

'Last Night a DJ Saved My Life': Avians, Cyborgs and Siren Bodies in the Era of Phonographic Technology

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Saving life, fixing the mix

I'm listening to Mariah Carey's version of the classic dance-tune, 'Last Night a DJ Saved My Life' (which appeared on the soundtrack of her disastrous feature film, *Glitter*). But Carey – arguably *the* female pop voice of the 1990s – isn't heard for the first minute of the track.¹ Instead, the scene is set by the intersecting imperatives of three male rappers, Busta Rhymes, Fabulous and DJ Clue, and their orders brook no argument: 'Pay attention! ... Give it to me! ... Shake it and bounce around!' Throughout the song, Carey's voice (capable as it is of multi-octave virtuosity) is restrained, generally low in register, positioned in the middle-ground of the mix, behind the men, behind the rhythm track. It comes across as the willing object of a complex manipulative production. What is going on? 1

In a time-worn move, the film's narrative tracks the audience's knowledge of Carey's own mythic life-story – from childhood struggle to stardom, via chance and romance (the very first sound-film, Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer*, set the trend). Her curvaceous but strangely homogenised body, draped in alluring poses and glittering, plasticated sheen around the CD booklet just as it is across the movie screen, seals the deal – the sale which buys celebrity. How does the DJ's life-saving performance fit into this narrative? 2

On one level the story told in the song is conventional enough: forget your troubles, lose yourself in song, find solace in dance. But this scenario is insistently gendered. The rappers' voices make explicit what we could anyway assume – that the DJ will be male, and that the object of his ministrations will be female, here 'embodied' vocally (as it were) in the little-girl-lost voice offered by Carey. The DJ stands for authority, an authority with pedagogic power: 'Hey listen up to your local DJ/You better hear what he's got to say/There's not a problem that I can't fix/Cause I can do it in the mix.' As the multiple rap voices shoot across the sonic space from all directions, surrounding Carey's low-key, centrally positioned vocal, it's tempting to adapt the distinction commonly made in film theory between a stereotypic male position – mobile, free to enter and 3

leave the visual scene, crossing boundaries at will – and the equally stereotypic female position – passive, fixed, an element of the space itself. As Teresa de Lauretis puts it, ‘The woman, fixed in the position of icon, spectacle, or image to be looked at, bears the mobile look of both the spectator and the male character(s). It is the latter who commands at once the action and the landscape...’² Yet the lyrics I just quoted come (towards the end of the track) from Carey, sliding between subject-positions. She has, on the one hand, learned the lesson which her posse of prancing rappers have handed down, but on the other hand, she appears to stand in their place: echo, mimic or (in some strange way, as if the positions of ventriloquist and dummy were reversed), precondition or even source?³

I’ll return to the issue of embodiment (and also to that of ventriloquism). For now, I want just to note that, in spite of the way the recording makes elaborate textural and vocal gestures towards the reproduction of a live event, actually all the voices here have, strictly speaking, left any body behind.⁴ The record form itself, generically, marks this erasure. But it’s amplified by the digital technology used to produce this particular recording: all the voices recorded in different studios, Carey singing her own backing vocals, the mix created with the help of Protools software. The voices come to us from..... from where? We have no idea – except that we know, if we stop to think about it, that they emerge from some apparatus, from a machine. This is canned music, its ontology most clearly centred in *things* – the CD, the audio equipment, the surrounding visual images of Carey; as a persistent strand of criticism throughout the twentieth century told us (‘Keep Music Live’, said the Musicians Union), this music is *dead*. How can a DJ, whose professional activity lies in the spinning, the spinning out, of this simulacrum of performance, possibly ‘save a life’?

As is well known, the connection of phonograph technology with tropes of death stems from its very beginnings.⁵ Preservation of the voices of the dead, it was envisaged, would be one of its principal functions. The editors of the *Scientific American* in 1877 ‘pronounced Edison the only man alive capable of raising the voices of the dead’.⁶ ‘Upon replaying the old cylinder,’ writes Friedrich Kittler, ‘...it is a corpse that speaks.’⁷ – a sensation whose uncanniness we should make every effort to reconstitute, for as the fictitious composer who features in Maurice Renard’s short story of 1907 – a story reproduced by Kittler – puts it: ‘How terrible it is to hear this copper throat and its sounds from beyond the grave!’⁸

In his early writings on the new recording technologies, dating from 1928 and 1934,⁹ Theodor Adorno laments the fading of this uncanny, disruptive power following the domestication of the apparatus into a piece of bourgeois furniture. The gramophone horn, once ‘brass’, becomes ‘muffled’, both in design and material, and its messages mutate from ‘fanfares of the street’ into ‘shrouds of the emptiness that people usually prefer to enshroud within themselves’. Even though this process of ‘stabilisation’ is apparently not complete – for ‘the

downtrodden gramophone horns reassert themselves as proletarian loudspeakers' – Adorno fails to pursue his own hint about the role of social variability, and his funereal imagery – it points towards a sort of 'second death', actually – seems to mark the end of records' role as 'disturbers of the peace'.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Adorno does suggest that in principle the needle's direct (that is, unmediated) inscription of its message still retains the potential to summon up memories of a pre-lapsarian *Ur-language*. This 'machine-writing', 'delicately scribbled, utterly illegible[,]...committed to the sound that inhabits this and no other acoustic groove', points towards a condition marked by a kind of pre-subjective subjectivity, a state before the babble (Babel) of divergent meanings, when things could speak for themselves and art might become 'an archaic text of knowledge to come'.¹¹ Much later, Kittler picks up this idea: 'Ever since the invention of the phonograph, there has been writing without a subject... Record grooves dig the grave of the author.'¹² (I'll come back to the overlapping territories of groove and grave.)

At first sight, Adorno's position might seem to manifest a dismaying nostalgia – 7
or at best to draw upon the messianic strand in the thought of his friend Walter Benjamin without fully assimilating it to his own rather different project. As cultural technology, records enter a social field that is always already formed – is alive and lively, one might say – and their voices are always already subjectivated. The image of the tortured parrot in a box presented in music-hall singer Gus Elen's 1896 song, 'The Finest Flow O' Langwidge Ever 'Eard', and discussed recently by Elizabeth Leach, comes to mind.¹³ Elen's 'phonygraff', as depicted on the song-sheet, is nothing more than a parrot hidden in a hat-box, into which four listeners are plugged via 'hearing tubes' (as so often with such images, the inter-connection of the listeners through a central machine has a cyborgian look to us today, and indeed medical technologies such as the stethoscope played an important role in the emergence of this new imagination of the sounding body, as Sterne has pointed out¹⁴). The parrot is forced into speech (by prodding it with a pin, dropping burning tobacco on it, putting pepper in its seed), but its 'songs', in successive refrains, engage common music-hall scenarios, inhabited by stock characters (an irate landlord, a bookie taken to the cleaners, a 'lady' jostled in the street). The scene may be surreal, even uncanny, then – nature and machine conflated – but the musical result is both socially specific and culturally familiar. Thus the parrot may certainly be read as 'foreign' – an exotic other – but has been domesticated too (a pet in a cage), and, although it impersonates both men and women, its babbling subservience positions it discursively, I would suggest, as feminine, its flow of mechanical mimicry a nicely suggestive complement to the contemporaneous figure of (silent) masculine fidelity offered by the celebrated HMV dog, Nipper.¹⁵ It is also low-class, its 'finest flow o' langwidge' clearly (and not surprisingly, given the torture that provokes it) a stream of obscenities which produces mixed reactions, of amusement or of outrage, from the respectable bourgeois listeners depicted on the song-sheet. Gus Elen, himself positioned as a cockney coster (a lovable, working-class exotic), has the role of a kind of *deus ex machina* (or

deus machinae?), whose 'negotiation' of/with this feminised, rough-trade avian other at one and the same time falls into a familiar pattern of music-hall cultural politics and looks forward to what would become (as we shall see) a standard dynamic within the cultural economy of recorded song.

As Leach makes clear, what is crucially at stake in Elen's song is the status of 'writing', as this has been and can be figured across a range of practices – from vocal performance through textualities of various sorts to mechanically and electronically mediated reproduction – and across a *longue durée* with roots deep in the Classical equation of language and reason, passed on through the traditions of Christian Platonism. In the beginning was the word, which was with God and which wrote nature into existence. If the book of nature is there, for science, to be read, it is also there as an ambivalent stage-setting for the voice of Man, at once source and threat. Elen's parrot stands not for nature in any primordial sense but for nature on the rack, subjected – as Adorno might well have pointed out – to the ravages of instrumentalised reason, forced to reflect back to us our most inane blather. Leach also points out that the parrot is not the only bird species to feature in this discursive tradition; just as it stands for irrational imitation, so the nightingale stands quintessentially for a kind of natural (as against human) reason, each in its divergent way being deployed to set off the distinctiveness of music proper. Yet singers too have over the same period often been compared to both parrots (silly reproduction machines) and nightingales (artless vehicles of nature). Were they 'phonygrafts', or even musical cyborgs, *avant la lettre?*¹⁶

For the Romantics, the book of nature was a *secret* one, and Adorno – following Benjamin – picked up the idea of a pre-representational 'hieroglyphic' system which, he suggested, it was music's utopian role, hinted at in the directly inscribed form of the record, to encrypt and to reveal. The parrot's mechanical 'flow o' langwidge' might also remind us, then, of another mysterious force of nature – the hypnotic effects associated mythically with the singing of the Sirens, who would become important to Adorno's argument as, in collaboration with Max Horkheimer, he subsequently developed it, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: the Sirens who, as Barbara Engh points out, are described as half woman, half bird.¹⁷ Adorno sees Odysseus's encounter with them as standing for that fateful moment which marks the way (male) logos would learn to resist the blandishments of (female) pathos – if only by stopping up the ears and immobilising the body – but for Adorno, Engh insists, this points not only towards the historical trajectory of gender difference but also to the still more basic problematic within which the human differentiates itself from beastly nature.¹⁸ Engh is right; and yet, the distinction of levels is hard to maintain with any rigour:

While they [the Sirens] directly evoke the recent past, with the irresistible promise of pleasure as which their song is heard, they threaten the patriarchal order which renders to each man his life only in return for his

full measure of time... Men had to do fearful things to themselves before the self, the identical, purposive, and virile nature of man was formed...¹⁹

The Adornian narrative – like this discursive tradition as a whole – has a distinctly theological cast: ‘the idea of music is the form of the divine name’, and music’s task is to ‘name the name itself’ in a form of ‘demythologised prayer’²⁰ – a phal-logocentrism whose hierarchic effect is hardly overturned by those inversions in certain feminist moves which locate a foundational stratum instead in some pre-linguistic bodily ‘knowledge’ to which women (like birds? like Sirens?) have privileged access.

Clearly, the implications of Adorno’s argument are far more subtle than my initial sketch may have suggested. His apocalypticism is grounded not just in ‘nostalgia’ but also in a historically located account of the human ‘traffic with technology’ which presents its potential outcome as having positively ‘post-human’ implications: ‘phonograph records’, he argues,

are not artworks but the black seals on the missives that are rushing towards us from all sides in the traffic with technology; missives whose formulations capture the sounds of creation, the first and last sounds, judgement upon life and message about that which may come thereafter.²¹

Yet, although developing (and exploitative) social relations have a vital role in his historiography, its quasi-theocratic underpinning – based, ultimately, on a scriptural metaphysics – limits the value of his interpretations of actual recorded content. He would no doubt agree with the suggestion that, as the needle circles towards the central ‘black hole’, the inescapably metaphorical status of this movement makes clear that the social dynamics within which records are emplaced are always specific (hence always gendered, raced, classed); indeed, his own imagery – he writes of ‘the scriptal spiral that disappears in the center, in the opening of the middle, but in return survives in time’ – might almost be taken to foreshadow the Lacanian discourse of ‘organ holes’ (such as the mouth) through which the culture can continue to be, in Derrida’s term, ‘invaginated’, and to summon up the equally sexualised connotations of the ‘horny’ loudspeaker, re-phallicising (hence dis-seminating) what the work of the needle had begun.²² Still, I believe that Adorno got the positions here somewhat awry. In his account, female voices don’t record effectively because they need the physical presence of their originating bodies, whereas the male voice – quintessentially for him that of Caruso – works precisely because here voice is identical with self, with logos we might say. To pick up Engh’s psychoanalytic extrapolation, the phonographic machine, in a sort of Lacanian mirror-phase procedure, acts as the ideal form of the male body – it is, in Adorno’s words, ‘the sounding image of his own person’, records being ‘sounding photographs of their owners’; and the male’s disavowal of loss – of his ‘castration’ – is made bearable through his demand that the female performing body fill in for his

lack.²³ But in the actual music history, things are surely not like this. In the field of popular song, we might speculate (however reductively), the privileged objects are the voices of women, and by extension of blacks and feminised men. Meanwhile, control of these voices is normatively in the hands of white males – either exercised through an authoritative lead vocal or, more typically, through a ‘voice off’ in the studio²⁴ – or in the spinning hands of the DJ: that DJ whose ‘performances’ animate the traces in the record grooves, in a process of Derridean ‘arche-writing’ which will place any quest for an *Ur-language* in question but which will persist in its belief that only in his hands can technics save life.

Why is this outline reductive? Because we can easily think, for example, of 11
macho male pop singers – Presley, Lennon, Jagger – not to mention ‘masterful’ women and black DJs and producers.²⁵ Nevertheless, the principle stands, pegged in place as a base-line from which deviations are experienced as such. Within this tradition, to *perform* at all – especially through such a bodily intimate mechanism as singing – is to put a body on display, to flaunt it, offer it up: a role which of course is typically associated with, expected of, women. Indeed, in this discursive formation, to *own* to a body already produces a place of subordination, creating the potential to suffer (as Mariah Carey does: the entire music culture within which this music works insists that we imagine her body, even if the inescapable visual images didn’t all the time remind us); meanwhile, the owners of discourse (Carey’s rapper friends, for instance) are all words, bodies effaced from view no less than those of the record producers.²⁶ But vocal machismo is often ambivalent, its pumped-up demand tinged with a homoerotic tease (Presley, Lennon, Jagger); similarly, ‘strong’ women (Joplin, Franklin, Simone, Madonna) nevertheless play to deeply entrenched male fantasies, just as black men, even when constructed into the stud persona of racist stereotype, also find themselves willy-nilly spending the legacy of an ‘emasculatation’ rhetoric rooted in the socio-sexual economy of slavery. All this confirms what we know well enough, that the sexual dynamics of gender (and race), however over-determined in their normative expression, can speak with many tongues – a complexity only intensified by the fact that, if the apparatus of recording acts as a mirror (as it surely does), it is an *acoustic* mirror that is involved. ‘Reflections’ of the vocal body, traversing anamorphically the gap between mouth and ear, have a capacity to short-circuit the ‘normal’ distinctions between inside and outside, self and other – for ‘the moment we enter the symbolic order, an unbridgeable gap separates forever a human body from “its” voice. The voice acquires a spectral autonomy, it never quite belongs to the body we see’²⁷ – as well as entering a permanent query about the mutual fit of the psychoanalytic mechanisms of ‘voice’ and ‘gaze’. Of what order are the bodies we desire or identify with as we listen to ‘Last Night a DJ Saved My Life’ (or as Adorno listened to Caruso), and through what processes are they produced?

What is a woman, what a man (and what a Siren)?

Others have begun to explore the social dynamics involved in the gendering of the recorded voice. Barbara Bradby, for example, has pointed to the key divergence in dance music between male rapping and female soul-singing, the one centred on language, the other on embodied feeling.²⁸ From a similar perspective, John Corbett has discussed the implications of the typical pop hierarchy of lead and backing vocals:²⁹ while for Corbett, recorded music as such is in a sense 'entirely voice-over',³⁰ within this overarching scenario a lead voice typically articulates the narrative while backing vocals offer an often linguistically nonsensical 'sonorous envelope'. The latter, he argues, are positioned normatively as female – and by extension, as also black; and hence as *castrated* – which (continuing the metaphor across the sexuating divide) produces a permanent threat of *bleeding* from one category to another, for example from female – that 'black hole where meaning drains out of the system', in Kaja Silverman's words³¹ – to male. Corbett's argument points, rightly, towards a more nuanced picture than the binary from which, necessarily, interpretation starts. If, at the level of the technology, 'it is lack of the visual, endemic to recorded sound, that initiates desire in relation to the popular music object',³² then this lack cuts, potentially, in all directions. (Think early Elvis. Does that groove 're-embody' the lead voice (and what gender, exactly, are those hips)? And if it does, is it in turn disrupted by Elvis's characteristic 'hiccups', 'dis-membering' a body turned back towards a *corps re-morcelé*? Is this body *black* – as early radio listeners famously assumed?) Thus recording technology, by apparently evacuating bodies from the scene of subject-production, places previous systems of both gender and race relations into crisis, a crisis which reassertions of familiar binaries will try to nullify – as in 'Last Night a DJ Saved My Life' – but whose underlying mode – usually hidden, sometimes visible – is one of *hysteria*.

Hysteria is, stereotypically, a female complaint; according to Lacan, its identifying question is 'Who am I? a man or a woman?', or, more precisely, 'What is it to be a woman?'³³ The complement here, on the male side, is obsession (a neurotic 'dialect' of hysteria, according to Freud) – but obsession mediated by a distinct strand of *fetishism*, manifested in masculine fetishising of records, both as collectable commodities and as carriers of aural fidelity, but in any case following the pattern of a familiar economy of possession and disavowal.³⁴ (Racial hysteria and fetishism follow similar patterns – allowing for the different terms in the structure.) But in a moment of crisis, both conditions migrate. Within the vocal field, the hysterical question, for the female, as Engh points out, concerns the threat of disembodiment, while for the male, it centres on loss of control over memory: whence, one might say, the fetishistic desire for and identification with a maximally abstracted sound – a voice of knowledge.³⁵ In Renard's story, his composer listens obsessively to the sounds held within a 'double-horned' sea-shell, which he compares to a gramophone; 'women were singing... inhuman women whose hymn was wild and lustful like the scream of a crazed goddess... and the same maddening scene was repeated, periodically,

as if by phonograph, incessantly and never diminished.’ Driven to distraction by his inability to notate the ‘sexual screaming’ he hears (that is, to abstract it, to tie it down for memory), the composer falls down dead; and ‘what if’, asks the narrator, ‘he died *because he heard the sirens singing?*’³⁶ But what about the Sirens, what happens to them? Is their hysterical question, mediated by the encounter with another (the phonographic) ‘reproductive body’, a question that takes the form of a demand for the return to them of phallic motherhood – of woman not as the source of infantile babble but the territory of maternal law, and beyond that, of a ‘writing before writing’, a vocal productivity which goes all the way down into nature itself?³⁷

I want to move shortly to consideration of a second recording, one that might throw extra light on the questions raised so far. But before this, I need to situate the record economy, however briefly, in something of its pre-history: a genealogy articulated in the intersection of several long-lived tropes in the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. First, Hegel’s master-slave dialectic – permeating both social registers (Woman, Black, Low, all widely imagined as natural slaves) and the march of reason itself, with its outcomes in such technologies as the phonographic ‘invisible master’ demanding fidelity from the voices he deploys; second, the mapping of this ‘slavery’ condition to the psycho-social dynamics of commodity-production and commodity-fetishism (notice how records even look a bit like coins, and are collected – hoarded – as if they were); and third, the way this drama of having and being (as Lacan would describe it) provokes that decisive shift in the structure of ventriloquism described by Steven Connor, from possession *by* (a supernatural force) to possession *of* (a dummy, genie, stooge) – a shift that is predictably gendered.³⁸ Small wonder that the voices of women, blacks and feminised men have been favoured by the phonographic ventriloquists, nor that it’s pre-eminently their bodies which have been put in question. For this genealogy as a whole places the body in crisis – and once again, Adorno and Horkheimer offer a telling insight. They present the Sirens episode as a master-and-slave allegory.³⁹ Both master (Odysseus) and slaves (his men) are ‘disabled’, the first immobilised and alienated from practice, the second reduced to a function, their labour alienated from their senses. In the crisis of the encounter, both too are *silenced*: Odysseus has no listeners (his men cannot hear) while they are just mutely ‘yoked in the same rhythm’.⁴⁰ The master-slave structure of ventriloquism breaks down – or rather, both parties become subjects of a higher (invisible) master, who, for Adorno and Horkheimer, will turn out to be: capital. At the same time, both are also ‘disembodied’: Odysseus is bound, his body straitjacketed, while the men’s bodies are turned into a mere instrumentalised force of reproduction (like women’s?).⁴¹

How, then, does the technology of recorded song speak to this still-evolving crisis? Disco might mark a key moment: when ‘slaves’ in all the categories I have mentioned – Woman, Black, Low, the ‘living dead’ rising from the grave of history – were summoned to the dance floor and took it over. The key issue then

might become, not only the surface politics of possession – who controls whom – but also the deeper question of the structure of possession as such, and its implications for subjectivity.⁴²

Machining voices, organising bodies

Here now, nurtured in the same dance-music lineage as gave rise to disco, comes the freaky figure of Dr Funkenstein, one of funk music pioneer George Clinton's several aliases, which go along with his many band names: Parliament, Funkadelic, and, with particular resonance here, The Brides of Funkenstein. He is singing – if that's the right word – his eponymous song;⁴³ but he's not alone. Clinton developed a celebrated live show, centred on space-travel imagery – he tended to emerge, in a clear birthing metaphor, out of 'The Mothership' – and John Corbett has argued persuasively⁴⁴ that Clinton's claims to 'alien' origins connect not only with themes of alienation, madness and liminal identity but also with the Afro-diasporic experience of displacement and slavery: to be positioned, however repressively, outside species normality (as 'non-human' – either beast or robot) creates a margin for subversion – maybe even a pointer towards the 'post-human'. It's not surprising, then, that, as Corbett points out, zombie-related discourse figures centrally in Clinton's rhetoric, and (as he doesn't⁴⁵) that such discourse has deep roots in Afro-diasporic culture; nor, perhaps, that in 'Dr Funkenstein' our mad funk-scientist is accompanied by a whole posse of – of what? Clones, the album title tells us – but clones, perhaps, with a history as slaves and zombies; and a future also – as duppy conquerors?⁴⁶

Over a slow funk groove, its tonic-chord drone (interrupted only by occasional IV-V-I curtain-raisers) embroidered with a polyrhythmic interplay of bass, guitar and keyboard riffs, our (invisible) master of funk introduces himself in relaxed proto-rap style. The boasting is standard ('kiss me on my ego'), and his verses alternate with a relatively unchanging choral refrain pronounced in rhythmic speech-song by what are undoubtedly his creatures ('We love you Dr Funkenstein, your funk is the best... Hit me on the one again; if you want, hit me again'), but also, it seems, his creation. The Doctor, fresh from the Mothership, so he tells us, positions himself in a lab ('micro-biologically speaking', begins one of his verses, before plunging into a torrent of pseudo-scientific gobbledygook), but his discourse is also embedded in history: his fascination with bones takes the form of an elaborate allusion to the old African-American spiritual 'Dry Bones', itself based on Ezekiel's biblical vision of the valley of bones. Thus the act of creating new life is referenced both to the moment of Romantic crisis when, as Mary Shelley's tale implies, the book of nature might indeed be read but with fateful results, and to an even longer, in-effect mythological history in which the life-and-death struggles of slavery were linked to the work of divine providence ('Son of Man, can these bones live?').⁴⁷ Indeed, the track as a whole positions itself within the complex dialogical networks of African-American Signifyin(g) (not least through the use of soul/funk formulae: 'well, all right', etc.);

in structure, it could be heard almost as a parody of James Brown's 'Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud', with its chanted children's refrain.⁴⁸

In the last couple of minutes of 'Dr Funkenstein', however, Clinton's voice gradually retreats from the foreground, burying itself behind the sounds of his 'creatures', not to mention a freaky, free jazz-style trombone solo (even before this, its authority had begun to be put at risk through gender-problematizing shifts of register); a 'parliament' of voices takes over. Is Clinton here subverting the structure of the master-slave dialectic; or even, perhaps, refusing its terms altogether? If so, part of this move might be a refusal of funk cliché, positioning the genre in the lab (rather than 'nature') and claiming the black body for modernity – a refusal that, in turn, might be read as also an attempt to side-step an oedipal competition with Brown (Soul Brother Number One, self-proclaimed inventor of funk, and epitome of the labouring, sweating, 'funky' black body).⁴⁹ This is probably too simple, though. Clinton no less than Brown constantly claims in his lyrics funk supremacy.⁵⁰ Moreover, in 'Dr Funkenstein' he is clear that his skeletal connections find their ultimate point⁵¹ in 'movement of the hips' – dance as simulacrum of sex – while, conversely, Brown presents himself, not just as a force of nature, but – in the title of one his songs – as a 'sex machine': a phrase conjuring up, needless to say, a whole history of cyborgian imagery centred on the robotic reproductive labour of the slave at the same time as it insists on black sexuality's relevance to contemporary industrialised culture. Dr Funkenstein's hips may clank and grind, or they may groove (but doesn't 'groove' summon up industrial as well as organic connotations anyway?) – but what exactly are their offspring? Are we talking reproduction – or (clone-like) replication?⁵²

To address this question, perhaps we should attend to the voices of these creatures. And strange creatures they are, indeed – not clearly either monsters or cyborgs. The choir is one thing – or rather, it isn't, its slightly raggy robotic rhythms sounding either drilled or drugged or perhaps both. But pervading the whole track is an array of individual voices (voice-unders?), filling the sonic space with life, many of them back-of-the-throat squawks and gurgles, others comically ululating melismas (part cartoon, part pseudo-operatic: sirens for the age of the pop diva?), all of them strangely positioned in frame of reference between the simian and the avian.⁵³ The scene, apparently, could be either jungle or studio-laboratory – or both. (Despite the importance of Clinton's live shows, it's clear that, in a reversal of the conventional assumption, the principles of his multi-polar, fragmentary aesthetic were worked out first in the studio, were made imaginable by studio technology.⁵⁴) But while this collective vocality is more variable than Clinton's lead, it is so only in degree; in both fields, it splits apart. Moreover it is, as we have already seen, far from clear, far from settled, where the lead is located. Is this a case of the authority normally associated with 'space-off' being subverted? At any rate, reading the 'sociology' of the song is certainly complicated. What genders are represented? Hard to say – and, while the groove is undoubtedly 'black', aren't there also (in the freakish sounds)

echoes of Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart, tribute to Clinton's earlier funkadelic fusion of acid and dance? (To quote the words of a slightly later Funkadelic album, 'one nation under a groove'.) One might diagnose symptoms of both gender and racial hysteria if the groove were not so relaxed – but for Lacan, 'hysteria' describes a certain social-symbolic structure as much as a clinical extreme: a structure that we can see in terms of an imaginary social anatomy, fragmented by inexplicable vectors of identity confusion.

The mad scientist's funk is engraved in the groove, the bodies – organs of this social body? – animated by system loops. (In the etymological history, 'groove' and 'grave' have linked origins, but there are sexual connotations as well – in American slang, the groove could be the vagina – as well as drug overtones – being possessed by grooviness – and of course the record groove, connecting to connotations of industrialised reproduction, spins us into the heart of the mechanical or cybernetic apparatus. In this discursive nexus, life and death, subject and object, body and machine, are tightly conjoined.⁵⁵) We have become used to the idea of funky machines – the robotic Grace Jones or Michael Jackson, 'slaves to the rhythm'. In Barbara Engh's discussion of Adorno and the Sirens, she points to an earlier episode in the *Odyssey*, where the hero, anonymous for the moment, *does* hear the song; unwelcome memories flood in, dissolving self-control, as he imagines himself a woman, a slave – by implication, an animal, 'panting and dying'.⁵⁶ As the record-apparatus threads its way, via transistor radio, walkman, iPod, mobile phone and the rest, into every social space, public and private, as sampling and re-mixing constantly re-animate what Engh, after Adorno, calls the 'archive of subjectivity',⁵⁷ we are far from the domestication that Adorno lamented, and moving – perhaps – towards a new understanding of the otherness of nature, of the nature of objectness, in which memory no less than images of possible bodies may circulate in a 'book' of digitised data. If we were to interpret 'Dr Funkenstein' in the light of Donna Haraway's project to reinvent 'nature' – problematising right across the categories of 'simians, cyborgs and women' – we would have to ask if we find here what she calls 'significant prosthesis': a new kind of embodiment.⁵⁸

But – was the body ever really *lost*? Or, to put it another way, hasn't it always already been 'lost' – a figure that the subject can hold together only with difficulty, under and against the pressures of particular, changing historical contingencies? Jonathon Sterne argues that the sense of trauma accompanying the initial phonographic moment marks the 'loss' of a prior fullness which this moment itself had constructed; the idea of aural 'fidelity' (along with a whole raft of associated concepts, including 'authenticity', 'live' as distinct from 'canned music', and Benjaminian 'aura') arises at precisely the point when technological change puts it at risk, thereby bringing it into being: 'reproduction precedes originality'.⁵⁹ This is to say that the most important effect of changes in cultural technology may be to reveal – that is, to enable us to think – what in a sense was already there. Certainly, if the advent of phonographic voice-over was traumatic, listeners seem to have got used to it fairly quickly; but this may be

because, on some level, they were well aware that the body, as cultural construct, has always taken multiple forms, including what has been termed the 'vocalic body': 'the idea... 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', an idea that can be given a strong sense of the complex energy flows involved, into, through and out of the various organs of ingestion, excretion and ejaculation, by means of the ancillary term, 'vocalimentary canal'.⁶⁰

We have long been accustomed to assigning such vocalic bodies to a putative source – an invisible cuckoo, a nightingale in the darkness, a mist-enshrouded foghorn (or siren), the thunder of the gods... By contrast, what might be called the 'acousmatic fallacy' characteristic of some theories of electro-acoustic music wants us to conceive of synthesised sounds with no 'body' at all – sounds in themselves, so to speak; but listeners immediately invent an imagined source for them, drawing on the contours embedded in their experience of the operations of the vocalimentary canal: the phallus (male or female) writes, the voice translates, and the mapping of this process to the structures of anatomical and other visual and tactile knowledge describes exactly how the sensuous and the symbolic create each other, through the Derridean networks of 'dissemination' and 'invagination'. All sounds, then, 'have body', as Roland Barthes almost said in his famous article, 'The Grain of the Voice' (an article that may be most productively read as being about the ways in which bodies, especially vocal bodies, *write themselves*). The acousmatic, on the other hand, often appears against this background as a re-inscription of the phallogocentric 'view (or rather, voice) from nowhere' – the 'sounds in themselves' familiar in theories of 'absolute music', which are so only because the omniscient 'invisible master' (or rather, the unacknowledged inaudible master standing behind His Master's Voice) is pulling the strings.⁶¹ Adorno's vision of a self-writing music morphs too readily into this voice, neglecting (as Benjamin did not) the implications of the possibility that in the beginning wasn't word at all, wasn't language (however universal), but *name*, and that naming requires an *act* – a bodily energy.⁶²

From this point of view, what is important about the phonographic moment isn't so much the technological changes themselves as the way an older economy of loss, embodiment and subjectivity is reconfigured, in a moment of crisis for understandings of the body; the cyborgian figures of recorded voice – vocalic bodies incorporating microphones, amps and the rest, all the way down to computers – are the symptom of this shift, a shift in which 'the apparatus had its own grain; the supposedly mute machines had many voices of their own', but which also puts the very 'human' status of the sounding subject in question, for 'the cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed.'⁶³ There is a suggestion that the trajectory put in place could be post-patriarchal, even post-oedipal: 'A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity... Unlike the hopes of

Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden.⁶⁴ What might such creatures be like? One is tempted to think of Deleuze's 'bodies without organs' – de-territorialising assemblages, or 'machines', opposing all centralised conceptions of *organism* in the possession of a subject. Deleuze's neo-Spinozan vision dismantles 'the body' but not, he insists, as a process of fragmentation:

"A" stomach, "an" eye, "a" mouth [and, presumably, "a" voice]: the indefinite article does not lack anything; it is not indeterminate or undifferentiated, but expresses the pure determination of intensity, intensive difference. It is not at all a question of a fragmented, splintered body, of organs without the body (OwB). The BwO is exactly the opposite. There are not organs in the sense of fragments in relation to a lost unity, nor is there a return to the undifferentiated in relation to a differentiable totality. There is a distribution of intensive principles of organs, with their positive indefinite articles, within a collectivity or multiplicity, inside an assemblage, and according to machinic connections operating on a BwO.⁶⁵

As a vector of perpetual becoming (becoming woman/child/animal/etc.), the BwO is connected in a privileged way by Deleuze with his idea of music;⁶⁶ and yet the process of *dispersal* identified here is, for Deleuze, in constant play with a re-territorialising movement named as *refrain*, for which birdsong provides the privileged exemplar, but which also underlies the principles of musical structure.⁶⁷ The record form as such, one might think, should stand for him as a manifestation of parroting refrain, in the interest of (capital) accumulation and (social) body formation.⁶⁸ But the paradoxes of repetition – certainly real enough, and epitomised in the chants of the creatures in 'Dr Funkenstein', which are both tedious and perpetually re-contextualised, looped and entertainingly loopy – atrophy politically outside the purview of a field of subjectivity. As a programme, Deleuze's irrationalist vitalism, predicated as it must be on a wilful (hence self-contradictory) de-subjectivisation, makes Adorno's 'nostalgia' seem positively rational.⁶⁹ Žižek's inversion of Deleuze's trope, picking critically at the latter's disavowal of 'loss', of 'castration', aligns the 'organ without a body' with the psychoanalytic concept of the part-object. Such an organ – here 'phallus', but equally 'voice' or 'gaze' – is one that 'I put on, which gets attached to my body, without ever becoming its "organic part," forever sticking out as its incoherent, excessive supplement' – it is, then, a 'mask that I put on'.⁷⁰ In Žižek's view (building on the later Lacan) this organ can certainly speak – indeed, the 'body' can under certain circumstances seem to collapse into just a multiplicity of such organs each giving voice – but not as an effect of the loss of subjectivity, rather of the emergence of the subject (the 'pure' subject, the subject as, so to speak, meaningless blob, the subject before the processes of subjectivisation formed it into a self) from out of the coherent mirror-like image of the 'person'. This subject is the subject of *drive*, and in its impossible desire for the part-object which alone sustains it, itself assumes the position of an

object.⁷¹

The difference between these two positions is crucial: it's the difference between a refusal of, and an engagement in, the problematic of (self-) 'possession' – or, to put it another way, it turns on the survival or not of the possibility of a supplementary 'and yet...' Still, it's important to maintain both, as points of tension within a cultural force-field dealing with the contemporary sense of a 'body in pieces' – a force-field that, as we have seen, bears insistently on the issue of the relations between man, animal and machine.⁷² This is all the more important because the two positions align so neatly with the twin tendencies sketched earlier of *hysteria* on the one hand, *obsessional fetishism* on the other. The BwO seeks always to evacuate from any fixed position of enunciation that would render the body into a determinate (gendered, raced) form. For Deleuze, 'music is a deterritorialisation of the voice'. The process of 'machining the voice' describes a constant play between the need for 'the abolition of the overall dualism machine, in other words, the molar formation assigning voices to the "man or woman"' [for 'Being a man or a woman no longer exists in music'], and, on the other hand, 'the requirements of capitalism, which wants a man to be a man and a woman a woman, each with his or her own voice'.⁷³ The OwB, by contrast, precisely *fixates*, and the Žižekian move is always in danger of what he himself calls a 'fetishistic short circuit'. The question here is whether the 'ancephalous subject who assumes the position of the object – or, from another direction, the position of an object that starts to talk, that subjectivises itself' – doesn't carry us 'beyond morality'⁷⁴, that is, towards a point in the economics of the ventriloquial shift (from possession to possessive) where elements of the possessive are mapped back on to a state of (ecstatic) possession, the (pure) subject spoken (still) by commodity (a real abstraction, slave of a higher power⁷⁵).

Perhaps what the creatures populating 'Dr Funkenstein' have to tell us is: like it or not (as in the children's game, 'coming, ready or not'), *there will always be bodies*; but, at the same time there will also always be *organs*. And what the phonographic moment makes easier than ever before to grasp is the potentially fluid and always problematic nature of this relationship – including social migrations of its hysterical and fetishistic states, and constant intersections within the sensorium between 'voice' and 'gaze', sound and sight, acoustic and visual mirrors⁷⁶ – not to mention its strictly *fictional* quality. In Žižekian language, these creatures are *spectres* – neither wholly material nor wholly spirit – whose role is to cover over the gap in the body of the Real, that gap which could close only in the event of complete symbolic collapse (that is, only with death).⁷⁷ Clinton's zombies are bodies/organs reclaiming voices, previously muffled while they lay – among the wreckage of history – at Benjamin's Angel's feet (the Angel that, in this context, is writing the groove of the record of history).⁷⁸ And what these spectral phenomena have to say is: *these bodies are the only ones we have*; this is what the 'loss' of the body documented in the record form actually reveals – that these bodies, the ones we (collectively, socio-

cyborgianally) make for ourselves, *are the only ones we ever had*. It is within this space of invention – a space not so much between two deaths as between two lives – that recorded voice, including even the work of the DJ, can contribute to saving life.

DJ as saviour? No doubt there are some practitioners of this art – lords of a spinning creation, carefully composing a universe, naming their names (at once imposing and forbidding translation) – who would welcome this description. 26
Mariah Carey is saved in the night – the sacred night (we can perhaps assume) of the dance club. George Clinton works his spell in the equally dark, mysterious space of the laboratory – the sound-lab. We're summoned to Walter Benjamin's 'night of nature': 'works of art', he wrote, 'may be defined as the models of a nature that awaits no day, and thus no Judgement Day; they are the models of a nature that is neither the theatre of history nor the dwelling-place of mankind. The saved night.' What manner of 'man' might, prospectively, inhabit such a place, and how would the redemption of nature bear upon his own salvation? Benjamin's answer is opaque – but in one passage seems to suggest that the crux would lie in the 'severing' (the recognition?) of the 'mystery' within his own makeup (the contradictions within his bodily force-field?), a possibility he finds offered in the moment of sexual fulfilment:

Sexual fulfilment delivers the man from his mystery, which does not consist in sexuality but which in its fulfilment, and perhaps in it alone, is severed – not solved. This mystery is comparable to the fetters that bind him to life. The woman cuts them, and the man is free to die because his life has lost its mystery. Thereby he is reborn, and as his beloved frees him from the mother's spell, the woman literally detaches him from Mother Earth – a midwife who cuts that umbilical cord which is woven of life's mystery.⁷⁹

Art; sex: where, pre-eminently, identity is hazarded in engagement with the promise of the other; where objects – phallic, vocal, other – are made to speak, where bodies write themselves. Yet the paradox (the 'mystery?') remains, for 'art' (the spiritual) is apparently aligned with nature while 'sex' (the natural) unbinds the fetters that tie man to life. Is this paradox the key to the 'severed' state, the cut of recognition? Knowledge of a loss of what cannot be saved but which will in any case return?

The religious motif is notable in both Carey and Clinton – even if in one case it revolves around blind faith (faith in the DJ and in 'a song' – in the sirenic seduction of art), in the other around scientific knowledge (which, however, is put to the procreative purposes of a sex machine). This religious tonality is not unusual for pop music.⁸⁰ In an unexpected twist to the 'dialectic of enlightenment', Derrida has suggested that, far from religion and science being opposed, 'technoscience' *supports* a discourse of 'salvation': the two forces (faith and knowledge, precisely) 'always have made common cause, bound to 27

one another by the band of their opposition'. It is worth quoting him at length:

Of a discourse to come... No to-come without some sort of *iterability*, at least in the form of a covenant with oneself and confirmation of the originary *yes*. No to-come without some sort of messianic memory and promise, of a messianicity older than all religion, more originary than all messianism... This *yes* will have implied and will always imply the trustworthiness and fidelity of a faith. No faith, therefore, nor future without everything technical, automatic, machine-like supposed by iterability. In this sense, the technical is the possibility of faith, indeed its very chance... Instead of opposing them, as is almost always done, they ought to be thought together, as *one and the same possibility*: the machine-like and faith, and the same holds for the machinal and all the values entailed in the sacrosanct (*heilig*, holy, safe and sound, unscathed, intact, immune, free, vital, fecund, fertile, strong, and above all "swollen") – more precisely in the sacrosanctity of the **phallic** effect... [an effect] which is not necessarily the property of man... The phallic... once detached from the body... is this not where one grasps... the potency of a logic powerful enough to account for... everything that binds the tele-technoscientific machine... to faith in the most living as dead and automatically *sur-viving*...?... One could ... connect everything in the semantic genealogy of the unscathed... that speaks of force, **life-force**, fertility, growth, augmentation, and above all *swelling*, in the spontaneity of erection or of pregnancy.... [But also to] covenants or founding promises in an *ordeal of the unscathed* that is always a circumcision, be it "exterior or interior," literal or... "circumcision of the heart."⁸¹

We might want to stress rather more than Derrida does the trans-gendering routes this phallic effect (potentially) travels. But the main point here is broader. If the phallus writes (as I have suggested), the outcome is an *automatic* writing. In the nexus that Derrida describes, sex, writing (representation; art) and faith are conjoined, in a 'machine' that works as if automatically on the problematic of *creation* (the one thing language – signification – cannot account for: 'In the symbolic nothing explains creation.'⁸²). If the hysteric's question revolves around the issue of *procreation* (what is a woman, am I a woman, can I procreate?), and the obsessive's around the issue of *de-creation*, hoarding up simulacra of 'life' in an attempt to cheat death, then recording technology, as it organises these positions, comes to look like a metaphor for – or rather, a way of re-playing – the act of creation itself (creation/procreation/reproduction/replication...): the search for *origin* on the one hand, for *difference* (sexual, grammatological) on the other, on both of which, of course, the book of *Genesis* is eloquent. It's not only a question of the DJ as god, therefore, but also of God as DJ, and His creation as always already phonographic. And the record mimes not only His creation but also the divine loss: just as God cuts adrift His universe, so the phonograph (god *in* the machine) forgets its offspring as it disseminates them. For the trace is also a cut, the ontological 'circumcision'

reflected in the technological groove. The mystery, then – so Benjamin tells us, I think – is just that there *is* no mystery.

The record groove – or rather, phonography as such – offers, above all, *fidelity* 28 – a potentially infinite memory and promise, confirmation of an originary yes. In the ‘abysmal’ structure of recorded performance – sample inside mix, mix inside tune, tune inside disc, disc inside set – the salvatory possibility devolves upon the iteration of a loss – of a self-loss – which, however, will always deliver a return, a return with interest, life in its dance with death. Phonography – a ‘machine for making gods’?⁸³ Or at least, unearthly bodies – stars certainly but also sirens and others. A machine, then, which, while placing the natural body (apparently) under erasure (returning it to ‘saved night’?), sets free what in an older language would be called the *soul*, in all its bodily ambivalences and spectrality. An old (religious) lesson: to save life demands that first we lose it.

Bonus Track

I’m listening to Björk’s extraordinary 2004 album, *Medúlla*. Virtually the whole 29 album, including the (electronically mediated) ‘beats’, is generated out of ‘voices’ (Björk’s own, one or two other solo voices, choirs), although there is a bit of synth and piano as well.⁸⁴ While a host of collaborators are featured, most of the tracks are written and produced by Björk – in this sense, the album stands at the end of a lengthy trajectory in which she has steadily taken an increasing amount of control of both the productions and her collaborations – so that on the one hand the music always seems to be referring to her (it is, one might say, an exercise in self-possession), yet on the other hand she is constantly subsumed into a larger and immensely rich soundscape. It would be possible to read many of the songs as dramatisations of the Odysseus-and-the Sirens story: seductive vocal textures (the sound of techno-sirens) are combined with repeating beats and, often, accompanying riffs (suggesting the endless labour of the oarsmen); except that the two spheres frequently cross over – vocal sounds are ‘rhythmicised’, beats are ‘vocalised’, as the Adornian binary of artistic contemplation and social practice is put at issue. It would often be impossible to know from listening what sort of ‘body’ the voices originate in, where they ‘belong’: what sound like synthetic sounds or processed vocal samples or ‘real’ voices aren’t always clearly distinguishable, mutate into each other; and similarly the constant dislocation of language (which perhaps finds a point of reference in Björk’s own well-established ‘mechanical’ style of vocal articulation) tends to put received notions of the voice/instrument distinction at risk. And yet, often enough, Björk’s familiar soaring solo voice will take wing from out of the more complex textures, calling our attention back to a visual image we know well (albeit it has been given many forms, often somewhat cyborgian, over the years). In the same sort of way, the more complex tracks are interspersed with simpler songs where this solo voice, almost alone, delivers folksong-like melodies which anchor her modernity in history (or, perhaps, in myth).⁸⁵ The album represents no utopian, nor even a ‘post-historical’ moment, then – rather,

it's just one symptom of new potentials. Björk has long insisted that for her 'nature' and 'technology' are not distinct;⁸⁶ and, as Donna Haraway might have predicted, for a woman to pursue the implications of this belief can only cast the gendering of phonographic technology in a new light. Whatever the nature of the vocal body (bodies) we hear on *Medúlla*, then, we would surely be justified in naming it (them): *Cybjörk*.⁸⁷

In 'One-Way Street', published in the same year as the first of Adorno's essays on the phonograph, Walter Benjamin, musing on the meaning of technology, argues for a recognition that 'technology is the mastery of not nature but of the relation between nature and man'. Is this what Björk is about? Some have read Benjamin's suspension of the opposition of man and nature – a characteristic example of his 'dialectic at a standstill' – as pointing towards the 'post-historical'.⁸⁸ However, he goes on, immediately, to affirm that 'Men as a species completed their development thousands of years ago; but mankind as a species is just beginning his. In technology, a *physis* is being organised through which mankind's contact with the cosmos takes a new and different form from that which it had in nations and families.' Just as there was writing before writing, there is, apparently, a history after history – all the more so because, according to Benjamin, the technological rape of nature is to be laid at the door of capital ('the lust for profit of the ruling class'), while the 'power of the proletariat' is required 'to bring the new body [the body of mankind] under its control... Living substance conquers the frenzy of destruction only in the ecstasy of procreation.'⁸⁹

But I'll give the final word to Evan Eisenberg's friend, Clarence, who, trying to catch the erotics inherent in the process whereby records make objects speak, pointed us in the same direction as Benjamin and Björk. 'Records,' he said, 'are inanimate until you put the needle in the groove' – until the thing gives voice, we might say – 'and then they come to life.'⁹⁰

Notes

¹ This article started life as a paper presented to a symposium organized by the Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music at Royal Holloway, University of London, 14-16 April 2005. I am most grateful to participants for their comments and the discussion that ensued. My thanks too to *Radical Musicology's* anonymous readers for their stimulating comments.

The Mariah Carey track, 'Last Night a DJ Saved My Life', is on *Glitter* (CD, Virgin 7243 8 10797 2 0, 2001), track 8; a DVD of the film is also available: *Glitter* (DVD, Columbia C8212269, 2001). There have been many versions of the song, and it's a favourite for re-mixing. Its title has attained emblematic status, being borrowed for at least one book (Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey* [London: Headline, 1999]) and encapsulating for many the almost messianic role of the DJ in contemporary dance club culture

(see e.g. Kai Fikentscher, “There’s Not a Problem I Can’t Fix, ‘Cause I Can Do It in the Mix”, in Lysloff, René T. A. and Leslie C. Gay (eds.), *Music and Technoculture* (Middletown CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 290-315; Fikentscher’s title quotes from the lyrics of the song – a line which I explore myself shortly).

But still, why *this* song (rather than countless others)? Some styles of musicological writing attract accusations of selectivity – either arbitrary or cunning – in their choice of musical examples. The songs I discuss in this article, both here and later on, are not offered as exemplars – representing a class, crystallising a type – but as symptoms, pointing, like ideological symptoms, towards features of the social, cultural and discursive formations that underlie them.

² See Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 43-4, 98-9: 44.

³ On the original recording of the song, by disco group Indeeep, there is no rapping until the ploy-out. It is initiated by the female lead singer, with the first couplet of the lyrics just quoted, and she then gives way to a male voice (probably the song’s composer Michael Cleveland) for the second couplet. Thus the switch of subject-position remains gendered, which makes Carey’s subversion of this division all the more striking. The Indeeep version is available on many reissues, for instance *Funk/Soul Classics: The Ultimate 80’s Soul and Funk Revival* (CD, Ministry of Sound, MOSCD84, 2004).

⁴ On the phonograph and disembodiment, see Barbara Engh, ‘After “His Master’s Voice”’, *New Formations* Vol. 38 (1999), 54-63.

Of course, if we watch the film, the body returns. Or does it? We certainly see images; but these cover a gap as much as the voice does (if in a different way). It’s not just that technology – visual and aural – renders the body of celebrity virtual (though it does), but that – as Lacan famously puts it – ‘reality’ (which ‘is structured like a fiction’) stands in for the Real.

For Lacan, an important aspect of this formulation is a distinction between voice as carrier of meaning, as vehicle of the Symbolic (for instance, in song lyrics), and ‘object voice’: that inaudible, indeed impossible voice which would remain if all meaning could be stripped away, and which points, therefore, towards the Real. While I certainly want to explore this territory – a territory traversed by intersecting figures of voice, body, nature and machine – I would hope to put at issue any too-easy pictures of simple binary distinctions.

For a clear introduction to the concept of object voice, see Mladen Dolar, ‘The Object Voice’, in Salecl, Renata and Slavoj Žižek (eds.), *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 7-31; and for a wider-ranging exploration of its intersections with other kinds of voice, see Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2006).

⁵ See for example Engh, ‘His Master’s Voice’, 55-6, 59-60; Jonathon Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 287-92, 297-8, 303-7. Sterne points out the deep embedding of phonographic memorialising in broader turn-of-the-century discourse around ‘preservation’, including spiritualism and ‘canning’ (e.g. of food).

⁶ See Barbara Engh, ‘Adorno and the Sirens: Tele-phono-graphic Bodies’, in Dunn, Leslie C. and Nancy A. Jones (eds.), *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 120-135: 124.

⁷ Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, tr. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 83.

⁸ *Ibid.* 53.

⁹ T. W. Adorno, ‘The Curves of the Needle’ [1928], tr. Thomas Y. Levin. *October* Vol. 55 (1990), 48-55; ‘The Form of the Phonograph Record’ [1934], tr. Thomas Y. Levin. *October* Vol. 55 (1990), 56-61. Both are re-published in T. W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2002), 272-282.

¹⁰ Adorno, 'The Curves', 52. The phrase 'disturbers of the peace' is almost certainly meant to summon up Freud's concept of Eros, the 'life-drives' (described as 'breakers of the peace' in the standard English translation of his 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920); see Sigmund Freud, *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis* [London: Penguin, 1991, 337]). For Freud, these drives were in a complex dualistic relationship with the drive towards stasis, quiescence, entropy characteristic of the 'death-instincts' (Thanatos). We know that Adorno was reading psychoanalytic work, including Freud, from the mid-1920s, and in the original German texts Adorno's phrase is the same as Freud's: '*die Störenfriede*'.

The idea of a 'second death' comes from Slavoj Žižek (and, through him, from Lacan): see Žižek, 'You Only Die Twice', in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 131-49. Between 'real (biological) death' and 'symbolic death' (the disintegration of the subject's place in the symbolic system or even of this system as such) lies a space where the Real can erupt, where peace can be disturbed. Adorno seems to suggest that, with the return of bourgeois good sense, the possibility of symbolic death dies (but at the same time listeners are, for him, also already dead, 'enshrouded' in emptiness).

¹¹ Adorno, 'The Form', 56, 59, 60.

¹² Kittler, *Gramophone*, 44, 83.

¹³ Elizabeth Eva Leach, 'Parrots, Phonographs, and Other Imitators', paper presented to a symposium organized by the Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music at Royal Holloway, University of London (30 October 2004). I am grateful to Liz for making this available to me.

¹⁴ Sterne, *Audible Past*, 154-67.

¹⁵ Parrots of course identify themselves as 'pretty Polly' and cannot stop talking; Nipper, by contrast, whom many early viewers of the original image took to be sitting on his master's *coffin* (see Sterne, *Audible Past*, 301-3), is all ears.

¹⁶ The status of 'writing': a topic so huge that its limit must, especially since the Derridean deconstruction, be deferred indefinitely. Though I cannot treat it adequately, however, it will surface continually in the course of my argument. In light of Carey's racial identity (and even more so, that of George Clinton, whom I will discuss presently), one reference worth making here is to an argument prominent recently which, denying the conventional account of the African-American/European musical relationship as falling into an oral/literate binary, wants to describe African-American music as 'phonographic': this music, it is argued, actually deconstructs this binary through its emphasis on the materiality of sound, which is *inscribed* on the (dancing, gesturing) body, most importantly on the reproductive mechanisms of bodily registered memory. (For a concise summary of this argument, with references to other relevant literature, see Katherine Biers, 'Syncope Fever: James Weldon Johnson and the Black Phonographic Voice', *Representations* Vol. 96 [2006], 99-125.)

But this argument applies to voice as such (hence to *all* musics centred on oral reproduction), which is always already split, always already embroiled in the spacings of *trace*; that is, reproduces on its own level the binary that it supposedly deconstructs. Biers's position recalls that of Deleuze and Guattari, whose speculative anthropology of 'savage' modes of representation positions systems of 'voice-audition' and 'hand-graphics' as both 'inscribed' on the body but as mutually autonomous, hence inter-connected (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, tr. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane [London: Continuum, 2004], 202-17). Despite paying lip-service to Derrida's insistence on the irreducibility of 'writing in the broad sense' (*ibid.*, 221) – the trace as 'the arche-phenomenon of "memory," which must be thought before the opposition of nature and culture, animality and humanity, etc... this trace is the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: spacing' (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, 70) – in practice

Deleuze and Guattari cannot bring themselves to abandon the myth of 'a graphism that leaves the voice dominant by being independent of the voice' (*Anti-Oedipus*, 221.) Against this, 'phonography' – as a Derridean understanding of historical anthropology no doubt facilitated by our recent experience of actual recording technology – must be understood as positing, always, a 'writing before writing'.

There is, nevertheless, a specificity to the African-American case, to which Biers draws attention, and which is to do with the aftershock of slavery and the way this coincided with, precisely, the advent of recording technology. This, as she points out, made it possible for African-American music to play a key role for whites, as a point of displacement for their anxieties over mechanical reproduction and its implications for both voice and writing: 'fugitive waves' duly 'captured', in Edison's no doubt inadvertently double-voiced phrase (quoted in Biers, 'Syncope Fever', 113). This dimension will be important for my argument when I come to discuss George Clinton – but it's also relevant to the racial voicing in Carey.

Despite this specificity, it is still worth pondering the possible parallels, as well as differences, between the music culture Biers is discussing – ragtime, coon song – and that represented by Gus Elen: both performative cultures, both captured (to some extent) in notation and in record grooves. An obvious place to start research would be the work of African-American blackface vaudeville star, Bert Williams, whose early recordings are contemporary with those of Elen.

¹⁷ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, tr. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997 [1944]), 32-43, 58-60. According to Giorgio Agamben (*The Open: Man and Animal*, tr. Kevin Attell [Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2004], 24), as late as the eighteenth century, serious scientists (Linnaeus, for example) still classified sirens with man on the one hand, with animals of various types on the other.

¹⁸ Engh, 'Adorno', 134. In the Homeric epic, Odysseus stops up his rowers' ears with wax so that they cannot hear the Sirens' alluring song, and has them tie him to the mast so that he cannot respond to it. In at least one early twentieth-century image, from the cover of the July 1913 issue of *Telephone Review*, the new sound-reproduction technologies take up the Siren function. In this picture, entitled 'Her Voice Alluring Draws Him On', three attractive young women in the foreground use the telephone to work their wiles, while the mythological Sirens look on from the background. See Sterne, *Audible Past*, 171. As Dolar points out (*Voice*, 207 n. 6), there's a lengthy, Christian history to this sort of adaptation of the myth.

¹⁹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Enlightenment*, 33. The right conclusion here, perhaps, is that both Engh's reading and the feminist account she is implicitly critiquing are 'true' (that is to say, both the sexual difference and the difference man/nature have originary status); but only as logical moments in a dialectical paradox the full tension of which must be preserved if it is to measure up to the mystery of the emergence of human subjectivity. Like the Adornian 'nostalgia' itself, this paradox, appearing post facto, registers a memory of 'what will have been'.

²⁰ Adorno (1953), quoted in Thomas Y. Levin, 'For the Record: Adorno on Music in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility', *October* Vol. 55 (1990), 41. Before 1909, when the Gramophone Company adopted the picture of Nipper as its emblem, their trademark had centred on images of a 'Writing Angel' inscribing the grooves with a heavenly quill (see *ibid.* 40 for reproductions); the shift from supernatural inscription to domestic respectability mirrors the trajectory of Adorno's lament (and note that the 'coffin' in the original Nipper picture was subsequently cropped out: see Sterne, *Audible Past*, 302).

²¹ Adorno, 'The Form', 61.

²² Adorno, 'The Form', 60. The original German text – '*die Schriftspirale, die im Zentrum, der Öffnung der Mitte verschwindet, aber dafür dauert in der Zeit*' – is not without its ambiguity. Max Paddison has pointed out to me (private communication) that Adorno is clearly touching here on one of his key themes, the temporalisation of space and the spacialisation of time in the relationships of performance, score and recording; the word *dafür*, he argues, is therefore best

translated as 'for that reason'. However, Thomas Levin's 'in return' is also very plausible – and contains its own ambiguity: the suggestion both of a reciprocity of going and coming, and of the homeostatic effect of the repetitions contained within mechanical reproduction, can hardly fail to remind us of the Freudian *Fort-Da*, the game in which Freud's grandson played out a simulacrum of presence and absence by repeated manipulation of a cotton reel. The two interpretations may not be too far apart if the *Fort-Da* is taken as a model of Derridean arche-writing, in which *différance* is defined in terms precisely of the imbrication of deferral in time and scriptal marking (grooving out) in space.

On the psychoanalytic concept of 'organ-holes' as objects of desire and sites of subjectivity, and their relationship to Derrida's concept of 'invagination' (in turn related in terms of gender rhetoric to his concept of 'dissemination'), see Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington IN: University of Indiana Press, 1988), 66-71. The sexualisation of the voice that is implied in my description of grooves, holes and horns might remind us of the old idea of the genital voice; this played a significant part in the history of ventriloquism (see Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 54-5, 70-72, 166-75, 182, 195-208), which in turn forms important background to the phenomenology of records, and will return later in my argument.

As an addendum, I should acknowledge that between the historical phase about which Adorno is writing – the phase of grooves, holes and horns – and the digitized apparatus within which Carey works lies a narrative of extensive technological change – too big a story to go into here (the place to start would be John Mowitt, 'The Sound of Music in the Era of Its Electronic Reproducibility', in Leppert, Richard and Susan McClary (eds.), *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987], 173-97). Nevertheless, 'disembodiment' is a constant. Moreover, I suspect that the spiral-hole figure (Adorno's play of time and space, disappearance and return) is buried quite deep in the phonographic imaginary as a whole: discs still get inserted into machines, to be 'read' (and 'written'), and we know that the trace they carry will fade but always return; with the iPod, the hole is, even more directly than before, the (eroticized?) organ of the ear. Why has vinyl refused to die – indeed, come back to life? Carey's life-saving DJ mixes discs; and the point of his mixing is just to delay, ideally to infinity, the organ-hole moment.

²³ Adorno, 'The Curves', 54. Adorno's argument here gets tangled. (Leppert [in Adorno: *Essays*, 233] suggests that the article has a 'vague, at times almost free-associational' quality related both to the author's youth and that of the technology, and resulting in 'theoretical uncertainty'. I think this uncertainty has definite roots.) First of all, he suggests that what records best is the singing voice, 'best' meaning what is 'most faithful to the natural ur-image'; presumably this is the singing voice as such, i.e. across gender. Then he moves on to distinguish the recordability of male and female voices, as we have seen. He follows this with an argument about abstraction, according to which gramophone sound has become so abstract that it needs to be complemented by 'specific sensory qualities of the object it is reproducing' – its 'full concreteness' – if it is to be 'graspable'. Where the object's 'natural substance' is itself already 'mechanically fractured' (he seems to be thinking of instrumental sound, separated from the body as this is), or is 'permeated by intentionality', the record cannot grasp it (*idem*). 'Permeated by intentionality' sounds like a (stereotypical) definition of male voice to me – yet Adorno has already told us that it's the female voice which recordings cannot grasp; how is the male vocal subject made concrete, then? And, by locating his gender distinction in 'natural substance', isn't Adorno himself – against the thrust of his own theory – embedding abstraction in ontology (i.e. outside history)? One might wonder if the species of concreteness Adorno seems to ascribe to the male voice is not an example of what has been called a 'real abstraction' – a form of social effectivity (as in commodity consumption) driven by an abstraction (exchange relations; or, similarly, universalizing male discourse?) whose value is misrecognised as 'real' (i.e. concrete, whole, meaningful – as in the mirroring self-presence of the male body sounding off?) (see Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 16-21). Adorno hints at a connection in the record-economy between abstraction and commodity form (see 'The Form', 57) but doesn't follow it up; I shall do so, later.

A different gloss on Adorno's 'famous "antifeminist" remark' is offered by Slavoj Žižek (*On Belief* [New York: Routledge, 2001, 44-5]). For Adorno, Žižek argues, Woman is situated *in between* bodily identification and disembodiment, a position enabling (e.g. in her resistance to recording fidelity) a hysterical protest against that reification which men can only tolerate. The trope of hysteria is intriguing – I will return to it myself, later – and, although there is little support for Žižek's reading in Adorno's own text, it is true that Adorno did write about 'the woman question' in these terms elsewhere, as Engh has pointed out ('Adorno', 131-2). But Žižek's account surely does little more than re-cast the patriarchal binary in which Adorno is implicated, rather than deconstructing it; the argument I want to make is that recording technology puts this binary precisely at issue.

It may be revealing that Adorno's vocal mirror-ideal is Caruso. On one level this is perfectly predictable: in terms of commercial and critical success, not to mention his trail-blazing legitimization of phonographic technology, Caruso was certainly the master voice of the early record industry. At the same time, his repertoire, his reception and descriptions of his voice and singing style yield readily to tropes of gender hysteria with which the history of twentieth-century mass entertainment, from Rudolf Valentino through Elvis Presley to Michael Jackson, have made us so familiar. (His repertoire covered not only opera but also the 'feminine' genres of Neapolitan song, light ballads and American popular songs; his audiences – his 'hysterical public', as Michael Scott describes it – were famous for 'explosions of passion... intoxicating storm[s]... delirium... an electric charge', 'shrieking' and 'tears'; his singing was 'vulgar... opulent... luscious', its 'angelic sweetness' and 'seductive grace', 'voiced in instinct with sensuous quality' and 'almost feminine delicacy', suggesting, especially in its celebrated quasi-falsetto upper register, an orientalism easily associated with the exotic image of the 'swarthy' Neapolitan: Scott, *The Great Caruso* [London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988], 43, 33, 47, 72, xvii, xviii, 6, 9, 128, 145.) Caruso's recordings are widely available on reissues. Personally, I find no difficulty in succumbing to the delirious ambivalence conjured up by his vocalic body. Caruso's death in 1921 provoked a perhaps not dissimilar response from the composers of Tin Pan Alley: 'They Needed a Song Bird in Heaven (So God Took Caruso Away)' – a siren voice indeed! We can imagine the posthumous Caruso – his angelic vocal body half bird, half... what? – scribing the grooves inhabited by his successors (cf. note 19 above). (Of course, for his phonographic fans, the living Caruso was already 'disembodied' – or rather, perhaps, bodily indeterminate, mutable, spectral.)

No doubt it would be simplistically psychologistic to reduce Adorno's problem with popular culture to a case of male hysteria. Even so... (Engh's discussion – 'Adorno', 132-3 – evokes a picture of him lashed to the phonographic apparatus, like Odysseus to the mast – terrified, presumably, that his body might betray him. For male hysteria and popular singing, see Richard Middleton, 'Mum's the Word: Maternal Law and Men's Singing', in Jarman-Ivens, Freya (ed.), *Oh Boy: Masculinities and Popular Music* [New York: Routledge, 2007]), 103-124.

²⁴ Again there's an analogy to film theory, here to the concept of 'space-off' – that space not visible in, but inferable from, what is shown in the frame. Note Teresa de Lauretis's point, however, that to subvert this relationship, by making space-off visible (audible), would potentially deconstruct its gendered structure; see De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, 26.

²⁵ It is somewhat reductive as well because it neglects the wider structure of commercial music production, in which a multiplicity of actors within multi-media transnational corporate systems all have their say; which of them, and in what inter-relationships, are speaking through any particular record? The 'body' of capital, as well as of labour in all its intersections, also tends to disappear, rendered invisible ('voices off') by the commodity-fetish (which, although here there is yet another large-scale topic which I lack the space to cover properly, *will* return).

²⁶ This idea that the discursive structure of body-possession is gendered, and that consequently so too is susceptibility to pain, owes much to Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). For Scarry, the reduction of the self to a body, at its most intense in a state of physical pain, destroys language, standing at an extreme from the disembodiment extension of the self out into the external world through the

authoritative deployment of voice; this structure, she further argues, is mapped on to asymmetries of power – of gender for example (see especially *ibid.* 207, including note 20), or class (261-77). Carey's emotional suffering is not the same as physical pain but, given the typical sense that such suffering is 'inexpressible' and has physical effects (the DJ saves Carey from a 'broken heart'), I suggest it occupies an adjacent position in this structure. Carey's enfeebled vocal, backgrounded by the repeated injunction to 'shake and bounce around' (she ends the record in almost inaudible vocalese), is an index of this position. There is one injunction that is an exception to the rappers' focus on her body: 'Talk to me'; but this is satisfied when she takes up, 'parrots back' to them, the DJ's position of power, a move that renders any subversive effect (see Note 3 above) ambivalent at best.

²⁷ Slavoj Žižek, "'I Hear You with My Eyes"; or, The Invisible Master', in Salecl, Renata and Slavoj Žižek (eds.), *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 90-126: 92.

²⁸ Barbara Bradby, 'Sampling Sexuality: Gender, Technology and the Body in Dance Music', *Popular Music* Vol. 12 No 2 (1993), 155-176.

²⁹ John Corbett, *Extended Play: Sounding Off from John Cage to Dr Funkenstein* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 56-67.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 60; within film theory, voice-over – voice of authority, its body effaced – is seen as normatively coded male: see Silverman, *Acoustic Mirror*, 47-54.

³¹ Silverman, *Acoustic Mirror*, 62.

³² Corbett, *Extended Play*, 37.

³³ Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III 1955-1956*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, tr. Russell Grigg (London: Routledge, 1993), 171.

³⁴ On this, see Corbett, *Extended Play*, 40-44; Keir Keightley, "'Turn It Down!" She Shrieked: Gender, Domestic Space, and High Fidelity, 1948-59', *Popular Music* Vol. 15 No 2 (1996), 149-177; and Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa* (London: Picador, 1988). The most memorable character featured in Eisenberg's engaging book is Clarence, who lives, cold, hungry and in squalor, but surrounded by his collection of three-quarters of a million records. The combination of arbitrariness, narcissism and disavowal typical of the fetishistic obsessive is nicely caught by the fact that one of the categories Clarence collects is 'anything with "Clarence" on it' (*ibid.* 6). What is disavowed is, of course, loss (i.e. 'castration') – ultimately, de-subjectivation (death: for Lacan, the obsessive's question is, 'why is he here?', and 'why is he going to disappear?' [Lacan, *The Psychoses*, 179]).

³⁵ Engh, 'Adorno', 121-3, 132-4

³⁶ Kittler, *Gramophone*, 54, 55. Leach points out ('Parrots') that Gus Elen's phonygraff scene is notated; but even here, as she implies, the assertion of the superiority of a performance culture centred on scores is troubled, for the parrot's words aren't reproduced, only reported in Elen's narrative: what is he afraid of – a parroted 'sexual screaming', offering the choice of catatonia or hysteria?

³⁷ The phrase 'reproductive body', used with this ambivalence of reference, is Barbara Engh's ('Adorno', 130). This interpretation of the Sirens' loss is already pre-figured by Adorno and Horkheimer, who speculate that with Odysseus's 'success', their mythic power disintegrates, and who link this process with the subsequent disablement of song (and by extrapolation, we might add, the subjection of women) (*Enlightenment*, 59-60).

Both Engh ('His Master's Voice', 62-3) and Dolar (*Voice*, 170-73) point out that in Kafka's version of the story the Sirens are *silent*; even more than their singing, it is this silence that is truly irresistible (see Franz Kafka, 'The Silence of the Sirens', *Shorter Works*, vol. 1, tr. Malcolm Pasley [London: Secker & Warburg, 1973], 106-7). Is this aphonia a (typical) symptom of their hysteria?

A manifestation of object voice (a Munch-like 'silent scream'; 'voice at its purest... the ultimate weapon of the law' [Dolar, *Voice*, 171]; the epitome of 'writing before writing')? Is it the silence of the (phonographic) grave, of the Freudian death-drive? For Kafka, the Sirens' defeat is nothing to them: for they are, as Dolar puts it, not just bird-women but also automata – cyborgs merely imitating humanity (ibid. 173); their silence, we might say, is that of the still-functioning phonographic machine after the record has stopped. But Kafka is still more complex than this. He obfuscates the causality of the silence. Do the Sirens produce it by merely pretending to sing – or does Odysseus produce it by obliterating the song from his consciousness? Is this an *acousmatic* silence – a silence without definite origin, a 'pure resonance', the silence of nature, the 'pure void of the Other' as such (ibid. 181)? Or is the whole paradox just (just?!) a game? Kafka's final *coup* is to speculate that perhaps Odysseus really did hear the silence, that his performance was just that; the Sirens 'were going through the motions of singing; he was going through the motions of not hearing their silence.' (ibid. 172) But hysteria is, precisely, a form of theatre; hysterics 'act out' their fantasy. Who, here, is the hysteric? Who, or what, possesses whom? Questions from which listeners to records cannot escape any more than can Kafka's characters.

³⁸ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 191-225, 249-89. It was women, typically, who up to the eighteenth century were possessed by spirits; conversely, how many ventriloquists since then – usually performing ventriloquists operating on dummies – have not been men?

The slave is in many ways the ultimate commodity, and also, commonly, the object of fetishistic desire, anxiety and obsessive control. Capital is the ultimate ventriloquist – an invisible master. The dialectic of having and being which is acted out here is, for Lacan, crucially figured in the drama of the phallus (typically, men have it; women are it) – a drama that in my view is historically embedded in this political-economic structure (and vice versa). For a more detailed exploration of this problematic, see Chapter 1 of my book, *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

³⁹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Enlightenment*, 34-8.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 36.

⁴¹ If, as Kafka has it (cf. note 37 above), the Sirens are silent as well, the invisible master might seem to be all-conquering – an eerie parallel to the Adornian second death (cf. note 10 above). But, as suggested there, the space of second death offers creative as well as funereal potential; the body cannot forever be muted – such, at least, would be my contention – and silence *qua* voice-as-such, voice at its zero point (cf. note 37), is always also pregnant, a non-space which, precisely because it is *empty*, offers room for Eros, the life-drives.

⁴² From its beginnings, disco offered privileged spaces to blacks, women and gays. The original version of 'Last Night a DJ Saved My Life', by disco group Indeep, dates from this period (1982 to be exact). Mariah Carey's biographical positioning is worth noting here. As a woman of mixed race (Irish-American mother, Venezuelan-African father), she is also often described as emerging out of an upbringing, after her parents' divorce, marked by poverty and conflict; and, like many divas, she has become a gay icon. Her career is often presented as a struggle for (self-) possession; but at the same time, of course, divas (like Sirens?) possess their listeners.

Disco and the dance-music lineage it initiated also gave a privileged role to turntable technology (hence the narrative of 'Last Night A DJ Saved My Life'). Against this background, the emergence of digital machines (CD and MP3 players) might seem to extend the Adornian story of domestication – to de-eroticise the apparatus. But these are still 'reproductive bodies'. No voice-machine can escape an (inevitably sexualised) role in issues of (dis-)embodiment. What metaphoric imagery might surround, for instance, the CD sliding into and out of its player, offering its mirror-like surface to the burning light of the laser?

⁴³ Parliament, 'Dr Funkenstein', *The Clones of Dr Funkenstein* (CD, Polydor 8426202, 2001 [LP, 1976]).

⁴⁴ Corbett, *Extended Play*, 7-24.

⁴⁵ But Marina Warner does: see her *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); for Corbett's discussion, see *Extended Play*, 19-21.

⁴⁶ In Jamaican patois, a 'dup' is a ghost (and may be linked etymologically to the musical genre of dub, with its startling sound trickery). 'Duppy Conqueror' is a 1969 Bob Marley track, probably written and certainly produced by dub pioneer Lee Perry. According to Perry, dub is 'the *funny* stuff, that's what's inside comin' out, so you put it down on a record. That's what it is, the ghost in me coming out.' (Quoted in Corbett, *Extended Play*, 129).

⁴⁷ Ezekiel 37:3; the spiritual tells how ankle, leg, thigh, hip bone (etc) are all connected – at least they are if we 'hear the word of the Lord'.

⁴⁸ On the African-American aesthetic of Signifyin(g) – 'repetition of a changing same' – see Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁴⁹ This suggestion stems from an interpretation initially put to me by Philip Auslander.

⁵⁰ In the early stages of his career, Brown apparently carried his record masters (*sic*) around with him: 'when I wanted to release something', he writes, 'I pulled the master out of the bag, and gave it to the record company... I called all the releases.' (James Brown, with Bruce Tucker, *James Brown: The Godfather of Soul* [London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1987], 160).

⁵¹ One is tempted to say, after Lacan, their *point de capiton* – that is, the point where the play of signifiers is (albeit temporarily) pinned (buttoned, quilted, anchored) into a specific knot of meaning.

⁵² This interpretation of 'Sex Machine' is indebted to a brilliant essay on the subject by my postgraduate student, Jenny Tamplin.

⁵³ Given the name of the band, it would be wonderfully apposite if Clinton had read Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Parlement of Foules* (1374-81?)! Chaucer's poem is in the form of a dream-vision, based on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*. Chaucer's dreamer is led by Africanus (*sic!*) to a 'parliament' of birds, assembled to celebrate St Valentine's Day and choose their mates. It's comic, satirical (of social hierarchy) and, of course, allegorical.

Adorno and Horkheimer point out in their discussion of Odysseus's encounter with the temptress Circe that, as 'representative of nature', she (and following her, Woman) is surrounded by 'obedient animals as her escorts' (*Enlightenment*, 71). But if Clinton is presented as a Circe figure, his 'creatures', as they 'name the name itself' ('we love you Dr Funkenstein'), seem to imply that 'she' still wants to play God. On the discursive coupling animal/Woman, see Engh, 'His Master's Voice', 59-61 – and also note 54 below.

Agamben describes the slave-like animality that supports the human in man as 'anthropophorous'. 'Perhaps', he writes, 'the body of the anthropophorous animal (the body of the slave) is the unresolved remnant that idealism leaves as an inheritance to thought.' (*The Open*, 12) Are Clinton's anthropophorous creatures inside or outside?

⁵⁴ See Corbett, *Extended Play*, 144-54. Indeed, it might be argued that Clinton's 'freak' sound-world does no more than continue a lineage of 'novelty' sound-effects going back to the early days of recording technology. But, although this embeds funk experimentalism – once again – in history, it shouldn't be taken to negate either the symbolic specificity of this world or the deep significance of its 'animalistic' qualities. One strand in the history can be traced back through African-American comedy records of the 1920s, drawing on vaudeville traditions and, before that, on the masquerades of the nineteenth-century minstrel show. Animal imitations often figured in the minstrel show (as indeed did cross-dressing), and can no doubt be linked to the still broader, Afro-diasporic trope of the 'Signifying Monkey' explored by Henry Louis Gates. The discursive territory here is that in which, in a variety of ways and not just for the obvious racist reasons, blacks were wont to be positioned, and often to position themselves, in close proximity to animals. At the same time, there's a technologically specific factor. Barbara Engh has pointed out

(‘His Master’s Voice’, 59) that the ephemera characterising turn-of-the-century phonographic culture overflow with animal and bird imagery (Nipper is of course the emblem of this, just as Gus Elen’s parrot is a symptom), embedding the sonic tradition to which Clinton’s ‘creatures’ belong in a long-established discursive habit. And, once again, the register of gender division overlaps the broader man/nature distinction: Engh’s discussion (ibid. 61-3) of the even longer tradition whereby Woman is positioned on the side of the animal culminates in a reference to Kafka’s story of Josephine the Singer, who is a mouse – a figure which Ian Biddle has shown to be deeply inscribed in the performativity of gender in this very same early twentieth-century moment (Ian Biddle, ‘Of Mice and Dogs: Music, Gender, and Sexuality at the Long Fin de Siècle’, in Clayton, Martin, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton (eds.), *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction* [New York: Routledge, 2003], 215-26).

⁵⁵ I discuss the groove/grave nexus in more detail in *Voicing the Popular*, 145-7.

⁵⁶ Engh, ‘Adorno’, 133-5.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 125.

⁵⁸ ‘Embodiment is significant prosthesis; objectivity cannot be about fixed vision when what counts as an object is precisely what world history turns out to be about.’ (Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 195.

⁵⁹ See Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 1-29, 213-21: 221.

⁶⁰ The term ‘vocalic body’ is Steven Connor’s; see *Dumbstruck*, 35-43 (the quotation is from p. 35). I introduce the term ‘vocalimentary canal’, an organ which I see as traversing the territory from head, through lungs and stomach to genitalia, in *Voicing the Popular*, 93. A Trobriand Islander once told Malinowski, ‘The throat is a long passage like the *wila* (cunnus) and the two attract each other.’ (Quoted, Eisenberg, *Recording Angel*, 71).

The pre-history of the ‘talking machine’, going back at least to eighteenth-century experiments in ‘mechanical voice’, suggests that the body/voice suture has long been understood as in a sense artificial, as a device of *embodiment*, however disavowed this idea might often have been. As Dolar puts this, ‘The voice appears as the link which ties the signifier to the body. It indicates that... the bodily emission must provide the material to embody the signifier, the disembodied signifying mechanics must be attached to bodily mechanics...’ (Dolar, *Voice*, 59).

⁶¹ Admittedly, there’s an ambivalence in the practice of acousmatic music, in which, sometimes, sounds are made to approximate to ‘real-life’ sounds. This parallels an ambivalence in the etymology, where the Greek *acousma* means ‘a thing heard’, and yet a key reference is to the way that followers of Pythagoras had to listen to their master’s voice while he was invisible, positioned behind a screen. Word was all; body was a distraction. See Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, tr. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 18-19.

Even the reading of Barthes’s article presented here can’t save it entirely. Barthes misses the point that the pinning together of sound and body, voice and gaze (real or imagined) is always incomplete and paradoxical; that ‘de-acousmatisation’ (as Chion calls it: ibid. 27-9) always fails in the end; that ventriloquism is irreducible (see Dolar, *Voice*, 197 note 10). The acousmatic voice is a voice *in search of a body* – even if the body it finds turns out to be ‘wrong’ in some way (see ibid. 60-61). Can we say that, attached (even phantasmatically) to things, sounds *become* voices, i.e. that things *veut dire* (to use a Derridean formulation; see ibid. 191 note 2)? In which case, my own formulation of ‘translation’ is misleading also. Voice doesn’t so much translate bodily gesture as transect and at the same time produce its imagined movement, creating (a little bit of) *embodiment*; as in the game of charades, its effects ‘look like’, ‘sound like’, meaning (or, as Barthes might prefer, like ‘grain’).

⁶² Cf. Freud (*Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, tr. James Strachey [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950], 161): ‘in the

beginning was the Deed'; Freud's context is his theory of a 'primal crime' (murder of the father), out of which 'culture' itself, including morality, guilt and language, could be thought to emerge, and he is quoting Goethe's *Faust* (which shows the price of such knowledge): '*Im Anfang war die Tat*'.

There is a Christian version of this myth. St Augustine describes John the Baptist as the Voice which must precede, and then give way to, the Word (Jesus Christ). Voice – voice as bodily emission, 'voice which merely resonates and offers no sense, this sound which comes from the mouth of someone screaming' – has to die if logos, theological truth, is to emerge. Still (as Dolar points out), Word must (then) become flesh, i.e. flesh transfigured, 'flesh of ideality itself' (Dolar, *Voice*, 15-16, 191 note 6). But further, flesh itself, including vocalizing flesh, was, as far back in the myth as we can go, always already shot through with ideality, act with inscription. Derrida points out that, in giving the name Babel to stand, as proper name (i.e. as origin), for 'confusion' (a common noun, thenceforth applied with impunity to the babble of foreigners, racial inferiors, women, children, apes, birds, nature itself), God introduced precisely confusion into the very interior of the name, and into the act of naming. 'Babel', as name, purports untranslatability, yet, as act, it sets up an originary multiplicity; it 'at the same time imposes and forbids translation' (a process we can understand as occurring within an initial production – 'translation' as originary, as phonographic (cf. note 61) – as well as between productions, as translation in the normal sense). Thus in the primal act of naming – Adorno's 'naming the name itself' – there is already deferral, a 'writing before writing', and the Babel story stands for 'the myth of the origin of myth'; even God's name, which he gives to himself, pleads for translation: 'before language, languages', before the divine body, bodies, before the primal act, already acts. (Jacques Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar [New York: Routledge, 2002], 104-34: 108, 104, 118. Derrida refers to two key texts by Walter Benjamin: 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', tr. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, ed. Michael Bullock and Michael W. Jennings [Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996], 62-74; and 'The Task of the Translator', tr. Harry Zohn, in *ibid.*, 253-63).

'In the beginning': I have throughout resisted the search for origin (except, of course, as retroactive myth); man is the creature who produces his own origin. Nevertheless, it is interesting that in palaeo-anthropologist, Steven Mithen's account of the proto-language developing among the hominid ancestors of man (he names it 'hmmmmm' because it was Holistic, Multi-Modal, Manipulative, Musical and Mimetic), discrete holistic expressions functioned like names rather than words, and were acted out as well as spoken/sung. Even so, the sources of this proto-language go back (to the primates and beyond) as far as one could go. There is no point zero in evolution. See Steven Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body* (London: Phoenix, 2006).

⁶³ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 274; Haraway, *Cyborgs*, 152.

⁶⁴ Haraway, *Cyborgs*, 180, 151.

⁶⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, tr. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 164-5. On its first appearance (in *Anti-Oedipus*, 9-17) the BwO is presented as dead, inert; yet it comes alive, as subsequent elaboration shows: it provides a surface for, appropriates as it rejects, the flows of the desiring-machines – the organs. It's the device Deleuze uses to acknowledge a remnant – beyond the machines – without having to think organism. Yet without something like a death-drive, a concept he rejects, this device remains speculative – a residue, we might say (strangely, for a supposedly materialist psychiatry), that idealism leaves to practice. But what if the BwO is itself a machine – a symbolic-discursive machine? In Deleuze's account, it records the flows; it is, then, a recording-machine – a *phonograph*. Recording not only memorialises but also defers, prolongs, sur-vives (to use a Derridean word-play); recording is, immediately, production.

⁶⁶ See *Thousand Plateaus*, 232-309, especially (for the music connection) 272: 'music is traversed by a becoming-woman, becoming-child... by becomings-animal, above all becomings-bird, but many others besides.'

⁶⁷ See *ibid.* 299-350.

⁶⁸ And indeed, the inert body of the BwO is presented as the social body, including the body of capital, on which the productions of the organs are registered, and this process is described as 'recording' (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 9-17). See note 65.

⁶⁹ One might think that Deleuze's 'molecular' ontology speaks of its times, congruent as it is with excitedly deterritorialising models of both the emergent digital media and the genetic revolution in evolutionary theory. Today it seems clearer that what both the 'bitscape' and the 'genescape' make available is more passages, more levels, more 'homes' for subjectivity rather than its demise.

⁷⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 87.

⁷¹ See *ibid.* 170-176.

⁷² Is this force-field the same place as the one Agamben describes (in different terms) as a 'zone of indifference' where, constantly, decisions as to 'the articulation between human and animal' – and, we may add, between human and machine – are made? For Agamben, this 'zone of indeterminacy in which the outside is nothing but the exclusion of an inside and the inside is in turn only the inclusion of an outside' is *empty* – empty save for the ceaseless activity of decision. But what if this activity is itself determinate, even passionately so, and the zone therefore *full*? Isn't this the territory where desiring-machines function (or not) and are converted (or not) into *drive* – that irreducibly hybrid (bio-machinic-human) force where *jouissance* and castration support each other endlessly, in the process circulating the first writing – writing before writing? (Agamben, *The Open*, 37, 38)

⁷³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 302, 303, 304, 307.

⁷⁴ Žižek, *Organs*, 176, 177.

⁷⁵ 'Real abstraction': see above, Note 23. The effect of commodity fetishism as real abstraction is to deposit the master-slave relationship in the social unconscious as *foundational*.

⁷⁶ In a telling pre-echo of this problematic as it would work itself out in subsequent media development, Alexander Graham Bell claimed for his newly invented device, the photophone (which transmitted sound through light), that 'I have heard articulate speech produced by sunlight! I have heard a ray of the sun laugh and cough and sing!' (Quoted, Sterne, *Audible Past*, 181.)

⁷⁷ For this conception of spectre, see Slavoj Žižek, 'The Spectre of Ideology', in Wright, Elizabeth and Edmond Wright (eds.), *The Žižek Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 53-86.

⁷⁸ For Benjamin's vision of the Angel of History, see his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), 255-66.

⁷⁹ Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 389, 482 (translation slightly modified). I owe my awareness of these texts to Agamben, who discusses them in *The Open*, 81-4. Benjamin's 'antifeminist remark' (cf. note 23), resonating with the elements of patriarchalism in both the Carey and Clinton tracks, is disturbing, if perhaps unsurprising. What, one wonders, would Björk (to whom I turn shortly) make of it?

⁸⁰ Pop music is, of course, overwhelmingly secular (except for the important exception of country music). However, to mention just ballad (love of God or of the Virgin transferred to the sphere of human romance); blues (devil's music); soul (gospel ecstasy transposed to the sexual relationship); singer-songwriters (closeted in the confessional); even heavy metal (homage to the Anti-Christ), should be enough to establish that this foundation is shaky. If Christianity invented secularism, secular pop maintains a home for the religiophobic. And if the anthropophobic is the remnant that idealism leaves to thought, then perhaps the religiophobic is the remnant that secularism leaves to spirit.

⁸¹ Jacques Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone', in *Acts of Religion*, 42-101: 43, 83-5.

⁸² Lacan, *Psychoses*, 179.

⁸³ The phrase is Henri Bergson's, quoted in Derrida, 'Faith', 77.

⁸⁴ Björk, *Medúlla* (CD, One Little Indian TPLP358CD, 2004). Björk uses a variety of singers, including a throat singer and several 'human beat-boxes'. On her approach, she says: 'I used different methods with each person, but I encouraged everyone to express themselves and imagine they were a human drum loop or bassline. I also got the Icelandic choir to pretend to be insects and birds and other ancient creature. The difficult job was sitting at the computer afterwards deciding what to edit. I had so much material I'd say 80% of the time spent on this album was pure editing. Sometimes I just needed to swap chunks around, other times I had to add vocals from one track to another or strip everything down to a couple of notes. As much as everyone delivered live performances, there was a lot of weaving and layering needed to bring the whole album together.' ([http://www.bjork.com/facts/about/what/On Medúlla/](http://www.bjork.com/facts/about/what/On%20Medúlla/) (29 July 2005).

⁸⁵ According to Björk, *Medúlla* is 'folk music, but without any folk attached' (ibid.).

⁸⁶ For example: 'For me, techno and nature is the same thing. It's just a question of the future and the past. You take a log cabin in the mountains. Ten thousand years ago, monkey-humans would have thought, That's fucking techno. Now in 1997 you see a log cabin and go, Oh, that's nature. There is fear of techno because it's the unknown. I think it is a very organic thing, like electricity. But then, my father is an electrician - and my grandfather as well.' ([http://www.bjork.com/facts/about/what/On nature and techno'](http://www.bjork.com/facts/about/what/On%20nature%20and%20techno/) [29 July 2005]). Or: 'Synthesizers are quite an organic, natural thing. But I think it's always with mankind that every time something new arrives, like say when they invented fire, they were terrified: "Oh this is going to kill us all! It's doomsday!"' ([http://www.bjork.com/facts/about/what/On technology'](http://www.bjork.com/facts/about/what/On%20technology/) [29 July 2005]). See also Charity Marsh and Melissa West, 'The Nature/Technology Binary Opposition Dismantled in the Music of Madonna and Björk', in Lysloff, René T. A. and Leslie C. Gay (eds.), *Music and Technoculture* (Middletown CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 182-203.

⁸⁷ Are they bodies or organs? 'Medúlla is primitive, like before civilisation. It's the soft squidgy thing in the centre. After Vespertine I was going to do an album with intuition only, no brain please. I was thinking more visceral, flesh and blood, pregnancy... death metal.' ([http://www.bjork.com/facts/about/what/On Medúlla/](http://www.bjork.com/facts/about/what/On%20Medúlla/) [29 July 2005]).

⁸⁸ Agamben is one who cites Benjamin's insight (*The Open*, 82-3) and places it in just such a 'post-historical' context.

⁸⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'One-Way Street', tr. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings*, 444-88: 487. Of course, 'development' (*Entwicklung*) is not 'history' – at least not in the sense assumed in the paradigm beginning with Herodotus and ending, maybe, with Nietzsche, which is centred on human projects, with teleological import, recorded in a would-be objective narrative. But isn't this paradigm itself an (imperialistic) construct of Western reason? 'If what is called history is a dynamic and open social reality, in a state of functional disequilibrium..., then primitive societies are fully inside history'. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 165). And, even if capitalism marks the end of history in a certain sense (ibid., 168), this says nothing about how long this end might last, nor the extent of the vicissitudes along the way.

⁹⁰ Quoted, Eisenberg, *Recording Angel*, 28.

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