

Love thy Neighbour? The Political Economy of Musical Neighbours

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The muffled thunder of dialogue comes through the walls, then a chorus of laughter. Then more thunder. Most of the laugh tracks on television were recorded in the early 1950s. These days, most of the people you hear laughing are dead.

The stomp and stomp and stomp of a drum comes down through the ceiling. The rhythm changes. Maybe the beat crowds together, faster, or it spreads out slower, but it doesn't stop.

Up through the floor, someone's barking the words to a song. These people who need their television or stereo or radio playing all the time. These people so scared of silence. These are my neighbours. These sound-oholics. These quiet-ophobics.

Laughter of the dead comes through every wall.

These days, this is what passes for home sweet home.

This siege of noise.¹

This is a resolutely urban story, and one unthinkable (at least with this intensity) ¹ before the advent of recording technology: music, noise, thumping bass, bang bang bang, through the wall, through the ceiling, through the floor; it's late and that noise keeps coming, keeps pressing in, keeps on and on, a never ending thumping, banging, dum dum dum. It's also a familiar story: the neighbour keeps different hours, disturbs your sleep with revelry, plays music 'at all hours'; and the headlines run along familiar lines – neighbours from hell, selfish neighbours, '15 years of torment', my neighbour ate my hamster. Chuck Palahniuk's characterisation of what might be termed the neighbourly 'relation in sound' in his short novel, *Lullaby* (2002), is interesting not just for its intensity, its hyperbolic elaboration of a problem anyone living in cities will have encountered, but also for its commitment to consistent and sustained examination of that relation: the neighbour is noisy, the neighbour is malign, the neighbour is always plural, a horde. The tabloid press, of course, feeds on the scenario that torments us most; like Palahniuk, they are attracted to the extreme cases of neighbour dispute, especially around noise, because these stories tap into a fear at the core of the urban imagination of developed capitalist societies, a fear both of isolation, and of vulnerability to the malevolence of the other. And when that other walks among us, when s/he is no longer efficiently marked out as different to us, then we are doubly anxious, doubly nervous about the deadly potential of the neighbour, since that potential is written into every face, lurks round every corner.

When someone enters into dispute with his or her neighbour, moreover, that 2
dispute can often centre on a perceived incursion or interference. This can
manifest itself in the perception that the boundaries of privacy have been
breached by the other, that the membrane of property has been 'pierced', as it
were; the dispute can also focus on a perceived blocking of access to the home,
an impeding of the functionality of that home, a disturbance of its serene
autonomy. Neighbourly complaints range from simple disputes over boundaries, or
over unwanted littering, to more complex disputes, which arise as symptoms of
underlying hostilities, often grounded on a generalised anxiety about sovereignty
and the threat the neighbour represents to that putative sovereignty. In this
context, what noise can do, especially in this age of phonographic disembodiment,
is intervene, make its presence felt without trespass, and it thereby manifests itself
as a kind of seeping or a *surreptitious* piercing of the membrane of sovereignty, a
membrane we have come, in societies like the UK, to value so highly. Noise
presents itself, therefore, as a symptom of *contagion*; it pierces the membrane in
ways that are more difficult to manage, organise, police and, therefore, prevent.
The pragmatics of the situation are quite complex and the hostile encounter with
the noisy neighbour inevitably raises some key questions as to the scope and
nature of sovereignty. Until when, for example, is it acceptable to play music, how
late into the night can a party run, what are the ethical responsibilities of the
neighbourly relation? In this article I do not want to attempt to answer these
questions directly, since, as we shall see, they are radically undecidable, but I
want, instead, to examine the means by which that undecidability is held in place,
and to get to grips with the ideological frames that nourish it.

From Freud's irritated contemplation in *Civilization and its Discontents* on just what 3
the injunction to 'love thy neighbour' in *Leviticus* 19:18 is trying to get at, to the
marking of the neighbour as the coveter of his neighbour's wife; from the
'neighbours from hell' that adorn our tabloids and television screens, and haunt
our collective imaginary, to nightly encounters with semi-anonymous but malign
noise (that 'siege' that Palahniuk speaks of), the figure of the neighbour, then, is
rapidly becoming (if it has not already become) one of danger, marking the
potential malevolence of dense living, of a community too close to our sovereignty.
And it is precisely at this interface of community and sovereignty, at the imaginary
line that separates 'them' from 'me', that the story of the noisy neighbour can be
told. It is with this sense, then, of the neighbour from/as hell (and the neighbour as
border dweller), that I will have to think in this article about property in particular
and how it shapes our attitudes to noise, and about the culturally-shared anxieties
that noise leaves in its wake, what it tells us in developed capitalist societies about
late modern constructions of sovereignty, autonomy and the im/possibility of
conjoining silence and privacy. I will also have to hold off drawing any neat or
stable distinctions between 'noise' and 'music' since, as we shall see, such
distinctions too become (even more) radically undecidable in the neighbourly
encounter.

Levinas on neighbours

Emmanuel Levinas's imagination of an ethics of the neighbour, *le prochain*, and its significance for his understanding of our responsibilities to what he terms the Other (sometimes with an initial uppercase, sometimes lowercase) is striking in its candid commitment to a debunking of any chronology of origins, beginnings or starting points: 'The neighbour as other', he says, 'does not allow itself to be preceded by any precursor who would depict or announce its silhouette. It does not appear.'² I am struck here also by Levinas's commitment to the ambivalence of the neighbour in the context of an ethics of the Other, and its disavowal of foreclosures of any kind: the neighbour stands as that which can never appear as *such*, and is always already instrumentalised, always already put to work, even before that first encounter. It is, to transform a term from Hegel, always 'for-the-other', always already implicated in a relation.

In a short meditation on philosophy, justice and love, Levinas interviews himself on the specifics of the neighbour and asks: 'would the experience of the death of the other, and in a sense, the experience of death itself, be alien to the ethical reception of one's neighbour?'³ The question is not a simple one, and reaches to the core of the Levinasian project of an ethics of the other, in that it seeks to understand the limits of the ethical relation, seeks to question how those limits can be spoken and what death brings to that relation as the most extreme, the most extraordinary test of that relation. His response is built around the figure of *the Face*, which Levinas identifies as a site of encounter, the place where the ethical relation *par excellence* is enacted:

Now you are posing the problem: 'What is there in the Face?' In my analysis, the Face is definitely not a plastic form like a portrait; the relation to the Face is both the relation to the absolutely weak – to what is absolutely exposed, what is bare and destitute, the relation with bareness and consequently with what is alone and can undergo the supreme isolation we will call death – and there is, consequently, in the Face of the Other always the death of the Other and thus, in some way, an incitement to murder, the temptation to go to the extreme, to completely neglect the other – and at the same time, (and this is the paradoxical thing) the Face is also the "Thou Shalt not Kill". A Thou-Shalt-not-Kill that can also be explicated much further: it is the fact that I cannot let the other die alone, it is a calling out to me.⁴

This 'calling out', which disturbs the visual relation of the Face, suggests something fundamental in the encounter with the ethical relation that is resolutely connected to sound, to a hailing, and to the sense of hearing – in 'hearing' that call one recognises one's responsibility to the Other. This ethical relation, then, is connected to the neighbour, which stands as an approximate instrumentalised figure of that relation, and to sound, that which calls us into the relation. And, just as Lacan took up Sartre's notion of 'the gaze' as structurally intervening in the relation with the Other and as in some sense substitutable in the invocatory drive with the voice (as its equivalent in that drive), so Levinas takes up the figure of the Face of the neighbour as a similarly structural tipping point and similarly

exchangeable with the sonic dimension of calling. Is it the Face or the call that occasions our ushering into the ethical relation? Hence, we might see in Levinas's ethics of the neighbour a symptom, to use Lacan's term, of a particular qualitative juncture in the history of neighbours and neighbourhoods: the neighbour has come to stand, at least for Levinas, as a key problematic, a key site of contestation where responsibility to the Other and violence against him or her might go hand in hand. And this imagination of the neighbour is resolutely connected also to late modernity, to a particular moment in the *longue durée* of modernity at which what Michael Wolf has termed the 'architecture of density' has come to dominate the ethical landscape.⁵ Neighbours, far from being the site of a guarantee of communal support or succour, have become the porous membrane between that guarantee and the threat of violence; neighbours speak to us now, it would seem, of a devastating ethical ambiguity.

The noise of the other

If we recognise in Levinas's notion of a calling more than just a figurative fancy, 6 we are called thereby to recognise something profound about the ethical relation with the neighbour that goes beyond the visual dimension of the encounter. Alongside this Levinasian ethics of the Face of the neighbour, then, there is a need for some engagement with what might be termed the *noise of the other* since the experience of dense living brings with it in particular the key problematic of sound disturbance, of the incessant violent eruption of the noise of the other into the peace of the self: 'calling', as Levinas seeks to name it, is fundamentally about *being turned by sound*. If we are to understand the relation of the neighbour and its articulation of a new ethics of the late modern, we need to get to grips precisely with this sound and this noise, and to work out the coordinates of the ideological frame in which the noise-music relation is played out. The face, we might say, is not silent: it speaks, shouts, sings; the neighbour, to use a term I take from Michel Chion, is an *acousmètre*, a being in and of sound.⁶ Indeed, for Kafka, one of the most eloquent witnesses to the psychic burden of modernity, that malign *acousmètre* raises the question as to the possibility of living with the other, since *his* noises and *his* silence mark an intent Kafka cannot fathom:

These dreadfully thin walls, which betray the honest but cover the dishonest! My telephone is attached to the wall that separates me from my neighbour. Yet I merely emphasise that as an especially ironic fact. Even if it were hung on the opposite wall, one would be able to hear everything in the next apartment. I have stopped saying the names of clients over the phone. But it doesn't take much cunning to guess the names from characteristic but unavoidable expressions. - Sometimes I dance around the telephone, with the receiver at my ear, full of restlessness, on my tiptoes, but I still can't help but reveal secrets.⁷

The neighbour listens, wants something, but that desire is never knowable. The notion of the neighbour as instrumentalised or implicated in this manner, as always already placed in the position of an unfathomable desire, will form the starting point for our exploration of the musical neighbour.

I begin, in confessional mode, with an admission, which is connected to the key 7
thematic of this article, and not too distant from the Kafkaesque imagination of the
neighbourly relation. I don't like my neighbour, or his music. This dislike is always
complicated for me by a certain unease or guilt, not least because I was raised,
like many British suburban children of the 1960s, with a sense that one ought at
least to *try* to like one's neighbour(s) and that, in a very real sense, failure to like or
connect with one's neighbours inevitably constitutes a failure borne not by the
neighbour, but by *me*. Following Lacan, we might articulate this logic
(encapsulated in the *ought* of the moral order of the master signifier) as a logic of
neurosis, a logic in which the subject constructs for her- or himself a foundational
fantasy of the whole, integrated self (the 'imago') against which s/he can never
quite measure up, thereby operating under a highly sensitised questioning of the
nature of being. Neurosis, a generalised condition, was resolutely connected by
Freud to modernity, to the malady, in particular, of urban existence – alienation
and social decay. The dislike for my neighbour, then, would be figured within this
logic of neurosis as a symptom of a failure, but one, after Freud, which is
nonetheless located, historically limited and held at the level of community
consciousness: the guilt of that 'failure' is shared, and has become generalised,
normative. For Lacan, the question as to whether or not I should recognise in my
neighbour one who shares and guards with me the resources of my community –
one who contributes to its character, one who rubs shoulders with me every day
on the bus, who wanders along the same road as I do, who shops in the same
shops, who I must learn to live with – would constitute an elaborated form of the
neurotic question, the 'question that being poses for the subject'.⁸ The duty to love
the neighbour, encapsulated most notably in the late modern reading of *Leviticus's*
'love thy neighbour as thyself', is a duty born out of the neurotic question of the
relation to the Other (a condition shared by the obsessive, the hysteric and the
phobic, all categories of neurosis), and the neighbour comes to stand in for
precisely that question.

This feeling of the 'duty' or imperative to co-exist happily and in peace with my 8
neighbour(s), constituted around the neurotic question (of being), is complicated in
the particular instance of the neighbour whom I do not like by my own
extraordinary sensitivity to noise (not uncommon, of course, amongst
musicologists): if, under the neurotic imperative, I am to try to embrace the
condition of possibilities represented by the neighbour whilst nonetheless always
failing, then what am I to make of his *noise*, his music, his incessant and
obsessive replaying of a small and intensely circumscribed field of musical
objects? It is as if he were performing back at me the potentiality of my own
neurosis (and of course this appearing as if performing neurosis back is itself a
symptom of neurotic projection): repetitive behaviour, commitment to the
performance of his gender, fear of silence (obsessive, hysteric, phobic). It is his
noise that for me has come to define him, his interference, his persistence, his
unwelcome insistence not just on being, but on *being heard*.⁹ For me, he has
become, to put it again in terms that Lacan would have used, a symptom, or, to
figure it in terms Levinas would no doubt use, his noise is the point at which the
neighbour's face also speaks, in the manner outlined above, of a danger, the
potential violence of/against the other brought by a malign *acousmètre*.

This micro-communal drama is more elaborate than it might first seem since my 9
noisy neighbour is not my only neighbour: I have, indeed, other neighbours, and
three of them live above me; they are all students and I must confess (since we
are still in confessional mode) to having been a very bad neighbour to them.
Impatient, bad-tempered, ever neurotic in my need for silence, I have regularly
banged on the ceiling with a broom handle at the slightest hint of their playing
music. At times I confess to having been so unreasonable in my demands for
silence that we have fallen out: about that I have felt guilty and indignant in equal
measure; despite the fact that they always try to meet my demands, I never know
what it is that they want of me. As Lacan would put it, *che vuoi?* What is it the
Other wants? And, as with all common-or-garden neurotics, the unknown (and
unknowable) desire of the Other is a constant source of anxiety that occasions the
neurotic question of being at its most intense.

In addition to these neighbours, there is also another other group, the third group, 10
the silent family at number 85. They are my neighbours at a distance, quiet,
unmoved, radically dislocated from the rest of us. They ignore me, but they talk
about me; I know they do; I can see them doing it though my window: they point
and look in at my window and then look away again. What are they plotting? I call
them *the others* (lower case o). They feed my requisite paranoia, surreptitiously
linked by Freud to agoraphobia and claustrophobia [*Platzangst*], neurosis and
other forms of what he terms 'nervous disorder'. The feeling of being watched, not
uncommon to the modern imaginary, is also to be connected, it seems to me, to
the feeling of being under aural surveillance, of feeling that one's own noise might
be cause of the flawed ethical relation that frames the dysfunction of my relation
with my other neighbours: is the silence of these neighbours not a sign of their
potential to abandon me, as Levinas would put it, to the most awful bareness, a
violence by neglect? Here, it is their silence that speaks (or, rather, does not
speak) of my vulnerability to hurt. The ethical relation of the Face falls down also
precisely when the Face does not speak, when it is silent.

In all cases the political economy of my micro community is written around sound 11
and I raise my experience here not simply to unburden myself, but also to try to
address that ubiquitous complaint of late modernity at the incursion of the other's
noise: the other is noisy, s/he speaks too much and s/he imposes her- or himself
without leave, without need and with malice; or worse, sometimes s/he does not
speak enough, s/he is too quiet, sinister, *too sovereign*. The neighbour seems to
speak to us of our own intolerance and of the impossibility of living with the other,
of living with the noise or silence of the other. The neighbour is often, it seems, a
certain kind of failure, a testament to the unbearable empirical complexity of social
interaction at its most complex and a symptom of the impossibility of the sonic
relation in particular.

Noise out into the community and back again

The characteristics of the various complaints about the noise of the other are 12
dependent on the specifics of community: on the localised social and economic
dynamics that give a community its character and determine its perceived

susceptibility to the pressure of the other; on the localisation of this other (inside or out); and on the extent to which the community has been able to construct what might be termed a 'community norm'. In the UK, for example, in so-called 'middle-class' communities (a term which, in the UK, tends to mean the more affluent communities that adhere to a set of values more explicitly focussed on privacy, property and sovereignty), complaints about noise are reasonably common and are often followed up either by local council units or the police; in other kinds of communities, where levels of complaint are low, random complaints tend not to be followed up since the community norm would seem to suggest that such noise levels are acceptable to that community; there are, of course, other communities where both noise levels and noise complaints are extremely high but where, for a number of complex reasons (likelihood that following up a complaint will make any difference to the neighbourhood, a sense that the neighbourhood is not worth investing enforcement time in and so on), complaints are rarely if ever addressed. In the UK in particular, the relations among class, race and noise are quite uniformly patterned: non-white immigrant communities, for example, are rarely sonically policed to the same extent that affluent white communities are policed, and less affluent white communities are also rarely policed sonically to the same extent as more affluent communities. The social norms that operate in different communities, it seems, are constructed and reinforced both internally and externally and those norms contribute fundamentally to the character of the encounter with the neighbour.

There is clearly a story to be told about the relations that are cast by the various new forms of urbanity: the local concerns of community members about crowding, the 'siege' of noise and anxiety about new incomers can be seen as symptomatic of a wider change in the meanings of community and sovereignty which, according to this story at least, has been under way for some time but which has recently come into particularly intense focus, especially in those communities where silence and privacy are held in high regard or, conversely where privacy and safety seem to be under some kind of malign pressure. The roots of this change, we tell ourselves, reside in the *longue durée* of modernity itself, which we take to be both resolutely connected to, and relatively autonomous from, the material conditions that seem to have generated it: a radical reworking of the social contract and a thorough-going recasting of the ensemble of social relations seems to be under way, where the great achievement of the Enlightenment project, the abstraction and universalisation of social relations to notions such as 'citizen' and 'subject', has begun to lose ground to more fragmented and less clearly articulable notions of post-humanity, post-citizenship and distributedness. This situation, although it has been somewhat overcharacterised, is grounded on a fantasy (one that I will analyse shortly) which is no less powerful for being 'merely' a story: the stories we tell ourselves are fantastical to be sure, but it is precisely the kind of fantasy work that these stories do that will form the basis of my analysis here. 13

The danger in any such social characterisation that lifts its head above the parapet of the local is that it will always in some sense reduce the local to anecdote and seek to over-symptomise the subtle texture of micro-social encounters. To avoid the worse excesses of this tendency, I want to turn my attention, first of all, to the roots of the modern understanding of what I have thus 14

far been calling the sonic relation and to analyse the key elements of the foundational fantasy of the modern imagination of that relation. To name the ground of that relation a fantasy is not to seek to undermine the validity or strength of that imagination: as anyone familiar with theories of ideology will know, fantasies are powerful agents in the formation of collectively-held beliefs and there are some key elements of the late modern fantasy of the sonic relation that can be shown to work powerfully in favour of a strong cultural critique of the political economy of sound.

By drawing attention to its roots in the emergence of a certain kind of urban space in the face of industrialisation, the late modern imagination of the sonic relation can be seen to throw the role of contemporary urban spaces into question. Such spaces, characterised as we know by the highly 'zoned' dispersal of subjects according to class, race and function across a range of housing types and around a number of zoned public spaces, have become texts, resources in the feeding of the late modern imagination by the hopeless distributedness and undecidability of the ethical relation. The characteristic zoning that attends the industrialised city also carefully manages the imagination of the sonic relation: a Marxist would note that cheap housing for tenant workers is invariably more densely built than the higher-specification housing for the property-owners and, for that Marxist, this differentiation would suggest that the relation among class, gender and wealth are all carefully articulated in the late modern urban text. Even the most short-handed social history of noise would point to the poorest communities as bearing the highest costs of dense living. 15

As industrialisation accelerated in the late nineteenth century, anxieties about noise spread from the poorest neighbourhoods to more affluent areas, and it was here, inevitably, that the urban bourgeoisie began to develop a keen interest in the problem of noise and the relation with the neighbour. It was here, furthermore, that the modern imagination of the social relation of noise to property comes into particular focus. For Theodor Lessing, founder of the *Deutscher Lärmschutzverband* or German Noise Abatement Society, urban noise constituted a symptom of the process of modernisation itself and his rage against noise, contrary to Max Nordau who deemed those who could not stand such stimuli 'degenerate', was also a rage against industrial modernity: 16

A coachman who cracks the whip, a maid who shakes out the bedding, a drummer who beats the drum, detect in their noises a personally enjoyable activity and a magnification of their own sphere of power. If these people have no other means to draw the world's attention to themselves and let others take notice of their power, then they can clearly prove their existence and influence through the ears of their fellow man.¹⁰

Lessing draws attention in particular to the *enjoyment* that noise constitutes for the multitude of others that press in on him: their public performance of their pleasures points to their falling short, as compensating for a lack in their 'sphere of power'. The riffraff, bestial creatures that know no better than to fill their emptiness with the noise of their being, are hopelessly attached to their empty bellowing and drumbeating. Anxieties about urban noise, as Peter Rayer has shown,¹¹ were not limited at the last fin-de-siècle to conservative thinkers like

Lessing, but emerged with rapid urbanisation as a shared concern (although, of course, it was the educated middle classes that wielded much of the discourse on the matter). Noise, especially when understood as a marker of the new density of living, was thus linked to a certain pressure on community resources, and to a threat, posed by the potential of being 'overrun' by neighbours, to the conjoining of privacy and silence: in the plural, neighbours come to represent in this period of intensified industrialisation the proximity to the horde.

In this context, the neighbour, the bearer of noise, becomes the symptom of the new sonic disposition and it falls to the neighbour therefore to bear all the anxiety of his or her Other as one with whom we fight for limited resources. In this, at least, late modernity is not so different from the modernities of the last fin de siècle: indeed, it might be possible to think of the neighbour as a, to a certain extent, *generalisable* symptom of modernity itself. We might even go further and observe that the neighbour has come to represent the limits of that modernity; indeed, since the notion of neighbour entered modern consciousness,¹² the term 'neighbour' has always been twofold – from Old High German [OHG] *nāhgibūr*, *nāhgibūro*, it combines two parts, the first from OHG *nāh* or *nā* (see also Gothic *nehw*, *nehwa*) and the second, *būr*, a shortened form of Old English *gebūr*, from the OHG *gibūr*, *gibūro*, meaning 'dweller', 'farmer', 'landtiller'; hence neighbour is one who dwells near by and who shares local resources (in Middle High German [MHG] *gibūr*, *gibūro* came to mean 'fellow-occupier of a dwelling, farm, or village' and thus the addition of the prefix was an intensification of the neighbour's 'nigh-ness').¹³ Its original connection (even, it is thought, in Gothic) to proximity and territory survives into the modern usage; but what modernity (especially late modernity) has done to the term is to imbue it with a particular kind of ambiguity that blurs the boundary between what might be termed autonomy or sovereignty (and territory, privacy) on the one hand and the communal/public on the other. 17

If the neighbour has come to mark the point at which those two spheres intersect, it also points up in particular the specific characteristics of modernity's inflection of (or intervention in) those spheres. So, if ever there were a figure that could be said to have a *longue durée* – to have, that is, a long and continuous presence in the post-Reformation 'Western' (European, North American) cultural imaginary – it is the figure of the neighbour. As I have intimated already, this is a figure that has proven itself able to operate variously as a cipher (holding together in a singular instance both the devastating ambiguity of community and its fullest and most enticing promise (of succour, mutuality, reciprocity)), and as a representation both of the possibility of ethical friendship and of the probability of hostility in equal measure. This is a figure, moreover, that has been put to an extraordinary amount of cultural work: as marker of organic community, as agent of early modern citizenship, avatar of emergent democracy, as one of the coordinates of the emergence of a newly confident bourgeoisie, marker of the putative decline of social cohesion, as a symptom, even, of the very sickness of modernity, as *ambiguity itself* – in all these articulations of the neighbour, s/he remains a harbinger of disquiet, as, literally, the bringer of *noise* (the all-too clear presence of the Other, too close) or of an unsettling quiet (the blank emptied-out face of the other, too distant, illegible). 18

What is striking in this *longue durée*, then, is not just the extent to which the neighbour has been able to present itself as consistently ambiguous, but also the manner in which it has been able to *sustain* itself precisely at the line between friend and enemy and, in the specific terms of this article, silence and noise. The radical undecidability in the neighbour, its resilient ambiguity, resonates strongly with Carl Schmidt's articulation of the political as an arena in which: 19

... only the actual participants can correctly recognise, understand and judge the concrete situation and settle the extreme case of conflict. Each participant is in a position to judge whether the adversary intends to negate his opponent's way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one's own form of existence.¹⁴

In other words, from 'outside' of the 'local' situation in which the subject and the neighbour are construed, the ethical differentiation of the one from the other is radically problematised. We can demonstrate this in the following question: in a dispute between neighbours over noise levels, how is one to differentiate unreasonable hypersensitivity from honourable indignation or harmful exuberance from antisocial behaviour? In other words, who bears the position of 'authority' (in the sense of a truth-bearer) in any such dispute and where is the line between the one who listens and the one listened to?

Good neighbours

In this situation, of course, it should come as no surprise that the neighbour is also a site of a particular kind of *nostalgia*, the other side of the fantasy we have been sketching. Common wisdom holds that there used to be some good neighbours and that they were always better than now; in developed capitalist societies we are hopelessly addicted to the nostalgic image of the good neighbour and contemporary vernacular culture is rife with its representation: they popped in for a cuppa and a chat, brought stews when you or your family were ill, looked after your cat when you were away, and they were there for your children if something bad should have befallen them when you were not there. Beyond these everyday and comforting imaginations of the neighbour, we encounter an underlying counter-fantasy about the Face of the other as promise of what we might term, following Levinas again, a generalised love, a love that embraces all without eros. And, like all fantasies, it is put to work in order to cover over an impasse or shortfall in the texture of reality precisely around the ethical relation. Pedro Almodóvar's film *Volver* (Spain, 2006) seems to thematise the neighbour with this idealising discourse of neighbour-love in mind. This is a film in which neighbours are constituted as part of a functional support network and in which time and resource is given readily in support of the protagonist Raimunda (played by Penelope Cruz). Nowhere in this film does the noise of the other erupt into the narrative and nowhere do neighbours bark at the incursion of the other. Indeed, music operates, as is often the case in Almodóvar, as a strong narrative agent, marking key developments, underlying the emotional structure of the narrative and, crucially, providing welcome respite from the storm and stress of the Almodóvarean aesthetic. There is one such striking moment in the film when 20

Raimunda (a young working class woman who has hidden the body of her violent and abusive husband in a freezer in a local bar, after her daughter, prey to his sexual advances, has killed him), performs the 'title song', 'Volver' (literally, 'to return' or 'returning'), to an audience of friends, restaurant clients and neighbours, overheard and watched by her 'resurrected' mother whom she thought dead but who is now hiding in a nearby car, having recently revealed herself to her sister, Sole. The song, we learn from Sole, was taught to her and Raimunda by their (about-to-return) mother and the song marks a moment of extraordinary intensity in the film: community and family cohere around this ritual, and around a memory of someone lost, but also a promise (delivered before our very eyes) of their return; and it is the music that frames all this, delivers, channels, shapes the narrative kernel that sticks to this ritual of remembering, to this ritualised enjoyment of remembering. In this singular moment, then, we are offered an idealised representation of spontaneous community: '¿Te acuerdas?' ['Do you remember?'], asks Raimunda of Sole, an injunction to remember again together in a shared act of both mourning and celebration. The song, sung by Estrella Morente, is from her 2006 album *Mujeres* and is persuasively mouthed by Cruz in the film, as if it were indeed Raimunda herself who were singing.

It is crucial that this moment be, in some sense, believed, grasped, disbelief 21 suspended, since without this the key structural moment of the film is radically problematised. Indeed, despite all its comfortable spontaneity, its easy and charming delivery, there is something stagey in this moment, something overly performative, perhaps, something even that seems to undermine the claims it might be making to a kind of authenticity (and it is clearly trying to do just that); we might even say of this moment that it delivers an imagination of community that is idealised, a community as *already being mourned*, and the spectacle (however persuasive) of Cruz pretending to sing adds to this sense of displacement, of always already having lost that which this fleeting moment is trying to capture. And this sentimentality, this melodrama of friends and neighbours, points decidedly to something uneasy in the relationship between music and communities : the song casts neighbours and neighbourhoods in a problematic light – if community is a kind of performative ritual, structured as so many emotional highs and lows, melodramas of contrasting emotional identifications, as 'camp', even, then the ethical coordinates of that community are called into question by dint of their being identified with 'mere' and self-conscious performativity, surface, artifice. It is around the music/neighbour relation in particular, then, that that ethical slipperiness comes into focus, in the staging of this spontaneous nostalgia, which we are supposed to believe, supposed to give ourselves to (and we can all certainly do that) but which we also know is artifice, a thin and pale simulacrum of a 'real' community.

In a very important sense, this ritualised moment (and the melodramatic logic that 22 drives the rest of the film) is faithful in turn to the logic of neurosis outlined above in describing my encounter with my neighbours. Lacan's formulation of neurosis is constituted in particular in a deliberate refusal to name as normative any notion of mental health, and leads to a radically re-formulated conception of what is general and what is particular in mental health and in the analytic situation; in the neurotic logic we have identified as that grounded in the neighbourly encounter, the *undecidability* is what is crucial here, and, in particular, how one deals with this. In

Raimunda's disavowal or refusal of such undecidability, in her ritualised displacement of it in favour of a kind of imago-in-process (as if to say, 'as I sing I refuse the ambiguity of modernity'), we encounter a particular formation of neurotic disavowal (repression) in what Lacan terms the discourse of the hysteric:

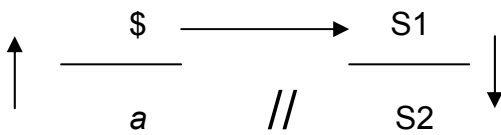


Fig. 1: Lacan's discourse of the hysteric¹⁵

The symbols, oft-used Lacanian 'mathemes' in this 'algebra', represent the following actors: the barred subject (\$); the master signifier (S1); knowledge (S2); and the *objet petit a* or 'thing' as cause of desire or as symptom (a). The four elements \$, S1, S2 and a are ranged across the four positions ('functions') thus:

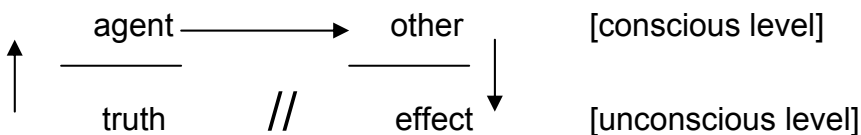


Fig. 2: Lacan's/Wajcman's Schema for the Functions of Discourse

It is worth noting that Lacan's diagram does not use the vertical arrows or the caesura that I include here (following Gérard Wajcman), but Lacan nonetheless does clearly insist on the function of the four positions and the *gap* between effect (or, as Wajcman puts it, 'production') and truth by always beginning his description of the four orders of discourse with the term on the lower left-hand side of the equation. Wajcman's additions, therefore, are useful in that they make clear what is latent in Lacan's formulation.

For Lacan, the hysteric positions itself in relation to the discourse of the master as one who disavows it, refutes it and yet fundamentally relies on the master signifier for its subjectification through the question: 'what/who am I?'¹⁶ Hence the statement \$ → S1 (the question posed by the hysteric of the master signifier) is wrought thus:

Tell me *who* I am? → You are *what* I say.¹⁷

And yet this apparent subordination of the hysteric to the order of the master signifier is itself an incitement, an acting out, a radicalisation.¹⁸ And the key observation for Lacan is that the discourse of the hysteric is a *structural* (and thus social) relation, as a question posed to the Other; that question is specifically about knowledge, about requiring that the (hidden) master respond with/as knowledge to the hysteric's demand:

If there's one thing that psychoanalysis should force us to maintain obstinately, it's that the desire for knowledge has no relationship with knowledge... A radical distinction, which has far-reaching consequences from the point of view of pedagogy – the desire to [k]now is not what leads

to knowledge. What leads to knowledge is ... the hysteric's discourse.¹⁹

We might formulate the specific instance of Raimunda's performance along Lacanian lines in the following manner: you (the absent master) may say (that is, I impute *this* to you) that community is a construction, a ritual, and that my friends and neighbours are not really operating with my best interests in mind, that the memories of my past are fragmented and unreliable, and that the condition of modernity is such that I am doomed to mourn the loss of the ideal organic community and the ideal family; but how am I to live like that, *who am I* in all this? So, to elicit your (S1's) response to my question, I continue to operate (as a ritualised disavowal) a recuperative authenticity, a musicking, an *acting out*. For Lacan, moreover, this performative authenticity would be understood precisely as *inconsistent* since the hysteric always knows that attempts at suspending the Real (in the ritual of remembering) are just rituals – sutures – and that the hysterical eliciting of the hidden master is doomed to get stuck in that ritual whilst always already cognisant of ritual's emptiness: is this all there is? Is this all that I am?

It is interesting to note also that the song from Morente's album was edited for the film: indeed, had the whole track from Morente's album been performed in the film, we might have been able to suggest that Raimunda is trying to address the implied hysteric question of the song (of the film, even: '¿Te acuerdas quien soy?', 'do you remember who I am?') to *someone*, but the full pronomial naming of the Other (the master signifier, 'tu', S1) in the performance of the song in the film is never quite fully delivered. In the full song, a potential unveiling is achieved in the first verse (and then only obliquely) with 'tuya', 'tuyo' ('yours'): 'En la quieta calle donde el eco dijo/ "tuya es su vida, tuyo es su querer"'; but since only the *second* verse is sung, even that oblique reference is not available to us.²⁰ Nonetheless, at one point in the chorus (which *is* sung in the film, towards the end of the scene), the pronoun 'te' (accusative second person singular, but here used, I suggest, as the colloquial impersonal pronoun, not unlike English 'you' when referring to 'one' or an unspecified addressee) is used: 'que febril la mirada / errante en las sombras / te busca y te nombra' ['the feverish gaze wandering in the shadows searches for you and names you']. The 'te' which is searched for and named can thus be attached to any number of agents (the singer herself, Raimunda's secondary performance, the listener, identifying with the singer/performer or some other person or agent [the Other (S1) as master signifier in the discourse of the hysteric]). This undecidability in the song's address operates as a kind of remnant of the hysteric's self-knowledge, the marker or symptom of the hysteric's (repressed) knowledge of the impossibility of the question, 'who am I for you, a man or a woman?'. 24

In the context of the trauma which is delivered at the end of the film (we learn eventually that Raimunda had herself been abused by her own father), the question of gender is raised with an extraordinary intensity. The song is what might be termed a *canción aflamencado* (or 'song adapted to the style of flamenco') and is a reworking of Carlos Gardel's tango original of 1935. From Estrella Morente's 2006 album *Mujeres* ('Women'), the song is one of a number of tributes to women on the album. 'Volver' is named as a tribute to Penelope Cruz herself (and is the only song not dedicated to a singer), and the intense identification that Cruz's spectacular lip-synching seems to perform (down to the 25

tinest details of mimicking vibrato, phrasing, gestures etc.) is returned by Morente in the dedication to Cruz: this is, then, a mutual *homage*, wresting the song from its masculine authorship and placing it firmly within the feminine domain of mutuality and friendship. This also intensifies our hermeneutic grip on Almodóvar's figuration of the feminine space as a site of self-avowedly idealised ethics, of mourning and a place where the hysteric's discourse operates as a structural frame: what is it to be woman?

One striking difference in this version from the Gardel original is its use of the flamenco *palo* [genre] rhythm or *compás* of the *bulerías al golpe* with its characteristic 'emphasis' on the first beat of each 6-beat cycle (the *golpe*), given here as the *palmas* (clapped rhythm) that start the song: 26

1	2	3	4	5	6
	x	x	x	x	x

This shift into 6, from the tango original in 4, makes the song seem airier, leaving longer gaps between each line of the verses and ensuring that the emotional structure of this scene is elongated. Hence, a characteristic of this version is its slower, more meditative delivery, and, as a result, the arrival of the chorus, 'Volver / Con la frente marchita / Las nieves del tiempo / platearon mi sien' (literally 'Returning, with a wrinkled forehead / the snows of time / have silvered my temple'), with its move to the tonic major, does not have the sense of a 'gear change' or sudden quickening of the harmonic rhythm we experience in the Gardel original: here the move to the tonic major feels like a broadening or brightening of the harmonic landscape and the chorus thus functions in this version more as a meditative centrepiece than as the 'hook' of the original.

I have already suggested that mourning is the key here and, according to Freud, 27 the work of mourning must be differentiated from melancholy, which for him always marks a *failure*, a 'getting stuck' as it were, in which an open wound is held open: 'The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energies [...] from all directions and emptying the ego until it is totally impoverished.'²¹ And cathexis is precisely this getting stuck, attaching oneself to an object, and to the oral or anal stages. In avoiding this getting stuck and emptying out, then (the open wound is a breaking of the surface, but is not a depth, and is thus an intensification of surface), the mourner must operate according to a logic of slow and careful detachment from the lost object. In that 'work', Freud (especially in 'The Ego and the Id' (1923)), also recognises an importing of melancholy itself, and an elegiac recasting of the ego as constituted fundamentally in endless mourning. Hence, as a symptom of Freud's imagination of modernity, the elegiac ego attaches itself to rituals of remembering, never fully detaching itself from the lost object. Such an ego, for Lacan, places itself in a relation with the master signifier that refuses both its own instrumentalisation and that of the other; it refuses, as it were, the exacerbation of the surface (the wound) and engages *mourning work* – the hysteric works through the trauma of modernity despite knowing at some level that that trauma is without end or cause and that the lost object will forever work its magic.

Raimunda poses the question in her performance with a calling to remember: she cannot bear the thought of the violence of neglect; her song is a calling, a hailing, a drawing of the listener into the ideal relation of the lost community and the lost family – let us remember together. This hysteric's relation to her neighbours is a relation structured around the question of being, addressed to an absent (incomprehensible, hopelessly distributed) master who stands for knowledge-giving – how can it be that we must suffer this indignity and how is it that you (S1) do not answer? You are responsible and yet you do not show yourself! As an address to modernity, the hysteric's question becomes the modern subject's question *par excellence*, the 'splendid child' of psychoanalysis, as Juan-David Nasio puts it (after Freud).²² The desire to know in Lacan is always already hysterical and the ritual of remembering enacted in song is a ritual that is also a kind of productive mourning work, a way of imagining the ideal ethical relation of neighbour to neighbour, of trying to capture Levinas's Face, fading, fading, a worked-on cathexis at the core of the elegiac ego. 28

Freud and the im/possibility of neighbour-love

The desire to know the neighbour, then, as the ultimate marker of the hysteric's discourse, is also (or, perhaps better, leads to) the desire for knowledge *in general*. In other words, this relation, as we have seen, is a structural one. In order to examine the consequences of thinking of song as a ritual of remembering (and thus also a kind of forgetting), I want to take the story back now to the famous injunction to 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' in *Leviticus* or, to be specific, to perhaps the most elegant of modernity's responses to that 'ancient knowledge' of the neighbour, casting modernity itself in the role of the hysteric, as it were. In a short but remarkable passage towards the end of *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud responds in disbelief to the injunction 'love thy neighbour as thyself': 29

Why should we do it? What good will it do us? But, above all, how shall we achieve it? How can it be possible? My love is something valuable to me which I ought not to throw away without reflection. It imposes duties on me for whose fulfilment I must be ready to make sacrifices. If I love someone, he must deserve it in some way.²³

The incomprehension, then, is symptomatic precisely of that question of being we have come to call hysteric. Indeed, for Lacan it is precisely this incomprehension, this splitting off of the ethical from the ideological in exasperation at the impossibility of getting an answer from the hidden and silent master, that drives the late Freud, that brings him into an encounter again and again with the predicament of modernity which he recognises in the figure of the bad neighbour: a threatening, deadly Other, the spineless and malevolent Other. How different from the neighbours in Almodóvar's lament for community and yet how continuous with that lament, how reliant upon the same *longue durée* of the neighbour: in this, in both Freud's refusal and Raimunda's mourning, the neighbour speaks. Certainly, Freud's approach to the injunction in *Leviticus* operates around a certain notion of what he terms 'truth': 30

The element of truth behind all this, which people are so ready to disavow, is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. *Homo hominus lupus*.²⁴

And this extraordinary passage gets to the heart of the Freudian project, and does so with remarkable efficiency and candour: the disavowal of any cosy or settled notion of man as thoroughly civilised, as only aberrantly or rarely violent, constitutes for Freud a devastating complacency at the heart of the political economy of neighbours. To rest on the laurels of modernity's putative civilisation is to make oneself vulnerable to slipping at any minute into the chaos of violence. What is striking is the manner in which the neighbour is made to work, yet again, as a symptom, as a figure that holds together in one place the incommensurability of being *of civilisation* and the recognition that that civilisation is coterminous with the most brutal and base instincts that have not been laid to rest (despite modernity's best efforts to abstract the social relation as if that violence could effectively be written out of the contract). The injunction that seemed so strange for Freud, to 'Love thy neighbour as thyself', reads in full:

19 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

The third book of the Hebrew Torah, *Leviticus*, the book of the Levites (ויקרא, *Vayyiqra* or *Wayikra*), is resolutely connected to law and ritual, especially to priestly ritual. Its laws are given to Moses and the Hebrew name of the book is 'and he called'. Moses is set into the law by this calling, this hailing, which is put in motion at the very beginning of *Leviticus* (1:1–2) :

1 And the LORD called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying,
2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the LORD, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock.

The commandment to love thy neighbour is thus initiated, in this first hailing of Moses, by a disembodied voice; Moses is, as it were, interpellated. Yet it is an interpellation that for Freud is clearly distinctly problematic: the engine that drives *Civilisation and its Discontents* is not the voice of God, but the 'truth' that God is dead. God, indeed, has always been dead but, as Lacan puts it, 'he does not know he is dead':

We who are trying to articulate Freud's thought and experience so as to give them their due weight and importance, we will articulate it in the following form: if this Symptom-God, this Totem-God or taboo, is worthy of

our pondering the claim to turn him into a myth, it is because he was the vehicle of the God of truth. It is by means of the former that the truth about God could come to light, namely, that God was really killed by men, and that once the thing was re-enacted, the primitive murder was redeemed. Truth found its way via him who the scriptures no doubt call the Word, but also the Son of Man, thereby admitting the human nature of the father.²⁵

Lacan is referring here to Freud's myth of the primal horde, which we have already seen transformed by late modernity into the neighbours that threaten to overrun us – the horde from within, as it were; in Freud's 'myth', the primal father forbids his sons sexual access to the women of the horde. The sons come together and murder the father because they want access to the women of the horde, thereby learning the great power of collective agency. In that moment of violence, the men overthrow the primal father and change the order of things: from then they are doomed to *mourn* the father, burdened by the guilt of their transgression, and thereby, in honour of him who has been wronged, they reinstate the dead father as the father-God, totem-God. And it is here, in the howl of this bloody transgression that the neighbour is born: *love him as thyself, for never again shall ye wrong him*. 'Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'.

The neighbour, then, is precisely this symptom and s/he emerges at precisely that moment when the horde's men fall under the sway of the father-God, when they fall under the sway of law, as they pass fully into the symbolic order into which they are hurled as its subjects, subjected, in chains. They mourn for that which is lost and yet reinstate it, put it back in place, revere it. The father returns as a symptom, as chant, as song, as a great humming. It's as if, to inject a trope from Almodóvar, he is always hiding in the car, just out of sight, presumed dead but about to return any minute, and we sing *volver, volver...* 33

The relation in music

Freud connects the neighbour to hurt, to transgression and the basest instincts which modernity (he thinks) has failed to mitigate in any meaningful way. We have seen how song, as a site of mourning, can be taken up in the repairing of the hurt of this bleak vision, and how it similarly fails to heal the wound that Freud exacerbates: in the ritual of remembering in song, communities both *cohere* (constructing an 'authentic core' in the maternal family) and *display their constructedness* (and thus their susceptibility to the malign erosion of history, time, symbolisation). One response to that impasse is to take up the subject position of the hysteric (\$ in Lacan's schema at the position of the agent) as a normative position, the *mot juste* of the modern subject, questing, asking, repeatedly addressing the absent master – the position of the subject in its quest for knowledge. And, as a ritualising of that question, song transforms it into a public repeating, a worked-on cathexis at the core of the elegiac ego in mourning: we have seen how, in Lacan's notion of the hysteric's discourse, the question of being demands speech, but in migrating the question into song, the demand holds off that return; the 'you are what you are' of the master signifier,²⁶ is systematically delayed and the act of demanding begins to operate as an 34

autonomous voicing, delivers its own kind of *jouissance*.

I want to consider now how the relationship of the hysteric and the neighbour can be thought out in the sphere of musical materials specifically, and how hysteric voicing manifests itself in a number of different musical situations in which notions of space and proximity are worked through musically. The musical elaboration of proximity will come under particularly intensive scrutiny here although my move from a short theory of the neighbour to a theory of musical proximity and territory is by no means guaranteed. Moreover, the relation of 'territory' to 'property' as I have been using it is by no means straightforward: on the one hand, of course, in 'hard' legal networks, territories are quite complex phenomena that embrace a number of different legal qualities, one of which is the quality of ownership, although that is a quality that does not *guarantee* the territory. Property, on the other hand, is a phenomenon in which that quality of ownership is crucial and in which boundaries are 'guaranteed' by a clear legal framework of provenance. Both concepts embrace a model of space as articulated by human agents, although the two are not synonyms, but, rather, point to a shared logic of legislative discourse in which the phenomenon cannot precede the articulation. If we were concerned here only with relations of property, then territory would seem at first to be a strange choice of metaphor. Hence the move from *property* to *territory* is precisely that – a move. But I do want to make this move in order to test the extent to which the notion of *a space articulated by agents* might work within specific musical instances, and then to test those instances against the broader frame of the ethical relation of the neighbour as outlined above; and I can only do that if we modify the articulation of space embraced in relations of property to embrace also other spatial relations that are not wholly reliant on property, but which in some sense are closely related to those spatial relations of property.²⁷ We can now usefully talk of *territorialisation* as a process by which localisation is imposed on a social agent, or under which a social agent accepts the operation of territory upon it, or in which a social agent imposes itself on a specific spatial domain: in this way we can capture both the more specific relations of property and those of proximity more generally.

Territorialisation, of course, has a complex history in continental philosophy, especially after the work of Deleuze and Guattari, and I will reference this here only briefly. In the terms we are working under, we can talk both of an explicit and an implicit territorialisation, a distinction that will become crucial for my argument below and which, in a rather limited sense, draws on Deleuze and Guattari's conceptions of *territorialisation*, *detrterritorialisation* and *reterritorialisation*. Explicit or 'hard' territorialisation is a largely 'sociological' category that emphasises the need to circumscribe, articulate or otherwise mark out different subcultural spaces from each other: under this rubric, the various logics of the ghettoisation, invasion, incursion and disaggregation of communities can be analysed. Implicit territorialisation, by contrast, is a 'symbolic' category and when we speak of territorialisation in this manner, we inevitably refer to territory as metaphor, although that is not to reduce it to a figure of speech. The work of implicit territorialisation can be linked to a tendency to de-particularise (and, perhaps, therefore smooth over) the material conditions of territory on which it draws, but which it seeks nonetheless to evoke and also invoke. In the move from the explicit to the implicit, we note the operation of ideology: the aesthetic can come to

represent a domain of secrets, spoken only obliquely – what Marxists used to call ‘mysitification’. Conversely, as we shall see, there is no guarantee that this implicit or symbolic territorialisation will constitute any such mystification: musical territorialisation can underline or call into appearance the very open wound of communities under malign erosion that other musics seek to ameliorate, or cover over.

I want to think through the notion of musical territory by identifying the means by which some musics (recent musics of developed capitalist societies) engage territory as metaphor, and the ways in which they attempt to hide that metaphor in a kind of *fort-da* dance of revealing and hiding. In this dance, music operates territory as a resource in which the hysteric’s discourse can run rampant: who moves, who sings? Where do they move to, where do they sing from? Who am I for them? Where am I in this place, this territory wrought in sound? Music is thus given the role by the listener of *operating* territory as if a kind of agent in itself, as taking the place of the master signifier, as putting in place the topography of the social and ethical relations. The relation of the listening subject with this musical territory is thus one in which the hysteric is both frustrated and titillated by the attenuation of what Žižek has termed ‘symbolic efficiency’:²⁸ it is precisely the conundrum of musical agency that operates as a cause of desire – in the hysteric’s discourse, as we have seen, the cause of desire, *a*, stands in the place of truth, marking an unbearable inefficiency in the symbolic circuit. And that relation of the hysteric to that cause of desire (as ‘truth’ in Lacan’s schema) is a relation shot through with pain, suffering but also *jouissance*. This relation, that is to say, operates at the juncture of suffering and enjoyment and puts in the place of the absent (inefficient) master signifier a fantasy of supplication to the music. As I and Freya Jarman-Ivens have suggested elsewhere:

‘[...] [popular] song [...] come[s] to constitute a site for the articulation of gender: masochism, that state of performative ‘as if’ as Žižek terms it, is resolutely connected to pleasure and the performance of pleasure, to an enacting of being taken up by another’s will [...] [W]here voice enters, so a series of enactments of the subject in chains ensue – ‘Rescue Me’, ‘Prisoner of Love’, ‘I’m in Chains’, ‘It Hurts So Good’, ‘Lovin’ Chains’, ‘Chained to You’, ‘Chained (To Your Love)’.²⁹

Thus we note in the relation of the listener to musical territory, to the placing and marking out of the place taken up by the other, a distinct masochistic potential. Territorialisation, then, is a process whereby music appears to operate as an unknowable master to which we give ourselves.

Beyond the frisson of this abstracted masochistic relation with a generalised master, music also plays with territories in ways that are more overt, more symbolically efficient, so to speak. It does this, especially in recorded Western popular song, by invoking sonic spaces, replaying different kinds of resonances, different inter-object sonic relationships. The means by which music does this are relatively straightforward: high levels of resonance tend to invoke large resonant spaces and ‘drier’ mixes tend to articulate smaller more intimate (even claustrophobic) spaces. Similarly, resonant sound objects (the bell archetype, if you will) released into dry acoustic spaces, cause a denaturalisation of the

acoustic frame (and the same is also true when a dry sound object is released into a resonant domain). In the interplay of these kinds of sonic spaces, then, music can engage and disengage real and imagined soundscapes, locate speaking, singing and other kinds of agents, and open out a vast array of new sonic relations. But there are some quite specific ways, I suggest, in which music is afforded the role of master signifier, as, so to speak, saturating the spaces emptied out by symbolic inefficiency. We might schematise the specifics of this implicit territorialisation in the following processes:

1. a retraction of the communal into the aesthetic, in which, as we have seen, some musics seem to cover over the 'real' social relations of territory by abstracting them or idealising them;
2. emphasis on virtuosity/display, in which social relations are transformed into relations of spectacle and in which that spectacularisation is seen to effect a transformation of the social relation;
3. objectification of the performing body, in which virtuosity brings the body under malign and intense scrutiny, thereby restricting both symbolic and 'hard' territory precisely to that body, limiting its cultural effectiveness, but simultaneously placing it centre stage;
4. power relations are mapped onto the structure of the consuming gaze: the listener places itself in relation to the performing body such that it both identifies with and desires that body, filling in the gap of symbolic inefficiency with the hard and limited body of the other.

Hence we might say that any approach along these lines to musical territory is as much a theory of *spectacle* as it is a theory of symbolic territory per se: the two are intimately bound together in an antagonistic but co-dependent relationship in what I term the 'spectacular circuit' where territory and virtuosity circle round each other thus:

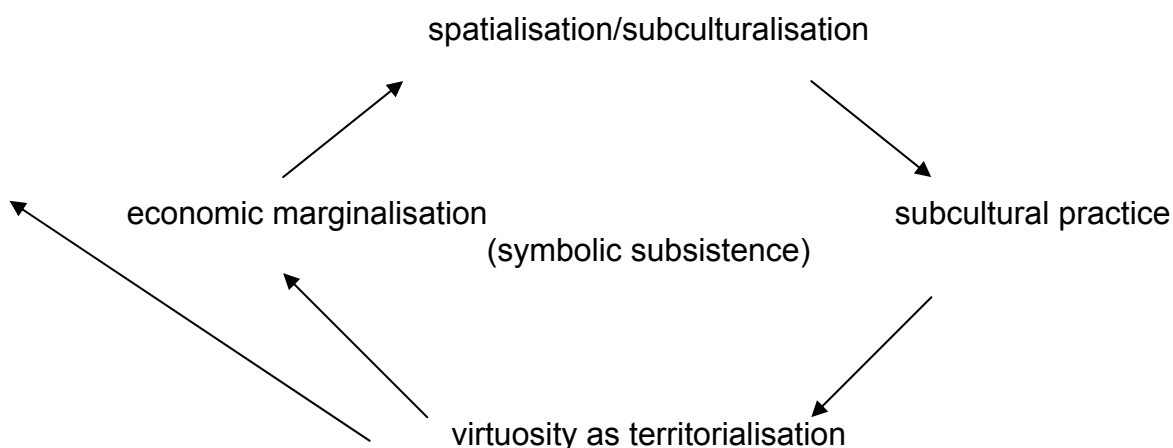


Fig. 3: the spectacular circuit

This closed circuit, elaborated from the basic theory of subcultures (a theory which from its inception drew quite explicitly on metaphors of *territory*) represents

the circulation of cultural practice within a subcultural space. This endless circulation is disrupted precisely at that moment when virtuosity attracts attention from outside the subcultural territory, when the subcultural capital accruing to the virtuoso exceeds the subcultural economy. What Russell Potter has termed the 'spectacular vernacular'³⁰ is precisely that which *detrterritorialises*: spectacularisation thus both territorializes – in that it marks the performing body as spectacle – and detrterritorialises – in that it pierces the membrane of subcultural space by making the performing body into a commodity, thereby abstracting the social relation out from the subcultural space, draining it and leaving it impoverished. This circuit, then, is broken only when a certain excess or supplement enters the economy.

I want to trace this excess now in musical particulars, in two tracks released in the last 3 or 4 years: the first is the track 'Spirit Fingers' by Four-tet (Kieran Hebden, of Fridge), from the album *Rounds*, released in 2003,³¹ and the second, 'The Rape Over', is by Mos Def from the album *A New Danger* (2004),³² which thematises precisely the ethical foreclosure of the spectacular circuit outlined above. In Four-tet's extraordinary piece of 'laptop folk', the musical space of the piece is radically distributed: the sound stage is full, expansive and yet simultaneously cramped – the samples are compressed and yet located in a wide and resonant sonic frame. This interplay of the compressed and the resonant is part of what makes this track so engaging. That interplay works as a kind of problematisation of musical territory, a denaturalisation and a detrterritorialisation whereby open play, open playfulness, are given free run: the track plays openly in its neighbourhood, displaying its toys, openly enjoying the spectrum that runs from closed to open, cramped to expansive, compressed to the fullest frequency range; territory operates as an expediency, a localised but infinitely expandable space in which agents are always on the move. The track deals in comfortable dialectics in which real encounters are absolutely abstracted. 39

In Mos Def's disturbing track, territory operates differently: here too there is a dialectic at work, but this time it is a contested dialectic of competing strategies, one in which the enunciation operates as explicit political message and another which refuses that instrumentalisation. The first projects the voice onto community: the I is spoken as a kind of collective, a curtailed collective admittedly, but ripe with that potential; there is an emphasis here on displaying out, on the spectacular as always already 'a new danger', in which the performing body refuses objectification and insists on its subjectivisation, on the requirement that the listener identify, locate and give space to the subject that identifies with its enunciation (hence the first person narrative); the power relations at work in the encounter of addresser and addressee are always explicitly drawn into the phosong, always part of its domain, always already part of the 'message', to use Barthes's nomenclature.³³ And yet, there is also a refusal of that kind of instrumentalisation at work here: the collectivising potential of the first person is also resolutely attached to the performing persona, also resolutely singular; the emphasis on display is also an emphasis on the historically-specific traditions of hip-hop practice, on displaying also as part of a convention, of an expressive technology; the politics of opposition that speak through the collectivising I of the first strategy are also problematised in this adherence to convention, to the poetics of rap; the performing body is thus also reduced to virtuoso, to vessel of 40

the tradition. What is striking is that both strategies (for want of a better word), the political and the aesthetic, operate in each other's space, delivering a radical undecidability in the performing persona of Mos Def. The undecidability of the subject that speaks in song is not limited to this kind of enunciation, however. When the musical encounter is de-humanised and abstracted, as in the Four-tet track, a radical undecidability still operates: the materials of the piece are distributed in an avant-garde (or, to use my colleague Bennett Hogg's term, 'post-vernacular') manner whereby internal conflicts are foregrounded and not disciplined into expressivity, as in the Mos Def track. Here the apparent freedom or openness of that playfulness points, in ways more clear than in our second track, to its underlying material condition of luxury, a *jouissance* in the strictly Lacanian sense as that which is not essential, an excess. In both tracks, the listener is called into a relation with the music that is avowedly hysterical.

Conclusion: Neighbourhoods, neighbours and musical mournings

The hysteric's discourse, as we have seen, would seem to place the listener in a relation with the addresser that is a questioning one. The *che vuoi?* (what do you want of me?) of Lacan's question posed by the barred subject (\$) to the big Other needs to be elaborated for the hysteric to include the *che cosa vuoi che io sia?* of the hysteric listener: what do you want me to be? Imagine this question posed in the context of Kafka's terror at disclosure of himself to his neighbour ('These dreadfully thin walls, which betray the honest, but cover the dishonest!'): between the addresser and the addressee there is a wall, a gap, a partially porous membrane and a radical ambiguity. Who am I for you, my neighbour? What do you want of me? What do you want me to be for you? For Kafka, the relation of addresser and addressee is never one of *disclosure* but of a fear of that disclosure; the radical ethical undecidability is what sustains the discourse in the two statements:

a → \$
 (the *objet petit a*, cause of desire, is itself without cause)

and

S2 // a
 (knowledge is barred from the cause of desire)

We have already seen something of how different musical enunciations can play out the complex ethical territories of different subcultural subject positions by naturalising and denaturalising sonic territories in a *fort-da* dance of revealing and covering over the material territories on which they are grounded. In the context of the hysterical listener, that *playing out* of territories is precisely what *seeps through the wall*: the wall (as a semi-porous boundary) in the neighbourly relation works as both material divide (marker of sovereignty) and as symbolic potential (its porosity points to a sovereignty in peril, haunted by the *acousmêtre* of the other), through which other sonic territories pour, territories however that no longer allow for the hysteric listener. Certainly, between knowledge and desire, there is a gap that, for the hysteric subject, cannot be navigated (knowledge is the

end of the quest and desire its beginning) but, crucially, in the neighbourly relation, music and noise disturb that fixedness of the subject and send the hysteric's discourse in a spin with the addition of the statement $S2 \rightarrow (//) \rightarrow a$. Hence, the discourse becomes susceptible to endless slippage:

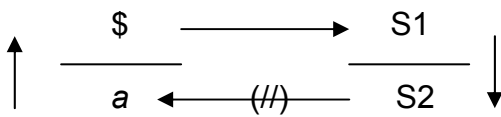


Fig. 4: The deterritorialisation of the hysteric

When the neighbour speaks, makes noise or plays music behind the wall, that wall seems to fall, to reveal a malevolent intent, to open out and to fail to hold safe, to fail to protect; it leaves the subject bare, vulnerable, open to hurt, to use Levinas's ethical frame of the Face. Here, in this flattened discourse-surface (Figure 4), there is no key marker of the four functions (agent, other, effect, truth), no crucial caesura to pin down the position of truth and effect, no fixing point to hold the subject in place. This leads to a radical *deterritorialisation*, in the terms that Deleuze and Guattari have set it up: in other words, in flowing through the (now) porous membrane between S2 and a, through 'the wall' (figured both as a material and a symbolic failed barrier), the circulation of meaning finds no rest and the 'place' of the subject is radically undecidable: we are always in one place, going nowhere. On the other side of that wall, malign and hostile *acousmètres* shuffle about, scratch, shout, bang and dance while knowledge (S2) dissipates, flows into the endless circle. The ethical structure that would seem to sustain the late modern idealisation of the neighbourly relation we encounter in Almodóvar is here utterly destroyed. 43

There is one film, perhaps more than any other, in which the slippage from the ideal neighbourly relation to the circular dance with the deadly *acousmètre* is plotted. John Schlesinger's *Pacific Heights* (1990) is the story of a young couple (Matthew Modine and Melanie Griffith) who buy an old house in Pacific Heights in San Francisco, renovate it and convert it into flats for rent. One of their tenants, Carter Hayes (played by Michael Heaton), seems initially to be the perfect tenant – articulate, smart and politely spoken. Yet, as soon as he moves in, he changes the locks to the flat, and becomes the neighbour from hell: strangers come and go; there is music at all hours, not to mention loud and thorough-going (and, of course, unauthorised) remodelling; Hayes releases cockroaches into the flat, and rapidly takes on the role of the malign *acousmètre*. The film is built on a deeply conservative anxiety about damage to property, of course – it is a thinly veiled plea for tougher property laws and presents the tenant as vicious, violent and a fundamental threat to the hetero-normative unit of the young property-owning couple. The key trauma that the film sets up and explores is that of contagion: cockroaches, drugs, smells, noise – all these contribute to Hayes's status as pariah. He is framed in Hitchcock-like long shots or often is only partially visible in the frame, making his voice and the other noises he makes all the more intensely connected to his function as *acousmètre*: Modine's character observes him from a space in the floor, or listens through the floors and walls. Each scratch, each bang, each thump is saturated with malevolent intent. Heavy metal music pounds until the early hours and the young couple start obsessing about the intent behind 44

each bang, each rustle.

Although the movie is unusual in its candid exploration of the porosity of that all-important wall that keeps neighbours at bay, similar themes abound in Anglophone cinema: Danny Boyle's *Shallow Grave* (1994), Douglas Jackson's *Deadbolt* (1994), John Klausner's *The Fourth Floor* (1999), Tony Spiridakis's *Noise* (2004) and Paul Schenider's *Love Thy Neighbour* (2005) all deal with the threat posed by the malevolent neighbour. In all these movies, a shift in the ethical coordinates of the neighbourly relation is shown to force the semiosis of subjective agency into a circular motion; this acts structurally in these narratives as a trauma, in the manner that Freud would understand it – as a breakdown, a collapse, of the order of the psyche into *Zwangsneurose* or obsessive neurosis where, as with Modine's character in *Pacific Heights*, the neighbour's noise becomes a symptom. Indeed, it is common for neighbours suffering under the effects of a malign neighbourly *acousmêtre* to become highly sensitised to noise and to engage in obsessive close observation of the neighbour, to the point where the injured party is placed precisely in that position in which they want to hold the neighbour, as the malign other; they slip inevitably into the place that holds *them* responsible. If this slippage is traumatic and can lead (in the popular imagination at least) to a break, or to a psychotic moment, then any theorisation of the musical neighbour that does not at least attempt to deal with this moment of ethical switching does not do justice to the complexity of the late modern sonic relation of the neighbour. Indeed, as Freud would no doubt have insisted, traumas will often occasion an ego-defence mechanism, perhaps the most common of which (and which certainly runs through Freud's case studies) is the constant return to ritual as the beginning of a kind of mourning work that can help the subject unstick itself from the empty repeating of melancholy. 45

The most profound trauma at the shift of the ethical coordinates of the neighbourly relation, however, is experienced not at the encounter with the violence that has been threatened, or with our finding the most awful proof of the other's malevolence, but in the recognition that we always already knew it would be like this, that it was always already destined to descend into this hostility in which injured parties have no recourse to the privileged position of the righteous. It is here that Schlesinger's film operates its greatest conceit – the film leaves no space for mourning work, foreclosing any such possibility with an act of violent revenge, enacted onto Hayes by Griffith's character. In leaving no place for that mourning work, the film attempts deliberately to cover over the incommensurability of dense living by allowing the injured neighbour to take up the privileged position of the righteous. 46

We began our account of mourning work with that glorious moment from Almodóvar's *Volver* where Raimunda sings her song of remembrance. One way to read Almodóvar's film, as we have seen, is precisely as an act of ritualised mourning: in the hysteric's discourse, Raimunda seeks answers to the question of being, but that question is an elegiac one, a questioning that mourns the absence of the master signifier. Mourning finds expression in an almost camp manner: women in black hum the Hail Mary like insects, packed into the small room where the body of aunt Chus lies; the film opens with the women of the village cleaning the graves of their relatives and the characters find out on a TV chat show that 47

Agustina (friend and neighbour to Aunt Chus) is dying of cancer. Death and resurrection stalk the characters of the film, the one chasing the tail of the other. 'Mamá te necesito' ('mother, I need you'), the last line of the film, underlines the necessity and inevitability of the return of the dead mother, and the neighbours in the film, of course, are all women. Indeed, the mother's return and the commitment to the feminine space are both disavowals of the impasse of the hysteric: if you will not answer, then we will ask each other, turn in on ourselves, rely on our own autonomous community. Men circle the narrative as mere props, corpses, guitarists, property owners, but not as narrative agents: their territory is outside this circle, they are intruders. And music serves to locate, to cohere and to envelop this community of women. They are as much *acousmètres* in a shared sonic space without walls as narrative agents and this doubled function is what marks them out in the Almodóvarean aesthetic as idealising women: in short, they refuse the ethical uncertainty of modernity.

How different from Freud's hostility to neighbour-love: for him there is no collective compassion, no resurrection of the patriarch, no understanding: the men of the horde fall upon the father and then mourn him, setting him up as a great totem, but doomed to suffer under the unbearable absolute equivalence of each and every one's guilt – they are thrown into a radically undecidable ethical relation. The crucial difference, of course, is that Almodóvar's film is about women and these are women of a very high order: they are made to take on the full moral authority of community, to carry that burden with smiles, tears and infinite patience. For Almodóvar, indeed, women represent an ideal and men always bring malevolent pressure to bear on that ideal. This is the crucial difference in the order of neighbours: for Freud (and for Schlesinger) neighbours fall under the masculine order of violence and for Almodóvar they fall under the feminine order of compassion. But for Almodóvar, the feminine order of compassion is also elegiac since this work is also a lament for the decline of communities, and it is music that does much of this mourning work. 48

That work, moreover, operates in the face of what I am calling the play of communities, the always more-than-one-ness of a community, its beholdenness to other communities that are often hostile, always malevolently mobile, encroaching, threatening to swallow up the places and spaces of the maternal ideal space. The postmodern predicament, as we have now come to call it, is a predicament in which the play of communities has for many become absolutely deadly: urban liminal spaces are under malign erosion and rural spaces are in ever greater threat of encroachment from the overflows of the urban. What is particularly striking, then, is the extent to which neighbours cease to be (if they ever were) the bearers of benign community spirit and come to represent *noise*, the noise of the other, the interference of the other, pressure, the chatter of the horde. And that danger is right next door. Right here. Listen. Hear that? 49

Notes

¹ Chuck Palahniuk, *Lullaby* (London: Vintage, 2003), 15.

² Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, tr. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 86.

³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other*, tr. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (London: Athlone Press, 1998 [1991]), 104.

⁴ *Ibid.* 104.

⁵ Michael Wolf, 'The Architecture of Density', <http://www.photomichaelwolf.com/intro/index.html> (19 August 2007).

⁶ Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, tr. and ed. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). Of course this notion of hailing is also key to Althusser's theory of ideology: interpellation, being hailed, is the moment at which we are made subjects of ideology and we are *turned* by that hailing.

⁷ 'Die elend dünnen Wände, die den ehrlich tätigen Mann verraten den Unehrlichen aber decken. Mein Telephon ist an der Zimmerwand angebracht, die mich von meinem Nachbar trennt. Doch hebe ich das bloß als besonders ironische Tatsache hervor. Selbst wenn es an der entgegengesetzten Wand hinge, würde man in der Nebenwohnung alles hören. Ich habe mir abgewöhnt, den Namen der Kunden beim Telephon zu nennen. Aber es gehört natürlich nicht viel Schlaueit dazu, aus charakteristischen, aber unvermeidlichen Wendungen des Gesprächs die Namen zu erraten. - Manchmal umtanze ich, die Hörmuschel am Ohr, von Unruhe gestachelt, auf den Fußspitzen den Apparat und kann es doch nicht verhüten, daß Geheimnisse preisgegeben werden.' (Franz Kafka, 'Der Nachbar', *Beschreibung eines Kampfes: Novellen, Skizzen, Aphorismen aus dem Nachlaß* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1969), 100-1: 100. My translation.)

⁸ Jacques Lacan, 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud', *Écrits: A Selection*, tr. Alan Sheridan (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 161-197: 186.

⁹ Anyone who lives in a so-called Tyneside flat (a design found only in the North East of England and characterised by two-storey terraces with a flat on each floor) will be familiar with the problems with invasive noise that can arise from proximitous neighbours. See Gateshead Council's explanation of the origins and layout of Tyneside flats: 'Housing in Gateshead', http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/DocumentLibrary/housing/Leaflets/display_boards.pdf (16 August 2007), 2.

¹⁰ Theodor Lessing, 'Über den Lärm', *Nord und Süd: Eine deutsche Monatsschrift*, Vol. 97 (1901), 71-84: 77, trans. and quoted in Lawrence Baron, 'Noise and Degeneration: Theodor Lessing's Crusade for Quiet', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Decadence (January 1982), 165-178: 167. See also Max Nordau, *Degeneration [Entartung]* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1968 [1892]).

¹¹ Peter Rayer, 'The Age of Noise: Early Reactions in Vienna, 1870-1914', *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 33 No. 5 (July 2007), 773-793.

¹² The Oxford English Dictionary has the following etymology for the word neighbour/neighbor: 'Cognate with Middle Dutch *nageboer*, *nagebuer*, *nagebuur*, *nagebuyer*, *nagebuyr*, Middle Low German *nächgebūr*, *nāgebūr*, Old High German *nāhgibūr*, *nāhgibūro* (Middle High German *nächgebūr*, *nächgebūre*), and further with Middle Dutch *nāber*, *nābuer*, *nābūr*, *nābuur*, Old Saxon *nābūr*, *nāhbūr* (Middle Low German *nāber*, *nābūr*, *nēber*, etc., German regional (Low German) *Naber*), Middle High German *nāchbūr*, *nāchbūre*, (German *Nachbar*) < the Germanic base of NIGH a. + the Germanic base of BOOR n. Cf. also Old Icelandic *nábúi*, Old Swedish *nabōe*, *nabō* (Swedish *nabo*), early modern Danish *naabo*, *nabo* (Danish *nabo*).' ('neighbour | neighbor, n¹', *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1989, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, <http://dictionary.oed.com> (4 Aug. 2007))

¹³ 'boor, n¹', *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1989, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, <http://dictionary.oed.com> (4 Aug. 2007).

¹⁴ Carl Schmidt, *The Concept of the Political*, tr. George Schwab (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 26.

¹⁵ Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Seminar XVII (New York: Norton, 2007), 13. For the addition of arrows and caesura, see Gérard Wajcman, 'The Hysteric's Discourse' from

Le maître et l'hystérique (Paris: Navarin, 1982), 11-30; available in *The Symptom*, No. 4 (Spring 2003), <http://www.lacan.com/thesymptom.htm> (21 August 2007). Translation not credited.

¹⁶ As Gérard Wajcman puts it, 'On the side of the Other the question ends with the gift of speech. But this gift has an essential flaw. By answering the subject's question: "Who am I?" the Other lets the subject come into being; but any given answer, necessarily specific, reduces the subject's quest to a finite object: "Who you are? A saint, a fool, a hospital case..." Calling the subject into being, the hysteric's "Who?" in response receives a what that objectifies her.' (Wajcman, 'Hysteric's Discourse')

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ 'The hysteric embodies the division between subject and object in a particular way. As subject she incites desire; but when this desire moves towards the object that causes it, the hysteric cannot condescend to be this object. She incites man to know what causes his desire, inciting him to acknowledge her as the inaccessible object of his desire.' (*Ibid.*)

¹⁹ Lacan, *Other Side*, 23.

²⁰ We could look to the full song here and note that this absent possessive pronoun in the absent first verse marks both the absent address and the absent addressee: 'in the quiet street where the echo said / "yours is its life, yours is its love [desire/wanting]". Not only is the address once removed in the absence of the fully stated pronoun 'tu', but the address itself is tendered out to the faceless 'echo' fundamentally problematising the position of the interlocutor: What is it an echo of? Who asks the veiled question of being?

²¹ Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 14, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1957 [1917]), 243-258: 253.

²² Juan-David Nasio, *Hysteria: The Splendid Child of Psychoanalysis*, tr. Susan Fairfield (New York: Other Press, 1998).

²³ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, tr. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961 [1930]), 748.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 239-240.

²⁵ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1997), 180-1.

²⁶ See again Wajcman: 'This mandate to speak is a fundamental aspect of the Demand: only speech is demanded, nothing else.' ('Hysteric's Discourse')

²⁷ Indeed, territories, with their much wider conception of the relation of agents to spaces, can also constitute a kind of *imposed* localisation, a prison sentence if you will, especially in those communities where ownership is, on the whole, largely absent, and location is a matter of economic necessity: in order to theorise the neighbour, in other words, we cannot rely solely on a theory of property since many communities are tenant communities where ownership is external to that community.

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 322.

²⁹ Ian Biddle and Freya Jarman-Ivens, 'Introduction', in Freya Jarman-Ivens (ed.), *Oh Boy: Masculinities and Popular Music* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 9.

³⁰ Russell Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (Albany: State University of New York Press).

³¹ Four-tet, *Rounds* (CD, Domino, B000092Q6L, 2003).

³² Mos Def, *A New Danger* (CD, Geffen Records, B00030EEO0, 2004).

³³ Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', *Image, Music, Text*, tr. Steven Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 179-189.

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