

## "I Feel a Song Coming on": Vocal Identification and Modern Subjectivity\*

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Frith, "Why Do Songs Have Words?", *Contemporary Music Review* 5.1 (1989), 77-96.

<sup>2</sup> A paper with precisely this title was presented by Kalina Zahova at the IASPM International Conference, University of Liverpool (UK), 13-17 July 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Koestenbaum makes some interesting comments on this word, 'marriage', in relation to words and music: see *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire* (London: GMP Publishers, 1993), 176-8.

<sup>4</sup> Gerry Moorey, "Music, Identity and Oblivion", *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network* 1.2 (2007), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: on the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 196.

<sup>6</sup> Irene Albrecht et al., "Speech Synchronisation for Physics-based Facial Animation", *Proceedings of the 10th International Conferences in Central Europe on Computer Graphics, Visualization and Computer Vision* (Plzen: UNION Agency, 2002), 5.

What the gramophone listener actually wants to hear is himself, and the artist merely offers him a substitute for the sounding image of his own person, which he would like to safeguard as a possession.  
(Adorno, "The Curves of the Needle")

My voice comes and goes. For you, it comes from me. For me, it goes out from me. Between this coming from and going towards lie all the problems and astonishments of the dissociated voice.  
(Connor, *Dumbstruck*)

Simon Frith famously asked the question, "Why do songs have words?"<sup>1</sup> We could also phrase the question in reverse: "Why do words have songs?"<sup>2</sup> Whichever way round we approach the marriage of language and music, which has (at the risk of sounding romantic) characterised so many musical texts from so many times and places, it is true that the marriage is intriguing.<sup>3</sup> What I aim to do in this article is to identify the role of the voice – as the carrier of both language and music in song – in drawing the listener in to identification, or to push the listener away and close down the possibility of identification.

Although what I mean by the term 'vocal identification' will emerge over the course of what follows, a tentative definition is worth outlining at this stage. Gerry Moorey goes some way in identifying what this process might be; implying the Althusserian notion of interpellation, he suggests early on that identification with music works when "the listener is inserted, body and soul, into the very fabric of what they hear".<sup>4</sup> He further cites Simon Frith, who writes that "we assign [recorded voices] bodies, we imagine their physical production".<sup>5</sup> Although Moorey considers the voice, with reference to private lip-synching moments and karaoke among other examples, he also explores instrumental examples of the musical identification process, including air-guitar and shadow-conducting. But there is an important distinction between vocal and non-vocal identifications that Moorey does not explicitly address: instrumental playing and conducting are primarily gestural, while the production of the voice has important invisible elements. Of course, lip-movements are visible and when watching a lip-synched performance, the perception of accuracy is highly dependent on a good match between phonemes and mouth movements.<sup>6</sup> I would also argue that there are numerous other subtle bodily movements that may determine the perceived accuracy of lip-

synching. Such movements may include those in any direction of the head (which may coincide with changes of pitch), or tensions perceptible in the neck (or rather, movements within the larynx, visible through the neck, and which may coincide not only with pitch but with volume), or movements of the chest that indicate the amount of air held within the lungs and the rate of its expulsion. But even with important facial and bodily movements at work, the production of the voice occurs first *within* the body.

It is, of course, true that every bodily movement originates from within the body. Where, after all, would our bodies be without muscles, bones, ligaments, and tendons? The key feature of the voice, though, is that its production fundamentally disrupts the borders of inside and outside: “My voice comes and goes”, writes Connor.<sup>7</sup> Moorey’s conclusion is to ask what the function of ‘musico-identificatory acts’ is: he argues that it is “a species of ‘healing’, or a reintegration of the individual into his or her surroundings”.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Gilbert Rouget identifies the role of music as that of “reconcill[ing] the torn person with himself”.<sup>9</sup>

What I will argue, through particular exploration of vocal identification and the application of psychoanalytic theory, is that reconciliation and healing are not the primary function of vocal identification; rather, such identification serves *both* to assert the subject’s being *and* to threaten it simultaneously. It is, I propose, a process in which the listening subject is brought into a moment of ontological crisis, and one that, while arguably postmodern in its manifestation, is a peculiarly modern phenomenon, benefitting as it does from the possibility of recorded music.

## The object voice

The main object of consideration here, then, is the voice. More specifically, I mean to consider both the vocal matter – the materiality of the voice as separate from the words it utters – and the object voice, which is not even vocal matter. As Dolar writes, the object voice “is not a function of the signifier [...]. It is] precisely a non-signifying remainder”.<sup>10</sup> For Lacan, as we can see in his famous Graph of Desire, the *objet voix* is a remnant, a leftover, a

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Moorey, “Music”, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations Between Music and Possession*, trans. by Brunhilde Biebuyck (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985), 206.

<sup>10</sup> Mladen Dolar, “The Object Voice”, in Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek, eds., *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (London and Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 10.

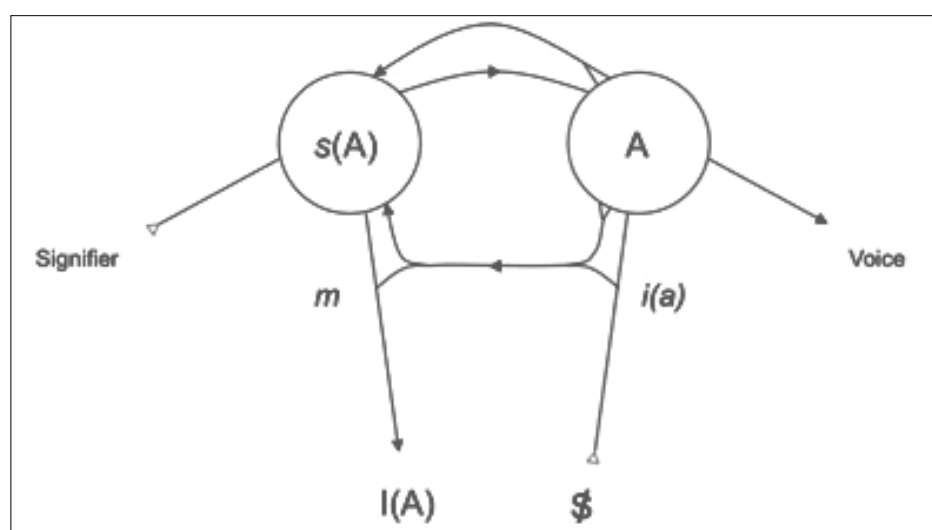


Fig. 1: The first level of Lacan’s completed Graph of Desire, in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 339

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misfire from the trajectory from barred subjectivity (\$) to the Symbolic.

This *objet voix* is not, then, a material voice; indeed, it is inaudible, “forever located outside that scene within which voice began to carry meaning”.<sup>11</sup> It is an object always-already lost; it is the voice without signifying purpose or function, the possibility of vocal meaninglessness. That it is always-already lost puts in place the very structure of what I am talking about here. The *objet voix* is, for Lacan, a site of loss and mourning, and therefore of desire for completion or retrieval. It is, then, the *objet voix* that facilitates the very process of identification with voices, voices as materialities. In moments of identifying with voices, we are seeking (in Lacanian terms) to relive the moment of loss, to ritualise it. But the path of self-actualisation in Lacan’s Graph entails an encounter with language, and as such the place of the materiality of the voice must be accounted for. The voice is an essential part of the subject’s self-actualisation, through encounters with Others in the world; in our day-to-day, closest encounters with Others, speech is a central medium through which the encounter is navigated, and this contributes to our continuing formation of ourselves as subjects. Stephen Connor writes:

If, when I speak, I seem, to you, *and to myself as well*, to be more intimately and uninterruptedly there than at other times, if the voice provides me with acoustic persistence, this is not because I am extruding or depositing myself with my voice in the air, like the vapour trail of an aircraft. It is my voice of my self, as the renewed and persisting action of *producing myself as a vocal agent*, as a producer of signs and sounds, that asserts this continuity and substance. What a voice, any voice, always says, no matter what the particular local import may be of the words it emits, is this: this, here, this voice, is not merely a voice, a particular aggregation of tones and timbres; it is voice, or voicing itself. Listen, says a voice: *some being is giving voice*.<sup>12</sup>

Speech brings the being into being – the speaker is more *here* for speaking, both to the listener and to the speaker. Perhaps that is part of why those of us who live alone can so often be found talking to ourselves at home, but for a more theoretical insight we can turn to Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage.<sup>13</sup> Here, the developing subject has to ‘see oneself looking’ in order to understand himself as Self, rather than Other; it is part of a process of separation, particularly from the Mother. This stage may or may not be identifiable as an historical moment in the subject’s development. On the one hand, it is indeed a developmental stage through which infants pass; on the other, the subject re-enacts this self-recognition (indeed, a mis-recognition) on an ongoing basis as part of a constant process of affirming his Self. Cognate to Lacan’s mirror stage is Derrida’s contention that “the voice is *heard* (understood) – that undoubtedly is what is called conscience”.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Dolar summarises, “*S’entendre parler* – to hear oneself speak – is maybe the minimal definition of consciousness”.<sup>15</sup> Thus, we can think of our speech and our own

<sup>11</sup> Richard Middleton, *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 63.

<sup>12</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 3-4. My emphasis.

<sup>13</sup> The cultural and historical specificity of Lacan’s model is not going unconsidered here. The very need to consider the subject *as* separate from the (M)Other is a particular post-Enlightenment phenomenon. Nonetheless, since I am working within this culture, at this time, I shall hold onto Lacan’s model, albeit with these (and several other) problems in mind.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 20. His emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> Dolar, “The Object Voice”, 13.

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comprehension of it as a central part of the production of our own subjectivity and agency in the world around us.

Another way to account for the place of the sonic reality of the voice in relation to the Lacanian *objet voix* might be to turn to the Barthesian notion of geno-song, which

forms a signifying play having nothing to do with communication (of feelings), expression; it is that apex (or depth) of production where the melody really works at the language – not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sounds-signifiers, of its letters – where melody explores how the language works and identifies with that work.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image - Music - Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), 182.

Here, the concern is with everything in the voice which is not the signifying content of what is being said. In song, it also depends on the extraction of the coded content of the music; this is a material voice that is neither language nor music, but that which exceeds and defies them both.

Moreover, the *act of speech* is understood to reveal something of the speaker; speech is considered to be very much *of* the person speaking. We can, for instance, recognise individuals by their voices alone. Indeed, it is perhaps rather important to us that this is true, there being a mild sense of discomfort when the words “It’s me” on the end of a phone line do not lead the listener to instant recognition of the speaker. But perhaps the uniqueness of the voice of an individual is more important to us as an idea than it is a thing of fact. It is certainly an idea that has been a recurrent cultural touchstone, and it connects a number of seemingly disparate cultural objects: Edison’s proposed use of his phonograph for the making of a ‘Family Record’<sup>17</sup>; the plotline of *Charlie’s Angels* (McG, 2000) or *Little Voice* (Herman, 1998); and the UK television show *Stars in Their Eyes*, or the Italian *Sei un mito*. The voice and the Self are intimately linked in our cultural imagination. Consequently, if our encounter with an Other is one involving the voice, we not only appreciate the presence and being of the Other because of *his* voice, but we also distinguish that voice from *our own*, and thus we too are brought into being. In hearing, and knowing that it is not we who speak, we make a separation between the Self and the Other that is crucial to the makeup of our own subjectivity. Thus, if the act of speech by an Other is part of a process for us as subjects of self-actualisation, it is precisely because we are not the speaker. That is to say, it is because we *do not* identify with the voice – we identify ourselves *against* it. The listener hears the speaker’s very being, or at least he wants to, and the listener’s Self becomes alteritously reinforced in that moment.

<sup>17</sup> “A registry of sayings, reminiscences, etc., by members of a family in their own voices, and of the last words of dying persons”; Thomas A. Edison, “The Perfected Phonograph”, *The North American Review* 146.379 (June 1888).

## Identification with the voice

But what about identification *with* the voice? Do we – and if so *how* do we – identify with the voice of an Other? Indeed, *why* would we, if our

<sup>18</sup> The piece was reissued in 1965 with a brief caveat by the author about the changes in technology after its original publication, and some edits to the language, and it is this reissue from which I work.

<sup>19</sup> Koestenbaum, *Queen's Throat*, 101.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>21</sup> This possibility is facilitated within Lacan's model of the *objet voix*; the desire for the voice put in place by the *objet voix*'s being always-already lost may be, on the one hand, an eroticised desire, or it may be the desire to take up the subject position that produces the voice.

distinction from it is so important for our self-construction? I turn now to my first epigraph, from Adorno's 1927 article "The Curves of the Needle", a piece about the nature of gramophone recordings.<sup>18</sup> The very concept contained within the quote – that the listener "actually wants to hear ... himself", a desire to hear and yet safeguard oneself simultaneously – seems to be the same drive that I am here calling vocal identification.

Wayne Koestenbaum's terminology also comes to mind, as he speaks in terms of desire for the voice. His desire is fierce and desperate, and he positions himself in a clear relationship with the voice: "we want to consume the singer," he writes; "we go to the opera to eat voice".<sup>19</sup> And in response to Maria Callas's 1953 performance of the 'Mad Scene' in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, he writes "Alas, I am separated from a desired voice!".<sup>20</sup> But even in this woeful lamentation, the nature of this desire is unclear. Is it a desire to possess the voice's creator, to consume the Being Giving Voice? Perhaps to *be* the voice, given life by the creator? What does it mean to "eat voice" – to internalise the voice such that it becomes part of one's own fabric? To destroy it and supplant it with one's own voice? Or precisely to make it one's own voice? This last possibility is the place of tension that is, for me, vocal identification. It is the desire to possess the voice being heard, to be that voice's creator, while also necessarily being separated from the voice's production.<sup>21</sup>

What we have here is the listener's identification oscillating between the Self of the listener and the Other of the singer. Adorno proposes that the listener uses the singer to stand in for himself, to whom he would much rather be listening. On the other hand, there is the reality of listening to our own recorded voices. If we consider once again the mirror, it seems obvious enough that what we see in our mirror images is not the same as what others see as they look at us. Indeed, there is a certain repulsion generated in any attempt to force together the two perceptions of what we see of ourselves and what others see. The photograph, for instance, forces a confrontation with a version of oneself very different from one's mental image of oneself, and it lacks the physicality of the mirror. The video image is, perhaps, even closer to what others see of us, and yet – or perhaps *therefore* – is even more repulsive to us. Whereas I have direct control over my mirror image (it moves when I move), the thing on the screen (impostor!) moves without me, and presents an even greater discomfort in this mismatch between movement and physicality.

An equivalent set of processes is at work in the voice, which also contributes to our 'mind's eye' (or, rather, 'mind's ear') version of ourselves. Just as the mirror and the gaze render different faces, what I hear as I speak is different from what another hears (that is, in the sense of geno-song, and of vocal qualities, rather than in the sense of the content or



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message being misinterpreted). Since the invention of the phonograph in 1877, the gap between the speaker's and the listener's experience of the same voice has become more readily understandable (and closable?) through the popularisation of recording technologies. The experience of that gap is commonly an uncomfortable one, as Stephen Connor describes: "People who hear their own recorded voices [usually] find them alien – ugly, piping, thin, crude, drawling, barking, or otherwise unattractive".<sup>22</sup> Our mental image of our voices, which (crucially) may persist during the act of speech or song, is thus disrupted by the playback of our recorded voices – dismembered, even, as it is cut from the body.

A useful model for unpacking this further can be found in Freud's concept of the ego-ideal. He describes the ego-ideal as something of a replacement for childhood narcissism, a mechanism by which we can maintain the illusion of our own perfection in the face of the reality of the matter:

He is not willing to forgo the narcissistic perfection of his childhood; and when, as he grows up, he is disturbed by the admonitions of others and by the awakening of his own critical judgement, so that he can no longer retain that perfection, he seeks to recover it in the new form of an ego ideal. What he projects before him as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps playing back a recording of ourselves disrupts this ego ideal; we have a mental image of our voices – an idealised one – and that has to be jettisoned when we hear ourselves played back, just as the recognition by the infant of his mirror image is, for Lacan, a *mis*-recognition. Now, although Adorno at first proposes that the listener subject wants to hear himself, he also makes it clear that the listener specifically does *not* want to – he wants to safeguard that as a possession, which is why he requires the substitute of the recorded singer. In the revelation of the ego ideal as an illusion is the disruption of the subject's defence mechanisms, and thus in the act of substitution is *inbuilt* the act of safeguarding.

However, what I am considering here is not a straightforward act of listening to an Other while keeping that Other at a distance. Perhaps 'substitution' here implies identification on some level, but while a simple substitution might forestall the threat to the ego ideal, an act of identification instead brings that threat back into play, insofar as the listening process involves positing the Other's voice as his own. In one sense, this contradiction makes the 'substitution' more complete, but the threat also remains and some continued distance must be maintained for the sake of the ego ideal's stability. If Freud's uncanny is a process in which the familiar is rendered strange, what is happening here is also a process of making the strange (the Other) familiar, incorporating the Other into the

<sup>22</sup> Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9.

<sup>23</sup> Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction", in Peter Gay, ed., *The Freud Reader* (London: Vintage, 1995), 558.

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Self. But it is crucial that this is *also* happening; that is to say, once the Other has been absorbed and forced into familiarity, it must immediately be rendered foreign again. Thus, a rapid oscillation is occurring between familiarity and strangeness, between Self and Other.

This relationship between the ears of the listener and the voice of the Other is, at its heart, interactive, as is implied by my second epigraph. To be heard at all, the voice must leave the body and be projected, disconnecting itself from the body that produced it, and it must then penetrate the ears of the listener; both features of the penetration – the leaving and the entering – must occur, and this implies two coinciding characteristics of the voice. On the one hand, the voice has to be set free from the body of its creator. On leaving the body, the voice acquires the power to roam at will and launch itself into another body, forcing itself into the passive, waiting ears, and thereby becomes invader, intruder, contagion. Mladen Dolar writes that the voice is “the paramount source of danger and decay”,<sup>24</sup> and that “the core of the danger is the voice that sets itself loose from the word, the voice beyond logos, the lawless voice”.<sup>25</sup> Yet, at the same time, the voice takes some part of the body with it; the “body in the voice as it sings” (or speaks) is exactly the ‘grain’ of the voice of which Roland Barthes writes.<sup>26</sup> Stephen Connor sums up the tension between the two constituent parts of the act of voicing: “Always standing apart from or non-identical with the body from which it issues, the voice is by definition irreducible to or incompatible with that body. And yet the voice is always in and of the body”.<sup>27</sup>

This penetrative quality inherent in the voice is, as Serena Guarracino notes, a “relation between two bodies, the voicing body and the body who receives that voice [that] is easily sexualized”.<sup>28</sup> She continues: “As a consequence, the listener’s body can become a contested space where diverse discourses about gender identity come into play”.<sup>29</sup> Specifically, I would argue, the detachment of voice from body renders unstable the signifiers at play here in such a way as to make the voice itself a space highly productive of the queer. So although, as Connor observes, the voice is always ‘of the body’ from which it emanates, the incompatibility between voice and body that he also acknowledges means that the voice does not function as a simple signifier of the gendered-ness of its producing body.<sup>30</sup> Guarracino is right when she observes the possibility for gender play in the operatic system with which she is concerned, where the penetrating body – that of the singer – is “in the collective imaginary, mainly female”,<sup>31</sup> but the principle can be taken beyond both opera and biology. In fact, the biology of the listener or the singer is something of a red herring; what is important in the ontology of the voice is its capacity always-already to detach the signifier of the vocal wave-form from the signified of the identity of the voice’s producer, and in turn to keep open

<sup>24</sup> Dolar, “The Object Voice”, 20.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>26</sup> Barthes, *Image*, 188.

<sup>27</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 208.

<sup>28</sup> Serena Guarracino, “I Would Like to Disappear into Those Vowels’: Gender-troubling Opera”, *The Newsletter for the LGBTQ Study Group*, 16.2 (Fall 2006), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 208.

<sup>31</sup> Guarracino, “I Would Like to Disappear into Those Vowels”, 3.

the possibility for multiple gender identities, until such time as identity is conferred upon the voice's producer by the listener. Annamarie Jagose identifies the queer as "those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire".<sup>32</sup> And if we adopt this definition, it can in turn be argued that the voice's rupture of the signs at work, in relation to gender identity and desire, and indeed identification, makes it a particularly intense site for the emergence of the queer. Moreover, the object voice is removed from the signifying order, insofar as it is a misfire or remnant of the Lacanian subject's journey into the Symbolic order.

But at the same time, the materiality of the (geno-)voice performs signifying work, in that it is understood as a signifier of the subjectivity and presence of its producer. In this borderline state between signifying and non-signifying, the object voice thus exposes the sign-ness of things, a function also of the queer in particular relation to gender and desire. More broadly, the queer is a subset of the uncanny, in the Freudian sense of that word. The intricacies of the relationship between the categories have been explored by Olu Jenzen in more space and depth than can be afforded here, but Jenzen offers some key connections, two of which will serve as a foundation for the next stages of the present study:

Firstly, the cultural and epistemological placing of the queer 'on the edge of', 'at the back of', 'in opposition to', and even 'underneath' heterosexuality resembles the relation of the *unheimlich* to the *heimlich*. Secondly, the uncanny effect of making strange and uncomfortable the world as we know it is an element identifiable both in queer theory and what we may want to call a queer aesthetic, drawing on both repetition and the carnivalesque.<sup>33</sup>

Jenzen makes clear here that the estranging of the familiar and the borderline state implicit in being 'on the edge of' are crucial to both the *unheimlich* and the queer. The queer, like the uncanny, is always recognisable enough to be familiar, meaning that some identification is possible by the Self (constructed as it is by default in psychoanalytic discourse as, by definition, not-queer). Yet the queer is also always strange and distant enough to repel that Self. The queer manifests itself in a postmodern play with signs, as the heteronormative sign-system is appropriated, deconstructed, and reconstructed. Signs are taken from multiple sexed and gendered subject positions that appear to be contradictory, and their juxtaposition is what yields the things we call queer. So the queer, in exposing the sign-ness of things, reveals the extent to which normative sexualities are not *natural* but *naturalised*, a product of long-term sedimentation of ideas about behavioural rectitude.

Furthermore, the queer is monstrous, as monsters "refus[e] to participate in the classificatory 'order of things' ...: they are disturbing hybrids whose

<sup>32</sup> Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory* 4 (December 1996), <<http://www.austalianhumanitiesreview.org>>, 30 July 2009. It is essential to note that those relations are only *allegedly* stable, and 'queer' is therefore not the *deconstruction* of those links, but those gestures which *dramatise incoherencies* in an already tenuous set of links. Some voices may perform these dramatised incoherencies more obviously than others, but I would argue that the voice always has the capacity for such dramatisation because of the inherent separation of speaker/singer from listener.

<sup>33</sup> Olu Jenzen, "The Queer Uncanny", *eSharp* 9 (Spring 2007). <[http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_41216\\_en.pdf](http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_41216_en.pdf)>, 25 May 2009.



<sup>34</sup> J. J. Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 6.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 7

externally coherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration".<sup>34</sup> Like the queer, they are "harbingers of category crisis". The monster "is difference made flesh",<sup>35</sup> incorporating the Outside, the Beyond; the Other can always have its Otherness exaggerated into monstrosity. What is also implicitly entwined in the object voice, then, along with the queer and the uncanny, is the abject; in setting itself loose from the body, from its creator, the voice is like a child breaking free from its mother, a process which, for Julia Kristeva, is one of abjection. This is not to say that the queer or the uncanny is abject *per se*, but that the same qualities that enable the first two categories also enable the third, and in fact, the distancing effect of the uncanny – the estranging process – is only a small step away from the violent rejection implicit in the notion of abjection.

So, the voice demands both identification and anti-identification (rejection, repulsion) in order to facilitate the continuous stability of the subject, but such stability is always precarious.

### Moments musicaux

Having established some theoretical ground, I turn now to some musical moments in which I perceive some of the processes I have laid out thus far. To be clear, I am not suggesting that my own experience of these moments would apply to any other listener; what follows is not intended to be an exhaustive list nor even a representative one, and I do not imagine it to be widely shared either. Rather, I want to pursue here a kind of auto-analysis in order to open up some possibilities regarding the relationship between sonic events and theoretical processes. Some of the following moments primarily draw me in, while others primarily push me away, but what I explore below is the ways in which there is no exact distinction between the two processes.

<sup>36</sup> <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x71jgMx0Mxc>>, 8 February 2010.

<sup>37</sup> <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dcikVBo0\\_4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dcikVBo0_4)>, 8 February 2010.

<sup>38</sup> <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ESqcg6jPCA>>, 8 February 2010>.

<sup>39</sup> <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CX-24Zm0bjk>>, 8 February 2010.

- Allegri, *Miserere* (recorded by the Tallis Scholars, 1980; Alison Stamp singing treble): the highest treble notes, a C6 coming 8-9 bars after each tenor chant section, and the turn on F5 (written out over four quavers) in the next bar leading into a resolution on G5.<sup>36</sup>
- Puccini, *Tosca*, recorded in 1965 by the Théâtre National de l'Opéra with Maria Callas as Tosca: Tosca's line "Ecco un artista!" in the third act, particularly the "Ec-" of "Ecco".
- Verdi, *La traviata*, as recorded in 1994 at the Royal Opera House, with Angela Gheorghiu as Violetta: Violetta's final line, "Oh gioia!"<sup>37</sup>
- Sade, "Smooth Operator": the word "ask" in the line "no need to ask", immediately before the chorus.<sup>38</sup>
- "Mein Herr" in the film *Cabaret* (Fosse, 1972): both occasions of the line "Bye bye, mein lieber Herr", leading into the choruses, and particularly the words "lieber Herr".<sup>39</sup>

- Otis Redding, “I’ve Been Loving You Too Long”: the word “tired” in the line “You are tired and you want to be free” (later, “and your love is growing cold”).<sup>40</sup>
- Luz Casal, “Un año de amor”: the final word, “amor”.<sup>41</sup>
- Martin Grech, “Open Heart Zoo”: the second iteration of the line “Fill this full of light”, especially the extended word “light”; and in the next line, “and open up”, the word “up”.<sup>42</sup>
- Diamanda Galás, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” (on *You Must Be Certain Of The Devil*): most of the song, especially the first “sweet”, the first “chariot”, and the second and third “swing”.

What I have not done in the above list is to identify in individual cases whether identification or anti-identification is most at work for me as a listener. On reflection, I find that these moments – and very specific moments they are – place me in a listening position in which the simultaneity of identification and anti-identification is complex to a point where separation of the two is not altogether possible, but the complexities themselves are worth exploration. Perhaps the simplest examples for me are those of Callas (*Tosca*), Gheorghiu (*La traviata*), and Stamp (*Miserere*). In each of the moments I have identified in those recordings, I experience a palpable desire to be part of the voices, to be producing them myself. At the same time, the anticipation in the *Traviata* and *Miserere* moments, due in part to the notes’ length, affords me a sense of tension such that, despite the pleasure I find in the notes, I am relieved when they are over. The fleeting nature of the word “Ecco” in the *Tosca* example is less obviously tense, but still the feeling of relief arrives when I no longer feel the desire to produce Callas’s sound. I find a similar sense of painful pleasure at work in “Smooth Operator” and to a certain extent in “Mein Herr”. What connects these five moments musically – at least in terms of a traditional musical analysis – is not immediately obvious, although the effects are similar for me. Tentatively, I would suggest that each case offers or points directly towards a moment of musical climax – anticlimax, perhaps, in the case of Sade, as her voice seems abandoned by the accompaniment at that moment – and that in so doing, they stand as moments outside of their immediate contexts.

In the remaining examples, apart from Galás, to which I shall return, there is also a sense of climax that contributes to the moment. And each of these cases – Redding, Casal, Grech – is filled with musical tension in ways similar to the cases of Gheorghiu and Stamp, but noticeably more boldly (even crudely) so. How Redding, Casal and Grech resolve their respective tensions is very different in each case, but the establishment of some kind of tension is undeniable. The musical similarities among these three moments are, in many ways, more obvious than those among the previous cases discussed; all three of them are occasions on which one

<sup>40</sup> <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqaOp7sly0w>>, 8 February 2010.

<sup>41</sup> <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQC8d0NgqLE>>, 8 February 2010.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xja7UXSZmps>, 8 February 2010.

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note – one syllable of one word – is sustained, almost pushed. In “I’ve Been Loving You Too Long”, after a rising passage in the brass, emphasised by the rhythm section, Redding picks up the penultimate note in the sequence (G#4) on the word “tired” and bends it gradually upwards over four seconds into the final note (to the A). The proximity of these two notes and the length of the bend Redding imposes yield tension enough, such that the resolution on the upper note is welcome relief when it finally occurs. What is even more intriguing about the note, though, is the shift of vocal timbres perceptible in his voice over the course of those four seconds, generated in part by a shift in vocal production from chest voice to falsetto. At the same time as Redding hits the note, the pounding triplets from the accompaniment give way to an arpeggiated piano feature (from the opening of the song), removing much of the volume and gravity from the overall sound; Redding himself mirrors this by way of a reduction in volume over the course of the note, and thus the latter half of the note – once he has come close enough to the upper note for melodic resolution – hangs weightlessly, representing a moment of calm after the great build up into it.

Something similar happens in “Un año de amor”, when Luz Casal enters her final note. Here, though, the discrepancy between the initial pitching and the note on which Casal finally resolves is a little less than the full semitone’s difference covered by Redding’s slide. This acts in combination with a different musical environment – the track ends, and the note with it, in a grand finale – and a much less radical shift in vocal timbre. The pitching, the timbre, and the musical context together make the moment more unsettling for me than the equivalent in “I’ve Been Loving You”. When listening to this final climax in “Un año de amor”, I am aware in part of wanting to produce Casal’s sound, and simultaneously of a desperate and uncomfortable desire for the ‘right’ note (that which is finally reached as her vibrato kicks in) to be reached. That desire is also present when listening to Redding – I have suggested that already – but my feeling in response to Redding is of being willing to go along with the note, *into* the note almost, whereas with Casal part of me pushes against the sound; perhaps here, I want to make the sound partly in order to rectify its pitch.

Grech’s voice goes even further towards generating a conflict of identification. His shifts of timbre are arguably even more deafening than Redding’s, and these timbral shifts are compounded by multiple slides of adjacent notes. Thus, in the word “light”, extended over 7 seconds, there is an initial slide up into one pitch before the melody turns around three consecutive notes and lands on the original pitch; but this makes it sound more fixed and notable than it is, because the slides into and out of each note have the ultimate effect of destabilising the sense of pitch altogether. And during all these melodic slips, the timbre of Grech’s voice becomes

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gradually more (and then less, and then more again) harsh and stretched, almost nasal, and quite unhuman. This unhuman quality is made more real by the uses of studio technologies, variously audible on close listening and always leaving their mark on the overall sound. Similar qualities of unfixed pitch and unhuman vocality are evident in the word “up”, coming a few seconds later and occupying a 4 second time-span; here, the technology is distinctly audible and particularly pertinent, as the final moments of this note are blended into a high-pitched synth noise that takes over the melodic line after Grech finishes. In this total of 11 seconds of sound the voice is pushed beyond what I could possibly seek to identify with, because of the uses of technology, and beyond what I find obviously pleasurable in the nature of the sound; this is a mercurial vocality and one that challenges the listener, but for me it says, ‘Go on, I dare you to keep listening until I release’.

Perhaps the most striking of the examples I listed is Galás, who is (in)famous for what could briefly be described as a sense of highly controlled chaos in her voice. Operatic in many ways, she is also distinguished by her commitment to pushing the boundaries of vocality, from the perspective of both singer and listener. As such “Swing Low” is not entirely unusual in Galás’s discography in the range of screams and squeals, and the way they sit alongside a highly controlled operatic vibrato; but it is an unusual rendition of the song, in that it takes nearly 3 minutes for her to sing four lines, because almost every word is stretched beyond capacity. There are many details to which I could attend, but they would distract from the overall point of this example: that every fibre of me is repulsed by this voice, the indecency of its excesses, and yet one tiny part of me enjoys it in a macabre way – it is rather like staring at a horrific car crash.

But this mix of pleasure and displeasure is, as I have tried to imply, at work in each of the moments I have identified. Indeed, to start to bring the theoretical and the music-analytical together, I would argue that the same mix is at the very heart of any moment of vocal identification. The pleasure and discomfort felt at the surface level of listening in moments of vocal identification are mirrored in the oscillation between the formation of and threat to the core of subjectivity. If at any of these moments I want to produce the sounds I hear, I am in one sense engaging in the ‘vicarious performance’ of which Cone writes.<sup>43</sup> But much more than this, as Adorno suggests, while I listen to the voice of an Other, what I really want to hear is myself. Or rather, I want that sound to be mine, to be of me; but I want that because of the protection it affords me against the inadequacy of my own state. In the mirror stage, when the developing subject is forced to see the lack of unity he really has with the world around him and the lack of control he really has over his own body, he imposes the ego ideal as a

<sup>43</sup> E. T. Cone, *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (New York: Norton, 1968), 21.

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protection against the inadequacy; in the same way, these vocal moments afford me the fantasy that I could hear my own voice (I want to hear myself, I want the voice to be mine) without a threat to my ego ideal. In that fantasy, my ego ideal is protected, and I am not forced to see it for the illusion that it is, as I would be if I actually heard my own voice from the speakers. And it is those speakers that are crucial to the processes that I have been exploring. Just as the technology of the gramophone prompts Adorno's musings, the same technology, with its possibilities for repeatability and privacy, also enables everything of which I have written, as the potential to relive those recorded moments that enable identification allows us to ritualise the moment of loss that Lacan identifies in the *objet voix*. It is also worth pausing to ponder what part the Barthesian geno-song plays here; although my examples may well not be widely shared, the points of interest that I have found in them are, to be sure, geno-moments. I want to propose, then, that certain vocal moments can function as sites of attachment for the listening subject, inviting us to use them as shrines for the ritualised reliving of the originary moment of loss. Thus, although the manifestation of this process takes something of a postmodern form, challenging as it does the position of the signifier, it is also reliant on the technology of modernity; more than this, it relies on the structures of the subjectivity of modernity, constructed as discrete and autonomous, and yet it is also defined by a kind of fusion of subjects. Perhaps, then, part of what vocal identification offers the listening subject – alongside the continued fantasy of the ego, its ideal, and its preservation – is a step into a network of subjectivities.