetic denial of the power of death”. It follows that in this context Freud views the idea of the “immortal soul” as the “first double of the body”.³¹⁸ However, the spirit guardians who in the past were protectors *against* have now become harbingers of death. Ghosts, hauntings in the form of the Uncanny: these diminished doubles are the residue of the old, animistic ideas, what is left to people who have, as moderns, surmounted animistic and supernatural beliefs such as “the omnipotence of thoughts, wish-fulfilment, secret harmful forces and the return of the dead”³¹⁹ through the evolution of the ego and the capacity, in the form of super-ego, for self-observation and self-criticism. Animistic beliefs, though, survive in a vacillation between the reactivation of such beliefs and the revulsion they stimulate in the Uncanny experience of the non-believer, particularly where repressed desires and fears are revealed. Freud writes:

The existence of such an authority, which can treat the rest of the ego as an object—the fact that, in other words, man is *capable of self-observation*—makes it possible to imbue the old idea of the double with a new content and *attribute a number of features to it*—above all, those which, in the light of *self-criticism*, seem to belong to the old superannuated narcissism of earlier times.³²⁰

In fiction, the subject and her *Doppelgänger* can be linked through physical resemblance, but also by more fantastical means. What the modern so-called rational mind might call “coincidence” is perceived as uncanny by the insertion of a fantastical element, such as telepathy, that causes the rationalist, if only momentarily, to question her bedrock scientific (and scientific) beliefs.

This relationship [between the subject and *Doppelgänger*] is intensified by the spontaneous transmission of mental processes from one of these persons to the other—what we would call telepathy—so that the one becomes co-owner of the other’s knowledge, emotions and experience. Moreover, a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other’s self for his own. The self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged.³²¹

³¹⁸ Freud, *Uncanny*, 142.

³¹⁹ Freud, *Uncanny*, 154.

³²⁰ Freud, *Uncanny*, 142-3.

³²¹ Freud, *Uncanny*, 141-2.

It is not a far stretch, then, to view the recorded voice as another kind of double, one that is also imbued with ideas of immortality as an antidote to the voice's (and its originating body's) ephemeral condition. As Barbara Engh has pointed out, "To its first auditors, the phonograph was, in a word, uncanny".³²² By providing a new body for the recorded voice—thus resurrecting the "voice of the dead"—the lipsyncher is able to engage in a fantasy of immortality embedded within his own body. The conveyer of the voice—the medium, as it were—holds the recorded voice fast to the physical life, the physicality of which is theirs to celebrate. It is the merging of the dead voice and the live body that makes a mockery of death and allows the lipsyncher a measure (small though it may be) of permanence. At the same time, exhibiting a reciprocity that is structurally akin to the Uncanny itself, the voice lives on beyond the body: "Speech has become, as it were, immortal",³²³ and the dog sits listening to His Master's Voice on the lid of his master's coffin.³²⁴ This line of thinking strengthens the case for the uncanniness of the recorded voice. If the recorded voice is a kind of double, as I suggest, it may be understood in Freud's words—in his case, referring to the "guardian spirits"—as "having once been an assurance of immortality, [the double/recorded voice] becomes the uncanny harbinger of death".³²⁵

For Freud, the figure of the double can also embody

all the possibilities which, had they been realized, might have shaped our destiny, and to which our imagination still clings, all the strivings of the ego that were frustrated by adverse circumstances, all the suppressed acts of volition that fostered the illusion of free will.³²⁶

These "possibilities", or as they are put more potently in the James Strachey/Anna Freud translation of Freud's text³²⁷, "*the unfulfilled but possible futures* to which we

³²² Engh, Barbara, "After 'His Master's Voice'", in *Hating Tradition Properly: The Legacy of the Frankfurt School in Cultural Studies*, New Formations 38 (Summer, 1999), 54.

³²³ Edison's phrase quoted by his assistant E. H. Johnson in Johnson, E. H., "A Wonderful Invention - Speech Capable of Indefinite Repetition from Automatic Records", *Scientific American*, 17th November, 1877, reproduced in facsimile in Wile, Raymond R., "The Wonder of the Age—The Edison Invention of the Phonograph", in *Phonographs and Gramophones* (Edinburgh: Royal Scottish Museum, 1977), 22, fig. 10.

³²⁴ See Engh, "After 'His Master's Voice'", 59; also Edge, Ruth and Petts, Leonard (eds.), *The Collectors [sic] Guide to "His Master's Voice" Nipper Souvenirs* (London: The EMI Group plc, 1997).

³²⁵ Freud, *Uncanny*, 142.

³²⁶ Freud, *Uncanny*, 142-3.

³²⁷ While my discussion is based largely on the translation of David McLintock from the Penguin *Modern Classics* series, I prefer the phrasing from the James Strachey and Anna Freud translation in the Standard Edition to be a more useful distillation of this particular passage: the Strachey and Freud translation gives us the "unfulfilled but possible futures", rather than the more ambiguous "possibilities" of the McLintock

still like to cling in phantasy, all those strivings of the ego which adverse circumstances have crushed, and all our suppressed acts of volition which nourish in us the illusion of Free Will”³²⁸ [emphasis mine] reside, I will argue, at the heart of Potter’s and Lynch’s use of lipsynching in the works discussed. In *The Singing Detective*, for example, Marlow consciously creates his own double in the form of the fictional detective-Marlow—a tougher, better, physically able self, he embodies “the possibilities which, had they been realized, might have shaped [his, Marlow’s] destiny”.³²⁹ Lipsynching in these works, as well as playing out the themes of uncanniness associated with death and unfamiliar returnings, forms, informs, represents, or conjures these “unfulfilled but possible futures”—desires repressed by the subject—that are behind, or projected onto, the double in the form of recorded song.

David Lynch, *Blue Velvet* and *Mulholland Drive*

The critical literature on these films—and indeed on David Lynch’s entire oeuvre—often explores their uncanny effects. To cite a couple of examples Rodley states in his introduction to *Lynch on Lynch*,³³⁰ “the Uncanny—in all its nonspecificity—lies at the very core of Lynch’s work”.³³¹ David Copenhafer, writing about *Blue Velvet*, explains how “the film turns popular, ‘everyday’ songs toward unfamiliar uses, rendering them uncanny if not terrifying”.³³² The Uncanny, in fact, can be seen in nearly every aspect of Lynch’s *Blue Velvet*. From the barely suppressed menace of the small-town opening montage through to the return of the robins, *Blue Velvet* could serve as a beginner’s course on the Uncanny in cinema. Lipsynching to popular song—in this case Roy Orbison’s ‘In Dreams’—is just one of many uncanny devices Lynch employs in the film, but, with considerable affective power, it plays a prominent role.

The film opens with a montage of a postcard-perfect small-town landscape, white picket fences with tulip borders, a friendly fireman waving from his red fire truck, Dalmatian dog at his side, riding in slow motion past a neat row of wood-frame bungalows.

translation. This seems to offer, for my purposes, and for the ways in which the double is used in the works discussed in this thesis, a nuancing of Freud’s original that has a more precise focus.

³²⁸ Freud, Sigmund, “The Uncanny”, in Strachey, James, and Freud, Anna (trans. and eds.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XVII (1917-1919)*, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 236.

³²⁹ Freud, S., “The Uncanny”, in Phillips, A., (ed.), *The Uncanny*, trans. McLintock, D., (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 143.

³³⁰ Rodley, C., and Lynch, D., *Lynch on Lynch*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), xi

³³¹ Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch* cited in Mactaggart, A., *The Film Paintings of David Lynch: Challenging Film Theory*, (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2010), 119.

³³² Copenhafer, D., “Mourning and Music in *Blue Velvet*”, *Camera Obscura* 69, 23/3, (2008), 136-157, 138.

Apparently there is no fire, nothing requiring speed, it is as if he is there as a prop, signifying a nostalgic return to a cliché-based dream of a world that never truly existed. All of this is set to Bobby Vinton's famous recording of 'Blue Velvet'. Although this is a case of non-diegetic score music, it introduces Lynch's use of popular song as *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich*, a source of both comfort and danger. The song—itsself dreamy with romantic nostalgia—serves the function of situating popular song as something that carries its own readings, independent of context and yet always, in the process of recontextualization, affording a multiplicity of meanings.

The sequence leads to a man collapsing from a heart attack while he waters his lawn, but this occurrence is not the first instance of darkness seeping into the small-town idyll. First Lynch takes us inside, to the interior of one of the houses, where we see a woman watching a black-and-white *noir* film on the television. On the screen is a close-up of a hand holding a gun. The gun travels across the screen, pointing at an unseen target. The woman watches absently, tucked away from the bright daylight and intensely saturated colours—the Technicolor dream—of the landscape outside. All the while the song 'Blue Velvet' continues to play. The scene then cuts to her husband outside watering the lawn. The hose gets tangled in a branch, forming a kink—a literal and figurative kink. It splutters ineffectually as the man struggles to put it right. In the midst of his struggle he collapses, gasping for breath. As the song begins to fade, we see a baby toddle towards the prone body as a small terrier stands atop it, biting playfully at the pressurized water that is now shooting freely like a geyser from the hose. Finally, the sequence ends as the camera takes us down into the grass that the man had been watering, where we find an underworld teeming with insect life. 'Blue Velvet' is replaced now by the alien sound of the crawling insects, becoming louder, fuller, and more watery as we draw closer to them, underscored by a faint drone. Here we have reached in essence a foundational level that is repressed beneath the superficial safety and comfort of suburbia. It is significant how this revelation displaces the smooth comfort of the song, which nonetheless had from the beginning, in juxtaposition with the unreality of the opening images, hinted at its own subversion. The tensions were in place from the start. As Mulvey observes:

the surface world is depicted as 'surface'. It has the immaterial, itself uncanny, quality of a cliché which speaks of appearance and nothing else

and the impermanent, almost comic, quality of a postcard which has no substance other than connotation.³³³

I have presented the opening sequence here in some detail to show how it works as a thematic distillation of the story to come and also serves to teach us how we might read the film, and perhaps more precisely, how we might *listen* to it.

In *Blue Velvet* voice is severed from body; an ear is severed from a body. The man from the opening sequence, recovering in hospital from his heart attack, is unable to speak to his son, Jeffrey, the film's protagonist. Later, Jeffrey finds a severed ear in the grass (covered in insects of course). The voice can't speak; the ear can't hear. The mystery of the ear is what draws Jeffrey into the dangerous underworld that forms the rest of the story, that of psychopathic Frank. The phallic imagery—the gun, the hose—is worth mention here. The fear of castration plays a significant role in Freud's *Uncanny*. Certainly the kinking of the father's hose—its sudden impotency—which ultimately leads to his loss of voice, is a striking example.

In the case of 'In Dreams', the lipsynched number performed by Frank's friend and "business" associate Ben, we see Frank—who can only express himself in physical and verbal rage—in a soon-to-be-aborted attempt at finding a voice for his homosexual desires in the form of Orbison's voice through the medium of Ben. Frank is afraid of the castrating effects of losing—even acknowledging the potential loss of—a heterosexually-defined manhood while at the same time he castrates, as it were, the voice that could allow him the expression of these repressed desires in their fully embodied potency. Voice as the external, outward expression of the body, becomes thus a kind of phallic image in *Blue Velvet*, always susceptible to castration/silencing.

The performance takes place at Ben's flat. Frank and his goons have kidnapped Jeffrey and Dorothy (the tragic nightclub singer whose son has been kidnapped by Frank, her husband killed, and who has become an object of Frank's violent abuse). Frank takes them on a harrowing "joy ride" during which he makes a stop at Ben's place. Ben is the only character in the narrative who appears to be immune to Frank's hostility. His flat is filled with its own cast of characters, a circus collection of cross-dressers, deadbeats, and colourful hedonists. It is a world of its own, removed from both the grime and

³³³ Mulvey, L., *Fetishism and Curiosity* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), 151, quoted in Mactaggart, *Film Paintings*, 127.

chaos of Frank's world and the surface calm of the small-town world to which Jeffrey belongs. Ben himself is a camp dandy, dressed in a silk brocade jacket, wearing pale makeup and red lipstick. As such, he is self-sufficient. He appears to neither need nor want anything that he doesn't already have in the interior of his home. It is difficult, in fact, to imagine Ben outside his cosy environment.

It is Frank who requests the performance of 'In Dreams'. Asking Ben to do "Candy-coloured clown they call the sandman" (a lyric from the introductory lines of the song), he starts the record on the turntable, himself the orchestrator of the performance (see *DVD2 > Chapter 4: Potter and Lynch > Lynch: Blue Velvet – 'In Dreams'*). Frank eschews the use of the song's title as a way of, perhaps, distancing himself from any association the song may have with his own "dreams". If this is so, the gambit fails. Ben saunters into the song. He holds a light to his mouth as if it were a microphone, casting his face in an eerie, though not unbecoming, glow. As he lipsynchs, the light illuminates his beautiful—"candy-coloured"—face from below like footlights. His performance is flawless (he has done this before, probably many times). The yearning that Orbison's soaring voice expresses is joyously embodied in Ben. Ben speaks few lines in the film, and in fact only appears in this one scene, which takes place about halfway through the film. However, through the pairing of his body and Orbison's voice his character is memorably revealed to us.

The performance is framed by a broad archway, a proscenium under which Ben and Frank share the "stage". During the performance, the two men draw closer to one another and Frank, eyes on Ben, begins to join in the lipsynch. As Copenhafer observes, "the scene is as much a duet the two men perform for each other as it is Ben's performance for the entire group".³³⁴ Yet while Ben is every bit the performer, Frank's lipsynching is hesitant. It appears to be done almost unconsciously, automatically, drawn out of him by the external force of the music. We see in Frank's face a building passion, which finally becomes so unbearably strong that he cuts the recording, the record player, and Ben mid-song—as well as, of course, the voice that is possessing his own body. In doing so, in rejecting the performance, he violently represses the possibility of finding his own voice. What is hidden and unspeakable gets spoken through Orbison and Ben but when it is revealed in Frank it is then quickly suppressed.

³³⁴ Copenhafer, "Mourning and Music", 149.

What is left, then, is more rage, more violence. Frank spreads his hands and yells, “Let’s fuck! I’ll fuck anything that moves!”

Despite his noisy disavowal, Frank performs “Candy-coloured clown they call the Sandman” once more in the film. In this scene he has taken Jeffrey to a secluded spot in order to work him over. Just before the beating, as the song plays on the car stereo and Frank’s goons hold in place a struggling Jeffrey, Frank recites the chorus—“In dreams I walk with you / In dreams I talk with you / In dreams you’re mine”. Again, his performance is like a possession that can only be exorcised through violence. As Michael Moon, quoted in Copenhafer, remarks about the lipsynching scenes:

Lip-synching is the ideal form of enunciation for the ritualized and serious game of ‘playing with fire’ — that is, with the game of inducing male homosexual panic and of making recognizable, at least in flashes, the strong S-M component of male-male violence — that Frank, Ben, and Jeffrey play: lip-synching a pop song allows Ben to ‘come on’ to Frank, and Frank in turn to ‘come on’ to Jeffrey, singing about how ‘In Dreams’ they possess the man to whom they’re singing — without doing so in any way that ‘counts’ for more than the fantasmatic and mimicked moments that the two pairs of men share.³³⁵

Just as Andy Kaufmann’s lipsynching performance of Mighty Mouse both transforms his “strange little man” but also reveals aspects of self and his character previously hidden, Frank’s hidden aspects are revealed through the act of lipsynching. Copenhafer adds to Moon’s observations:

For much of *Blue Velvet*, Frank struggles against visible enemies. Music is exceptional for being primarily invisible, an enemy at whom Frank cannot shout, as he does to both Dorothy and Jeffrey, ‘Don’t you look at me.’ Music approaches from all sides, conjures unwanted thoughts, and provokes the body. Moreover, it is fundamentally transgressive, able to supplement forms of heterosexual and homosexual fantasy alike. This is what is so pathetic, in every sense of the word, about Frank’s performance of ‘In Dreams.’ In trying to arrest the mobility of music, the drifting of apostrophic song from one phantasmatic mode to another, Frank not only becomes the figure he fears, the intruder in the night, but the figure he hates, the man who ‘voices’ his desire for another man.³³⁶

Although the film’s diegesis contains only one repetition of ‘In Dreams’ after the first instance at Ben’s, it is clear—as evidenced by Ben’s expert performance and Frank’s

³³⁵ Moon, M., *A Small Boy and Others*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 21, quoted in Copenhafer, “Mourning and Music”, 148.

³³⁶ Copenhafer, “Mourning and Music”, 153.

deep and troubled connection—that the song is frequently, obsessively, revisited by Frank, but we do not see or hear this. As we saw earlier in this chapter in the discussion of *The Singing Detective*, repetition as enabled by recording is central to the ways in which we find and make meaning with songs, particularly those we have heard—repeatedly—in childhood. Repetition, though, is also a component of the Uncanny. According to Freud:

In the unconscious mind we can recognize the dominance of a compulsion to repeat, which proceeds from instinctual impulses. ...[A]nything that can remind us of this inner compulsion to repeat is perceived as uncanny.³³⁷

The compulsion to repeat, therefore, has a trigger: the reminder. And this trigger is the thing repressed that is trying to return. Frank's compulsion to repeat "Candy-coloured clown they call the Sandman" is triggered by his repressed homosexual desires coming to the fore, which he perceives as uncanny, alien, and dangerous. They are, if you will, the beetles churning the soil beneath his lawn. Yet the repetition of the song that the Uncanny triggers, thrills as well as disgusts him. In fact, he seeks it out, like touching a live wire repeatedly for the thrill of the shock. By contrast, Marlow in *The Singing Detective* uses the compulsion to repeat the songs of his youth as a way to finally air—to *unstrange*—his past and fold it into a healthy, coherent present (the way, we may presume, Freud would have it). Even Marlow's attitude towards the songs themselves changes through therapeutic repetition: he is made more sympathetic to them; the songs become capable of bringing pleasure and expressing affection. Frank's compulsion, on the other hand, is more akin to a sublime torture that he resists, literally, tooth and nail and fist and raging, infantile temper.

In both cases, however, the recordings are triggered to "go off" in the minds of the characters, at least initially, by forces of which they are un-, or barely-, aware but that carry great psychological (and in Marlow's case, physiological) consequences. I do not, however, mean to imply by the foregoing that everything that triggers a particular recording to "play" in our minds or which compels us to seek an audition of a favourite tune, represents the return of something repressed in the expression of the Uncanny. In fact song repetition can happen for many reasons, some of which are external—for instance, the dreaded "song bomb" or "melody bomb" by which "earworms" may be

³³⁷ Freud, *Uncanny*, 145.

introduced, which may have no historical or affective connection to the “victim”. Yet the capacity of a song recording to trigger or be triggered by trauma or psychological disturbance—as well as the compulsion to repeat it—is considerable, and in these films made ever more intense and concretized through the medium of lipsynching.

In *Blue Velvet*, the “happy” ending, signified by the return of both the robins and the small-town idyll, can be seen, in light of what has come before, as a kind of return *to* the repressed. We, the audience, know now that the normalcy to which the film returns is built on the teeming dirt upon which the manicured landscape feeds and which feeds on it. In the final image, the camera seems to burrow into Jeffrey’s ear. By entering the ear, we exit the film. Ironically, the severed ear allowed Jeffrey to listen to an underworld he never knew existed—to hear through another’s ear. At the close of the film he must rely once again on his own ear, which may or may not be listening, but, as with Frank, the music is now permanently embedded within. In Chion’s words:

the ear functions here as a passageway, the symbol of communication between two worlds, then of recovering a normal world (at the end of the film, we exit through Jeffrey’s ear). Frank thus offers Jeffrey a key to life and a gift of imagination. In short, everything in *Blue Velvet* has a dynamic sense of life, and love really is everywhere. And this too is frightening.³³⁸

In *Mulholland Drive*, Lynch gives us a lipsynched performance of another Roy Orbison song, a Spanish version of ‘Crying’. The performance serves as the fulcrum between the film’s two distinct halves. On one side of the fulcrum is Betty, a bright, young ingénue, fresh off the plane that has brought her to Los Angeles to pursue her dreams of Hollywood stardom. Betty is charmed, charming, and about to nab a leading role at her very first audition. On the other side is Diane, a down-on-her luck would-be actress who has been consumed and discarded by the Hollywood machine. Strung out, drug addled, wracked with jealousy and paranoia, she is in essence the waste product of a callous industry and the insincere, self-serving people who flourish within it. Betty and Diane are played by the same actress, Naomi Watts, and are, in fact, the same person. Or, rather when, in the second half of the film, Betty and her narrative have disappeared and are replaced by Diane and her very different narrative, we realize that Betty, in whose story we had become invested, is merely a fantasy created by Diane as an idealized alter-ego. It comes as a shock, although in retrospect we are forced to admit that, even

³³⁸ Chion, *Lynch*, 97.

as Betty's story was becoming increasingly troubled, her character was just a little too good, too clean, too uncannily *capable* to be a real person. We are forced to accept the conclusion that Betty exists only deep in Diane's misbegotten could-have-been.³³⁹ Perhaps she represents a vestigial part of a Diane who existed before the ravages of her Hollywood life took their toll, a part unrecognizable in the Diane whom we now see portrayed.

Throughout the film, Lynch is challenging surface, the artificial. In the universe of *Mulholland Drive* a film director is forced by mafia-style backers to hire the wrong actress for the job; actresses lip-synch their auditions; a concealed monstrous figure resides behind a cheerful diner; a hitman casually socializes with his marks before he kills them. There are always unseen, and often unsavoury, layers of menace threatening to breach the surface cool. In the first half of the film, Betty befriends a beautiful amnesiac who calls herself Rita after an old poster she sees for a Rita Hayworth film. The film audience knows that Rita has lost her memory as the result of the car accident by which she was inadvertently saved from a planned assassination and therefore understands that Rita is potentially still in danger. Betty takes in the homeless, nameless Rita and together they begin to trace the mystery of her identity, an activity that seems to become increasingly perilous the deeper they probe. In the process the two women fall in love and a merging takes place.

On the night they consummate their love—coming out of a dreamy post-coital sleep³⁴⁰—Rita awakens already speaking the words, *Silencio, no hay banda*, over and over, as if possessed. Following this “voice”, Rita takes Betty to a back-alley theatre called *Silencio*, where every portion of the show is in some way an illusion. The emcee—a magician of sorts—comes out onto the stage and explains, portentously, to the audience:

There is no band... this is all a tape recording... and yet we hear a band...
If we want to hear a clarinet, listen [we hear a recording of a clarinet]...
Muted trumpet [we hear a trumpet]... It's all recorded... It is all a tape.

³³⁹ As we have seen, this “could-have-been” is itself an expression of the Uncanny that introduces another fold of uncanniness back into the already uncanny situation of Diane and her apparent *Doppelgänger*.

³⁴⁰ We see them lying together with their faces positioned in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* face meld, a wonderful bit of intertext which alerts the audience to the permeability of identity between these two women and foreshadows Diane's struggle with her own persona. *Persona*, dir. Ingmar Bergman, Svensk Filmindustri, 1966.

[He is directing the sounds to appear “in the air”, like a magician conjuring smoke]. It is an illusion. Listen.³⁴¹

At the conclusion of his “act” he disappears from the stage theatrically in a puff of blue smoke leaving only the microphone flickering in a shaft of intense, blue light. The singer, Rebekah del Rio, is then introduced. She is La Lloronda de Los Angeles (The Crying Woman of Los Angeles). She “stumbles onto the stage with a drunken/drugged meandering gate”, as Mactaggart describes it.

yet, as she starts to sing ‘Llorando (Crying)’ her timing and expression appear to capture perfectly the cadences and emotion of the song. The sound, pitch and intensity of her performance appear genuine and her voice punctures the defensive shells of Rita and Betty who begin to cry in response to the rendition.³⁴²

Although Betty, Rita, and we, the film audience, have been given ample preparation for this illusionary melding of recorded voice and live body, we are taken in. When the singer collapses on the stage and is dragged behind the curtain (from whence she came) by theatre personnel, the voice—the *recorded voice*—remains. Disembodied, it continues to “sing” the song through to its climax as Betty and Rita watch the stage, still rapt, yet only the disembodied recorded voice and the empty microphone occupy the space (see DVD2 > Chapter 4: Potter and Lynch > Lynch: Mulholland Drive – ‘Llorando’). “It’s all recorded ... It is all a tape”. The body, it appears now, is superfluous. Mactaggart describes the predicament as “the nature of modern spectatorship: we know it’s not ‘real’”.³⁴³ And yet even in the dawning realization of the illusion—even as the singer’s body is overcome and disposed of—the two women remain committed to the power of the performance. Such is the power of the recording to invite connectedness even as it would appear to alienate.

Todd McGowan formulates the voice in the context of del Rio’s “performance” as an “impossible object”, stating:

the voice detached from her body is an object, voice as impossible object. Despite their knowledge that the song is not live, Betty and Rita find themselves caught up in it anyway, unable to disavow this knowledge.

³⁴¹ Each line of his act is repeated, to-and-fro in Spanish and English. For clarity, I have only transcribed the English here.

³⁴² Mactaggart, *Film Paintings*, 61.

³⁴³ Mactaggart, *Film Paintings*, 61.

They experience the enjoyment of the impossible object in the voice. The song moves Betty and Rita to tears because it communicates a sense of loss. Rebekah del Rio is ‘crying’ over the lost love object, over the lost sexual relationship, and this touches both Betty and Rita, as they feel the incipient loss of what they have experienced. When we experience the loss of the sexual relationship in fantasy as a result of following fantasy to its end point, we experience the loss of a relation that we never had. Fantasy effects an identification with the lost object. ... In this sense, fantasy allows us to mourn the lost object in a way that we could not do without fantasizing. Since the subject never actually has the “lost” object, the only experience of loss that the subject can have must occur through fantasy.³⁴⁴

Here, in augmentation of Diane’s repressed desires, we have the double as wish fulfilment that can never be fulfilled. The disembodied voice of del Rio transfers from the body on the stage to the bodies of Betty and Rita. But this transfer does not happen at the point of del Rio’s exit but from the beginning of the performance. In George Toles’ words,

In a ravishing Spanish rendition of Roy Orbison’s ‘Crying,’ the female vocalist, with a single painted tear on her face ... carries us so far into the unsuspected depths of this overfamiliar pop song that she becomes the tragic embodiment of *all lovers’* weeping: scalding tears personified.³⁴⁵

The uncanny effect of the voice touches on primitive or childhood beliefs: infantile fears and infantile wishes. Freud writes:

Let us take first the uncanny effects associated with the omnipotence of thoughts, instantaneous wish-fulfilment, secret harmful forces and the return of the dead. There is no mistaking the conditions under which the sense of the uncanny arises here. We—or our primitive forebears—once regarded such things as real possibilities; we were convinced that they really happened. Today we no longer believe in them, have *surmounted* such modes of thought. Yet we do not feel entirely secure of in these new convictions. Now, as soon as something *happens* in our lives that seems to confirm these old, discarded beliefs, we experience a sense of the uncanny, and this may be reinforced by judgments like the following: ‘So it’s true, then, that you can kill another man just by wishing him dead, that the dead really do go on living and manifest themselves at the scene of their former activities’, and so on.³⁴⁶

But just as the disembodied, recorded voice that echoes in the curiously named *Silencio* is a site of ambivalence, the film leaves us with a sense that Betty, though a product of

³⁴⁴ McGowan, T., *The Impossible David Lynch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 214.

³⁴⁵ Toles, G., “Auditioning Betty in *Mulholland Drive*”, *Film Quarterly*, 58/1, (Fall 2004), 12.

³⁴⁶ Freud, *Uncanny*, 154.

Diane's imagination, is perhaps in some ways more real than Diane herself. The force of the Uncanny in the form of the *Doppelgänger* represents Diane's resurrection of her discarded beliefs. In the end, with Diane's suicide, neither Betty nor Diane survive; yet, in a meta-narrative sense, they live on in the medium of film, in the same way that Lynch has presented the recorded voice as a site of resurrection. "The song is ended", perhaps, yet as Potter made explicit with his quotation of Berlin's song at the end of *Pennies*, "the melody lingers on". The residue of the song clings to its listeners—lingers on—despite the ephemeral condition of the voice. Of life itself.

Potter's Uncanny

Eros and procreation are opposed in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* by Thanatos and the death drive.³⁴⁷ Even if we must all die, we might vicariously "live on", we might push back against the death drive—however unsuccessful or impossible that might literally be—in our offspring. It is interesting to note, therefore, that none of the fictional characters that I include in this discussion, whether written by Potter or Lynch, have offspring. None of these characters possess any real-life "insurance against extinction" in the form of progeny. Whether intentionally conceived so by their authors or an accidental outcome of other narrative concerns (for Freud, of course, nothing is truly accidental), these characters have only their desires, fantasies, and compulsions with which to construct any sense of the eternal in themselves. They stand, in other words, face-to-face with death, without the buffer of the procreative double, and, inasmuch, the device of the double serves as both the denial and the resurrection of the "soul", or, in a perhaps less potent but more disturbing form, a ghosting, or haunting.

There is an abundance of doubles in *Pennies from Heaven* and *The Singing Detective*, vacillating between a disturbing Uncanny and comforting fantasy—both *Unheimlich* and *Heimlich*. Potter's characters display a yearning to bring the Uncanny home—to bring the *Unheimlich* back *Heim*—in the form of the double, to feed it and nurture it and make it less frightening, more known to them. In *The Singing Detective* Marlow creates his own doubles, specifically detective-Marlow, and through the psychoanalytic process finds, encounters, and constructs many more. Lipsynching is central to this process, as already noted, because Marlow can only get close to the songs by bringing them close to his double, and vice versa—having them lipsynched by detective-Marlow—or

³⁴⁷ Freud, S., "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", in Strachey, J., and Freud, A., (trans. and eds.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud XVIII* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961 [1920]), 7-64.

imagining/hallucinating them being lipsynched to by others from his past, characters in the novel, or persons in the immediate surroundings of the hospital ward. In *Pennies from Heaven* Arthur has one primary double in the form of the Accordion Man.³⁴⁸

Arthur's fateful connection to the Accordion Man begins with an act of kindness. Having given the hitchhiking Accordion Man a lift to Gloucester, Arthur buys him dinner and in response the Accordion Man "performs" 'Pennies from Heaven', lipsynching to Arthur Tracey's 1937 recording in the café where they eat. It is unclear whether the performance is happening in Arthur's head or the Accordion Man's. A merging of the two minds, two destinies—the telepathy that Freud describes—is taking place that will ultimately, as we have seen, lead to Arthur's demise. The song, 'Pennies from Heaven', plays a significant role in the doubling of Arthur and the Accordion Man. Whether in this first instance it is transmitted from the Accordion Man to Arthur or vice versa (my preference is for the former reading), the song which is shared between them ultimately becomes in the language of commercial entertainment, Arthur's "theme song", or, in the language of religion, his prayer. In the final episode Arthur performs the song at his trial. Standing in the dock, addressing first the court, then Eileen, and finally some ineffable God or Soul or even the Accordion Man (who has, unbeknownst to Arthur, committed suicide)—the song is his final defense (*to compare these versions of 'Pennies From Heaven' see DVD2 > Chapter 4: Potter and Lynch > Potter: Pennies From Heaven > track 5: Pennies From Heaven – Accordion man Lipsynch and track 6: Pennies From Heaven – Arthur Lipsynch*). Incarnate in Arthur, the song becomes his immortal soul, his "insurance against the extinction of self".³⁴⁹ In equivocal Potter fashion, however, and in keeping with the Uncanny of modern times, the song when embodied by Arthur's *Doppelgänger*, the Accordion Man, is no longer "an assurance of immortality" but is transformed into "the uncanny harbinger of death".³⁵⁰ death brought to the murdered girl by the Accordion Man, to the Accordion Man by his guilt-ridden suicide off Hammersmith Bridge, and to Arthur executed in the place of the Accordion Man who actually committed the murder. Whereas the doubles in *The Singing Detective* are constructions of the main protagonist, Marlow himself, and visible only to him, the uncanny doubling of Arthur and the Accordion Man is, we might say, "real". Though they look and sound nothing like one

³⁴⁸ Other doubles exist in the series, most notably, perhaps, the meta-fictional doubling of Eileen and Potter himself—the "innocent" from the Forest of Dean forced to "prostitute" themselves in London. However, in the interest of space, I will be concentrating here on the Arthur-Accordion Man doubling.

³⁴⁹ Freud, *Uncanny*, 142.

³⁵⁰ Freud, *Uncanny*, 142.

another, Joan momentarily mistakes the Accordion man for Arthur. The uncanniness of this is tangible to her, “something you can’t put into words”, something that makes her “shiver”, and this carries through into Arthur’s execution for the Accordion Man’s crime. They share a fate, and this sharing is underwritten, perhaps even enacted, by them also lipsynching to the same song.

Earlier in this chapter I suggest that the dance routine and lipsynch of doctors and nurses in *The Singing Detective* to ‘Dem Bones’ stands at what we might call the Brechtian end of a continuum of critical perspectives on popular culture and bourgeois respectability. The sequence ends, however, with the uncanny sound of birds “singing” in Marlow’s mind, and this then triggers thoughts of his father and childhood. As I shall show, Mr Marlow is associated with birds at several different registers: real birdsong, imitations of birdsong in whistling, and in the lyrics of songs associated with him. With the exception of the “real” birdsong, all of these associations happen through, or as in the case of ‘Dem Bones’, in direct association with, lipsynching.

In the first instance in which we see Mr Marlow performing in the miners’ club, “singing” ‘It Might As Well Be Spring’, one of the pitmen inserts himself between young Philip and his view of his father. The pitman, whom we will see twice more in the series, serves as a kind of Greek Chorus created by Marlow as a combination of something (someone) vaguely remembered from his childhood and an imaginary collective voice, speaking on behalf of the mining community, emerging from Marlow’s sense of guilt towards his father. As Philip, along with the rest of the crowd, is applauding his father’s performance the pitman stands and faces him. He is shot from Philip’s point of view and so speaks directly into the camera; his solid, wide face and shoulders take up most of the screen. He is a figure in whom Marlow in his hallucinations has imbued great authority, who may or may not be “real” but speaks truths to young Philip, and, especially, to Marlow who is, of course, imagining the scene. In this first appearance he tells Philip: “There y’ant nobody ‘round ‘ere is gonna hold a candle to thee father as far as a-warblin’ is concerned, m’boy. You’re dad’s too good to belong down the pit, old buddy”. I want to emphasize the importance of the word “warblin” as it is the first explicit instance we have of the identification of Mr Marlow with birds.

In one of Mr Marlow's performances in the local club, he performs the whistling tune, 'Birdsong at Eventide', in which he imitates birdsong, whistling their calls virtuosically. In essence, Mr Marlow *is* a bird, and, as such, can be seen as "the original singer", at least in the (sub-conscious) mind of Marlow. In some scenes the birdsong associated with Mr Marlow is diegetic; Marlow's memories of Mr Marlow will often begin with Marlow "hearing" the sound of birds—and it is probably worth noting that even if young Philip is not a bird, is not a "warbler" like his dad, he is nevertheless drawn to the birds' element, spending hours of his boyhood up a tree, sitting on a favourite branch, high above the human world.³⁵¹ More explicitly, Marlow lies in his hospital bed in one scene saying, "cuckoo... cuckoo"³⁵², mimicking his father's birdcalls from 'Birdsong at Eventide'. And twice Marlow, thinking of his father, recites, "All the birds in the trees. All the love in the world", almost like a mantra which brings him closer to his father. To the stricken Marlow, Mr Marlow represents both—birds (i.e., song) and love. Hence, the two are conflated in the form of Mr Marlow and the songs Marlow remembers/conjures.

In the hallucination/memory in which Marlow sees Mr Marlow "whistling" to 'Birdsong at Eventide', the pitman appears again. At the end of the song, the camera pans past the beguiled audience and lands at last at Philip's customary table, but in this instance it is not the young Philip sitting there, smiling at his father as seen earlier in the scene, but Marlow. He is the "real" Marlow, hunched at the table, wearing his hospital garb, and has infiltrated the memory of the miners' club, replacing Philip. As Marlow tries to applaud his father, he notices his hands are clubbed with his psoriatic arthropathy. "I can't seem to—I can't clap my hands. I can't. Not even for my dear old dad". The pitman fills the screen again, addressing Marlow:

Pitman Ah, but thou doesn't want to, do'st?

Marlow Don't want to?

³⁵¹ It is from this branch that he loses the essential connection with his beloved forest, his parents, even God (with whom he converses from his high perch) when he witnesses his mother's adulterous sex in the woods with Mr. Marlow's sometime singing partner, Ray Binney. The sexual act brings Philip down from the tree. It grounds Philip as surely as it emasculates Mr. Marlow.

³⁵² As an interesting side note, "cuckoo" is used idiomatically to mean "crazy" and in the context of Marlow's psychological predicament the repetition of this particular birdcall can be seen as self-mocking. The porter who ferries Marlow around the hospital to his appointments with the psychoanalyst Dr Gibbon, refers to Gibbon as "the cuckoo man". In addition, the similarity, between the word cuckoo and cuckold may be in play here, as Mr. Marlow is the cuckolded husband, a fact around which some of Marlow's psychological trauma revolves—cuckoo is crazy, but also a bird, and a cuckold, in other words, Mr. Marlow.

Pitman You ben't interested in clapping thee father, now beya? Thou never did give the poor bugger credit when he were alive. Thou too big for thy boots...

Marlow What do you mean?

Pitman Thou knows very well what I mean, you cocky bugger.

Marlow Are you trying to say? Listen, are you trying to say that my dad is dead?

Pitman Dead? Aye. 'Course him is. Dead and gone and nobody to care yuppence.

Marlow But no, I have so much to say to him, I need to speak to him very badly. Don't be stupid. He can't be dead, not my dad.

Pitman Oh him's dead. Him's dead all right. Dead and buried long since.

Marlow Listen, you. That *was* him, wasn't it? That was my dad doing the birds. That was my dad up on the platform. [He turns to address the stage and calls out to his father] Dad! Dad! Over here, old buddy! Come over here! Thou knowest how much I care about tha.

[The din of other voices in the room begins to fade as the camera pulls back to reveal Marlow alone in the now long-deserted miner's club. As the voices fade, the sound of birdsong replaces them].

But I saw him. That was my lovely dear old dad. That was him whistling. I heard him. I heard him. *All the birds in the trees, all the love in the world.* I heard him, I heard *him*."

At this point we see the Pitman again, but he is speaking in—lipsynching to—the voice of Marlow's doctor who is asking Marlow what he is trying to say. The scene cuts back to the hospital ward where this is happening, and we see Marlow in bed, where he has obviously been speaking, semi-consciously, the words we've just heard in the hallucination. With the doctor bent over his bed, Marlow continues, "I heard him. I saw him". As he closes his eyes, drifting back into unconsciousness, he murmurs, "*All the birds in the trees, all the love in the ...* I saw him". It is clear that the memory of his father "doing the birds" has had a profound effect on Marlow. By intervening in Marlow's pleasant memory of his whistling father, the pitman reminds Marlow of what has been repressed. He and, most importantly, the *songs*, form the "voices" in which the Uncanny is revealed to Marlow. Throughout the series, and especially through the repetition of the songs, Marlow is trying to come to terms with his past. Marlow may

downplay the music—“banality with a beat”—but time and again it is the music that brings him closer to an essential, coherent state.

Many of the songs Mr Marlow and detective-Marlow sing also make mention of birds in their lyrics. In our first glimpse of detective-Marlow, he is singing, ‘Cruising Down the River’ with the line: “The birds above all sing of love, their gentle, sweet refrain”. In ‘It Might as Well be Spring’, during which we get our first glimpse of Mr Marlow singing in the miners’ club, the line is “I am starry-eyed and vaguely discontented, like a nightingale without a song to sing. I haven’t seen a crocus or a rosebud, or a robin on the wing. But I feel so gay”. Mrs Marlow, lipsynching to ‘Lili Marlene’, as both herself (in London soon after she has left Mr Marlow, while she and Philip sit with her family listening to the recording in her father’s house) and then transformed by Marlow into a mysterious (and ill-fated) *femme-fatale* in his novel, sings “when birds all sing and love was king”, recalling, we presume, Mr Marlow (birds and love) and what she—Marlow’s mother—has lost.

The theme of birds and birdsong is, of course, a common element in the romantic love songs of the period. Though their use here may be mere coincidence, a case can be made for a hermeneutic depth to Potter’s choice of songs. The fact that birds are so prominent in his choices is probably intentional and not just due to the statistically high probability that a given song from this period will mention birds in its lyrics. Though birds and birdsong are certainly an artificial, culturally clichéd convention of Tin Pan Alley, Potter is able to tap much deeper cultural connections to ideas of nature and the originary source of singing, a kind of originary beauty, the mythologies of which have developed over millennia and which, on the surface at least speak to a more “authentic”, “foundational” and “natural” state of being that existed before recordings and the music industry. It also redounds to the Forest of Dean as the point of origin, freedom, and paradise (and also, importantly, original sin). Birds, though, also evoke the Uncanny. They are often seen in traditional British culture as dead souls—it is bad luck if a bird flies into the house because it might be the soul of some loved one trying to return. Birds in the house are also bad luck because, as dead souls, they can be uncanny harbingers of death; a bird flying down the chimney is read, in some areas of Britain, as an omen of death coming to the house concerned.

The song ‘Cruising Down the River’ also forms a site where the Uncanny is invoked by Potter. The plot of Marlow’s *noir* novel involves the murder of a Russian spy/prostitute, Sonya, whose body is discovered in the Thames and fished out of the river near Hammersmith Bridge by the police. Detective-Marlow, performing the lipsynched version of ‘Cruising Down the River’ in the dance hall, mulls over the case as he is singing and we hear his thoughts as voice-over:

I like to snap my eyes around the hall when I’m crooning this sort of stuff. Study faces. Watch the feet. You can learn a lot about life when you size up ballroom dancers. It helps my think-box to send out sparks, and my head’s got a fizz on this case. This old river I’m cruising down: I knew they’d fished out a body, and I knew it wasn’t a *mermaid*, but there was something fishy about it, that’s for sure. Yes sir, the Thames can be all sleaze and no flow. I’m talking of flotsam and jetsam.

One only has to consider the title of the song, which is also the first and last line sung, to conflate it with the image of the dead woman being fished from the river. The river scene, however, takes place at night—the blue-grey pallor of the corpse is illuminated against the dark monochrome of the river (“all sleaze and no flow”)—while the song, with its romantic sentiments, is set on a lovely, colourful afternoon. The image of the drowned woman is repeated a number of times throughout the series, but in later repetitions the body that was originally Sonya’s is replaced by first, Nicola, and then Mrs Marlow. As the novel and Marlow’s real life bleed into one another, the Uncanny presents itself in the doubling of the murdered prostitute with Marlow’s mother, who, in the final episode, is revealed to have committed suicide by jumping off Hammersmith Bridge.³⁵³ This revelation is, of course, a crucial part of Marlow’s psychoanalytical process—the return of the repressed—foreshadowed in the lyrics of ‘Cruising Down the River’, which (as we have seen in an earlier part of this chapter) is the first song that detective-Marlow sings in the series. Both the song and the image of the drowned woman, therefore, exemplify Freud’s repetition compulsion, which is also configured in the Uncanny. Further, the Brechtian device of detective-Marlow’s hardboiled voice-over is eventually revealed not as a device to keep Marlow distanced from his feelings (as much as he may try, and as much as this may seem to be the case), but ultimately as a vehicle through which his repressed feelings about his mother (and, through her, his generalized misogyny) are brought into consciousness. “I knew they’d fished out a body, and I knew it wasn’t a *mermaid*, but there was something fishy about it” is

³⁵³ Where, as we have seen, the Accordion Man in *Pennies from Heaven* also killed himself.

information Marlow has repressed which comes back to him in the uncanny figure of his mother's fictitious *Doppelgänger*, articulated by *his* fictitious *Doppelgänger*.

One final double that is crucial to the dénouement of the series comes in the form of the scarecrow that young Philip sees from the train. As we have seen, in the first instance the scarecrow becomes the double of Mr. Marlow by assuming his posture, metaphorically casting Mr. Marlow as a “hollow man”, weak, his head stuffed with straw.³⁵⁴ It is also by name and definition a figure whose purpose is to scare birds away, and it is therefore significant that Philip first sees it while traveling away from his father, the personification of birds. On the same train journey Philip imagines the scarecrow as a grotesquely comic effigy of Hitler, whom the soldiers kill. Finally, Philip “sees” the scarecrow again on the train journey he takes back to his father after his mother's suicide, but this time he imagines that its face is that of his abusive primary school teacher. In the chilling uncanny moment in which Philip sees her face on it, it/she begins lipsynching to Al Jolson's recording of ‘After You've Gone’, a song whose lyrics can be seen to originate with his mother, his father, or himself as he once was. Later, Marlow imagines the scarecrow shuffling into the hospital ward in the middle of the night. When it reaches Marlow's bed its face is again revealed to be the schoolteacher's as she/it resumes the Jolson song, just one line, “You'll miss the bestest pal you've ever had”, after which it disappears and Marlow is left alone in the ward, shaking with fear (*see DVD2 > Chapter 4: Potter and Lynch > Potter: The Singing Detective > track 6: 'After You've Gone'*). Significantly, this comes after a session with Dr Gibbon in which Marlow has broken down, sobbing as he recounts perhaps the most significant memory behind his pathology, a memory involving a self-preserving lie he told at school that led to the severe punishment—a beating at the hands of the schoolteacher—of an innocent schoolmate, and the bizarre consequences of the event. The “return” of the schoolteacher in the form of the scarecrow marks the final turning point in Marlow's psychotherapy with Dr Gibbon. As John Amiel notes, “It's impossible to hear [‘After You've Gone’] again without thinking of this”. The uncanny, ultimately, will continue to inhabit the *song* as well as the characters in the drama.

³⁵⁴ Eliot's poem, though not alluded to by Potter, seems an apposite emblem for Mr. Marlow, both as dead father and missing voice: “We are the hollow men / We are the stuffed me / Leaning together / Headpiece filled with straw. Alas! / Our dried voices, when / We whisper together / Are quiet and meaningless / As wind in dry grass / ... Those who have crossed / With direct eyes to death's other Kingdom / Remember us—if at all—not as lost / Violent souls, but only / As the hollow men / The stuffed men.” Eliot, T. S., *The Hollow Men* [1925], in *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), 89-92.

Chapter 5

Vernacular Lipsynch Practice

A man and a woman are driving along a country road lipsynching to the Carpenters' 'Top of the World'. He drives, she works the car stereo. The video camera is mounted on the dashboard so we see the couple head-on. The landscape recedes, a blur of green trees, street signs, empty sky. It is summer; the man and woman are relaxed and happy. On holiday, maybe. The performance is a lark. The two are passing the time, acting silly and having a laugh, but as the song continues their commitment to the world of the song increases. At the end they applaud themselves and look lovingly at one another.³⁵⁵ (see DVD2 > Chapter 5: Vernacular Lipsynch Videos > Group 1 > track 1: Clint&Liz Style -- 'Top of the World').

A young man is in his kitchen lipsynching to Michael Jackson's Billie Jean. The man is an unlikely "Prince of Pop": slightly overweight, wearing a loose-fitting tracksuit and stocking feet. He knows the song cold. Not only is his lipsynching nearly perfect, he competently performs Jackson's iconic choreography³⁵⁶, moonwalk and all. Hours of practice must have gone into learning the routine, learning the inflections of Jackson's body and voice. Still, the socks, the sloppy tracksuit... it may be safe to say that Billie Jean is indeed not his lover (the man is altogether too comfortable to be the possessor of this much angst). And yet even more incongruous, perhaps, is the tidy suburban kitchen in which he performs. Yet the man provides a body, however unlikely, for the familiar voice, and for the length of the song we are on his side, rooting for him. We can identify ourselves in the fantasy, the imaginative escape from the mundane, the pure enjoyment of the song.³⁵⁷ (see DVD2 > Chapter 5: Vernacular Lipsynch Videos > Group 1 > track 2: MattyJ – 'Billie Jean').

A teenaged girl is in her bedroom. Her head is closely framed, but you can still see the posters in the background that cover her walls. They are (stereo)typically "girly"—pop stars, film stars, puppies—but there is nothing typical about the performance taking place. The voice of Ben Folds singing 'The Luckiest' appears to issue from her mouth as she faces the camera, earnestly miming the words. The rolling "credits" at the beginning of the video inform us that the song is dedicated to her "babu". Although we know she is addressing a specific person, we experience her gaze as if directed at us, the viewers. For the entirety of the song she never releases us from her loving address. By the final verse she is wiping away tears of happiness and love for the boyfriend or girlfriend for whom the video was originally made. But her message—"I am the luckiest"—is shared with all of us.³⁵⁸ (see DVD2 > Chapter 5: Vernacular Lipsynch Videos > Group 1 > track 3: Megan Elisius – 'The Luckiest')

³⁵⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9s8RWfWrBQ> - this and the following YouTube examples can be found on the DVD submitted as part of this thesis.

³⁵⁶ The choreography is from Jackson's performance at the Motown 25th Anniversary concert, during which, incidentally, Jackson himself lipsynched to the recording.

³⁵⁷ mattymj2007... video accessed by author 2007, subsequently removed from YouTube with following message: "This account has been terminated due to repeated or severe violations of our Community Guidelines and/or claims of copyright infringement."

³⁵⁸ Megan Elisius (<http://www.youtube.com/user/nutm3g05>), video accessed by author in 2007, has since been removed by poster.

*A white-haired man is sitting at a desk in his study facing the camera. The song is 'My Funny Valentine' as sung by Chet Baker, and the performance is personal, introspective. The man is nearly motionless as he "sings", only turning his head between lines as if to take a breath or regain his composure. Baker's iconically reedy voice is thin and high and seems incongruous with this man's physiognomy, yet it is beautifully, painfully, suited to the expression he gives the song. It seems clear that the song is addressed to a particular person, but the man's melancholic performance speaks equally of love and loss, and leaves some doubt as to whether the object of his affection is close at hand or estranged from him; alive or dead. The ambiguity is heartbreaking.*³⁵⁹

(see DVD2 > Chapter 5: Vernacular Lipsynch Videos > Group 1 > track 4: Henry Zbyszynsky – 'My Funny Valentine').

From out of the bedrooms, bathrooms, cars, and other private locations, the vernacular practice of lipsynching to recorded music has emerged for the world to see. From a cultural landscape in which the use of lipsynching by professional music performers, whether done "live" or in a television studio, has produced outrage and debate among pop music fans and detractors, the vernacular lipsynch is celebrated and has even infiltrated the traditionally private rituals of love and intimacy such as marriage proposals, family and community celebratory and bonding rituals such as wedding ceremonies, birthdays, sesquicentennials, etc. Lipsynching performance is used to raise funds for charities and to raise awareness for causes and special groups, such as American soldiers in Iraq. It also has its detractors, of course, though mainly in the form of those who complain about the paucity of quality videos on YouTube. Along with the ubiquitous "cat videos", "teenagers lipsynching in their bedrooms" is also used as a marker of the frivolous nature of the medium.

The videos described in the vignettes above give a small taste of the vernacular lipsynching videos that can be found on the internet from all over the world. The videos vary drastically in quality and intent, ranging from serious to comic, from slapdash to nearly professional in quality. Sub-genres exist and are continuously updated. One of the most successful of these is the so-called "lipdub", which has become popular at universities, schools and corporations and involves large groups of people lipsynching to a song while the camera moves among them, often covering the space of whole office buildings or campuses or cities (usually, but not always, filmed in a single take). Another example is "marryoke" (a conflation of the words marry and karaoke), in

³⁵⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48NO0Shb7pA>

which wedding parties and guests produce a lipsynching performance as a video keepsake of the day. In some cases, the cameras, and lips, start to roll as soon as the vows are made; the couple kisses and the song is cued. Proposing marriage to one's partner has also become occasion for the staging of elaborate lipdubs. A new cottage industry has grown up around the production of lipdub videos, and for a small-to-considerable fee a team of videographers will choreograph, film, edit and disseminate your "professional quality" marryoke or lipdub video.³⁶⁰ We have also seen the emergence of YouTube lipsynching "stars" whose videos in some cases individually have garnered literally millions of views.³⁶¹ Some stars have been interviewed on network television programs; some have subsequently performed in music videos and appeared on stage with the popular musical acts to whom they have paid tribute. Thus they are re-absorbed into the realms of a commercial music industry still trying to come to terms with the phenomenon.

In the previous four chapters I have explored ideas of the disembodied and re-embodied voice, technological advances in recorded sound and sound cinema in which such ideas are implicated, the production of "the live" in the highly mediated world of contemporary popular music production and performance, and the insertion of lipsynch performance as diegetic material into the constructed "real" of cinema and television. Through case studies I have traced an evolution from concealment of lipsynching in professional contexts to more recent engagement with the practice on its own terms—Potter, Lynch, and films which feature diegetic lipsynch "numbers"—tracing an evolutionary process that has introduced and habituated audiences to the practice. Through these observations, I have set the scene for this final chapter of my thesis: that is to present, theorize, and perform a hermeneutic analysis of the practice of lipsynching as a vernacular activity of amateurs and music fans—with particular focus on the YouTube lipsynch phenomenon.

The internet landscape is a pluralistic space, filled with diverse phenomena, millions of competing voices wanting to be heard, and a particularly postmodern configuration of personalities and subjectivities. Inevitably, then, as a cultural environment it resists, perhaps even more than the "real world" metropolis, any approach to regulate and

³⁶⁰Examples include, Ear Shot Creative (<http://earshotcreative.com>), Mindspring (<http://www.cosemindspring.com/>), Lipdub.eu (<http://www.lipdub.eu/>)

³⁶¹A few examples of YouTube lipsynching "stars" include: Gary Broolsma, Keenin Cahill (<http://www.keenansroom.com/>), Moymoypalaboy (<http://www.youtube.com/user/moymoypalaboy/videos>).

standardise. There are hierarchies, of course, as in the postmodern city, but their existences are not stable. Any attempt to deal with such a widespread cultural phenomenon, then, as lipsynching must find ways to confront and then represent such a welter of information, opinion, identity, and practice. For this reason I have chosen to organise the primary research into vernacular lipsynching—collecting and analysing the videos themselves—under a series of categories. It should go without saying that these categories are nowhere near exhaustive. The nature of the ideas and issues raised by the vernacular lipsynch phenomenon are often highly “localized”, close-knit fan groups, collectives of enthusiasts sharing files with one another, one-off experiments, alongside individuals who post new videos almost every single day. I have chosen, therefore, to represent and offer hermeneutic commentary on those videos (and more generally practices) that lend themselves to being organised together. After briefly describing and analysing some of the paradigmatic early videos—produced during the first two years of YouTube’s existence (2005-7), when Youtube was becoming a popular vehicle for lipsynching practice—I will move on to examine issues concerning the changing status of amateur versus professional “musicking”, which also raises the issue of ownership of the music and copyright. Who has the “right” where commercial material is concerned is strongly implicated in the split of consumer and professional producer; my argument is that lipsynch challenges, in productive ways, deeply-consolidated ideologies over intellectual and creative copyright, and so called Fair Use. I then focus in more detail on three thematic approaches to a hermeneutics of vernacular lipsynching:

- 1) ritual, including the ways that lipsynching and the communities it forms constitute a very particular configuration of the idea of fandom;
- 2) the soundtracked life/lives, as a culturally pre-existent condition that strongly informs lipsynching, touching on the ubiquity of recorded music in the (post)modern environment that serves as a form of cultural conditioning where lipsynching is concerned;
- 3) the specific collective practice of lipsynching known as “lipdub”, in which already existing communities represent themselves, attain (or at least reinforce) coherence as social units, and challenge the “rules” of consumption laid down by cultural corporations.

Finally, I will revisit ideas of the Uncanny already engaged with, as something that inheres to lipsynching, and to the disembodied voice of recording and broadcast technologies in general.

Background

Hey there.
I got my webcam recording,
I got my favourite song is playing,
Now watch me go.

I point to the camera,
And then I make fists at the camera,
I look to the ceiling and then
Shake my head.

I don't care what you think of that
'cause I do what I do.
I'm lip syncing to the song! ...

Hey there.
I'm actin' all sad now.
I got the pouty look on my face but
It won't last.

Now I'll bust out a gang sign
Even though I don't know a gang sign,
Look to the left and the right then
Shake my head.

I don't care what you think of that
'cause I do what I do.
I'm lip syncing to the song!³⁶²

In 2007, Canadian songwriter and actor, Billy Reid (YouTube name, “Very Tasteful”) produced the music video, *Lip Syncing [sic] to the Song*, which he posted on YouTube with the description, “I noticed a lot of people lip sync to their favorite songs. So, I wrote a song about lip syncing and lip synced to it. Now dance” (*see DVD2 > Chapter 5: Vernacular Lipsynch Videos > Group 1 > track 5: Billy Reid – ‘Lip Syncing to the Song’*). The video quickly “went viral”.³⁶³ Reid was among the first to capitalize on the

³⁶² Billy Reid (Very Tasteful) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zK5w9QPf6ek>

³⁶³ The “viral video” is the now-familiar term for videos that become popular on the internet due to web sharing, a kind of virtual person-to-person contact that leads to widespread “infection” and a sudden increase in views, most commonly measured by YouTube viewing statistics.

growing trend of the YouTube vernacular lipsynching video, parodying the performance conventions he observed—the fists, the pout, the gang sign—and in a sense codifying what was at that time a still-emergent form. Reid’s video deftly characterizes some of the conventions developed during the early days of the internet lipsynch video (approximately 2005-7). These early videos were, primarily, of poor audio-visual quality, filmed with the low-resolution web-cams with which many laptop computers were then equipped, or similar inexpensive auxiliary components.³⁶⁴ The performer was usually a single subject or a pair, seated facing the computer/web-cam, addressing the camera—head-on—as if directing the performance to an audience or into a mirror.³⁶⁵ In terms of musical scope, videos were not limited to any one particular genre or style; however, top-40 hits in the, loosely-defined, pop or rock genres were most common. Often, particularly among the young (spanning the pre-teen years to early adulthood), a song would be chosen for its comic possibilities. Common objects of fun were sentimental love ballads, such as Celine Dion’s, ‘My Heart Will Go On’³⁶⁶ or Debbie Boone’s ‘You Light Up My Life’, and songs by the popular boy- and girl-bands of the 1990s, such as ‘nSync and the Spice Girls. Performers also paid tribute to old or iconic favourites, Queen’s ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ being a prime example. An emerging lipsynching cannon was forming that revived hits from earlier eras and brought them into new contexts, new bodies, and a new collective body of work. It also formed new avenues of communication and identification: popular lipsynching videos and songs were copied or restaged by other YouTube users. A kind of creative call-and-response was taking place among practitioners.³⁶⁷ From their chairs, performers would mimic the clichéd gestures of music videos and each other; sometimes sincerely, often in parody and playful self-mockery.

I now turn to three pioneering videos³⁶⁸ that became among the first viral lipsynching “hits” on YouTube and influenced many videos in their wake.

³⁶⁴ While some lipsynching videos now employ more sophisticated technology and/or staging—technologies such as green screen, for example, are sometimes used and high-resolution cameras are more common—these early conventions remain popular.

³⁶⁵ It is interesting to note how this configuration mirrors, so to speak, the situation of the old-fashioned bathroom-mirror lipsynch. The web-cam constitutes the mirror—in fact, users can monitor the image captured by the camera in real time on their computer screens as they perform. Yet there is also the aspect of we, the audience, who may be construed as both viewers and mirror. We consume and reflect.

³⁶⁶ A young man performing in one such video comically lipsynchs the song to his dog.

³⁶⁷ In an interesting operation of shared self-referentiality, many people made videos in which they lipsynched to Billy Reid’s ‘Lipsynching to the Song’.

³⁶⁸ While I am able to provide an exact year for one of these three pioneering videos—The Numa Numa Guy’s, which has a well-documented history—it is impossible to track down originating dates for the

Back Dorm Boys: ‘I Want It That Way’ by the Back Street Boys³⁶⁹

Although not the first lipsynch video to go viral, the “Backdorm Boys”³⁷⁰ performance of ‘I Want It That Way’ has been widely circulated and has spawned countless imitations. The video pictures two young men in their college dormitory room somewhere in China who “just happen to be” lipsynching to the famous recording by American boy-band The Backstreet Boys. Wearing matching basketball jerseys they face the camera, side-by-side (one placed slightly behind the other) in what would become common “staging” in lipsynching videos involving two or more participants. They address not each other but the camera: the unity between the two is established by turn-taking, the assignment of particular voices, parts or lines to one or the other performer. Their movements are exaggerated, hilarious in fact, as they sway, emote, indulge in “head-banging” and fist shaking, occasionally making goofy faces for the camera, often addressing it with over-acted ardor (*see DVD2 > Chapter 5: Vernacular Lipsynch Videos > Group 1 > track 6: Backdorm Boys – ‘I Want It That Way’*).

The crucial element, however, that singled this video out from so many others is a “silent” third “performer”: a young man who during the entire performance is playing a computer video game in the background. With his back to the camera and the performers, the game-player ignores the performance taking place in the same small space he also inhabits. It is as if the attractions of the video game that he plays are more compelling than his buddies’ extraordinary lipsynching performance, their spontaneous outburst of re-embodied song. His presence signals an everydayness to the scene. It tells us that the lipsynch performance is so “normal” in these young men’s lives that it can be easily ignored. Given the extent to which this formula was repeated in lipsynch videos across the globe, we might suppose that this element was one of the reasons so many people enjoyed, shared, and copied the video. It suggests that this is what these guys do. It is just them, fully contextualized in their everyday lives.

The inclusion of the third figure who calls attention to the everyday surroundings underlines one of the fascinations of the lipsynch video: the glimpse it provides into the

other two (“Backdorm” and “College Guys”) because of the nature of reposting culture on YouTube, but it is certain that both were originally posted between 2006-7.

³⁶⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBICtqsat-w>

³⁷⁰ In the reposting of the video by many users, the pair was alternately dubbed “The Backdorm Boys” and “Two Chinese Guys”.

everyday worlds of its creators, the bedrooms, dormitories, kitchens, offices, the posters, roommates, pets and unmade beds that are offered to the viewer. The environment of the performance is not a stage or other conventional performance space designed to hold the attention of an audience, but the private, cluttered and homely interiors of daily life made remarkable by this activity. It is the re-animation of voice and song in the mouths and bodies of the residents of “normal” life.

Kathrin Peters and Andrea Seier³⁷¹ comment on the ways in which the “room décor supplements” such videos, noting what they call “a certain aesthetic of randomness” that is easily accepted by the viewer by virtue of the “average taste” exhibited by the interiors that are framed by the image. The randomness and homely spaces “contrasts profoundly with the thoroughly designed video clips” of professional music video. “The supplementary aspect of the image in turn forms the *aesthetic surplus* [emphasis mine] of the YouTube video”.³⁷² In the case of the Backdorm Boys’ video, the “aesthetic surplus” of the third “performer” and the computer screen and even the matching basketball jerseys constitutes an antidote to the slick production and often highly stylized imagery of the professional music video. It provides a refreshing alternative. And it concretized for the audience that which they already knew: how absolutely ordinary is the habitation of recorded music in their lives and how deeply they themselves inhabit the music.

Two College Guys: ‘Wannabe’ by the Spice Girls³⁷³

Another early hit was Two College Guys’ performance of ‘Wannabe’ by the Spice Girls. The video carries on the tradition of the Back Dorm Boys in that it features a pair of lipsynchers in the foreground with a third, silent “performer” seated in the background who seemingly ignores the activity of, in this case, *her* friends. Like The Backdorm Boys’ ‘I Want It That Way’, ‘Wannabe’ aims for parody of the song and the original singers, while also engaging in self-parody. In this way—perhaps even more so

³⁷¹ Although Kathrin Peters and Andrea Seier focus on the dance aspects of these videos, referring to them as “Home Dance” videos, theirs is the only scholarship I found in my research that specifically interrogates the practice of (what I call) the vernacular lipsynch video. One significant difference between our respective studies that is important to note, however, is the fact that they focus strictly on the dance and gestural aspects of these videos, ignoring lipsynching and issues of re-embodied voice, which are at the heart of this thesis. Despite this, some of their findings supplement my own and therefore provide a useful concurrence of material observations.

³⁷² Peters, K., and Seier, A., “Home Dance: Media and Aesthetics of the Self on YouTube”, from Snickars, P., and Vonderau, P., (eds.), *The YouTube Reader* (Stockholm: Mediehistoriskt Arkiv 12, 2009), 192-193.

³⁷³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjex-ALmdYw>

than the Back Dorm Boys—the Two College Guys ultimately take an affectionate stance towards themselves and towards the music they parody. They poke fun in order to revive, reclaim and re-animate, albeit temporarily, identities, tastes, actions, and relationships made unavailable to them through the dominant social order.³⁷⁴ In particular, by taking on the female voices of the Spice Girls, the College Guys are able to transgress limiting expectations of gender (*see DVD2 > Chapter 5: Vernacular Lipsynch Videos > Group 1 > track 7: Two College Guys – ‘Wannabe’*).

In terms of a masculinist, rockist critique, ‘Wannabe’ and the Spice Girls, as exemplars of manufactured pop music directed at a young, female audience, are an oft-visited site of critical disdain. As Robert Walser puts it, “judgements of music are judgements of people”,³⁷⁵ in which case ‘Wannabe’, according to the traditional judgements of rock music critique, is, to borrow a well-worn phrase, music you wouldn’t want to be seen with on a Friday night. And yet here they are, the Two College Guys, hanging on the arm of the oppositely gendered, critically dismissed anthem of “Girl Power”. Not only hanging on its arm but giving their own male-identified bodies to it; *being* it. Of course, this kind of transgression is nothing new; drag performers by definition have always done it, and it is familiar to most Westerners in the form of “camp”. As camp, though, it diverges from Walser’s “judgements of people”. Camp taste, in Susan Sontag’s words, “relishes, rather than judges ... Camp taste is, above all, a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation—not judgment. Camp is generous. It wants to enjoy. It only seems like malice, cynicism. (Or, if it is cynicism, it’s not a ruthless but a sweet cynicism.)”³⁷⁶ The young people lipsynching to ‘Wannabe’³⁷⁷ are generous, towards the music and towards themselves as positioned within it, relishing rather than judging. The performance invites participation. It invites others to cast themselves into the music, which they did, hundreds of times in hundreds of bodies.

As with the Backdorm Boys’ video, however, the aesthetic surplus of the Two College Guys video is not, as with traditional drag performance and music video, carefully stylized and illusionistic but constitutes the ordinary, homely space in which the

³⁷⁴ I shall elaborate on this rather sweeping statement with reference to Small and Bakhtin in particular later in the present chapter.

³⁷⁵ Walser, R., “Popular Music Analysis: Ten Apothegms and Four Instances” in Moore, A. F., *Analyzing Popular Music*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 38.

³⁷⁶ Sontag, S., “Notes on ‘Camp’”, in Sontag, S., *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, (New York: Delta, 1966), 291.

³⁷⁷ The “silent” third partner turns around in the hip-hop bridge, in fact, and joins in with the performance.

performers are not actually “performers” but their “everyday selves”—male selves who just happen to be, for the duration of the video, voicing the feminine. That the third performer is a woman completes the identification—the company-keeping—to which the Two College Guys’ performance is committed.

Gary Brolsma (the “Numa Numa Guy”): ‘Dragostea Din Tei’ by O-Zone³⁷⁸

Gary Brolsma’s video in which he lipsynchs to Moldovian pop group O-Zone’s recording ‘Dragostea Din Tei’ (nicknamed “Numa Numa”) was the first lipsynching video to reach international YouTube fame, preceding both the Back Dorm Boys and Two College Guys.³⁷⁹ Due to the nature of clip sharing, re-posting, etc., it is impossible to tabulate the number of views this video has received since its early 2006 YouTube debut (it predates the Backdorm Boys’ and Two College Guys’ videos, discussed above), but a conservative estimate would put the number at over a billion views. Brolsma, who came to be known affectionately as the “Numa Numa Guy”, was not seeking views, fame, or notoriety. He first posted the video privately on a social media site in 2005 in order to share it with some of his friends, never intending it to travel beyond his small circle. Yet even before it found its way onto the pages of the newly launched YouTube, “Numa Numa” had already turned viral, attracting over two million viewers through other forms of downloading and sharing.

The video is of very low quality (as with most user-generated content of the time), taken by a web-cam, and shows Brolsma seated at a desk while lipsynching to the song. Although he remains seated throughout the entire video, he dances in his seat and mugs for the camera engagingly (*see DVD2 > Chapter 5: Vernacular Lipsynch Videos > Group 1 > track 8: Gary Brolsma (The Numa Numa Guy) – ‘Dragostea Din Tei’*). His movements have been dubbed “the Numa Numa Dance” and have been copied by thousands of fans. In interviews, Brolsma comes off as a shy, unassuming young man. Awkward in body and speech, somewhat bewildered by his fame, he is, in every way, exactly what his fans wanted and assumed him to be: ordinary. Answering interview questions, politely contained, sweet and self-effacing, he (perhaps unwittingly) exemplifies the transformative powers of music, reminiscent of Andy Kaufman’s ‘Mighty Mouse’ performance. We see how the body and personality can undergo a type

³⁷⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmtzQCSH6xk>

³⁷⁹ Such was Brolsma’s fame that his animated likeness was included in a *South Park* episode depicting a fatal grunge match between the subjects of YouTube’s first viral videos, including the “Star Wars Kid”, “Sneezing Panda”, “Leave Britney Alone”, and “Purple Rain”, among others.

of possession. Broolsma's bodily experience creates a space where, to use Small's words, "a psychic boundary between the mundane and the supernatural worlds breaks down"; he is able to "leave behind ... everyday identity and become, as we say, possessed".³⁸⁰ Broolsma's performance, for both himself and his audience, expresses, to quote Sontag again, camp's "love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration".³⁸¹ At the same time it can be viewed in terms of Bakhtin's "grotesque realism" in which "the bodily element is deeply positive ... universal, representing all the people This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, and immeasurable. ... The exaggeration has a positive, assertive character [It does] not reflect the drabness of everyday existence".³⁸² We see here the fascinating paradox of the vernacular lipsynching performance: the ways in which it converges with and diverges from everyday life. As such, it suggests a useful proximity to Bakhtin's theorizing of Carnival, a joyful inversion of official culture that emphasizes not only the collective nature of Carnival, but also the ways in which different identities can be temporarily assumed, transgressing the normative rigidity of, for example, gender roles or religious leadership, and permitting a state of possession to be entered into without risk. I will return to these ideas later in the chapter. Presently, however, it will be useful to examine issues concerning the dichotomy of amateur versus professional forms of musicking which, along with copyright ownership and its violation, is deeply implicated in the split of consumer and professional producer; the status quo of popular music consumption, that, I argue, is challenged by vernacular lipsynching.

The "Price of Perfection": The Amateur

By around 1850 amateurs had more or less disappeared from the public stages of the great musical centers of Europe and, a little later, of the United States of America. ... The elimination of the amateur performer—and with even more force, the amateur composer—from the public platform speaks of a profound change of attitude. Musical works were made for playing, and now they are for listening to, and we employ professionals to do our composing and playing for us. A piece of music is written not to give performers something to play but in order to make an impact on a listener, who is its target. ..._the price we pay for perfection is high.³⁸³

³⁸⁰ Small, *Musicking*, 96.

³⁸¹ Sontag, "Camp", 275.

³⁸² Bakhtin, M., "Folk Humour and Carnival Laughter" in Morris, P., (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), 205.

³⁸³ Small, *Musicking*, 72-73.

One way of viewing the internet lipsynching phenomenon is through the frame of commodification and the usurpation of what Christopher Small refers to as our “musical birthright” through a process of capitalist professionalization of musical production, performance, and dissemination. There is certainly the sense that people in the act of lipsynching are doing so as a substitute for “the real thing”, singing (this would chime with those who may reject the idea that the activity is a form of musicking) and that the activity is a capitulation of sorts, a reification of the music’s status as a commodity produced for mass-market consumption, a by-product, in fact, of the grand commodity. “The everyday,” write Toby Miller and A.W. McHoul, “is remade by controllers of capital, but in the space of ordinary people. It is ‘the most universal and the most unique condition, the most social and the most individuated, the most obvious and the best hidden’ [quotation from Lefebvre, H., 1987]”.³⁸⁴

In his Marxist reading of popular music, Adorno refers to the pseudo-individualization of musical materials—the gestural ornamentations that obscure the repetition of basic structures, clichéd practices, predictable chord progressions and the 32-bar template. He argues that consumers of music are like consumers of automobiles who, in Gracyk’s words, “make purchases based on minor differences, but everyone drives away in essentially the same vehicle”.³⁸⁵ Pseudo-individualization, then, points to a lie, generated under capitalism, that plays on the emotions of consumers, not so they can experience something real and truly transformative as they might with a great—non-commodified—work of art, but so they will conform to their narrow roles as consumers. At issue for Adorno is the way this emotional manipulation, or duping, maintains a subjugating status quo. “This emotionality”, he writes,

is catharsis for the masses, but catharsis which keeps them all the more firmly in line. One who weeps does not resist any more than one who marches. Music that permits its listeners the confession of their unhappiness reconciles them, by means of this ‘release’, to their social dependence.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ Miller, T., and McHoul, A.W., *Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (London: Sage, 1998), 10. This includes a quote from Lefebvre, H., “The Everyday and Everydayness”, trans. Levich, C., Kaplan, A., and Ross, K., *Yale French Studies*, 73, (1987), 7-11.

³⁸⁵ Gracyk, T. A., “Adorno, Jazz, and the Aesthetics of Popular Music”, *The Musical Quarterly*, 76/4 (1992), 529.

³⁸⁶ Adorno, T. W., “On Popular Music”, in Adorno, T. W., *Essays on Music*, Leppert, R., (ed.), trans. Gillespie, S., (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 462.

Developing these ideas, Adorno and Horkheimer in their critique of the “culture industry” write:

[t]he technology of the culture industry is no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of work and that of the social system. The need which might resist central control has already been suppressed by the control of the individual consciousness. The step from the telephone to the radio has clearly distinguished the roles. The former still allowed the subscriber to play the role of subject, and was liberal. The latter is democratic: it turns all participants into listeners and authoritatively subjects them to broadcast programmes which are all exactly the same. No machinery of rejoinder has been devised, and private broadcasters are denied any freedom. They are confined to the apocryphal field of the ‘amateur’, and also have to accept organization from above.³⁸⁷

Adorno/Horkheimer’s reading is particularly interesting when considering the impact of recording and the internet on the idea of the “amateur”. It illustrates a culture industry that uses the advance of technology to maintain control, disenfranchising the amateur, indeed, dehumanizing him or her, even as s/he is made to feel that the products of culture are plentiful, closer than ever, within her/his grasp. While written long before the internet and social networking, the essay might be read as an appeal for these more recent technologies; when Adorno and Horkheimer write that “No machinery of rejoinder has been devised” we can imagine such a technology as the internet as something to be desired. With the internet and the so-called democratization³⁸⁸ of information (at least this was its promise) we believed, at last, that here *was* the “machinery of rejoinder”. Yet Adorno/Horkheimer’s essay remains prescient. Like Nature, Capitalism abhors a vacuum, and the so-called democratization of information that the internet seemed initially to afford is being quickly enfranchised by corporate interests, even on “social networking” sites such as YouTube.

The strong hegemonic cultural/ideological attitudes that developed alongside the professionalization of music remain an obstacle, though, whatever emancipatory potential “technologies of rejoinder” may, in theory, offer. For the denigration of the idea of the “amateur” is by now firmly rooted in Western cultural configurations and, therefore, we, “the humble audience”, become complicit in perpetuating the standard. Part of YouTube’s initial success was their slogan, “Broadcast Yourself”, which

³⁸⁷ Adorno, T. W., and Horkheimer, M., “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”, in Doring, S., (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 30-31.

³⁸⁸ This particular ideal of “democratization” might be referred to as “liberality” in Adorno/Horkheimer’s terms.

highlighted the democratic nature of the medium, and yet this imperative, according to Geert Lovink, “is put into action by less than 1 percent of its users. In this Long Tail age, we know that it’s mainly about ‘Broadcasting to Yourself’. The Internet is used mainly as a mirror”.³⁸⁹ Lovink’s conclusion is consistent with the Adornian idea of “catharsis for the masses” and also implies there is a strong self-censoring mechanism already embedded in “the masses”. In fact, a common trope found in descriptions of lipsynching videos and other amateur offerings on YouTube is that of boredom: “I made this video because I was bored / I didn’t want to study for finals / it was raining / I had nothing better to do, etc”. The claim to boredom as a motivation for a performance appears on the site so often it seems a knee-jerk defense. Such prefacing seems highly contradictory in its motivations, saying, “I know I have no right to claim a space here, but here I am, but only because I was bored, but I hope you enjoy it, but I know I’m no good, etc”. There seems to be a background of cultural insecurity - amounting at times to something like shame - about doing something we in fact enjoy. It is an unhealthy condition.

In proposing the term “musicking”, Small seeks to redeem the legitimacy of the amateur. Small’s project is one of reclamation of what he considers to be an essential part of our being away from western modernity’s professionalization and commodification of music, its “elimination of the amateur performer and composer from the public platform”, and the increasing emphasis on musical stars, which further excludes “non-musicians” (i.e., most of us). The result is a mass disenfranchisement of most people from a musical life; people who, he contends, are then “fated to be no more than consumers ... while a few stars, and their handlers, grow rich and famous through selling us what we have been led to believe we lack”. Small asks:

if everyone *is* born capable of musicking, how is it that so many people in Western industrial societies believe themselves to be incapable of the simplest musical act? If they are so, and it seems that many genuinely are, it must be either because the appropriate means for developing the latent musicality have been absent at those crucial times [of early development] ... or more often, I believe, because they have been actively taught to be unmusical.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁹ Lovink, G., “The Art of Watching Databases: Introduction to the Video Vortex Reader”, in Lovink, G., and Niederer, S., *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures), 11.

³⁹⁰ Small, *Musicking*, 210.

This is a crucial point. Small talks about the experience of all too many children whose teachers “suggest” they mime to the songs during their school choir concerts because they aren’t good enough to sing with the rest of the children. The message to such children: you’ll spoil the thing, the music; we can’t have your bad singing spoiling the impression we wish to make on the audience or the experience enjoyed by the rest of us. Their first experience with lipsynching is exclusionary and demoralizing—an enforced humiliation, a punishment for a lack they didn’t up until this time know they had. The vernacular lipsynching video performance, although it does not in any way presume that its practitioners are non-musical even in the traditional sense, can be seen, on the face of it anyway, as a kind of self-negation, a handing over the vocal duties to the professionals. Be that as it may, I would like to argue that it is *also* a form of *reclamation*. If, as Small asserts, we are robbed by the forces of commodification and professionalization from our right to see ourselves as musical, here we see people in the process, in the ritual act, as I shall argue later, of stealing something of it back.

It is useful to look once again at the words of Garrison Keillor (from his monologue, ‘Me and Choir’), which I used earlier in the thesis as the epigraph to the Introduction (see page 1) and which bears repeating here:

[After choir practice I] go home in disgrace and go to my room and lie on my bed and wonder why god was so cruel to me, when what I most want to be in life is a singer. To be like Elvis, or be like Ezio Pinza, or be like George Beverly Shea! And stand up on stage somewhere, with light all over me, and sing to people in a marvellous voice that would tell people that life was full of magnificent surprises! And instead, he gave me a voice that tells people to ‘look out!’, ‘be careful!’. And so, to make myself feel better, I do as I always do and put on a record of Ezio Pinza from *South Pacific*... and pretend it’s me singing before a vast audience of people who’ve come to hear me. And I close my eyes as the music starts, and I face the dresser and the window, and I throw my head back, and I open my mouth and I mouth the words; just as my mother walks into the room with a load of socks in her hands and walks in front of me--between me and the footlights--puts the socks in the drawer, looks at me, walks out.³⁹¹

Keillor’s adolescent self performs this ritual so that he may “sing to people in a marvellous voice that would tell people that life was full of magnificent surprises!”. He performs a corrective, sets the world straight, enacting ideal relationships,³⁹² *as he sees*

³⁹¹ Keillor, G., “Me and Choir”, *The News from Lake Wobegon: Spring*, audio CD released by High Bridge Company, 1998.

³⁹² Small, *Musicking*, 105. Small’s discussion of “ideal relationships” will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5.

them, between himself and others, himself and the world, up until the point at which his mother interrupts him and re-establishes the social order that he longs to subvert and control. Singing for Keillor is more than a dream of celebrity. Singing “[t]akes you back... to a time before you could talk, before you were smart”³⁹³, and its suppression is therefore a trauma of profound, even primal, loss. According to Small, “The voice is at the centre of all musical activity, but it is all too easy to silence and very hard to reactivate, since those who have been silenced in this way have been wounded in a very intimate and crucial part of their being”.³⁹⁴ Even with a musical practice that is to outsiders as seemingly non-musical as lipsynching, its practitioners feel powerfully invested in their performances, feel sincerely that they have “voice”. Performers whose videos have been censored for copyright infringement (as corporate forces seek to reclaim their own “rights”) express feelings of being “silenced”, of being wounded. I will explore some examples of this in the next section.

Corporate vs. Personal Investments: Copyright and Censorship

Since the rise of the internet lipsynching video, issues of copyright have formed an area of some contention. The use of copyrighted material in these videos is, frankly, unlawful and some corporations, most notably among the largest ones, Warner’s, E.M.I., and Universal, have taken action to suppress such instances of copyright infringement. Lawsuits have been filed against YouTube and vimeo.com and in some cases agreements have been struck with music corporations whereby the social media sites act as self-censors, policing their own users for “copyright violations” and removing offending videos, or at least stripping the audio files at issue from the videos, or else adding advertising materials to the video in a process known as monetization. Software has been developed for the purpose of detecting (as a background operation) copyrighted material and automatically removing it from video-sharing sites. During the course of my research I have seen many videos removed, monetized, or stripped of their audio because of copyright violations. Occasionally, though, I have seen them restored or reposted. The policing of videos seems random and a bit capricious: a kind of copyright speed trap for lipsynchers. User and audience responses to the removal or muting of lipsynch videos are often emotional, sometimes angry. Lipsynch performers often cry “Fair Use!”, though Fair Use laws as they stand do not cover this kind of activity and vary from country to country. When, for example, videos by a popular

³⁹³ Keillor, “Me and Choir”.

³⁹⁴ Small, *Musicking*, 212.

lipsynching duo B&B Style began to be targeted, the two friends produced a new video—“B&B Fading Away Compilation”—lamenting what they saw as the demise of something very close to their hearts (*see DVD2 > Chapter 5: Vernacular Lipsynch Videos > Group 2 > track 1: B&B Style – ‘Fading Away Compilation’*). The video, a self-tribute, is a montage of clips from their videos set to slow, melancholy string music, and includes the text:

Slowly, B&B Style is being silenced by YouTube.
Some videos have been taken off ...
Others have been muted.
We’ve enjoyed our stay ...
But it appears we are no longer welcome.
[montage of clips]
Thank you for your support.
Enjoy the videos ...
While they last.³⁹⁵

The maudlin tone of the video is in some ways a comic device (used to perhaps distance themselves from the charge of self-pity or of taking themselves too seriously), but the message is clear. In their introductory comments to the video they write, “Just because we’re not producing videos any more doesn’t mean YouTube has to pull our old videos off. Sure, we used songs without permission. Who doesn’t? This video [the Fading Away Compilation] might be muted soon, too. We love our fans and supporters and we know they love us too. And for that reason ... we’re stickin’ it to The Man!”.

Another performer whose lipsynching videos were censored, Eleanor Guerrero (in her YouTube vlog, *The Eleanor Show*), produced a tearful post when her lipsynching videos were identified for copyright violation. In the first instance, instead of removing the copyrighted material, the copyright holder, Universal Music, simply monetized the video in question. This prompted a long vlog post in which Eleanor grappled with the issue of copyright, defending both herself *and* the copyright holders in alternate fashion. Her self-debate is a characteristic blend of respect for (or at least acknowledgement of) corporate investments while claiming legitimacy for her considerable personal investments.

Even though I’m not making any money off it, even though I’m not getting anything from it, they’re going to take my art and use it to sell

³⁹⁵ B&B Style, “Fading Away Compilation (B&B Style)”, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=0v8XwfnpeeI> (January 2009).

things. Which, great, I guess I'm taking *their* art and using it for my own gains and purposes, but. And then there's the whole thing about where does the art begin and end? And how successful are my videos because of the songs that I choose and I am creating to, and how much of it is my performance? Do I continue to choose to violate copyright infringement? God, it's a really tough call. Because I pick those songs because they resonate with me, they cause me to be excited, they rev my creative juices, and they provide a starting point. Maybe I don't get that starting point anymore. I don't know. So that's the conundrum I'm in right now. ... Of course, I have a lot of ethical beliefs about things, and now I'm all conflicted. So I guess I could produce 100% original content, which they say in the YouTube rules ... but, God, that's really fuckin' hard to do. ... How would you all have *found* my videos if it weren't for the songs? So that's a valid claim. There's a significant weight to the fact that I'm using somebody else's music. Even if they yank down every single one of my videos, at least I'm producing something. I mean, I guess they could come and sue me. ... although I think [the video] would be positive for the song because it provides publicity, which is the rationale for slapping their advertisement on it, and I guess I just have to live with that.³⁹⁶

It is interesting to note how she refers to her lipsynching performances as “art”, a position she would defend again in a later vlog post created after two more of her videos were targeted for violations. Her grief expressed in the second post is evident. The censorship of her videos, she reports, is unbearable to her, infringing as it does on her own *creative* rights as she sees them.

Welcome to a new day for the Eleanor Show. This morning, two more videos were flagged for copyright infringement, and this time [the copyright holders] ... stripped the videos of the audio. So now I'm dancin' around to nothing. It seems like they're coming up with new and inventive ways to torture me. And it *is* rather torturous to put so much of your heart and creative being into something and have it taken away. I guess in 2009 I will no longer be violating copyright because I can't take it. ... I'm not stopping [making lipsynching videos] because it's great. I love it; I don't want to stop. ... The aesthetic of the internet is authentic, is it not? I mean, that's what's supposed to be most compelling about this stuff. The vulnerability and the authenticity of the people who are producing, and that they're talking from their hearts and talking about things that are important to them and they are producing things that are important to them. You know, I thought that when I started this I'd give myself a year, and that [my videos] would be instantly viral. And if it didn't happen in a year then I would quit. And so now its coming up on two years, and I thought, 'Well, I'm not viral, but here I am, still producing, performing'. Because it comes from my heart and because [she becomes tearful] it's something I feel like I have to give. And so,

³⁹⁶ Guerrero, Eleanor, “Eleanor Show #44—What Are the Rights of Copy?”, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=fDpGZP1ymEk> (May 2008).

regardless of what anyone thinks I'm gonna keep putting stuff out there.³⁹⁷

After this, Eleanor did produce more lipsynching videos but, in order to avoid further censure, she performed only to recordings by an unsigned group who had asked her to make the videos for their own publicity purposes. Although she said that she loved this group's music and loved performing their songs, the new videos lacked the spark of her earlier efforts. It is tempting to propose that the elimination of the act of choosing for herself was to blame; as quoted earlier, she is clear about what motivates her: "I pick those songs"—referring to the copyrighted material which has been censored—"because they resonate with me, they cause me to be excited, they rev my creative juices, and they provide a starting point".

An even more impassioned response to audio disabling comes from the SPCA of Wake County,³⁹⁸ in North Carolina, who had appropriated ABBA's "Take a Chance on Me", in a lipdub video they created as part of a fundraising drive for their animal shelter's pet adoption program. After the audio track was disabled they posted this to their website:

This silly little video that we made with a stolen song changed lives. In fact the video might have actually, literally saved a human life or two. That might be worth stealing a piece of intellectual property for. At least that's what I'm starting to wonder. There is nothing like being exposed to people's pain and knowing you can help make it better to make you question what you thought was important.³⁹⁹

The organization came up with a creative solution to the problem. They immediately re-edited the video to include a "handy countdown timer" in the left-hand corner of the screen, "signaling when to press play" and urged viewers to either purchase the song and synchronize it with the video as per the on-screen instructions, or synchronize it with another YouTube video featuring the same song (they provided the link). A page on their website was devoted to the "Complete Story of the 'Best Pet Adoption Video Ever'" that explained the history of the video's making, the responses the organization had received on its posting and the story of the copyright violation and reactions to it. The text, written by development and fundraising officer, Mondy Lamb, includes

³⁹⁷ Guerrero, Eleanor, "Eleanor Show 52 – Great Flaming Balls of Change", <http://youtube.com/watch?v=EO9JzRQV82Y> (January 2009).

³⁹⁸ SPCA is the acronym for The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the American branch of the RSPCA.

³⁹⁹ SPCA of Wake County, "SPCA of Wake County Lip Dub Video", <http://www.spcawake.org/site/PageServer?pagename=LipDubVideo> (September 2011).

commentary on the practice of making lipdub videos in general terms in an effort to justify the use of the copyrighted material. She writes about the proliferation and popularity of such videos saying, “User-created content (often silly videos we ‘regular-joes’ make at home with hand-held cameras) [have become] plentiful, free advertisements for songs ... The video itself becomes a nice little piece of free advertising for the song. A tacit quid pro quo. Seeing other user-created content featuring ABBA songs led me to be nonchalant because we were just another ‘regular joe’ making a homespun video”. The video then become a viral hit, which brought it to the attention of the songwriters’ legal team but also created a passionate following.

Lamb writes:

People emailed us from Chile, from Japan, from Spain, from Bulgaria and more. And they pretty much said the same exact thing: ‘Thank you for creating this video—it moved me, it inspired me, it lifted my spirits, it gave me hope, it made me feel like I’m not alone because I care about animals, too’. And then there were the posts that brought us to our knees. Such as, ‘I am at a low point in my life, and think there is nothing left for me here and then I saw your video. It saved me. *It saved me.*’ There were others like this. Personal pain and heartache spilled out in the emails and posts shared with us from across the WORLD that this video helped heal their pain because it simply made them happy.

It is no doubt true that part of the video’s appeal and one reason for such heartfelt responses was the video’s subject matter and the inclusion of adorable, homeless pets in the lip dub—YouTube, after all, was founded on the spread of cuteness and the stories of underdogs (no pun intended), and here you had both—yet, as Lamb explains, the fact that the organization chose to do a lipdub instead of some other kind of documentary video showing the activities of the animal shelter was inspired by a belief that “happiness and joy will move more people to action than sadness and guilt ever will”. As much as the puppies and kittens contributed, the strong appeal of this particular video was also in large part due to the embodiment of the “stolen song” in the bodies of the shelter personnel taking part in the lip dub and the feeling of *joie de vivre* it communicated. Furthermore, the participatory nature of lipsynching, which is perhaps most especially demonstrated in the lip dub format, communicates a spirit of involvement. The collective interpretation of the song exhibited by the lipsynch performers enlarges the material—breaks it open—in ways that invites audience members to “join in”, be a part (of the song, the community of performers, and the activities and purposes of the location on display) (*see DVD2 > Chapter 5: Vernacular*

Lipsynch Videos > Group 2 > track 2: SPCA of Wake County Lipdub – ‘Take a Chance on Me’).

While the intricacies of Fair Use and copyright law are not covered in this thesis,⁴⁰⁰ the creative process is. Among those affected by the corporate purges, it was the perceived insult to what they viewed as acts of creativity that was most keenly felt. The strong feelings expressed by many lipsynchers and commenters contained sentiments of feeling betrayed, of loss, of anger at the myopia and self-interest of corporate institutions, and feelings of helplessness. The censorship of these videos was often felt as a personal attack, e.g., B&B Style: “It appears we are no longer welcome”; Eleanor Guerrero: “It seems like they’re coming up with new and inventive ways to torture me”. Their complaints were not limited to the loss of individual videos or beloved performers. The purges were also occasion for commentary concerning a corporate culture that does not value or respect the opinions of its consumers or understand their creative efforts⁴⁰¹; a culture that seems willfully to misunderstand the personal investments that its own products inspire. People expressed their anger at an industry that in their view does not even understand its own products, or how they are used, or what role they play in people’s lives—how they create meaning and social connectedness—the way their products, in fact, have *always* been circulated and shared among friends.

Arguments made by performers and commenters defending the practice usually follow one or all of the following sentiments: 1) it wasn’t hurting anyone; 2) it made our lives better; 3) no one made any money off of it; 4) it’s free publicity for the song/artist; 5) we worked so hard on it; 6) we loved it/shared it/will always think of it when we hear this song. Most crucially, perhaps, many comments focus on the ways in which such corporate tampering was ruining the spirit and purpose of YouTube itself. The YouTube of 2014 is undeniably a very different place from YouTube, circa 2005-7. While the spirit of the amateur still exists on the site one would not necessarily know it at first glance. Although new cat videos, to cite the most obvious example, continue to be posted apace, as well as lipsynching videos, other types of fan videos, animations, musical performances, etc., the home page directs the user to mostly *commercial*

⁴⁰⁰ A useful discussion can be found in McLeod, K., *Freedom of Expression: Overzealous Copyright Bozos and Other Enemies of Creativity*, (New York: Doubleday, 2005).

⁴⁰¹ Many commenters on the SPCA video, for instance, scorned ABBA for not supporting the video and vowed to boycott their music.

content provided by the major entertainment outlets. Usually the only hint of non-commercial content will be found under the heading, “Popular on YouTube”, which usually shows a mix of commercial content and perhaps the latest user-generated videos to go viral. Of course, the search engine will bring up amateur content, but search algorithms have changed so that commercial content and “suggestions” with only tangential connections to the user’s search parameters are often featured or promoted among results that more faithfully follow the original search. For some the Carnival, in which they could inhabit new roles and play out desires suppressed by the official order, is cancelled. The people lamenting the demise of YouTube were/are responding to a perceived loss of personal and creative agency.

Lipsynch Performance, Musicking, and Ritual

Having outlined above some of the issues pertaining to the practical aspects of vernacular lipsynching I would now like to look in more hermeneutic depth into three theoretical perspectives which might be applied to contemporary amateur lipsynch practice: ritual, the soundtracked life, and collective lipsynching (often referred to as “lipdub”).² Christopher Small’s theory of musicking, invoked several times already through this thesis, provides a useful tool with which to understand the activities of YouTube lipsynchers as constituting musical practice and therefore serving a *ritual* function. Ritual, according to Small, is an essential element of “musicking”:

The elaborated patterns of gesture that we call ritual bring into existence relationships between those taking part, which mimic, or dramatize if you like, that set of ideal human relationships whose origin the myth relates. ... It is very important to realize that in taking part in a ritual we do not only see and hear, listen and watch, or even taste, smell, touch, but we also *act*, and it is in the bodily experience of *performing the actions* in the company of others that the meaning of taking part lies. The more actively we participate, the more each one of us is empowered to act, to create, to display, then the more satisfying we shall find the performance of ritual. This is not surprising, since in acting, creating, and displaying we are bringing into existence for the duration of the ritual a society in which we ourselves are empowered to act, to create, and to display [emphasis mine].⁴⁰²

Although Billy Reid’s ‘Lipsynching to the Song’ comically identified some of the derivative behaviours shared by thousands of the performers suddenly appearing on YouTube—reflecting a perception of these videos as a trivial pastime of bored suburban teens—his observations also held deeper significance. When Reid sings, “I don’t care

⁴⁰² Small, *Musicking*, 105.

what you think of that ‘cause I do what I do” he is enacting a process by which the performers reclaim their *right* “to act, to create, and to display”, even in the face of appearing ridiculous. The repetition by lipsynchers of stereotyped moves lifted from professional music videos and copied from each other involves, as we have seen, a process of ritualization. Bored, suburban, or otherwise, the (mostly) young people involved in the making of these lipsynch videos are parroting but also *creating* a public language with which they can explore private identities. They appropriate familiar musical and extramusical forms of expression (celebrity personae, for example) in order to make connections between themselves and unknown others, their larger cultural milieus, as well as local settings.

Music, in Small’s account, is first and foremost “something people do”.⁴⁰³ In this paradigm music is not created, nor can it be experienced, in the abstract; it cannot, in other words, be defined solely by the musical work conceived of as the product of an individual composer—not the discreet notated works of Western classical musics, nor, for my purposes here, the recorded popular song - but by the full cohort of experiential practices of creation, performance, and reception. Small’s idea is simple; music is not a noun but a verb, an activity. Further, music is not an exclusive or exclusionary activity of celebrated elites, nor does it communicate meaning by a unilateral, hierarchical transmission from composer through performer to listener. Small believes that all people are born with the gift of music as they are with speech. He states:

The fundamental nature and meaning of music lie not in objects, not in musical works at all, but in action, in what people do. It is only by understanding what people do as they take part in a musical act that we can hope to understand its nature and the function it fulfils in human life.⁴⁰⁴

Within a musical context, writing, performing, listening, recording, dancing are all forms of “musicking” and the combination of these activities and their accompanying social relationships and practices form that which he calls “musicking”. Performance is not merely a delivery system for a musical object but one of a diverse spectrum of activities, which together constitute musicking. He further states:

The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening [whether located in physical circumstance, memory, or recontextualization] a set of

⁴⁰³ Small, *Musicking*, 8.

⁴⁰⁴ Small, *Musicking*, 8.

relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conveniently thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance.⁴⁰⁵

Small argues that ritual is the “mother of all arts” and describes how in pre-modern society, “The musical performance was part of that larger dramatic enactment which we call ritual, where the members of the community acted out their relationships and their mutual responsibilities and the identity of the community as a whole was affirmed and celebrated”.⁴⁰⁶

Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories on “carnival laughter” and the “second life” in medieval European society offer another useful frame. “Carnival festivities”, he writes, “and the comic spectacles and rituals connected with them ... offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world of man, and of human relations; [the participants] built a second world and a second life outside officialdom”.⁴⁰⁷ We may view the practice of vernacular lipsynching performance, then, as a ritualistic act, in Bakhtin's words, of “denial, revival, and renewal”; as ritual it serves a function similar to pre-modern Carnival festivities. One “officialdom”, for example, that is resisted in the case of vernacular lipsynching, is a hierarchical popular music industry which produces “audiences”, i.e., consumers, who exist solely in order to consume their products. Through lipsynching individual personal investments and creative engagements are revived and reclaimed. Another site of resistance is against the officialdom of larger Western hegemonic ideological formations—masculinist, rockist, Capitalist—which can be seen to “coerce” individuals into narrowly defined taste communities and, especially (in the case of many lipsynching videos), gender roles. These hegemonic, “ecclesiastical” and “political” forces that would seek to limit and control avenues of self-expression are hereby cast off and challenged. Even if only temporarily, the individual and the community are enlarged and enriched by the vernacular practice of lipsynching; a second life is formed which transgresses the suppressive/repressive functioning of official organizations and structures. The performers are latter-day Carnival revelers creating for themselves and their viewers a second life that contradicts the conventional functions they are made to serve in “real” life.

⁴⁰⁵ Small, *Musicking*, 31.

⁴⁰⁶ Small, *Musicking*, 39.

⁴⁰⁷ Bakhtin, “Folk Humour”, 197.

Further, some lipsyncher's enjoyment and laughter at the song and themselves, in the form of camp especially, is akin to "Carnival laughter" as identified by Bakhtin, and as such, like Carnival laughter, "is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negation is completely alien to folk culture".⁴⁰⁸ Rather than simply exploiting a song or performing identity deemed ridiculous by forces of culture (the Spice Girls, as we have seen, are an oft-visited site of ridicule by boys), the parodic lipsynch performance subverts the official cultural codes and allows its participants (viewers included) to partake in alternative identities at a safe, yet fully embodied, distance. It is the "truth" that lurks behind the "joke". We might borrow Sontag's words as she defines 'camp': parodic lipsynching as camp is "a kind of love, love for human nature. It relishes, rather than judges, the little triumphs and awkward intensities of 'character'. ... Camp taste identifies with what it is enjoying. People who share this sensibility are not laughing at the thing they label as 'camp', they're enjoying it. Camp is a tender feeling".⁴⁰⁹

As if to support these ideas, and Small's assigning a central place to ritual, Douglas Wolk, giving an account of Gary Brolsma's Numa Numa video, rhapsodizes:

Brolsma's video single-handedly justifies the existence of webcams. ... Suddenly the big difference between Brolsma's video and, for instance, the infamous video of a kid practicing his light-sabre moves became apparent. Everyone laughed at the Star Wars Kid; everyone wanted to be the Numa Numa Guy—to feel that un-self-consciously self-conscious joy he felt in his body, flailing around in his chair and lip-synching a stupid pop song in a language he didn't understand. ... [The thousands of imitators] aren't mocking the Numa Numa Guy; they're venerating him. They are geeks honouring the King of the Geeks, and they're beautiful to see, because they're replicating and spreading his happiness. They're following a ritual that's meaningful if not yet venerable: learning the dance, lip-synching the song, documenting their performance just so, making it available for the world to see.⁴¹⁰

Wolk's "ritual that's meaningful if not yet venerable" in which participants are "replicating and spreading [Brolsma's] happiness" resonates coherently with Bakhtin's Carnival and Small's musicking.

⁴⁰⁸ Bakhtin, "Folk Humour", 200.

⁴⁰⁹ Sontag, "Camp", 291-2.

⁴¹⁰ Wolk, D., "The Syncher, Not the Song" *Believer*, June/July 2006, http://www.believermag.com/issues/200606/?read=article_wolk

On YouTube it is possible to view countless other videos that exemplify the ideas explored thus far and which also resonate with Wolk's "ritual that's meaningful if not yet venerable". In one, a teenage girl (YouTube name, 'TheBeatlesToday') is wearing a red wig, styled in a 1960's "flip", as she lipsynchs to The Beatles' Hey Jude (*see DVD2 > Chapter 5: Vernacular Lipsynch Videos > Group 2 > track 3: TheBeatlesToday – 'Hey Jude'*). She regards the camera earnestly, like a friend. She holds a prop microphone to her mouth: the literal version of the proverbial hairbrush. In terms of Altman's "sound hermeneutic" (which determines that a disembodied—recorded—voice must be inhabited, if only imaginatively, in a plausible body), it seems at first *implausible* that hers is the body that Paul McCartney's voice conjures—or that his is the voice conjured by her body. It is too easy to conjure for *ourselves* the iconic body that we know belongs to the iconic voice. In the case of a song and voice so immediately recognizable the experience for the viewer can be somewhat jarring. We may even feel a spike of protest: how absurd, we might say, how presumptuous.⁴¹¹ For there is no parody here, only a girl in a wig, lipsynching to the famous voice, in a room we have never seen. 'TheBeatlesToday', however, is engaged not only in an act of appropriation but, through appropriation, is enacting a ritual in which she can, according to Small's claim for the function and meaning of musicking, "affirm and celebrate ... relationships through musicking" in order to "explore and celebrate our sense of who we are, to make us feel more fully ourselves".⁴¹² The relationships being celebrated in her performance of 'Hey Jude' are first and foremost those between herself and McCartney and the meanings she derives from the music in which she plays a central role. In her other lipsynching videos,⁴¹³ she, without exception, lipsynchs to McCartney's voice, never assuming the positions of the other three members of the group, and thus demonstrates a singular devotion to—and identification with—Beatle Paul.

On display are hero worship and love, romantic love and the love of the dedicated fan. At the end of the final verse (running into the "na-na-na-na" coda), when McCartney sings in ascending scale, "... better, better, better, better, better, better, Ooooooh!" his

⁴¹¹ "Scholars have argued that modern fandom is always in some ways an 'improper identity' often interpreted as a 'pathology'" (Cavicchi, D., "Loving Music: Listeners, Entertainments, and the Origins of Music Fandom in Nineteenth-Century America" in Gray, J., Sandvoss, C., and Harrington, C. L., *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 249.

⁴¹² Small, *Musicking*, 142.

⁴¹³ All of which, including 'Hey Jude', have been removed from YouTube due to copyright violation.

voice, embodied in ‘TheBeatlesToday’, is both musical and sexual climax. Although the lone figure on the screen suggests a sense of onanistic pleasure as she gives herself fully to McCartney’s climactic wail, the girl is fulfilling two basic desires, which, in any official sense, are outside her grasp: the desire to *have* McCartney and the desire to *be* McCartney, the latter of which comes across as the more powerful—and even, in the logic of the appropriation, more attainable—desire. Crucially, the lipsynching performance differs from other types of fan activities, such as collecting, discussing, even swooning over images of pop stars, in the positions taken up by its participants. For the length of the performance, a *second life* (Bakhtin) is not a dreamed-of condition but experienced in the ritual process—the “bodily experience of *performing the actions*” (Small)—wherein the meaning of those actions lies. To lipsynch, then, as a fan, and to circulate one’s lipsynchs publicly is to participate in rituals of musicking. These rituals facilitate the formation of social relationships, as well as establishing identities specific to the ritual circumstances, and at the same time evoking an ideal world brought temporarily into being. Small again:

Who we are is how we relate. So it is that to affirm and celebrate our relationships through musicking, especially in the company of like-feeling people, is to explore and celebrate our sense of who we are, to make us feel more fully ourselves. . . . we have been allowed to live for awhile in the world as it ought to be, in the world of right relationships.⁴¹⁴

I should now like to examine in a little more depth the specific ways that lipsynching, as a fan activity, might transform the relations of an audience or fan community to the recorded songs around which such groupings form.

Lipsynching and Fandom

The lipsynchers as musickers inhabit more than an idealized sense of the world. They inhabit the *songs* themselves. In addition to affirming a sense of ideal relationships or an ideal self, the feelings of “rightness” that Small describes above can be applied to relationships with recorded songs as shared cultural objects of “exploration and affirmation” and personal extensions of self. For Eisenberg there is a mythic aspect to our relationships with songs that we find meaningful, insofar as “[E]ach playing of a given record is an instance of something timeless. The original musical event . . . exists, if it exists anywhere, outside history. In short, it is a *myth*, just like the myths ‘re-

⁴¹⁴ Small, *Musicking*, 142.

enacted' in primitive ritual".⁴¹⁵ Playings of a record, then, can be thought of in terms of private rituals of listening that mark anniversaries, accompany holidays or celebrate/commemorate certain times of the day, certain activities, such as waking, driving, etc.⁴¹⁶ The fact of the music being in the form of a record "makes private ritual convenient, but cheap",⁴¹⁷ and though there are echoes of an Adornian critique of pseudo-individualization here, Eisenberg nevertheless foregrounds the possibility of the meaningful ritualistic pairing of "cheap reproductions" with both the important and the trivial events that constitute and structure a life. The very "mythic" nature of the original musical event invites such appropriations, as I shall now discuss.

Wurtzler understands the recorded song as positing what he terms an "absent original"⁴¹⁸, the imagined "live" event of musical production whose "absence" correlates quite closely to the mythic dimension of Eisenberg's recorded songs. Eisenberg states: "[T]he original musical event ... exists ... outside history ... it is a *myth*"⁴¹⁹. Even contemporary audiences who are accustomed to the practices of multi-tracking and digital enhancements, imagine a form of absent-original event - they "mythologize", in Eisenberg's terms, an absent-original - alongside the image, constructed or observed, of the performers, which may also include the performers' biographies, their contexts and bodies of work, the musical culture they represent, and so on, as well as each individual listener's personal experiences and associations with a given recording, artist, or musical scene or genre. Wurtzler explains:

All representations posit an absent original whether such events are understood as fictional (*Blade Runner*) or "real" (Coltrane at the Village Vanguard). ... Any representation can be thought to consist of the moment or act of representing, the absent event posited by the representation, and a consumer's encounter with both.⁴²⁰

The "absent original", then, can be a product of that encounter—an "original" created after the fact, an *imagined* original produced by the listener at the point of consumption—even as our experience of the recording suggests a "present" original, the

⁴¹⁵ Eisenberg, *Recording Angel*, 50.

⁴¹⁶ He also talks about the "anti-custom" or ironic use of recordings as part of ritual ceremonies, e.g. listening to Frank Zappa's Mothers of Invention on Mothers Day or the contrary promotion of songs such as 'Killing in the Name' by Rage Against the Machine, to give a fairly recent example (2009), for the UK's yearly "Christmas Single".

⁴¹⁷ Eisenberg, *Recording Angel*, 54.

⁴¹⁸ Wurtzler, "She Sang Live", 88.

⁴¹⁹ Eisenberg, *Recording Angel*, 41.

⁴²⁰ Wurtzler, "She Sang Live", 88.

“authentic” material we imagine to have been situated at the point of creation brought forward, experienced anew. So with representations of sound recording we are talking about a perceived indexicality: an imaginative construction of time, place, material and situation *in situ*, with a given audition. Lipsynchers are referencing an idea of an absent-original and in doing so are constructing their own performances around a “tissue of quotations”, to use Barthes’ terminology from his “The Death of the Author”⁴²¹, that constitute *relationships* formed with the material over time and then re-animated in their own bodies, which have their own histories, their own set of relationships to the materials.

Queen’s ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, a popular recording for internet lipsynchers, provides an interesting case study in this respect. In the majority of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ lipsynch videos that I reviewed, the performers combine visual elements from both Queen’s original music video and the headbanging-in-the-“Mirth-Mobile” scene from the film *Wayne’s World*. The fascinating chain of production and reception begins with the original studio recording (Wurtzler’s “absent original”) which in turn is visually represented and aurally reproduced in Queen’s music video, which combines “live” concert footage - synched to the studio recording - with phantasmic staging of bottom-lit faces in the dark and other “artistic” gestures. Then, throughout the 1980s, “headbanging”, a forward, thrashing movement of the head and neck mainly associated with Heavy Metal performers and audiences, became solidified as a performance convention and entered the lexicon of rock music performance and consumption more generally which, in the 1990s, was reproduced and commodified in the scene from *Wayne’s World* in which the characters sing and lipsynch to ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ and “headbang” in unison to the hard rock guitar solo that follows the “opera” section of the song. This headbanging then became the new point of reference for behaviours that already belonged to fans of the song (who recognized themselves in the scene from *Wayne’s World*) and similar genres but are now associated with *Wayne’s World* as an originating text. This culminates in the private, shared, and then widely disseminated YouTube lipsynching performances in which the performers do not pay homage to Queen by mimicking the image of a stationary Brian May performing the guitar solo on stage in the original video, but to *Wayne’s World*. As evidenced by their lipsynching videos, the *Wayne’s World* “choreography” has become fixed in people’s minds - and

⁴²¹ Barthes, R., “The Death of the Author” in Barthes, R., *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 146.

bodies; both despite and because it enacted real-world behaviours. It has become, as evidenced by the lipsynching videos, a primary text to which any subsequent performance of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ is associated. The intertextual elements that are seen in these videos act as a cross-authentication, or, at the very least, a company-keeping among absent originals, their new incarnations, and the people who share in the behaviours.

The “absent-original” in this case is subsumed by a popular culture narrative, activated one might say by each repetition and receptive act. It is culture eating itself in a sense, but also a shared building process; it resembles the choreographic conventions of, for example, a Viennese waltz, in which movements shared and strictly adhered to form a mass re-enactment of behaviours that, while conservative and largely unoriginal as conventions, confer a sense of belonging to a subset of the population and sets the participants apart from the uninitiated. The history of popular-music reception is laden with the tension of a mass audience of “true” fans and participants defining themselves against an idea of an inauthentic mass of the uninitiated by dint of generation,⁴²² class, gender, race, education, and other social categories of difference. Popular-music fandom is therefore formed through shared experience which defines itself against perceived opposition defined through elitist—even as it may wear the clothes of populist—exclusion. As with the very idea of authenticity, inclusion in music taste groups is defined in large part by what it is not, even to the point that fans of certain songs or groups disavow their allegiance when a group becomes popular, “sells out”, or in any way becomes associated with, or appreciated by, the “wrong” audience. They mourn a kind of loss of “their” music when it is embraced by a larger, more heterogeneous (commercially created) audience.

On the face of things, it would be possible to propose that such fans are simply the victims of pseudo-individualisation, and are duped into believing that a mass-produced artefact was in fact produced for their benefit. Their sense of loss, in such a reading, would be delusional: it was never theirs, and the producers could not care less about their feelings. However, is it possible to think of their (actually quite legitimate) reactions as a perceived loss of aura, the loss of a kind of aura conferred on the musical object through a sense of personal “ownership”? And if this is so, is such a sense of aura

⁴²² Generational gate-keeping became particularly acute starting in the 1950s with the advent of rock ‘n’ roll music, seen as “belonging to” an emergent youth culture.

defined not by Benjamin's singular original, but by an individual, or limitedly collective, act of *reception* in which the "aura" exists—is in fact *produced* - within the receiver through identification or even a sense of authorship? In essence: the personal intimacy of internalizing the art object through the individual or collective encounter. Auslander, defining the relationship between the recorded and "the live" in popular-music authentication processes, writes, "The aura is located in a dialectical relation between two cultural objects—the recording and the live performance—rather than perceived as a property inherent in a single object, and it is from this relation of mutuality that both objects derive their authenticity".⁴²³ In lipsynching, then, we can see aura as a relational quality produced not dialectically but in a three-way relation: the recording, the posited though absent "live" performance (in other words, the "absent original"), and the act of reception externalized in the body of the lipsynching performer, which at least in part re-articulates the "absent original" as it is/was imagined by the lipsyncher.

So it is that we might argue for a kind of "originality" that is constructed within the lipsynching performer (who is also, necessarily, as John Peters asserts, a receiver as well⁴²⁴), notwithstanding the fact that the object around which these relations take place is a "mechanically reproduced" one. Michel de Certeau talks about ways that popular culture can be redefined as a series of "combinatory ... modes of consumption". In other words, "how people use a 'formal structure of practice' that engages with goods and services to produce 'everyday creativity'".⁴²⁵ Such experiences of "everyday creativity" are formed out of cultural bricolage, societal norms and expectations, narrational archetypes, childhood memories, repressed desires, and so on. Each individual "user" of such a "formal structure of practice", then, arrives at a unique and individual constellation of materials, which is then articulated to "a public". Aura then, creeps back into the artwork, in my reading of it, but as a *relational* rather than absolute phenomenon. It is something constructed or imagined by the perceiver rather than grounded in the physical existence and historical persistence of an individual object, as with Benjamin's original and auratic artworks. We might therefore ask if the lipsynching receiver/performer of a recording attains a kind of "ownership" of the

⁴²³ Auslander, *Liveness*, 84-85.

⁴²⁴ Peters, *Speaking into the Air*, 7.

⁴²⁵ Miller and McHoul, *Popular Culture*, 11; quoting de Certeau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Rendall, S., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), xiv-xvi.

music, producing their own “original” invested with their individual meaning through a process of interpretation/appropriation?

Allan Moore, though not discussing lipsynching specifically, describes the relationships that music fans in general have to recordings as instances of an “authenticity of experience”.⁴²⁶ Carol Langley, who *is* discussing lipsynching, notes that it “is an active exercise, as opposed to a passive one, requiring the performer to appropriate the song and give its rendition their own particular imprint”.⁴²⁷ The vernacular practice of lipsynching, then, can be seen to articulate the “authenticity of experience” of the music fan in general in a way that brings the lipsyncher’s own “particular imprint” to an audience, and in doing so transforms the situation of reception. The *experience* of the lipsynchers themselves, their engagement with *their* “absent original” through musicking may be said to produce an “original”, if you will, that acquires its own aura that transcends the otherwise (in a conventional reading of Benjamin) non-auratic recorded artefact. Most importantly, there is a process at work here that moves beyond that of *receiver internalization*—which we might think of as similar to Barthes’ “Birth of the Reader”—to that which I call “*receiver externalization*”. Like Barthes’ reader, the lipsyncher eschews the modern “author-god” of the perceived original in order to complete meanings which are made through the receiver’s encounter with a text. The “completion” of the text is enacted by the reader and internalized. For Barthes this differs from the situation pertaining in “ethnographic societies” in which texts were performed by “narrators” (storytellers, shamans, etc.), who were perceived as “mediators” but not originators—carriers but not creators.⁴²⁸ Receiver externalization, in one sense, then, may be seen as a revival of this narrator-mediator function, performing an interpretation of “un-original” materials that they have received for an audience. In a more profound sense, though, lipsynching serves as a unique medium through which a receiver’s interpretation can be articulated, and collectively validated, as a creative act in its own right. By externalizing her reading of a mass-produced recording, the individual, as receiver *and* performer, is empowered by creating a new, unique work out of her own personality, experiences, and any of the various associative scraps by which she is inspired—the “combinatory modes of consumption” of de Certeau’s “everyday creativity”. Further, it is only at the point of externalization that the

⁴²⁶ Moore, A., “Authenticity as Authentication”, *Popular Music*, 21/2, (May 2002), 209-223.

⁴²⁷ Langley, C., “Borrowed Voice: the Art of Lip-synching in Sydney Drag”, *Australasian Drama Studies*, 48, (2006), 5.

⁴²⁸ Barthes, “Death of Author”, 142.

receiver may be able to experience, for herself, hidden, unconscious motivations and desires. The receiver externalization process is therefore a process of self-discovery as well as communication. The example of “TheBeatlesToday” discussed above might well serve as an emblem of such a deep and auratic quality to the act of lipsynching as a fan.

The reaction of viewers to a lipsynch video, however, may be far from celebratory depending on the extent of the viewer’s own sense of personal ownership and their investment in the lipsynched song. Here, I think about phenomena such as “my song” and how they relate to the level of passion in the comments people leave on videos when such personal investments are seen to be breached. Comments such as “You’ve ruined this song for me!” or “I’ll never be able to hear this song again without thinking of this!” are often left. These commenters in a sense forfeit their personal ownership, unwillingly surrendering *their song* to the sullyng incarnation produced by the lipsynching body. By contrast, positive reviews express a sense of joy in what is felt to be a shared communication between like-minded individuals. For these commenters a song is enriched in the recontextualization, and some of them in turn are motivated to produce their own versions, as with the “Numa Numa” imitators.⁴²⁹

Soundtracked Lives

Those of us living in industrialized settings have developed, from the omnipresence of music in our daily lives, a mode of listening dissociated from specific generic characteristics of the music. In this mode we listen “alongside” or simultaneous with other activities.⁴³⁰ [Kassabian]

In chapter one, I briefly introduced the idea of the “soundtracked life”. Based in part on Annahid Kassabian’s work on what she has termed “ubiquitous music”, and the work of others dealing with the social aspects of music in everyday life⁴³¹, the soundtracked life

⁴²⁹ Fabrice Hergott observes, “We listen for what we see: And we see, thinking we listen. These distinctions are part of our contemporary reality: a vast commercial collage rising from everywhere, an unerring chaos, which the act of buying regulates out of necessity. It would be interesting to know whether it is still possible to dissociate a tune from an image, and whether or not it is the latter we remember today when we think we remember the tune” (Hergott, F., *Playback*, (Paris: Paris Musées, 2007), 8.

⁴³⁰ Kassabian: <http://www.echo.ucla.edu/Volume3-issue2/kassabian/Kassabian1.html>

⁴³¹ See Fedorak, S. A., *Pop Culture: The Culture of Everyday Life*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Bull, M., *Sounding out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000); Miller, T., and McHoul, A. W., *Popular Culture and Everyday Life*,

is not an original idea, per se. The phenomenon, if not the term, has been well documented in the studies of Michael Bull, for example⁴³². I however advance the use of “soundtracked life” as a term that provides a useful shorthand for a contemporary cultural condition—a change in the ways that many people “use” music to *accompany* their lives, facilitated by the ubiquity of recorded music and the widespread use of personal stereo devices, and informed by the culturally deeply-entrenched cinematic traditions of sound and image discussed in chapters two through four. The soundtracked life is an important condition in understanding lipsynching, setting, as it did, an initial frame for vernacular lipsynch/lipdub performance as it emerged during the early days of YouTube.⁴³³

Kassabian defines ubiquitous music in part as the music which we “listen ‘alongside’” to, or which we listen to “simultaneous with other activities”. “Ubiquitous listening,” she contends, “blends into the environment, taking place without calling conscious attention to itself as an activity in itself. It is, rather, ubiquitous and conditional, following us from room to room, building to building, and activity to activity”.⁴³⁴ There is a history to the ubiquity of recorded music in public settings—or as it was once commonly referred to, “Elevator Music”⁴³⁵—which emerged in tandem with developments in sound recording and cinema practice outlined in earlier chapters. As such, these different forms in which music has come to mediate public space have served a sort of educational function, conditioning people to expect there to be a musical soundtrack layered over many “non-musical” experiences,⁴³⁶ which plays into the emergence of the soundtracked life. The development of radio in the early twentieth century, for example, paved the way for music designed specifically to work alongside

(London: Sage, 1998); Quiñones, M. G., Kassabian, A., and Boschi, E., (eds.), *Ubiquitous Musics: The Everyday Sounds That We Don't Always Notice*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

⁴³² See Bull, *Sounding out the City*; Bull, M., *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁴³³ I have taken the term from an advertisement slogan for the internet “radio” site Spotify that uses the word ‘soundtrack’ as a verb: “Spotify music for every moment; soundtrack your life”. The adjectival form was drawn from this usage.

⁴³⁴ Kassabian: <http://www.echo.ucla.edu/Volume3-issue2/kassabian/Kassabian1.html>

⁴³⁵ See Lanza, J., *Elevator Music: A Surreal History of Muzak, Easy-Listening, and Other Mood Song*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004, revised edition).

⁴³⁶ There is, it should be noted, a tension generated by putting ubiquitous music, in the terms with which Kassabian frames it, into this constellation of practices. What Kassabian sees as music listened to *alongside* “other” activities—she gives the examples of “listen[ing] to opera in your bathtub and arena rock while riding the bus.” (Kassabian: <http://www.echo.ucla.edu/Volume3-issue2/kassabian/Kassabian1.html>) - would, in the terms within which Small or Eisenberg understand our experience of music in general, be seen (at least potentially in the case of Eisenberg, and certainly in the case of Small) as an part of such activities, and vice versa, regardless of how attentive or disengaged the listening itself might be.

our daily activities. The *Muzak* Corporation, founded not long after public radio, is probably the company most commonly identified with providing “canned” music for corporate settings (to the extent that “muzak”—small ‘m’—along with “elevator music”, has become a generic term for any music perceived as bland or anodyne, music that is “unobtrusively” piped in to public areas).⁴³⁷ Following Muzak’s success, other “audio architecture” providers entered the marketplace to the extent that silence has been identified by some as Muzak’s “biggest competitor”.⁴³⁸ Many have commented in similarly negative terms on the “musicalization of the soundscape”⁴³⁹, some even identifying it as a public health issue. In 1969, for example, the General Assembly of the international Music Council of UNESCO passed a resolution denouncing “the intolerable infringement on individual freedom and of the right of everyone to silence, because of the abusive use, in private and public places, of recorded or broadcast music”, and calling for the initiation of a study “from all angles—medical, scientific and juridical” with “a view to proposing ... measures calculated to put an end to this abuse”.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁷ The Muzak Corporation’s music programs began to accompany the activities of office and factory workers in 1934, but as early as the 1920s, Edison was investigating the connections between music and mood. He subsequently released *Mood Music*, described as a “compilation of 112 Edison Re-Creations [recordings] according to ‘what they will do for you’” (Grajeda, T., “Early Mood Music: Edison’s Phonography, American Modernity and the Instrumentalization of Listening”, in Quiñones, M. G., Kassabian, A., and Boschi, E., (eds.), *Ubiquitous Musics: The Everyday Sounds That We Don’t Always Notice*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 31).

⁴³⁸ Silence has arguably become the exception in our public and, for many of us, private lives. Musician David Byrne laments: “Technology ... has ... flooded the world with music. The world is awash with (mostly) recorded sounds. We used to have to pay for music or make it ourselves; playing, hearing and experiencing it was exceptional, a rare and special experience. Now hearing it is ubiquitous, and silence is the rarity that we pay for and savor (<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/How-Do-Our-Brains-Process-Music-169360476.html>). As early as the 1940s John Cage planned a composition, *Silent Prayer*, “a piece of uninterrupted silence” for sale to the Muzak Corporation, which eventually found its public in 1952 as Cage’s most famous piece, *4’33”*. (Kahn, D., *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 178).

⁴³⁹ Facci, S., “An Anthropology of Soundtracks in Gym Centres”, in Quiñones, M. G., Kassabian, A., and Boschi, E., (eds.), *Ubiquitous Musics: The Everyday Sounds That We Don’t Always Notice* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 140.

⁴⁴⁰ http://www.asiascape.org/resources/publications/asiascape_ops_2.pdf

In 1970, R. Murray Schafer wrote about “sound imperialism” focusing on what he calls the “territorial expansion” of sound consistent with other U.S. and European expansionist behaviours. “Just as we refuse,” he explains, “to leave a space of our environment uncultivated, un-mastered, so too have we refused to leave an acoustic space quiet, un-punctured by sound” (Schafer, *The Book of Noise* quoted on [quiet.org](http://www.quiet.org/noiseletter/spring2007/page1.htm): <http://www.quiet.org/noiseletter/spring2007/page1.htm>). In an implicit verification of the detrimental aspects of this phenomenon, recorded music is also used as a means of torture: “From the trumpets of Joshua’s army at Jericho to the loudspeakers of US Marines blasting AC/DC at the besieged General Noriega” (Cloonan, M., and Johnson, B., “Killing Me Softly With His Song: An Initial Investigation into the use of Popular Music as a Tool of Oppression”, *Popular Music*, 21/1 (2002), 29. In 2009, the “Gitmo Playlist”, was leaked, a documentation of “the most played” popular recordings used to torture inmates at the infamous U.S. military prison installation at Guantanamo Bay. The list included songs such as ‘Baby One More Time’ by Britney Spears, ‘Killing In The Name’ by Rage Against The Machine, ‘Born in the U.S.A.’ by Bruce Springsteen, and the *Sesame Street* theme song, and was condemned by many of the artists represented, who expressed their disapproval at the use of their music for purposes of torture.

The ubiquity of recorded music in our public and private spaces is not, however, universally perceived negatively. By 2014, a number of generations have now been born into a world in which recorded music in one form or another is easily accessible and constitutes a large proportion of their music interactions. Phonograph, radio, jukebox, hi-fi, stereo, Walkman, mp3: a procession of technological advances spanning nearly 130 years have led to some profound changes in, not only our experience of music, but in how we conduct our lives *through* music. This way of listening to, of experiencing, music has become naturalized, and for many is therefore experienced as the way things have always been.⁴⁴¹

Ubiquitous music, then, is one part of a larger socio-cultural process in which people learn to assimilate musical mediation of their activities and the spaces in which these activities occur. Though qualitatively different, the use of personal stereos since the early 1980s has been a significant addition to the ubiquity of music in public life. Together with other less individually-controlled instances of ubiquitous music, with cinema and television presenting realities that are musically accompanied, and with a cultural imagination that encompasses and normalizes these phenomena, personal stereo use has arguably been an equally important factor in the emergence of the soundtracked life. In 2000, Michael Bull reported the findings of his research on personal stereo use. Through the many interviews he conducted, he observed a number of common themes emerging. The interviewees were asked to describe their experiences as users of personal stereos and offer their own speculations on the whys and wherefores of their daily use. A theme of particular interest to my study was the “cinematic nature” of their experiences.⁴⁴² “Users,” he states, “describe filmic experience in a variety of ways. An

⁴⁴¹ Music in public spaces, though, still has the capacity to irritate. A new term, “Sodcasting”, for example, has been identified to describe derogatorily, as the name implies, “[t]he act of playing music through the speaker on a mobile phone, usually on public transport. Commonly practiced by young people... with dubious musical taste” (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=sodcasting>). Activist organizations such as Pipedown, the International Campaign for Freedom from Piped Music and Quiet.org continue to work to raise awareness about the detrimental effects of ubiquitous recorded music in public spaces. Founder of Pipedown, Nigel Rogers, explains: “We are not campaigning for the total abolition of piped music, simply for the freedom to go round public places—restaurants, hotels, shopping malls, hospitals, airports, etc.—without having someone else’s idea of good music drummed into you all day and everywhere. For easily the worst thing about piped music... is its infernal, inescapable ubiquity. You can NEVER escape it—even waiting in aircraft to take off, or while on hold on the phone, a distortion of Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* can drive you screaming to the very edge of insanity. Pipedown ... answers a real global need” (Pipedown: <http://www.pipedown.info/>; Quiet.org: <http://www.quiet.org/>). As early as 1935, The Anti-Noise League curated an exhibition called “Noise Abatement Exhibition” in the Science museum in London. Another prominent activist organization, The Noise Abatement Society (<http://noiseabatementociety.com/>), was founded in 1959 in the UK.

⁴⁴² Bull, M., *Sounding out the City*, 86.

initial distinction can be made between specific recreations of filmic-type experience with personal narratives attached to them and more generalized descriptions of the world appearing to be like a film”.⁴⁴³ He observes:

Almost any experience can be construed as filmic by personal-stereo users. . . . Sometimes the physical scene is endowed with new meaning, a background to their imaginary drama, or at other times the drama is redrawn as an interior recollection or mental orientation or mood where the external world isn't really attended to at all.⁴⁴⁴

These observations support my earlier assertions about the ways that cinema soundtracks (and television and music video) have entrained us to the feeling that recorded music follows us from place to place, commenting on our moods and lives. I would like to quote two of Bull's interviewees, “Mags” and “Magnus”, whose experiences encapsulate such feelings:

Mags: “[Playing my Walkman in the rain] makes it filmic. It seems more like a scene and you can imagine yourself as the tortured heroine from this film walking along in the rain and all this score... music blasting! You're the heroine. You can see yourself as if on the screen.”⁴⁴⁵

Magnus: “I have sort of like making my life a film. Like you have the sound, the soundtrack in the back.”⁴⁴⁶

Bull's interviewees are using their personal “soundtrack” as the inspiration for what is in every way a creative act. Describing Mags' experience, Bull explains:

The image [of herself as ‘tortured heroine’] is not specific, it doesn't necessarily remind her of a scene but is rather her own creation taken from a stock of memories of heroines in films half forgotten, scenes barely remembered or scenes from the multitude of pop videos watched distractedly, or maybe even a trace from childhood novels of romance read from under the bedclothes deep into the night.⁴⁴⁷

Similarly, Magnus

likes to enhance his environment and fantasizes to music on his personal stereo. He described his actual environment as boring. He chooses his music and creates

⁴⁴³ Bull, M., *Sounding out the City*, 86-7.

⁴⁴⁴ Bull, M., *Sounding out the City*, 96.

⁴⁴⁵ Bull, M., *Sounding out the City*, 88.

⁴⁴⁶ Bull, M., *Sounding out the City*, 91.

⁴⁴⁷ Bull, M., *Sounding out the City*, 89.

an adventure out of his normal but mundane journey. He describes the wearing of his personal stereo in town as creating a filmic situation in which he is the central player”.⁴⁴⁸

Tim McNelis and Elena Boschi also note the cinematic feeling that many personal stereo users feel as they navigate their surroundings while listening to music.

As Tia DeNora states, “[music] works within the scenes of “real life” as it works in the cinema, bestowing meaning upon the actions and settings that transpire within its sonic frame.’ Similarly, respondents in ethnographic studies often speak in cinematic terms of listening experiences involving mobile playback technology.⁴⁴⁹

Bull talks of “internal contingency” to describe the self-conception of his users’ experiences: “users [are] extremely sensitive to the contingent nature of their own cognitive processes, their thoughts and emotions. ... Personal-stereo use enables the user to transform both their relationship to themselves and the world beyond them”.⁴⁵⁰ Through playback technologies users are therefore able, as McNelis and Boschi put it, to “manage moods and inner sensations, and ultimately [inhabit] a different space”⁴⁵¹, the latter related to cinematic imagination and the soundtracked life. Crucially, in the case of personal stereo use—with music that we choose ourselves—we can talk not in terms of passing responses to the music we happen to hear as we navigate the world, but of intentionality and agency. The soundtracked life is as much a product of individual creative processes as it is a condition of cultural—and commercial—effects of musical ubiquity

The soundtracked life is thus another instance of de Certeau’s idea of “combinatory ... modes of consumption”, the “arts of making” that engage with commercially available, mass-produced goods through bricolage and the incorporation of personal experiences to produce “everyday creativity”.⁴⁵² Such experiences of “everyday creativity”—in the present case the filmic imagination of Bull’s personal stereo users—allow a subject to transcend her immediate surroundings and life condition imaginatively. Yet the subject is at the same time making use of her immediate surroundings: synthesizing the

⁴⁴⁸ Bull, M., *Sounding out the City*, 91.

⁴⁴⁹ McNelis, T., and Boschi, E., “Seen and Heard: Visible Playback Technology in Film”, in Quiñones, M. G., Kassabian, A., and Boschi, E., (eds.), *Ubiquitous Musics: The Everyday Sounds That We Don’t Always Notice*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 89.

⁴⁵⁰ Bull, M., *Sounding out the City*, 43.

⁴⁵¹ McNelis and Boschi, “Seen and Heard”, 110.

⁴⁵² Miller and McHoul, *Popular Culture*, 11, quoting de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, xiv-xvi.

recording and the “aesthetic surplus”⁴⁵³ which surrounds her. But it is the presence of the recorded song that is the crucial element in casting such imaginative synthesis—a certain kind of “everyday creativity”—as cinematic. And, by turns, it is the cinematic that casts the conflation of every day experience and imagination as *musical*.

With the introduction of YouTube in late 2005 (and similar sites, such as MySpace and vimeo.com), along with inexpensive digital video capture and editing software, making and sharing homemade videos on the internet was suddenly easy and accessible to many “ordinary” people as a casual pastime. Emerging into a world in which the soundtracked life and ubiquitous music were already familiar experiences for many, the technological development of YouTube set the conditions in which lipsynch videos seem almost the logical outcome of soundtracked life; a soundtracked life that is validated as such through being broadcast. Users cast themselves as the stars of their own film musicals. Indeed, many lipsynching videos are filmed out of doors, in cars, on bicycles, paired with the process of seemingly performing some everyday activity. It is John Travolta strutting down the Brooklyn streets mixed with Gene Kelly on a rainy street (performing for nobody but himself with the incidental props—the umbrella, the store display, the potholes—of his surroundings). It demonstrates Feuer’s ideas of inclusivity and spontaneity in the folk musical number (as discussed in Chapter Two) as well as the intimacy of the personal stereo. It is Muriel combining forces with ABBA and Garrison Keillor awash in the footlights, each, in a sense, re-authoring the recorded song and by doing so putting something of their own authorship into their lived surroundings.

Lipdub as Collective Soundtrack

The popular sub-genre of the lipsynching video, called “lipdub”, which features large groups of people who share some commonality, such as workplace or school, provides a good illustration of the soundtracked life as a collective phenomenon, and thus brings community explicitly into the foreground, immersing its members in a shared musical experience within their shared setting. The video that started the lipdub trend was made in the offices of Connected Ventures, a media company that at the time was recruiting new employees. The video in one sense, then, serves as advertising for the company and to attract potential talent to the firm.⁴⁵⁴ It begins with a shot of woman sitting by a

⁴⁵³ Peters and Seier, “Home Dance”, 187-203.

⁴⁵⁴ Lipdub as a genre name is used to denote community productions, though they are not always performed strictly in one take. Lipdub in the meaning of a lipsynching performance onto which the sound is dubbed post-production can also refer to any lipsynching video that uses this technique.

window wearing earphones attached to an iPod and presumably searching its menu for a specific song. As we hear the voice of Harvey Danger singing the song ‘Flagpole Sitta’ she begins lipsynching to it. She performs for the camera, which begins to move with her as she walks towards it around the office. After the first few lines a new member of the office comes into view and takes over as the first drops out of sight. The camera continues to move through the offices, picking up and dropping off different lipsynchers along the way, until, by the end of the song, the entire population of the office is involved, lipsynching together and dancing and writhing comically in the centre of a large common room. The video was a viral hit for the then recently launched vimeo.com and was also widely disseminated by fans on YouTube and other sites (*see DVD2 > Chapter 5: Vernacular Lipsynch Videos > Group 2 > track 4: Connected Ventures Lipdub – ‘Flagpole Sitta’*).

What was initially novel about the ‘Flagpole Sitta’ lipdub was the fact that it was shot in one long take. Of course most individual and small-group lipsynching videos are also shot in one take, but the camera is often stationary, the bodily movements contained within a single space, or, if there is movement across many spaces, such as with car, bicycle, or walking lipsynchs, the camera is mounted to the dashboard, held in the hand, or otherwise constrained. What marked ‘Flagpole Sitta’ as different was how the hand-offs from performer to performer were choreographed in what felt like one seamless motion. Although the video had the look of complete spontaneity, the participants were rehearsed in advance, their on-screen moments tied to the movements of the camera and not the other way around. It was the idea of the group effort that viewers responded to and the idea that in any workplace something as remarkable, even subversive, as this performance could break through the everyday tedium, and that a shared moment, waiting for expression beneath the surface of a normal day at the office, could grow out of a single song.

As the lipdub format was copied by other institutions it quickly established itself as a new subgenre. It has become a tool to enhance teamwork and employee well being, to demonstrate “school spirit”, to recruit students, to attract tourists, to raise money for charities, to document certain populations at certain key life moments, such as weddings. It is also used, especially by schools, as a competitive activity. High schools and universities make lipdubs to vie for the most online views (a measure of success that is sadly disproportionately valued), and cities vie for the largest number of

participants to perform in a single video. Perhaps the most famous community lipdub video to date was produced by the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan⁴⁵⁵ in an effort to rehabilitate the city's reputation after it came in 10th on the weekly news magazine *Newsweek*'s list of "America's Dying Cities". The video boasts the "world record" for number of participants in a lipdub, approximately five thousand. Popular film critic for the Chicago Sun-Times Roger Ebert blogged that it "is simply the greatest music video ever made". Although not the first community-pride lipdub, it is often cited by other cities producing lipdub videos as their inspiration.⁴⁵⁶ The video lasts ten minutes, covers a huge swath of the downtown area of Grand Rapids, and was made with one travelling camera in a single take (at the end, the camera even enters a helicopter and travels over the city). The "singing duties" are passed from person to person, group to group, at what seems like the camera's behest. The song to which the residents lipsynch is a live recording of Don McLean performing 'American Pie'. It is an ironic song choice for a city trying to demonstrate that it is not, in fact, "dying". But, like many lipdub videos, the lyrics of the song seem to matter little or not at all. Songs are chosen for the feeling of collective goodwill they evoke, and what seems to matter most is how the participants display that sense of goodwill as the camera sweeps past (*see DVD2 > Chapter 5: Vernacular Lipsynch Videos > Group 2 > track 5: Grand Rapids Lipdub – 'American Pie'*).

Regardless of the degree to which the intentions of the performers concur with the lyrics of a song or its original meanings, the new synthesis, in which the actions of the participants are performed in sympathy with musical, if not lyrical, gestures, becomes the locus of meaning in these videos. Lipdub videos in particular illustrate how popular song recordings can become—particularly in their ubiquity and proximity in the era of the soundtracked life—potent "objects-to-think-with".⁴⁵⁷ Sherry Turkle builds upon Claude Levi-Strauss's ideas of bricolage and "theoretical tinkering", which she conceptualizes as means "by which individuals and cultures use the objects around them to develop and assimilate ideas". She states that "[c]ultural appropriation through the manipulation of specific objects is common in the history of ideas. Appropriable theories, ideas that capture the imagination of the culture at large, tend to be those with

⁴⁵⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPjjZCO67WI>

⁴⁵⁶ A recent notable example citing Grand Rapids as an inspiration was made by the English city of Lincoln whose July 2013 lipdub to a mash-up of Take That's 'Shine and Never Forget'. The first of its kind in the UK, it included over 500 participants and has also gone viral.

⁴⁵⁷ Turkle, Sherry, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon & Schuster; Touchstone, 1997), 47.

which people can become actively involved”.⁴⁵⁸ Here she is talking about intellectual and philosophical ideas, such as Freud’s theories, adopted by people because they are found to be useful in the contexts of their lives. She explains:

the popular appropriation of Freudian ideas had little to do with scientific demonstrations of their validity. Freudian ideas passed into the popular culture because they offered robust and down-to-earth objects-to-think-with. The objects were not physical but almost-tangible ideas such as dreams and slips of the tongue. People were able to play with such Freudian ‘objects’.

I propose that the same can be said for cultural/artistic objects, such as popular music recordings: objects “with which people can become actively involved”. The songs that are appropriated by groups and communities for lipdub videos are chosen for these very reasons. They provide robust sites for the contemplation and bodily expression of what are seen as larger community values. Thus, song recordings become objects-to-feel-with, objects-to-persuade-with, to-express-with, to-display-with.

The premise upon which all lipdubs are built is the idea that a popular music recording can embed itself into a community; can propel a community, however disparate its members may be, to perform together in a shared activity; can, in fact, allow a community of disparate individuals to speak with one voice while at the same time maintaining a sense of the individual within the group. The shared, singular soundtrack song unifies and generalizes the group while the camera roaming among its members allows them to individuate and particularize. This brings up, though, as many troubling ideas as it does causes for celebration, for there is a danger in the mobilizing force of music, especially when those in power use its particularizing quality to convince a population’s members that what it expresses is individual to them. Adorno and Horkheimer caution against being taken in by “[t]he striking unity of microcosm and macrocosm [which] presents men with a model of their culture: the false identity of the general and the particular”.⁴⁵⁹ Although Adorno and Horkheimer in this instance are talking about city housing projects, the observation can be applied to YouTube which itself could be viewed as a kind of cultural housing project in the Adorno/Horkheimer mould, a metaphor for an architecture that disavows any dissonance between the general and particular. We can then take further caution from Small, who, writing about the architecture of performance spaces, states that:

⁴⁵⁸ Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 48.

⁴⁵⁹ Adorno and Horkheimer, “Culture Industry”, 30.

[e]very building ... is designed and built to house some aspect of human behaviour and relationships, and its design reflects its builders' assumptions about that behaviour and those relationships. Once built, it then has the power to impose those assumptions on what goes on within it.⁴⁶⁰

The recent failure of YouTube to live up to the DIY and grass roots aspirations of many of its users, along with the ongoing censorship by the recording industry of lipsynchs as individual creative (as opposed to criminal) acts, can only serve to ground this metaphor more firmly.

We like to believe that YouTube, where you can “Broadcast Yourself”, is OurTube, but however DIY our aspirations, the architecture inside which they are articulated is corporate; in a world subject to the forces and imperatives of capital, where individuality is claimed through engaging with and consuming the products of capitalist industry (“our song”), is such innocence *really* possible? Can anyone ever be “The Numa Numa Guy” again? Positive social results may be attained by communal lipdubs, there is no doubt about this, but these results (funds raised, awareness raised, team-work enhanced, a sense of belonging) tend to be on the terms of, or at least within the structures of value of, a rather institutionalised and coerced, rather than participatory and spontaneous framework. Feuer’s theorisation of “folk art” offers a way that commercially-produced cultural products can be *used* in ways that open them to spontaneity, integration, and participation. YouTube, and professionalized and institutionalized “lipdubs”, let us down by not living up to the myth of Feuer’s folk art, myths upon which a less compromised collectivity might be grounded. Lipdubs are “directed”; but Feuer’s position is concerned with how people *use* music, themselves, within a collectivity. Does the institutional “lipdub”, therefore, whatever its positive social outcomes, ultimately stand as a betrayal of the hope for non-instrumentalized, genuinely collective creativity?

Returning to the Uncanny

Rhetorical questions aside, we can still find meaning, however compromised one might construe it. Perhaps even beyond any of the fulfilling, creative, and empowering local instances of lipsynching that I have articulated in this thesis, a deeper meaning for lipsynching may reside in the rehearsal and constant reworking of the foundational

⁴⁶⁰ Small, *Musicking*, 20.

trauma of the recorded voice. This is a trauma which we confidently feel that “we are over”, assimilated as we are to disembodied voices. And yet, the uncanniness of the disembodied voice, its continued representation *as* uncanny in cinematic and televisual culture, indicates its continued fascination for us; we are far from “over it”, it is actually too fascinating for us to *want* to be “over it”. The aspect of its repeatability, too, that is inherent in recordings, suggests an uncanniness that persists, but also the recovery/re-experiencing through lipsynching of voices that have “become, as it were, immortal”, puts lipsynching into a position in our culture where playful embodiment and uncanny disembodiment can circulate, and in so doing marginalise, if only temporarily, the established value systems of socio-economic power.

In the case of the original recording versus the lipsynch video/performance comments such as “You’ve ruined this song for me!” may say less about the lipsynch’s power to depreciate the subjective idea of an original as it does about the unique power of the lipsynch itself: though playful, the new embodiment can have an extremely *persuasive* power, which may not always sit comfortably with all viewers. This reinforces what I have written earlier here about the creative empowerment made available by the lipsynch, which may well exceed the concerns about inauthenticity or pseudo-individualisation voiced earlier. We may feel a distancing effect and at the same time a violation—*too much proximity*— of what is perceived as our own territory by another individual’s interpretation of something of which we may feel ownership ourselves. The violent, even traumatised, reactions of lipsynchers to the silencing or monetizing of their work, as noted above, testifies to the fact that we are in volatile and emotional territory here. When we are made to feel closer to this new performance/interpretation/performer than to that of the original—celebrated, distant, professional, untouchable performer—there is the danger of letting down our guard as subjects, and allowing ourselves to feel that we could be the lipsyncher - the homely surroundings, the ordinary clothing, the domestic settings, - these may seduce us, however unwillingly (or unconsciously) into identifying with the lipsyncher, even as we find their performance to be not congruent with, and disruptive of our own “embodying” of the song. In other words, it is not a question of the vernacular lipsynching performance taking us too far away from a favourite song or performer, but rather confronting us with the folly of any identifications we might have with what is, essentially, a record. Seeing another embodying the song in a way that does not simply reinforce our own imagining may well reveal the equally embarrassing, mundane,

stupid, and vain pretensions that we invest into these inert cultural objects. But there is also a sense of the Uncanny that, stupidity and vanity aside, still inheres to any voice that occupies a body from which it did not originate, playful, parodic, ironic, or otherwise. Similar to the trauma of hearing a recording of one's own voice, now estranged, we feel discomposed upon seeing the voice of a beloved performer embodied in the ordinary body of the lipsyncher; in Connor's words, "the voice's continuing power to animate, in the absence of a body which it should be animating and be animated by, is distasteful and unnerving. The life that continues to reside in and emanate from the voice is a hostile life".⁴⁶¹ Whether the new embodiment sullies our experience of the voice or provides new avenues of enjoyment, the effect of the performance, especially for the lipsyncher herself, can be occasion for the familiar defamiliarized, and vice versa. In other words, even when we are "messing about", we may be in the presence of the Uncanny.

Lipsynching has a fundamental paradox at its heart—we internalise and *become* the song, and we *remove* the song from where it "should" be. One reading of this is creative/productive, in the familiar terms of the post-modern recontextualisation of cultural materials as a creative act; the other is transgressive/destructive. However we choose to read it, though, we can view almost any lipsynching video or performance as uncanny. Mary Anne Doane observes that, "There is always something uncanny about a voice which emanates from a source outside the [cinematic] frame",⁴⁶² and while a lipsyncher puts the voice back *inside* the frame, as it were—thus, perhaps, bringing the Uncanny, or unhomely (*Unheimlich*) back home (*Heimlich*)—the recording's status as pre-existent object, as we have seen previously, maintains a foreign, ghostly element which now occupies and colours its new embodiment within "the frame", within the *Heimlich*: the *Doppelgänger*, the voices of the dead, the repressed returned. In Chion's terms, the lipsynching body could be seen to de-acousmatize the *acousmètre* of the recorded voice—thereby stripping it of its power—yet, as I have proposed, the process of disempowerment is never absolute. As a "voice" with its own "life" outside of any relationship to the new, lipsynching body, the recording must retain at least some of its *acousmètre*-ic power. The "hostile life", to use Connor's words, of the disembodied voice in the form of recorded song is never fully brought "home", for there is no home to which it belongs, and therefore the recorded voice of the song is never "at peace",

⁴⁶¹ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 12.

⁴⁶² Doane, M. A., "The Voice in Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space", in *Yale French Studies*, No. 60, *Cinema/Sound* (1980), 40.

can never be “at rest”. This restlessness, if you will, of the recorded voice is part of what renders it uncanny when it encounters the body of the lipsyncher, who offers it temporary residence as he tries to make and give sense to the voice. In order to do this, the lipsyncher must confront the voice first as an outsider/intruder and then, like Philip Marlow in *The Singing Detective*, work to bring it closer, to assimilate and render it less frightening, more “homely”. Much of this process occurs, most likely, in an unconscious register of the psyche, which is not to say, of course, that every act of lipsynching will reveal deeply pathological meanings, at least not for everybody. But there will always be that element in the re-animation of voice that is felt as *other*, alien, and which seeks an uncanny “return”. Hence the traumatized response to lipsynchs that “ruin the song for me”, where the mismatch between original song and lipsynch cannot be assimilated into the viewer’s world, reinforces the uncanniness of the dissociated voice that the viewer’s *own* assimilation had, up to this point, managed to repress.

Jimmy Slonina’s lipsynching video to Howlin’ Wolf’s ‘I Put a Spell on You’⁴⁶³ is something of a textbook example of how a lipsynch video can be entertaining on the surface, and at the same time frame and evoke psychic states implicit in the song, and the body of the lipsyncher, that can literally “get under the skin” of the original and the viewer, for better or worse. The somewhat maniacal voice of Howlin’ Wolf’s performance seems, for me, so fully to inhabit—to *fuse* with—Slonina’s flesh that for the duration of the video there appears to be no separation (*see DVD2 > Chapter 5: Vernacular Lipsynch Videos > Group 2 > track 6: Jimmy Slonina – ‘I Put a Spell on You’*). Slonina’s performance is comically obsessive, disturbed and frightening, but even/especially as comedy it reveals hidden dimensions to Slonina and also Howlin’ Wolf (as configured in relationship to Slonina), as if Slonina has in the act of embodying the voice discovered his uncanny double, and become in one sense “whole”. Where comedy is concerned, “many a true word is said in jest”. When he/Wolf sings “Because you’re MINE!” and screams, Slonina’s open mouth forms a deep and terrifying cavity: we are looking into the body of this man and what we find there is a monster voice. But the most monstrous aspect of this voice is that it is actually someone else’s voice, something that emanated from someone else’s viscera, and which carries someone else’s emotional experience/expression. And yet, here it sits, or here it erupts, out of another man’s body, because, as a sound recording, it can. It plays out an

⁴⁶³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OexXGfzivJ8>

uncanniness that persists despite more than a century of being educated to expect it, and it is also *very* entertaining.

Reflections: Lipsynching as Art

As I indicated in the Introduction, my research for the present thesis combined scholarly and practice-based approaches. Although some of the key points that I have deployed from authors such as Connor, Chion, Altman, Freud, Auslander, and Small will be worth repeating, in this final section my focus will be on one of the practical research activities that has constituted an important aspect of the methodology of this research project, by way of a conclusion to the thesis as a whole. I am going to outline the processes engaged with, and insights gained through, the production of *YouGhost*, a four-channel sound/video installation in the plunderphonics/collage tradition, using as its source materials lipsynching videos produced, performed, and posted by members of YouTube.com and vimeo.com (see DVD3 > Conclusion: *YouGhost*). As should become evident, through working on this piece over a two-year period, I gained not only insights into the breadth of lipsynching practices, but was also able to concretize positions that informed the thesis as a whole. The piece uses four synchronized DVD projections, each containing a separate “line” or “voice” of the overall audio/visual composition. The work was inspired by the idea of Plunderphonics, originated by composer John Oswald⁴⁶⁴, and the reuse of existing materials by sound- and video-collage artists such as Christian Marclay and Vicky Bennett and their explorations into the associative relationships between materials drawn from different media. Especially influential was Marclay’s sound/video collage, *Video Quartet* (2002), a work that directly influenced this project in compositional, technical, and artistic terms.

Similar to the practices of collage and sampling, lipsynching involves the dual processes of quotation (or appropriation) and fragmentation. In fact, lipsynching itself is already a kind of audio-visual collage wherein the silent bodies of the lipsynchers recombine with the disembodied voices of recorded song to create a new articulation of both. Following Marclay’s approach, I treat my materials as found objects to be used as such. In other words, with the exception of occasional volume envelopes, speed changes and fade effects, I aim to retain the original qualities (or, on a couple of occasions, to exaggerate qualities I have perceived in the clips) of the source materials; the visual and aural

⁴⁶⁴ Oswald, J., “Plunderphonics, or Audio Piracy as Compositional Prerogative”, republished as “Bettered by the Borrower: The Ethics of Musical Debt”, in Cox, C., and Warner, D., (eds.), *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, (London: Continuum, 2004), 131-137. See also Cutler, C., “Plunderphonia” in *ibid*, 138-156.

materials, though heavily edited and collaged, are used “intact” for the most part; the lipsynchers still speak in their own “voices”.

Although vernacular lipsynching most often engages with (relatively) contemporary popular music, there are cultural roots to lipsynching which touch on the invention of puppetry, the use of masks, as well as cultural beliefs in spirit possession, channeling, and speaking in tongues. For instance, Connor explains how The Oracle at Delphi “became the prime exhibit in a Western tradition which associated ... profane arts of divination with ventriloquism, which is to say speaking with the voice of another, or the voice of another speaking through oneself”⁴⁶⁵ and Jeffrey Sconce identifies a whole supernatural subtext to modern media technologies.⁴⁶⁶ Notions of “the live” as explored by Auslander, who interrogates the practice of lipsynching specifically, are also productively engaged here. By viewing lipsynching through a broader lens, we can move beyond the popularly held view of lipsynching as a kind of artistic fakery to one in which we acknowledge its connections to deeper forms of identity formation, ritual, communication, and the cultural and individual fluidity of body, voice, and the gaze—connections which are interrogated in this piece.

An initial version of this piece was created as part of Culture Lab: Newcastle’s “Haunted House”, staged as part of the Newcastle-Gateshead AV Festival 2008, for which the theme was “Broadcast”. As Sconce explains, radio broadcasting has been associated with various instances (journalistic as well as fictional) in which the dead seem to communicate with the living.⁴⁶⁷ The brief to produce some new work for “Haunted House”, then, with the theme of “broadcast” elided with ideas I had already been exploring about recorded voices and the voices of the dead, and helped me to make some critical connections of my own around ideas of the disembodied voice, the frictions between the mediatized and the “real”, and the internet lipsynch performance. A passage by Michel Chion was particularly potent at this stage in my thinking and bears repeating here:

Ever since the telephone and gramophone made it possible to isolate voices from bodies, the voice naturally has reminded us of the voice of the dead. ... In cinema, the voice of the *acousmètre* is frequently the voice of one who is dead. ... Particularly in the cinema, the voice enjoys a certain proximity to the soul,

⁴⁶⁵ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 49.

⁴⁶⁶ Sconce, *Haunted Media*, passim.

⁴⁶⁷ Sconce, *Haunted Media*, 58-72, and passim.

the shadow, the double—these immaterial, detachable representations of the body, which survive its death and sometimes even leave it during life.⁴⁶⁸

In the case of my YouTube lipsynchers, the *acousmêtre* - in this case the voice of the recorded song, as I have argued for it in chapter 3 - belongs in an originary sense not to the bodies of the lipsynchers, but to those of the musicians (and technicians and producers) represented by the recording. As voices that no longer sound in their “own” bodies, these can be imagined as voice(s) of the dead. At the same time, the visual cue, the conceit of the lipsynched performance, asks us to consider that these voices have been re-embodied in the bodies of the YouTube broadcasters, who are themselves recorded, mediatized representations. The original motivation for *YouGhost*, then, was the exploration of this idea of a multiply distanced, deferred, referred, and reanimated performance, suggestive of Connor’s “vocalic body” insofar as it outlines the different forms that can contribute to such a multiplicity. To provide clarity, it will be instructive to repeat Connor’s definition:

Voices are produced by bodies: but can also themselves produce bodies. The vocalic body is the idea—which can take the form of dream, fantasy, ideal, theological doctrine or hallucination—of a surrogate or secondary body, a projection of a new way of having or being a body, formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice.⁴⁶⁹

The vocalic body is particularly interesting when coupled with Peters’ idea (derived from his reading of Benjamin) of ruptures in history/historical time in which “the present becomes intelligible as it is aligned with a past moment *with which it has a secret affinity*.... simultaneity not only across space, but across time as well [emphasis mine].”⁴⁷⁰ In *YouGhost*, I take this “secret affinity” as in one sense connecting with Connor’s notion of “idealized voices”, which, he says, “derive their power, prestige, and capacity to give pleasure from *this willingness to hear other voices as one’s own*” [emphasis mine]⁴⁷¹. It is in the “willingness to hear other voices” as our own that we are able to identify ourselves with the recorded voices, distanced in time and space, and articulate these “secret affinities” through lipsynching. Idealized voices serve in the context of *YouGhost* as voices of the dead, as ghosts: the original recordings bear the traces of the dead, the lipsynchers serve as mediums who are themselves mediatized by

⁴⁶⁸ Chion, *Voice In Cinema*, 47. See also Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 362-394; Kahn, “Death in Light of Phonograph”.

⁴⁶⁹ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 35.

⁴⁷⁰ Peters, *Speaking*, 3.

⁴⁷¹ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 32.

the technology with which they are captured (entombed) and then re-embodied (resurrected) through the medium of the computer. As “found” materials, the YouTube videos from which *YouGhost* is composed are collaged and re-composed in order to reveal the uncanny, poignant, or humorous “ghosts in the machine”, as I perceive and project them.

The preliminary materials for the “Haunted House” manifestation of *YouGhost* were extensively developed into the final version exhibited at The Sage, Gateshead, in 2009 and repeated there in 2010. This completed version of *YouGhost* requires a dedicated room, capable of black-out, measuring approximately 10 x 10 meters. Inside, it must be possible to hang the four (light) fabric screens, as well as four to six others hung behind the main four (for layered effects). Four data projectors are needed for either front (overhead) projection or rear projection. Front projection is preferred if possible. The four speakers are placed in the room so that each one provides the sound for one of the four screens.

The four translucent fabric screens, each measuring 150cm x 200cm, are hung side-by-side (long-ways) in a broad semi-circle either towards the back of the room (front projection) or closer to the front (rear projection). Behind each of the main screens another one or two lengths of fabric are hung for layering effects. Compositionally, *YouGhost* is episodic and at times narrative. It can be split roughly into the following sections:

Introduction / Emergence
Segue 1
Again / Rain
Crooners / Shhh
I / Am
Segue 2
Radio / Video
Lips / Eyes / Howl
Segue 3 (Is that all there is?)
Sandman / Ghost
Silence / Sing

Introduction / Emergence

YouGhost begins with a kind of introductory statement made by the looping and audio layering of the “B&B Style” video of Annie Lennox’s ‘No More I Love You’s’ [apostrophe sic]. The lipsynchers emerge from the bottom of the screen, like something that has been lurking there. They appear to me as ghostly characters as they imitate

aspects of Lennox's original music video. The segment ends at the sounding of the first note sung by Lennox. While the song is tender, there is something menacing, even deranged, in the performance of the two young men, which I highlight through repetition. We see them enter the screen again and again. As soon as one is cut from one screen, another emerges on another, like something trying to edge its way into consciousness.

Segue 1

This features the instrumental lead-ins to songs and shows the lipsynchers listening and preparing to perform (one girl is "conducting" the music). I have cut the first few clips just as the performers open their mouths to "sing"—thereby emphasizing the "silence" of the lipsyncher—after which I allow the performers to "sing" the first few words or lines of a song before I cut them off. The layering of these clips becomes more complex before resolving into the next section.

Again / Rain

This section features a video of young woman lipsynching to Julie Andrews as Eliza Doolittle, from the Broadway cast album of *My Fair Lady*. She is playing the character herself, reacting to the voice of Rex Harrison as Henry Higgins who is ordering her to puppet his words. I edited the clip so that Higgins repeatedly interrupts her as she struggles to speak. His interruptions and her strained obeisance work contrapuntally. Finally, as the next section begins, bleeding into this one, we hear the voice of Henry Higgins saying "Again. Again. Again...", demanding her to repeat, while she stares at the camera. Her face now appears to express stubbornness and she seems to "refuse" any further repetition or resignation. There is a choice, here, for her: the possibility of agency on her part, or of silencing.

Crooners / Shhh

This is the "boy's section" and is made up of clips of boys and men lipsynching to the voices of "crooners" such as Frank Sinatra, Bobby Darrin, Dean Martin, and parody crooner Richard Cheese (performing his lounge interpretation of pop-rapper Sir Mix A Lot's 'Baby Got Back'). The emphasis in this section is on the energy and bravura of the original recordings matched by the lipsynchers and culminates on the big finish—the held note—of the classic crooning numbers. This section celebrates the crooning tradition, especially of the Sinatra-Darrin-Martin mould (as opposed to that of less

rambunctious crooners such as Crosby or Como), and the obvious joy the lipsynchers take in their assumption, the bodily pull, of the larger-than-life alpha-male voice.

This stands in contrast to the previous section in which the feminine voice is manipulated and silenced. However, while the contrast is intentional and political, it is by no means a negative critique of the masculine tradition of crooning, which is at its best (and in the video clips) life-affirming. Yet the contrast is there. The voiceless woman is present in frustrated opposition to the vocal power of the men. By including the clip of the man “shushing” the others⁴⁷², however, I also considered the silencing, or attempt to silence, the male voice. One suspects, though, that here it is a case of one man objecting to the “noise” of other—perhaps over-dominant—male voices. The politics is perhaps a sideline, but worth mentioning. Mostly, the section is comic in tone, but by putting these voices and personalities together they compete for attention, either mine, the imagined viewers, or each others’.

I / Am

This short sequence is a one-song composition, but is collaged to form a minimal statement that for me expresses the existential condition I perceive with this particular lipsyncher. The source material is sentimental, a love song by Ben Folds performed by a young woman. I was taken with the simplicity of her image. Alone, in her bedroom, she addresses the camera unblinkingly, a direct address. Out of the repeated phrase in the original song of “I am”, I formed a polyphonic pulse of repeating “I ams”, which can be seen as the primary message, not only of the YouTube lipsyncher, but of human communication: “I am”. By isolating the “I ams” and layering them into four parts, the girl harmonizes with herself. By looping these, she repeats “I am” without resolution—it just *stands*. Throughout most of the segment she is not “the luckiest”, as the lyrics go on to say, or any other particularizing modifier. She simply *is*. I do, however, allow her to “sing” the bridge of the song, which expresses words of love directed at a “you”, but embedded in the sea of “I ams”, these sentiments become just one of the things she is, a person in love. She is many other things as well.

I chose to retain the song’s sentimental tone. The song and the young woman’s performance of it are lovely examples of the importance of sentimentality to popular song and the uses to which people put it. Here she uses the voice of sentimental song to

⁴⁷² He is lipsynching to Robert Preston singing “Marion” from the *Music Man* original cast album.

communicate her own sentiments of love. I allow the end of the song to play out, resolving in “I am the luckiest”, but after all the repetitions of “I am”, we can read this, as with the bridge, as just another thing she is, or rather, what she is *at this particular moment*. It may be counter-intuitive, the conceit that she claims a space, gives herself voice, when she is in fact lipsynching to someone else’s voice, but, as I have asserted in the thesis, popular song can be a vehicle with which to express deeper aspects of self. Though we cannot know whether or not this teenage girl is still in love or who she is or has *become*, we share with her for the duration of the performance the space she is claiming *at that particular moment* for herself in the world.

Segue 2

We see a restless young man, sitting in a white room, pacing back and forth, fading in and out of the doorway to the melancholy instrumental bridge of Kathryn William’s ‘How Can We Hang On To a Dream’. What initially drew me to this video is the soft feminine voice, almost a whisper, performed in complete sympathy by the large man. The bare walls, the empty passage of the doorway give a sense of isolation and loneliness. As we see him fade to nothing in the doorway he becomes a transitional figure. In this section of *YouGhost* I only used clips from the instrumental, non-lipsynching portion of the song in order to emphasize this. He is the singer waiting for the chance to sing.

Radio / Video

This section is made of four videos, each one occupying a single screen from which they never move. I left the clips intact; there is no internal splicing and each song is allowed to play “uninterrupted” but frozen from time to time. In essence I turn the videos on and off, almost randomly, allowing them to play separately in turn. The four songs are like four different locations on a radio dial. Although I gave them a rather loose commonality in that the videos I’d chosen were all recordings of the 1940s and ‘50s, the songs remain separate and the effect is that of changing channels. It is a simple idea. I like the idea of simultaneous play, but stuttering, interrupted, and only partially heard, as if the listener/viewer is changing channels, web-surfing, scanning the radio, a common experience for most of us. I am not sure if I am duplicating a kind of short attention span or impatience. By freezing the videos, though, I was also capturing facial expressions and gestures for the viewer to study. Made still, they forestall the ephemeral, the way photographs do.

Lips / Eyes / Howl

This sequence is more abstract than the previous ones in that there is no attempt on my part to form any coherent narrative or, as with the previous section, imaginative conceit with which to unify the clips; yet it is also, ironically, more visceral. The disembodied/devoiced elements of open mouths, held notes, hisses, combine to evoke actions such as biting, licking, howling, oral sex. The tone is one of intimacy and revulsion, sex and cannibalism. The mouths are too insistent. The sounds become something caught in the throat, forced out. My attempt here is to capture something of the dual nature of display and invitation that characterizes so many of these videos. There is also an element of possession in some of the clips: even in the poorly lit, oddly coloured chins lipsynching to ‘The Lion Sleeps Tonight’ there is a sense of something supernatural speaking out of human mouths.

Segue 3 (Is that all there is?)

A middle-aged woman is lipsynching to Peggy Lee, asking, “Is that all there is?”. I juxtaposed her with a teenage boy (in dental braces) lipsynching to the Black Eyed Peas’ ‘Shut Up’ in which the same question is posed. The two share the line, passing it from one to the other: the woman and the boy seeming to grapple with the same existential problem in voices and bodies from two different generations. Finding such connections was one of the pleasures of working with these populations. Seeing what song each performer chose, how they approached these materials, and then watching them “converse” across time and space, style and genre, I was able to find a commonality among them.

Sandman / Ghost

This sequence, a pairing of two videos—one of the Chordettes’ recording of ‘Mr Sandman’ and the other Billy Idol’s ‘Rebel Yell’—is the most explicitly “ghost-like” of the segments in the piece. ‘Rebel Yell’, which is lipsynched by a beautiful, conservatively-groomed young woman is uncanny in and of itself. Idol’s voice is deeply embodied in her; it is her “belly voice” summoned forth, and as such has the feel of something repressed showing itself, spilling out. I took this video and slowed it to half its original speed; a simple trick, but in this case the effect was stunning, frightening. The audio track became a demon voice sounding amidst rattlings, vaguely mechanical creakings, metal scrapings, something terrible thumping and pounding for release. ‘Mr

Sandman’, sung in the bell-like harmonies of the 1950s “girl group”, is ostensibly a dreamy yearning for a perfect romantic partner “with lots of wavy hair like Liberace”, yet the Sandman is also a ghostly figure who hovers over your bed at night, and forms one of Freud’s case studies in “The Uncanny”. The song is lipsynched by “B&B Style”, (featured at the beginning of *YouGhost*), who are clearly satirizing its pristine 1950s innocence. By placing the image of the woman between the two I formed a trio and by doing so the dream of the Sandman becomes a nightmare inserted into the song. It also plays with the idea of the “ideal love” and poses the question “does the ghostly figure of the woman represent the object of desire or terror?”. The lines drawn are ambiguously positioned. The effect is indeed sinister—the woman appears trapped, howling and writhing between the men—but she is also the uncanny reminder, the expression of the darkness—the something other—that is repressed, lurking beneath 1950s respectability.

Silence / Sing

In this sequence, I project two different lipsynchers into an imaginary relationship with one another, the nature of which remains mysterious. As with *Again / Rain*, I play with the idea of a narrative arc, but in this case one that is obscured by design. I also explore the idea of silence within a practice which by definition is both sounded and silent. In the lipsynched performance, what does silence conceal or reveal? As a collage artist, am I *removing* sound or *inserting* silence? In the compositional process I did both.

For me, this final segment carried great poignancy. The two older people are each lipsynching to songs that carry obvious emotional potency and meaning: she, ABBA’s ‘Slipping Through My Fingers’ and he, Chet Baker’s ‘My Funny Valentine’. As she is the active, more emotive performer, I chose to remove the sound (except for a held note, which I repeat) from the woman’s video clips. The male performer is almost completely still as he lipsynchs and appears to be the more vulnerable of the two, in part because of Baker’s fragile voice to which he gives his body. In the narrative I constructed he sings to her while she has other things on her mind. Though he is the “sounded” character, she cannot hear him. The melancholy piano in the instrumental play-out of ‘My Funny Valentine’ plays to its conclusion and the man reaches up and turns off the camera. She is memory, which he can only half-conjure. *YouGhost* ends here. With a haunting of the most familiar kind: that of the memory of a lost loved one—in this case, translated into song.

Love, Relationships, and Other Concluding Observations

With hundreds of videos from which to choose, to assemble and edit, producing *YouGhost* was a long and painstaking process. Much of the work involved was, as they say, left on the cutting room floor. As an intuitive activity, it consisted of trial and error, blind alleyways, beautifully crafted expendables, over-invested blunders: in other words, the gross sum of the creative process, without which none of the discoveries or the productive mining of the materials could occur. But to suggest that the long hours spent in the process of reviewing and editing the countless repetitions of minute bits of information were tedious would be disingenuous, for the process was enjoyable. More than this, it was revelatory in unexpected ways. The time I spent alone in a dark studio with only the digitally recorded lipsynchers for company was no solitary activity. My experience of it was highly social and strangely dialogical. As the creator/composer of the new work I had a certain omniscient power: I could *use* the video clips in whatever way I wished and to whatever sonic, visual, representational, communicative, rhetorical, relational purposes I desired. Yet my lipsynchers were not mere puppets nor only bits of plundered or phonetic information. As actors and creators in their own right they dictated my creative actions as much as they bent to them. In other words, they could make suggestions and, more than that, they had veto power over some of mine. For instance, the over-invested blunders (as with any creative process) were often the result of a kind of insensitivity to the needs of the materials, an effort on my part to shoehorn materials that, after much frustrated exertion, I had to admit would simply not fit together musically, visually, thematically or aesthetically. Yet it was not a simple matter of an artist testing a bad idea and then admitting defeat: on these occasions the lipsynchers themselves “refused” to cooperate. Moreover, their refusal was not on aesthetic but social grounds. Try as I might, I could not force *this* performer to interact with *that* one. The surprising flipside to this was when the lipsynchers “acquiesced” to their new situations and the relationships staged between them. There formed a partnership between myself and my phantom performers that seemed to be only partly a product of my authorial agency. Although I manipulated them, putting their performances into situations that the originators never imagined and certainly didn’t sanction, their video representations, their digital ghosts, who in every sense were the versions of the original—the physical presence—that I came to know, had their own agency, at least for me.

I admit there is on my part a phantasmic assignment of intentionality or sentience to the inanimate video artefact. However, I did experience something extraordinary in the making of *YouGhost*: these partnerships, and the ways in which my interactions with the lipsynchers felt social and dialogical, resulted in what I can only term as love; I fell *in love* with my lipsynchers. In the long hours of our encounters they became not lipsynchers but *my* lipsynchers. I felt a sense of possession and protectiveness over them that I experienced as love. This experience was unique. In past works of audio-video collage that I composed of plundered material, the sources had always been from cinema or television or other commercial audio-visual products. In *YouGhost* I was using vernacular materials through which I could feel a closer connection. While there is no ontological difference between a professional piece of cinema or an amateur YouTube lipsynching video, there is a phenomenological one. The sense of a “real person” was always with me in a way that was absent in the products of professionals, and I wondered if this feeling was connected to a certain vitality inherent in the practice itself.

The close involvement I formed with my lipsynchers and their music through the making of this piece allowed me to access what I have come to see as the most vital aspect to the practice of lipsynching in general: the encounter between the lipsynching body and the recorded voice is one in which fundamental relationships are formed and concretized. To return to Christopher Small:

Musicking is about relationships, not so much about those which actually exist in our lives as about those we desire to exist and long to experience: relationships among people ... and also perhaps with ourselves and with our bodies and even with the supernatural. During ... any musical performance anywhere and at any time, desired relationships are brought into virtual existence so that those taking part are enabled to experience them as if they really did exist ... By bringing into existence relationships that are thought of as desirable, a musical performance not only reflects those relationships but also shapes them. It teaches and inculcates the concept of those ideal relationships, or values, and allows those taking part to try them on, to see how they fit ... In articulating those values it allows those taking part to say, to themselves, to one another and to anyone else who may be paying attention: these are our values, these are our concepts of ideal relationships, and consequently, this is who we are. It is thus an instrument of *affirmation*.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷³ Small, *Musicking*, 183.

These relationships exceed the obvious one between the voice of the recording artist and the body of the lipsyncher, then, and extend outwards beyond the act of lipsynching itself to viewers and listeners—both admirers and critics—through a dense network of factors that include what I have called sonic pedagogy and receiver externalization, as well as musical ubiquity, file sharing, fandom, peer group membership, and the emergent cultural practices and activities associated with the most recent developments in mobile technologies. Lipsynching serves as a location in which our sense of living-within popular music in all its trivia *and* depth is displayed and personalized. The popular music recording is both ubiquitous and intimate, and through lipsynching, by giving body to its voice, the complexities of “living-within” are pulled together. We externalize through lipsynching an experience that, though individual, is constituted within the dialogics of individual and community; at the same time we perform an internalization of the values, identities, and styles of popular culture operating in the other vectors of this dialogic relation. We assert our personal creativity at the same time that we buy into the creativity of others. It is, I propose, through these convergences that the meaning of the practice takes place.

Appendix 1

Fredasterical 'Pop Muzik' Viral Screen Shots

The following figures are screen shots showing a few of the “viral” locations to which Fredasterical’s ‘Pop Muzik’ video travelled. These are included as representative; not exhaustive.

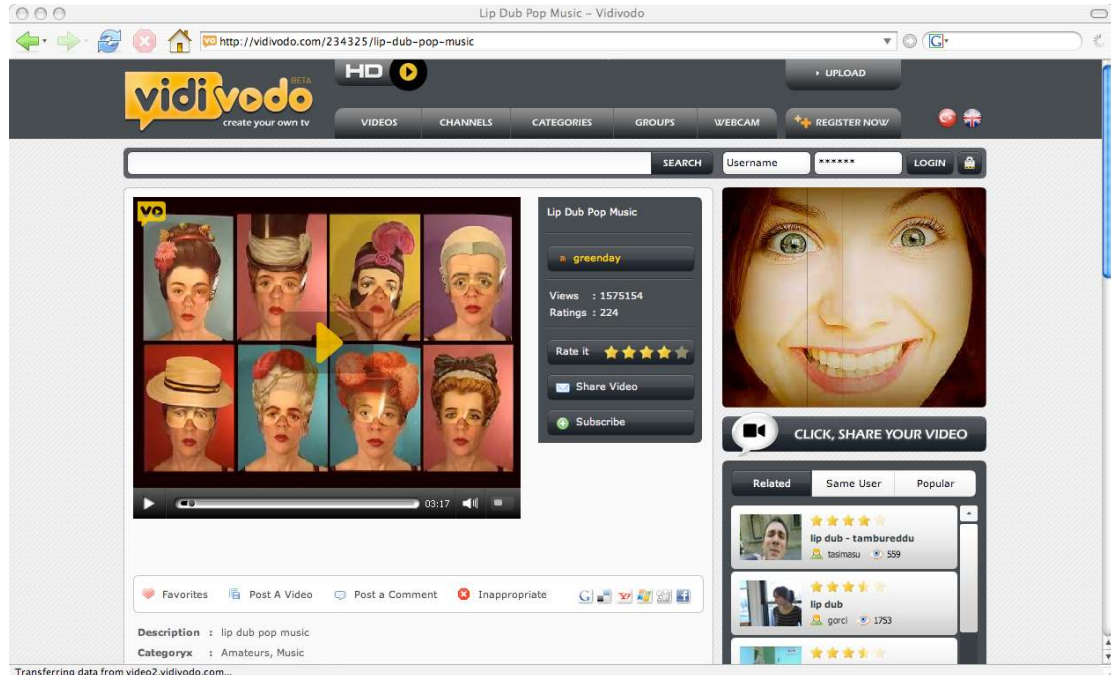


Figure 1, Turkish video-sharing website, vidivodo.com



Figure 2, “Free People” clothing company website

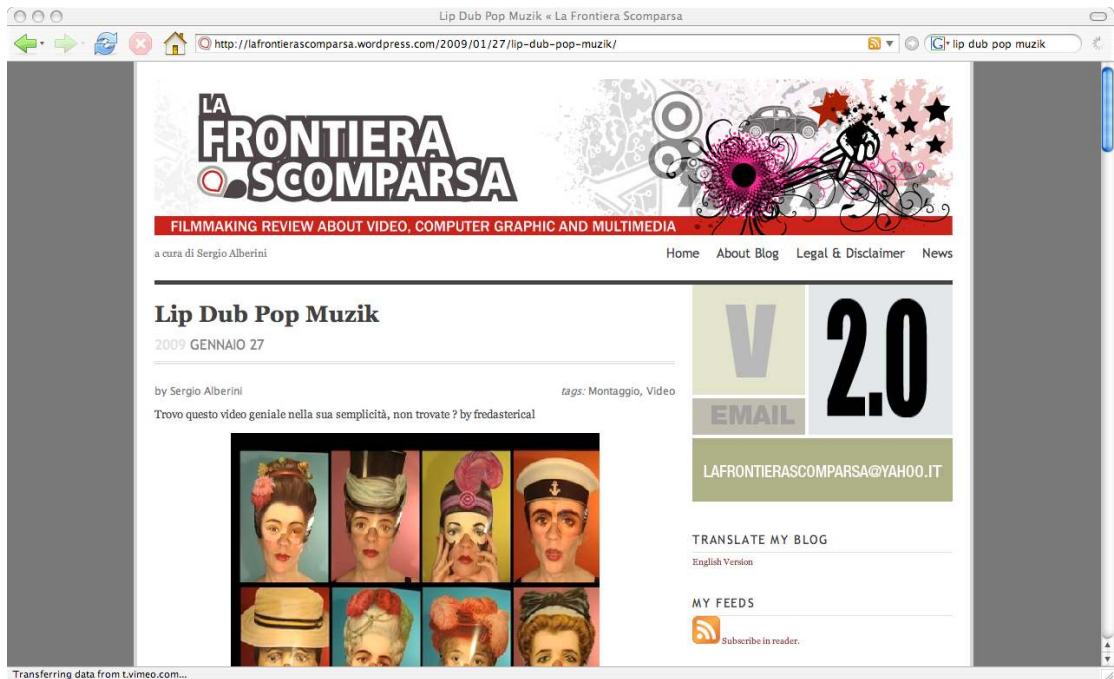


Figure 3, French filmmaking blog, La Frontiera Scomparsa

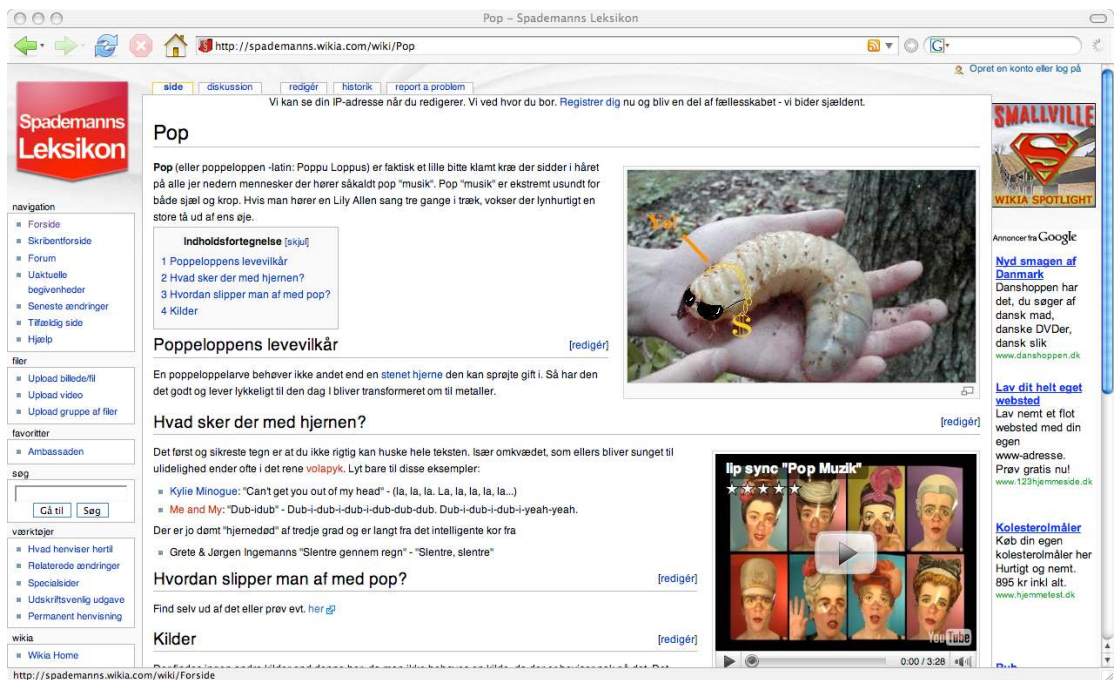


Figure 4, Danish "wiki" site, definition for "Pop"

Appendix 2 Ongoing Artistic Projects

In parallel to *Fredasterical* and *YouGhost*, I have been working on two other artistic projects: *MySong*, an installation piece, and a play entitled *Daughters of the Air*. While these two works have obvious connections to my research, they seemed to open new territory that lies beyond the frame of the present thesis, and I, therefore chose not to include them. My goal is to exhibit both some time in 2015. Below, I include brief descriptions of both.

MySong

MySong is a multi-channel sound/video installation piece, which I plan to complete in 2015. The basis of the piece will be a collage of videos of myself lip-synching to recordings of members of my family *singing* songs that are meaningful to them or that they associate with me and/or our collective memories as a family. *MySong* revolves around ideas of popular music's role in the autobiographies of its consumers: phenomena such as "my song" or "our song", songs that invoke particular moments—times, places, feelings, relationships, circumstances—and how these songs provide a kind of soundtrack, internal and external, individual and collective, intentional and *imposed* on our lives. Whereas my PhD thesis deals specifically with the ways people use commercially-produced popular song recordings, *MySong* is based on the amateur *a capella* voices of my family, recorded in their own domestic spaces.

Daughters of the Air

Daughters of the Air is based loosely on both Hans Christian Andersen's tale of *The Little Mermaid* and the current controversy and surrounding pop singers—most notably Britney Spears—who are "caught lipsynching" and subsequently vilified as fakes. The play explores anxieties about how the voice articulates the self in an increasingly mediatized culture, one in which the voices of the media—news pundits, film stars, pop singers, politicians, fans—exert strong pressures on the formation of individual and collective voice. When such voices are revealed to be "faking it"—when a pop singer lipsynchs in a live concert, for example—the source of their power is undermined, rendered inauthentic. As with many feminist readings of *The Little Mermaid*, the play is also concerned with the cultural construction of female voices and identities as sites of

suspected or assumed inauthenticity. The pressures that are brought to bear on female singers, in particular, to conform to highly processed commercial recordings of their voices are seldom examined in the often-rabid denunciations of them when lipsynching is exposed.

The entire script is pre-recorded and then lipsynched by the actors (with one notable exception at the end of the play, described below). The voice of the narrator and some of the dialogue is newly written, but the script also draws attention to existing media voices by including “found” recordings: excerpts from news reports, recorded song, video blogs, talk shows, etc, all of which are presented on stage through lipsynching. All the characters are essentially “being spoken” by other voices. Just as a pop star might lipsynch to pre-recorded materials, all of the characters are mimics. Only the unseen narrator, Lisa, has her own voice.

Plot:

Lisa is the sister of a pop star called Angel who, while touring, becomes the centre of a lipsynching scandal. Like the Little Mermaid, Angel has been forced to give up her voice—at least as a live performer—in order to conform to an idea of perfection embodied in the recording. Off stage as well as on, Angel has no voice of her own, being subjected to media misquotes and the control of her publicity team. Everything we know and hear about Angel comes through other voices, but only one of those voices—Lisa’s— does not itself pass through the media. Lisa’s story, therefore, is that of two sisters who have made choices that have separated them. In terms of *The Little Mermaid* story, Lisa does not occupy the place of the mermaid’s earthly sisters, who can only offer murder as a way to regain voice, but rather one of the “daughters of the air”, who at the end of Andersen’s story bring redemption and the return of voice through love and kindness. Re-establishing contact with Lisa, Angel finds a space, within which she begins to recover an idea of herself as having a voice of her own that has not been destroyed by the media campaign.

The ending, however, is not strictly speaking a happy one. In the final scene, the tour has ended and Angel has returned to the studio to begin recording songs for a new album. It is the only moment in the play in which we hear a live rather than lipsynched voice, as the actress playing Angel places headphones over her ears and actually sings. The triumph and beauty of this moment, however, is made ambiguous: although we

hear Angel's "real" voice, this is also the moment at which the cycle presumably begins anew and her voice is once again taken away from her. The final sound we hear is the voice Angel has just recorded being played back to her in the studio.

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