# Breaking Voices

Voice, subjectivity and fragmentation in popular music
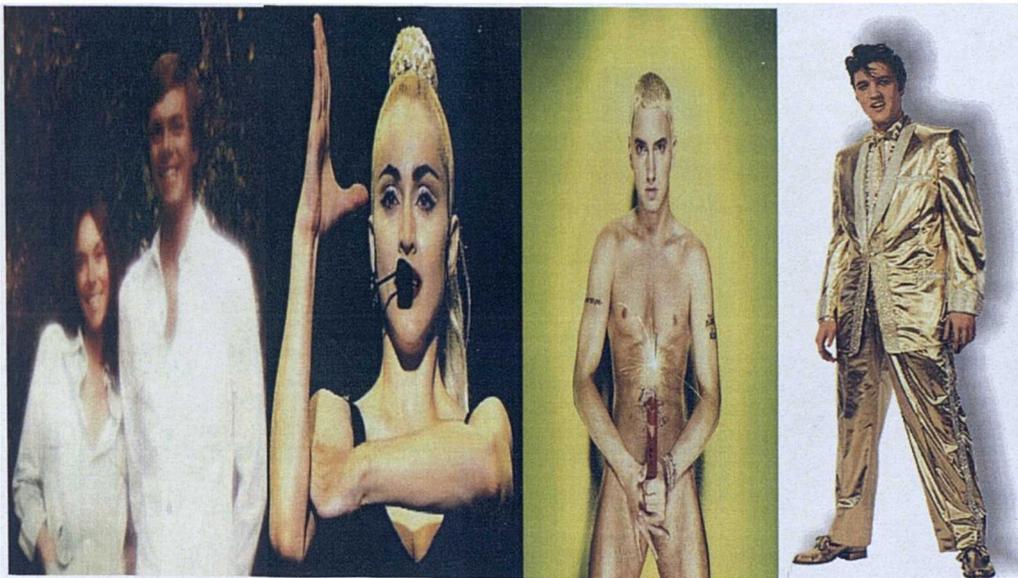
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ABSTRACT

Four case studies from 'mainstream' popular music are used to explore the voice as a primary site for the construction of meaning in popular music, both as a vehicle for language and as an 'object' outside of or alongside language. The first chapter argues that the extensive use of overdubbing technology by the Carpenters forms part of their relationship with the 'geno-song', and that the cyborgian voice which emerges from such use of technology disrupts human-centred psychoanalytic models of subjective development. Finally, different recordings of 'Superstar' are analysed to show how different recordings of a song negotiate ideas of 'presence'. The second chapter outlines various sexually queer subjects presented by Madonna, and argues that the process of constant transformation challenges hegemonic Western notions of a unified 'self'. The chapter also argues that musical factors have underpinned her visual transformations, and that her vocality has suggested her maturation as an artist and challenged the ideology of 'voice' as a stable signifier of identity. A chapter on Eminem explores his simultaneous use of three distinct characters to play out different aspects of his own identity, and how his work represents and constructs masculinity. Specifically, the chapter argues that the use of language as a system does not easily parallel the masculinist content of the lyrics, but can instead be aligned with traditionally 'feminine' or feminising modes of writing. Moreover, according to a traditional gendered musical semiotics, the interface between language and music does not underline 'masculinity' in normative ways. The final chapter considers how ideas of 'self' and Other are negotiated in Elvis Impersonation. In particular, a model for understanding vocal impersonation is offered, using Freud's model of the ideal ego and Baudrillard's orders of simulacra. Finally, the chapter explores the representation and construction of masculinities in various examples of Elvis Impersonation.

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INTRODUCTION

Voices

In the consumption and use of popular music, the voice is a primary site for the construction of meaning. In the first instance, this is because the voice is a carrier of some kind of message, typically manifested in sung or spoken lyrics. The ways in which lyrics construct meaning are of course varied, and contingent according to the genre in which they are produced. A great deal of dance music exists, for instance, in which there are no lyrics at all, or perhaps only a few short lines repeated throughout. In genres such as psychedelic rock, part of the how the hallucinogenic experience is assembled is through lyrics that have ambiguous meanings and/or are evocative of drug-induced states of mind, such as 'Purple Haze' (1967) or 'Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds' (1967).[1] Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin have noted that the content analysis of lyrics was "until the mid-sixties the most common form of academic pop-writing", and "appealed to empirical sociologists because it employed an apparently scientific method" (1990, p. 2). Although such content analysis did represent an academic interrogation of how consumers use popular music, one of the crucial problems of the approach was that it neglected the impact of the musical content or the performative context on the construction of meaning. As a basic example, for a white man such as Elvis Presley to sing 'Hound Dog' (1956) results in a very different meaning from that put into place by a black woman, Big Mama Thornton, who had previously recorded the track in 1953. The difference in effect is certainly disproportionate to any differences in the lyrics, and it must be considered that musical and paramusical factors are at work in the making of meaning.[2]

Both of these fields have indeed been taken on as appropriate areas of popular musicological study, and it is now comparatively common to find scholarly work considering the role of musical factors in the making of meaning, often alongside the lyrical content. Covach and Boone's *Understanding Rock* (1997), for example, is a volume of essays in musical analysis with an entirely popular musical focus. Works are collected in that volume that explain the experimental musical style of the Beach Boys (Harrison, 1997), the chromatic tonal shifts in Paul Simon's work (Everett, 1997), or the ways in which in a particular prog rock song ('Close to the Edge' by Yes, 1972) blends

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aspects of 1970s rock with aspects of Western art music, both on a surface 'content' level and on a larger formal level also (Covach, 1997). Academic efforts to explore the ways in which meaning is made by popular music texts, then, and indeed by the users of those texts, have been wide-ranging. Common methodological approaches include the musically analytical (such as Covach and Boone's volume), the ethnographic (for example Cohen, 1991), the sociological (see Rose, 1998), or increasingly, the more explicitly hermeneutic (such as Krims, 2001). Lyric-content analysis now sits alongside these other approaches. Lori Burns, for instance, explores how k d lang's live performance in 1985 of 'Johnny Get Angry' – originally a hit for Joanie Sommers in 1962 – used performance gestures as musical elements to reposition the song as a feminist statement (1997). Here we are presented with an amalgamation of lyrical, musical, and performance analysis in a popular musical context.

However, while lyric analysis is now commonly used as part of a more wide-ranging interpretation of popular musical texts, and the vocal melody (for instance) may be analysed in relation to the lyric content, comparatively little work has been done on the role of the voice as an object – of vocality – in popular music. As Leslie Dunn and Nancy Jones argue, "Too often 'voice' is conflated with speech, thereby identifying language as the primary carrier of meaning" (1994, p. 1). It nearly goes without saying, of course, that 'voice' has some function as a 'carrier of meaning' with or without language. It would not be disputed that a good sense of a person's emotion can be conveyed to another, even when the two do not speak the same tongue, and we can presume that certain vocal codes carry across linguistic barriers, to an extent at least,[3] and continue to communicate some kind of meaning. The (hypothetical) removal of language from 'voice' leaves one simply with the voice as an object – not simply an 'instrument', a vehicle by which information (language) is transmitted, but as a thing-which-makes-noise. Those noises may, of course, be language-based, but even without language the voice still sounds. Even more pertinently, the voice sounds alongside language, in between it, or behind it. When a voice speaks language, there is also a level on which the voice sounds without language. It inevitably makes noises that are not contained within the system of (supposedly direct) communication that is language. Sometimes this happens in ways generated more directly by the language (for instance,

the transitions between words, or the way in which a phoneme is articulated), but it also occurs in ways that are not so directly caused by the language (for instance, the sounds of the vocal physiology, such as a croak when the throat needs clearing, or the air in a whisper). Roland Barthes, reacting to what he saw as an inadequate mode of musical analysis, termed this space the 'geno-song', within which space he positioned the 'grain' of the voice, or "the body in the voice as it sings" (1990, p. 299). With these terms, and particularly the latter, Barthes offered the musicologist terms to start with when attempting to consider the voice as an object. Barthes's theory is founded on his transposition of two Kristevan terms, 'pheno-text' and 'geno-text', to be used in a specifically vocal sense. Thus, Barthes distinguishes between 'pheno-song' and 'geno-song'. Pheno-song refers to "everything in the performance which is in the service of communication", those vocal functions which are culturally coded and assimilated: "the structure of the language being sung, the rules of the genre, [...] the composer's idiolect, the style of the interpretation: [...] everything which it is customary to talk about" (Barthes, 1990, p. 295). Geno-song, in contrast, refers to aspects of singing which are located outside of this. It is not concerned with direct communication and representation, functioning instead as a playful signifier with no culturally recognised signified. The grain of the voice is found within the geno-song, and is identified by Barthes as specifically the perceptibility of the body's presence in the singing voice.

Here emerge some of problems inherent in Barthes's theory, and these must surely be addressed to avoid applying his model uncritically. The dualistic construction of pheno-song as opposed to geno-song is arguably somewhat idealistic, for Barthes presents geno-song as extra-cultural, and whether anything can exist entirely outside of culture is debatable. Grain and geno-song are necessarily constructed as extra-cultural by Barthes who, in turn, is necessarily located within culture. So, perhaps the most significant aspect of Barthes's theory is not exactly the division of sonic objects into 'cultural' and 'extra-cultural', which is problematic, but the fact that he demands a reconceptualisation of vocal music in terms other than the ubiquitous, "trivial and facile" adjective, which he derides as "the poorest of linguistic categories" (p. 293), and thereby invites different ways of thinking about the voice. Barthes's critique of the tendency towards traditional modes of music criticism is that language – albeit "the only semiotic

system capable of interpreting another semiotic system"– interprets music "very badly" (p. 293). In order to move away from the inadequacy that Barthes perceives, he suggests not "trying to change directly the language on music", but changing "the musical object itself", thereby displacing "the fringe of contact between music and language" (p. 294). It is the change in 'musical object' that leads him to consider geno- and pheno-song, as opposed to the more commonly considered factors of pitch, rhythm, and so on. In constructing geno-song and pheno-song in opposition to each other, Barthes's triumphs are in his identification of aspects of vocal activity which it is *not* "customary to talk about", and his motion towards a way of approaching those features. Despite the problems concerning his positioning of geno-song as extra-cultural, then, it is important to recognise the existence of sonic objects that are not culturally assimilated in the same way as many other sonic objects, in order to enable an informed analysis of vocal music. It might be more productive to think not in terms of a strict division between the cultural and the extra-cultural, of entirely unassimilated vocal actions with no cultural meaning, but in terms of *under*-assimilation. This approach would recognise the potential for some kind of meaning that is present in, say, an audible inhalation, or diction ('slurred' as opposed to 'precise', for example). These details do signify something, but that 'something' is not often explicitly identified, nor is there an established culture in the analysis of music of wanting to identify them. In this way, it would be valid to say that such details are under-assimilated in comparison to, for instance, certain intervals: as an example, a falling tritone has a long-established musical history of denoting either "a stereotype of longing" or an imminent harmonic resolution (Tagg, 2000, p. 95), typically a perfect cadence (given its presence in the dominant 7th chord). The question with which the present thesis begins, then, is one of the extent to which any kind of meaning can in fact be drawn out from the geno-song.

Breaking

If the 'Voices' in the title of this thesis can be considered as sites for the construction of meaning, it is arguably when those voices offer some kind of rupture – a 'breaking' point – that they become most notable. There are of course points at which the voice as an instrument sounds in such a way as to expose the presence of the body which

produces it, and in that sense the geno-song offers one such breaking point. For me, what the geno-song opens up – as will become clear in Chapter One – is the possibility for the deployment of psychoanalytic theory as a useful way of unpacking some of the underlying meanings generated by the voice. Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking essay 'Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema' (1992, first published 1975) saw the field of psychoanalysis merge with film theory, and heralded the beginning of a 'beautiful friendship' between the two. The 'gaze' has since become a common tool with which to analyse visual media, and while some use has been made of psychoanalytic theory in application to sonic objects – often alongside visual input such as film or video – the present study supposes that the use of psychoanalytic theory can also benefit musicologists, without the intervention of visual media.

Thinking both within and beyond Mulvey's framework, let it be clear that my intention is not to construct a generalised model of identificatory processes in listening, or an audio equivalent of the 'gaze'. Indeed, the use of psychoanalysis to suggest ways in which music is heard consciously is inherently problematic. It might be argued that *the listening subject does not consciously bring such theory to the listening experience*, unless one is listening specifically in order to apply theory. Neither can psychoanalysis be viewed as unlocking the secrets of a collective unconscious, as this would rely on a romantic notion of music as universally meaningful. Rather, I would like to suggest that psychoanalysis – as a historically located system of inquiry and a discourse about the self – is a productive way of rethinking the cultural work performed by sonic objects for the listening subject, in the present cultural-historical location. It is not a scientific system with which absolute statements of meaning can be made: it is instead a descriptive tool that offers a certain way of thinking about things – in this case, sounds and images – and can be used as a starting point for drawing out possible formulations of meanings. Nor is it an ahistorical or universal mode of exploration, since it is itself contingent on the cultural and historical contexts of its emergence and development, and is to be deployed within another specific such context and in response to particular contextualised artefacts. As Teresa Brennan observes, "the wish to take account of 'gender, race and class' is muttered mantra-like at the beginning of every academic paper, but the wish remains too often unfulfilled. There is what I will call an

applicability gap between theory and explanation, which sentiment alone will not bridge" (1993, p. 5). At this point, my concern is not with the mantra that Brennan describes. (I am quite aware that race and class have been marginalised in this thesis, but accept that as part of its limitations.) But an 'applicability gap' is nonetheless a pertinent concept in that psychoanalytic theory does not, and cannot, explain all there is to explain, and does not even explain what it can here with an overriding sense of absolute certainty. I choose to use it here as a tool alongside others, almost as a set of archetypes, to make points of connection between different materials, and between those materials and other archetyped ways of explaining human creative endeavour.

Film theory relies on a few central arguments to claim psychoanalysis as a useful tool. First is the similarity recognised by Mulvey between screen and mirror (as conceived of by Lacan), in that both structures allow – even encourage – not only the recognition of similarity, but also the misrecognition of difference, as the ego constructs an idealized version of the self (1992, pp. 25-6). Further to this is Kaja Silverman's (1988) suggestion of a similarity between film and dreams, which she bases on the ways in which displacement and condensation work, allowing infinite possibilities for the representation of the ego. Finally, the contemporaneous emergence of psychoanalysis and cinema may well make the former ideal for analysing the latter: because the two structures developed in the same cultural-historical location, one might suggest that they are both, in a sense, tools for expressing and unraveling the problems of new-capitalist consciousness. It is easily arguable that none of this logic can be 'translated', as it were, to the field of musicology. As Friedrich Kittler has written, "A medium is a medium is a medium. Therefore it cannot be translated" (1999, p. 265), and if the medium cannot be translated, perhaps the tools of analysis cannot be translated either, at least not without the difference that Kittler perceives is inherent in such an action. Ultimately, Kittler's observations indicate that we cannot unproblematically transfer the logic of psychoanalytic film theory to the field of musicology. However, bearing in mind the inherent problems of mediality, I have allowed for something of a 'mistranslation' of logic. Whilst it would verge on the ludicrous to argue that music and psychoanalysis originated in similar cultural-historical locations, the high/low division that constructs 'popular' music in contrast to 'classical' or 'art' music is deeply embedded in the same

romantic ideology that prevailed during the emergence of the psychoanalytic tradition. More to the point, recording technology *did* arise in the same historical moment as psychoanalysis.[4] The resultant question might be: is there perhaps a sense in which psychoanalysis is particularly suited to the study of *recorded* music? Such a suggestion takes on further significance if we return to Mulvey's analogy between screen and mirror. A similarity between music and mirror is not immediately obvious, but let us remember Dolar's suggestion (after Derrida) that it is not only the reflexivity of 'seeing oneself looking', but also that of 'hearing oneself speak' that is essential to the development of subjective consciousness (1996, p. 13). As Bryan Turner describes, for Sartre, "Being seen and observed by the other results in a recognition of my facticity, that I am an object to the other" (1996, p. 77). To extract this to an audio analogy, the ratification of our identity as subjects may depend on us being heard – as well as seen – by an Other (for Sartre) or by ourselves (for Derrida and Dolar). Consequently, the recorded voice at least suggests the appropriateness of a psychoanalytic framework, and this too makes psychoanalysis a particularly suitable tool for musicology concerned with vocal expression, which is a logical approach in the present context given the voice-centred nature of much popular music.

Freud writes, "Once a picture has emerged from the patient's memory, we may hear him say that it becomes fragmentary and obscure in proportion as he proceeds with his description of it. The patient is, as it were, getting rid of it by turning it into words" (quoted in Miller, 1991, p. 56). Kittler uses this example to back his claim that "Interpretation is only a special instance of the general technique of transposing media" (1999, p. 270), which for Kittler is never unproblematic. By proposing an analysis of popular music using psychoanalytic theory, would I be 'getting rid of the music, by hearing it through psychoanalysis'? The counter-approach might be 'just to listen to the music', and let it 'speak for itself'. Yet, is that possible, and if so, how, when music is not (primarily) a system of direct representation? Interpretation of some sort is inevitable and entirely necessary. Working from Kittler's model, perhaps we should determine that all interpretation leaves a gap, and results in the difference that is a product of the untranslatability of media. Instead of trying to smooth over the gaps, perhaps we should accept their inevitability and be aware of them, thus not presuming that a single mode of

analysis is exhaustive or without fault. To a certain extent, if Kittler is right, any sort of musical analysis 'gets rid' of the music, diminishing it in some way. A psychoanalytic approach may be seen to diminish it more than other forms of analysis because it does not deal with 'just the notes' in the same way as does 'traditional' notation-centric musical analysis. Indeed, it goes far beyond not only the concrete reality of the music as a set of sonic objects such as a traditional analysis would use. In popular music, however, 'the notes' are already a slippery subject: the score is not primary, but the recording; the reading is not primary, but the listening; and the listening reveals many aspects that do not always have standardised forms, such as uses of the voice, or various technological effects. Consequently, analysing 'just the notes' is a difficult (and possibly not very useful) task. Yet the use of psychoanalysis also extends beyond the 'real' experiences of 'real' listeners, which an ethnographic approach might consider. When listening has been restored to its position as the primary sensory experience of music, however, not only 'what is heard' but ways of hearing must be explored, and psychoanalysis – as a discourse about the subject – seems to offer a particularly productive way of thinking about the listening subject.

'Mainstream'

As disparate as the genres may be in which the four cases here have operated, each of them can loosely be described by that problematic term, 'mainstream'. If high street music stores are any kind of indicator as to what that might mean, it should be noted that each of them could almost certainly be located easily at any branch of any major chain. In scholarly terms, however, they vary in their adoption by musicologists generally as case studies. In 2000, statistics placed Madonna at number four in a list of 'Top 100 Acts'. According to that list, she is the top female act at number four (with two significant drops to the next two women – Diana Ross at 10, and Shirley Bassey at 22). Madonna is also listed as having more number one hits than Elton John, and more total hits and weeks on the charts than the Beatles (Guinness, 2000, p. 40). Perhaps partly as a result of her unique position as a woman in the music industry, and partly because of the many challenging positions she has adopted over the course of her career, she has for at least fifteen years been quite consistently interpreted and analysed by academics. After

Ramona Curry's early article on pastiche and parody in Madonna's videos (1990), Madonna's *Sex* book (1992) generated a book-length collection of academic responses to that particular text (Frank and Smith, 1993). Similarly, Elvis Presley (placed at number one in the same list) has been the subject of many texts of varying academic rigour (examples include: Marcus, 1991; Quain, 1992; Rodman, 1996; and Tharpe, 1983). Indeed, Rodman's book is concerned specifically with the phenomenal 'career' that Presley has continued to enjoy since his death, exploring the depth and ramifications of his continuing posthumous presence. An increasing amount of work is emerging on rap music in general (Krims, 2000; Perkins, 1996a; Rose, 1998), and Eminem in particular has been singled out as an interesting case study. This may be partly to do with the extreme controversy that he has generated, but it is more specifically connected with the extent to which he has enjoyed success in the so-called mainstream of popular music, despite this controversy (or, more likely, *because* of the controversy: see Armstrong, 2004, p. 336). With a triple-platinum first album, his commercial success has almost certainly outstripped that of his equally challenging predecessors, such as NWA or Public Enemy, and this fact alone makes him a worthy case study. He also represents a site for the negotiation of musically racialised bodies, as his whiteness is a significant factor, given his choice of genre. Indeed, it seems that former NWA member and widely regarded rap producer Dr. Dre signed Eminem partly because of his race (Armstrong, 2004, p. 336), in a move highly reminiscent of Sam Philips' search for a 'white man with the negro sound'. Given these factors – his controversy, his persistent success, his race – it is not surprising that much of the academic work that examines his work closely takes his general oppositional status as a starting point. Thus, it is common to find articles that explore the 'corrupting' capacity of his lyrics (Cobb, Boettcher, and Taylor, In progress; Cobb and Boettcher, In progress), or the generally problematic nature of his representations of women (Keathley, 2002; Stephens, 2005. See also Armstrong, 2001). Other work also considers his negotiation of race in relation to the construction of authenticity in his work (Armstrong, 2004). By comparison, a great deal less academic work exists on the Carpenters, although a few articles of note have appeared in recent years (Desjardins, 2004; Hilderbrand, 2004; Holm-Hudson, 2002), and more work is, at the time of writing, forthcoming (Mitchell).

One factor that may offer some explanation for the varying levels of academic interest in the four case studies offered in this thesis is the idea of popular musicians' capacity to adopt or possess an oppositional status. With this hypothesis in mind, it is unsurprising that a great deal of popular musicological work has focused on how popular music artists, their music, videos, or other work can present some kind of challenge or alternative to dominant ideologies, particularly those concerning gender, sexuality, race, or class. Thus, Gillian Gaar traces a history of women's contribution to popular music history starting from the premise that "Far from being an unique trend, women-in-rock have instead been a perpetual trend" (1993, pp. xi-xii). Gaar perceives that "women as a gender are not integrated into society but are still seen as an 'other' that deviates from a male norm" (p. xii), and her work thereby starts from a position of exploring the role of this so-called 'other'. A similar philosophy seems to underlie several of the articles collected by Sheila Whiteley in *Sexing the Groove* (1997a), such as Whiteley's own chapter on Mick Jagger (1997b), or Mary Celeste Kearney's work on riot grrrl, feminism and lesbian culture (1997). Stan Hawkins' contribution (1997), on 'masculinity and banality' in the work of the Pet Shop Boys could, arguably, only exist in an academic environment where the non-banal in music is privileged: the 'banal' is only worth noting since it works against what is considered important, and offers its own challenge in that way. Whiteley's monograph, *Women and Popular Music* (2000) also emphasises 'challenging' positions, such as those adopted by Patti Smith, Annie Lennox, or k d lang.[5] If we accept that, on the whole, the 'oppositional' or 'challenging' are privileged in popular musicology's choice of case studies, we can explain the academic responses to the case studies that I have chosen for this thesis. Madonna, consistently challenging in so many ways, has of course generated a large amount of scholarly interest, and the same is increasingly true of Eminem. Given Presley's so-called 'decline' into musical banality, the story of which underpins much writing on his work (see Middleton, 1983, p. 155), it may be understandable that his life's work (particularly his later work) is not responded to academically as often as his 'posthumous career', his persistent presence in our culture that marks him out over and above any other cultural icon (examples of the latter include Harrison, 1992; Marcus, 1991; and Rodman, 1996). The Carpenters, meanwhile, are characterised particularly by their shameless conformity to musical

normativity, and their enduring respect for composers and artists of prior decades pervaded their work. During their careers, they were described by *Billboard* as "Soft rock stars [...] proud to belong to the establishment" (quoted in Gaar, 1993, p. 161). Crucially, the description continues, "Their lifestyle as well as their music reflects traditional middle-class American values" (p. 161). Their position as conformative and pro-establishment is also particularly thrown into stark relief given their historical context. According to Lucas Hilderbrand, Todd Haynes' controversial (and withdrawn) film *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* "positions [them] as something of an anomaly during a period of social revolt" (2004, p. 59), and a cursory look at the musical conditions surrounding their emergence would seem to confirm this. 1967 saw the release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and *The Doors*. As Mark Kurlansky suggests, 1968 was "the year that rocked the world" (2005), and 1969 heralded Captain Beefheart's *Trout Mask Replica*. In the same year, competing with Beefheart and Led Zeppelin's *Led Zeppelin II*, the Carpenters released their debut album *Offering* (later released as *Ticket to Ride*), which was radically different from the other musical examples noted above. Its difference did not work in their favour, and the album was not commercially successful (Gaar, 1993, p. 161). To a great extent, then, those artists who have presented greater challenges to the 'establishment' have received greater academic attention.

Conversely, a great deal of popular material exists surrounding such artists. Indeed, a significant problem faced by the academic considering any example of popular culture is the amount of popular material written and produced in response to such examples. That is to say, especially when dealing with particularly well-known artists, one must consider the surplus of popular writing (and indeed television documentaries or unauthorised CD biographies) about the subjects. With regard to the present cases, Madonna and Presley present the greatest challenges in this sense. Much of the popular writing about Madonna is periodically collected in volumes such as *Madonna: The Rolling Stone Files* (*Rolling Stone*, 1997), or *The Madonna Companion* (Metz and Benson, 1999). In the case of Presley, a great number of books have been published that either implicitly offer some supposedly 'new' angle on his life, or are offered as 'ultimate' collections of details, including such texts as *The Elvis Encyclopedia* (Stanley,

1998), *Inside Graceland* (Rooks, 2005) or *Elvis and Gladys* (Dundy, 2004). Given the inevitable chain of time delays between production by an artist, reception by the media, reception *of* the media by the academic and the production (and publication) of analysis, the academic analysis will always lag behind artists' actions. In Madonna's case, at the time of writing, another studio album is due for release (*Confessions On A Dancefloor*). Some pre-release information is available regarding the album's aesthetic – "No ballads. No messages. [...] It's back to Madonna queen of the dancefloor" (Liz Rosenberg quoted on <http://www.mad-eyes.net/disco/coad/> [Accessed 16 September 2005]) – and clips from what will be the first single, 'Hung Up', are available on the internet. I have chosen not to consider the album in the course of this thesis, since the information available is largely speculative and the concrete materials – music, videos, accompanying images – suffer from extremely limited availability. This is simply one example of how a prolific artist such as Madonna presents challenges to the academic, but even a dead artist such as Presley is a troublesome choice of subject, given the excess of material (mostly music and film) he generated during his life, and the even more intimidating mountain of information that has since taken him and his work as a starting point. So, while I have endeavoured to incorporate as many examples as possible, for all four of my case studies, I am aware that those I have selected can probably be further supported, or challenged, with other examples that are not containable here for reasons of space. What I have attempted is not an exhaustive study of four cases – each of which could easily fill an entire volume alone – but a thematic study of 'voice', using these four cases as examples, and selecting the most relevant examples from each of their catalogues.

The cases

The four case studies presented in this thesis each take the geno-song as their starting point, and each one shows ways in which vocality can be considered a productive site of meaning in vocal popular music. They also extend the notion of voice to incorporate the idea of a 'creative voice', although is a lesser theme. The four cases, despite being divided on the bases of historical location and gender, each seem to offer ways of considering the notions of unity and fragmentation in popular music. Chapter One

explores the music of the Carpenters, which is (in)famous for two kinds of vocality: the 'pure', 'intimate' voice of Karen Carpenter; and a heavily overdubbed and closely harmonised choral style. The 'purity' that supposedly characterises Karen Carpenter's voice does not seem to disrupt the overall feeling that the Carpenters' music is one of 'unity'. That is to say, a typical (and justifiable) description of their music would not only incorporate ways in which it conforms to conservative musical standards (thereby not 'breaking the mould'), but also ways in which the musical – and specifically vocal – textures created are 'smooth', with little in the way of 'disruption' even within the unit of a single song. Dynamics and orchestration are carefully policed in their work and serve to create a feeling of a controlled musical environment. With that in mind, the ways in which their music can be seen to negotiate the idea of fragmentation, or represent a point of rupture, seems highly tenuous. What I would like to suggest, however, is that this sense of control – which underlies their work, and which can be felt on listening to it – can never entirely suppress those elements of vocality that constitute the geno-song. As such, one of the most interesting features of the Carpenters' music is precisely the way in which they seek to regulate the geno-song and the grain of the voice. The oscillation between discourses of a 'pure' and 'natural' voice – which inevitably and willingly reveals a grain – and of musical control in fact provides an obvious forum in which can be questioned what the 'natural' voice means, how it is constructed, and how its possible dangers (to be found in the geno-song) may be negotiated. Since a great deal of this negotiation was facilitated by technological means, I consider the impact of technology as a discursive practice on the possible ways of understanding the Carpenters' music. I conclude the chapter with a comparative analysis of different recordings of 'Superstar' which, in its extensive recording history, demonstrates the potential for a piece of music[6] – and I am not suggesting it is the only song with this capacity – as opposed to an artist, to fragment and problematise.

Madonna offers a more obvious example of the fragmentation of the subject, in that her persistent and radical shifts of image and identity have become a hallmark of her lengthy career. In Chapter Two, which explores Madonna's work, I start with the ideas of 'queer' and 'queering' as ways of understanding not only the individual transformations but also the transformations as a strategy. That is to say, after laying out

some of the ways in which her separate images draw from certain 'queer' sexualities, I go on to explore how we might consider the constant process of transforming as in some way challenging to hegemonic notions of subjectivity, which seem to uphold the myth of a unified ego. Throughout her constant visual mutations, what have often been ignored in academic studies of Madonna are her musical changes. In an attempt to correct this longstanding omission, I argue that her changes in musical and vocal style have worked alongside her visual transformations and contribute strongly to whatever image is being portrayed visually. Finally, bringing the chapter back to a sexually queer context, I offer a possible interpretation of the ways in which her various metamorphoses could determine particular structures of the gaze, as held by both a gay male and a lesbian audience.

Eminem, the subject of Chapter Three, is an example of a fluctuating identity in a way quite similar to Madonna, although his particular device is one of constantly playing three distinct and named identities off against one another. Madonna has not engaged in this kind of identity-play, and it might be suggested that hers is an act of shape-shifting in a more traditional sense, always modifying herself and never remaining stable. Eminem, by contrast, offers three consistent characters simultaneously, and so while he does of course represent an interesting case study when considering fragmentation and popular music artists, he maintains a sense of consistency in a way very different from Madonna. I start by exploring Eminem's three different identities and offer some initial ways of understanding the characters he presents. The rest of that chapter then situates him in his generic context and uses him as a particularly productive example of the offensive potential in rap lyrics. That said, what the chapter argues is that the traditional understandings of his work as being hetero-male-dominant (misogynistic and homophobic) are not entirely unproblematic. Thus, the use of language in rap as a genre is seen to be associable with traditionally feminine modes of writing, and the insistence of heterosexuality that pervades his lyrics may in fact *not* have the effect of assuaging fears of homosexuality. These issues are tied together in the final section of the chapter, in which I turn specifically to musical and vocal analysis of Eminem's music in order to argue for an underlying impression of a masculinity that is not unquestionably heteronormative.

As I have noted, a great deal of work on Elvis Presley is concerned with his continuing posthumous presence, and my final chapter is little exception. To that end, it is not so much about Elvis, as about 'Elvis', a particular construction of an idea of an artist that has superseded the artist himself. To a large extent, the discrepancy between a star and a star-image always exists. As Richard Dyer writes of film stars, "Stars are images in media texts, and as such are products of Hollywood (or wherever)" (1998, p. 10). The same applies equally to popular musicians, whose image and identity is always already mediated. 'Elvis'/Presley, however, arguably represents the extreme end of this phenomenon, insofar as he continues to be consumed with great voracity, and the same system that consumes him also now creates him, since he is no longer present to offer any enduring sense of the 'real'. The particular aspect of 'Elvis''s continuing cultural presence which I consider in Chapter Four is Elvis Impersonation, since it is – despite a general tendency towards very visual-based acts – one of the few cases of his posthumous career in which the voice of 'Elvis' is still relevant. After considering the ways in which 'Elvis' is constructed by Elvis Impersonation as a phenomenon, I go on to offer a model for understanding vocal impersonation. The plethora of Elvis Impersonators invites so many possible interpretations, but in line with previous chapters' exploration of the construction and representation of genders and sexualities, I conclude the chapter by investigating the impact of Elvis Impersonation on our understanding of masculinity, and specifically the masculinity of 'Elvis'.

Finally, I would like to offer some thoughts on the idea of artistic agency that may be taken as something of a disclaimer. Given the approach which I take to the artists whose work I consider in this thesis, which is one of interpretive analysis, it would not be wise to presume too much in the way of intention on the part of any of them. (Of Chapter Four, it also ought to be said that little intention should be presumed on the part of the impersonators, where their work is the focus of the analysis contained therein.) In the case of the Carpenters, then, I am not wishing to suggest that an awareness of 'geno-song' as a theoretical model entered into any music-making decisions. However, Richard Carpenter has displayed a keen awareness of his roles as arranger and producer of the music, and the extent to which those positions allow him to control the

soundscape he was instrumental in creating (Carpenter, 2004). The academic analysis of Madonna's various transformations has already received much criticism, examples of which include the following comment: "If the Madonna created in the heads of academics existed she would have to carry Foucault in her handbag and have Derrida at her bedside" (Kate Muir quoted in Watts, 1999, p. 292). However, there is much evidence with which to argue that some conscious awareness does exist on Madonna's part, and that several noteworthy references have been made with full understanding of the context. Several of her videos have made clear references to other pre-existing visual texts: as Corinna Herr notes (2004, pp. 46-7), one image from the 'Bedtime Story' video (dir. Romanek, 1995) is lifted directly from the painting *Los amantes* (by Remedios Varo, 1935); the video for 'Hollywood' (dir. Mondino, 2003) caused a legal battle resulting in a £250, 000 bill for Madonna because of the flagrant allusion to images created by fashion photographer Guy Bourdin (Nicholl, 2004, p. 35). Ultimately, she arguably throws down the gauntlet to eagerly awaiting analysts of popular culture when she declares in 'Die Another Day', "Sigmund Freud, analyse *this*", thus revealing at the very least her own awareness of the academic analysis of her work, and possibly providing some evidence that she may be leaving other titbits for intellectual scrutiny. Eminem, as will be noted in Chapter Three, expends a great deal of energy toying with media criticisms of his work, writing deliberately controversial lyrics and then attempting to distance himself from them by describing them as humorous. While his tripartite character may not be being deployed with a conscious sense of some of the theory with which I analyse it, I would argue that the theory used there can provide one productive way of understanding the cultural work being performed by his creation. For instance, where I argue that Slim Shady represents a negative formation of Freud's concept of the ideal ego, Eminem's knowledge of Freudian theory (or lack thereof) may be brought into question. However, if we were to take the Freudian model as a given, then the structures that the model describes would be at work in Eminem as a living being, as in us all. From that point, it can quite easily be argued that Slim Shady is one way of realising an ideal ego. Elvis Impersonators raise particularly interesting questions when it comes to the matter of artistic agency, because they enact a layering of their own position as artists over that of Presley himself. Thus, when it comes to the ways in which

Elvis Impersonators (re-)construct masculinity in relation to Presley, we have to bear in mind Presley's own construction of his masculinity as well as the extent to which the Elvis Impersonator is bringing this element into his or her act. Ultimately, all of the ways I offer in this thesis of understanding these popular music examples are merely my own explanations of what I perceive to be an interesting phenomenon that runs throughout much so-called 'mainstream' popular music with more frequency than is typically recognised, which is the negotiation of (and challenge to) hegemonic formulations of identity and subjectivity.

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[1] Sheila Whiteley has explored in some detail how musical factors contribute to the construction of a psychedelic song environment (2000). Peter Blecha sums up the typical "sonic elements" of this music as "feedback, droning chords, meandering leads guitar solos often spiced with sitarlike modal-scaled noodling, [and] exotic percussion". He also cites "oblique tripped-out lyrics" as a component (2004, p. 67).

[2] 'Paramusical' is a term favoured by Philip Tagg to mean something which is "alongside or concurrent with the music". Tagg uses 'paramusical' instead of 'extramusical' because he senses that the latter term, by meaning something 'outside of the music', is conceptually problematic since most supposedly 'extramusical' factors in fact occur in conjunction with music (such as lyrics). See Tagg, 1999, p. 29 (n50).

[3] It should be noted that certain vocal codes probably do not carry over certain linguistic boundaries. That is to say, the different pitch inflections of different languages will affect the way in which the receiver judges those emotions which are perceived through changes in pitch. For instance, in English, excitement may be accompanied by an overall rise in pitch and wider pitch range, but the general use of pitch in, say, Mandarin is very different and the vocal communication of excitement would therefore be impeded.

[4] The same is true for film, which has been most subjected to psychoanalytic theoretical readings. It would be worth suggesting here that psychoanalysis, recording technology, and film each in some way represents culturally and historically located ways of constructing and unraveling the modern subject.

[5] Notably, Whiteley also includes a chapter on Madonna.

[6] Here I mean primarily recordings of the song, part of what Tagg would denote music$_v$, i.e. music as sounding object, as opposed to music$_v$ (music as conception), music$_\phi$ (music as perception) or music$_\gamma$ (music as notation). See Tagg, 2000, pp. 81-2.

CHAPTER ONE
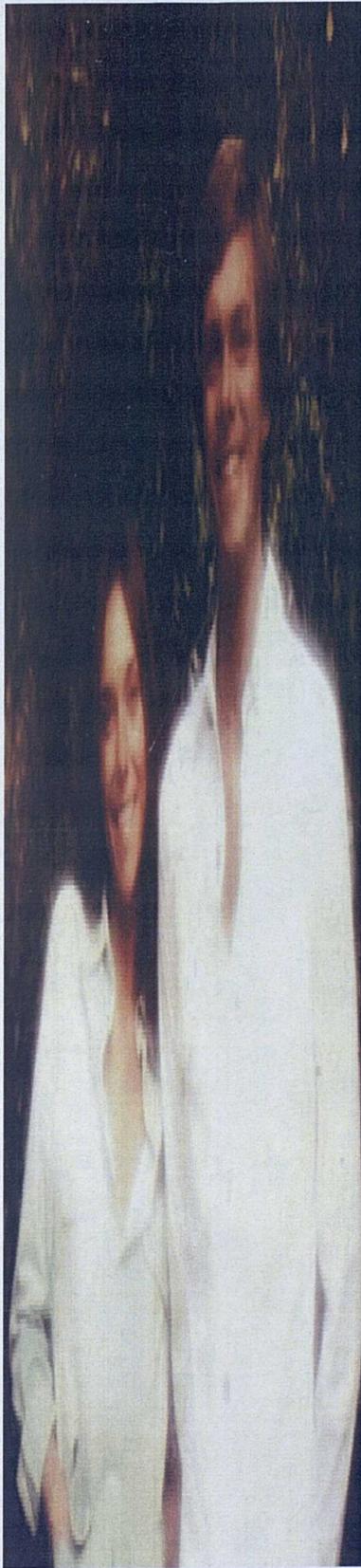
THE CARPENTERS

1.1 The grain and the voice

The 1994 tribute album *If I Were A Carpenter* features a host of Carpenters-wannabes covering the most famous of the sibling duo's tunes. The album presents a variety of musical styles, in which the characteristically smooth timbres and intimate harmonies of Karen and Richard – emergent on the *Offering* album (1969),[1] exemplified most intensely in 'Intermission' on *A Song For You* (1972; CD1/Track 1), and saturating their work by *Now And Then* (1973) – are sometimes imitated, but more often replaced by other variations of sonic nuance, both instrumental and vocal (see Track 2). Moans and groans, squeaks and squeals, screams and half-speech, distortion and dissonance, vocal hiccups and heavy regional accents. These are the 'unmeasurables' (or unmeasured?) of music, that which is beyond (the current system of) notation, and they combine on *If I Were A Carpenter* to expose the relative qualities of the original tracks, as intensely informed as they were by discourses of purity and control.

Such aspects of vocality point towards what Barthes calls the "'grain' of the voice", which he describes as "beyond (or before) the meaning of the words, their form [...] and even the style of execution: something which is directly from the [singer's] body" (1990, p. 295). There is an important distinction to be understood between 'grain', in Barthes's sense, and 'graininess', which might be understood as a primarily timbral quality positioned at the other end of a spectrum of vocality to so-called vocal 'purity'.[2] Although the 'grainy' voice perhaps points more clearly to Barthes's grain than does the 'pure' voice, as in some of the tracks on *If I Were A Carpenter*, it is essential to understand that while many of the vocal effects found on the album might lead us to Barthes's theory, they are not the full extent of the grain for, as he makes clear, "the 'grain' of the voice is not – or is not merely – its timbre". He describes it instead as the "friction between the music and something else, which something else is the particular language (*and nowise the message*)" (1990, p. 297. My emphasis). The grain, then, is located in the tension between two semiotic systems, music and language, where language is not defined as the meaning of the words, but is extended to encompass the words 'themselves', words as sound-objects. The distinction between the grain and 'graininess' is particularly significant in the case of the Carpenters, since it is very much the idea of the 'pure' voice that the Carpenters' music prioritises, and this is a key part of their relationship with the

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grain. Much of the significance of this point will become clear below, but the priority of so-called 'purity' is evidenced at a very basic level in the Carpenters' early decision to use Karen as the lead vocalist, a role she performed for the vast majority of songs recorded by the pair. While this may seem to be a trivial point, the choice in fact has some interesting implications in a Barthesian context. On those tracks where Richard sang the lead vocals, or where his voice is easily distinguishable, it becomes clear that he has a distinct lisp.[3] I do not mean to suggest that this fact alone influenced the Carpenters' decision to prioritise Karen vocally over Richard, but the ultimate effect of the decision means that the enduring audio impression of the Carpenters is predominantly of Karen's voice, less 'tainted' as it was by simple speech impediments.

Despite the way in which the Carpenters' music privileges the idea of the 'pure' voice, the subtleties of Barthes's grain still run deeply throughout the Carpenters' work. Indeed, it may well be impossible to sing entirely without grain since it is, in Barthes's definition, precisely "that apex [...] of production where the melody really works at the language [...].It is, in a very simple word but which must be taken seriously, the *diction* of the language" (1990, p. 295. His emphasis).[4] The association between melody and language might suggest that the wordless singing voice potentially exists in a 'grain-less' state, but that would be an erroneous assumption, because Barthes defines language in such a way as to deny this position. When he writes of the melody 'working at the language', he means language not in the sense of "what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sounds-signifiers, of its letters" (p. 295). Even when no words are present, phonemes are sung: Claire Torry's famous vocal lead on Pink Floyd's 'The Great Gig In The Sky' does not contain any consonants, being a lengthy extemporization on the sound 'aah'. Despite the complete lack of language in the traditional, denotative sense, her vocals demonstrate the persistence of grain in the wordless voice. For instance, only thirty seconds into her solo, Torry peaks at A^2, a note which she hits three times in succession (with a fall to the G after each one), displaying a subtly different timbre in each case, and with a progressively more audible soft palate (see Track 3): this is exactly 'the body in the voice'. What proves most interesting about the Carpenters' music are three elements: the ways in which the grain is subjected to forms of control and discipline; the ways in which this suppression foregrounds those aspects of their music that allow the grain space to play; and the tensions that arise between the essentially

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insuppressible nature of the grain and the attempts made to suppress it.

Wayne Koestenbaum identifies the voice as an established signifier of "self-knowledge, self-portrayal, presence". He describes an "ideology of 'voice' as original and identity-bestowing", manifesting itself in a belief that no two voices are exactly alike (1991, p. 205).[5] The voice is coded not only as identity-bestowing, but also as identity-revealing: Koestenbaum also observes that "the voice can't keep a secret, or if it can, only an open secret" (p. 212). In his discussion of Derrida, Christopher Norris also identifies this concept of 'voice' as an agent of authenticity and revelation,

> *Voice* becomes a metaphor of truth and authenticity, a source of self present in 'living' speech as opposed to the secondary lifeless emanations of writing. In speaking one is able to experience (supposedly) an intimate link between sound and sense, and inward and immediate realisation of meaning which yields itself up without reserve to perfect, transparent understanding.
>
> (Quoted in Moi, 1985, p. 107)

Here, although the voice is implicitly sounding language, the fact that it has its own function in the transmission of meaning is recognised. The model presented by Norris, of 'voice' as 'yielding itself up' to be understood, and as containing some absolute 'meaning' is something of a contrast to the function of Barthes's grain. In order for 'meaning' to be realised and 'perfectly understood', a fixed semiotic structure would surely be required, whereas central to Barthes's theory of grain is a tension between two semiotic structures – music and language – which leaves a space in vocality for the culturally unassimilable (or maybe just unassimilated).

Located in the space of the geno-song (but not constituting the whole of that space) are those aspects of vocal production which reveal the physiology of vocality and are outside of language – the grain. The sound of the mouth opening and closing, the intake of breath before singing, the manipulation of phonemes and transitions between them are all included here. The role of 'voice' as metonymic of an 'immediate realisation of meaning', as described by Norris, is fundamentally challenged in Barthes's system. Geno-song and the grain are not "concerned with communication" or 'meaning': their function is opposite to this, since communication is something of a cultural process and the grain is precisely that which is culturally unassimilated. The idea of meaning is therefore rendered somewhat unstable. Such a challenge to the voice as agent of meaning is also described by Lacan's Graph of Desire (Figure 1.1), in which the circuit of rational

discourse (the vector from S to I(A)) positions the voice as a remainder, a left-over. The voice "is not a function of the signifier, since it presents precisely a non-signifying remainder, something resistant to the signifying operations" (Dolar, 1996, p. 10). The voice as an object – the 'object voice' – is figured as contradictory to meaning. Yet the comprehension of the voice is simultaneously essential to the construction of consciousness, introducing a further tension in the function of voice. Cognate to Lacan's mirror stage, in which the subject is required to 'see oneself looking' to induce self-recognition, is Derrida's contention that "The voice is *heard* (understood) – that undoubtedly is what is called conscience" (1976, p. 20. His emphasis). Similarly, as Dolar summarises, "*S'entendre parler* – to hear oneself speak – is maybe the minimal definition of consciousness" (1996, p. 13). While the object voice is not incorporated into the circuit of rational discourse, the recognition of its existence seems implicit in the development of consciousness.
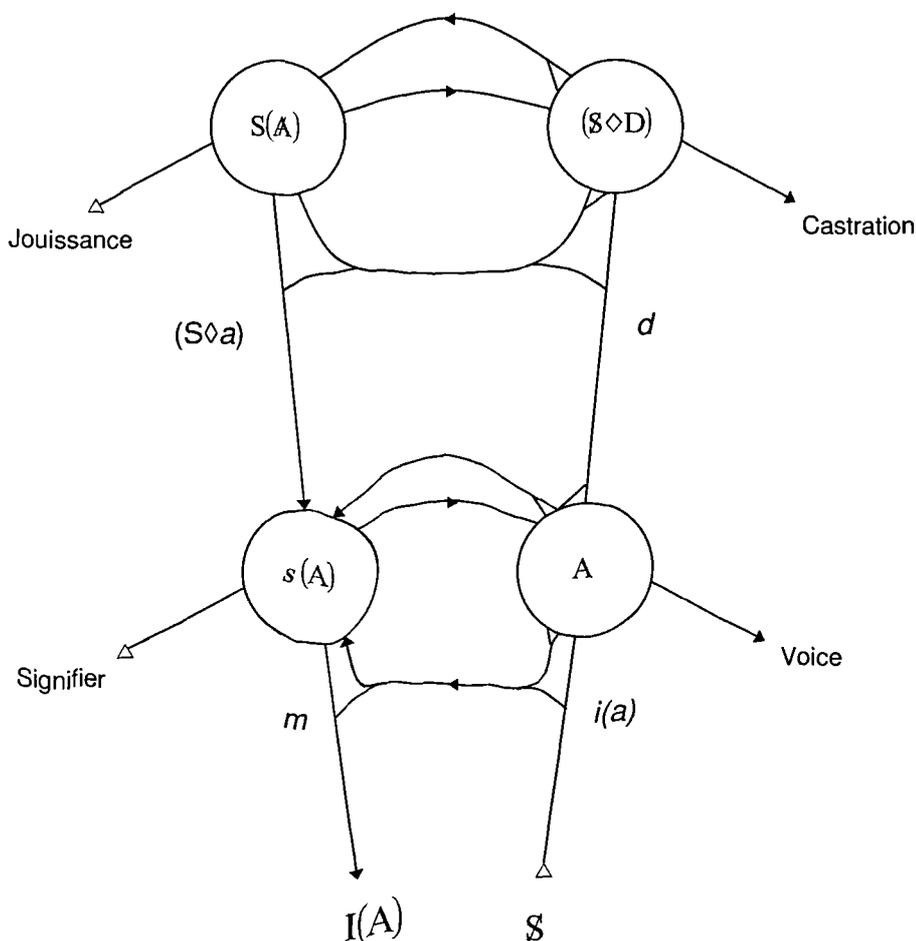
Figure 1.1
Lacan's Graph of Desire[6]

In addition to these conflicts in the role of the voice, we find a further tension brought about by the training of the voice for singing. In contrast to the image of the voice as uncontrollably truthful and revealing of the self, Koestenbaum introduces the issue of subjectivity in the art of opera singing. Singing manuals, he observes, "hardly encourage self-invention", instead demanding adherence to depersonalised – and depersonalising – method. For Koestenbaum, the trained voice consequently does not reveal the self so much as its own history: "Voice, once taught, sings the story of its training" (1991, p. 224). Karen Carpenter's voice was not taught or trained in the rigorous manner of an opera singer, yet we still find in her voice similar paradoxes to those emergent within this framework, and her voice materialises as a site of some anxiety in relation to discourses of meaning and ownership. At the age of fifteen, Karen had some vocal tuition from Frank Pooler, the head of choral studies at California State University, where Richard was then studying. Following Richard to CSU in 1967, Karen was involved in the university choir, but she apparently remained the "nontechnician" to Richard's "consummate, sight-reading musician" (Coleman, 1994, pp. 56-7). Karen was described as having a "blooming, natural voice", rather than one perceived as having been trained into her (p. 56). Koestenbaum's observations suggest that the partially trained or untrained voice might be understood to be a more competent vehicle of self-definition than the highly trained (operatic) voice. Yet Karen's voice does not entirely reflect this categorisation, since her voice still 'sings a story' – not of formal training, perhaps, but certainly of a culturally located tradition of singing which influenced her style, and included other artists such as Patti Page and Matt Monro (in turn influenced by Frank Sinatra). Such artists are of a vocal tradition and period of popular music history in which a sense of vocal 'purity' was afforded great importance. In describing the 1950s style of the cover version, Deena Weinstein notes the significance of the timbre of the singer's voice: "In general [most 1950s covers] transformed the R & B arrangements in the direction of pop. Singers' voices were chosen for *polish*, rather than *rawness*, and their enunciation of the lyrics was *clear*, not gritty, as in many of the originals" (1998, pp. 139-40. My emphasis). The distinctions made here clearly parallel the vocal style which the Carpenters pursued. Karen's voice, and the vocabulary in which it is often described, reveals that the so-called 'natural voice' may be as cultivated and performed as the highly trained voice. As Wayne Koestenbaum describes it, "the natural voice is a repressive fiction"

(1993, p. 170). Arguably, Karen Carpenter did not sing with a 'blooming, natural voice', as much as she *performed* 'natural voice' as a concept.

The construction and development of the 'natural' voice, the assumption that such a voice even exists, and that its qualities could be universally agreed upon, are juxtaposed with the discourses of voice coaching and authenticity. Daniel Boone's guide to 'finding and using your natural voice' is a particularly interesting example of this fusion, as it is predicated on the existence of something 'undiscovered', waiting to be revealed – "Each of us *has* a natural voice" (1991, p. 7. His emphasis) – but it simultaneously reads as a voice coaching manual:

> We tend to assume that our voice is something we were born with and that we cannot do anything about it. [This book] will show you that that is not true. It is designed to help those millions of you with poor or ineffective voices to develop better sounding voices. For most of you that will prove to be your *natural voice*, a voice that is distinctively your own, one that makes you sound the *way you should*. [A good voice] doesn't come with a cosmetic 'quick fix' [...]. It requires developing a new awareness of the impression you make on others with your voices, and a willingness to *train yourself to improve it*.
>
> (pp. ix-x. My emphasis)

An intricate dialogue is thus established between the ideas of the 'natural' and the 'constructed'. One case study in particular exemplifies the couched conflicts in Boone's manual:

> Jamie, a 26-year-old salesman [...] had had a bad voice all of his life. Recently, he had become aware that his voice was hurting him in his sales work. [...] On voice examination, we found that Jamie's problem was throat resonance, caused by his tongue being excessively retracted in his mouth. [...] Some of his front-of-the-mouth speech sounds, such as *th* and *t*, were slightly compromised by his back-in-the-mouth focus. In voice therapy, he did exercises designed to bring his tongue forward [...]. Jamie practiced these tongue movements throughout the day. As his tongue was carried more toward the middle of his mouth, his voice resonance improved dramatically, and *Jamie at last discovered his natural voice*.
>
> (pp. 10-11. My emphasis)

The question raised here is surely whether the voice that Jamie developed after training was any more his 'natural voice' than the voice that he had been using 'all of his life': what was so 'unnatural' about that voice, the one he had always used? Might the 'natural' voice not instead be precisely the one we were 'born with', one that we *don't* 'do anything about'? Boone goes on to give his advice on inflection, further exposing the discursive complexities of his project: "voice inflection can be changed to meet the self-image requirements of any particular situation" (p. 143).

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Implicit here once more is the idea that the voice reveals something of its owner: in the case of emotion, at least, this may well be true, although the use of the word 'self-image' suggests something more than that. More significantly, however, is the unspoken suggestion that the 'natural voice' is perfectly compatible with a consciously manipulated voice, one that is deliberately differently generated in varying circumstances.[7]

The paradox thereby arises, revealed both in Boone's work and the vocabulary with which Karen Carpenter's voice is described, that the so-called 'natural' voice may be just as disciplined and carefully crafted as the explicitly constructed voice. What is significant about Karen Carpenter's voice in particular is the way in which it seems to generate the conflation of 'natural' with the idea of 'purity', and how this is linked to Barthes's grain. The reliability of her voice "was kinda taken for granted", said Paul White [Carpenters' road manager 1970-71]. "She used to hit notes like radar. Some singers hit them a little under and slide up and down. Karen was pure" (quoted in Coleman, 1994, p. 103). Some significant gendered implications of White's characterisation of Karen's voice as 'pure' can be found deeply rooted in cultural discourses, stretching back at least as far as Victorian European sexual-moral rhetoric, in which women are characterised as 'pure' only when they are asexual, although willing to perform their 'marital duties'. In the writings of English sexologist William Acton we see described

> a perfect ideal of an English wife and mother, kind considerate, self-sacrificing, and sensible, so pure-hearted as to be utterly ignorant of and averse to any sensual indulgence, but so unselfishly attached to the man she loves, as to be willing to give up her own wishes and feelings for his sake.
> (Quoted in Nead 1988, p. 21)

In his famous *Psychopathia Sexualis* of 1886, German sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing summarised: "the man who flees woman, and the woman who pursues sexual gratification, are abnormal phenomena" (quoted in Gay, 1984, p. 154). Between Acton, Krafft-Ebing, and their contemporaries, we see the construction of women as *naturally* 'pure' in their 'aversion' to sexual enjoyment. Purity and sexual

abstinence tend to be synonymous even in modern constructions of gender-appropriate behaviour for women and young girls, as Jane Ussher notes:

> Adolescent girls can engage in all manner of foreplay, but as long as they don't 'go all the way', in terms of vaginal penetration [...] their virtue remains intact. [...F]or a woman, to be sexual, to be penetrated, is to risk slipping from virgin to whore, unless she is protected by the safety net of marriage.
>
> (1991, pp. 29-30)

Purity, then, is figured as a 'natural' state, as a default, original position: to be 'pure' is to be 'natural'. Furthermore, 'purity' has historically been constructed as a quality particularly associated with women, and in particular one which it is their responsibility to uphold and maintain in others, as well as themselves, as part of a patriotic duty (see Nead, 1988, pp. 91-2).

Paul White's description of Karen Carpenter's voice as 'pure' resonates strongly with the historical conflation of 'pure' and 'natural', reducing the two concepts to being mutually implicit, while also tapping into a history of the asexuality in women.[8] Perhaps paradoxically, this relies somewhat on his positioning of portamento as being 'impure' and presumably therefore 'unnatural'. In Barthes's model, portamento might suggest a culturally un(der)assimilated musical factor, eschewed by Karen's ability to pitch a note. Consequently, the so-called 'purity' of her voice seems to imply, or even depend on, a rejection of the grain and geno-song. In this case, 'pure' emerges as *antithetical* to 'natural', since culture and nature are traditionally pitted against each other – with culture configured as 'post-nature'. Thus, we return to the idea of Karen as performing rather than as unquestionably possessing (the unpossessable?) 'natural voice'. The discursive tensions between vocal 'natural-ness', vocal training, the grain of the voice, and voice as a unique indicator of identity, are certainly at work in the voice of Karen Carpenter and the ways in which her voice has come to be perceived, and are therefore central to understanding the Carpenters' work. What the following work attempts to describe are some of the precise ways in which grain, 'authenticity' and vocal 'presence' are manifested in their work, and some of the implications which might be drawn from this.

1.2 Taming the grain

The Carpenters' characteristic vocal style was part of Richard's musical vision from the start: in the early stages of his partnership with lyricist John Bettis, Richard envisioned "a choral approach to pop" (quoted in Coleman, 1994, p. 61). As a platform for their early experiments, Richard and Bettis united with Karen, guitarist John Sims, bassist Danny Woodhams, and vocalist Leslie Johnston to form a band called Spectrum in 1967. The tight harmonies which they developed were rejected by record companies, not because the sound was unattractive in itself, but because of the contemporary musical trends:

> The sound [was] hopelessly unfashionable, neither synchronised with the rock 'n' roll age nor a valid contrast. [...] Their appearance was condemned, too. [...] One record executive told Ed Sulzer [the group's early manager]: "They're wearing turtleneck sweaters, *blue velvet* suits; they have *short* hair; and they're singing words that we *can understand!* [...] we don't want to take a chance on it."
>
> (Coleman, 1994, p. 64. His emphasis)

Spectrum disbanded in early 1968, but Richard and Karen went on to record three tracks together in sessions with bassist Joe Osborn. They sung all the vocal parts between the three of them, and the sound which came to characterise the Carpenters' music matured from these early recordings.

The sound developed by Spectrum was the antithesis of late 1960s music industry values. The record single was increasingly dismissed as a format, and lost popularity as the 'concept' album became the favoured mode of popular music consumption (see Kurlansky, 2005, p. 181; Whiteley, 1992, pp. 37-8).[9] Furthermore, 'words that we can understand' were far from being a common feature of psychedelia-inspired rock music at this time, and this could be taken either in the sense of words-as-message or as in the sense of words-as-objects. That is to say, in the Carpenters' music, not only can the listener make out what words are being sung, but they can also usually understand the message that those words are trying to convey. Instrumental epics became popular in a move away from the voice as the focal point of popular music, and new uses of the voice itself were explored. Pink Floyd demonstrate both of these trends in a single piece, the title track of *Atom Heart Mother* (1970). Over twenty-three minutes long, the track is structured by six successive 'movements', and employs a wide range of musical styles and effects ranging from chromatic, polyphonic brass sections and expansive rock gestures,

intimate keyboard and guitar arpeggios beneath a melancholy cello, and bluesy guitar solos over funky keyboard punches. An ethereal vocal section includes the metamorphosis of a single wordless human voice into a cluster of quasi-synthesised dissonance. The penultimate section of 'Atom Heart Mother Suite' also makes interesting use of the voice, employing various vocal effects – pitched, non-pitched, and semi-pitched – which include apparently nonsensical utterances (see Track 4).

In a musical environment of vocal and, perhaps more noticeably, instrumental experimentation, where the sounds created by Pink Floyd were not atypical, the Carpenters' idiosyncratic harmonies were comparatively outmoded. One of Richard's clear early influences had been the Beach Boys. Spectrum had "wanted to emulate the new-style harmonic strengths being pioneered by [...] the Beach Boys" (Coleman, 1994, p. 67), and the Carpenters' use of overdubbing is a clear indicator of the Beach Boys' influence. Richard's respect for the Beach Boys can be heard directly on *Now And Then*, in a cover of 'Fun, Fun, Fun' (by the Beach Boys, 1964), and in terms of vocal and harmonic style, the influence is also clear on the Carpenters' second album, *Close To You* (1970). A particularly audible example of this is found on that album in 'Baby It's You', a song originally recorded by the Shirelles (1961; Track 5) and covered by The Beatles (1963; Track 6).[10] Although the Beatles' cover is transposed from B♭ to G, and despite a clear shift in genre, the two versions are in many ways similar in their styles of delivery. For example, each one is upbeat and emphasises the 'Sha-la-la-la-la' motif (to which the Carpenters make only a cursory reference at the end of their recording). The Shirelles' original arguably uses rhythm in a very different way from that employed by the Beatles, the primary difference being that the Shirelles' version emphasises a syncopated rhythmic pattern which, in the Beatles' version, is hardly perceptible beneath a rhythmic focus on an even $\frac{4}{4}$ tempo facilitated particularly by the persistent hi-hat quavers. The difference in rhythmic patterning is heard most clearly in each recording in the opening 'Sha-la-la-la-la'. The Beatles sing on every quaver, whereas the Shirelles immediately introduce a more syncopated rhythmic gesture in the first bar of each motif, contrasting with an even, legato second bar.

Underlying rhythmic pattern		'Sha-la-la-la-la' motif	
Shirelles	[musical notation] (or [note])	*Shirelles*	[musical notation]
Beatles	[musical notation]	*Beatles*	[musical notation]
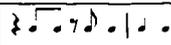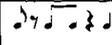
Figure 1.2
Rhythmic differences in 'Baby It's You'

In terms of instrumentation the two versions are also slightly different: where the Shirelles include an organ solo, the Beatles use a guitar, as is to be expected of their genre and style. Despite many subtle differences such as this, most of which are attributable to the different styles of the two groups, and perhaps even the time gap between the two recordings, the Beatles' cover very much relies on, and refers to, the original.

In this context of a tendency towards imitation rather than redefinition, the Carpenters' version of 'Baby It's You' is strikingly different (Track 7). Most importantly, the extremity of the changes made arguably lends greater significance to the changes themselves: the subtle differences between the earlier recordings tend to be subsumed by the overall feeling of similarity and the reference back to the Shirelles' original. Differences may also be largely accounted for by differences in genre. Certainly, the Carpenters operate *within another genre* again, but Richard's changes are so radical as to appear much more deliberate and meaningful. At the very beginning of the Carpenters' version of 'Baby It's You' the difference from earlier recordings is clear: the slower tempo,[11] the use of major 7th tonic chords, and the choice of piano as the primary instrument set a more maudlin and (emotionally) unstable mood, compared with the rhythmic buoyancy found in the Shirelles' or the Beatles' versions. I do not wish to enter into much more of a comparative analysis here, but one aspect of the Carpenters' version is highly indicative of the way they were influenced by the Beach Boys and therefore worth noting. At the second and third refrains we hear the thickest use of choral overdubbing on this track. At these points, the choral voices change their function from backing vocals, as they had functioned throughout the second verse, to carrying the melody, but the harmonies are so close that the melody is blurred somewhat. The parallels with the style of the Beach Boys are clearly audible here, and are reminiscent in some ways to the verses and choruses of 'In My Room' (1963; see Track 8), especially at 2'24" when the Carpenters sing *a cappella* and overdubbed, and Richard sings falsetto. A similarity can also be sensed to the refrain of the Beach Boys' 'You Still Believe In Me' (1966;

see Track 9).[12] By the late 1960s the popularity that the Beach Boys had enjoyed following such hits as 'I Get Around' (1964), 'Fun, Fun, Fun' and 'California Girls' (1965) had waned. Despite the philosophy of experimentation on which the Beach Boys were apparently founded (see Harrison, 1997), and the move on *Pet Sounds* (1966) from the white middle-class surf idiom to that of beatnik counterculture (Harrison, 1997), they became "increasingly un-hip to the burgeoning hippie scene" (Guinness, 1998, p. 31). By the time Richard was inspired to 'emulate' the Beach Boys' sound in Spectrum, and certainly by the time the Carpenters emerged in their final form, the Beach Boys' style was out-dated. By extension the Carpenters could immediately be associated with an outmoded style and were commercially undesirable. The way in which grain is disciplined in the Carpenters' music is starkly exposed against the prog-rock backdrop of musical style in which the grain is comparatively untamed, allowed to do its own work, and perhaps even encouraged through such devices as Jimi Hendrix's mass of amplifiers and effects pedals.

The only exception to the rule of the Carpenters' characteristic overdubbed style, which will be argued below to be a key site of 'control' in the Carpenters' music, was when the group were on tour, because an entirely live performance prohibits the use of pre-recorded back-up vocals, and it was indeed a *live* 'live' performance that the Carpenters presented.[13] However, Richard insisted on every other musical detail being an exact copy of the recorded version, instructing the performers, "we have a record out there, and our stage performance *must match it.* [...] The audience gets the same sound as on the record" (quoted in Coleman, 1994, p. 102. His emphasis). Such attention to detail was frustrating for drummer Jim Squeglia, who was instructed to imitate exactly the drumming recorded by Karen, but who did not "wanna be doing the same break every night" (quoted in Coleman, 1994, p. 103). Richard insisted on regulating the sound, and did not tolerate improvisation in concert, telling Squeglia that even "if the audience is screaming and yelling with enthusiasm" the performance must be as exact a copy of the record as possible (quoted in Coleman, 1994, p. 102). In practice, exact replication of even those factors which could be replicated under live conditions was not always achieved. A cursory listen to *Live At The Palladium* (1976) reveals several points at which the live performance deviates from the recorded versions, including some of Richard's own improvised fill-ins. However, in comparison with other artists who may perform an altogether different interpretation of their recorded material, the

Palladium recording is on the whole extremely similar to the recorded versions of the same songs. Even small details like drum fills are almost exactly as they appear on the album versions, and it is only in very minor ways that the live performances differ from their sources. Ultimately, the unexpected, and therefore 'uncontrolled', was thus kept to a minimum in live performances, and any deviation from the agreed arrangements resulted in heated arguments, even between Karen and Richard who were equals in perfectionism (Coleman, 1994, pp. 119-20).

This discourse of control is also apparent in the biographies of both Richard and Karen, and their perfectionist tendencies were not confined to touring. Bass player Wes Jacobs, who had played with the Carpenters since high school, described Richard as "absolutely uncompromising. He had a vision of how a particular song or arrangement should be, and he wouldn't bend until he got exactly what he wanted" (quoted in Coleman, 1994, p. 53). Richard willingly admits his own rigorous attitude towards song production:

> If there was one little rub, one little note where there was a slight rub where it wasn't perfect, we would do it over. Even if it was something that once it got into the mix you thought you would never hear, I believe that in a way you would because ultimately there is a sparkle to our things, and I think that's because I wouldn't let one little note by anybody that wasn't right get by.
>
> (Carpenter, 2004)

Karen's need for precision seems to have been linked in part with her brother's exacting requirements and her admiration of him, which in turn may be somewhat connected with her harsh judgements of her own performances (Coleman, 1994, pp. 151-2). Although she was aware that her intonation was perfect, she seems to have been constantly dissatisfied with her performances: songwriter Nicky Chinn recalls how he might comment, "'That's a great record, Karen, congratulations' – and she'd say, 'Oh yeah, it's a hit, but maybe I could have done better'" (quoted in Coleman, 1994, p. 155). Such dissatisfaction was neither whimsical nor short-lived: as late as 1978 she re-recorded her vocals on "Merry Christmas Darling", a single the Carpenters first released in 1970. It seems that Karen held Richard in much higher regard than she did herself, and her desire for perfection was apparently not only about her own need.[14] There is conflicting evidence regarding the extent to which Richard influenced his sister's singing style, and possibly even her feelings about her singing. Richard angrily denies any suggestions that he influenced or controlled Karen's singing style in any way, and says that "She didn't like me, or anyone else,

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telling her how to sing" (quoted in Coleman, 1994, p. 253). Yet when she declared, "There isn't anything I wouldn't do to give him the perfection that we both want" (quoted in Coleman, 1994, p. 151), she arguably revealed a level at which Richard's role in the production process did indeed influence her. What these examples illustrate is a tendency in both siblings towards control over the production of their music, but the pattern of control and perfection resonates at a level deeper than studio discussions and arguments on tour. It is this theme that is at the heart of their relationship with the pheno- and geno-songs, and this is manifested in methods of disciplining the geno-song.

We have already seen that, even prior to any technological manipulation, Karen's so-called 'pure' voice is a key point at which pheno-song is encouraged in the Carpenters' music. Furthermore, the reliability of Karen's voice is an essential part of the Carpenters' style. It was declared by Olivia Newton-John that Karen "IS the Carpenters sound" (quoted in Coleman, 1994, p. 274. His emphasis). Such a statement clearly misses the importance of Richard's input, either vocally – as a lead singer or a part of the backing vocals – or in terms of production, in which he played a central role. This latter point was defended strongly by Karen: "Look at what he's produced! There are sixteen gold records [speaking in 1975]. He's produced one of the most successful acts in the world, and nobody gives him any credit. He never gets referred to as a producer or as an arranger, and they walk right by him" (quoted in Coleman, 1994, p. 151). Whatever the implications of Newton-John's assertion, what is even more pertinent in the present context is that the technique of overdubbing requires a high level of vocal control, as it involved 'matching' an earlier recording in all aspects of vocality, including articulation, dynamics, and diction. That the Carpenters employ – indeed, that they *are able to* employ – the overdubbed style so heavily is indicative of the level of control Karen had over her voice.

Pheno-song is also foregrounded by the density of Richard's harmonic arrangements. The multiplication of Karen's solo voice through overdubbing seems to emphasise both the 'purity' of her voice, by reinforcing that crucial voice and underlining the control necessary for this type of recording. The Carpenters' notorious harmonic style has multiple interpretive possibilities, however. A greater number of melodic lines arguably increases potential geno-space,[15] because of more voices 'working at the language', in Barthes's words. Yet the intimacy of the Carpenters' harmonies seems instead to blur the individual lines, thus rendering grain

in any one vocal part less accessible, while emphasising the harmonic intimacy and textural density. When the Carpenters were signed by A&M in 1969, the prevailing guitar-based rock styles of bands such as Cream, Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, and the Who displayed a tendency to explore instrumental capabilities alongside the vocal, and there was little space for complex vocal harmonies within the expanse of electric noise. Throughout the 1960s, vocal groups had proved especially popular: the Supremes, the Beach Boys, the Temptations, and the Ronettes, are just a few examples of groups stylistically defined by their vocal work. Yet vocal groups by definition consist of a number of vocalists, and however alike the timbres may be of a group of similarly aged people of the same age, sex and race, the sound is fundamentally different from that which the Carpenters chose to pursue: however many parts there are to be sung, ultimately only two voices sing them. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the voices of Karen and Richard blend together particularly well: "for the background vocals, being brother and sister, they blended beautifully", says recording engineer Roger Young, who worked with the pair for many years (quoted in Coleman, 1994, p. 183).[16] In addition, Karen's vocal strength lay mostly in the lower end of her range, which descended to D_1, and with her brother being a tenor the vocal ranges of the pair overlapped significantly, blurring the boundaries between the two voices even further.

By cultivating the 'purity' of Karen's voice, by using overdubbing techniques, and through dense harmonic textures, the Carpenters achieved a musical style in which Barthes's pheno-song is foregrounded, and geno-song is controlled. By turning once again to Barthes, a parallel emerges between pheno- and geno-songs, and his configuration of the texts of 'pleasure' and 'bliss':

> Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts [...] unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language.
>
> (1992, p. 98. His emphasis)

To establish the relation between pheno and pleasure on the one hand, and geno and bliss on the other, we must first look to psychoanalytic models of subjective development, which typically formulate a three-stage construction, with some

psychic childhood trauma acting as an agent of development. In Kristeva's model the subject moves from the Semiotic stage to the Symbolic stage, by way of a thetic stage. This paradigm equates approximately to the Lacanian subject's transition from the Real to the Symbolic via the mirror stage, and to the Freudian castration complex as the passageway between the pre-Oedipal and the Oedipal realms. In such models, however, there remains a point of discomfort. In entering the traumatic phase, the subject experiences himself as fragmented, where before his experience of himself was as a continuous being. The process of self-actualisation is synonymous with the realisation of difference from the (M)Other, whereas before he experienced no difference. He continues to yearn for his pre-traumatic feeling of wholeness, and yet that experience, by its very nature, is irretrievable.

This desire is summoned vocally by Lacan's *objet petit a*, which is sound before language, before meaning. This sound is also unrecoverable: indeed it is 'always already' lost – there is no point at which a subject can experience sound without any resonance with meaning. Thus it is figured by Lacan as the cause of desire. Within this framework, the grain of the voice seems to point towards, or perhaps imitate, the *objet petit a*, and therefore functions as a reminder of unfulfillable desire, and the fragmentation of the subject who feels it. The grain of the voice breaks with culture, for culture in Lacan's model is post-traumatic, and the grain gestures towards the pre-traumatic. In the grain of the voice is the recognition of the loss of selfhood. Consequently the grain "unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, and psychological assumptions", and in its tendency towards the non-lingual, it "brings to a crisis his relation to language". Thus, the grain of the voice – which as part of the geno-song deconstructs the "tissue of cultural values" – "discomforts" and "imposes a state of loss", thereby generating bliss in the listener. Conversely, as I have noted, pheno-song symbolises "everything in the performance which is in the service of communication, representation, expression, everything [...] which forms the tissue of cultural values". In this sense it "comes from culture and does not break with it" and, in this Barthesian context is parallel to the text (or song) of pleasure, even though we must remember the problematic suggestion of something entirely outside of culture (and meaning). The grain, in its function as the *objet petit a*, suggests the pre-traumatic (and therefore the pre-cultural), yet it is created and responded to from a point within culture. While it may in a sense 'break' with culture, it also – like the pheno-process – "comes from culture". Despite these

implicit problems, the general parallels between pheno and pleasure, and geno and bliss remain, and we can still draw from Barthes's construction an impression that the grain of the voice has currency within a psychoanalytic framework.

With the putative necessity of psychological trauma in the journey of subjective development, as noted above, the subject may attempt to defend himself against the disturbed mental space which is generated by the remains of the pre-traumatic in the post-traumatic realm, and psychoanalytic theory offers several variations of such defence. For Freud, the trauma is centred on the genital differences between the sexes. In his model "the great majority surmount" the "fright of castration at the sight of a female genital". Those who do not overcome this fear form some sort of defence against it: "some people become homosexual as a consequence of that impression, while others fend it off by creating a fetish" (Freud, 1927, p. 354). Homosexuals, according to Freud, maintain an aversion to female genitals, and their choice of sexual object results from a fear of the properties of the 'normal' sexual object choice. The fetishist, however, is 'saved' from becoming a homosexual "by endowing women with the characteristic which makes them tolerable as sexual objects" (p. 354): that is to say, he creates a fetish to act as a mediatory object of desire and therefore continues to desire women. Freud describes the fetish as "a substitute for the penis", but goes on to specify that:

> it is not a substitute for any chance penis, but for a particular and quite special penis that had been extremely important in early childhood but had later been lost. That is to say, it should normally have been given up, but the fetish is precisely designed to preserve it from extinction. [...T]he fetish is a substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in and [...] does not want to give up.
>
> (p. 352)

Crucial to an understanding of the fetish is that the subject does not simply deny the castration, but allows in some way the realisation of castration to endure:

> 'Scotomization' seems to me particularly unsuitable [a word], for it suggests that the perception is entirely wiped out, so that the result is the same as when a visual impression falls on the blind spot in the retina. In the situation we are considering, on the contrary, we see that the perception has persisted, and that a very energetic action has been undertaken to maintain the disavowal. It is not true that, after the child has made his observation of the woman, he has preserved unaltered his belief that women have a phallus. *He has retained that belief, but he has also given it up.*
>
> (p. 353. My emphasis)[17]

Thus, the pre-traumatic image of the phallic mother persists in the *mind of the post-*

traumatic subject (fetishist). Yet this is juxtaposed with the motivation behind the creation of the fetish, which is to defend against the fear of castration, and against the effect of the trauma, which facilitates the subject's transition into the post-traumatic world. It is here that we see the way in which pheno-song might parallel Freud's model. In one sense, pheno-song symbolises the persistence of a unified, pre-traumatic image in the post-traumatic world, operating neatly within the post-traumatic state of culture. It is the methods by which the pheno-song is foregrounded that disavow the post-traumatic status: the overdubbing so prevalent in the Carpenters' work gives an effect of unity. Thus, the pheno also serves to defend against the trauma of transition into the post-traumatic realm, disavowing the traumatic phase. Geno-song and grain, in contrast, capture some of the trauma of separation, and in this way they do not provide psychological comfort, but instead 'blissfully' 'discomfort' and 'unsettle'.

Pheno-processes can thus be seen as working in ways similar to Freud's construction of the fetish, in that they simultaneously recognise and defend against the pre-traumatic realm. However, a fundamental difference emerges between Freud's configuration and pheno-song as fetish, particularly in its use by the Carpenters, for Freud's notion of fetish is inextricably linked to sexual difference. In contrast, there is no immediate sense in which pheno-song as a fetishistic construction is sexualised. (Indeed, the Carpenters' ultra-wholesome image ultimately works in opposition to any sexualisation.) On eroticism in music, Richard Dyer notes that "It can be argued that all popular music is erotic" (1992a, p. 152), but he goes on to distinguish different styles of eroticism in music. 'Popular song' – which Dyer describes as "the Gershwin, Cole Porter, Burt Bacharach type of song" – displays what Dyer describes as 'disembodied' eroticism, as it "succeeds in expressing a sense of the erotic which yet denies eroticism's physicality" (p. 152). According to Dyer, this is achieved through a combination of the song's lyrics, melodies, and rhythm:

> Popular song's tunes are rounded off, closed, self-contained. They achieve this by adopting a strict musical structure (AABA) in which the opening melodic phrases are returned to and, most importantly, the tonic note of the whole song is also the last note of the tune. [...] Thus although popular songs often depart – especially in the middle section (B) – from their melodic and harmonic beginnings, they also always return to them. This gives them – even at their most passionate [...] – a sense of security and containment. The tune is not allowed to invade the whole of one's body.

> Popular song's lyrics place its tunes within a conceptualization of love
> and passion as emanating from 'inside', the heart or the soul. Thus the
> yearning cadences of popular song express an erotic yearning of the inner
> person, not the body.
>
> (pp. 152-3)

Finally, Dyer observes that this kind of popular song is not "insistently rhythmic",

and he places this comment in the context of the historical perception of rhythm in

Western culture:

> Rhythm, in western music, is traditionally felt as being more physical than
> other musical elements such as melody, harmony and instrumentation. [...]
> It is to other cultures that we have [turned] – and above all to Afro-
> American culture – to learn about rhythm. [...] Typically, black music was
> thought of by the white culture as being both more primitive and more
> 'authentically' erotic. Infusions of black music were always seen as (and
> often condemned as) sexual and physical.
>
> (p. 153)

Consequently, popular song's sense of eroticism is removed from bodily experience

through three fundamental aspects of song: melody; lyrics; and rhythm.

We can see this 'disembodied eroticism' exemplified in many of the

Carpenters' songs, whether they are originals written by Richard with John Bettis, or

covers arranged by Richard. It is not insignificant that the Carpenters covered many

popular song classics, such as Porter's 'From This Moment On' and 'When I Fall In

Love', and released two Christmas albums featuring carols, which are traditionally

highly formalised and harmonically contained. Richard notes the similarity in

structure between some of his own compositions and earlier twentieth-century

standards, comparing Porter's 'Begin The Beguine' or Irving Berlin's 'Let's Face

The Music And Dance' with his own 'Rainy Days And Mondays' and 'Merry

Christmas Darling': of all of these examples, it can be said, as Richard does, "there

you have AABA" (Carpenter, 2004). Lyrically a great number of the Carpenters'

songs conform to Dyer's vision of "a conceptualization of love and passion as

emanating from 'inside', the heart or the soul", lyrics which "express an erotic

yearning of the inner person, not the body", as opposed to the lyrics of disco music,

which are more "directly physical". For example, where 5000 Volts promise to

"make your fire burn / With a touch or just one kiss / Turn ya on, all night long" (in

'I'm On Fire', 1975), the Carpenters sing of "white lace and promises" ('We've Only

Just Begun, 1970). Or, while Richard and Karen "long to be / Close to you" (1970),

Anita Ward is aware that "The night is young and full of possibilities", allowing for

much 'ringing of her bell' (to use her own innuendo, in 'Ring My Bell', 1979). Rhythmically too, their work exemplifies Dyer's assertion that 'popular song' is not "insistently rhythmic". One can draw out two elements of rhythm that have each been commonly figured as 'erotic' in quality: prominence and syncopation. That is to say, a prominent regular pulse and a persistent feeling of syncopation each come to be described in terms of their erotic potential. By comparison, the Carpenters' music foregrounds melody and even-ness of rhythm – and not generally in a driving, forceful, 'erotic' sense – as can be seen in tracks such as 'I Need To Be In Love' (1976) or 'Yesterday Once More' (1973).

Beyond rhythm and lyrics, Dyer notes methods by which "popular song's tunes are rounded off". First, the binary musical structure, AABA, is established. Within this, "the opening melodic phrases are returned to" towards the end of the song, and "the tonic note of the whole song is also the last note of the tune", a feature which Dyer notes as being crucial. Melodically, too, many songs by the Carpenters display those aspects of popular song which Dyer sees as suggesting 'disembodied eroticism'. 'For All We Know' (1971), 'Top Of The World' (1973), 'Sing' (1973) and 'Jambalaya (On The Bayou)' (1974) are all examples of songs which melodically return to the tonic note. The 'sense of security and containment' that, for Dyer, is achieved by this melodic resolution is also supported harmonically and structurally. In 'For All We Know' (Track 10), for example, the introduction moves towards the dominant in preparation for the verse to commence on a tonic harmony, while being supported by a tonic pedal for the full eight bars. The same applies when the introduction is repeated after the first two verses, and again at the end of the song. Despite repeated suggestions of a modulation – primarily brought about by the major supertonic chord (A^7) – there is little movement away from the 'harmonic beginnings', and the 'melodic beginnings' of the introduction are returned to at the end of the song. 'Jambalaya' is based on an extremely simple harmonic structure consisting of movement from tonic to dominant and back again (see Track 11). A basic background analysis reveals that this structure of movement and return underpins the length of each verse or chorus. The first two lines see a movement from I through V and back to I, although this is left open as the melody rests on the mediant note. The second couplet also rests upon a I-V-I movement, but the falling third at the end of the fourth line settles this time on the tonic note, easily bringing a more 'closed' effect to the same harmonic progression.[18] Melodically, the verses

push upwards through the first two lines through the submediant and leading tones, inviting the resolution that is provided when the third line begins on the tonic, topping the octave which is finally completed at the end of the fourth line, with the tonic in its lower-octave form.

Figure 1.3
Vocal melody from a verse of 'Jambalaya (On The Bayou)

Harmonically speaking there is very little movement, with every dominant harmony feeling destined to return to the tonic, and this is reinforced in the final seconds with a clear and well-prepared perfect cadence. These are amongst many of the Carpenters' melodies that provide melodic 'security and containment'. There are, however, at least as many examples of the Carpenters' most famous songs that do not close simply on the tonic note: '(They Long To Be) Close To You', 'Rainy Days And Mondays' (1971), and 'I Won't Last A Day Without You' (1972) all finish their final phrase on the dominant note. Yet this does not mean that such songs are necessarily less 'closed off'. 'Without You' resolves a dominant tone with a tonic harmony to a single point of closure, 'Close To You' reiterates a perfect cadence to fade, and all three of the above mentioned examples are founded on the 'closed' musical structure to which Dyer refers – the ternary form AABA.

What we can take from examples such as these, then, is a sense in which pheno-song (especially as it is used by the Carpenters) might ultimately be configured as a kind of 'disembodied fetish', since it simultaneously acknowledges and disavows the pre-traumatic state in the manner of Freud's fetishist, and yet it also offers the 'security and containment' of which Dyer speaks, recalling Barthes's 'text of pleasure' that 'contents, fills, grants euphoria'. This act of disembodiment, in a

sense cutting the voice from its physicality, involves to a great extent the taming of the voice's grain that has been described above. What has been neglected so far, however, is the part of the grain which remains, for the annihilation of grain seems impossible. In the Carpenters' music, the grain remains not only as an insistent, uncontrollable aspect evading assimilation – as is its nature – but it also exists as an illusion, for it is consciously manipulated within their editing processes. Ray Coleman documents one such example of Richard's manipulation of the grain in the recording of 'Goodbye To Love' (1972):

> Giving the record a distinctly human edge at the start, where it began with voice and piano, Richard decided to leave in Karen's audible intake of breath. As Roger Young, their engineer, points out, because Karen sang very softly, very close to the microphone by habit, the "intense presence" of her voice was accentuated, and Richard's instruction to not edit-out the deep breaths on 'Goodbye to Love' and on other tracks added a special, unexpected dimension.
>
> (Coleman, 1994, p. 125)

It is notable that Coleman cites this example, since 'Goodbye To Love' proved one of the most technically difficult songs for Karen to sing: the elongated phrasing of Richard's melody left little time for her to breathe, and indeed she was capable of singing them with a single breath (see Track 12). As a consequence, those few breaths which she did take assume an interesting identity. In one respect, they disrupt the controlled phrasing of the rest of the song, introducing a sense of the unknown into the highly regulated soundscape which Richard otherwise achieved, perhaps adding that 'special, unexpected dimension' precisely because of this, since the expectation is not to be aware of such 'imperfections' in the context of the Carpenters' music. On another level, however, they are merely an illusion, an imitation of themselves, since they are always subject to Richard's technological manipulation. Because the potential is there for the breaths *not* to be heard, the decision to leave them for aural consumption renders them, in a sense, void: they appear to assert the independence of the grain, but they also perform the idea of grain as an artificial construct, and technology is therefore surely at the heart of the Carpenters' problematic relationship with the grain of the voice.

1.3 Cyborgs and simulation

With technology playing such a central role in the circumscription of the grain of the voice in the Carpenters' work, the ways in which technological strategies were used by the duo should surely be considered in further detail. To a large extent, the impact of technology on popular music (or, indeed, any kind of music) is inescapable. Neglecting unhelpful (though common) analogies between the body and machinery, quite possibly the only instrument in any music making that does not involve some level of technological intervention is the voice. We should therefore think not in terms of certain musics 'using' technology and certain musics being 'un-technological', but in terms of an index of technological visibility. This allows for the historical shifts that have occurred in the discourses surrounding music (and particularly popular musics), such that certain kinds of technology are *more visible as technology* than others. Paul Théberge notes one example of a famous electric guitarist declaring his instrument to be "real", as opposed to synthesisers and samplers. Théberge writes:

> It was as if the mere presence of vibrating strings (and the player's contact with them) cancelled out all other characteristics of the technology – from the [...] lacquer that covered its body, increasing its rigidity and preventing it from resonating, to the electro-magnetic pickups that captured the [...] sound of the unamplified strings, to the many special effects devices [...] that transformed the sound, to the tubes, circuits, and massive speaker systems used to project the sound out to the audience.
>
> (1999, p. 211)

In many ways, all music involves some kind of technology, and as Théberge also notes, this is true not only in terms of the making of music, but also in its circulation (1999, p. 210). Popular music arguably makes greatest use of highly visible technologies, with the advent of sampling technology, synthesisers, and a generic emphasis on high levels of amplification (often to assist in the kind of mass distribution embodied by a rock concert, as opposed to the more 'exclusive' occasion of a chamber concert).[19]

As we have seen, in the Carpenters' work, there is a tension between the grain of the voice as an unquashable factor, implicit of the body (read 'natural'), and the constructed nature of that grain. What such a tension exposes is the extent to which Karen's voice is always and at all levels technologically constructed. This in turn invokes a figure which has been implicit thus far, that of the cyborg ('cybernetic organism'), defined by Featherstone and Burrows as "a human-machine hybrid in

which the machine parts become replacements, which are integrated or act as supplements to the organism to enhance the body's power potential" (1995, p. 2). If 'technology' is always present in the making and distribution of music, but is variably visible, the 'visibility' of the technology involved necessarily has an impact on the perception of any human/machine fusion. While the image of the cyborg has invaded popular culture quite blatantly through such characters as the Terminator, Robocop, or Steve 'Six Million Dollar Man' Austin, it is increasingly clear that many types of human interaction with (or reliance upon) technologically contrived prosthetic devices constitute engagement with cyborgian realms:

> the use of a pair of spectacles is a prosthetic device which can be placed near to one end of the human/machine combinations that make up the cyborg.
>
> (Featherstone & Burrows, 1995, p. 3)

> We are *already* cyborgs. My mother, for instance, leads a relatively normal life thanks to a pacemaker.
>
> (Rucker et al., quoted in Featherstone & Burrows, 1995, p. 3)

To a certain extent, then, the very use of a microphone to amplify, record and reproduce Karen Carpenter's voice invokes these images. More than this, however, is the way in which the production of Karen's voice/'voice' relies so heavily on technological manipulation. The overdubbing technique which was so typically used by the Carpenters is an artificialisation of the voice achieved through technological means. In this cyber-sonic context, there is a sense that the 'distinctly human edge' that Coleman describes, achieved by Karen's audible breath at the beginning of 'Goodbye To Love', disguises the image of Karen-as-cyborg. Nevertheless, this cyborg figure undeniably pervades the Carpenters' work.

At the point of intersection between the realm of the cyborg and the psychoanalytic framework employed thus far, the cyborg might be given something resembling its own trajectory of subjective development. In the human-centred models of Freud and Lacan (amongst others), the path of the subject is from a state of original unity through the separation from the mother, to self-actualisation and mature subjectivity. It is within this framework that pheno-song and geno-song function in the ways argued for here, as they resonate with the division of pre-traumatic from post-traumatic. As Donna Haraway observes, however, "the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense [...]. The cyborg skips the step of original unity" (1991, pp. 150-51). Such a realisation requires a reassessment of the roles of

pheno-song and fetish in the Carpenters' music. If, in the human-centred model, pheno-processes serve simultaneously to replicate the pre-traumatic realm and defend against trauma, and geno-processes re-open the wound, recalling the trauma, how can these be relocated in a cyborgian framework which, since there is no original unity to disrupt, contains no such trauma? Furthermore, how does Barthes's image of the grain as 'the body in the voice as it sings' intersect with the cyborgian effects of deconstructing the boundaries between organism and technology (nature and culture) and reconceptualising the body "not as a fixed part of nature, but as a boundary concept" (Balsamo, 1995, p. 215)?

One attempt to answer such questions might involve retracing the logic, and establishing a way in which the lack of original unity in the cyborg does not entirely preclude the idea of trauma. Certainly, the trauma of disruption of the state of original unity is impossible, since there is no such state for the cyborg. However, the cyborg is positioned as a boundary figure, the intersection of nature and culture, and when such terms recall the primal, pre-traumatic realm and the post-traumatic realm of culture (as in Lacan's Symbolic) respectively, the cyborg can easily be seen in terms of an intermediary trauma. It is by definition an agent of disruption, and the cyborgian voice can thus ultimately be perceived as something of a trauma in itself. The technological manipulation of Karen's voice which enables the application of cyborgian frameworks is defined by a process of fracturing and apparent re-unification. The overdubbing technique creates vocal unity as a reflexive illusion. One voice – the same voice – displays itself as many voices sounding as one; original unity, subsequent rupture and attempted return to unity are simulated through a prism of technology. The rapid oscillation of fragmentation and re-unification, sounding simultaneously, results in a single idea of (cyborgian) voice as both trauma and unfulfillable desire. Yet the function of the cyborg as trauma is dislocated from the temporality of the human-centred model. It may itself be a trauma, but there is no clear sense of a pre- or post-traumatic time, no "pre-oedipal symbiosis" (Haraway, 1991, p. 150) from which to degenerate. How can this be seen to interact with pheno- and geno-process which depend not only on the trauma itself, but also on the spaces before and after? What the cyborg ultimately offers is an emptying-out of the human-centred model, as the removal of the temporal dimension results in the collapse of the constituent elements upon themselves. If the cyborgian voice is in itself a trauma, it also functions as a geno-process in that it constantly reminds us of trauma. Yet at the

heart of the construction of this particular cyborgian voice is pheno-song, since it is that which opens up space for the emergence of the cyborg figure in the Carpenters' work.

So, the cyborg voices of the Carpenters (and especially Karen) might be seen not only as a trauma, but also as a geno-process mediated through or achieved by pheno-processes, enacting an implosion of the traditional psychoanalytic framework. The cyborg(ian voice) can be further constructed as a geno-text through a comparison with Barthes's grain. Two central features of the grain to consider here are its description as 'the body in the voice as it sings', and its (perceived) function as noise outside of language/communication/message. The grain sits on the borderline between the 'natural' body and language, which is of culture. In an analogous structure, the cyborg represents a 'merger' of biology and technology. Anne Balsamo writes:

> this merger relies on a reconceptualisation of the human body as a boundary figure belonging simultaneously to at least two previously incompatible systems of meaning – 'the organic/natural' and 'the technological/cultural'.
>
> (1995, p. 215)

Thus, both cyborg and grain work to disrupt the putative boundaries between 'nature' and 'culture', and to expose their limits. In this complexity, the cyborg voice opens up a space for the reassessment of Barthes's texts of 'pleasure' and 'bliss' in terms of the fate of the subject who experiences both texts:

> the subject who keeps the two texts in his field and in his hands the reins of pleasure and bliss [...] simultaneously and contradictorily participates in the profound hedonism of all culture [...] and in the destruction of that culture: he enjoys the consistency of his selfhood (that is his pleasure) and seeks its loss (that is his bliss). He is a subject split twice over, doubly perverse.
>
> (1973, p. 98)

Since the cyborg reminds us that 'geno-' and 'pheno-' are not strictly polarised opposites, suggesting instead that one may be articulated through the other, Barthes's articulation of pleasure and bliss (which, as we have seen, compare by way of psychoanalytic models to pheno- geno-texts) may also thus be challenged: neither pleasure/consistency nor bliss/loss can be experienced in isolation, and the 'twice split subject' is therefore an inevitability.

A similar theme is picked up by Richard Dyer, who writes, "the movement between banality and something 'other' than banality is an essential dialectic of society, a constant keeping open of a gap between what is and what could or should

be" (1992a, p. 156). Although Dyer's specific context is of the role of disco music in the "work-leisure to-and-fro", with disco positioned as a mode of leisure (p. 156), senses of Barthes's 'pleasure', 'bliss', and the result of their simultaneity, permeate Dyer's statement, and we might liken 'banality' to 'pleasure' and 'something other than banality' to 'bliss'. As Dyer notes, the movement between these states is 'an essential dialectic of society', while for Barthes the result is a 'subject split twice over, doubly perverse'. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that Herbert Marcuse "argues that our society tries to close that gap, to assert that what is is all that there could be, is what should be" (Dyer, 1992a, p. 156). While transition between the banal and the 'non-banal' continues – while the subject keeps both pleasure and bliss in his field – he is 'doubly perverse', and a gap is maintained between 'what is and what could be'. Marcuse's argument indicates a defence within society against the gap, the perversion. 'Culture' would participate in the destruction of itself if it were to acknowledge that which is outside of itself, which is unassimilated. To maintain its own authority, it defends against the alternatives. Thus we see the re-emergence of the cyborg figure: indeed, the Carpenters' cyborg voices demonstrate both the perversion and the defence against it. The cyborg is positioned primarily with Dyer's domain of 'what could be', functioning as an imagined body. Yet in the case of the Carpenters, it also imitates the 'real' or 'human' body by simulating original unity. As we have seen, the Carpenters' music suppresses and controls the grain, while also acknowledging it, through the cyborg. In these cyborgian paradoxes we see how the Carpenters' cyborg voices not only keep open the gap between 'what is' (the human body) and 'what could be' (the cyborg) – thereby perpetuating the perversion – but also defends against perversion by simulation and attempted or illusory (re-) unification.

The Carpenters' work provides a forum in which anxieties surrounding what constitutes 'natural' and 'synthetic' are negotiated, and offers an example of the ways in which these are mediated in popular music discourses. The 'authentic', 'uncorrupted', 'natural' voice of Karen is played off against the 'synthetic', which is to be found in the highly overdubbed sections in which technology is highly audible. At the same time, markers of the 'natural', to be found in the individual vocal grains, are subsumed by technological practice. If the grain is indicative of the body, the treatment of the grain seems to interact with any consideration of the treatment of the

body, and thus the presences of voice and body are in many ways linked. However, in another sense, the presence of the body is obscured by the type of presence perceived in the voice. Lucy Green, in describing a continuum of intention to display in musical performance, argues that full intention to display cannot usually involve musical performance, since music dilutes the display through distraction (1997, pp. 21-4). The body of the singer is thus displaced: the singing body is delineated more as *singing* than simply as a *body*. Furthermore, when considering the treatment of the grain of the voice, it could be argued that any attempt to suppress or control the grain – such as that made by the Carpenters – suggests a further disappearance of the body: the less we can hear 'the body in the voice as it sings', the more the voice is, in a sense, 'disembodied'. This brings about a position whereby the suppression of the grain both absents the body and presents the voice, hyperbolically re-enacting what is at stake in any recording of the voice and refocusing attention on the object voice. In a pose similar to that adopted by Green, Peggy Phelan writes:

> In performance, the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of "presence." But in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability, the performer actually disappears and represents something else – dance, movement, sound, character, 'art.'
>
> (1993, p. 150)

This takes Green's argument one step further by implying that, in the disappearance of the body, the presence of the performer's very identity is challenged. This is an interesting position at which to arrive, given the traditional construction of the voice, identified by Wayne Koestenbaum, as a long-established signifier of 'self-knowledge, self-portrayal, presence', and as 'original and identity-bestowing' (as noted above). Thus, presence is at once established by the voice, and undermined by the body in its position as eclipsed by the function of the voice.

Phelan further argues that all the factors identified thus far – technology, body, and presence – are issues for consideration in relation to performance, and her construction of the ontology of performance suggests some interesting issues to be considered in the present context:

> Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance.
>
> Performance occurs over a time which will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as 'different.'
>
> (1993, p. 146. Her emphasis)

28

Phelan concludes that it is in the nature of the idea of performance to be irreproducible, and unrepeatable. We must therefore consider the question of reproduction, which is part of the idea of recording technology. This issue is inescapable in most analysis of popular music, in which the recording – a kind of reproduced performance – is so often the primary object of analysis. Yet, on another level, the reproduction of the voice as part of the strategic deployment of technology in the very act of music-making, in the form of overdubbing, also invites us to question the relationship between reproduction and performance.

The term 'reproduction' might more usefully be substituted in this case by the term 'replication', which Donna Haraway places in polarised opposition to the former term. Her choice of opposition is part of a "chart of transitions from the comfortable old hierarchical dominations to the scary new networks [she has] called the informatics of domination" (1991, p. 161). In her set of dichotomies, 'reproduction' is on the side of the 'old hierarchy' and 'replication' on the side of the 'new networks'. The term 'replication' is also generally more appropriate for overdubbing as a practice, since the original act of overdubbing would have involved the same singer re-recording the original line – trying to replicate it – rather than copying (reproducing) the original recording onto a second track. The very act of overdubbing would in this way stand in stark opposition to Phelan's description of performance. The attempt to replicate the already-sung is, by definition, an attempt to participate in the repetition of something which 'will not be repeated'. Even reproducing an already-recorded line by copying it onto another track would symbolise something incompatible with Phelan's notions of performance. Perhaps it is this kind of discourse which underpins common criticisms of the Carpenters' work, as 'dry' or un-dynamic because of its highly regulated and 'synthetic' (read, audibly technological) nature. Yet, working alongside this are the implications of the grain of the voice, which speaks so readily of the body – the 'natural', the 'uncorrupted', the 'spontaneous'.

1.4 Presence and absence in 'Superstar'

The relationship with technology, and the cyborgian effect of these two factors all come into play in a new way when looking at one particular song recorded by the pair: 'Superstar' (1971; Track 13). At the time of commencing this research, I believed the Carpenters to have been the first recorders of the song, and there to be only one cover version (by Sonic Youth in 1994), a misunderstanding that arguably evidences the centrality of the Carpenters' recording to the history of the song.[20] In fact, the issues at stake in the music of the Carpenters generally are brought to the foreground by the many other recordings of the song, which was neither written nor first recorded by the Carpenters, and has been recorded at least eight times since their release. While I try here to detach somewhat from what I perceive as a tendency to centralise the Carpenters' recording, the cultural perception of that recording as a significant part of 'Superstar''s history is also to be negotiated here. Given this tendency, and the focus in the present chapter on the Carpenters' work, I therefore employ that recording as a pivotal part of this chapter and the analysis herein. What I hope to draw out from the various recordings of 'Superstar', then, are different configurations of 'presence' and 'absence', ways and means through which these are constructed, and how conventionally defined notions of these concepts are played out and (re-)formulated. The senses of 'presence' and 'absence' as I use them here are mostly derived from performative senses of the words, in which there is most clearly what might be called 'spatial presence' – the perception of space and distance upon hearing a recording – and part of my analysis involves the spatial presence of the voice, as achieved through technological factors. Related to this is the grain of the voice, which can be taken as a marker of distance (both physical and, arguably, 'emotional'). We would expect to hear quite detailed movements of the vocal apparatus in the singing of someone who positions their mouth very close to the microphone, as Karen was known to do (Coleman, 1994, p. 125), and this is typically taken to be a marker of 'intimacy', a 'personal' listening experience, as well as being synonymous with a sense of the singer as 'present' (see Straw, 1999, pp. 201-2). The impossibility of singing entirely without grain means that it is worth considering the ways in which the grain makes its mark. In the music of the Carpenters, as we have seen, the relationship with the grain of the voice is quite knowing, and the grain is seen to be consciously manipulated.

As we have seen, the ways in which the Carpenters attempt to discipline the grain of the voice are essentially threefold: the alleged 'purity' of Karen's voice, supposedly devoid of geno-song 'imperfections' such as unintentional portamento; the overdubbing of the siblings' voices (either as individuals or as a duo); and the close harmonies, which are further overdubbed, having the effect of an almost total suppression of the grain. These features all have their own implications in terms of vocal and spatial presence. Karen's solo voice plays the role of the 'authentic' voice, and while certain 'imperfections' are written out by the vocabulary in which her voice is described, her physical proximity to the microphone does have its effect on the attentive listener, allowing one to hear many moments of grain. In overdubbing her voice, many of those moments are erased. At the same time, the double voice takes up more audio space (in the sense of hearing the voice very much in stereo, rather than a single, full-frontal voice). Yet it would be too formulaic to suggest that occupying more space implies a greater overall presence. The effect of these overdubbed moments is in fact just as much about blending Karen's voice in to the orchestral environment, as it seems to occupy a wide aural space, rather than being positioned at the very front of that space. This effect is enhanced when the tight and overdubbed harmonies are sung by both siblings. The synthetic choral effect achieved means that, for example, the unison 'waaah's at the end of 'Goodbye To Love', or 'Close To You', are essentially part of a lessening of musical interest, rather than a final vocal assault. On top of these vocal tactics to control the grain, it should be remembered that the voices themselves are always subject to the control of the producer (in this case, most often Richard Carpenter). Perfectly aware of his own ability to control the final result, Richard is also aware of the effect of supposed 'imperfections': "We get letters every now and again regarding certain sounds, especially on acoustic guitar moves, where there would be little squeaks sometimes from the fingers, and to me that's a natural sound. Some people don't like it at all, but we would leave it in" (Carpenter, 2004). But on the power of the breath, he writes:

> The breaths – as much as I could, I tried to leave in because, of course, they're natural. [On 'Goodbye To Love', the opening breath] is there on the multi-track, but we couldn't use it in the original mix as there was drumstick leakage from the count-off audible in Karen's headphones, so when we went to remix it in 1985 I put the breath in.

Thus, as I have argued above, such moments may represent moments of the grain breaking through the control imposed upon it, but because of the constructed-ness of these moments, they also perform an illusory grain, more regulated than it appears.

So, partly deriving from these conceptualisations of vocal and spatial presence, we can see that the role of technology also requires close examination, in several senses: first, in the construction of the voice and vocal quality; second, in the construction of aural space; third, as a factor apparently present when audible (or apparently absent when concealed); and finally, in its function as a mechanism of reproduction. As we have seen, technology clearly works in the music of the Carpenters to construct the ways in which we hear the voice, and Karen's in particular (as the vocal centre of their music). In a way, this seems to work to underline the idea of 'presence' in their work, in various senses. Technological considerations ensure the positioning of Karen's voice in the foreground of the aural space, when it is apparently unadulterated – not overdubbed, and not stripped of geno-factors such as breathing. On the role of technology in the recording of his sister's voice, Richard Carpenter writes: "she was born to be recorded. No manipulation". Even more than this, he argues, "Karen had the intimacy built right into the sound of her voice [...]", so that, for him, even her well-documented proximity to the microphone was not a factor in her sound: "It's not singing close to the mic. Singing close to the mic just made it sonically better" (2004). Technology here seems inaudible, and is written out of the journey of Karen's voice from studio to headphones, yet is very much present and functioning: it is not absent, it does not stop working, and it often works by actively not doing something (for example, removing a breath).

One of the first set of discourses to be negotiated in considering the recording history of 'Superstar' is that surrounding ideas of authorship.[21] As I have noted, the Carpenters were neither the composers of the song in its initial form, nor the first to record it. Interestingly, the composers – Leon Russell and Bonnie Bramlett – did both record the song, but on separate occasions, and Bramlett's recording came after the Carpenters had achieved widespread success with their single release. Russell's recording came in 1970, with him as bandleader and pianist, and with Rita Coolidge on vocals, on Joe Cocker's *Mad Dogs And Englishmen* (Track 14). Bramlett's was released in 1972 on *D & B Together*, and features Bramlett herself singing with her

and husband Delaney's band (Track 15). In between these recordings was a television performance of the song by Bette Midler, and it was that performance which inspired the Carpenters to record their version (Coleman, 1994, p. 105). Midler subsequently recorded the track for *The Divine Miss M*, released in 1972 (Track 16). By 1972, then, the song as conception – what Tagg terms 'music,' (2000, p. 82) – has already achieved a problematic status as something authored. The Carpenters' success with their version, surpassing the other three early recordings, is probably central to subsequent interpretations of the song. It is my contention that an interesting variation on 'authorial presence' emerges through post-Carpenters recordings of 'Superstar'. Post-Carpenters recordings have varying senses of the presence of the Carpenters – not Russell or Bramlett, the composers, but the musicians and producer responsible for one particular version.

A few key musical details mark the Carpenters' recording of 'Superstar' as different from the recording sung by Rita Coolidge and Bette Midler's performance of the song.[22] First, the introduction on the Carpenters' recording is quite distinctive. Whereas Bramlett's version cuts straight into the first verse, and the Cocker/Coolidge recording features a simple, undulating pattern played by Leon Russell, which seems to prioritise setting the tonal region, the Carpenters' version features eight bars of melodic introductory material which sets the mood as well as the tonality. Like Midler's recording, the Carpenters take the first three notes of the vocal line as a starting point, but whereas Midler's pianist then moves back to reiterate the resolution of the suspended supertonic (Figure 1.4), in Richard Carpenter's arrangement an oboist moves on through the next three notes of the vocal line (Figure 1.5). The oboe's line then sweeps downwards and pauses momentarily, before sustained chords played by horns lead into a descending bass guitar motif that immediately precedes the beginning of the first verse.

Figure 1.4
Introduction to Bette Midler's recording of 'Superstar

Figure 1.5
Introduction to the Carpenters' recording of 'Superstar'

The next crucial musical detail that helps determine the presence of the Carpenters' influence on post-Carpenters recordings of the song is a trumpet fill-in that appears in the choruses:

Figure 1.6
Fill-in in the Carpenters' recording of 'Superstar'

This fill-in recurs in several of the post-Carpenters recordings, and is a useful marker of the influence of that recording in the history of the song, since it does not appear prior to their recording.

This is far from an exhaustive list of the aspects that mark the Carpenters' recording of 'Superstar', but one other feature that I would like to draw attention to is the infusion of a sense of nostalgia into the song. The ways in which this is achieved

vary between recordings, and comes to the foreground more in some recordings than in others. It is my perception that Midler's performance was the first to inject this into the song (although, as mentioned, this is based on a presumption of similarity between her 1972 recording and her previous television performance). If this feature does reach back as far as the Midler performance, its reappearance in post-Carpenters recordings cannot be said entirely to be an indicator of the Carpenters' authorial presence. I would suggest, however, that references in any post-Carpenters recording to the other two factors – the introduction and the trumpet fill-in – means that any 'nostalgia' in the recording also arguably reveals the legacy of the Carpenters' interpretation (even if that in turn was influenced by Bette Midler's). The Midler recording reveals a sense of nostalgic longing primarily by way of orchestration and tempo. To start with an undulating solo piano, dancing around the tonic F minor, creates an intimate atmosphere from the start, recalling perhaps an informal nightclub setting. Midler's voice works with the piano in a slow *rubato* tempo, until the first chorus. At this point, drums and bass enter as orchestral support, and have the effect of tying the tempo in place. A harp glissando heralds the next verse, which is further supported by sweeping strings. Throughout this verse, Midler's vocal line is filled with sustained notes, for instance on the words "sad affair", "sleep with you again",[23] and "come again, come back and play". This is contrasted with an informal, semi-spoken, almost whispered "what can I say" in the middle of the verse, which has not only an air of intimacy to it, but brings to mind examples of moments in musicals,[24] which always seem to have a sense of the familiar, the already-known. The second chorus sees the introduction of a flute, but more significantly it begins in a much more upbeat tempo than before, with a more lilting rhythm emphasised by Midler's vocal patterns. Halfway through the verse, the mood shifts back again to the wistful feeling that opened the track. Remembering "[you called me] baby, baby, baby, oh baby", Midler's voice becomes filled with yearning as the music decreases in pace and volume to leave her voice almost hanging on each iteration of 'baby'. The waxing and waning of the tempo and orchestration throughout the track further add to the generic association with showtunes (which in turn associate with a particular style of popular song), creating moments of tension and release through obvious musical means.

The Carpenters' enactment of a kind of nostalgia is not quite as obvious as Midler's, or rather it is not so clearly connected with an idea of the song as already

well-known by the listener. Shifts in orchestration and dynamics appear at relevant moments in their recording, as indeed they do in almost all recordings of the song. Broadly speaking, in several versions there is a gradual crescendo towards the chorus, and a moment of suspense towards the end of the chorus. This is typically followed by a thicker texture in the second verse (which is still quieter than the loudest part of the preceding chorus), the maintenance of this texture throughout the next chorus, and a final climactic chorus to fade. The Carpenters are no different, and deploy texture and dynamics in generically appropriate ways. Yet in terms of the recording history of the song, the Carpenters and Bette Midler are the first to use these signifiers so obviously: the shifts are much less blatant in the Coolidge or Bramlett versions. Of course, these markers are particularly relevant to easy listening, to which much of Barry Manilow's music would testify, for example (see 'Mandy' (1975); 'Trying To Get The Feeling' (1976); and 'Even Now' (1978)). Neither Bramlett nor Coolidge (with Cocker and Russell) fall neatly – or even at all – into the 'easy listening' genre, and as such we should perhaps not expect to see similar uses of these signifiers. Nonetheless, the overall effect of the Carpenters' and Midler's treatment of these factors means that they do evoke all of the emotional ebbs and flows that are brought into being in that genre. Whether the markers had such a connotation prior to their repeated use in easy listening tunes, or whether they now connote yearning *because* of their generic associations is something of a moot point. Part of the emotional landscape is a nostalgic longing, and ultimately, the surges of emotion and longing are enacted through the tactical use of such factors as texture and dynamics. Karen's voice of course has its role to play, with her capacity for elongated phrases and the fact that we hear several crucial breaths throughout the song. The deliberate suspension of rhythm also contributes to the nostalgic effect. At the beginning of the second verse, each syllable of her first word – "Loneliness" – falls slightly behind the quaver beat on which it is expected. The syllable 'Lo' is suspended by elongating each of the constituent phonemes, and a similar tactic assists in the delaying of the next two syllables. This effect is mirrored by the introduction of backing vocals at the line "What to say to make you come again". Richard and Karen's overdubbed voices interject, "What to say", coinciding their 'What' with Karen's 'say', and thereby delaying the three words as a unit.

    It seems that most post-Carpenters recordings take at least two of these significant factors – the introduction, the trumpet fill-in, or the sense of nostalgia –

and deploy it in such a way as to invoke the lingering authorial presences of Karen and Richard. After the initial flurry of recordings in the early 70s, the next release was from Elkie Brooks (on *Pearls*, 1981). Rather than approach this comparative analysis in a strictly chronological fashion, however, I would like to take a more thematic approach and return to Brooks' version later. As we will see with reference to later recordings of the song, hers initially seems to differ from the Carpenters' version (and hence from the majority of post-Carpenters versions), and yet it turns out to be strikingly similar in several ways. For the purposes of clear reference over the next few paragraphs, the following is a list of other post-Carpenters recordings:

Year	Artist	Album
1993	Superfan	*Wayne's World 2* soundtrack[25]
1994	Sonic Youth	*If I Were A Carpenter*
2000	Dogstar	*Happy Endings*
2000	Pam Bricker	*U-Topia*
2003	Ruben Studdard	*Soulful*

In the introductory bars of Superfan's recording (Track 17), the reference to the Carpenters' recording is obvious. The oboe's melody is reassigned to a harmonica or similar instrument, and the horns' chords are sounded on an electric piano with a subtle vibrato setting that has supported the harmonica until that point. Other minor differences are palpable – the descending bass fill is absent, for example – but the overall melodic content is strikingly similar to the Carpenters' recording. The Carpenters' trumpet fill-in is also discarded by Superfan, but there is a cunning tactic which allows them to inject a sense of nostalgic narrative. Consisting of Urge Overkill with Chrissie Hynde, 'Superfan' was formed primarily for the purpose of recording this track. What the combination allows for is the strategic use of two vocalists: Hynde sings solo up until the first chorus, and they duet in the choruses. This instils the recording with a sense of a story, openly reclaiming the original concept behind the song, of a groupie singing to a superstar. (The song was originally called 'Groupie (Superstar)', a title that was changed early on in the song's history.) Significantly, it is only Chrissie Hynde that sings "I love you, I really do" at

the end of the chorus, further positioning her (character) as a devoted 'groupie' who has been jilted by a wayward star.[26] Although exposing the narrative also recalls the author-ity of Bramlett and Russell, another parallel effect of this in Superfan's recording is of the nostalgia conjured by Midler and the Carpenters. More specifically, I would argue that Midler invokes a sense of nostalgia *for the song*, constructing a sense of familiarity with the song as an object. By comparison, the Carpenters suggest more of a kind of *diegetic* nostalgia, in which the narrator yearns for the superstar at the heart of the song's narrative. It is this sense of narrative combined with yearning that characterises Superfan's recording of the song. The narrative is underlined in their recording by means of the spoken interlude in the middle of the song. Here, Chrissie Hynde('s character) asks for "Room 1218 please", only to find the occupant absent, and declines an offer to leave a message. Urge Overkill singer Nash Kato('s character) is then heard on a telephone – "This is room 1218" – but there are no messages. This dialogue quite clearly underlines one permutation of the narrative already written into the song, and more specifically points to the implication of a female groupie and a male superstar (that, of course, cultural assumptions would have us presume all along).

Despite a noticeably increased tempo, Dogstar's recording of the song in 2000 is again strikingly similar to the Carpenters' version, particularly in its use of the introductory material (see Track 18). Here, there are two significant differences: first, two bars of pre-intro are sounded on the drums; and second, the chords heard on the horns in the earlier recording are played in double-time by Dogstar.
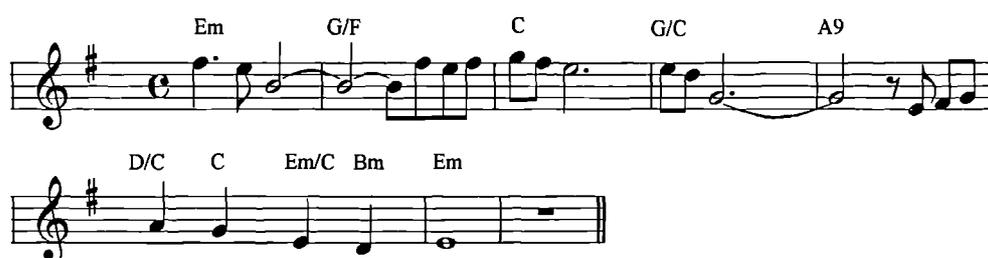
Figure 1.7
Introduction to Dogstar's recording of 'Superstar'

The trumpet fill-in is notably absent from the choruses, but the use of backing vocals in the Dogstar recording does recall the Carpenters' overdubbing. Dogstar are not obviously overdubbed in their choruses, and if they are then it is not on nearly the same scale as that employed by the Carpenters. Yet the harmonies used by the all-

male band are reminiscent of those used in the earlier recording.[27] Apart from the few differences already noted, the obvious and crucial difference is one of genre, since Dogstar are a guitar-based rock band. This clearly accounts for many of the differences in musical detail between the two recordings, such as the choice of instruments, but essentially Dogstar's version comes across as a rendition of the song in a different genre, with the Carpenters recording as a clear starting point (as denoted primarily by the introduction).

The recording of 'Superstar' by Sonic Youth (Track 19), for the tribute album *If I Were A Carpenter*, is also highly referential to the Carpenters' recording, and this is in a sense to be expected because of the nature of the album as a project. Equally, the song's appearance on this album makes quite clear the Carpenters' centrality in the recording history of the song, something which I am arguing can already be garnered from the subsequent recordings.[28] Yet the ways in which singer Thurston Moore and his fellow band members treat the song and the key reference points therein establish a relationship with the earlier recording that is very different from that set up by Dogstar. Like Superfan and Dogstar, Sonic Youth open their recording with the melody penned by Richard Carpenter. The tempo and mood set are very similar during the opening bars, but several crucial differences occur that also imply to the knowing listener that an unusual relationship will unfold between this recording and its reference point. First, before the introduction even commences in the Sonic Youth recording, we hear the distant sound of drums and an acoustic guitar strumming an chord whose tonality is obscured: F, definitely, but whether it is major or minor is unclear because its appearance is so short, being played only twice in the background, and the third tone is either absent or too quiet to hear. This is interrupted by a noise suggesting the movement of an electric guitar or microphone while it is plugged in (or perhaps the act of plugging it in), and then several seconds of amplifier distortion. As the band enters to commence the introduction proper, Moore heralds the song's opening with a loud exhalation. While melodically, a steel-stringed acoustic guitar simply replaces the Carpenters' oboist, there are other musical gestures from the earlier introduction that are treated very differently in the later recording. For instance, Sonic Youth's bass player Kim Gordon takes up the line instituted by the Carpenters' bassist – a simple line descending in step from F to B♭ with a dotted rhythm: ♩. ♪♩. Yet at the point when the earlier recording makes use

of a descending bass motif to lead into the verse, Gordon repeats an upwards motif. In fact, it sounds as if three notes from the original motif have actually been sampled and reversed. Similarly, the horn chords from the Carpenters recording have almost certainly undergone the same treatment, although the slow attack on the original means that the reversal is more subtle than with the bass motif. A hi-hat – used in both recordings to keep time during the bars of sustained horns – is also reversed, and it interrupts the 'normal' hi-hat sound during the two bars immediately preceding the first verse. Finally, and crucially, the F minor chord at the end of the Carpenters' introduction, reasserting the tonic, is rejected by Sonic Youth in favour of F major. (Could this also, in a sense, be a kind of inversion?) In addition, Moore's exhalation can also be seen as a form of reversal, if we consider the significance of Karen Carpenter's inhalations (as I have discussed above in relation to 'Goodbye To Love'). Ultimately, the reversal of several features that had distinguished the Carpenters' introduction – perhaps even without our knowing it, in the case of the hi-hat – signifies an ambivalent relationship with the recording which Sonic Youth appear to be taking as inspiration.

Throughout the rest of Sonic Youth's recording, a further sense of ambivalence towards the Carpenters' recording is set up at key moments. Karen's supposedly 'intimate' vocals, which were so central to the construction of the 'presence' of her voice, are caricatured throughout: one review describes Moore's "deadpan, microphone-practically-in-my-mouth vocals" (Wittmershaus, 2002). Ironically, as Kevin Holm-Hudson notes, Karen's proximity to the recording equipment was not a particular feature of her vocal work for 'Superstar', as the recording made use of her first take, one "originally intended as a 'scratch' or 'guide' vocal" (2002, parag. 26). Yet the idea of her vocal intimacy (established through this proximity) persists, because in so much of the Carpenters' work her voice is to be understood in this way. Moore's extreme proximity to the microphone affords his vocals a distorted sound, as the grain of his voice is made explicit. Such distortion is also used by Sonic Youth to taint other central aspects of the Carpenters' recording. For example, the trumpet fill-in which distinguished their release is taken on by Sonic Youth, on the piano, but a distorted and overdriven guitar overwhelms the melody with sheer noise. Generally, the verses in Sonic Youth's recording see very little reverb on any of the instruments used, and this gives a dry, lugubrious sense to the recording which stands in stark contrast to the lush, smooth production which

distinguishes Richard Carpenter's style. In this way, it is not just Moore's vocals which "transform a sentimental, syrupy pop song into an obsessed, quasi-insane, rocking-back-and-forth-in-front-of-the-stereo symphony of musical pathos" (Wittmershaus, 2002). The aural graffiti found in Sonic Youth's recording has the effect of forcing their technology upon the listener, and this is a relationship with technology very different from that played out in the Carpenters' version. Where the Carpenters would use technology to construct a smooth, constrained atmosphere, in which technology's function is almost to exscribe its own presence, Sonic Youth gleefully plaster it all over key elements of the earlier recording, twisting and disfiguring it in the process.

Reference to the Carpenters' recording is negotiated quite differently in Elkie Brooks' 1981 recording (Track 20). In certain superficial ways, Brooks' recording appears to be quite different from the Carpenters'. Hers stands out from other post-Carpenters recordings by reclaiming some of the original lyrics, singing of a desire to 'sleep with', rather than 'be with', the absent star. The change was made by the Carpenters in line with their 'wholesome' philosophies (Coleman, 1994, p. 105), and Brooks returns to the original lyric.[29] To be comparative, Brooks' introduction most closely resembles that on the Cocker/Coolidge recording, with a piano undulating between the tonic chord and one with a suspended supertonic, although Brooks' recording is slower and the piano more legato than in the introduction to the first recording. Brooks has a sense of both Coolidge and Karen Carpenter to her voice, although the slightly gritty timbral moments and the frequency of her vibrato resemble more closely Coolidge's vocals. Despite these moments of reference – even if they are unconscious – to the Coolidge/Cocker recording, Brooks' recording features one highly conspicuous reference to the Carpenters' version. With minimal differences in melody and rhythm, the trumpet fill-in scored by Richard Carpenter is taken up by the pianist of Brooks' recording (see Figure 1.8).

Figure 1.8
Fill-in in Elkie Brooks' recording of 'Superstar'

This ultimately culminates in a kind of parody of the Carpenters' recording through the treatment of the motif. At first distinctly similar to the Carpenters' trumpet motif,

but set as a background element, by the last chorus Brooks' track foregrounds the theme through heavy homophonic orchestration, with the rhythm emphasised by the drums (3'05"-3'07").

In the same year as the highly referential Dogstar recording, jazz singer Pam Bricker also recorded the song as part of a project to capture the "freshness and spontaneity of a live performance without the annoying background noise of cash registers and talking" (Liner notes, *U-Topia* (2000)). An improvisatory mood pervades Bricker's recording, vocally and instrumentally (see Track 21). Minimal orchestration is deployed: Bricker's voice is supported by piano, plucked double bass and brushed snare and hi-hat, and this instrumental set-up is obviously crucial to the smooth jazz feel on the recording. The genre is indulged in, with nearly two minutes of piano improvisation after the first chorus, and a very improvisatory feel towards the end of the track that extends into the vocals and drums. This recording is quite unusual in that, if a comparative approach is to be adopted, it resembles most closely Bette Midler's recording. That is to say, Bricker and her band seem to bring about a sense of nostalgia for the song, as I have argued Midler's recording does, rather than a sense of longing for the star, which seems to characterise the Carpenters' recording and, I believe, Elkie Brooks' also. Bricker's recording achieves this kind of nostalgia not primarily through changes in texture or tempo, both of which are mostly static on the Bricker track, but through the extreme improvisation which occurs. What this seems to achieve is the idea of the song as an object, a text for interpretation and reconstruction, rather than as a supposedly 'genuine' medium of personal expression. This is also implicit in the project which Bricker describes in the liner notes, since the album is designed to be about performance, the act of rendering a song.

Ruben Studdard's recording from 2003 (Track 22) extends further this relationship with the song as an object. The first factor of difference to overcome between Studdard's recording and the Carpenters' is that of the singer's sex. The vast majority of previous interpreters of the song have served to set up a female groupie/male star relationship, with Sonic Youth's version as a notable exception. Holm-Hudson argues that the change of the singer's sex in the Sonic Youth recording already "invites an altogether more serious interpretation – that this 'groupie' may in fact be a pathological fan" (2002, parag. 45). He goes on to justify the 'sinister interpretation', although it is significant that a crucial piece of evidence is found in the lyrics' articulation of the desire to 'be with' (not 'sleep with) the star,

a change which Holm-Hudson argues "allows for a more vicarious interpretation" (parag. 42). This change allows for the possibility that any affair may not actually have happened, and that the song is more about a fantasy than a recollection. This in turn suggests that the Carpenters' decision to make that change is something of a precursor to the psycho-fan narrative that Holm-Hudson perceives in the Sonic Youth recording. That this change in the lyrics was brought about by the Carpenters suggests that their authorial influence is perceptible even in this 'sinister' feel, which Holm-Hudson implies is entirely a Sonic Youth construct. Moreover, Holm-Hudson in fact offers little justification for the sex of the singer being a factor in such an interpretation. To an extent, I agree with his statement that "'Groupies' are not generally male", although I would suggest that they are more precisely not *considered* or *presumed* to be male. Yet he goes on to read Moore's performance as enacting a "vicarious identification with the distant rock-star object", whose sex Holm-Hudson does not seem to question: he implies that the absent star is male, because of the 60s/70s rock guitarist implications in the song's lyrics, and it seems that for him this must mean an identification with the star, rather than a sexual objectification. I am not suggesting that the song must be afforded a heterosexual narrative, but it is notable that Holm-Hudson seems to ignore any potential for a sexual reading of a male interpretation of the song, describing the narrator in this version as "a pathological fan" (2002, parag. 45). In his formulation, it seems that Moore cannot possibly be singing of sexual desire for an absent star (of either sex).

To extrapolate these points, the 'sinister interpretation' apparently invited by Moore's male sex cannot be presumed of Studdard's recording.[30] If we are to take the song (as recorded by Studdard) as an 'authentic' expression of any kind of emotion, it would be more in the manner of the female 'groupies' who had previously recorded it. More significantly, as his recording enacts a form of nostalgia for the song, and given the predominantly female history of the song's performance, he seems ultimately to enact nostalgia for a 'female' song. At the very least, in this respect, Studdard's recording adopts a position more similar to Midler's or Brooks', for instance, than to Sonic Youth's. In this version, a sense of nostalgia is set up in the first instance by an expansive, symphonic orchestration. Some unusual harmonic shifts combine with a free sense of time in the introduction to establish a dramatic, perhaps even cinematic, atmosphere. Although melodically and harmonically Studdard's introduction soon deviates from the Carpenters', it does unfold from the

opening notes of the vocal line, as did Midler's and the Carpenters'. Moreover, the classical orchestration also harks back to Richard Carpenter's arrangement. As Holm-Hudson argues, the Carpenters' introduction is filled with musical details which denote "'serious' music of a melancholy character", and these include the choice of orchestration (2002, parag. 38). In Studdard's version, similar tactics are deployed. Sweeping strings and harp arpeggios serve to reference particular styles of Romantic music, while major seventh chords also introduce a sense of an impending blues love song. Studdard's melismas – markers of the contemporary RnB genre in which he performs – have a tendency to emphasise the semitonal relation between the dominant and submediant tones in the minor key (E minor, in this case), and this further adds to a sense of 'melancholy', while also underlining the tonic-dominant relation that is at the centre of much Western art music. The melismas themselves arguably achieve a sense of the song's history, as the listener may be presumed to know the core melodic features so well that multiple melodic embellishments do not obscure the listener's sense of the song overall. Such radical melismatic interventions as Studdard's – as much as they are a marker of the genre – can, after a point, only be 'allowed' on the basis of a presumed familiarity with the song on the part of the listener. In a sense, then, the combination of nostalgia for the song, and some of the ways in which this is achieved, makes this one of the most interesting performances, since it arguably demonstrates a specific nostalgia for *the Carpenters' recording of the song*. This may well be a by-product of what is overall an earnest attempt at a 'genuine' and 'personal' performance. However, it might equally be proposed that the markers of the 'genuine' and 'personal' – the melismas or the *rubato*, for instance – also refer back to the ideology of Carpenters' recording, since that is also to be understood as a 'genuine' performance, with diegetic nostalgia inscribed therein. Thus, the 'genuine' in Studdard's version may well point to a certain characterisation of Karen Carpenter's voice, just as the orchestration references Richard's part in the Carpenters' recording.

The ways in which the idea of 'presence' works in 'Superstar' and the Carpenters' work generally are manifold. We have seen how, at the elemental point of contact between singer and listener, the voice functions in terms of presence, in particular through the idea of the grain of the voice. In the work of the Carpenters, this vocal presence is in a constant state of fluctuation between the explicitly manipulated vocality achieved through intense overdubbing and concentrated

harmonies (which seems to weaken the presence of individual geno-songs), and Karen's apparently unprocessed, 'natural' voice (which suggests a kind of presence in the *accessibility* of the grain). This latter position is considerably destabilised by the exposure of Karen's allegedly 'natural' voice as distinctly performative, and on many occasions highly constructed through technology. Further to vocal 'presence', we have also seen the influence of technology, which on one level interacts with vocality to produce some of the effects I have just noted. On another level, technology is a 'present' factor in itself, and the level of audibility of this factor affects the way in which we perceive vocal 'presence'. The most obvious comparison to be made is between the Carpenters' recording and Sonic Youth's: the earlier recording uses technology to exscribe itself, whereas the later recording uses technology as a strategy by which to achieve an intensely ambivalent relationship with what is one of the seminal recordings of the song. Beyond these senses of 'presence', what emerges from a comparative analysis of the various recordings of 'Superstar' is that the Carpenters' recording is a pivotal point in the song's history. Pre-Carpenters versions are apparently more independent from each other than post-Carpenters recordings, which display a marked tendency to refer to the Carpenters' recording lyrically, melodically, and thematically, thus ensuring a sense of referential presence. On closer examination, some of the ways in which references to the Carpenters' version are made produce a sense of parody – for instance in Brooks' orchestration, or Thurston Moore's vocals. These later versions in themselves will surely feed back into the history of 'Superstar' and, I would suggest, ensure a continuing perception of the Carpenters' version as a central point of reference.

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[1] Re-released as *Ticket To Ride*.

[2] This term is, of course, extremely problematic and raises several important issues, some of which will be explored later.

[3] A few examples of which I am thinking are, 'I Kept On Loving You' (*Close To You* (1970)), 'Saturday' and 'Druscilla Penny' (*Carpenters* (1971)), 'Piano Picker' (*A Song For You* (1972)), 'Fun, Fun, Fun' and 'Deadman's Curve' (*Now And Then* (1973)). Richard's voice also plays a particularly prominent part in 'Crystal Lullaby' (*A Song For You*) and 'Love Is Surrender' (*Close To You*).

[4] It should be noted that Barthes does seem to imply the possibility of a voice without grain, as he accuses singer Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau of being devoid of grain (1990, p. 297), and makes a similar statement regarding some popular vocalists (p. 299). It seems to me, however, that by definition this is an impossibility. Certainly, there may be more or less obvious examples of the grain, but if it is indeed "the body in the voice as it sings", does not every body impact upon the voice in that way?

[5] One recent example of this trope in popular culture is the film *Charlie's Angels* (dir. McG, 2000). The main plot involves an attempt to recover a piece of stolen voice-recognition software that offers the ability to determine any individual's specific location, globally, by satellite. The fictional software works on the basis that no two voices are exactly alike.

[6] See Lacan, 1989, for his development of the Graph. See Evans, 1996, for explanations of the Graph and the terms used.

[7] The dialectical relationship between different voices and their 'natural-ness' or 'constructed-ness' will be explored from a different angle in Chapter Two in relation to Madonna.

[8] See Nead, 1988, pp. 6-7, on female sexuality in Victorian England. The connection with the Carpenters is quite appropriate, given the utterly 'wholesome' image they sustained, however unwillingly (see Coleman, 1994, p. 142).

[9] The Carpenters did not entirely avoid the idea of a 'concept' album. *Offering* is framed by two short tracks, 'Invocation' and 'Benediction', which seem to give the album an overall sense of beginning and end, in the manner of a concept album. *A Song For You* closes with a reprise of the opening (title) track emerging from somewhere in the aural distance. Also on that album appears the track 'Intermission', which serves as exactly that. *Now And Then* is held together by the idea of a radio show playing 'golden oldies', and individual tracks are introduced by a 'DJ'. Despite these underlying 'concepts', the overall aesthetic behind the Carpenters' work is not similar to the concept album in its more widely accepted sense (advocated by Pink Floyd et al.). On *Now And Then*, arguably the most 'conceptual', the majority of tracks are covers of songs by artists such as the Beach Boys, Shelley Fabares, and The Crystals, ensuring a sense of nostalgia rather than experimentation.

[10] Unsurprisingly, several other recordings of the song (by Bacharach, David, and Williams) exist. Artists include (but are by no means limited to): Cilla Black (1965); Smith (1969); and Elvis Costello (1995).

[11] The Carpenters perform the song at ♩ = 80 bpm; the Shirelles' recording is at ♩ = 114 bpm; the Beatles' is a similar tempo, at ♩ = 116 bpm. Smith's is slower, at ♩ = 96 bpm, but this is part of a rock/blues take on the track, rather than the transformation into a melancholy ballad which the Carpenters bring about.

[12] In Tagg's semiotic terminology (2000), the two Beach Boys tracks I have cited here might be termed part of a bank of IOCM – Interobjective Comparison Material – generated from the IMCs (Items of Musical Code) of close harmony, overdubbing technology, and tempo ('In My Room' plays at approximately ♩ = 70 bpm, and 'You Still Believe In Me' at approximately ♩ = 90 bpm).

[13] *Live At The Palladium* (1976) is a good demonstration of how live backing vocals are substituted for famous overdubbed sections. Track eight on that record, a medley of ten of their most famous tunes reveals this especially well.

[14] On a biographical note, Karen's ultimately fatal anorexia nervosa demands to be mentioned here. Psychological explanations are manifold, and include the possibility that the sufferer may be trying to exercise some control in their lives (see George, 1997).

[15] I use the term 'geno-space' (and, conversely, 'pheno-space') in one sense to suggest a space in which geno- (or pheno-) processes are played out. Also, the terms seem a useful way of implying the audio-spatial functions generated by the geno-/pheno-processes 'themselves'. I use the terms 'geno-processes' and 'pheno-processes' with the intention of denoting a broader range of functions than either Kristeva's 'texts' or Barthes's 'songs', both of which are specific to their respective objects of study. The idea of 'process', for me, suggests an action in the mode of 'geno' or 'pheno', in the Kristevan or Barthesian senses, but without particularising the broad ideas of 'geno' and 'pheno'.

[16] It may be worth noting that the Beach Boys, a particular influence on Richard, were also made up of siblings, Brian, Carl and Dennis Wilson (and a cousin, Mike Love).

[17] 'Scotomization, from 'scotoma': "a blind spot" (*Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*). The context given is medical – "due to disease of the retina or optic nerve" – but Freud's transposition of the term is clear and valid.

[18] The same harmonic progression features in each chorus, and a similar melodic contour exists. Interestingly, the melody of the first chorus closes on a falling semitone from the subdominant to the mediant. The second and subsequent choruses utilise the Carpenters' characteristic overdubbed choral style which simultaneously emphasise other notes of the tonic chord, most obviously the dominant. Both instances leave an 'open' tonic.

[19] Of course, within the realm of 'popular music', different genres make use of differently 'visible' technologies. For example, dance musics such as disco or house have historically used technologies in highly visible ways, whereas artists from the singer-songwriter tradition have often used lower visibility technologies. For the purposes of the present argument, suffice it to say that popular music as a 'whole' (if such an idea may be permitted) uses technology in more visible ways than western art music has historically done.

[20] The firm association between the Carpenters and 'Superstar' may also have inspired the title of the (withdrawn) film *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (dir. Haynes, 1987).

[21] It should be noted that I am primarily considering the song's recording history, rather than its performance history. This decision was taken mainly for practical reasons, since unrecorded performances are, by definition, hard to track down.

[22] I have used the recorded version as my primary point of reference rather than the television performance. The full performance including video is no longer available, but I have located an audio recording of the performance and can confirm that it is similar enough to the album version to use the recording as a point of reference. I have chosen to use the album recording as the television audio track is of low quality.

[23] As will be discussed later, this line was changed by the Carpenters to "be with you again".

[24] I am thinking in particular of the line "Have I said too much?" towards the end of 'Don't Cry For Me Argentina' from *Evita* (see recordings by Madonna (1996) and Elaine Paige (1978)).

[25] This recording also appears on the Pretenders' *Fifteen Hard-Ons A Day* (1994). The group's name is surely a device to implicitly reconfigure the relationship between the song's narrator (or, in this case, narrators) and the 'superstar'. The details of this relationship will be considered later in the chapter. Film directed by Stephen Surjik, 1993.

[26] As a point of equal interest, it is Kato who sings of Hynde playing a 'sad guitar', making the narrative roles quite confused.

[27] Perhaps this is not too surprising, since the use of thirds is a fairly obvious device. However, the fact that Dogstar choose to use them at all is of note.

[28] 'Superstar' is just one example on the album of a song not first performed by the Carpenters, but most associated with the Carpenters. Other examples featured on the album include: 'Calling Occupants of Interplanetary Craft' (first released by Canadian group KLAATU on *3:47 EST*, also known as *KLAATU* (1976)); 'We've Only Just Begun' (originally sung by Paul Williams for a television commercial); or '(They Long To Be) Close To You' (first recorded by Richard Chamberlain in 1963).

[29] Since we are considering Brooks' recording in hindsight, it is notable that all other post-Carpenters recordings of the song also take on the Carpenters' change to the lyrics, however else they may distance themselves from that recording.

[30] One other performance of the song which I have come across, sung by a male vocalist, quite explicitly positions the absent star as 'loved'. Mark Everett ('E') of the Eels performed the song on KCRW radio (26 October 1996), and he prefaces the song with the statement: "This poem's about a rock star that I fell in love with". Here, the song is made to be about an absent star *and* a star singing the song, perhaps removing some of the passivity normally associated with the 'groupie' position. Nonetheless, it is an example of how the song can be sung by a man *and* with a romantic sentiment.

CHAPTER TWO

MADONNA

2.1 Queer subjects

The music of the Carpenters invites us to consider the musical negotiation of fragmentation and reunification, but it is on a visual level that Madonna raises the most obvious questions about the same issues: her repeated changes of style are undoubtedly the aspect of her career for which she has become most famous, and ensure that she is always a fragmented image. As Newitz argues, this extends far beyond her output of culturally consumed artefacts such as songs, videos, or stage performances:

> Madonna is not a musician. Certainly, she achieved fame within the music industry, but perhaps it might be more accurate to say that she only began to be famous within the music industry. For what Madonna has given to American culture, and culture throughout the world, is not a collection of songs; rather, it is a collection of images.
>
> (1993)

This is not to propose that her continued success is instead due solely to her video clips or photo shoots, for instance, or any of her other forms of creative output. Rather, it is to suggest that she has become more famous for *being Madonna* than for any of the musical work she generates in that role. This is evidenced in part by the intensity and persistence of popular and academic analysis of the possible meanings to be found in the images she presents, and in the personae she constructs. Both the sustained popular fascination with her and the level of scholarly interest in her work are founded in part upon the relentless challenges her work appears to make to hegemonic understandings of identity and dominant aspects of society, including the music industry within which she first found fame.

One of the challenging positions Madonna most notably revisits is found in her relationship with the idea of the 'queer', in its sexual sense. Throughout her transformations she has repeatedly made use of images associated with lesbian and gay male (sub-)cultures,[1] or aligned herself with images associable with those groups if considered alongside particular (sub-)cultural conventions. To expand, the images and personae she has deployed that have been argued as relevant to these (sub-)cultural groups are not always direct forms of appropriation. In many instances, the association made between Madonna and queer culture might more usefully be considered in terms of a 'discursive constellation' (after Foucault, 1974). That is to say, the connections can be made given a certain analytical framework, from a particular perspective, but they are neither absolute nor indisputable. Specifically, as

Richard Dyer notes: "Audiences cannot make media images mean anything they want to, but they can select from the complexity of the image the meanings and feelings, the variations, inflections and contradictions, that work for them" (1986, p. 5). Such correlations have most often been analysed in terms of Madonna's relationship with a gay male audience (see Curry, 1990; Henderson, 1993; Robertson, 1996), and it is worth starting by reviewing those creative themes in her work which have been argued as relevant to that particular (sub-)cultural group.

Retro-camp

One significant theme throughout Madonna's transformations has been her engagement with a certain kind of nostalgic camp. This first manifested itself in her resemblance to Marilyn Monroe in the mid-80s, during which time she lifted images directly from Monroe's performance of 'Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend' (from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (dir. Hawks, 1953)) in the video for 'Material Girl' (dir. Lambert, 1985), drawing explicitly from one famous homage to materialism to create her own modern anthem.
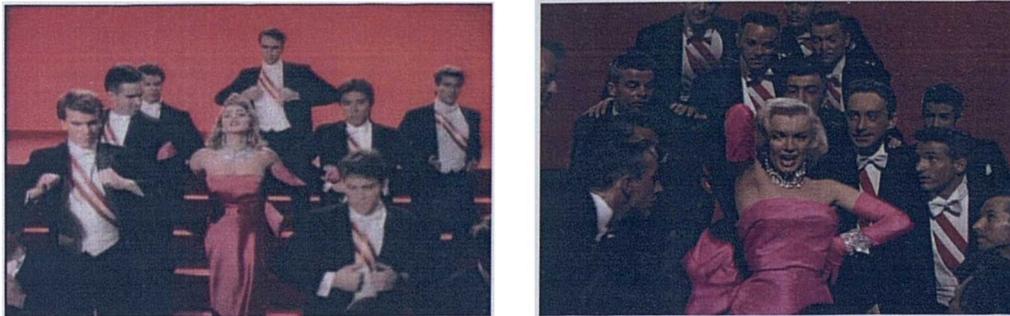
Figure 2.1
Madonna (left) and Marilyn (right) as material girls

In addition, Madonna has posed for a number of photographs in which she imitated several of Monroe's most famous images (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2
Comparisons between Madonna's images (left) and Monroe's originals (right)

Monroe's significance for Madonna's audience surely lay in her multiple cultural functions. Although the qualities of the 'ideal' pin-up have undoubtedly shifted over the decades, Monroe arguably still represents the archetypal objectified woman, 'to-be-looked-at' (to borrow a term from Mulvey, 1992), and it was on this basis that her success was founded: as Thomas Harris noted contemporaneously, "the film makers, with publicity support [...] accomplished [...] the establishment of Marilyn Monroe as the ideal 'playmate'. It was the playmate image which [...] skyrocketed her to an almost allegoric position as the symbolic object of illicit male sexual desire" (1991,

p. 42).[2] At the same time, Monroe has become established as a standard drag figure on both sides of the Atlantic (Cohen, 1998, p. 281).

The Monroe references were still noticeable at the time of the *True Blue* album (1986), on the cover of the album and in the video for the title track (dir. Foley, 1986), but they soon gave way to other classic Hollywood icons. In 1990, as Breathless Mahoney in the film *Dick Tracy* (dir. Beatty), Madonna arguably invoked the figure of Mae West, and the visual similarities might easily be detected by a knowing eye. Also in 1990 came 'Vogue',[3] the video for which (dir. Fincher) situated the dance practice of voguing – emergent in the Harlem balls in the 1930s and 40s and still popular in contemporary African-American and Latino gay dance cultures – in a 1940s-style black-and-white montage redolent of classic Hollywood cinema, an allusion made more obvious by Madonna's spoken lyrics:

> Greta Garbo and Monroe,
> Dietrich and DiMaggio.
> Marlon Brando, Jimmy Dean,
> On the cover of a magazine.
> Grace Kelly, Harlow, Jean
> Picture of a beauty queen.
> Jean Kelly, Fred Astaire
> Ginger Rogers, dance on air
> They had style, they had grace
> Rita Hayworth gave good face
> Lauren, Catherine, Lana too
> Bette Davis, we love you.
> Ladies with an attitude,
> Fellas that were 'In The Mood' ...

As early as 1986, in the video for 'Open Your Heart' (dir. Mondino), Madonna's work had made visual reference to Weimar Germany, a theme that Ramona Curry identifies as persistent (1990, p. 19 and p. 21).[4] In 1993, a more specific reference was made, fusing that theme with Hollywood cinematic icons. In *The Girlie Show* tour (1993), during a performance of an early hit, Madonna sang 'Like A W/Virgin' in an overplayed German accent, wearing top hat and tails, and playing (more than) suggestively with a walking cane. A $\frac{3}{4}$ time-signature and a circus-like orchestration underpinned by a barrel-organ together clearly located the performance in a Berlin-cabaret-type context. The reference to Dietrich became indisputable by the end of the song, when Madonna segued into the first verse of 'Falling in Love Again', which Dietrich famously performed in *Der Blaue Engel* (dir. von Sternberg, 1930) as 'Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss (auf Liebe eingestellt)'.

Significantly, the tuxedo is worn by Madonna with full-length trousers, as opposed to the feminising stockings characteristic of Hollywood chorus girls.[5] The sequence of signifiers from Madonna's performance to Dietrich's film(s) hints at a convoluted process of queering here. In *Morocco* (dir. von Sternberg, 1930), Dietrich wears a male-style tuxedo in a scene where she kisses a woman. Yet in *Der Blaue Engel*, Dietrich wears a top hat and stockings (see Figure 2.3), a further adaptation of the fem-tux trope, in precisely the scene where she sings 'Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss'.

Figure 2.3
Marlene Dietrich singing 'Ich Bin von Kopf bis Fuss' in Der Blaue Engel[6]

Singing her 'theme song', Dietrich's character straddles a chair in a way that is later found in both Liza Minnelli's performance of 'Auf Wiedersehen mein Herr' in *Cabaret* (dir. Fosse, 1972) and, by association, the video for Madonna's 'Open Your Heart' (dir. Mondino, 1986). Whilst singing the reprise, Dietrich wears "what contemporary audiences could recognise as a hat traditionally worn by itinerant (male) cabinet-makers" (Prawer, 2002, p. 53), thus reinscribing the music as referent to playful gendered codes. Thus, her invocation both of Dietrich-as-context and of these particular scenes in one of Dietrich's films makes Madonna's appropriation (however brief) of 'Falling In Love' even more meaningful, confusing her own gendered representations.

Retro-camp references in Madonna's work enjoyed a less privileged position from the mid-90s onwards, but the theme re-emerged with the ruby slipper seen in the CD artwork for *Music* (2000), blatantly referencing Dorothy's magic shoes in *The Wizard Of Oz* (dir. Fleming, 1939). In addition, Dietrich was once more invoked

in 2002 in Madonna's photo spread for *Vanity Fair*, entitled 'Madonna Marlene' (Daly, 2002).

Figure 2.4
Photos from 'Madonna Marlene'

It is significant that Madonna has repeatedly capitalised on figures from the classic Hollywood era who have been commonly utilised in formation of a homosocial bond between gay male audiences.[7] Eve Sedgwick (1985) describes how the exchange of women serves to form *homosocial* bonds between heterosexual men, while also assuaging fears of *homosexuality*. Stephen Maddison (2000) recasts this model, arguing that heterosexual women facilitate the construction of heterosocial bonds in a homosexual culture, as the women are not exchanged, as in Sedgwick's model, but engaged with instead. In the case of female protagonists of classic Hollywood films, they are both identified with and exchanged as cultural capital: "like many gay men, I ardently identify with women characters" (Dyer, 1993, p. 12). Significantly, since the star herself is always absent, she cannot be party to the heterosocial bond of Maddison's model. Her function instead more resembles that of Sedgwick's exchanged woman, thus bringing about the formation of homosocial bonds between gay male audience members. Certain key Hollywood icons are often cited in discussions relating to gay (sub-)culture and cinema, positioning them as central figures in the relationship. These figures include (but are not limited to) Mae West, Marilyn Monroe, Marlene Dietrich, and Judy Garland,[8] whose death is commonly understood to have been a catalyst to the Stonewall riots of 1969 (see Maddison, 2000, p. 1 and pp. 4-5), and whose character wore the ruby slippers cited on Madonna's *Music* artwork. As noted, each of these women has been referenced, sometimes to the point of appropriation, by Madonna at some point in her career:

Monroe/*True Blue*; West/Breathless Mahoney; Dietrich/'Like A W/Virgin'; Garland/*Music*. A knowing audience will recognise these references, as the co-incidences are not always dismissible as mere coincidences.

Susan Sontag (1999) describes how nostalgia and retrospection have significant parts to play in her understanding of Camp. It is important to note at this point that while Camp may not be exclusively a gay male *modus operandi*, Richard Dyer has (re-)claimed Camp as a "core element of gay male subculture" (Kleinhans, 1994, p. 186). Dyer writes: "It is just about the only style, language and culture that is distinctively and unambiguously gay male. [...] Camp is the one thing that expresses and confirms being a gay man" (1999, p. 110), and he describes straight camp as an 'adoption' of the style by straights, thus implicitly distinguishing it as gay-owned (p. 115). Although Sontag's understanding of Camp tends to gloss over the problematics of the gayness (or otherwise) of the aesthetic, there is a broad popular tendency to equate Camp with gay men and thus her comments on it might usefully be applied to the present study. Sontag writes:

> Time may enhance what seems simply dogged or lacking in fantasy now because we are too close to it [...]. This is why so many of the objects prized by Camp taste are old-fashioned, out-of-date, *démodé*. It's not a love of the old as such. It's simply that the process of aging or deterioration provides the necessary detachment [...]. Thus, things are campy, not when they become old – but when we become less involved with them. [Camp] incarnates a victory of 'style' over 'content' [...].
>
> *(1999, p. 60)*

Similarly, Jack Babuscio notes that "The time factor is [...] crucial to one's appreciation of camp theatricality. A good deal of the screen acting which only recently appeared quite 'natural' will, in the goodness of time, doubtless become camp for its high degree of stylisation" (1999, p. 124). With this time factor in mind, we might consider Madonna's relationship with retro-camp on more than one level. In the first instance, she makes individual references to icons and archetypes representative of a bygone cinematic era which has its own established reputation as camp on the basis of lessened 'involvement' with the medium and stars by contemporary audiences. Moreover, in the act of performing these transformations, Madonna emphasises style over content, surface over depth. Mark Watts proposes that it is the existence of a signifier that is foregrounded and important in Madonna's work, over and above the content of the signified: "It is the act of referring to something that is important, not what is being referred to", he writes, accusing

Madonna of "referring for the sake of referring" (1999, p. 294). Watts' underlying argument is that Madonna's references are consistently empty, and he ultimately asserts that "No image [within a Madonna video] adds particularly to our understanding of the linear narrative meaning of the video, nor to the song itself" (p. 294), thereby suggesting that the signified has very little meaning at all in her work. Whilst I would suggest that the signifieds in Madonna's work have more potential meaning than Watts allows for, it is easy to argue that the signifier is very much foregrounded in her work, which has the effect for Madonna of constructing herself as camp on her own terms. Furthermore, the process of transformations detaches her from her audience, although individual personae may interpellate the audience and thereby suggest some connection, as with her 'Marilyn Monroe' stage. In even more Sontagian terms, Madonna thus privileges 'character' over the *development* of any single character: "Wherever there is development of character, Camp is reduced" (Sontag, 1999, p. 61).

A woman dressed as a man dressed as a woman

Madonna has become especially renowned for her various 'gender-bending' performances, for videos and stage acts which not only present obviously same-sex activity, but also problematise the representation, construction and nature of gender. A significant factor in the speculative controversy which surrounded the 'Justify My Love' video (dir. Mondino, 1990), for example, was not simply the group sex and voyeurism which it represented, but quite specifically the androgyny of a particular character in the video who kisses Madonna. Moreover, much scholarly effort has been invested in investigating the ways in which her performances have presented gender as constructed and performative, and as unstable (see Curry, 1990; Henderson, 1993; Robertson, 1996; and Schwichtenberg, 1993). Also with regards to the 'Justify My Love' video, we might think of the point where two androgynous twins paint moustaches on each other, possibly in an effort to claim their masculinity. Contemporaneously, in the *Blond Ambition* tour (1990), the i-conic-al breasts for which Madonna became notorious were also parodied by her male dancers, notably in the performance of 'Like A Virgin', during which the dancers caressed their phallic-mammary constructions while she simulated masturbation (see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5
Male phallic mammaries

Madonna's own body has also become a site for the exploration of the constructedness of gender. A well-known example would be the video for 'Express Yourself' (dir. Fincher, 1989) and its notorious live performances during the *Blond Ambition* tour and at the MTV Music Video Awards (also 1989). In these performances, Madonna wore a 1930s-style pinstriped men's suit and monocle, performing a version of aristocratic masculinity which she has revisited in various other performances since then. At the same time, visible beneath the suit is a pink satin basque with the infamous embellished cups for her breasts, and the suspender hooks dangle down her legs, above the men's trousers. Madonna grabs and thrusts her crotch in the style of Michael Jackson, or perhaps of any number of male rap artists in more recent years, and blatantly demonstrates and problematises the constructedness of gender through a layering of gestures and vestimentary codes.[9] While a number of significant points arise from her various interactions with masculinity and male attire, and these will be explored below, what I want to suggest here is that Madonna might also be viewed through the lens of female-impersonation, of drag queens.

The idea of a female female impersonator is a problematic one, but one with a history. Mae West has been likened to a female impersonator, of both male and female varieties.[10] Ramona Curry has also since made the connection, describing West as a 'female displaying a male displaying a female', and justifying her reading by positing West's sexuality as 'aggressive' and therefore 'masculine' (in Robertson,

1996, p. 33). Robertson further justifies Curry's description by observing elements of female impersonation in West's outfits, which she describes as "trimmed with excitement" (p. 33).[11] She specifically cites an example from *She Done Him Wrong* (dir. Sherman, 1933), in which West dons a "tight black Edith Head design with sequins on the bodice, off-the-shoulder feather, and white satin birds accentuating the bust" (Robertson, 1996, p. 33). Robertson also observes that West "foregrounds the fetishistic character of her costumes to the point of parody" (p. 33), and it is exactly the fetishisation and parody which are adopted by 'glam' drag queens. Similarly, "Garbo 'got in drag' whenever she took some heavy glamour part, whenever she melted in or out of a man's arms, whenever she simply let that heavenly-flexed neck [...] bear the weight of her throw-back head" (Parker Tyler quoted in Butler, 1993, p. 163). The trope of the female female impersonator was also the central narrative theme of the film *Viktor und Viktoria* (dir. Schünzel, 1933), in which the central female character, Susanne, performs on stage as a female impersonator in place of her friend Viktor, a female impersonator whose stage name is Viktoria, and who is too ill to perform. The film has since been remade three times: as *First A Girl* (dir. Saville, 1935); another *Viktor und Viktoria* (dir. Aton, 1957); and, most famously, as *Victor/Victoria* (dir. Edwards, 1982). We might conclude that although such clear instances of the female female impersonator are rare,[12] this particular example has enjoyed a fair share of cultural exposure.

Although massively overwhelmed statistically by male-female-impersonation (i.e. straightforward M2F cross-dressing), the female female impersonator is thus not an entirely unknown figure in popular cultural texts.[13] The question then arises as to the extent to which Madonna might draw on this trope, and the ways in which this could be manifested. One starting point for the investigation of this question would be to explore what cultural functions the male female-impersonator performs and what the codes of female impersonation are, such that these might (or might not) be transposed to Madonna's work. Esther Newton makes a distinction between transvestism and cross-dressing, which is that while the transvestite's goal is to pass successfully as a member of the opposite sex, the cross-dresser exaggerates the perceived gender codes of the opposite sex, and appears poorly disguised – not as a woman, but as a man in woman's clothing (1979, pp. 97-111). Peter Ackroyd suggests that this is something of a sub-set of transvestite behaviour, with fetishists

also implicated in the term. Ultimately, however, Ackroyd too sees transvestism as an 'earnest' form of cross-dressing behaviour:

> Some transvestites, for example, are exclusively fetishistic; they dress, in other words, to obtain some kind of sexual arousal. [...] But there are the other transvestites who move out of the fetishistic stage; they cease to be sexually excited by the act of cross-dressing itself, and go on to a more comprehensive form of feminine 'passing'. They dress as women for long periods, appear in public as such and, as one transvestite put it, 'they take their aspirations to femininity seriously, and make a serious attempt to behave as well as dress like women'.

(1979, p. 14)

This 'serious attempt' is in contrast not only with Newton's cross-dresser, but also with the drag queen – in some ways an extension of the same paradigm – whose motivation is primarily performance, and thus may involve any level of adequacy of 'disguise'. The performance may depend on an exaggeration of the disparity between body and clothes, or on a mocking caricature of the 'feminine' style. In Madonna's case, an obviously inadequate 'disguise' as a woman is not possible: she is always biologically female and makes no attempt to play a male 'in between' the two 'females' (the biological origin and the stage performance), as Victoria does in Edwards' film by appearing publicly as a man, or removing her wig and revealing 'Victor's' 'real' cropped hair at the end of a show. Even in Victoria's case, however, enough emphasis may not be placed on 'Victor'. An analogy may be drawn with an optical illusion known as the 'subjective contour', in which a shape which is not explicitly drawn is perceptible by association with surrounding shapes. In the following version of the subjective contour (Figure 2.6), a central triangle (marked in the right-hand figure with a dotted line, for ease of illustration) is implied. Like this absent central triangle, 'Victor' is more implied than present.
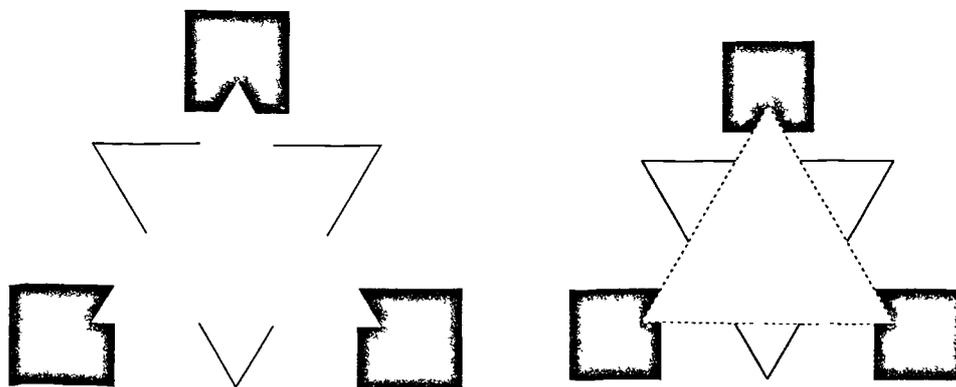
Figure 2.6
Subjective contour

Since Madonna cannot achieve an effective disparity between body and clothes, and does not perform the Victor-esque male 'in-between', the sense in which Madonna plays out a kind of female impersonation is related more to the ways she parodies the 'feminine', and this is often achieved initially through vestimentary codes, as it is with male female impersonators. In her 1990 performance of 'Vogue' at the MTV Music Video Awards, for example, the gender ambiguity and female-to-male (F2M) cross-dressing that had characterised the video were abandoned in favour of ornamental, Baroque costume, 'trimmed with excitement' (see Figure 2.7), inherent in which is the fetishisation of hair, hips, and bust, and quite a clear performance of gendered codes.

Figure 2.7
Performance of 'Vogue' at the MTV Music Video Awards, 1990

The varied forms of femininity performed by Madonna have ranged from the Monroe-esque 'playmate' of 'Material Girl', through matriarch as Eva Perón and mother in 'Drowned World/Substitute For Love' (dir. Stern, 1998), to the sexual object of 'Like A Virgin' (dir. Lambert, 1984), the erotic mistress of 'Human Nature' (dir. Mondino, 1995), the pimp/mack style of 'Music' (dir. Åkerlund, 2000), and a great deal more besides. In the very process of performing such an assortment of femininities Madonna opens up a space for the idea of femininity as performed, especially when one considers the context of explicit questioning of gender boundaries throughout her work. While videos such as 'Justify My Love' or 'What It Feels Like For A Girl' (dir. Ritchie, 2000) are possibly among the most obvious examples of the destabilisation of traditional gender circumscription in Madonna's work,[14] other examples also perform similar cultural work in different ways. Thus, where 'Like A Virgin' operates clearly within the realm of woman as 'to-be-looked-at', as sexual object, 'Express Yourself' juxtaposes that same trope with woman as

capitalist master (while also invoking Dietrich and all of the attendant gender-related confusion). While 'Human Nature' works to blend genders through the (limited) androgyny generated by uniform latex catsuits, 'Take A Bow' (dir. Haussman, 1994) aligns the female corset – accepted as one factor in the construction of a certain historical form of femininity – with the ritual dressing up of the matador, suggesting the precarious construction of all genders. The idea of Madonna as a female female impersonator is not entirely unreasonable: in much of her 'dressing up', there are ways in which she is in fact also dressing up 'as a woman'.[15] Again, it should be emphasised that this is dependent on a specific cultural-historical perspective, and that for many viewers, Madonna may never overcome the stage of 'woman'. Crucially, though, given the relevant perspective, this particular cultural constellation can be seen quite clearly by others.

Male mimicry

If Madonna's performance of femininity has certain queer interpretive possibilities, her long-term relationship with phallic imagery and F2M cross-dressing even more clearly invites queer analysis. It was the 'Express Yourself' video that so infamously heralded the starting point of a history of F2M cross-dressing and phallic references throughout Madonna's work, and her deployment of such references since that point has become noteworthy. During the *Dick Tracy* section of her *Blond Ambition* tour, she referred to the dancer playing the role of the famous detective as 'my dick', playfully demeaning the phallic power inherent in Tracy's first name and persona – arguably leaving only his surname with any power, although as an ambiguously gendered forename its power in a patriarchal society is questionable. Tracy himself is represented by a clownish dancer whose stature is diminished by the phallic femme fatale who dominates the performance and controls the action. Another example is found in the *Sex* book of 1992, where Madonna is seen naked, leaning back ecstatically as a water fountain 'ejaculates' between her legs (see Figure 2.8). Similar ejaculatory scenes featured in the *Drowned World Tour* of 2001, when a hose was placed between her legs by her dancers, and she 'ejaculated' dry ice across the audience during a performance of 'Impressive Instant'. Also, in the final moments of the withdrawn video for 'American Life' (dir. Åkerlund) in 2003, she sprayed an audience with a high-pressure water jet from waist height (also Figure 2.8). In *The Girlie Show* of 1993, she made explicitly phallic use of a walking cane as a prop,

while wearing a tuxedo and top hat during her self-parodying version of 'Like A W/Virgin': the walking cane returned ten years later when she featured in Britney Spears' video 'Me Against the Music' (dir. Hunter, 2003).

Figure 2.8
From the 'American Life' video (left) and from the Sex *book (right)*

Given her legendary history of highly sexualised, problematically-gendered performances, might we read these examples simply as Madonna 'gender-bending', or just as playing with phallic symbols for the potential shock value (which is arguably fading in this age of pomo-sexuality)? Possibly, but looking back to 'Express Yourself', we should also take careful note of Melanie Morton's reading of the notorious crotch-grab. While Morton identifies the phallic nature of the gesture, she is careful not simply to equate the phallus with masculinity and/or male-ness, writing that even as Madonna "mimics the phallic swagger of crotch-grabbing rock stars", there may be "no pretended allusion to a penis", but that she asserts instead "her own specific adequacy" (1993, p. 233). It is possible to apply this reading to certain other phallic images presented by Madonna over the years, and justifiably question any interpretation of her 'phallic' images as male-centred, or indeed as phallic. Andrew Ross similarly notes that the ejaculatory image in *Sex* is most redolent of "female ejaculation, the great open secret of lesbian subculture in the 1990s" (1993, p. 58). Male climax may be more readily perceptible in the later ejaculations, in 'Impressive Instant' and the 'American Life' video, given the accompanying props – a hose and a water-jet respectively – and their intentionally meaningful placement at Madonna's waist height. Yet reconsidering Morton's proposal, perhaps there are no penile allusions in these examples either. Must we necessarily relate her ejaculations to the male body and/or masculinity (and

simultaneously equate those two), or might they instead suggest something of a metonymic slippage between clitoral erection and female ejaculation?

The ways in which masculinity, the male body, power, and the phallus interact are convoluted and elusive. Is it precisely power which defines masculinity? Judith Halberstam observes: "Masculinity in this society inevitably conjures up notions of power and legitimacy and privilege; it often symbolically refers to the power of the state and to uneven distributions of wealth. Masculinity [...] represents the power of inheritance [...] and the promise of social privilege" (1998, p. 2). Yet the equation of the male body with power is surely only effective in the context of so-called 'dominant' – white, adult, middle-class, heterosexual, and *male* – masculinity. Thus, lower class men may be seen as 'more masculine' but have less socio-economic power, while upper-class men have more of such power but are often figured as insufficiently masculine (Halberstam, 1998, p. 2). Black, Latino, and Asian male bodies occupy various points on a spectrum of masculinity, but socio-economic power tends to be an unstable signifier in these configurations. Homosexuality is all too often equated with effeminacy, and altogether lacking in masculinity, while female masculinity is stereotyped as "a pathetic parody of maleness" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 241). When Madonna makes use of symbols which are both phallic and not phallic, representations of the male body are either totally absent (as in the *Sex* photo above) or highly ambiguous, as in 'Impressive Instant' or 'American Life', both examples of phallic signifiers in which there is a choice as to whether or not to perceive a penile allusion. One notable example, however, problematises the construction of masculinity in quite a different way. During her performance of 'Like A W/Virgin' in *The Girlie Show*, Madonna, dressed in top hat and tails – both profound signifiers of aristocratic masculinity – plays with her walking cane, another relevant signifier of both aristocracy and the phallus. At one point, at a musical break for dramatic effect, she makes the cane rise between her legs humorously to suggest an erect penis: thus the cane has its place secured as a symbol of male phallicism in this scene. After 'Like A W/Virgin', however, Madonna is joined onstage by two female dancers, also cross-dressed in top hats and tails, and carrying walking canes. In the ensuing rendition of 'Bye, Bye, Baby', the three 'men' are entertained by three other female dancers, in basques, stockings, and high heels, performing as dancing girls for 'male' sexual pleasure. During the course of the song, the 'dancing girls' tease the cross-dressed women, rubbing themselves

on their thighs and using the canes again as phallic props. They then proceed to dispose of the 'men's' signifiers of masculinity, throwing the canes to the floor and removing their top hats, and ultimately pushing the 'men' themselves to the floor.

The dismissal of the walking canes and hats can be read in at least three ways. The first of these is a kind of feminist reading, in which female dominance replaces male dominance. However, 'male' power seems ultimately to triumph when the 'men' respond by slapping the girls and aggressively simulating sex with them. The 'men's' dominance is also ostensibly present after the song, at which point they swagger around the stage, grabbing their crotches and adopting other exaggerated macho mannerisms. Here, Madonna exhorts her cross-dressed colleagues to "Fuck those dames", proclaiming, "We ain't gonna cry for no broads", and ultimately asserting, "We fuck women!".[16] Second, the exposure of the 'men' as cross-dressed women might justify a lesbian interpretation of the scene, especially given the simulated sex which follows, as the audience are forced to confront the fact of the 'men's' biological female-ness. This reading, however, is far from unproblematic, as it relies on and reinscribes a binaristic gender system, and the fixity of that system's construction of gender, sex, and sexuality as mutually implicit. By contrast, we might view the scene as realising the performativity of all gender formations: "genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (J. Butler, 1999, p. 174). The idea of the drag king is useful here. Halberstam notes that "the drag king performs masculinity (often parodically) and makes the exposure of the theatricality of masculinity into the mainstay of her act" (1998, p. 232), and in these ways 'Bye, Bye, Baby' might easily be understood as a drag king performance. As Judith Butler summarises, "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself" (1999, p. 175). Specifically, "the drag king performance [...] exposes the structure of dominant masculinity by making it theatrical" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 239), an aspect underlined in this example by the framing of the entire *Girlie Show* in the vocabulary of the theatre: lush, red curtains open and close ceremoniously; a Pierrot periodically reappears onstage (both of these signifiers are reasserted immediately prior to 'Like A W/Virgin'); and circus-style orchestration underscores 'Like A W/Virgin'. The theatricality of Madonna's scenes works against dominant notions of masculinity as original – with femininity as the deviation – and as 'authentic', where femininity has long been accepted as constructed and performative.

The interrelated problems of maleness, power, masculinity and the phallus are further held up for scrutiny in the more recent video for Britney Spears' 'Me Against The Music' (dir. Hunter 2003), in which Madonna appeared, wearing a white trouser suit and again carrying a cane (see CD2/Track 1, video). She clearly holds a position of moneyed power in the video's narrative, signified by the suit and the cane, amongst other factors. Notably, the suit is quite fitted, especially in the waistcoat, that clearly reveals Madonna's body to be female (especially when she removes her jacket). Her hair is long, and her face is made up, and despite her playing suggestively with the cane at the line "Come over here, I got something to show you" (attention to which is drawn musically by overdubbed *a cappella* and rapid melodic repetition in triplets (see Figure 2.9)) there is quite clearly no 'pretended allusion to a penis' as she remains proudly female throughout (Track 1, video, 2'45"-2'55").[17]

Figure 2.9
'Come over here I got something to show you'
from 'Me Against The Music'

At the same time, while she seems to hold the power (of the gaze)[18] at the beginning of the video, she gradually seems to lose this as Spears chases her and becomes the dominant figure. This loss of power is signified by her disposing of her cane and jacket, and Madonna's character becomes more noticeably female biologically and more feminine socially as her phallic power deteriorates. Meanwhile, Spears also wears a suit with a tie and braces, and her female-ness is equally assured with a low-cut top, long hair, and make up. She becomes more assertive throughout the video, and the sexual subtext is of Spears attempting to dominate Madonna, but being teased by the older woman, who ultimately seems to retain the power and, crucially, the phallus: while she has disposed of her own cane, and Spears has taken it, Madonna recovers her phallic power in the last seconds of the clip in the form of a cigar from an onlooking male, and finally fades into thin air just as Spears seems to have won the sexual hunt, reinscribing her own intangibility as a subject and holding a power which has nothing to do with male bodies or masculinity, even as it is linked with phallic signifiers.

Madonna's ability to play with phallic signifiers and masculinity was manifested in musical practices in her performance of 'Candy Perfume Girl' on the *Drowned World Tour*, where her use of an electric guitar throughout the song invites interpretation in terms of gender and musical practice. The rendition of the song is markedly different in mood from the version on the *Ray Of Light* album: the tour version is notably heavier in its rock styling than the album version.[19] That Madonna plays the electric guitar during the song might not, in itself, be a point worth noting, except that it is a rare example of her using an instrument at all. The significance of the performance might also be lessened on the basis of a dedication in the tour notes to her husband, Guy Ritchie: "special thanks [...] to my husband for handing me a guitar and daring me to learn how to play it" (Madonna, 2001). Yet the ways in which the guitar is utilised in 'Candy Perfume Girl' do raise several interesting points for consideration. The oscillation between 'boy' and 'girl', hinted at in the closing lines of the song (on the album as well as the tour), is realised here in the performance of a certain kind of masculinity, and the problematic/problematising nature of that performance. Madonna wears a tartan kilt as part of her signification of a punk milieu and anarchic aesthetic historically associated with youthful, aggressive masculinity, an aesthetic which is underlined by the dry ice, dim lighting and (for the audience of the videotape) erratic camerawork. Crucially, the kilt also allows for multiple gender representations, being an ambiguously gendered garment.[20] The scene is set for precisely the kind of musical act which ensues: heavy distortion, dissonances and unexpected harmonic shifts. Whereas the musicians are often obscured on Madonna's stages, here they are all visible, and a feeling of 'band plus star' is created, as opposed to the 'single artist' act that might have been brought about by concealing the musicians.[21] Madonna's adoption of the electric guitar is fitting for this role, as the lead vocalist in rock bands is often also a guitar player, and commonly takes the lead guitar role as opposed to the rhythm. Madonna thus draws from a long tradition of male-fronted guitar-based rock bands, and attempts to assume the role completely by playing a solo break – the function most regularly aligned with the masculine element of the rock guitar performance – and positioning herself back-to-back with another musician in a manner customary for this genre.

The musician in question, a man wearing a t-shirt that reads 'Rock God', provides an excellent point of comparison for Madonna's use of the electric guitar, as he plays the same instrument. His portrayal of the Rock God archetype is perceptible

apart from his t-shirt, as he sports long wavy hair in the style of Bryan May, Robert Plant, or Slash (of Guns 'n' Roses), all electric rock guitarists like himself. Madonna's 'Rock God' is plainly comfortable with his role, and with his instrument. His movements appear relaxed and natural, and his body seems to move entirely appropriately for the music he creates. At the same time, Madonna's movements seem hampered by the burden of her instrument, and by the end of the song her smaller frame is beginning to appear weighed down. (For all her weight training and intensive yoga, the fact remains that she does not play this instrument regularly.) The gestures she makes appear deliberate, and although the Rock God's may be equally performative and calculated, he seems more 'practised' in his performance than she does, as his movements appear smoother. As the song builds to a climax towards the end, he performs the quasi-masturbatory gesture noted by Mavis Bayton as being characteristic of the (male) electric guitarist: "With legs firmly planted akimbo, the guitarist is able to lean back in a parody of sexual ecstasy" (1997, p. 43).

While the Rock God thus reinscribes the phallic potential of the electric guitar, Madonna's enactment of the same kind of gesture is more problematic. As her fingers move along the neck of the instrument towards the melodic peak of her solo break, she gradually raises the neck such that it almost vertical as she reaches the summit, which she plays *tremolando*. After this climactic moment, Madonna brings the guitar close to her face, holding it with what seems like a caress, and then pushes the neck down slowly but firmly. This is a unique mode of interaction with the instrument, and quite unlike anything expected in male guitarists. Several interpretations of Madonna's gesture here are possible. If we presuppose the penile associations of the guitar, we might see her pushing away some kind of penile temptation that had temporarily enticed her. Another reading might be of her caress as maternal, of her cradling the guitar like a child, but what then is to be made of the subsequent rejection? Either of these readings allows for a destabilisation of the electric guitar tradition as male dominated and phallically governed, especially given that this gesture is followed by Madonna lingeringly licking the middle finger on her right hand (see Figure 2.10), in a highly sexualised move that hints also at digital (as opposed to penile) penetration.
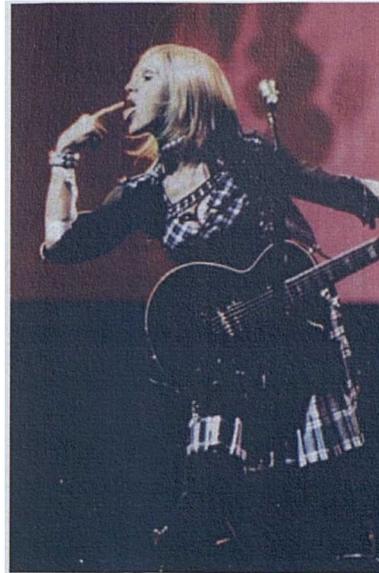
Figure 2.10
Finger licking move during 'Candy Perfume Girl'

With the end of 'Candy Perfume Girl', and the beginning of 'Beautiful Stranger', a rapid change of mood is achieved. The lights brighten, the smoke clears, and a lighter guitar tone opens this next song. At the same time, the band is relegated to obscurity, hidden from view, as Madonna abandons her guitar and performs with three female backing vocalists in a complete shift of gender performance. In these few minutes, Madonna's performance makes clear statements about (and draws from long-standing traditions relating to) gender and musical performance. The performance of 'masculinity' is achieved through the creation of music with instruments, notably the electric guitar with its history of phallic connotations, and the disposal of the instrument parallels a move into a 'feminine' mode of voice-centred musicality. The phallic potential and male-dominated nature of the guitar are problematised during 'Candy Perfume Girl', but the same conventions are also fortified in the transition to 'Beautiful Stranger'. Again we see the ambiguous and ambiguating nature of Madonna's relationship with phallic signifiers and masculinity.

As self-evident as the performative nature of masculinity might seem, in a post-*Gender Trouble* way, the performance of masculinity is in many ways a great challenge. Madonna may be more or less successful in her performance, but any point at which the performance is legible *qua* performance is less of a 'failure' to perform effectively, and more of a testament to the problems inherent in that performance. If we understand masculinity as having a tendency "to define itself as nonperformative" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 236), it becomes culturally difficult to

perform masculinity. As Seth Clarke Silberman proposes, "Women dressing as men is not the *performance* that men dressing as women is" (1997, p. 182. His emphasis). While her relationship with masculinity has not always involved blatant cross-dressing, she has also engaged repeatedly with F2M cross-dressing and challenged the supposedly non-performative nature of masculinity through a set of 'queer subjects'. Madonna's deployment of F2M cross-dressing arguably challenges Silberman's contention at a basic level, since her cross-dressing is always seen as part of a performance, whether that be a video clip, a tour performance, or the broader context of her life, now perceptible as a constant layering of performances. The central proposition of Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* is that "masculinity does not belong to men [and] has not been produced only by men". Rather, "what we call 'masculinity' has also been produced by masculine women, gender deviants, and often lesbians" (1998, p. 241).

If Madonna uses phallic props without necessarily making 'penile allusions', and if instead she is referencing her own female genitals, perhaps we should turn to the clitoris, which has commonly been figured as an organ analogous to the penis. Certainly, both penis and clitoris develop physically from the same region of the foetal genital ridge. Moreover, each organ has a head, a superfluous flap of skin, a shaft, a base, and in these ways they are more or less physiologically equivalent. But if Madonna 'asserts her own specific adequacy', without penile reference, her sexual organ surely performs the same feat. The clitoris is not strictly a small-scale penile equivalent: it has no urinary or ejaculatory function; no obvious function at all, in fact, except as a locus of female sexual pleasure. It would be tempting to suggest that the phallic props she deploys are unequivocally and knowingly phallic in the male-bodied sense, so unsubtle are the ways in which they are utilised on many occasions, and that consideration of female phallic power should be sidestepped in favour of the dominant male-centred reading. Yet, arguably, this is precisely the problem of the female utilisation of phallic symbols. Is there no potential for autonomous female phallicism? If the phallus is not the penis, as post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory suggests, then (why) does phallic power have to be a male reserve? Lacan implies the potential of the phallus to signify other than the penis – the phallus "is even less the organ, penis or clitoris, that it symbolises" (1989, p. 316) – and yet it is a specifically male signifier: "The phallus has no corresponding female signifier" (Evans, 1996, p. 143). In Lacan's formulations, the Phallus has Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic

elements (where 'Phallus' is not a euphemism for 'penis', but a term to denote the role which the penis plays in fantasy, the power which it is afforded). The first of these is mostly equivalent to the term 'penis' (which, as Evans notes, Lacan generally prefers to the term 'real phallus' (1996, p. 141)). The Imaginary Phallus is envisioned as "a part-object which may be detached from the body by castration" (Evans, 1996, p. 142). In the notion of the Symbolic Phallus, the Phallus is a signifier "of the desire of the Other" (Lacan quoted in Evans, 1996, p. 142). In this sense, the Phallus is also implicit in its Imaginary form, as a part-object which can trigger desire. The Imaginary Phallus may be a detachable part-object, but in its detachability it presents a source of anxiety, the fear of castration. Although the Phallus has no 'corresponding female signifier', it would be worth comparing the phallus in its Real sense – as the penis – with the most closely corresponding female organ: the clitoris. Natalie Angier writes:

> the comparison [between the penis and the clitoris] is not wholly accurate. A woman doesn't pee or ejaculate through her clitoris, of course. No urethra runs through it. She does nothing practical at all with her clitoris. The clitoris is simply a bundle of nerves: 8,000 nerve fibers, to be precise. That's a higher concentration of nerve fibers than is found anywhere else in the body, [...] and it is twice the number in the penis. [...] All this, and to no greater end than to subserve a woman's pleasure.
>
> (1999, p. 58)

It is in its sole function as a site of pleasure that the clitoris supersedes some of the function of the Phallus. If the Symbolic Phallus is a signifier of desire, and the Imaginary Phallus is a detachable part-object, we can easily think of the Phallus in terms of Lacan's *objet petit a*, being an "object which sets desire in motion, especially the partial objects which define the drives" (Evans, 1996, p. 125). Yet the *objet petit a* is also "the excess of *jouissance* which has no 'use' value, but persists for the mere sake of enjoyment" (p. 125), and in this way it seems also to remind us of the clitoris.

Clearly, the clitoris does not possess the same kind of power with which the Phallus is imbued, and in this sense we must concur with the Lacanian configuration in which the Phallus as a signifier has no 'female equivalent'. Judith Butler describes the gendered implications of 'having' or 'being' the Phallus:

> To 'be' the Phallus is to be the 'signifier' of the desire of the Other and *to appear* as this signifier. In other words, it is to be the object, the Other of a (heterosexualized) masculine desire, but also to represent or reflect that desire. [...] For women to 'be' the Phallus means, then, to reflect the power

of the Phallus, to signify that power, to 'embody' the Phallus, to supply the
site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through 'being' its
Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity. By
claiming that the Other that lacks the Phallus is the one who *is* the Phallus,
Lacan clearly suggests that power is wielded by this feminine position of
not-having, that the masculine subject who 'has' the Phallus requires this
Other to confirm, and hence be the Phallus in its 'extended' sense.

(1999, p. 56. Her emphasis)

From here, we could deduce that if a female subject *has* the phallus, she either
requires an Other to assume the 'feminine position of not-having', or both she and the
Other have the Phallus, in which case neither one has their Phallic possession totally
confirmed. This points towards what may be the central question when considering
Madonna's deployment of phallic and/or ejaculatory props and her performance of
masculinity: to what extent is she referencing *male* masculinity, a *male* masculine
position of 'having'? Does she instead present something approximating an
autonomously female masculinity? Might it not be that, in her use of props which
may be phallic and not-phallic, she adopts a female and masculine position of
'having', while also suggesting that the clitoris can have a power similar to that of the
Phallus? Perhaps the only clear point to be taken, and what is always absolutely
central to Madonna's performance of masculinity, is that masculinity is entirely
performable, even as it resists its own performativity. In her representation of queer
subjects, she always insists on the performativity of any subject-position.

2.2 Queering subjectivity

The intensity of Madonna's visual transformations has been well documented (see for example Bosma and Pisters, 1999), and various interpretations have been offered of specific images used by Madonna, especially in terms of their significance to particular subcultural groups (see Fouz-Hernández and Jarman-Ivens, 2004, and Schwichtenberg, 1993). Yet the process of change itself has also generated a range of interpretations and several points of interest can be uncovered. For Ellen Goodman, the changes represent a 'failure to integrate', and her primary conclusion is that this undermines Madonna's position as a positive feminist role model (much-debated as it is): "In the end, watching the Madonnas pass before us over the years is a bit like watching the three faces of Eve [...] as a role model. That's not an answer for women trying to integrate their lives" (quoted in Henderson, 1993, p. 121). Alternatively, it could be argued that by redefining herself on such a frequent basis, Madonna is empowering herself by claiming her right to be 'who she wants', whenever she wants, and is representing the possibility of this to other women.

Regardless of any kind of interpretation of what a particular (sub-)cultural response might be to the intensity of her transformations, there are a number of interesting ways of seeking to understand some of the processes at work in such rapid mutation. R. D. Laing writes of the role of the mask in the human psyche: "A 'man without a mask' is indeed very rare. One even doubts the possibility of such a man. Everyone in some measure wears a mask, and there are many things we do not put ourselves into fully. In 'ordinary' life it seems hardly possible for it to be otherwise" (1965, p. 95). For Lucy Green, any act of performance involves an implicit distance between performer and audience, and she conceives of 'display' as involving "something metaphorically akin to wearing a mask" (1997, p. 21). Green continues:

> The mask has an effect of splitting the displayer in two. From the point of view of the onlooker, the displayer takes on a double form, as both 'other' and 'mask'; from the point of view of the displayer, the self is doubled into 'self' and 'mask'. The mask is the central locus of the exchange [... D]isplay involves the enactment of a mutual power differential. On one hand, the displayer is in the active position, and has the power of the lure, of spectacularity, the possibility of playing with the mask from that point of view; whereas the onlooker is passively in danger of becoming seduced and ensnared by the mask. On the other hand, the displayer is passive, weakened by the necessity to be partially concealed, to present a mask rather like a protective shield on which s/he must rely for the continuation of the

> relationship; whereas the onlooker has the panoptical, disarming power of the
> gaze, the possibility of playing with the mask from that point of view.
>
> (pp. 21-2)

In Madonna's case, the mask becomes a consciously manipulated device, and this results in a further layering effect. 'Madonna' is thus split into more than two: she is 'self' (or 'other'), 'masked' and 'changer of masks', with this last category both emerging from and informing the previous two. The power differential between her and the audience is consequently further problematised: Madonna is both more passive and more active in Green's terms. On the one hand, Madonna is still subject to the onlooker's 'disarming power of the gaze', and the extra mask of 'changer of masks' could, by this logic, be said to weaken Madonna further because of the 'necessity' of an additional 'protective shield'. On the other hand, the constant and conscious changes of mask leave Madonna in a more active position by foregrounding her own play with the masks: while she is in control of the play, the onlooker is denied some power.

The (sub-)cultural impacts of her individual masks have been explored from one perspective previously in this chapter, but the idea of this extra layer, 'changer of masks', suggests a highly productive network of discourses – psychoanalytic theories pertaining to subjective development – which also help us access contemporary debates relating to subjectivity, a notion rendered problematic in Madonna's constant mutability. As noted briefly in the previous chapter, a common trope in psychoanalytic theory is a point of some split or fragmentation in a child's journey to healthy subjectivity. This is especially perceptible in Lacan's mirror stage paradigm, in which the subject's infantile identification with his mirror image results in a misplaced sense of mastery, provoking the beginning of his experience as dis-integrated. He perceives his mirror image as unified and whole, as he had previously understood himself to be, and he idealises it, but now experiences himself as divided in relation to that image: thus, he is alienated from himself (or, his Self). A simultaneous recognition by the subject of his difference from the Other, and a comparison of his own insufficiencies with the (M)Other's omnipotence fuels the ideal ego, "which functions as a promise of future wholeness which sustains the ego in anticipation" (Lacan quoted in Evans, 1996, p. 216). Moreover, in Lacan's later formations of his model, the mirror stage assumes importance on a structural basis, rather than simply on the basis of its temporal location in a child's development: "In

the first place, it has a historical value as it marks a decisive turning-point in the mental development of the child. In the second place, it typifies an essential libidinal relationship with the body-image" (quoted in Evans, 1996, p. 115). Thus, the mirror stage is seen by Lacan as an enduring paradigm of the subject's relationship with himself, rather than merely a moment in the ego's formation.[22]

It is crucial that the split inherent in the mirror stage is not presented by Lacan as a misdevelopment. Rather, it is necessary and therefore healthy, and this type of construction returns in many psychoanalytic models. In Jung's model, "The goal of the Self is wholeness. Jung called this lifelong process the quest for *individuation*, and individuation is the *raison d'être* of the Self" (Stevens, 1999, p. 41. His emphasis). Significantly, this implies a position whereby the Self may, in fact, *not* be whole, but ever seeking to be so. This trope re-emerges in Lacanian terms in the sense of loss generated by entering the Symbolic realm. A certain sense of wholeness is lost on entry, as a perception of incompleteness arises. This is attached to objects – 'part-objects' such as breasts or faeces – and triggers desire, which in turn generates a motivating emotional force of some description. The promise of re-establishing some of the lost unity – an impossible goal which can only cease in death (and even then it will not be 'fulfilled') – sustains the ego. At the same time, in Jungian theory, the Self:

> appears to act as something like a magnet to the disparate elements of the personality and the processes of the unconscious [...I]t is the function which unites all the opposing elements in man and woman, consciousness and unconsciousness, good and bad, male and female, &c., and in doing so transmutes them.
>
> (Fordham, 1963, p. 62)

Here, the Self has a unifying role, even if the ego is simultaneously not whole itself: "The self is not only the centre, but represents the whole man; making a unity out of the contradictions of his nature" (p. 64). This is a common understanding of the idea of 'self', then, as "a *unitary phenomenon* [...] used to refer to a particular, individual person (or person-system) and not to a 'personality' or to an aggregate of factors which 'add up' to a person" (Johnson, 1985, p. 93. His emphasis).

Yet there is apparently space within the idea of a unified/unifying Self for what has been termed 'subpersonalities', which on some level can presumably be likened to the 'contradictions' identified by Jung. John Rowan describes the subpersonality as "a semi-permanent and semi-autonomous region of the personality

capable of acting as a person" (1990, p. 8) – one of many parts of a fundamentally unified 'personality'. Similarly, Johnson outlines the apparent paradox of the 'Self': "Self is seen as situational, and yet as something which transcends the ebb and flow of transitory encounters and reflections" (1985, p. 95). It is quite plausible, then, for one person to behave differently – to take on different 'personae' – in different situations, while the basic stability of 'Self' remains central to its perceived health and normality. Rowan goes on to describe a 'dissociative continuum', at one end of which he positions "fluctuations in mood", fundamentally transient states of emotion (1990, p. 9). Also in the 'normal' range of the continuum, but further dissociated, he posits "the roles and ego states and subpersonalities within which individuals perform state-specific tasks and life activities" (p. 9), contextually determined personalities played out by an essentially cohesive subject. What characterises states positioned towards the other end of the continuum, those which are outside of the 'normal' range, is a greater sense of dissociation. At the abnormal extreme, then, we find disorders such as Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID, also referred to as Multiple Personality Disorder), a severe personality disorder the symptoms of which include total amnesia and dissociation between two or more entirely separate personalities.

Rowan's continuum is an example of the notion that, although a certain level of psychic fragmentation is posited as normal and inevitable, a fundamental sense of a unified 'Self' in fact acts as a marker of psychiatric wellbeing. In psychiatry, then, that notion emerges as a persistent paradigm, and many significant psychiatric maladies have come to be defined in relation to some sort of ideal of putative unification: the word 'schizophrenia' derives etymologically from the ancient Greek 'schizein' [split] and 'phrenos' ['diaphragm'/'gut', and also 'mind']; bipolar disorder (also termed 'manic depression') is characterised by a fluctuation between two extreme states of mood, changing the personality in a way beyond the variability allowed for in Rowan's 'normal' range[23]; DID is perhaps the most extreme example of identity splitting as the focus of psychiatric disorder. Subpersonality formations outside of Rowan's 'normal' range appear to receive a great deal more media attention than other kinds of mental health issues. A situation has arisen whereby 'abnormal' subpersonality formations have come to be representative of mental illness in the popular imagination, and the understanding of fragmentation is commonly defined primarily in whatever terms the media construct it: as Nairn,

Coverdale and Claasen note, "It has been shown that the public's primary source of information about mental illness is the media" (2001, p. 654). Moreover, as Martin Anderson observes, "broadsheet and tabloid newspapers made a significant link between mental ill health, criminality and violence. Such stories were often given more exposure than positive articles", with journalists apparently working "on the premise that 'sensation sells'" (2003, p. 298), and this despite a long-held position by advocates for the mentally ill that "persons with mental illness are no more likely to commit violent acts than are persons who are not mentally ill" (Arboleda-Flórez, 1998, p. 989). Specifically, Otto Wahl argues that a popular conception exists of schizophrenia as 'classic madness', what the population at large imagine when they think of a 'mad person', suffering from delusions, hallucinations, and 'hearing voices' (1997). I would propose also that a common trope of 'split personality' is also at work in popular culture, and that this is central to popular conceptions of madness.

For R. D. Laing a division of the self is at play in the 'false-self system'. This condition consists of the construction by a subject of a 'false self' to satisfy the perceived expectations and desires of others (typically one or both parents) placed on the subject.[24] Specifically, he describes "a persistent scission between the self and the body" (1965, p. 78), such that the schizoid individual suffers from a form of disembodiment, and his so-called 'true self' and his bodily experience are detached. In his description of how this system works, Laing presents two diagrams to represent the relations between the self and the other.
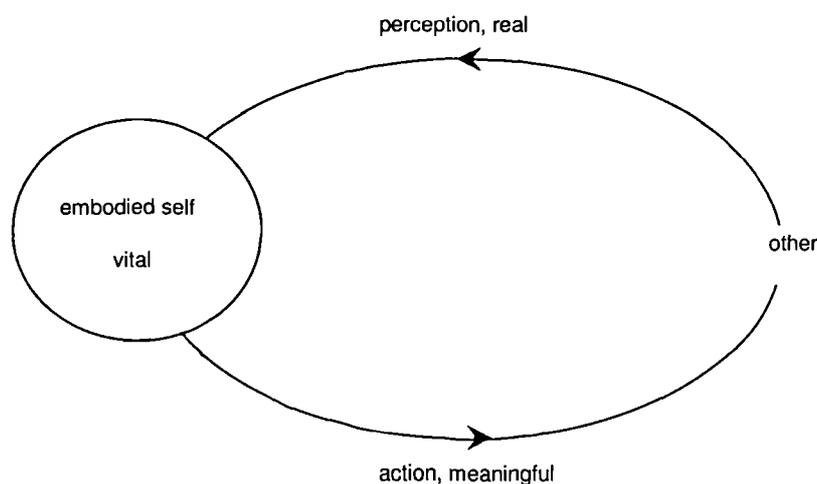
Figure 2.11
Non-schizoid formation (Laing, 1965, p. 81)

Of this first diagram (Figure 2.11), a non-schizoid formation, Laing writes: "Objects

are perceived by the self are experienced as real. Thoughts and feelings of which the self is the agent are alive and are felt to have point. Actions to which the self is committed are felt as genuine" (1965, p. 80). An alternative formation is represented in the following schema.

perception, unreal

'inner' self

generalized
deadness
embodied
'false' self

other

action, futile
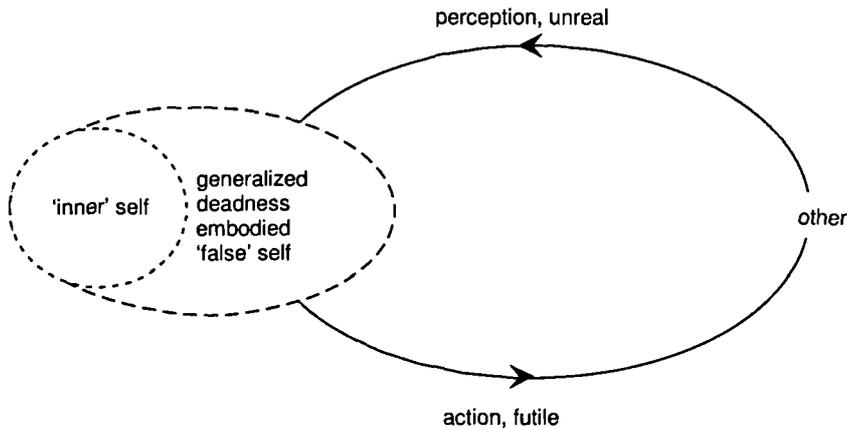
Figure 2.12
False-self system (Laing, 1965, p. 81)

In this 'false-self system', "the individual delegates all transactions between himself and the other to a system within his being which is not 'him', [and] the world is experienced as unreal, and all that belongs to this system is felt to be false, futile, and meaningless" (p. 80). In Madonna's case, an exaggerated form of these structures seems to be at work, and I have thus reworked Laing's diagrams to describe this particular situation (see Figure 2.13).

audience
perception: refracted

Madonna

idea of
Madonna

changing
mutable
personae

audience

Madonna's action: futile
and/or meaningful
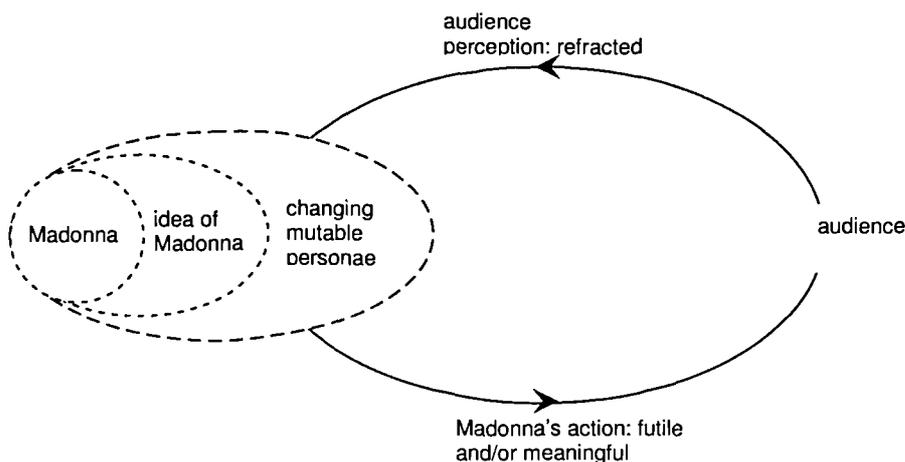
Figure 2.13
Exaggerated false-self system

There is a key difference between the foundations of this diagram and those of Laing's representations. Where Laing is concerned with the self's perception of the

other, Figure 2.13 above describes the audience's (other's) perception of the self (Madonna), thus attempting to posit some sort of star-audience relationship. This, then, is a diagram with two subjects, rather than the single focus of Laing's diagram. It should also be noted that the first apparent discrepancy, between Madonna and the 'idea of Madonna' is in place with any star and his or her audience, heavily mediated as they invariably and inevitably are:
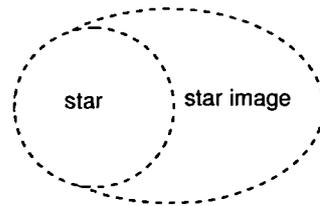
Figure 2.14
Star/Star image

This discrepancy between 'self' and 'image' is indeed central both to celebrity consumption and the false-self system: while the celebrity is always already mediated, the false self comes increasingly to represent the body as observed by others, and the false-self schizoid thereby similarly mediates himself. The 'changing mutable personae' are a further layer of mediation between audience and star here, and are central to the 'idea of Madonna' which is always present in the relationship. This results in the audience perception being refracted. It is both real and unreal: they really perceive Madonna's image, and yet her image is unreal, unstable, both representative and non-representative. Meanwhile, Madonna's actions are both futile and/or meaningful, and are perceived as such. Although Mark Watts can quite justifiably accuse Madonna of "referring for the sake of referring" (1999, p. 294), Madonna's work also foregrounds the putative reality of necessary fragmentation as proposed by Lacan and others, while more practically endorsing 'self-expression', that perennial mantra of late twentieth-century capitalist society.

As easy as it is to map these discourses of splitting and psychiatric disorder on to Madonna's work, in no way do I mean to suggest that she suffers from a severe dissociative psychiatric condition. Rather, I believe that the value of these kinds of discourse is located in the ways they suggest of understanding her relentless transformations. The point I am trying to make is that Madonna's constant changes of external image expose the 'aggregate of factors' and 'situational' context of which Johnson writes, and represent a challenge to the hegemonic unified ego championed

by psychiatric discourse. In a sense, her mutability foregrounds the putative reality of our fragmented identities. That is to say, where we might strive for a forced and bogus unity, Madonna arguably lives out her own disjointed state. Thus we return to the idea of 'queering', as the dominant practice of seeking a unified and largely consistent subjectivity is challenged, and the idealised notion of an integrated Self is destabilised.

Simultaneous splitting

To a certain extent, the idea of Madonna's mutable identity could be validly interpreted as part of a "recipe for 'longevity' – based on regular self-reinvention" (Gauntlett, 2004, p. 161), which might encourage a reading of the changes as being more commercially driven than anything else. Certainly, to survive two decades in the music industry and to generate a consistently high level of interest almost demands a certain amount of image-changing. Comparisons with Madonna are hard to find in this respect, as the length and sturdiness of her success are almost unmatched by any female artist, but one possible contender is Kylie Minogue, who entered the pop world only four years after Madonna, and whose success has continued since then. Minogue has undergone similarly radical changes of image since her teeny-bop Stock, Aitken, and Waterman days of 'I Should Be So Lucky' (1988) and 'Locomotion' (1988), emerging as more explicitly sexual with the sensual robotic movements in the video for 'Can't Get You Out Of My Head' (dir. Shadforth, 2001), the writhing bodies of 'Slow' (dir. Walsh, 2003), or the 'red-blooded' male fantasies played out in 'Red Blooded Woman' (dir. Nava, 2003). For David Gauntlett, Minogue's regular reassessment of image and musical direction have contributed to her lengthy career, as with Madonna: "Kylie Minogue [...] has stretched her pop career from the 1980s to the present, partly by reinventing herself as 'indie Kylie', 'dance Kylie' and 'disco Kylie'" (2004, p. 172).

Yet even if we accept a reading of Madonna's changing image as being purely strategic in commercial terms, the notion of a split/ting identity still pervades many of her video clips to a fascinatingly high degree. As early as 'Borderline' (dir. Lambert, 1984), the construction of two separate (but ultimately interacting) spaces was a central feature in Madonna's videos. Most clearly, space is divided in 'Borderline' according to the two principal male characters, a wealthy white photographer and a comparatively impoverished Latino youth. Santiago Fouz-

Hernández writes of "the men's opposing worlds, in which the Latino men are relegated to the streets and the bar, and the British man is situated in a safer, private space (his studio – with all its associations of productivity and success)" (2004, p. 141). The spaces are accordingly contrasted by their use of phallic imagery: where the photographer enjoys the symbolic strength of "classical image[s] of masculinity – a Roman-style statue of a nude soldier holding a spear erect [...] and a series of Palladian columns", Latino masculinity is afforded only "a shabby street lamp, and a pool cue" (p. 141). Yet as clearly as the space is divided according to the men involved, the video also sees something of a division of Madonna(s). When she is in the Latino man's space, Madonna is thrown into relief as a white girl, and in the latter half of the video she appears as the sexual initiator, trying to recapture the heart of her "true love" (*Rolling Stone*, 1997, p. 223). By contrast, in the white man's space, she is cast as object – he quite literally holds the power of the gaze in his hands, as a photographer, and this shifts symbolically into sexual objectification as well. At the same time, she performs a stylised Hispanism for the white man, appearing in an almost comically Spanish-style dress. A similar split is made in 'La Isla Bonita' (dir. Lambert, 1987), also in relation to Hispanic identities.[25] In that video, the division is more obviously between two Madonna characters: one an austere, chaste character confined to a simple, indoor space; and the other an extravagantly dressed parody of Hispanic style, seen dancing into the distance at the end of the clip.

Later videos make use of gradually more complex split identities. In 'Human Nature' (dir. Mondino, 1995), two Madonna characters demarcate realms of apparent sincerity and clear parody. The prevailing character is mostly presented as 'earnest' and 'genuinely' engaging in sadomasochistic sexual discourse, whereas a second, intercut character is obviously designed as a comedy foil, moving in a silent-movie style and laughing out of sheer amusement with an S/M scenario, and gradually the 'genuine' S/M-er becomes part of a carefully deployed ironic commentary.
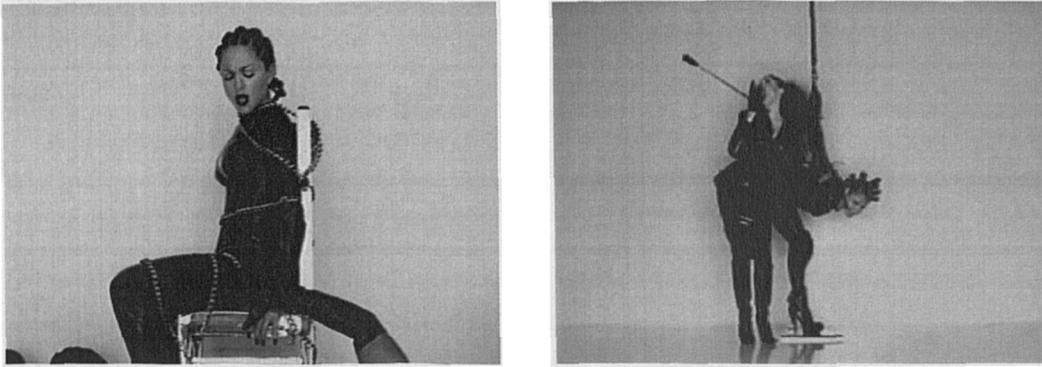
Figure 2.15
Two S/M Madonnas in 'Human Nature':
one sub (left) and one dom (right).

The video for 'Die Another Day' (dir. Traktor, 2002) features a radical and explicit juxtaposition of two Madonnas, with a 'good' Madonna (dressed in white) crossing swords – literally, in a fencing match – with a 'bad' Madonna (dressed in black).[26] 'Music' (dir. Åkerlund, 2000) is another example of Madonna being played off against herself, and the video can be seen to emerge as something of a paradigm for Madonna's relationship with her own history. In 'Music', a cartoon Madonna (a replica of her human character) fights and destroys a series of neon signs spelling out the names of many of her previous hits. Such a positioning of the cartoon Madonna against her own history is something of a precursor to her *Re-Invention Tour* of 2004. Billed as a 'greatest hits tour', the tour's set list seemed indeed to focus on hits from her first ten years, with the last five songs including 'Into The Groove' (1985), 'Papa Don't Preach' (1986), 'Crazy For You' (1985), and 'Holiday' (1984). The penultimate song of the show was 'Music' (2000), and its concomitant associations of an unsettled relationship between Madonna and her own history are surely not to be overlooked in this context.

Madonna as showbiz shaman

Returning to the idea of Madonna's commercial survival being predicated in no small part on her habitual self-transformation, for Rogan Taylor it may well be a fundamental characteristic of the entertainer that he or she undergoes some form of mutation. Taylor traces the history of modern showbusiness from shamanism, a form of religion practised by nomadic tribes and still palpable today in Australian Aboriginal societies (1985, p. 16), and he makes a convincing argument for the survival of shamanic tropes in the figure of the modern entertainer. Published in the

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early days of Madonna's career, Taylor's work obviously makes no reference to her, but she can surely be ranked alongside his examples of David Bowie, Jimi Hendrix, or John Lennon in terms of her shamanic qualities. "The shaman", writes Taylor, "is he-who-*must*-change in order to survive. He must become a maestro of transformation" (1985, p. 19). It should be noted that the male generalisation here is somewhat misleading, as Taylor also notes the "The majority of shamans in the distant past may well have been female" (p. 163). On female shamans, he continues:

> [I]n Western showbiz prior to the twentieth century, [the female shamans']
> daughters had been few and far between, perhaps because the ruling religion
> had greatly feared female magic as the Devil's favourite ploy and zealously
> guarded its one-sexed Trinity. [...] By the turn of [the twentieth] century
> however, with the Church in full flight before the demon science, the rebirth
> of great female showbiz shamans was complete.
>
>   (p. 163)

He suggests something of a shamanic lineage from Sarah Bernhardt, through Bessie Smith and Billie Holliday, to Sarah Vaughan and ultimately Marilyn Monroe,[27] and – as the single most successful female recording artist of the twentieth century – it does not require a great leap of the imagination to place Madonna's name amongst them. A few biographical features point us towards shamanistic potential in Madonna. "Amongst the psychological disturbances frequently associated with a young shaman-to-be, the experience of partial or total orphanhood seems to be quite common. [...] The situation can demand both courage and psychological strength in great measure. These are also some of the required attributes of a would-be shaman" (Taylor, 1985, p. 21). This might be compared with Madonna's comments on how the death of her mother when the singer was only five years old contributed to her ambition: "For Madonna, the anguish of losing her mother 'left me with a certain kind of loneliness and an incredible longing for something.' She has also said, 'If I hadn't had that emptiness, I wouldn't have been so driven. [...]'" (Taraborrelli, 2002, p. 13). Taylor also links the typical shaman biography with a history of poverty, presumably as a metaphor of the Underworld to which a young shaman would typically travel in some fantastic sequence of events (1985, p. 24 and p. 26), and in this sense Madonna's own shamanistic links are at best exaggerated and at worst dubious. While Andrew Morton makes clear references to a time when Madonna "lived off popcorn and dressed in hand-me-downs" (2001, p. 18), and "survived by bumming meals from friends and acquaintances" (p. 19), this era seems to have come after she left home: Taraborrelli claims that "Madonna seemed to want to give the

impression in interviews that she came from a lower-income family [...]", but that this simply was not true (2002, p. 9), evidenced by the fact that, at the age of ten, she moved to "an affluent community not far from the exclusive Detroit suburb of Bloomfield Hills" (p. 21).

The shamanic trope continually emerges in various themes that have recurred throughout Madonna's career. Female or male, a certain bisexual, androgynous, or hermaphroditic nature is quite characteristic of the traditional shaman (and the ideal Jungian Self? (see Fordham quote above)), and one that has survived in modern entertainers, from Little Richard to David Bowie (Taylor, 1985, p. 175 and p. 198). Madonna's infamous sexual escapades in the early 1990s are surely enough evidence of this particular shamanistic quality, with gender morphing and sex-play in abundance (see above). More than simply morphing between differently-sexed humans, the shaman also typically has an intimately transformative relationship with the animal world:[28]

> The basis of the shaman's intimacy with the animal world lies in his ability to effect *transformations* into animal form. [...T]he animal spirit [...] assumes great importance, as both the principal assistant during magical journeys, or even the 'alter-ego' of the shaman, his 'animal double'. Animals are also frequently used in lesser roles, as messengers who travel on the shaman's behalf, and locate the information required for successful healing or divination.
>
> (Taylor, 1985, p. 121. His emphasis.)

Madonna's 'animal double' is most likely a cat, varying in its manifestation from a domesticated black specimen to a wild lion. The animal's history in Madonna's work stems back to her early days in New York when she posed for a series of nude and semi-nude 'art' shots, some with a domesticated tabby cat. The cat came back in the video for 'Like A Virgin' (dir. Lambert, 1984), this time as a lion enticing Madonna around Venice in a dream-like sequence, before morphing itself into a lion-masked man who romantically sweeps her away. The comedy cougar in *Who's That Girl?* (dir. Foley, 1987) was somewhat more tamed than the lion of 'Virgin', and a black *felis domesticus* was central to the video for 'Express Yourself' (dir. Fincher, 1989), this time as a missive between (capitalist) Upperworld and (labouring) Underworld, a narrative theme with truly shamanic resonances (see Taylor, 1985, pp. 22-28, and p. 121). From early on in her career, Madonna explicitly displayed her own potential for feline transformation, snarling in the video for 'Burning Up' (dir. Baron, 1984). Curry notes Madonna's own catlike qualities in the 'Express Yourself' video,

describing a "disheveled Madonna slinking around like a cat" (1990, p. 22), although she does not point out the overt imitation present when Madonna, on all fours, laps a bowl of milk. With the boundaries between woman and cat already problematised in this way, it could easily be suggested that the cat in the video is not simply a messenger, but also an alter-ego.[29]

Taylor notes several examples of popular musicians engaging quite explicitly with religion, albeit in something of a troubled relationship, and this central aspect of the 'showbiz shaman' is very obviously worth noting in relation to Madonna. If Little Richard made a deliberate turn from rock 'n' roll to religion (Taylor, 1985, p. 175), if Jerry Lee Lewis descended from a Christian upbringing to 'having the devil in him' (p. 178), if the Beatles were more popular than Jesus Christ, and Mick Jagger was His Satanic Majesty, Madonna too walks a fine line between the sacred and the profane. Madonna in name, but often whore in nature, she has openly declared that she will not be satisfied until she is "as famous as God" (*Q*, p. 3). Her Catholic upbringing was evident from the beginning of her career, not only in her distinctive name but also her characteristic usage of religious iconography. She quickly established herself as controversial in her attitude towards her native religion, continually making challenging juxtapositions of religion and sexuality.[30] She went on to be seen using times of prayer to exhort her dancers to "kick ass" (see *Truth or Dare*, dir. Keshishian, 1991), and *The Girlie Show* tour further juxtaposed religion and sexuality in a homosexual sadomasochistic scene involving one participant in a classic crucifixion pose on a military-style climbing net. Despite her obviously troubled relationship with the Catholic Church, she named her first child Lourdes – after the Catholic place of pilgrimage – and had her baptised a Catholic (Morton, 2001, p. 210). As persistent as Catholicism has been in both her personal life and her professional image, she has in more recent years turned to different religions, which has taken her through Hinduism and Buddhism, and culminated in her present fascination with the teachings of the Kabbalah (pp. 214-6), a collection of Jewish mystical writings and an extension of that religion. After twenty years of legendary shape-shifting, in which her name has been the most consistent feature, Madonna – who in 2002 asked, 'Do I have to change my name?' ('American Life', 2003) – has asked to be called Esther (Benjamin, 2004, p. 34), after a Jewish heroine whose story is celebrated annually during the Purim festival (and whose story is told in the Biblical book of Esther).[31] Taylor argues that "Rock 'n' roll and religion were

betrothed by fifties stars like Little Richard. The wedding was not celebrated, however, until the sixties" (1985, p. 175). Madonna/Esther may represent the analogous renewing of the vows.

At the time of writing, Madonna has in many ways come full circle. Her Neptunian,[32] shamanic shape-shifting has led her through a myriad of sub-cultures, bringing Underworlds to the surface and then letting them go. Yet her latest subject of transformation is not an ethnic, sexual or class-based (sub-)culture, but her own history. A quick glance at the *Re-Invention Tour* setlist may seem to characterise it as a retrospective 'greatest hits' tour,[33] but it might also be seen as part of a strategic step forward. Indeed, as much as her career has been defined by relentless transformation, various themes have continued to surface, such as the problematisation of gender categories, and engagement with ethnic (sub-)cultures. Moreover, she has repeatedly made reference to previous moments in her career. Textual references to 'Express Yourself' form a refrain in 'Human Nature', and 'Vogue' is referred to in 'Deeper and Deeper' (from *Erotica*, 1992). Visually, one can compare the pose featured on the cover of the *Drowned World Tour* video (2001) with the performance of 'Who's That Girl?' in the *Who's That Girl?* tour (1987).[34] More recently, she has demonstrated the weight of her pop legacy by recasting a scene from the 'Human Nature' video, in which she dances up against a reflective wall, in 'Me Against The Music' (dir. Hunter, 2003) with Britney Spears, in which she and Spears mirror each other's movements up against either side of a wall (compare Track 1, video, 1'25"-1'44" and Track 2, video). Neva Chonin writes, "Madonna as Madonna theorist: It could be her most innovative identity yet" (2004, E1). Subject as subject-theorist: surely the queerest kind of subjectivity.

2.3 Musical mutations

While her visual changes may be the most striking (and therefore most documented and analysed) aspect of Madonna's transformative nature, musical factors have also come to play a significant role in her repeated mutations. It is not simply that she has developed musically while changing visually on another path. Rather, musical signifiers seem also to underpin consciously her more tangible visual changes. Keith Clifton observes how the use of synthesised strings to suggest a classical gravity to 'Papa Don't Preach' (1986) was arguably part of an attempted shift towards musical maturity such that she would be taken seriously as an artist (Clifton, 2004, p. 61). Yet when the *True Blue* album (on which 'Papa' was featured) was released in 1986, Madonna was going through a phase of visual resemblance to Marilyn Monroe, something of a leftover from the 'Material Girl' video of 1985 (from *Like A Virgin* (1984)), and mid-twentieth-century musical characteristics are also easily perceptible on *True Blue*. The title track is most notable in this respect: harmonic progressions, lyrical content (especially in the chorus), and backing vocal input combine to engender a recollection of 1960s girl-group songs (see Figures 2.16 and 2.17).[35] 'Johnny Angel' (by Shelley Fabares, 1962) is a particularly good example of the genre to which Madonna points in 'True Blue', emphasising similar major/minor relations, and featuring an interplay of lead and backing vocals comparable to that found in Madonna's track (see Tracks 3 and 4).[36]

Figure 2.16
Third verse of 'Johnny Angel'
From the recording by Shelley Fabares, 1964

Figure 2.17
Third chorus of 'True Blue'

The vocal harmonies in the Madonna track are also reminiscent of those in 'Chapel of Love' by the Dixie Cups (1964; Track 5). The chord progression is different in the Dixie Cups track (being I-ii-V) but, stripping away the harmonic foundation, the vocal harmonic relations and the melodic contours in each song bear some similarity. The similarity of the stepwise melodic contours combines with specific tones to make the two tracks very similar at specific moments: the $\hat{2}$-$\hat{1}$-$\hat{7}$-$\hat{1}$ movement that occurs on "dreaming of" in the 'True Blue' backing vocals also occurs on the first "chapel and we're" in the main melody of 'Chapel Of Love'; similarly, the $\hat{3}$-$\hat{2}$-$\hat{1}\#$-$\hat{2}$ movement from the backing line "like a glove" matches the main melody on the second "chapel and we're".

Figure 2.18
Harmonies in 'Chapel of Love'

Madonna's 'Jimmy Jimmy' also makes clear references to this musical genre (see Track 6), the first clue being found in the title itself: 'Jimmy' was most famously cast as 'Jimmy Mack' (by Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, 1967); he was also the 'Leader Of The Pack' (by The Shangri-Las, 1965); and he surely ranks alongside 'Johnny' as something of an archetype in music of the era.[37] The lyrics of Madonna's track also construct the image of a 'home-girl' with a protective father, and a bad boy "much too wild for this town", with the role of the female narrator played down significantly.[38] The chorus of 'Jimmy Jimmy' makes a specific lyrical reference to 'Why Do Fools Fall In Love' (by Alma Cogan, 1956, and Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, 1956), as Madonna sings, "Why [...] / Do fools fall in love with fools like you?". Musically, the era is again captured by the interplay of lead and backing vocals, and by a bell-like sound during the chorus that underlines the rising vocal line. The recurring refrain of the verses – "Jimmy Jimmy, oh Jimmy Jimmy" – highlights the lyrical references, and is harmonised in generically appropriate major thirds. The bridging line "Oop shoo boop, oop boop sha la la la" (repeated four times) is a further, somewhat cartoonish, reference to the era, again harmonised appropriately.[39]

Moving on from her 'Marilyn' phase, Madonna attempted a move even further into the role of 'serious artist': *Like A Prayer* (1989) was arguably more earnest in its intent (both musically and in terms of lyrics) than any of her previous projects. Although *True Blue* had covered topics such as teenage pregnancy ('Papa Don't Preach') and the universal importance of love ('Love Makes The World Go Round'), it also depicted holiday romance ('La Isla Bonita') and posed the ever-

youthful question, 'Where's The Party?'. On *Like A Prayer*, Madonna addressed such personal topics as her mother's death ('Promise To Try') and her troubled relationship with her father ('Oh Father'), and those songs with a romantic theme felt more mature in their attitude ('Cherish' and 'Express Yourself' both speak of the merits of commitment in a relationship). The break-up of her marriage to Sean Penn also featured in 'Till Death Do Us Part', adding a greater sense of troubled 'reality' to the album as a whole. A greater use of metaphor, simile and descriptive imagery was present in the lyrics,[40] as well as quasi-philosophical comments on the human condition: "Life is a mystery, everyone must stand alone" ('Like A Prayer'); "Time goes slowly for those who wait" ('Love Song'); or "Don't forget that your family is gold" ('Keep It Together'). Musically, a wide range of factors contribute over the album to make this feel like a deeply heartfelt, personal, and experienced project. 'Promise To Try' is very simply arranged, with piano and strings providing an unobtrusive, sensitive accompaniment to Madonna's solo voice, with no backing vocals complicating her vocal line on this track. Harmonically, the song never strays far from the tonic, and repeatedly reinforces the tonic with plagal and ♭VII-I cadences. Although traditionally a perfect cadence would serve more obviously to demarcate a tonality, the cadences used in 'Promise To Try' have the effect of rarely moving away from a safe tonic region and thereby underlining it (see Track 7). The sincerity and solemnity of the lyrical content is thus allowed space to be expressed, and the result is in keeping with the mature image of herself that Madonna was trying to put forward at that time in her career.

I'm Breathless (1990) assisted Madonna's next transformation, this time into a 1940s-inspired image reminiscent of Mae West or, at times, Marilyn Monroe again (see Figure 2.19).

Figure 2.19
Mae West; two stills from Dick Tracy

Musically, this cultural-historical location is deafeningly obvious on tracks such as 'More', 'Cry Baby' and 'Hanky Panky' (see Tracks 8, 9 and 10), but the significance of this album alongside Madonna's visual transformation is somewhat lessened because the album was essentially a soundtrack album for *Dick Tracy*, in which this new visual persona was most prominently played out. Thus, the next noteworthy personal project in her career was *Erotica* (1992). The sexually controversial images of Madonna in the *Sex* book (1992) invited their own soundtrack in the form of this album. The lyrics, of course, are suitably charged with sexual imagery: "Erotic, erotic / put your hands all over my body" ('Erotica'); "Go down / Where it's warm inside" ('Where Life Begins'); and "Did she sit on your face?" ('Did You Do It?'). Infused with house and funk influences, much of the album is characterised by laid-back, bluesy grooves, often with spoken, whispered, or mumbled lyrics, engendering a feeling, perhaps, of late-night inebriation. On 'Secret Garden' (Track 11), the verse lyrics are muttered, *sotto voce*, over a repetitive and pulsating bass-line consisting only of tonic and dominant tones (in E minor). The drum kit uses mostly open hi-hat and snare, with reverb and chorus bringing about a spacious feeling, while the rhythm guitar provides a funky interruptive punch in the background, its effect assisted by the onomatopoeic wah-wah pedal. The track is long, at 5'32", and the last minute-and-a-half is given over to the improvisatory skills of the instrumentalists. The rhythm and bass guitars continue as before, and the piano comes very much to the fore, waxing on a blues scale. The saxophone – that had been barely perceptible throughout the song's main body – also remains present, still situated in the

background of the mix, and again with some reverb, but becoming gradually more noticeable and vociferous within the final thirty seconds. The track eventually fades out, with the impression left that this session will continue late into the night.

Bedtime Stories (1994) is quite similar musically, if a little more laid-back in its overall groove. Tracks such as 'Inside Of Me', 'Forbidden Love' and 'Sanctuary' are all drum- and bass-heavy, with echo used tactically to create a sense of space and presence simultaneously. The album's lyrics are quite different from those on *Erotica*, however, tending towards apparently 'mature' love themes, in which sexual knowledge is a given, but not the foundation of a relationship. Thus, whereas lyrics on the earlier album were focused on possible sexual acts, 'I'd Rather Be Your Lover' is an example of how *Bedtime Stories* is more about desiring a settled, sexually frank relationship: "Take a walk within me, venture through the dark sea / Can't you see, I need you beside me / [...] / I'd rather be your lover". 'Sanctuary' also displays a desire for a stable relationship: "It's here in your arms I want to be buried / [...] / It's here in your soul I want to be married / You are my sanctuary". Another theme on the album is one of retaliation, presumably against critics of the *Erotica* and *Sex* projects. In 'Human Nature', she declares sarcastically, "Oops, I didn't know I couldn't talk about sex (I musta been crazy)". In 'Survival', she asks, "Here's my question / Does your criticism have you caught up in what you cannot see?", and declares proudly, "I'll never be an angel / I'll never be a saint it's true / I'm too busy surviving". These themes seem to imply progress from the previous sexually explicit projects towards another statement of 'maturity', while the musical similarity to *Erotica* might suggest that the newfound sexual freedom is not being rejected entirely. Visually, a similar tactic is used. In the video for 'Take A Bow' (dir. Haussman, 1994), one of Madonna's characters wears a glamorous 1940s style skirt suit with a veiled hat and arm-length black gloves, while the other writhes around on a bed with a television, dressed only in her underwear, apparently masturbating (see Figure 2.20).

Figure 2.20
'Take A Bow'

One also might usefully compare the references to motherhood in the video for 'Bedtime Story' (dir. Romanek, 1994; see Figure 2.21), with the sadomasochistic theme played out previously in the 'Human Nature' video (see Figure 2.15).

Figure 2.21
A 'pregnant' Madonna releasing doves to invoke maternity

The next major transformative move on Madonna's part was heralded by the *Ray Of Light* album of 1998.[41] The videos for 'Frozen' (dir. Cunningham, 1998) and 'Drowned World/Substitute for Love' (dir. Stern, 1998) showcased a new Eastern-inspired image, backed up by her new-found dedication to Ashtanga yoga, with a settled, mellow edge apparently justified by the birth of her first child, Lourdes, in 1996: "I've been practising Ashtanga since my daughter was born. [...] I'm more relaxed and less rushed. It's all the yoga. It's changed my life. It gives you a lot of clarity and softness. I'm not as aggressive as I used to be" (Madonna quoted in Thompson, 2001, p. 251).[42] Many of the lyrics on *Ray Of Light* speak of this new

shift in Madonna's state. In 'Nothing Really Matters', she ponders karma ("Love is all we need / Everything I give you / All comes back to me") and her old ways ("I lived so selfishly / [...] / I realise / That nobody wins"). She sings of guidance from gurus in 'Sky Fits Heaven', quite clearly tapping into the vocabulary of a 1960s-style bohemian ethos: "Sky fits heaven so fly it / That's what the prophet said to me / [...] / Fate fits karma so use it / That's what the wise man said to me". 'Shanti/Ashtangi' is the track most explicitly informed by Madonna's new engagement with Eastern religions, adapted from a classic Sanskrit text *Yoga Taravali*: "Vunde gurunām caranāravinde / [...] / Sahasra-śirasam / Vande".[43] Another theme was beginning to come to the fore in Madonna's life at the same time as her turn to the East: still eastwards from her home town of Michigan, but a little less far, Madonna was developing an attraction to British culture. In 1997 she began looking for property in England, and declared: "I have some excellent friends in London and have thought about sending my daughter to school there. I think British people are more intelligent than Americans" (quoted in Thompson, 2001, p. 245). The intersection of these two themes, then, may well be found in the choice of title track for Madonna's 1998 album: 'Ray Of Light' is a reworking of a little-known song, 'Sepheryn' (1971), by an obscure English folk-rock duo, Curtiss Maldoon. The subtonic is consistently flattened in Madonna's vocal line, resulting in a mixolydian mode with a B♭ tonic (Track 12).[44] Much of the melody revolves around the first three pitches of the B♭ scale, but there are frequent breaks into a melody which moves stepwise, orbiting the crucial A♭ (see Figure 2.22).

Qui-cker than a   ray   of   light___   Qui-cker than a   ray   of   light___

Qui-cker than a   ray   of   light_____

Figure 2.22
'Ray Of Light', Madonna / William Orbit (2'23"-2'40")

The persistent refusal of the natural subtonic pitch throughout the song speaks of a tonal 'other': the mixolydian mode approximates the North Indian *thaat Khammaj*,[45] and parts of 'Ray Of Light' are thus somewhat reminiscent of Indian sub-continental music.[46] The resulting effect is a euphoric, trancey stereotyping of 60s/70s bohemian culture, informed as it was by Indian religion and culture. An ecstatic loss of control,

perhaps suggestive of the hallucinatory drugs typical of that era (and present also in Goa trance of the early 1990s, perhaps derived in part from the same cultural sources), is captured musically by Madonna in a few seconds at the end of the song (4'35"-4'40"; Track 13), as her voice seems to 'spin' on the word "feel" and the centrifugal force sends it screaming into orbit, an effect prefaced by synthesisers in the few seconds immediately preceding this. The Asian potential of the mixolydian mode is further realised in the next track, 'Candy Perfume Girl', which uses the same mode (this time with an F♯ final): at the very end of that song, Madonna ornaments the final phoneme of "candy", taking the highest pitch to the flattened subtonic (E♮) with her voice's plasticity here giving an oriental effect (see Figure 2.23), and a chorus or overdub effect lending an air of harmonisation that defies Western musical tradition (Track 14).

Can - dy_____

Figure 2.23
Final seconds of 'Candy Perfume Girl'

Music (2000) is not on the whole as musically explicit as Madonna's previous albums in forming part of a wider image change. The artwork at least (by Jean-Baptiste Mondino) supported her transformation into rhinestone cowgirl: bales of hay, an ornamented serif typeface, and the framing of pages with pictures of decorative metal all parallel the images of Madonna herself in stereotypically 'Western' clothing, Stetson-and-all. For the most part, neither the lyrics nor the music on this album support this transformation. As Sean Albiez summarises, "Very little in the album announces itself as Country music per se" (2004, p. 131). Yet, he argues, the album overall "alludes to acoustic singer-songwriting" and engages "with Country not as nostalgia but as a contemporary attempt to reconstruct a cyber-folk sensibility" (p. 131). 'Don't Tell Me' features a steel-string guitar playing a riff that makes some allusion to Country and Western music (Track 15), and the video for the song (dir. Mondino, 2000) makes best use of the song's tempo and rhythmic foundation with the choreography of a line-dance sequence, but the song's lyrical content makes no overt suggestion that this would be an appropriate musical realisation. Her cover of Don McClean's 'American Pie' (1971), which closes *Music,*

is arguably something of an attempt to capture an All-American sentiment that may indeed support the cowgirl image, although the musical treatment of McClean's song is distinctly less nostalgic and conservative than the original (see Track 16), as Albiez's analysis would suggest.[47] What might be taken from *Music* as a whole, then, is a camp excess manifested in a form not previously used by Madonna, and it is this that I feel characterises the album musically and its accompanying visuals. Stan Hawkins describes in some detail the way in which the album's title track can be understood as an exercise in musical camp (2004), and many of the same criteria-for-camp that Hawkins perceives can also be found in tracks such as 'Impressive Instant' or 'Runaway Lover'. Both of these tracks tap into the gay-male-dominated disco idiom (see Tracks 17 and 18), and celebrate the same triumph of style over content as that observed by Hawkins in relation to 'Music' (2004, p. 10), after Sontag's famous summary of Camp (1999).

American Life (2003) seems to articulate two positions equally: the tracks are almost evenly split between those which deal with a questioning of her past, or act as a cathartic expression of certain problematic aspects of her own life, and those which celebrate her then newly-regained personal stability, in the dual forms of Guy Ritchie and their son, Rocco.[48] The former category of songs tends to be characterised musically by a predominance of electronica and technological intervention. 'I'm So Stupid', perhaps the most self-critical set of lyrics on the album, is most notable for the modification of Madonna's voice into a noise resembling a sine wave at the beginning of an early chorus, with the word "I" (Track 19). 'Mother And Father', a therapeutic monologue on the subject of being motherless from a young age, is clearly influenced by co-producer Mirwais Ahmadzaï's experience in electronic dance music. The same can be said for 'Die Another Day', during which Madonna's voice is repeatedly deformed by technological means (Track 20). Songs falling into the latter category tend towards less visibly technological instruments. 'Love Profusion' keeps returning to an instrumental foundation of acoustic guitar, while Madonna sings "I got you under my skin". An acoustic guitar also prevails in 'Nothing Fails', where it is assisted by a simple, droning string accompaniment, and the lyrics speak of a peace discovered through falling in love: "When I get lost in space / I can return to this place / 'Cos you're the one" (Track 21). Although 'Intervention' (an ode to Rocco and reference to complications during her labour) uses an electric guitar, the overall effect is similar to 'Nothing Fails' and 'Love

Profusion' as it is not markedly distorted or affected, and at several points in the track it forms the sole instrumental accompaniment (see Track 22). Although Madonna has on many previous occasions used her musical projects as a form of personal therapy or to question her status at any given time,[49] the persistence of these themes on *American Life* is noteworthy: even the previous album, *Music*, featured tracks that fell outside the boundaries of the deeply personal, such as the frivolous 'Music' or the 'American Pie' cover. As for the image accompanying *American Life*, it seemed to be yet another bid to be taken seriously as an artist, brought about in some way by a kind of European chic. If *Music* had explored and engaged with the North American side of Madonna's heritage, as Albiez argues (2004), *American Life* saw her adopting a more questioning position with regards to that heritage, and taking on certain Euro-isms as she attempted to facilitate her integration with this side of the Atlantic.

Vocal mutations

Apart from general musical changes throughout her career, it has also been proposed that Madonna's voice has been a continuous site of deliberate mutation. Keith Clifton argues for this:

> Especially in her usage of the voice, Madonna's self-transformation is paramount and deliberate. We may perceive audible changes from the early years (squealing sex kitten in 'Material Girl' (1984) and 'Dress You Up' (1984)); through passionate balladeer in the 90's ('Take a Bow' (1994)); to energetic disco-style diva ('Music' (2000)); and rapper ('American Life' (2003)). Madonna's vocal metamorphosis has proven to be a central and yet undertheorized aspect of her career
>
> (2004, p. 55)[50]

Clifton's aim is to construct the vocal changes he perceives as part of her function as an icon for gay men, running alongside the visual changes noted above, and the camp musical production noted by Hawkins (2004) that is also visible in, for example, the performance of 'Beautiful Stranger' in the *Drowned World Tour*.

It may well be possible to trace a clearly linear development of Madonna's musical style (although I do not necessarily mean 'development' to imply 'improvement'), but the specifically vocal changes are not necessarily as straightforwardly teleological as Clifton's argument seems to imply. He notes the reception of the *True Blue* album as representing Madonna's "first mature artistic statement" (2004, p. 60), and tracks such as 'Live To Tell' (1986) do indeed

demonstrate a move towards a vocal maturity, a vocality quite distinct from the so-called 'little-girl voice' that featured so prominently in earlier tracks such as 'Material Girl' (see Tracks 23 and 24) or 'Into The Groove' (1985). Yet that same perceived vocal immaturity is also present on *True Blue*, particularly in those songs which allude to the 60s girl-group genre. So, Madonna's new 'voices' do not eclipse the old ones entirely, and just as visual themes have recurred throughout her career, her vocal techniques have come to form something of an artist's palette to be dipped into time and again. Moreover, just as the *Re-Invention Tour* can be viewed as Madonna commenting on her own history (see above), she has arguably made use of her voice in quite self-reflexive ways. Hence on the *Blond Ambition* tour, 'Material Girl', which had encapsulated a classic example of the nasal 'little-girl voice' on its first release, was performed in a voice which plainly caricatured that kind of voice. Another form of this reflexivity can be heard on 'Waiting', from *Erotica*, which features a sample from 'Justify My Love' (1990), or in 'Deeper and Deeper' which, as noted above, makes reference to 'Vogue'.

Despite such inconsistencies in any implicitly teleological approach to Madonna's changing vocality, Clifton's overall point is indeed valid, especially in his description of a clear long-term development of Madonna's vocality in relation to her role in *Evita* (dir. Parker, 1996). A change at this point is clearly perceptible in her vocal style and ability. As her vocal coach Joan Layder noted, "Madonna developed an upper range she didn't know she had" (quoted in Taraborrelli, 2001, p. 249). The role certainly required much more of Madonna's voice than she had previously achieved. Challenging melodic shifts are to be negotiated throughout *Evita*, as in the opening lines of 'Eva's Final Broadcast' (Track 25), or in 'Eva and Magaldi/Eva Beware of the City' (Track 26), and she navigates them with greater ease than might have been expected prior to her vocal training. One might compare, for instance, her ability in *Evita* with the chromaticism in the bridge section of 'Sooner Or Later' from *I'm Breathless* (Track 27). As an example, her tuning at the words "ever fights me again" is marred by her difficulty with the low pitches and chromatic line scored at this point. Madonna's comment on Stephen Sondheim's writing of this song (and two others which he wrote for the *Dick Tracy* soundtrack) was that "He writes in a kind of chromatic wildness", and that the songs had therefore been difficult to learn and to sing (quoted in Victor, 2001, p. 34). Her difficulty with Sondheim's writing is noticeable despite having a big-band as musical

support, whereas in 'Eva's Final Broadcast' the vocal line is supported minimally by droning brass and wind sections, with rhythmic punctuation from a nylon-stringed guitar. Moreover, in 'Sooner Or Later', her breathing unnecessarily disjoints the word "a˅gain".[51] The same point can be made in relation to 'He's A Man' (also from *I'm Breathless*) at the lines "why do you ˅ have ˅ to ˅ save the human race", and, "make your ˅ secret ˅ getaway", with the result being an ironically 'breathless' performance (see Track 28). By comparison, in 'Eva's Final Broadcast', although the breath is also used to make a dramatic point (Eva is nearing the end of her life), Madonna displays markedly more control and seems to be able to sustain the lines for longer. Hence, the line "Sad to be defeated by her own weak body" is carried by a single breath, despite there arguably being opportunity for another to be taken (between 'defeated' and 'by'). Similarly, in 'Frozen', from *Ray Of Light*, she manages to sustain the lines "How can life be what you want it to be / You're frozen" on a single breath. The developing versatility of her upper range is evident in songs such as 'Rainbow High' from *Evita*, in which a minor sixth leap at the word "rainbow" forces her to cross registers from throat to head. The new-found strength behind it can be heard in the modulation to B minor, when the word "saviour" takes her only one tone lower than the "rainbow" in the original tonic (B♭ minor), and this time leading to it with a well-supported chest-voice (Track 29). 'I'd Be Surprisingly Good For You' also made use of her newly developed upper range, requiring even greater control as low volume was often called for, as at the words "I'm not talking ...", and in the opening line "Colonel Perón", with the angular melody further complicating the line.

Writing in 1993, Simon Frith argued that Madonna "gets her effects not by switching gear but by switching register, and, whether she's singing from mouth or throat or chest, when she pushes her voice it becomes shrill and petulant" (p. 88). Since *Evita*, Madonna's upper register has become noticeably more controlled and effective. The skills she learned for the musical became clear in 'Ray Of Light', when the melodic line takes her up to F[1] at the repetition of "quicker than a ray of light" (see Figure 2.22 above; Track 30). Similarly, her lower range sounds much less forced, as she relies less on attempts to sound deliberately husky and chesty. A good example of this can be heard by comparing 'Live To Tell', from 1986, and 'Frozen', from 1998 (see Figure 2.24). The earlier track itself demonstrates something of an improvement in Madonna's ability to pitch notes at the bottom end

of her range, compared with a track like 'Angel' (1985; Track 31). Yet the quality of the voice in the lower range of 'Live to Tell' still seems to speak of a guttural bodily production, and this is most noticeable when greater volume is called for, as at the beginning of the chorus. As the crescendo starts to build at the beginning of the chorus, the lowest notes of the song (A G_1 F_1) are sung with the words "thousand lies". The increased volume and descending pitch combine at this point in the song to expose the manner in which Madonna's lower range is produced physically. The lowest pitch in 'Frozen' is also F_1 (in the refrain line "when your heart's not open") and the melodic details leading to it are similar to those found in the earlier song (A♭ G_1 F_1), so this offers an excellent point of comparison in terms of Madonna's vocal development (see Tracks 32 and 33).
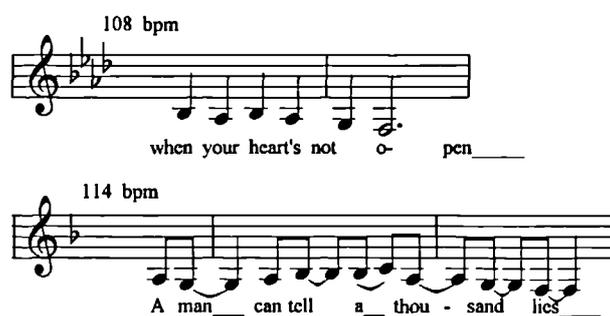
Figure 2.24
Descents to F_1 in 'Frozen'(top) and 'Live To Tell' (bottom)

Although the low F is sounded with slightly less volume in 'Frozen', which might be interpreted as revealing a weakness at low pitch, there is in fact a noticeably greater sense that Madonna was able to control her voice more effectively at that level by 1998. Essentially, the physical production of her voice at the depths of her range is less present in the sound of the voice. In Barthes's terms, the body is less obvious in her voice as it sings (1990, p. 299).

Arguably, we might expect a more reliable voice from Madonna in her middle age, since physiological changes to the laryngeal cartilages at this time in life result in a better-supported larynx, and therefore (potentially) a more stable voice (NCVS, 2004). Yet the process of active vocal preparation for the role of Eva Perón, and the way in which the training impacts on the understanding of Madonna's vocal quality/ability, ultimately invoke discourses surrounding vocal training, and a dialogue between natural maturation and conscious training. Furthermore, while arguing that her voice has become more stable since undergoing training, it is notable

that my case was built in part on the changing relationship between geno- and pheno-factors in her performance. The level (or lack) of control over her voice is indicated by the points at which the body breaks (or does not break) through into the singing voice. Although, as I have noted, it is almost certainly impossible to sing entirely without 'grain', by definition, the perception of the geno-song forms a significant part of a listener's relationship with a voice, and is often implicit in qualitative analyses of the voice. Geno- (and indeed pheno-)processes seem to have restrictions put upon them in terms of their acceptability. In Karen Carpenter's voice, as we have seen, her tendency to sing close to the microphone enhanced a sense of intimacy between singer and listener considered entirely appropriate, partly because of the genre in which her music is situated, and partly because of her semi-mythic biographical construction as emotionally repressed/suppressed 'victim' (see Coleman, 1994). Yet in other ways, geno-processes are constructed as requiring erasure, perhaps because of their challenge to cultural practice, the way in which they "unsettle" (Barthes, 1973, p. 98). It is this kind of process, the putative inappropriateness of certain geno-factors, which underpins the fact that those points when Madonna's voice is perceived as inadequate are often related to the physiological aspects of her vocality. Wayne Koestenbaum identifies some of the implications of the way in which Maria Callas's voice audibly transitioned between vocal registers:

> The naked break [between vocal registers] shows her to be, though a genius, a bit of a freak – delightfully self-embarrassing, unable to control herself in this tiny matter on which the *bel canto* art depends. The break between registers is the moment when the voice proves itself to be of two minds.
>
> (1993, p. 146)

Equally, however confidently and accurately Madonna may negotiate the leap in 'Rainbow High', the break between registers is laid bare. Despite the training, her voice may still 'fail' by revealing the body behind it. Indeed, perhaps *because* of the training there remains the anticipation of a return to 'weaker' (more bodily?) form. But in Koestenbaum's terms, this may be a significant part of Madonna's appeal: writing again of Callas – this time of her 'wobbling' upper register – Koestenbaum proposes that the "infallible performance does not require an audience" (1993, p. 137). Audible intakes of breath may have a similar function to the 'naked break' between registers.

Callas took in breath dramatically, audibly, as if she were gasping. She

> turned the need to breathe into an expressive opportunity. But the gasp also
> revealed the cost of music-making: phrases need to come from somewhere
> in the body [...]. The gasp is the price tag on the expensive garment of the
> aria.
>
> (p. 146)

Remembering some of the moments in Madonna's music described above, such as in 'Sooner Or Later', the comparisons are easy to make, although the conclusion in Madonna's work may not involve the word 'genius', perhaps due to the generally lower cultural status of popular music (when compared with the supposed zenith of art music that is opera). Ultimately, the audibly fallible vocalities of both Callas and Madonna have some effect. Again, the following may describe the responses of knowing listeners to Callas and Ciccone alike: "Callas's unattractive sounds forced her audience to reevaluate the difference between the beautiful and the grotesque" (Koestenbaum, 1993, p. 146). Patricia Pisters (2004) notes a similar result emanating from the work of Madonna, taking Baudrillard's theories of seduction and applying them to what she sees as Madonna's over-production of signs. In the Baudrillardian formulation, seduction "uses signs that are already simulators to make them falser than false" (Gane, 1993, p. 113). In seduction, Gane summarises, "I am not beautiful, but worse" (p. 113). It is moments of the grotesque in Madonna's work, that leads Pisters to conclude that Madonna too is "not simply 'beautiful' but 'worse'" (2004, p. 35). The moments that Pisters cites are visual, and include the video for 'What It Feels Like For A Girl' (dir. Ritchie, 2000) and a video image of her brutally battered, bleeding face presiding over the performance of 'Mer Girl' in the *Drowned World Tour*. Yet the same logic might usefully be applied to her vocality which, in its persistent inability to hide the register break, and its frequently over-breathy nature, appears as 'grotesque' as Callas's. In those moments of 'gothic' vocality, Madonna's voice produces excess meaning. The object-voice is forced upon the listener. After all, 'the phrase has to come from somewhere in the body'. This is the grain of the voice, and as we have seen it is a rupturing and discomforting thing. The voice which cannot hide the body which produces it defies the rules of 'proper' singing and unsettles the listener's culturally-enforced expectations. Koestenbaum writes: "Every body is a civil war. Callas sang the war" (1993, p. 146). Madonna is still singing it.

2.4 Desire and identification in flux

In her constant problematisation of gendered subject positions, Madonna represents a particularly productive site for the (re-)theorisation of the gaze. Laura Mulvey's seminal work on the gaze and classic Hollywood cinema (see Mulvey, 1992) theorised the gaze as male, masculine and heterosexual, with the female body as the object, and precisely as objectified. Variations on Mulvey's formulation have since been proposed, including Doane's female spectator (1992) and Drukman's 'gay gaze' (1995). It is at the points at which such models merge, as well as in the gaps which they leave, that the notion of the gaze can be seen to be particularly useful in relation to Madonna's work. As I have argued earlier, her work consistently presents a series of challenges to clearly defined genders, sexualities and subjectivities, and it is therefore essential to consider the gaze in terms of its fluid potential: what emerges is a state of oscillation between various gendered identities.

Implicit in the idea of the gaze is the analogous process of display which, as noted previously, has been usefully theorised by Lucy Green in terms of a relationship between displayer and onlooker founded upon the symbol of the mask, which effectively splits the performer into 'self' and 'other', simultaneously rendering him (or her) active and passive (1997, pp. 21-2). I have also noted how Madonna's relationship with the mask is more complex than Green's bifurcated model, and this seems to have resultant implications for ways of understanding desire at work in her work. Here, desire is not to be understood solely in the Lacanian sense, but also in the more commonly understood senses of desiring to *have* (especially sexually) or desiring to *be* an other.

Identification with / desire for: part I

It is difficult to envision the application of the gaze outside of any gendered framework, as it has usually been within such frameworks that its formulations have come about. Yet it is precisely its potential for deconstructing hegemonic conceptions of gender that makes it useful here. Perhaps, then, it is helpful to suppose certain senses of gender and sexuality in order to proceed, such that we can see how any 'sense' may be subjected to a process of confusion (or not) through Madonna's work. The following diagrams are an attempt to schematise some of the possible processes of identification and desire when the gaze is directed at Madonna. The first schema (Figure 2.25) is predicated on the holder of the gaze being a gay

male, although it is worth noting certain problems in such a statement before unpacking the various meanings of this representation. First, it is essential to keep in mind that the sexual preference of a subject is of course not the only condition upon which the subject's identity position is formulated, and that the common factor of being a gay man does not inevitably determine the ways in which processes of desire and identification work for any given individual. Second, just as lesbians may, in practice, choose to be celibate (see Loulan, 1990, pp. 147-9) or to sleep with men (Harper, 1990), gay men may also express their sexual identification in a number of ways that do not include having sex with men. Adrienne Rich uses the term "lesbian continuum to include a range [...] of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman" (1993, p. 217). Eve Sedgwick also uses the idea of a continuum, but describes it as 'homosocial', rather than specifically homosexual. Sedgwick asks the question: "Doesn't the continuum between 'men-loving-men' and 'men-promoting-the-interests-of-men' have the same intuitive force that it does for women?". Her answer is a decisive refusal of such a claim: "Quite the contrary" (1985, p. 3). Thus, while we might see both male and female continua, the social and psychological processes at work in each one are quite distinct. In the first of my diagrams, then, the subject position of 'gay male' is broadly intended to denote a particular archetype of gay male sexuality, perhaps incorporating the 'Madonna Queen' (see Clifton, 2004). The schema deploys the stereotype of gay male camp, which traditionally takes "the fetishized Hollywood female star as its focus – not just any female star, but the 'strong', highly sexualized feminine images, the sirens, vamps and femme fatales" (Graham, 1995, p. 168): the substitution of Hollywood star for Madonna is easy enough, especially given her history of appropriation of that kind of iconography.
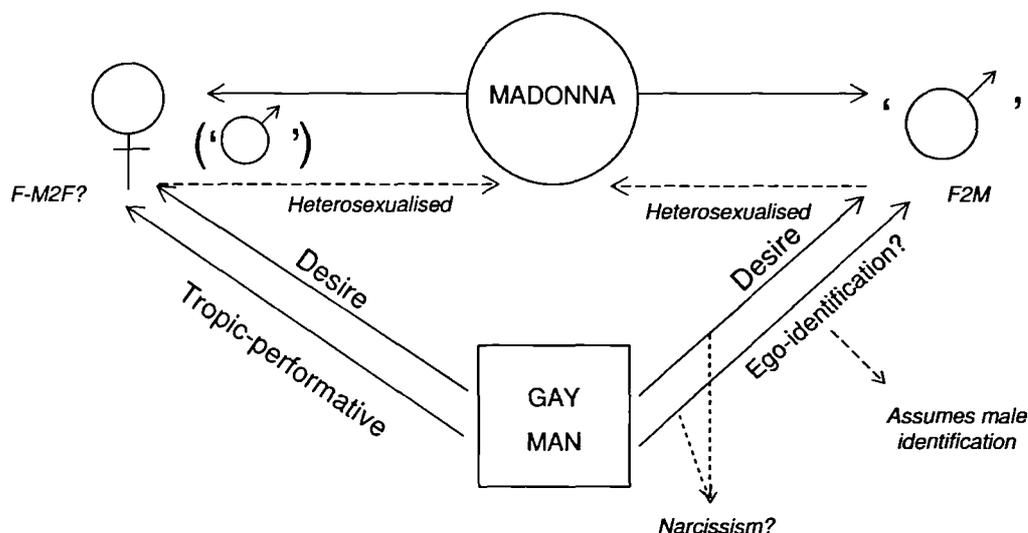
Figure 2.25
Formulation of gay male desire/identification

The two protagonists of this diagram are Madonna and her gay male 'Madonna Queen'-style onlooker. At the top of the picture, to the left and right of Madonna, are figures which represent her gendered masking: the image in the top right indicates Madonna cross-dressing to signify a male form (as in the 'Express Yourself' video, for example), and the image in the top left indicates both Madonna as woman and Madonna as female female impersonator, with the bracketed symbol representing the potential for an implicit male form between her own body and the body she presents (see Figure 2.6 above). With respect to the former of these manifestations, the F2M-cross-dressing Madonna may signify both an object of sexual desire for the gay male onlooker and a site of ego-identification for him. As in the Mulveyan model, the male gaze-holder might identify with the central male character, but in this case that character is Madonna. This identification with F2M-Madonna might assume a form of male self-identification on the part of the onlooker, which may or may not be present. Alternatively, it might leave space for identification with the performative nature of gender, allowing the onlooker a way of describing his own troubled gender identification, if this applies. The simultaneous existence of sexual desire and ego-identification points towards the trope of narcissism that has characterised some work on homosexual desire. Freud in particular is (in)famous for this, writing that "[perverts and homosexuals] are plainly seeking *themselves* as a love-object, and exhibiting a type of object-choice which must be termed 'narcissistic'" (1914, p. 554. His emphasis). The onlooker in this

situation is also in a sense 'duped' into a heterosexual mode of desire and identification, since beneath the performance of 'male', Madonna remains physically female. Thus, the sexual desire is in some way heterosexualised, and the ego-identification is similarly displaced onto a female object (perhaps further complicating the process by almost 'lesbianising' it).

The other manifestation of Madonna in this diagram, Madonna-as-woman (either female or female female impersonator) yields another set of structures. If we take Madonna-as-woman to be representative of a female impersonator (as hinted at in her 'Marilyn Monroe phase', for example), then the gay male onlooker may identify with that trope of performance, the drag queen archetype. Concurrently, as with the previous model (of Madonna as F2M cross-dresser), Madonna can signify an object of desire for the onlooker, albeit much further displaced than before, in the form of the male body she implies. And just as in the previous model, the underlying female body has the potential to heterosexualise the desire here. If, however, we take Madonna-as-woman *not* to invoke the drag queen archetype (and there are many occasions on which she presents a female body *qua* female body), then the desire and identification may be afforded very different meanings. Any suggestion of identification could raise the spectre of Mulvey's original formulation, implying that a homosexual male may be inclined to identify with the female character, in her role as object-of-male-desire. This, in fact, is a duality at the heart of gay male desire: a gay man both *exercises* male desire and is the *object* of male desire. In the above schema, then, to desire sexually Madonna-as-woman (female *qua* female) would be a heterosexual trajectory not typically undertaken from a gay male subject position, whereas to identify with her would be to recognise his position as object-of-male-desire *as well as* to feminise his own subject position (perhaps inappropriately).

As a central single figure, Madonna is both consumed by individual gay men and has become commodified by gay men as a community. As I have noted above, the consumption of Madonna in this way evokes Sedgwick's homosocial continuum, and the exchange of women between men in the formation of homosocial bonds (1985). In Sedgwick's formation, the homosocial exchange of women not only serves the formation of these bonds, but also to allay fears of homosexuality. Homosocial bonds are carefully formed, such that they carve out bonds between men *through* women, safely displacing any accusations of homosexual desire. What has thus far been overlooked, however, is that in the specific case of Madonna,

consumed in this instance by self-declared gay men, the homosocial and the homosexual become even more entangled. Here, a woman is being exchanged or bonded with in order to form homosocial bonds between men, but with the understanding that homosexuality is another crucial common factor between the men, absolutely *not* something to be avoided at all costs. Rather, it is part of what allows the bonds to be formed, since without the homosexual line having been crossed, the exchange would occur in quite a different way. Identification can occur in the homosexual context, and this is a form of bond, whereas a heterosexual context can only allow for exchange, and probably sexual(ised) exchange at that.[52]

Identification with / desire for: part II

The analogous system of identification and desire of Madonna by a lesbian onlooker is both infinitely simpler and much more intricately layered.[53] Perhaps the differences are also shaped in some way by the differences between the female and male homosocial/homosexual continua, already noted above. Eve Sedgwick writes:

> [T]he diacritical opposition between the "homosocial" and the "homosexual" seems much less thorough and dichotomous for women, in our society, than for men. At this particular historical moment, an intelligible continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations link lesbianism with the other forms of women's attention to women [...]. Thus the adjective "homosocial" as applied to women's bonds [...] need not be pointedly dichotomized as against "homosexual"; it can intelligibly denominate the entire continuum.
>
> (1985, pp. 2-3).

Sedgwick continues by observing that this is "in strong contrast to the arrangement among males" (p. 3), which she describes as a "radically disrupted" continuum (p. 2). In the above case of a gay male observer, Madonna acts as a facilitator of gay male bonding, as cultural capital exchanged between two men. In the lesbian model (Figure 2.26), however, many of the structures of desire and identification are differently problematic.
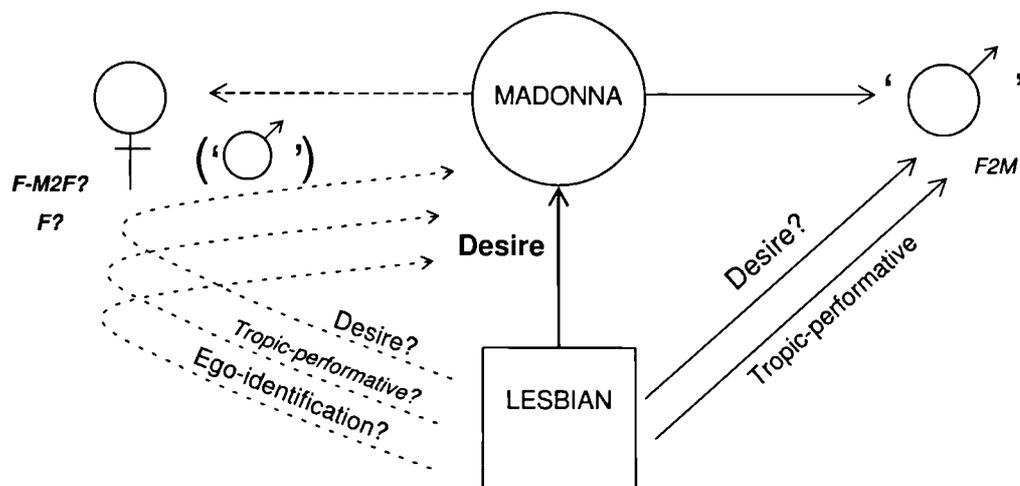
Figure 2.26
Formulation of lesbian desire/identification

Here, the entire left-hand side of the diagram is under question, since the idea of Madonna-as-female-female-impersonator arguably has less currency in lesbian (sub-) culture. Hence, the lines of desire, ego-identification and tropic-performative identification are pictured as reflexive, perhaps ricocheting off the elusive F-M2F Madonna, perhaps circumventing it altogether and exscribing the putative male.[54] The dotted nature of these lines further suggest them to be in many ways contentious. Although in theory lesbians and gay men have equal access to drag queen performers in the so-called 'homosexual community', drag queens and female impersonation undoubtedly carry much more cultural weight within gay male circles than in lesbian communities. This may be partly to do with a perceived misogyny in the drag performance, which depends either on an exaggeration of the disparity between body and clothing, or on a mocking caricature of the 'feminine' style, something of an essentialisation of femininity, and an elision of femininity and female-ness that seems broadly to have less currency (or at the very least a number of problematic implications) for many lesbians than for most heterosexual women (see Ainley, 1995, pp. 145-50). Whatever the reason, the relevant effect in the present context is that it is more difficult to assume a lesbian identification with the performative trope of female impersonation. Were we to take this trope as being identified by the lesbian protagonist in this diagram, we might see an ego-identification with the performance of femininity, just as the gay male previously may have identified with the performance of masculinity while not necessarily identifying directly with female-to-

male drag performance.[55] Perhaps performativity is inherent in the act of being 'feminine', whoever performs it: "since femininity is *always* drag, no matter who paints on the nail polish and mascara, it is easy to caricature" (Solomon, 1993, p. 145. Her emphasis).[56] Also available here is sexual desire (desire for the female being 'performed'), but this could easily be problematic for a lesbian onlooker if the object of desire in any way implies 'male'. Putting the drag queen aside, what is left is Madonna-as-female, female *qua* female (whatever that means), which is probably equivalent to the 'Madonna' positioned centrally, and presents less of a challenge to the onlooker's construction of her own sexuality. Indeed, with this in mind, we might see the entire diagram (and especially the left-hand side) as a complication of the central line, which indicates that Madonna-as-Madonna may (or may not) be sexually desired by any given lesbian simply on account of being a woman. As I have noted, Madonna may never move beyond the stage of 'woman' for many viewers, and this would have implosive effects for the above diagram.

On the right-hand side of the diagram, Madonna-as-F2M holds a meaning for the lesbian onlooker very different from that available to the gay male. These lines of desire and identification are roughly equivalent to that between the gay male and Madonna-as-drag-queen, but the wearing of traditionally male clothing by women is regarded very differently from the wearing of female clothing by men and this has implications when unpacking the above diagram. With the possible exception of the Scottish kilt, the majority of Western culture implicitly prohibits the wearing of skirts by men. Conversely (or somewhat perversely?), women are almost encouraged to cross-dress (loosely), in what is ultimately a patriarchal society: "According to most doctors, male transvestites derive sexual excitement – and erections – from wearing women's underclothing, but women are regarded as having not *sexual* but *cultural* desires – desires that the culture and its doctors understand" (Garber, 1993, p. 45. Her emphasis).[57] Given the casual prevalence with which women now wear clothing designed for men, or clothing inspired by menswear designs, making a point about gender through clothing has perhaps become more difficult, for women at least. As a consequence, if Madonna wishes to recover the drag king/male impersonator image, her choice of clothing must be defined as obviously and exclusively (or at least primarily) male, and the specifics of her chosen styles therefore acquire some significance. In a great deal of her F2M cross-dressing, Madonna's choice of clothing evokes early twentieth-century men's fashions. This is the case, for

example, in the videos for 'Vogue' and 'Express Yourself',[58] as well as the 2002 photo shoot for *Vanity Fair* (Daly, 2002). While the visual images presented by Madonna foreground the gendered-ness of vestimentary codes outside of any historical context, specific reference to this era has the effect of underlining her point, by alluding to an important period in the history of male impersonation and F2M cross-dressing. In terms of lesbian (sub-)cultures and history, the significance of Madonna's F2M cross-dressing becomes clear through an analysis of the specific style of clothing that she chooses to wear in her performance. Although there has not developed an extensive drag king culture to parallel that of drag queens (Halberstam, 1998, p. 234), F2M cross-dressing was a popular form of entertainment in early twentieth-century England:

> Drag kings ruled Britain's stages throughout the hey-day of music-hall as mass entertainment. 'Male impersonators', as they were billed, became hugely popular acts; their costumes influenced men's fashion and their looks won them vast numbers of (mostly female) fans. [...] Every hall had at least one such act [...].
>
> (Bingham, 1997, p. 26)

The popularity of women wearing men's clothing was also a common element of Hollywood films in the early twentieth century: Josef von Sternberg, for instance, directed seven films starring Marlene Dietrich – several of which featured the star in men's clothing.[59] Sternberg's intention was apparently to give Dietrich appeal to the female audience, and make her more than simply a sex symbol for male consumption (Kobal, 1968, p. 49).[60] With reference to Figure 2.26 above, the history of drag kings and 'male impersonators' may destabilise, infuse and defuse the potential desire held for F2M-Madonna by a lesbian onlooker, just as the historically and culturally-located tropes of the molly or the lady-boy may inflect the desire of a gay man for the female-impersonator or drag queen.[61]

It is important to remember that any of these codes are read with hindsight, and caution is essential in assuming a lesbian interpretation of Madonna's cross-dressing. In this formation, the monocle worn in the 'Express Yourself' video ensures the possibility for a clearly lesbian reading of the performance (see Figure 2.27). As Garber notes: "The tuxedo, the cigarette, the cropped haircut, and the monocle are the most recognisable and readable signs of the lesbian culture of Paris [in the twenties]" (1993, p. 153). Arguably, the monocle especially is reminiscent of this era and culture, since tuxedos, cigarettes and cropped haircuts have withstood

changes in fashion where the monocle has not, and it has therefore retained a definite historically locating power. The monocle is also notably associated with Lady Una Troubridge, the long-time lover of Radclyffe Hall (Doan, 1998, p. 676), thus affording it a distinctly lesbian signification.
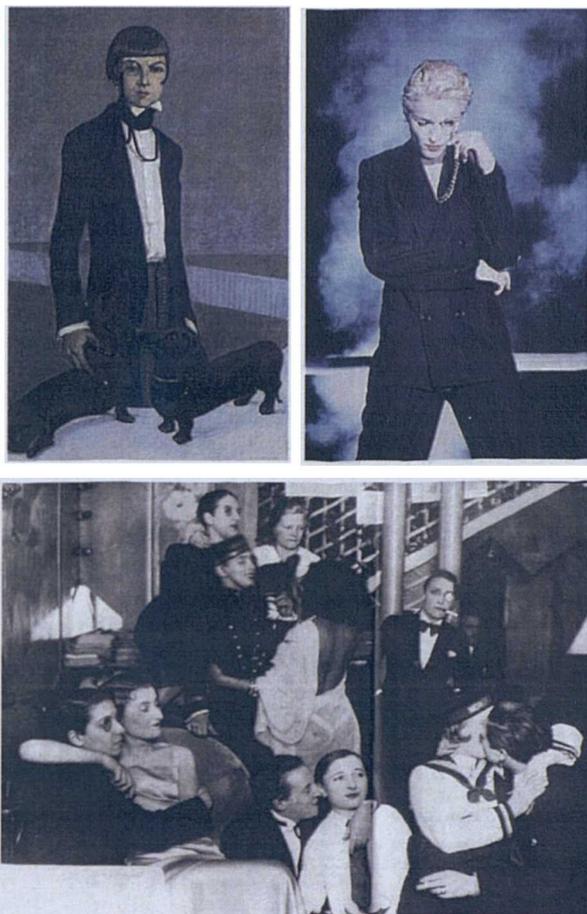
Figure 2.27
*Lady Una Troubridge; Madonna in the 'Express Yourself' video;
and an all-female audience at a Parisian cabaret, c. 1920*

Somewhat contrastingly, Laura Doan disputes the inevitability of these 'signs' as proto-lesbian signifiers, warning against "pinning down the cultural significance of monocles, short hair, and cigarettes to any one effect", and noting Garber's own point that cross-dressing is multiplicitous in its cultural meaning (Doan, 1998, p. 667). Doan observes, "in England in the 1920s, fashion-conscious women of all sexual persuasions were obliged to 'cross-dress' by donning boyish or mannish attire and by cutting their hair short" (1998, p. 667), and "codes such as smoking, short hair, and hands in pockets denoted a particular fashion rather than a sexual identity" (p. 675). My own analysis of the instability of these signifiers is that, overall, Madonna's work effectively references a 'golden age' of cross-dressing, "a time of

unprecedented cultural confusion over gender and sexual identity" (p. 665), and in so doing, I would suggest that it opens up a free space for lesbian interpretation. The signifiers may not necessitate such a reading, but at the very least they invite it.

Moreover, Madonna's use of the monocle is one example of how her F2M cross-dressing induces a further reconsideration of the gaze and its phallic effects. 'Express Yourself' is an obvious, and well-documented, example. Melanie Morton reads the monocle first as a "condensed symbol of mastery, the gaze, and the cinematic apparatus" (1993, p. 229), alongside a discourse of knowledge: *Metropolis* (the film which inspired Madonna's video, dir. Lang, 1926) "constantly equates vision with knowledge. Characters never overhear information" (Morton, 1993, p. 222).[62] The crucial crotch-grab in the video represented a fusion in Madonna's work of phallic power and the gaze that has continued in various guises, being most often deployed alongside at least a modicum of F2M cross-dressing.[63] A history of problematising gaze processes extends in Madonna's work back to 'Borderline' (see Schwichtenberg, 1993, p. 134; Fouz-Hernández, 2004, p. 142), but 'Express Yourself' was arguably a crucial point in its synthesis with phallic power in her work. Since 'Express Yourself', several examples are noteworthy. One such example is the video for 'Erotica' (dir. Baron, 1992), which features Madonna as her alter ego, Dita Parlo, wearing (as in the *Sex* book and at the beginning of *The Girlie Show*) a black leather mask over her eyes. In each of these contexts, Madonna/Dita plays with a riding crop, clearly intended as a phallic prop, although cross-dressing is minimal. Here, she is the holder of the phallus and of the gaze, and reinscribes her position by literally wearing a mask. The gaze cannot simply be returned, as it might in many cases of a performer staring into the camera, because the mask introduces a physical layer, from which the gaze may emanate but which it may not easily penetrate. The next most notable example may be her performance of 'Impressive Instant' in the *Drowned World Tour*. At the point where Madonna becomes phallic and ejaculatory by way of a fuming hose between her legs, she is the only performer on stage whose sight is not fragmented or passive. Her dancers all wear small lights to either sides of their heads, making their biological eyes imperceptible – their substitute 'eyes' (the lights) are looked *at* rather than agents of looking – and disintegrating the whole structure of the gaze. At the same time, she leans back in (sexual?) ecstasy, such that she herself is predominantly "to-be-looked-at" (Mulvey, 1992, p. 27), and sexually so, surrendering (herself to) the gaze (of/)to the audience

(although she is also somewhat defended by the smoke). Her 'cross-dressing' in this example is particularly interesting as she is wearing a kilt which, as noted above, already has an unstable relationship with gendered codes. The multiple layering of markers of gaze, (phallic) power, and gender thus result in an entirely equivocal scene.

Another recent and notable example of Madonna's problematising relationship with the gaze's phallic power is to be found in the video for 'Me Against The Music' from 2003, in which Madonna features alongside Britney Spears. The very appearance of Madonna in the video clip is of note, as it recalls the many journalistic column inches devoted to the relationship between the two women since 2000. David Gauntlett notes:

> [The relationship] came to a head for a few months in late 2000, when the two stars wore each other's T-shirts and were rumoured to be considering a duet [...] Madonna dedicated the song 'What it Feels Like for a Girl' to her protégé during a New York *Music* promotion gig, and the entertainment newsmedia became almost obsessed with their relationship of mutual admiration.
>
> (2004, p. 162)[64]

Comparisons between the stars continued, perhaps because of Madonna's unique position as a woman in the music industry, and in 2003 their relationship again attracted the media's undivided attention following a performance of Madonna's 'Hollywood' at the MTV Music Video Awards. What started out as an apparent homage to the older star by Spears and Christina Aguilera – performing 'Like A Virgin' in wedding dresses similar to that worn by Madonna in her own controversial performance of that song at the 1984 MTV awards – quickly transpired to be a new highlight in the relationship between lesbian imagery and popular music performance.[65] Interrupting this song, Madonna emerged from a wedding cake (again, the same prop used in the 1984 performance), heralded by Mendelssohn's wedding march (from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). Dressed in a top hat and tails, she played the groom to Spears' and Aguilera's brides. The three women then launched into 'Hollywood',[66] and a dance routine rife with courtly references: Madonna bowed to kiss Aguilera's hand, and danced gallantly with each of the two younger women. There gradually emerged a distinctly lesbian undertone to the performance as Madonna removed her hat and tails, bringing attention to her female body and her sapphically-fetishistic heeled-boots,[67] and caressingly removed Aguilera's garter from her thigh. At the climax of the performance, Madonna kissed

Spears and Aguilera on the lips, although Aguilera's part was sidelined by the media in favour of the many comments passed on Madonna's encounter with Spears.

It is with this history in mind that the video clip for 'Me Against The Music' should be read. The visual action is propelled by a sexual tension between the two women, and a fluctuation by each of them between predator and prey that is sustained for the viewer (at least in part) through ways in which the gaze is structured. As noted above, the gaze and its attendant power are held primarily by Madonna at the beginning of the video: this is signified by her possession of a walking cane and apparent control over a number of video cameras, which broadcast an image of Spears to Madonna's television. A reference may be being made – although not explicitly so – to the notion of the telescreen as portrayed in George Orwell's *1984*, in which the telescreen is both a transmitter and receiver. Although in a cinematic sense this might seem to equalise the gaze-holding power afforded to the parties on either side of the instrument, the power in Orwell's novel is always held by Big Brother. The division of power is not so clear in Spears' video clip, although it starts with a hint of Big Brother to it. At first, Madonna seems to view Spears without being viewable, and then broadcasts herself as an omnipotent, presiding figure – when she is seen, she is not gazed at or weakened in any way. Her power over Spears is also hinted at in the form of references to Madonna's own previous videos: when Spears pulls up in her car at the beginning of the clip, the image is reminiscent of a moment in the video for 'What It Feels Like For A Girl' (dir. Ritchie, 2000); when the two women mirror each other's dance movements on either side of a stud wall, the similarity to 'Human Nature' is clear. It is after this latter part that the balance of power shifts somewhat. Perhaps this scene represents a kind of equalisation of the two women, symbolising the scales of power balancing before tipping in favour of Spears. Madonna then runs from Spears – is watched by her – and loses her symbolic cane in the process, which is in turn picked up by Spears. Madonna's power is reinstated, along with her cane and jacket, as she reappears on a giant telescreen and dominates Spears. The recurring themes in the video clip are the gaze, the cane, and the suit: whenever one is lost or relinquished, the others also seem to disintegrate; whenever one is deployed, at least one other is present or also utilised. The traditional relationships between gaze and phallic power are in a sense upheld, as symbols of each are often aligned in the clip. However, the fluctuating nature of the gaze-holder and her position – indeed, the very obvious fact that each

party is female and in many ways typically *feminine* – results in the gaze and its associations being re-evaluated. Furthermore, since Madonna manages in the final moments of the video to salvage the phallus (in the form of a cigar), and remains elusive, even as she is chased by Spears, the normal relations of power and gaze are destabilised.

As Cathy Schwichtenberg argues of the 'Express Yourself' video, Madonna's body is "caught in the flux of destabilized identities" (1993, p. 135). These 'destabilized identities' are not just played out visually, but are simultaneously underpinned by changes in Madonna's musical output and in the tensions rumbling in her voice as it develops and is trained. Schwichtenberg 's observation can easily be projected across the length and breadth of her career, and would suggest that processes of desire for and identification with Madonna are always oscillating. As she fluctuates herself, she forces her audience into a state of equal and opposite flux. In turn, as their position fluctuates, as well it might, the flux loses its equality and direct opposition, resulting in state of extreme instability of desire, identification and subject-position. In the closing moments of the 'Me Against the Music' video, Madonna is passive, hunted down, pinned against a wall, positioned as feminine and visibly female, and yet she clings desperately on to the phallus, which perhaps allows her fantastic evaporation, the point at which she disappears into thin air – not just what has been termed a 'flight into androgyny' (see Showalter, 1977; Herr, 2004), but maybe androgyny enabling flight? Ultimately, what is being enacted in the diagrams above, and in 'Me Against The Music' as an example, may be similar to Laura Mulvey's thoughts on the problematic position held by the female spectator of classic Hollywood melodrama. In response to *Duel in the Sun* (dir. Vidor, 1946), she writes of the heroine: "Her oscillation, her inability to achieve a stable sexual identity, is echoed by the woman spectator's masculine 'point of view'" (1989, p. 30). Perhaps Madonna's juxtaposition of gendered codes forces her own dissolution, as she achieves a state not conceived of as culturally possible. To extrapolate this point across Madonna's lengthy career, her continuing presence is always-already queer, as she insistently maintains a precariously gendered position, and refuses to disappear.

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[1] Because of the problematic nature of the word 'subculture', I write of '(sub-)cultures'. For an overview of the politics of 'subcultures', see Gelder and Thornton, 1997.

[2] See also Dyer's chapter on 'Monroe and sexuality' (1986, pp. 17-63).

[3] Available on the *Dick Tracy* soundtrack, *I'm Breathless* (1990).

[4] This may be the same trope invoked by k d lang on the cover of *Drag* (1997), even though her fingers – set in a smoking pose – hold no cigarette. The album's title refers first to the project – a collection of songs about smoking – but the implications of gender ambiguity are also obviously referenced.

[5] See Judy Garland in *Summer Stock* (dir. Walters, 1950) for just one example of the feminised tuxedo, maintaining a clear sense of an objectified and sexualised image alongside the traditionally male-identified tuxedo.

[6] A likeness may be detected between Dietrich's costume here and Madonna's costume during a circus-inspired section of the *Re-invention Tour*. See Image Gallery at www.madonna.com.

[7] See Babuscio, 1999, on Camp and classic Hollywood cinema.

[8] On West, see Robertson, 1996. On Dietrich, see Dyer, 1999, p. 113. For a "'gallery' of camp icons" which mentions all of the figures listed here, see Cleto, 1999, p. 27.

[9] See also Curry, 1990, p. 23 on the rapid oscillation of gendered codes in the 'Express Yourself' video.

[10] O'Donnell notes how West was "rumored to be a gay man or a black woman in disguise" (2002, p. 498); Robertson describes how, "Against an earlier misogynist view that West seemed like a man in drag, feminist critics read her as a female female impersonator who challenges traditional gender and sexual stereotypes by denaturalizing traditional feminine aesthetics" (1998, p. 125).

[11] Robertson uses this phrase to reference Mae West's play *The Drag* (1927), a line of which reads, "Wait till you see the creation I'm wearing, dearie. Virginal white, no back, with oceans of this and oceans of that, trimmed with excitement in front" (II, 4).

[12] Another example is Episode 3 of the sit-com series *Blackadder Goes Forth*, "Plan C: Major Star", (BBC1, 12 October 1989). A young private by the name of Bob – in fact a young girl called Kate, posing as a man to join the army – appears as the leading lady (in 'drag') in a music hall show to entertain the troops. See <http://blackadder.powerie.org/transcripts/4/3/> [Accessed 11 March 2005].

[13] In some ways, might it represent an inversion of the Shakespearean theatrical trope, of young men playing female roles who then dress up as young men within the play's narrative?

[14] See Pisters, 2004, on the construction and representation of gender in these two videos.

[15] It may be of note that an internationally touring exhibition of Madonna's costumes is planned for the near future.

[16] However, the immediate response to the last of these statements, 'We do?', from one of the other 'men' reintroduces a certain level of instability with regards to gender and power.

[17] I am not suggesting here that the musical activity contributes to the construction of gender at this point in the video. The musical details do draw attention to the visual action, however, and it is this point that I am trying to make.

[18] This aspect of the video will be dealt with further below.

[19] Interestingly, the rock edge to the music increases after the organ interlude. In the tour performance, a 'monster' enters at this point. The monster's sex can be judged as male from his build, and he wears a gas-mask with an extended trunk (presumably a phallic signifier here). With harder rock music in the background, the monster violently abducts and removes from the stage a contortionist who had been performing thus far. Although somewhat ambiguously sexed, the contortionist had been displaying a feminine excess.

[20] A few points are worth mentioning here regarding the kilt. First, it is understood that the style of the kilt originally aimed to facilitate free-movement in battle situations, while allowing a sufficient quantity of suitably thick material to keep a warrior warm at night. Second, although the modern, Victorianised kilt may resemble a woman's skirt, it is not intended to be worn by women, who have historically worn tartan in a different style. Consequently, in traditional Scottish kilt-wearing, the distinction between the genders is not blurred to the trained eye, and the modern 'dress-kilt' is understood primarily as male attire.

[21] It is worth noting that Madonna was once the vocalist in a band, The Breakfast Club, although the band achieved little success and Madonna has always been most famous as a solo singer, unlike artists such as Ronan Keating (formerly of Boyzone) or Robbie Williams (formerly of Take That) who have had great success in a group act prior to assuming a solo career.

[22] In Lacan's early formations, the mirror stage does appear to be presented simply as a transitory developmental phase for the child subject, beginning around 6 months and ending around 18 months (1989, p. 2). By the early 1950s, it had come to represent in his work a "permanent structure of subjectivity" (Evans, 1996, p. 115), and Lacan apparently maintained the two configurations alongside one another, as in the above quotation.

[23] See in particular mixed bipolar disorder, in which "symptoms of manic and depressed episodes [are] intermixed or rapidly alternating every few days" (Daley, Moss and Campbell, 2002, p. 214), or even ultradian bipolar disorder, in which the cycles between mania and depression can occur multiple times in a twenty-four hour period (Ritvo, Hales and Yudofsky, 2003, pp. 457-58). Ultradian and mixed bipolar are hard to distinguish from each other, but are defined as distinct conditions (p. 458).

[24] See, for example, the case of David, described by Laing (1965, pp. 69-74).

[25] See Fouz-Hernández, 2004, for a more in-depth analysis of Madonna's relationship with the Hispanic.

[26] 'Good' and 'bad' are far from united visually, being pitted against each other, and yet each is represented visually by the same body, suggesting some kind of connection.

[27] The points of connection between Madonna and Monroe should once more be remembered here.

[28] Let us not forget the Darwinian path from animal to (specifically) human, and that the two realms are far from being mutually exclusive.

[29] Madonna has also morphed into other animals in her videos. See 'Frozen' (dir. Cunningham, 1998), in which she collapses to the ground and shatters on impact into a murder of crows, and later morphs into a black dog.

[30] See for example 'Like A Virgin' at the 1984 MTV Music Video Awards, and the video for 'Like A Prayer' (dir. Lambert, 1989).

[31] There is in fact a significant connection to be made between the two names. Esther was known as a goddess of fertility throughout the ancient world (incorporating Babylon, Akkadia, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Syria, Phoenicia and Israel), and in this way she is archetypally related to the Roman Diana, the Norse Freya, the Greek Aphrodite, and the Egyptian Isis. The last of these is typically depicted with the baby God Horus on her knee, in an image strikingly evocative of the Christian representations of Jesus being held by Mary – the Madonna. My thanks go to Theolyn Cortens for pointing out this connection.

[32] Neptune symbolises change, morphing, illusion/elusion/delusion. In Greek mythology, Poseidon – Neptune – rules the waves, and is characterised is relentless, shifting, transforming, elusive (ruler of a 'Drowned World'?). In Madonna's astrological birth chart, Neptune is found in Scorpio, giving it a dark, intense quality (played out, perhaps, in 'Frozen' (dir. Cunningham, 1998)), and at a square angle with Venus in her chart – a strong but difficult relationship – thus describing the ways in which she expresses herself as a creative artist and as a woman. In Hinduism, the same archetype – Idapati, Master of the Waters – is thought to be an aspect of the god Vishnu. Madonna sported a Vishnu *tilak* (forehead marking) when she performed 'Frozen' at the MTV Music Video Awards in 1998.

[33] 'The Beast Within' (reworking of 'Justify My Love', 1990); 'Vogue' (1990); 'Nobody Knows Me', 'Frozen' (1998); 'American Life' (2003); 'Express Yourself' (1989); 'Burning Up' (1984); 'Material Girl' (1985); 'Hollywood' (2003); 'Hanky Panky' (1990); 'Deeper and Deeper' (1992); 'Die Another Day' (2002); 'Lament' (from *Evita*, 1996); 'Bedtime Story' (1995); 'Nothing Fails' (2003); 'Don't Tell Me' (2000); 'Like A Prayer' (1989); 'Mother And Father' (from *American Life*, 2003); 'Imagine' (by John Lennon); 'Into the Groove' (1985); 'Papa Don't Preach' (1986); 'Crazy for You' (1985); 'Music' (2000); 'Holiday' (1984).

[34] Available commercially as *Ciao Italia*.

[35] See Garr, 1993, pp. 33-67, on the pivotal role of girl groups in 1960s popular music.

[36] Other examples displaying the specific generic markers used by Madonna might include the following: 'Baby Love' (by The Supremes, 1964) for its lyrics; 'Whisper You Love Me Boy' (by The Supremes, 1965) for the backing vocals; 'I Only Want To Be With You' (by Dusty Springfield, 1963) for its backing vocals and harmonic progressions; or 'Sweet Talking Guy' (by The Chiffons, 1966) for its backing vocals, especially in the third verse.

[37] See 'Johnny Angel' (by Shelley Fabares, 1962; also by Patti Lynn 1962); Johnny is also the love-rat of 'It's My Party (by Lesley Gore, 1963), redeemed some months later in 'Judy's Turn To Cry' (by Lesley Gore, 1963). See also 'Johnny B. Goode' (Chuck Berry, 1958) and 'Johnny Get Angry' (Carol Deen, 1962). The archetype was also revived by Dire Straits in 'Walk of Life' (1986): "Here comes Johnny singin' oldies goldies".

[38] The effacement of the female narrator is typical of lyrics of this period. See, for example, 'Bobby's Girl' (by Susan Maughan, 1962), in which the narrator's existence can only be validated by her relationship with Bobby, or 'My Boyfriend's Back' (by the Angels, 1963), which is the story of one man's anticipated response to another man's flirtations with the narrator. 'Johnny Angel' is also relevant, with the narrator explaining her contentment with simply day-dreaming about Johnny, despite his apparent lack of romantic interest.

[39] 'The Shoop Shoop Song (It's In His Kiss)' by Cher (1991) was a renaming of 'It's In His Kiss' by Betty Everett (1968). The Carpenters similarly recaptured a bygone musical era by referring to "Every 'shing-a-ling-a-ling', every 'whoah-oh-oh'" in 'Yesterday Once More' (1973).

[40] "On the merry-go-round of / Lovers and white turtle doves / Leprechauns floating by / This is your lullaby / Sugarplum fingertips kissing your honey lips" ('Dear Jessie').

[41] As with *I'm Breathless*, the *Evita* soundtrack can be left to one side momentarily, since it is part of a pre-existent text into which Madonna has inserted herself. I will, however, consider *Evita* later as a key moment in Madonna's changing vocality.

[42] It is worth noting that Ashtanga yoga is fast-moving and aerobic, and is not characterised by the sustained moves performed in most forms of yoga. It should therefore not be presumed that the yoga itself is a mellow practice here, although it may contribute to a meditative state, thereby having many of the same spiritual and mental effects as other forms of yoga.

[43] "I worship the gurus' lotus feet / [...] / I bow respectfully / Peace". Translated by Vyass Houston and Eddie Stern.

[44] It should be noted that the opening chords of the track are $I - ii - iii - IV$ ($B_{\flat} - Cm - Dm - E_{\flat}$) and that the Dm relies on a subtonic that is *not* flattened (in this case, A$\natural$). Although the majority of the song is not based on this particular chord sequence, with the mixolydian A$_{\flat}$ thereby confined mostly to Madonna's vocal melody, the final verse (a repetition of the first) is sung over the same guitar riff that opened the song, complete with Dm. Despite this modal inconsistency, the mixolydian aspect prevails, and is ensured to the end of the song in Madonna's vocal line.

[45] A *thaat* is a modal foundation for a raga.

[46] Notably, 'Shanti/Ashtangi' is also set in the mixolydian/*Khammaj* modality.

[47] This is not to say that Madonna's version is in any way musically radical, or that McClean's is 'stagnant'. Madonna's verion is in fact quite staid in its arrangement, but it draws clearly on late twentieth-century musical gestures, rather than making any attempt to hark back to a golden age of All-Americana as McClean's does.

[48] Madonna met Ritchie in 1998, and by 1999 they were quite publicly a couple (Taraborrelli, 2002, p. 325). Rocco was born in August 2000. His christening and their wedding took place in December that year.

[49] See 'Till Death Do Us Part' from *Like A Prayer*, 'Human Nature' from *Bedtime Stories*, or 'Drowned World/Substitute For Love' from *Ray Of Light*.

[50] 'Material Girl' and 'Dress You Up' were both released in 1985 in the UK.

[51] The ˘ character denotes the point at which the breath is taken.

[52] In an online quiz run by SkyOne – "How Gay Are You?" – points were to be scored by answering multiple-choice questions. The desired result, for the male target audience, is constructed as being 'just gay enough' to be attractive to the opposite sex, not 'undergay' (too coarse, not sensitive enough) or 'overgay'. One question asks the quiz-taker whom he would most like to take to dinner: Kylie Minogue, glamour-model Jordan, or Madonna. The third of these scored most 'gay' points. <http://www.skyone.co.uk/howgay/intro.asp> [Accessed 4 June 2004].

[53] As with 'gay man', 'lesbian' here is not pointing to a 'lesbian community' as a whole, nor to any individual lesbian consumer of Madonna, but to lesbian-as-archetype.

[54] See comments above on *Victor/Victoria*.

[55] This is not to suggest that heterosexuals of either sex cannot identify with the performance of gender. Here, I am merely using gay men and lesbians as examples, not onlookers with exclusive rights to the problematics described.

[56] The same point can equally be made of masculinity as noted previously in this chapter. See Halberstam, 1998, p. 236, on the cultural status of masculinity as supposedly non-performative.

[57] Note also the section of spoken prose in Madonna's 'What It Feels Like For A Girl' (2001), a sample from the film *The Cement Garden* (dir. Birkin, 1993): "Girls can wear jeans, cut their hair short, wear shirts and boots. It's OK to be a boy. But for a boy to look like a girl is degrading because you think that being a girl is degrading".

[58] In both of these cases, the historical reference is clearly deliberate. The lyrics of 'Vogue' make reference to the 'golden age' of Hollywood, and the 'Express Yourself' video is known to have been inspired by *Metropolis* (dir. Lang, 1926), and thus the style of men's clothing adopted by Madonna in both videos is far from anachronistic.

[59] Morocco (1930); Dishonored (1931); Blonde Venus (1932); Scarlet Empress (1934).

[60] During the Hollywood Production Code era, which lasted from 1933 to 1962, "male impersonation died out as a mainstream theatrical practice", despite sustained female-to-male cross-dressing in cinema, (Halberstam, 1998, p. 234). Thus, once the Code was lifted, female cross-dressing had lost

much of the cultural presence that it had once enjoyed, and it might be argued that Dietrich's cross-dressing thus became an integral part of her style to a point that might not be accepted in today's cinema. See Halberstam, 1998, pp. 175-230, for a more in-depth reading of the cinematic history of female masculinity. Of course, cinematic cross-dressing is located in a long history of literary and dramatic F2M transvestism, what Garber describes as 'the transvestite norm' (1993, p. 39). See also for example, Ferris, 1993.

[61] 'Ladyboy': "Transvestite; a young male dressed as an attractive girl, often practising as a prostitute"; most relevant in south-east Asian culture, 'ladyboys' are common in Thailand <www.urbandictionary.com>. 'Molly': frequenter of a molly house, a meeting place in eighteenth-century England for men sexually interested in each other. "Men [at the molly house] often dressed in women's clothing, took on female personae, and affected effeminate mannerisms and speech" (Bateman, 2004). 'Moll' also denotes simply 'prostitute', and the slippage to its alternative meaning of 'gangster's girlfriend' is smooth.

[62] Arguably, this may be an effect of the technology available to/used by Lang: *Metropolis* is a silent film, and although 'overhearing' could undoubtedly be depicted, overseeing is somewhat more logical, and perhaps easier to represent, as overhearing may confuse the issue of who is speaking at any given moment. However, Morton's overall point is valid, as the monocle remains equated with knowledge in the film, whatever the historical factors which may have led to that equation. Furthermore, the monocle can always be viewed as a symbol of aristocracy, which in turn presumes power and knowledge (through education, as well as through power).

[63] Other readings of the video are, of course, available for simultaneous or alternative use. There is of course a set of class tensions enacted in the video's narrative, in which the monocle is a signifier of aristocracy and a tool with which the capitalists keep watch over the workers. Cathy Schwichtenberg notes the potential for a gay male reading, particularly facilitated by the all-male workers, whose activities and environment hint at gay male pornographic texts (1993, p. 135). Madonna also plays the archetypal femme fatale in the video, once again invoking classic Hollywood archetypes.

[64] By saying "the stars wore each other's T-shirts", Gauntlett means that the two women wore T-shirts emblazoned with each other's names.

[65] The well-documented arch-rivalry between Spears and Aguilera provides an added level of interest to the performance.

[66] The choice of song may be of interest here also, reminding the listener of the vocal mutations undergone at the end of the album version of 'Hollywood'. Madonna's voice is shifted, with the aid of technology, gradually downwards in pitch, from her normal female speaking voice to an obviously altered form, but – most interestingly – via a point at which her voice resembles normal male speech. The gendered implications of this transformation may be read back into the MTV performance, perhaps allowing for wider gender shifts onstage.

[67] This may be something of an oxymoron, but I would like to try and claim the idea of a sapphic fetishism. Fetishism is, by Freud's definition, a mechanism by which a (male) subject compensates for the realisation of the mother's 'castration' (lack of penis). To a certain extent this could be argued as being the process at work in the performance of 'Hollywood': Madonna could easily be afforded a male subject position by virtue of the role she takes in the performance, and it could be argued that the knee-length, viciously-heeled boots are penis-substitutes, and fetishistic in a Freudian sense. However, there may – as in the 'Express Yourself' video – be "no pretended allusion to a penis" (Morton, 1993, p. 233). Rather, the boots may conjure up the idea of a specifically female and lesbian adoption of power – phallic, perhaps, but not necessarily with any inherently penile reference.

CHAPTER THREE
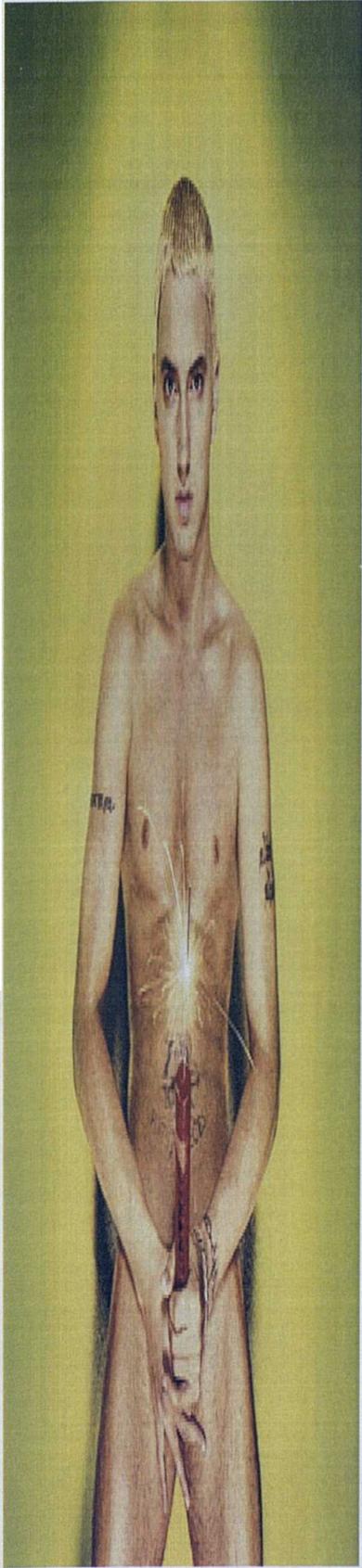
EMINEM

3.1 The unholy trinity

One of the first issues to confront when examining the work of Detroit rapper 'Eminem' is not, in fact, his problematic lyrical content. Certainly, his lyrics have been at the centre of much controversy since his first successful album, *The Slim Shady LP* (1999) and its precursor *The Slim Shady EP* (1998). A central factor to affect any consideration of this man's work is hinted at in the titles of those early releases, and further pointed to in the titles of the two ensuing albums, *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000) and *The Eminem Show* (2002): this particular rapper, probably more than any other, operates through multiplicitous personae. It is common – even expected – for rap artists to adopt a stage name (Perkins, 1996b, p. 5), and this often derives from their given name. Examples of this particular strategy include AZ (Anthony Cruz), Dr. Dre (Andre Lyon), LL Cool J (James Smith), and DMC of Run DMC (Darryl McDaniels). In the case of Eminem, this moniker clearly derives from the initials of his birth name, Marshall Mathers (M&M). The derivation of this stage name came with his emergence on the Detroit rap scene during his teenage years, and was part of an attempt to make a mark on that scene. Prior to this time, the young Mathers had repeatedly moved homes with his mother, found socialising and school life difficult as a result, and been bullied to the extent that he was hospitalised with a cerebral haemorrhage. In the artist's history and work, 'Marshall' has become a symbol of the victim. It was through the development of his ability to rap that 'Eminem' emerged, and through 'Eminem' that Mathers started to enjoy success. Already, then, we should perhaps be considering his work as being put out by an Eminem-as-rapper, whose origins as Marshall Mathers III were to be shunned.[1] It is unusual that, after taking a stage name, a rapper forms another alterego, an extra character against whom they continue to play themselves off. However, the group of Detroit rappers D12, of which Mathers is the only white member, are founded upon this approach. The group consists of six artists, all of whom have a stage name, and all of whom have an extra persona, making twelve 'identities' (hence D12, which denotes Detroit Twelve and Dirty Dozen[2]). D12 member Proof outlines the group's philosophy: "The whole thing in D12 was to have a personality where you would just say anything [...]. You just didn't give a fuck. Your persona was almost like a mask to hide behind" (quoted in Bozza, 2003, p. 28). 'Slim Shady' was a culmination of several months of rapping which had been gradually intensifying in terms of content,

partly in response to the criticisms against his first recording *Infinite* (1996),[3] which were part of a series of events leading to Mathers' attempted suicide in 1997. Thus, as Anthony Bozza describes, "Slim Shady became his avenging angel, a figure he pictured as a mummy with its wrists slit; a fiend without feeling and beyond life, death, or caring; a monster-freak who only knew how to say and do what no one was supposed to" (2003, p. 29). In the form of 'Slim', Mathers was apparently able to release all of the inner, twisted thoughts that originated in resentful feelings directed mainly towards his mother and Kim Scott, the girlfriend with whom he had already suffered a turbulent relationship, who had borne their daughter in 1995, and whom he would marry in 1999 (only to divorce again in 2001). Yet Proof acknowledges that even in this context, Mathers' approach was more radical than that of any of the other five members: "Em took Slim Shady and he ran with it. He took it way more serious than all of us" (quoted in Bozza, 2003, pp. 28-9).

What makes Mathers different from the majority of other rap artists who adopt a stage name is not only that he has developed two alternative personae, as the other members of D12 have also done, but that his birth name denotes a third character ('Marshall') and, crucially, that he continues to play all three identities off against each other, each having quite distinct roles in his work. In the introduction to his lyric collection, *Angry Blonde*, he seems to revel in the potential for confusion: "This book is made by Slim Shady, from the mind of Marshall Mathers, as seen from Eminem's point of view. Got it?" (Mathers III, 2000, p. 3). The 'Eminem' identity is that which he is most associated with, and that which he tends to perform under. Just as 'Slim Shady' operates as an outlet for his sinister fantasies, 'Eminem' is the vehicle which allows Mathers-the-person to speak out at all. 'Marshall' continues to operate as a foil for these two more robust characters, and is a vessel into which can be poured all of Mathers' inner turmoil, his self-doubt, his problematic conception of himself. Against this is pitted 'Slim Shady', whose role is equally concentrated, but in whom we see primarily Mathers' troublesome conceptions of others. As a practical consideration, we are surely obliged to ask: what terminology should be used in the discussion of this man's creative output? Clearly, he records and performs as 'Eminem', and rejects the name Marshall Mathers III in this sense. At the same time, a great deal of his output is articulated in the character of 'Slim Shady', although this persona is more clearly constructed as such throughout his work. The response I have taken to this particular predicament is a fluid one. For

now, I will be treating 'Eminem', 'Marshall' and 'Slim' (or 'Slim Shady') as characters, and keep their names in inverted commas to signify this. In contrast, I will refer to the body and person that we are presented with simply as Mathers. Clearly, there is to be negotiated the issue of star persona. Just as in the case of Madonna, who very obviously operates as a star persona, and many other artists, the Mathers we see is of course heavily mediated, quite apart from the confusing, layering effect of these three characters, and undoubtedly this mediated Mathers is a different being from the person Mr. Mathers conceives of himself as being. This is of course to be taken as read in any discussion of celebrity work, and not something I will spend time discussing here. What I hope to draw out from this particular case, then, are wider points regarding the interplay of multiple star characters and the use of this as a performance device, as well as considering implications for the construction of identity in this unusual way.

Interestingly, the first three major albums have each been named after one of these sides of him, and perhaps we could therefore take them as broadly defining each of the three characters. This is of course only a generalisation, as they are not entirely self-contained, they are all recorded under the name Eminem, and they all generally reveal aspects of each character. On *The Slim Shady LP*, 'Slim Shady' comes very much to the foreground, as most of the lyrics are filled with exceptionally violent fantasies. According to Bozza, the forerunner to the album, *The Slim Shady EP*, "has all the Slim Shady essentials: flippant nihilism, self-loathing, destruction, acute battle raps, fucked-up family pathology, and comedy, both subtle and slapstick" (2003, p. 29). The track 'Cum On Everybody', for instance, opens: "My favourite colour is red, like the blood shed / In Kurt Cobain's head when he shot himself dead / Women all grabbin' at my shishkebob / Bought Lauryn Hill's tape so her kids could starve". A similarly sadistic image is conjured up in 'Role Model': "I strangled you to death and I choked you again / And broke your fuckin' legs till your bones poke through your skin". Appropriately, 'I'm Shady' sums up the character well:

> Who came through with two glocks to terrorise your borough?
> Told you how to slap dips and murder your girl (I did!)
> Gave you all the finger and told you to sit and twirl
> Sold a billion tapes and still screamed 'Fuck the world!'
> [...]
> The ill type, I stab myself with a steel spike
> While I blow my brains out just to see what it feels like

> And this is how I am in real life
> I don't just wanna die a normal death, I wanna be killed twice

The Marshall Mathers LP, which quickly followed *Slim Shady*, sees the 'return' of

'Slim Shady' in 'I'm Back'. With a chorus that asserts "they call me Slim Shady, I'm

back, I'm back", we hear further fantasies of revenge:

> I take seven kids from Columbine and stand 'em all in a line
> Add an AK-47, a nine,
> A Mac-11 and this oughtta solve this problem of mine
> And that's a whole school of bullies shot up all at one time

As a character, 'Marshall' seems to emerge primarily in contrast to 'Slim', and

functions as a site for Mathers' insecurities (rather than being a direct representation

of his own and entire being). 'Marshall' himself starts to emerge more clearly on this

album, particularly in the song 'Marshall Mathers', in which the rapper declares, I'm

"just a regular guy / I don't know why all the fuss about me". While the song also

displays the same tendencies towards violence as those mentioned above, the overall

mood of the song is one of defending personal space and identity, rather than lashing

out at others as in the 'Slim Shady'-dominant songs. A comparable track in this

regard is 'The Way I Am' (2000), which also portrays an aggressive response to the

attention Mathers receives from others, be they fans or critics. At the same time,

however, the ultimate effect of 'The Way I Am' is to portray something that we are

meant to perceive as Mathers' 'inner feelings'. Certain sections therefore seem

clearly intended to bring about sympathy for the rapper:

> But at least have the decency in you
> To leave me alone when you freaks see me out
> In the street when I'm eating or feeding my daughter
> To not come and speak to me
> I don't know you and no I don't owe you
> A motherfuckin' thing
> I'm not Mr. N'Sync, I'm not what your friends think
> I'm not Mr. Friendly, I can be a prick
> [...]
> Sometimes I just feel like my father
> I hate to be bothered with all of this nonsense
> It's constant, and "Oh, it's the lyrical content"
> The song 'Guilty Conscience'[4] has gotten such rotten responses
> And all of this controversy circles me
> And it seems like the media immediately
> Points a finger at me

The 'Marshall' here, then, is much the same 'regular guy' he declares himself to be

in 'Marshall Mathers'.

A characterisation of 'Marshall' as notably feeble, ineffectual, and (sexually) inept is quite obviously played out as well, not on any of Mathers' recordings, but *The Slim Shady Show* (dir. Brooks and Gilstrap, 2001), a series of animated cartoon sketches. The 'episodes', individual short cartoons with self-contained narratives and recurring themes, follow the antics of Slim Shady and his friends,[5] who are for the most part modelled on character types. Thus 'Big D', according to Mathers' manager/lawyer Paul Rosenberg, is a typical "school bully", who finds himself compelled to assault every "hyped-up celebrity" he encounters, both verbally and physically.[6] 'Susan' is "a cute, alternative chick who dyes her hair purple", and 'Dave' is "the stoner kid", a cannabis-addicted ne'er-do-well (interview with Rosenberg on *The Slim Shady Show* DVD). Notably, the most central character after Slim Shady is Marshall, "based on the pre-Eminem days, pre-rapping Marshall Mathers" (Rosenberg on *The Slim Shady Show*). To signify both his low socio-economic status and his origins in Mathers' own biography, Marshall lives in a trailer park with his 'white trash' aunt Sue.[7] Marshall bears a striking resemblance to Slim in the film (and of course both resemble Mathers himself, see Figure 3.1) – both characters have short, bleached blond hair and dark eyebrows, and similar shaped noses and mouths – and it is easy to sense that the two are intended to be linked. Key physical attributes mark them as very different, however: Slim's eyebrows are thick, low-set and close together, giving a scowl to his face, where Marshall's are thinner and often higher-set, giving an effect of naivety; Marshall's higher forehead and longer face add to this effect; Slim's hair is rougher at the fringe, making him seem both tougher and more stylish than Marshall; and crucially, Slim's eyes are red, the intended demonic reference being obvious. Slim's overall demeanour is also very different from Marshall's, in that he is generally much brasher, to the point that his over-confidence sometimes leads him into trouble.

Figure 3.1
Slim Shady (left) and Marshall Mathers (right)

A central theme that recurs throughout the cartoon episodes in *The Slim Shady Show* is Slim's attempt to facilitate Marshall's first sexual encounter. In the episode 'Plexi Max Extravaganza', Marshall declares his affection for Pristina Gagulera (a blatant satirisation of Christina Aguilera),[8] and reveals the childish nature of his sexuality, by declaring that he likes her because "she's on TV, and I can see her tits in every video". In 'Dyke Hills Mall', Slim then takes Marshall and the others to the local shopping mall where Gagulera is appearing to sign autographs. Before he joins the queue to meet Gagulera and get an autograph, albeit a rubber-stamped version, Slim advises Marshall: "treat them like they wanna be treated – drop your balls on the table and say 'sign *these*, bitch'" When it comes to his turn, Marshall recalls Slim's advice, and so ensues a 'dream' sequence (see Figure 3.2). Here, Marshall is seen to fear an involuntary erection, for which Gagulera ridicules him, and at the point that he returns to reality and allows his testicles to fall, they are shown to be withered, saggy, and spotty, accompanied by a very small penis. This moment is quickly followed by the stamping of Marshall's testicles with the rubber stamp that has been 'autographing' fans' items, which causes him to collapse in pain. Marshall is not simply characterised as sexually incapable, he is also repeatedly positioned as the brunt of jokes, especially by Slim and Big D: they bounce on a sofa, causing Marshall to fall on the floor; they laugh at him when he falls off a bucking bronco; and Slim trips him up outside a toilet.

Figure 3.2
Dream sequence: Marshall's involuntary erection, small penis, and unpleasant testicles

To return briefly to the character of 'Slim Shady', Slim's extreme nature is articulated well in the episode entitled 'Slimshank Redemption', in which the gang find themselves in jail.[9] Slim's ex-girlfriend – clearly modelled on Mathers' ex-wife Kim Scott – comes to visit in order to gloat about her new breast implants, which Slim has funded but which another man is apparently enjoying. The relationship with his ex seems to be Slim's one weak point, since his rage overcomes him and he plunges his hands through the window between him and the ex, and into her breasts,

in order to tear out the implants with his bare hands. For this, he is sent to solitary confinement where he is left, according to Marshall, "freestyling about gibberish":

> I fuckin' hate you, I can't stand you
> I'll rip your titties off and them I'll hand you
> You're ugly, you won't hug me
> You're dumb, you're stupid
> I'm fat and lazy and crazy
> You think I'm Shady?
> I *am* Shady, you stupid bitch
> Take your silicone implants
> Now you got a slim chance
> Of fuckin' with me ever again
> I got your silicone, you can't fuck with me
> But I'm still alone in my cell, mad as hell

Slim's rage against his ex is, appropriately, expressed through rap but this also signifies a perception of insanity that was arguably always under the surface. To extrapolate this character back into Mathers' recorded work, 'Slim Shady' is repeatedly figured as insane, and dangerous with it, and this of course is articulated through some of his most skilful rhymes.

The facets of 'Marshall' as a character are further explored on *The Eminem Show* album. The female choruses of "Marshall!" in 'Business' invoke the cry of "Batman!" from the 1960s television series theme tune, and he refers specifically to the Dynamic Duo in the line "Looks like Batman brought his own Robin", in which he figures himself as Batman, and Dr. Dre ('Andre' in the song) as his sidekick (see CD3/Track 1). Yet the opening dialogue between the characters played by Mathers and Dre suggests that the former is to be aligned with Robin, when he exclaims, "Holy whack! Unlyrical lyrics, Andre!" in a parody of Robin's famous alliterative puns. Mathers clearly plays Robin to Dre's Batman in the video for 'Without Me' (dir. Kahn, 2002), this being enacted on a visual level. The combination of 'Business' and the 'Without Me' video puts 'Marshall' in an interesting position. In 'Business', Mathers declares that "Hip-hop is in a state of 911", and that he and Dre must rid the music world of "rap criminals" by way of Mathers' rapping skills. 'Marshall's' role as Batman in 'Business' is made clear by the end, when it is declared that "Marshall has come to save the day / Back with his friend Andre".[10] Although an audio reference is made to the *Batman* theme-tune in 'Without Me' which might allude to Mathers being positioned in the Batman role (2'09"-2'12"; Track 2), the Dre/Batman-Mathers/Robin roles are very clearly established in the

accompanying video. Mathers dons the red and green outfit seen on Robin in the television shows, with an 'Ǝ' symbol on his chest and belt that is presumably intended to be likened to Robin's initial.[11]
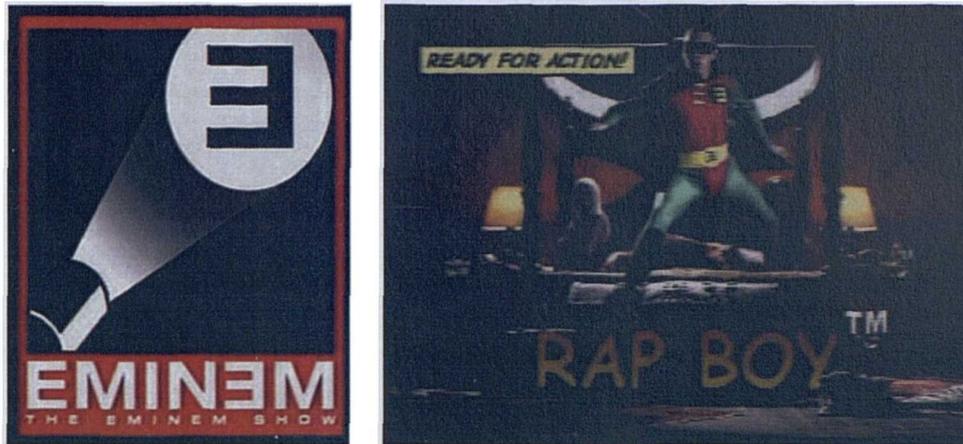
Figure 3.3
A Batman-style projection of Eminem's logo, from the DVD accompanying The Eminem Show; *and 'Rap Boy' from the video 'Without Me'*[12]

Mathers' character in the video is named 'Rap Boy', presumably an allusion to 'Boy Wonder', Robin's nickname. It would be easy to argue that, by virtue of their close homosocial relationship, Bruce Wayne's (Batman's) upper class affectations, and their lack of muscularity (amongst other factors), neither Batman nor Robin embody a particularly robust masculinity.[13] Indeed, Will Brooker carefully describes ways in which the relationship can be (and has been) read as homosexual over the course of Batman's history (2000, pp. 125-70), and that while trying to censor this subtext, the 1960s television show ended up being camp (pp. 171-248, especially pp. 225-7). Of the two of them, however, Robin is probably the less stereotypically masculine, insofar as he is characterised as pre-adult, and therefore lacking in some of the gendered privileges of adulthood. He is also repeatedly rescued by Batman, having suffered some capture or mishap, and this could be likened to the trope of the 'damsel in distress'.[14] With these reference points in mind – and they are quite clearly intended to be invoked by Mathers' video – we could certainly question the kind of masculinity portrayed by Mathers here. The results of such questioning would see something of a likeness in the characters of Robin and 'Marshall', in that they are both figured as somewhat inept and unable to function alone, playing second fiddle to a more confident and capable figure (Batman, and 'Slim Shady' respectively). So, while 'Marshall' is this capable figure in 'Business', his role in 'Without Me' is somewhat confused. Rap Boy seems to lead the mission at the heart

of the video's narrative, accompanied by Dre, and yet Robin is distinctly insufficient in his masculinity, certainly when compared with Batman. 'Marshall' is rejected in the lyrics of 'Without Me', in favour of 'Slim': "no-body wants to see Marshall no more / They want Shady". Given other parts of the song, however, it could be suggested that Rap Boy is a case of 'Marshall' either being quashed by 'Slim' and 'Eminem', or 'Marshall' usurping the positions of those two more capable personae. The opening lines, "Guess who's back? / Back again / Shady's back", announce that the narrator is primarily 'Slim', although the 'Ǝ' symbol also specifically asserts 'Eminem's' presence. Later, Mathers sings to the tune of the famous Batman television show theme (see Track 2), suggesting a claim to the privileges held by Batman himself. Whatever other Bat-configurations might be found here, it is clear that 'Marshall', 'Eminem' and 'Slim' are continuing to interact with each other in a short video clip, and that this is being achieved and confused through the established figures of Batman and Robin. Most importantly, 'Marshall' is to be seen as an independent character in Mathers' work, and one who is repeatedly aligned with less favoured models of masculinity.

To find 'Eminem' amongst the 'Marshalls' and 'Slims' is a challenge, primarily because his name is also that under which Mathers records and performs, and it might therefore be presumed that Eminem-as-an-artist is really only playing off 'Marshall' and 'Slim'. However, there are several notable instances throughout Mathers' work that point to 'Eminem's' independence from the other two characters. In *The Slim Shady Show*, 'Eminem' appears in a cameo role, pointing to his distinction from 'Marshall' and 'Slim' in the film and, arguably, in Mathers' work also. Mathers' introductory comments in *Angry Blonde*, noted above, further suggest that he is consciously orchestrating three separate characters. 'Eminem' is not overtly positioned as a 'character' in quite the same way as 'Slim Shady' and 'Marshall', however, his space being mostly between the lines. A useful analogy might be drawn with some explanations of the Christian concept of the Holy Trinity, which describe a procession of the Holy Spirit from Jesus and God, and Jesus also proceeding from God (as His Son).[15] A similar allegory could be used in the case of Mathers, at least in order to determine some kind of structure to the three figures he deploys: 'Slim' emanates from 'Eminem',[16] who in turn emanates from 'Marshall'. This rather unholy trinity emanates as a unit from the mind of Mathers himself, with each character symbolising a side of his personality.[17] In this formulation, 'Eminem' is a

vehicle, a medium of expression for the angry 'Marshall' and the demented 'Slim' alike: 'Eminem' is the mouthpiece for the inner workings of both of them, and without him neither would have a voice. Similarly, in the Christian model, it is Jesus' carnal being that facilitates the diffusion of the God's will, and the emission of the Holy Spirit.

Mathers declares (knowingly or otherwise) a link to the model of a trinity in the chorus of 'The Way I Am'. Mathers' hook, "I am whatever you say I am", bears an uncanny resemblance to God's assertion to Moses: "I Am That I Am" (Exodus 3:14).[18] Yet Mathers' position is self-declaredly profane, rather than sacred. He had already associated himself openly with diabolic forces in 'Kill You' (2000), in which he is "tryin' to develop these pictures of the devil to sell 'em", but he takes one step further in the opening line to 'American Psycho' (2001), with D12, proclaiming: "I'm the Devil".[19] In the opening seconds of the track, the scene is set musically for the sort of gruesome lyrical content which follows (Track 3). A bass guitar plays a slow riff in C minor, emphasising the subtonic and submediant tones, and although a dry snare initially suggests what turns out to be a $\frac{4}{4}$ pulse, the snare is silent while a hi-hat and then a tom propose a triple-time beat that repeatedly cuts across the rhythmic stability. Before the regular pulse returns, we hear D12 making some low-pitched throaty noise that sounds like barking, or something more monstrous. A piano then enters, doubling the bass motif at high pitch and giving an eerie edge to what is already a dark atmosphere. The entry of Eminem's first line, declaring his diabolic identity, is accompanied by the same monstrous utterance that had previously been heard, affording the line an even more ominous mood. The Devil's history is a long and interesting one, and although he enjoyed several centuries of striking fear into the hearts of most Christians, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw, according to Peter Stanford, his reduction in Christian minds from a physical being to a symbol (1996, p. 201). Stanford cites the work of Percy Bysshe Shelley as an example of the Romantic relegation of Satan to "a symbol for anyone who wished to overthrow the established order" (p. 204). The Devil persists in modern culture as an embodiment for all things 'evil'. While science and psychiatry have proffered explanations for many human and worldly negatives, there are still certain events or acts which seem to resurrect the concept of 'pure evil', represented in diabolic vocabulary.[20] The demonic function enacted by Mathers, primarily through 'Slim Shady', allows for a kind of re-embodiment of the Devil, deprived of

much of his role by psychiatry, amongst other disciplines – frequently, wrong-doers
may be 'mad' rather than 'bad' (see Porter, 2003, p. 187 and p. 191). 'Slim' allows
for these positions to be re-amalgamated, since he willingly describes himself as
depraved ('I'm Back', 2000), and revels in his own iniquity, as in 'American
Psycho'.

    A relationship between popular music and diabolic forces extends throughout
popular music history, with its roots no doubt in Luther's question: "Why should the
Devil have all the good tunes?" (quoted in Bacchiocchi, 2000a, p. 31). Anxieties
about Satanic forces in music and musicians have prevailed in various forms
throughout musical history: the tritone was famously termed 'diabolus in musica';
and Paganini was rumoured to have sold his soul to the Devil in return for his talent
(see Noles, 2002, p. 30[21]). As Bacchiocchi notes, rock and roll already had
associations with the Devil because of its roots in the blues, and in turn in African
musical traditions, which have especially informed rap. Rhythm and Blues "became
the expression of those who rejected any divine solution to their plight" (2000b, p.
69). In the form of Elvis Presley, the Devil had apparently sneaked his way into the
church, given Presley's assertion that his infamous dance-style was derived from the
Pentecostal church (see Bacchiocchi, 2000b, p. 72). Although Bacchiocchi chooses
the Beatles over the Rolling Stones as propagators of an anti-Christian message (pp.
73-6), the diabolic family tree descends more logically to Mick Jagger, and his
alignment of himself with Lucifer, heralded by 'Street-Fighting Man' and embodied
most clearly in 'Sympathy For The Devil', both from the Stones' *Their Satanic
Majesties Request* (1967). As Ossie Clark recalls of the Stones' infamous
performance at Altamont in 1969,[22] "I always knew Mick had several clearly defined
personas – talk about a split personality! But this was a side of Mick never revealed
before. He was rejoicing in being Lucifer!" (quoted in Hotchner, 1990, p. 21).[23] A
key reference point for Mathers' demonic act is that which ensued after the Stones:
70s and 80s heavy metal music, which is well-known and constantly vilified for its
tendency towards diabolic references, even when it avoids overt references to
Satanism, and includes lyrics which referred to suicide, child-abuse, infanticide, and
sexual intercourse with demons (see Bacchiocchi, 2000b, pp. 78-83. See also Bozza,
2003, pp. 108-9; Moreman, 2003). Yet, comparing Eminem with a more direct
descendant of 80s heavy metal, Anthony Bozza writes:

> A pill-popping metal monster like Marilyn Manson who lives in a drug-
> addled hell is just a guy with a bad case of Halloween. Eminem, the former
> dishwasher from the local grill who pops his mom's pills, dreams of killing
> his wife, and encourages robbery, date rape, and double homicide, is scarier.
>
> (2003, p. 110)

It is this underlying sense of the ordinary – 'I'm just a regular guy' – that means Mathers is such a threat to Middle America. Mathers represents the latest reincarnation of the ultimate rebel. Just as Jagger has been described as a Satanic 'leader of the dance' (Whiteley, 1997b, p. 82), Mathers claims to instigate a unification of youthful rebellion: "I'm not alone in feeling the way I feel. I believe that a lot of people can relate to my shit [...]. Everybody gets to the point of 'I don't give a fuck'" (quoted in Huxley, 2000, pp. 53-4).[24]

In establishing his unholy trinity, Mathers also draws from a long literary (and cinematic) history of anxiety surrounding the idea of the double, or the doppelganger. As Darryl Jones summarises, "The image of the double – the *Döppelganger* or second self, the mirror image, the Other who is also Oneself – tracks, haunts, or shadows cultural production in the nineteenth century, and on into the twentieth" (2002, p. 103). He goes on to explain how some of the origins of such fears may be found in the human shadow, and already a crude link to Mathers is perceptible, inasmuch as the most demonic side of his trinity is named Slim Shady. Specifically, we could compare Mathers' trinity with an example that Jones uses, Edgar Allen Poe's story 'William Wilson', which tells the tale of a man (Wilson) "haunted from schoolboy to *roué* by his double, namesake, and conscience" (Jones, 2002, p. 107). Jones describes how "Both Wilsons are 'singularly alike' – doubles who are single, who together make one person, the same person" (p. 107), and the idea that the two characters may be part of the same being can be easily transposed to the case of Mathers. Similar cases exist in contemporary films such as *Fight Club* (dir. Fincher, 1999), as will be explored below, and *Dead Ringers* (dir. Cronenberg, 1988). In Cronenberg's film, the two principal characters are twins who have always done the same as each other and shared every experience. Thus, when one twin tries to keep the details of a new relationship from his brother, the brother declares, "you haven't had any experience until I've had it too. You haven't fucked Claire Niveau [the girlfriend] until you tell *me* about it".[25]

What Mathers achieves by bringing his dangerous threesome into the realm of popular music is a fusion of this history of anxieties surrounding the split self

(which also surely has a great deal to with the enduring ideology of the unified ego, explored in Chapter Two) with the threatening potential of popular musicians as an archetype. He thus mobilises anxieties concerning the role of musicians in contemporary society, and the gothic ancestry of his work makes him appear even more sinister. He repeatedly points to sites of 'evil' outside of his own music, and in this way he may remind the knowing watcher of the Rolling Stones' response to the crowd violence at Altamont, which Sheila Whiteley describes as fatalistic, "where responsibility for both good and evil are located outside the merely human" (1997b, p. 87). Whiteley quotes Stones member Keith Richards: "You don't shoulder any responsibilities when you pick up a guitar or sing a song because it's not a position of responsibility" (p. 87). Such a refusal of liability for the audience's behaviour during the performance at Altamont is strikingly similar to the claims of innocence that Mathers makes. Displacing responsibility quite clearly on to his audience, he says: "A lot of my rhymes are just to get chuckles out of people. Anybody with half a brain is going to be able to tell when I'm joking and when I'm serious" (quoted in Huxley, 2000, p. 52). In 'Who Knew' (2000), he declares: "I just said it / I didn't know if you'd do it or not". Many more of his lyrics speak of criticisms lodged against his work, and point out counterexamples to suggest that he is not solely responsible for all antisocial or malevolent behaviour amongst (especially American) youths:

> So who's bringin' the guns in this country?
> I couldn't sneak a plastic pellet gun through customs over in London
> And last week I saw a Schwarzenegger movie
> Where he's shootin' all sorts of these motherfuckers with a Uzi
> I sees these three little kids, up in the front row,
> Shoutin "Go!" with their seventeen-year-old uncle
> I'm like – Guidance?
> Ain't they got the same moms and dads who got mad when I asked if they
>   liked violence?
> And told me that my tape taught 'em to swear
> What about the make-up you allow your twelve-year-old daughter to wear?
>   ('Who Knew?')[26]

> Of course they're gonna know what intercourse is
> By the time they hit fourth grade,
> They got the Discovery Channel, don't they?
>   ('Real Slim Shady', 2000)

> And it seems like the media immediately
> Point the finger at me

So I point one back at 'em [...]
It's the one you put up
When you don't give a fuck, when you won't just put up
With the bullshit they pull, 'cause they full of shit too
When a dude's getting' bullied and shoots up his school
And they blame it on Marilyn, and the heroin
Where were the parents at?

('The Way I Am')[27]

Despite his protests of blamelessness, Mathers has consistently been demonised by politicians and the media (see Bozza, 2003, pp. 104-5). This fact, and its clear descent from earlier associations between popular musicians and demonic forces (especially by way of Mathers' claim to a Luciferian identity in 'American Psycho'), suggest something of a diabolic theme in the history of entertainment. Rogan Taylor picks up on this, stating without hesitation that "Showbusiness has its roots in Hell", explaining: "As the eighteenth-century audiences soon learned, going to the first pantomimes was an evening spent largely in the Underworld" (1985, p. 95). In a sense, artists such as Jagger and Mathers are epitomising something that is at the heart of popular music as a form of entertainment. Taylor goes on to explain how he means 'Hell' not in the sense of the pre-Reformation Christian formulation, as a "place without value" (p. 97), but in the sense of an Underworld, valued immensely by ancient shamans as a site of transformation (pp. 96-7).[28] A magical journey to the Underworld (and/or Upperworld) is part of the shaman's initiation, his becoming: "The experiences he has on this journey are the source and inspiration for all his later performance in healing and other magic". The connection is then made: "They are also the very stuff of which showbusiness is made" (p. 25). As the Devil, Mathers becomes the master of the Underworld, presumably able to plunder it for all its creative potential, and this rises to the surface in the form of 'Slim Shady', the most diabolic of Mathers' three personae. In that initial journey to the Underworld, the shaman undergoes a transformation which facilitates his magical powers. Thinking biographically, in shamanic terms Mathers has been subjected to two instances which may be considered facilitators of just such a journey, first in his early hospitalisation at the hands of a school bully, and later in his own attempted suicide, both of which left him comatose. Taylor describes the characteristics of shamans' Underworld journeys as catalysed by sickness:

> The narrator begins by describing his sickness and how it very nearly killed
> him. This apparent death is followed, normally, by a descent into the
> Underworld in the company of a spirit who acts as a guide. In the

> Underworld, the candidate suffers many trials and adventures and learns
> much new knowledge, but in the end he is unable to withstand the demonic
> forces which surround him. He is caught, sometimes tortured and eventually
> his body is cut up into pieces. This dismemberment is always followed by a
> magical recovery [...]. This crucial 'resurrection' allows the hero (for now
> he is such) to ascend towards the Upperworld in mystical flight, where he is
> received by the gods and taught many new things. The story comes to a
> close with the hero's joyous return to the Middleworld, where he wakes up
> and finds himself a shaman with power.

(1985, p. 26)

Of course, I am not proposing here that Mathers underwent a literal journey to the
Underworld and Upperworld during his comas. Neither would I argue that he is
exactly equivalent to an ancient shaman with mystical powers. Rather, just as in the
case of Madonna, I am suggesting that Mathers offers us – in some ways – an
example of the contemporary entertainer's descent from shamanism that Taylor
argues for. In this way, the comas act as tropes, metaphors, sites of trauma, which we
know have longstanding symbolism as points of transformation or development.
With the cultural significance of the shaman having waned significantly over the
centuries, we might find a modern parallel in psychoanalytic terminology, where an
early point of trauma also acts as a catalyst for the transformation of the subject:
Freud's Oedipus complex and Lacan's Mirror Phase are obvious examples.[29]

Another useful way of trying to understand the multiple personalities in play
in Mathers' work would be in terms of Freud's conception of the ideal ego, a kind of
idealised, aggrandised version of what we believe ourselves to be, or to be capable
of. Although 'Eminem' may emerge as an apparently balanced ideal, crucially what
Mathers sets up is a twisted ideal ego, in the form of 'Slim Shady' and an inferior
ego in the form of 'Marshall Mathers'. Freud's formulation might lead us to suspect
a largely positive role for the ideal ego, it being a point of perfection that the ego
strives towards. Freud describes the emergence of the ideal ego in the childhood
subject:

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

(1914, p. 558)

'Slim Shady' is essentially a negative adaptation of this model. (Here I do not mean
'negative' in the sense of an inverted form, but in terms of the underlying principle.)

Freud later amalgamates the concepts of the ideal ego with the super-ego,[30] and describes how the super-ego's "relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: 'You *ought to be* like this (like your father).' It also comprises the prohibition: 'You *may not be* like this (like your father) – that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative'" (1923, p. 24. His emphasis). At the risk of entering into amateur psychological analysis, it would be worth remembering that Mathers' own father was entirely absent from Mathers' life, from an early stage. In an initial Freudian account, one might therefore speculate that the lack of the father has in some way deprived Mathers of the facility to offset the development of his own psychological structures. Thus, where socially unacceptable feelings might normally be repressed into silence in Freud's accounts, they are expressed – and contained – in Mathers' work in the form of 'Slim'. Critic Wendy Case describes it thus: "He created that character [Slim Shady] as an outlet for [...] the angst that he was feeling. Marshall Mathers may not turn around and tell you to piss off, but Slim Shady would" (*Eminem: Hitz and Disses*). The Oedipal problematics are enacted throughout Mathers' work, and we also have to contend with his own personal role as a father. We might justifiably question what kind of Oedipal formations are at work when Mathers is himself a father, but lacks a father of his own, while expressing his fantasies of killing the mother of his child ("'97 Bonnie & Clyde' (1999); 'Kim' (2000)) and raping his own mother ('Kill You'). Since Mathers' father is already gone, he requires no overpowering in the normal Oedipal sense, and the Father presents no obstacle to Mathers' sexual possession of his mother. Nonetheless, this possession is taken by force. As the father in his daughter Hailie's Oedipal triangle, Mathers arguably performs some of her work on her behalf, describing the killing of Hailie's mother in order that he and the daughter might remain together (see especially the lyrics to "'97 Bonnie & Clyde' in this regard). 'Marshall' represents another interesting aspect of the ego ideal model, since he is arguably Mathers' psychological dumping ground for the effects of the 'admonitions of others' and 'his own critical judgement'. Indeed, this is a feature to which Freud also alludes. When he writes that "the formation of an ideal heightens the demands of the ego" (1914, p. 558), one implication to be drawn is surely that of the failure to meet those heightened demands. In Mathers' work, this function is not exactly repressed – as Freud suggests it might normally be – but played out in the form of 'Marshall'.

On the surface Mathers represents a scapegoat, in that he is seen as something of a demonic force in modern entertainment. As I have noted, he himself identifies the blame (mis)placed on him for social problems that may have deeper-running causes than the popularity of his music. The etymological origins of the word 'scapegoat' are worth remembering. The word apparently derives from the biblical translation of 'Azazel' (Leviticus 16:8), and may denote 'the goat that departs', which refers to the tradition of sacrificing one goat and releasing another (imbued by the people with their sins) as part of a 'sin offering' (Leviticus 16:9). Alternatively, it may be a name for the chief of the goat-demons,[31] from whence Satan has descended archetypally, and for whom the departing goat ('escape goat') was intended as an offering. The common representation of Satan as a goat, or at least half-goat – horned, tailed, and hoofed (see Stanford, 1996, plates between pp. 146-7) – underlines the slippage between him and the 'scapegoat', a dumping ground for 'evil'. In Taylor's analysis, this concentrated form of 'evil' can easily be seen to take on a therapeutic function, and he explains the relevance in the consideration of entertainment:

> It is a homeopathic principle: the cure for a sickness is achieved by dosing the patient with minute quantities of substances which, in larger does, would actually create the symptoms of the sickness. The shamanistic cure for sickness involves experiencing a little of the *essence* of sickness. While Western culture has suffered a demonic possession, showbusiness has grown in importance because it provides just such a little does of Underworld experience.
>
> (1985, p. 99. His emphasis.)

Taylor draws this out as a trope of Western culture, and the importance of entertainment therein. Specifically, we might apply it to the case of Mathers inasmuch as he represents quite explicitly the negative aspects of which society as a whole would probably like to rid itself, a kind of society-wide version of the negativised ideal ego. His function might therefore be seen in terms of an escape valve, allowing us to pour all the 'evil' we want into the expressions of artists such as Mathers, thus relieving ourselves of any such 'evil', or blame for certain cultural problems. In fact, Mathers turns this around to point it back at his audience:

> I'm like a head trip to listen to, 'cause I'm only givin' you
> Things you joke about with your friends inside you're living room
> The only difference is I got the balls to say it in front of y'all
> And I don't gotta be false or sugarcoat it at all
>
> ('Real Slim Shady')

The interplay between 'Marshall', 'Eminem' and 'Slim Shady' can ultimately be viewed as a variation on a what is a common rappers' strategy of name-doubling (see Hess, 2005), since Mathers quite consciously plays all three personae off against each other. In the process, and perhaps less consciously, he represents several archetypal responses, including the shaman's story of Underworld trials, a demonised scapegoat that continues to offer relief from responsibility (even as he speaks out and attempts to relocate the apparently misplaced blame), and a player in two highly problematic Oedipal triangles. This tripartite division of Mathers as an artist serves as an idiosyncratic enactment of identity generally within rap music, and what will be considered below are some of the further ramifications for any understanding of rap music as a whole, and Mathers' music specifically.

3.2 Language and masculinity in rap

Eminem has undoubtedly been a major factor in the rapidly deteriorating reputation of rap music as a genre.[32] An artistic descendant of 90s gangsta rap, he has become a notable figure in the history of the perception of rap as a male-dominated genre that expresses its masculinity through violence, misogyny, homophobia, and extreme bragging based on all of those factors. As the unbridled embodiment of the generalised exscription of women from a great deal of music history,[33] hip-hop culture tends to position women on the margins:

> Just as the accomplishments of women in the blues tradition or in rock 'n' roll remain largely unrecognized, so in commercial representations of hip hop, women are typically depicted in secondary roles as cheerleaders or bystanders rather than as producers and active participants.
>
> (Guevara, 1996, p. 51)

Various female rappers have managed to sustain a noteworthy presence in the rap arena, such as Lil' Kim, Missy Elliott, and Sister Souljah, but the elimination of non-rapping women from the male rap arena is a prevailing trope in the genre. This elimination is effected on several levels, and lyrical content interacting with visual imagery (including, but not limited to, the music video). All-male spaces are constructed visually by way of the 'crew' or posse. Groups of disenfranchised young men work to enact an almost excessive kind of masculinity, not only through the very real exclusion of women from their space, but also through physical actions such as grabbing their genitals or keeping their hand close to the pelvic area, and swaggering boastfully. When women are allowed into this all-male space, they are often fetishised and objectified in a way that constructs the space as male-dominated and heterosexual. The CD artwork for the Bloodhound Gang's *Use Your Fingers* (1995), for example, displays a scantily clad woman devouring a chicken drumstick (see Figure 3.4).
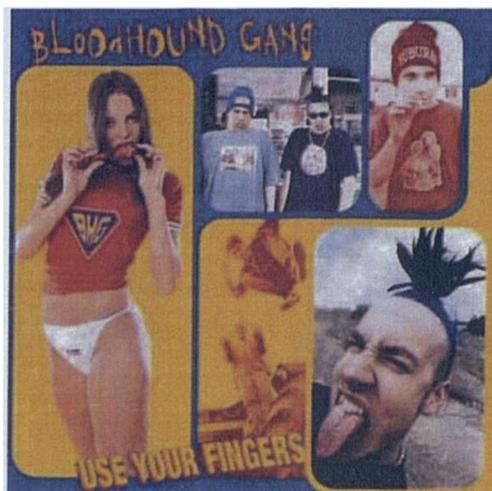
Figure 3.4
Cover of Use Your Fingers

The meanings to be derived here are at least threefold: first, we sense the objectification of the woman's body; second, perhaps a link also exists with fast-food chain KFC's slogan, 'Finger Lickin' Good' (which in turn may be seen as knowingly prompting a level of sexual innuendo from the words 'finger' and 'licking')[34]; and finally, a possible association exists by metonymic displacement from the chicken's thigh to (female) human thigh to female genitals.[35] Similarly, the group's album *Hooray For Boobies* (2000) fetishises the breasts through the title, and the CD itself is also transformed into a fetish object by association: the disc is skin-pink in colour, with a different shade of peach around the central hole (to represent an areola), and an instruction is printed in small type: "Attention: Insert tongue to simulate nipple".

Such exclusion of women to create a homosocial arena in rap might usefully be approached in terms of Eve Sedgwick's continuum of male bonds, with homosociality and homosexuality positioned as points on that continuum. Crucially, this continuum is "radically disrupted" (1985, p. 2): it does not contain the potential for slippage between social and sexual that is integral to, say, Adrienne Rich's formation of a "lesbian continuum" (1993, p. 217). Within the male system of relations described by Sedgwick, the exchange of women forms homosocial bonds between men, whilst simultaneously serving to assuage fears of homosexuality. Thus, I am not suggesting here that all male rap crews contain an element of the homosexual, or that rap crews are gay, or even verge on it. Rather, if the exchange of women assures heterosexuality, I propose that we should simply start by examining the ways in which women are exchanged within such groups of men. When women are objectified and fetishised, reduced to body parts, they become ideally packaged

for exchange as cultural capital. Yet, if they are demeaned and rejected with disgust, as is also often the case in this musical genre, we may also question the level of male desire for these female bodies.

Lyrical content has undoubtedly been a central factor in the widespread condemnation of rap music, especially in styles such as gangsta rap, and particularly on the basis of its persistent degradation of women. As a genre, and more than any other genre of vocal popular music, rap necessarily privileges lyrics. This is to a great extent because its history is precisely one of linguistic skill and the verbal conveyance of information, and these are the factors which continue to distinguish it as a genre. The messages that come from rap are as varied as should be expected given that even as an apparently coherent genre, it forms the backbone of musical expression for a varied and heterogeneous nexus roughly described as a young, urban (and historically, but now maybe not predominantly, black) community. Thus, there is what is now called 'old skool rap', pioneered in the 1970s by artists such as Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash, which celebrates the pleasures of young (black, male) experience. The commercialised extreme of this is known as 'playa rap', which celebrates the life of the playa protagonist, whose primary concern appears to be his own wealth – financial and sexual – and artists such as Nelly and Puff Daddy continue this line of the rap family tree. 'Message rap' – or the similar, nationalistic and sometimes Islamist 'militant rap' – is a vehicle for the expression of the trials and tribulations of young black (male) experience, and its lyrical content often takes a political stance against the problems of urban black communities, such as drugs, violence, gang culture, and so on (see the work of Public Enemy or Kool Moe Dee for examples). In the late 80s, 'gangsta rap' emerged as a descendent of message rap, epitomised by the work of NWA, or Ice-T for example. This most notorious of styles can be taken as an acute form of militant rap, inasmuch as it functions as a voice for a disenfranchised black, male, ghetto community, but it also displays certain features of the playa style in its exaggerated celebration of (crime-related) wealth and male sexual supremacy. It is gangsta rap and the artists who have descended from it, such as Eminem, that now embody the controversial extreme of rap as a genre.

Various tensions in the expression of gendered identities quickly emerge even when looking at the language of rap, even as it seems intended to be unquestionably heterosexist and male supremacist. First, however, the issue of intent is a significant factor to contend with. The Bloodhound Gang, for example, engage in a kind of toilet

humour that commonly includes references to women's genitals as odious and repulsive, and this is not atypical of rap music. The hook-line of 'Kiss Me Where It Smells Funny' (1996) is a good example: "She grabbed me by the ears and said / 'Kiss me where it smells funny'". The search for a sexual encounter is described as "fuzzy flounder fishin'" ('You're Pretty When I'm Drunk', 1995), and the act of copulation itself is called "parkin' the beef bus in tuna town" ('A Lap Dance Is So Much Better When The Stripper Is Crying', 2000). Such a hysterical reaction to female genitals begs to be likened to the *vagina dentata*, the fearful, castrating, core of female sexuality manifest in myths throughout time, and popularised by Freud (see Showalter, 1996, pp. 145-8). The fetishisation of particular female body parts is also a factor, reducing the implicated female character to a set of disembodied components: "I need to find a new vagina / Any kind of new vagina" (Bloodhound Gang, 'Three Point One Four', 2000). In this example, the desired female mate is metonymically reduced to her genitals, which in turn are immediately reduced to representing a linguistic challenge: "It's hard to rhyme a word like vagina / Calvin Klein kinda North Carolina". Such responses to female sexuality and physicality are founded upon an exaggerated notion of disgust which borders on the comic, being almost a parody of itself. It may well be that comedy is deployed as a distancing strategy by the group, such that the offensive potential is somewhat defused by an implicit *caveat emptor*: 'it's just a joke'.

Eminem's messages are rather less obviously self-parodic but, in a sense, the extreme nature of the lyrical content may well desensitise the listener, such that one presumes he must not be sincere in his words precisely because they are so far removed from the 'normal'. In addition, there are occasions on which a dark humour does enter his lyrical content:

> Hey, it's me, Versace
> Whoops, somebody shot me!
> And I was just checkin' the mail
> Get it? Checkin' the 'male'?

('Criminal', 2000)

> Dumpin' your dead body inside of a fuckin' trash can
> With more holes than an afghan

('Just Don't Give A Fuck', 1999)

More explicitly playing with the level of intent that we should presume of him with regards to his lyrics, Eminem has repeatedly spoken out on the issue, both in

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interview (see Bozza, 2003, pp. 110-11) and in his lyrics. In 'Kill You', he concludes a tirade of obscene misogynist violence with the line, "I'm just playin' ladies – you know I love you".[36] Similarly, the opening of 'Criminal' contains a violent message for those who believe he means what he raps about:

> A lot of people ask me stupid fuckin' questions
> A lot of people think that what I say on record
> Or what I talk about on a record...that I actually do in real life,
> Or that I believe in it.
> Or if I say that I wanna kill somebody, that I'm actually gonna do it,
> Or that I believe in it.
> Well shit – if you believe that, then I'll kill you. You know why?
> 'Cause I'm a CRIMINAL[37]

The song later invokes the First Amendment defence that Eminem quite convincingly relies on, of his right to free speech, while also subtly reassuring the listener that the content of his lyrics is indeed genuine self-expression:

> 'Cause every time I write a rhyme
> These people think it's a crime
> To tell 'em what's on my mind

Parody, lyrical content, and interview statements combine to leave the listener unsure as to how much of the message, if any, is endorsed by the rapper (in general, and by Eminem in particular).

Yet this is in stark contrast with the presumption of intent that pervades much popular music discourse, and certain other stylistic characteristics of rap music. The majority of genres of popular music prize some version of 'authenticity', and this is often constructed in part through questions surrounding song lyrics: did the artist write them? does s/he 'mean' them in performance? The lyrics put forward by rappers, however, are intensely personal and often claimed by the artists as 'true' self-expression. Artists often name themselves and their crew in the song, and may use their own identity as the central feature of a song (see Rose, 1994, pp. 86-7). Moreover, these presumptions of 'authenticity' and of agency are extended into more complex descriptions of acts which the rapper claims to have seen or done. The emphasis on the particular and specific, and indeed the specifically unusual in rap's lyrics is to be contrasted with a greater tendency towards the general in other popular music genres. For example, whilst we would expect the singer to appear 'genuine' in performance of most lyrics by the Carpenters, for instance, the content of such lyrics can very easily be transported into the lives of many listeners, and that is their aim. By contrast, the following rap lyrics are not personally claimable by any listener,

speaking as they do specifically of Eminem's relationship with other music artists and the music press:

> You think I give a damn about a Grammy?
> Half-o' you critics can't even stomach me, let alone stand me
> "But Slim, what if you win, wouldn't it be weird?"
> Why? So you guys could just lie to get me here
> So you can sit me here next to Britney Spears?
> Shit, Christina Aguilera better switch me chairs
> So I can sit next to Carson Daly and Fred Durst
> And hear 'em argue over who she gave head to first
> Little bitch put me on blast on MTV
>
> ('Real Slim Shady')

What seems to be central to rap's lyrics in this respect is a fluctuation between the general and the specific. 'Real Slim Shady' also features lines whose general sentiments may easily be adopted by the audience: "I'm sick-o' you little girl and boy groups / All you do is annoy me". It is also one of several songs which speak directly to Eminem's audience,[38] and (in this case) their emulation of him: "And there's a million of us just like me / Who cuss like me, who just don't give a fuck like me / Who dress like me, walk, talk, and act like me", thus interpellating his audience members. The chorus in particular encapsulates the dual function of rap's lyrics. Although the chorus hears Eminem declaring himself to be the 'real' Slim Shady, the idea of 'Slim Shady' is expanded here to become a notion, a particular kind of person: "Guess there's a Slim Shady in all of us"; "Every single person is a Slim Shady lurkin'". Eminem then overtly calls to his listeners to participate in the final choruses, allowing them also to be 'real' Slim Shadys: "if you feel like I feel, I got the antidote / [...] / Sing the chorus and it goes / I'm Slim Shady yes I'm the Real Shady..."; "One more time, loud as you can, how does it go? / I'm Slim Shady ...". Eminem's lyrics are notable in their fluctuation between generalised and indiscriminate hatred, specific personal details, and the articulation of extreme and far-fetched fantasy. 'Kill You' offers an example of this. The opening lyrics offer a brief account of his troubled childhood, and his feelings about his mother: "When I was just a little baby boy / My momma used to tell me these crazy things / [...] / But then I got a little bit older / And I realised she was the crazy one". The chorus offers a generalised misogyny – "Bitch I'ma kill you / You don't wanna fuck with me / Girls neither, you ain't nuttin' but a slut to me" – and the second verse takes the listener further into the realm of dark fantasy: "Like a murder weapon I'ma conceal you / In a closet with mildew, sheets, pillows and film you".

On balance, whether Eminem does mean the things he raps about, or whether he is 'just playing', his representation of certain images still gives great cause for concern. Whether or not, given the failure of his rap career, he would actually "be a fuckin' rapist in a Jason mask" (as he suggests in 'Criminal'), is not directly relevant. What rap such as his has been criticised for is the statements made, their popularisation, and – by association with the artists who have made money from them – their glamorisation. In the context of popular music as a whole, and specifically of the idiosyncratic nature of many of rap's lyrics (for example, through self-naming in songs), we can arguably presume a certain level of intention behind the lyrics. As Mickey Hess summarises of the existing literature, "Scholars such as Tricia Rose [1998], Christopher Holmes Smith [1997] and Adam Krims [2000] have theorised the performance of authenticity as necessary to establishing credibility as an artist within hip-hop" (Hess, 2005, p. 297). At the very least, we must believe that rap artists consider the images they present to be tolerable to themselves, however troublesome those images may be to others. Whatever level of intention can be presumed, rap demands to be examined more closely for further meaning, and its lyrics, music, and images should not simply be dismissed simply because of its controversial nature.

Gangsta rap, from whence Eminem's distinctive style has originated, generally appears unconcerned with distancing itself from the violence contained within its lyrics. On the contrary, since its emergence in the late 80s, its exponents have seemed entirely committed to courting the surrounding controversy. James Haskins summarises: "Gangsta rap is harsh, hard-hitting, brutal, bloody and usually obscene. [...I]ts lyrics deal with guns, gang wars, treacherous females, drugs, alcohol and going against [...] the police" (2000, p. 76). More recent successors of the style revel in the excessive demeaning of any minority group (with the notable and understandable exception of blacks). D12, Eminem's crew, open their *Devil's Night* album (2001) with the warning: "if you get offended by words like bitch, ho, sissy, faggot, homo, lesbian, fudge-packer, clit-eater, all that shit like that, then you should turn this shit off right now, because that's just some of the shit – no, that's the *only* shit you gonna hear right here on this album" ('Another Public Service Announcement'). Although a significant subtext of gangsta rap is a black reaction against oppression by white authority (typically embodied by the police (see NWA's 'Fuck Tha Police' (1989)), running in parallel to this is the domination of women by

hyper-'masculine' men. A content analysis of the representation of violence against women in rap music, between 1987 and 1993, reveals that 22% of gangsta rap songs contained violent and misogynist lyrics (Armstrong, 2001, p. 99),[39] and that the content and frequency of such references have increased significantly with the emergence of artists such as Eminem (pp. 104-5). Examples thus abound of misogynist lyrics, in which women are referred to as 'bitches', 'sluts', 'whores' and 'hoes', and otherwise generally demeaned, objectified, and subjected to apparently gratuitous violence. Rappers' masculinity is, notably, also constructed as unquestionably heterosexual, a fact perceptible through a mixture of homophobic lyrics and the insistence of heterosexual activity between the rapper(s) and women, even if they appear simultaneously disgusted by or aggressive towards those women. Heterosexual male dominance is thus instated as an unquestionable characteristic of the rapper, and Eminem plays on this as much as any rapper:

> My words are like a dagger with a jagged edge
> That'll stab you in the head whether you're a fag or lez
> Or the homo-sex, hermaph, or a trans-a-vest
> Pants or dress, hate fags? The answer's yes

('Criminal')[40]

In the case of Eminem, we see homosexuality merging easily with paedophilia, and both are amalgamated in the concentrated scapegoat form of his regular character Ken Kaniff. At one moment, "It's Ken Kaniff on the internet / Tryin' to lure your kids with him into bed" ('I'm Back', 2000). Kaniff is then clearly established as homosexual later on the same album in 'Ken Kaniff' (2000).[41]

Although gangsta rap and its descendants seem to represent a problematic hyper-masculinity through misogyny, thereby supporting the stereotype of the (hetero-)sexist male rapper, there are already certain incongruities to confront before determining rap as a genre to display a uniform and unquestionable masculinity. Linguistically, both this stereotype and its logical analogy in the form of the 'feminist female rapper' have counterexamples to disprove the generalisation, just as they have examples to support them. In 'Pussycat' (2002), for example, Missy Elliot implores her genitalia not to let her down at the crucial romantic moment, as she attempts to persuade her lover that she is worth his fidelity. In a spoken epilogue, Elliot states that 'Pussycat' was "for [her] ladies", an instruction in "how to keep yo' man". Yet the double standards are easily perceptible, as the central message is implicitly still male-centric, presuming the pre-eminence of male satisfaction, and

ultimately upholding the idea of a 'woman's sexual duty' to a man who is culturally positioned as free to roam and select his mate at any given point. Similarly, the level of sexual boasting that can be engaged in by female rappers may always be governed by culturally-enforced notions of acceptable sexual behaviour, which are always gendered. Salt (of 1980s female rap duo Salt-n-Pepa) declares: "If a woman wanted to do that kind of bragging, I'd just say go ahead. But I know what she'd have to deal with after" (quoted in Gaar, 1993, p. 424). Although these examples – as counterexamples to the clearly gendered 'rules' of the genre – do not themselves form a new rule, it is clear that certain complex tensions between the sexes are already manifest in the lyrical content of rap.[42]

Language and the male

The very centrality of lyrics to rap's identity as a genre may also mark it as being well-suited to male dominance, since language has culturally-located meanings in terms of gender. Dale Spender (1985) notes how English linguistic content can be seen to sustain the 'male' as normative and positive, while the 'female' is positioned as derivative and negative, positions that are maintained in cultural beliefs pertaining to gendered differences in language use. Indeed, the word 'woman' itself has become a particular site of feminist struggle, with a variety of alternative spellings exscribing the 'man' (or 'men' in the plural form): womyn; womon; or wimmin.[43] Furthermore, as Key notes, there is something of a 'myth' of male superiority when it comes to the usage of language, implying that men are typically held to be more skilled in the realisation of language's potential, both writing and speaking more fluently and eloquently, and possessing (and using) a wider vocabulary than women, who are charged with an emotional emphasis in their uses of language (1975, p. 15). This notion is indeed in opposition to a great deal of evidence – academic and anecdotal – that young boys actually develop their language somewhat later than their female counterparts: "Through the preschool years and in the early school years, girls exceed boys in most aspects of verbal performance. They say their first word sooner, articulate more clearly at an earlier age, use longer sentences, and are more fluent" (Maccoby, 1966, p. 26). In later years, the study of languages at school (be it English – literature or language – or a foreign language), as well as those subjects that demand essay-writing skills, tend to be female-dominated. Where there is a choice as to whether or not to take a subject, the sex division is notable in the classroom

demographics (see Table 3.1); where there is little or no choice, the division might be traced through exam results (see Table 3.2).

	FEMALE		MALE		TOTAL
	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%	
English	34 226	68.9	15 434	31.1	49 660
French	7 996	69.1	3 583	30.9	11 579
German	3 891	66.8	1 935	33.2	5 826
Spanish	2 173	68.7	988	31.3	3 161
Communication Studies	8 814	66.0	4 539	34.0	13 353
Religious Studies	4 259	73.5	1 539	26.5	5 798

Table 3.1
Gender division by subject at A-level [44]

Grade:	A*		A		B		C	
	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE
English Lit.	10 905	5 991	35 245	20 540	61 530	44 496	62 529	55 641
English Lang.	10 597	5 781	36 291	21 952	60 534	44 755	69 931	62 744
French	12 404	6 460	21 311	13 156	25 026	16 924	35 527	27 695

Table 3.2
Gender division by exam results in language-based subjects at GCSE [45]

The question should therefore be raised as to how to reconcile these apparent contradictions: from the beginning to the end of childhood, boys are either behind their female peers in linguistic ability, or disinterested in the study of a 'female' subject, yet men are still considered dominant in the use of language in adulthood. There may in fact be very little to corroborate the 'myth' of male linguistic superiority, which is not to propose a counter-myth of female superiority, but simply to suggest that the myth is indeed just a myth. Similarly, despite the analogous myth that women's use of language is excessive and frivolous, which has a long-standing history (see Cohen, 1996, pp. 32-3), "There has not been one study which provides evidence that women talk more than men" (Spender, 1985, p. 41). Yet the assumptions maintain their cultural hegemony nonetheless, and this is a highly relevant point given the male- and language-dominated nature of rap as a musical genre.

It seems also that different styles of writing have variously gendered meanings. According to Lorri Nielsen, there is an expectation in educational settings to write in one of three modes: expository (telling); transactional (doing); and

argumentative (2003, p. 4). In the face of this institutional bias, lyrical modes of writing, creative and poetic writing styles, are marginalised.[46] Nielsen's studies suggest that "women and girls opted for lyric forms of communication (expressive, personal) over rationalist discourse" (p. 5). Dale Spender argues that women's writing is generally contained within a 'private' sphere, as opposed to a public one (1988, pp. 192-3). Poetic and lyrical forms of writing may thus offer radical alternatives to rationalist forms of language, associated by way of their rationality and by their institutionally endorsed cultural superiority with patriarchy. This has particular implications for rap inasmuch as the lyrics tend to be extremely personal, even given the problems noted above of establishing intent. A sense of the 'personal' is further attached to rap lyrics because of the overwhelming prevalence of first-person writing. Complex uses of rhyme, alliteration, simile, metaphor, and word-play characterise rap lyrics, and this would seem to indicate a high level of linguistic skill that is generally obscured by the offensive content of gangsta and related styles. The cultural importance of linguistic skill thus emerges as an important factor, the significance of which being that linguistic ability has been prized since the very roots of rap music and is maintained in practices such as 'playing the dozens' and 'toasting':

> Just as rappers today are praised for their verbal gymnastics, so, too, were griots lauded, as well as those tribal members who could display a quick verbal dexterity. To be able to come up with a quick comeback or facile phrase was a matter of pride among the members of the various peoples of West Africa [...].
>
> (Haskins, 2000, p. 13)

Eminem describes mid-1990s rap as being particularly focused on skilfully-rhymed material: it was "the era of just rhyming for the hell of it" (Mathers III, 2000, p. 135). The title track of *Infinite* emerges directly from this philosophy, and exemplifies precisely the kind of word-play that is at the centre of modern rap (Track 4):

> Man, I got evidence I'm never dense and I been clever ever since
> My residence was hesitant to do some shit that represents the MO
> So I'm assuming all responsibility
> 'Cause there's a monster will in me that always wants to kill MCs
> Mic Nestler, slamming like a wrestler
> Here to make a mess of a lyric-smuggling embezzler
> No-one is specialer, my skill is intergalactical
> I get cynical, act a fool, then I send a crew back to school
> I never packed a tool or acted cool, it wasn't practical
> I'd rather let a tactical, tactful, track tickle your fancy
> In fact I can't see, or can't imagine

A man who ain't a lover of beats or a fan of scratchin'
So this is for my family, the kid who had a cammy on my last jam
Plus the man who never had a plan B, be all you can be,
'Cause once you make an instant hit I'm tensed a bit
And tempted when I see the sins my friends commit
I'm Infinite

The central theme of this song, in terms of lyrical content, is the emceeing skill of Eminem himself, and this is undoubtedly connected to the environment in which the track was conceived: local 'battles' and open mic nights (see Mathers III, 2000, p. 135).[47] Yet the route taken to achieve this message is circuitous, using similes, metaphors, half-rhymes, and alliteration. We may feel a logical conclusion with the declaration "I'm Infinite", but the relevance of the track being 'tactical' and 'tactful' is not clear. These adjectives are, of course, included primarily for their alliterative function and form part of a rhythmic shift to rhymes falling on off-beats, where on-beat rhymes had previously dominated the verse. Such blatant word-play openly takes pleasure in the subtle capacities and variety of the English language, to the point that it almost pushes language to its limits by inventing words when the situation requires it ('specialer'). The normal rhythmic patterns of language are modified, for instance in the emphasis placed on 'a' between 'send' and 'crew', which forces the clause into an iambic meter against its natural stresses.

In contemporary Anglophone cultures, as Spender notes, "To be inferior when it comes to language is frequently to be discounted" (1985, p. 10). Not only this, but the inappropriate or inaccurate use of language – or the lack of language at all – is very often associated with neurological or psychiatric disorder. It is significant that of aphasia[48] *Baillière's Encylopaedic Dictionary Of Nursing* advises, "It is important to realize that the inability to speak or write coherently does not necessarily mean that there is a loss of mental competence" (1989, p. 68), which of course implies that such a connection might mistakenly be made. The manifestation of language has long been an apparent indicator of a subject's state of mental health. The subject may not speak at all, withdrawing from communication altogether, may insist on talking primarily to him- or herself, or may express him- or herself inappropriately in some way. In the late 1830s, on his release from the asylums where he had been contained for being "religiously insane", Englishman John Perceval wrote: "To halloo, to bawl, to romp, to play the fool, are in ordinary life, signs of irregularity" (quoted in Porter, 2003, p. 23). Moreover, it must be noted that

if madness is associated with an unusual relation with language, it has also historically been associated with women. The nineteenth century saw the trope of the madwoman enjoying particular cultural relevance, as medicine and the newly-emergent discipline of psychiatry proposed scientific foundations for the already longstanding presumption that mental disorder and femininity were mutually implicit. Elaine Showalter observes, "While it was recognized in men, hysteria carried the stigma of being a humiliatingly female affliction", and that the hysterical man was therefore inevitably figured as effeminate (1996, pp. 106-7).[49]

It is worth noting here that, even as gender and language in rap use intersect in interesting ways, resulting in paradoxes such as these, gender and language also intersect significantly with the question of race. Rap has, of course, historically been considered a black musical genre, and certainly has a strong black musical history even as it is being consumed and performed by gradually more whites. Specifically, it is worth noting that black masculinity is not constructed in the same terms when it comes to language use: on the contrary, black masculinity is figured (in white culture especially) as specifically verbose, and as tending towards the use of metaphor, simile, and lyrical language styles. The griot tradition of prizing linguistic mastery extends into tactical usage of language by a systematically marginalised group in white-dominated cultures. Tricia Rose writes of "the long history of black cultural subversion and social critique in music and performance" (1994, p. 99). Specifically, she describes how "oppressed people use language, dance, and music to mock those in power, express rage, and produce fantasies of subversion" (p. 99). Nancy Guevara describes a history of the importance of linguistic skill in black American popular culture:

> Beyond [rap's] immediate historical antecedents within black culture (from the bragging blues of Bo Diddley to the high-energy inspirations of James Brown in cuts like 'Soul Power' and 'Sex Machine,' from radical prison toasts to those developed by hip hop DJs like Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash), there stretches a longer history, running back through street games of 'signifying' and 'the dozens' all the way to the word games embedded in West African cultures.
>
> (1996, p. 50)

In white-dominated cultures, rap thus functions as a black-dominated space where language is used as one counter-strategy against the deep-rooted racialised power structures. Moreover, it has been suggested that a sense of virtuosic display may be part of an "African American aesthetic", perceptible in but not restricted to musical

performance, perhaps also having the sense of bonding that is implicit in the strategic

counter-racist use of language noted above:

> Composer Olly Wilson notes [...] occasions in black music performance
> [that he calls] 'soul focal moments'. In a soul focal moment, the player
> performs the unexpected with virtuosity, elevates the community through
> his or her individual effort [...]. Michael Eric [Dyson captures] three
> necessary ingredients of the soul focal moment: the will to spontaneity,
> stylization of the performed self, and edifying deception.
>
> (Caponi, 1999, p. 5)

Clearly, these elements are played out in the kind of verbosity which is characteristic

of rap music. Indeed, Gena Dagel Caponi specifically points out that:

> Hip-hop combines a fistful of African American aesthetic factors. The
> rhymed satirical patter takes off from children's rhyming plays and games
> and adult signifyin(g) poems; the dancing is an athletic stylization of many
> forms of African American dance, from children's 'jumps' to, occasionally,
> tap. [...] Hip hop dance is competitive, using the community in its
> traditional functions of support and confrontation, for the good of the
> performance.
>
> (p. 26)

Such elements are also part of the 'showiness' that, as Caponi writes, "has always

been a part of African American expressive style" (1999, p. 5). Such a claim has

been made before, and one example can be found in the work of Zora Neale Hurston

who, writing in 1933, sets forth a series of observations about the 'Characteristics of

Negro Expression'. Hurston writes:

> The Negro's universal mimicry is not so much a thing in itself as an
> evidence of something that permeates his entire self. And that thing is
> drama.
> His very words are action words. His interpretation of the English
> language is in terms of pictures. One act described in terms of another.
> Hence the rich metaphor and simile.
>
> (1999, p. 294)

Hurston goes on to identify what she calls the "will to adorn", by which she means a

tendency to ornament language (as she perceives it): "In this respect the American

Negro has done wonders to the English language" (p. 295). Rap – as a currently

highly visible expression of something understood as 'blackness' – almost certainly

has something to do with the continuing perception of black masculinity as a site of

linguistic play, mastery and verbosity that may have more to do with African-

American-ness than with the hysterical feminine.

The first point worth making in response to this is that the examples of rap

music that I have been discussing here – as much as they operate within a 'black'

genre – also operate within a Western, predominantly Anglo-American, culture that is white-dominated in its discourse, and thus the whiteness of that discourse bears down heavily in readings of the genre. Moreover, Eminem is a white rapper and, as such, he is received as a creative individual on 'white' terms as well as 'black' terms: the white domination of Western discourses apply especially to him. Perhaps even more importantly, psychoanalytic discourses have contributed immensely to the weight of the figure of the 'female hysteric' that I have deployed in this part of my argument, and it is worth picking up on the implications of the historical and cultural specificity of those discourses. That is to say, perhaps the potential to relate hysteria, emasculation, and rap speaks of an inherent racism of those psychoanalytic discourses. If psychoanalysis is a male-centric discourse that subordinates the female and the feminine, it is also a white and middle-class discourse that subordinates the black and the working-class. Victor J. Seidler writing of reason and masculinity, and how they function through linguistic operations, describes the historical depth of an implicit conflation between the sexual and the racial other, on the basis of other-ness:

> Often, men presented themselves as 'rational' and 'reasonable', so defining others as lacking these essential qualities which define our very humanity. This conception of reason organized the way imperialist relations between Europe and Africa and Asia were legitimated, so that Europeans could present themselves as bringing advances of reason and science to a world supposedly void of reason and civilization.
>
> (1989, p. 15)

Alan Petersen describes the connection as being even more explicit: "Both women and non-European men and women were regarded as deviations from the European male norm [...]. 'Women and Africans were seen as sharing similar deficiencies when measured against the constant norm – the elite European man'" (1998, pp. 44-5). [50] It could be argued, then, that hysteria is figured not simply as a 'female affliction', but as an affliction of the Other, of the subaltern. To be 'hysterically verbose' is to be liminal, outside, and other, and it is in this sense that the notion of hysterical verbosity remains significant in the present case study, even as the complex network of racialised and gendered discourses intersect and complicate the matter..

The paradoxes of gender and language are these: the masculine 'norm' is characterised as possessing superior linguistic skill, while the feminine/feminised 'deviation' is the hysterical chatterbox; and it is mostly male writers and poets who have taken their place in the literary canon, while girls and young women seem to

display greater aptitude for the study of English Literature and greater enthusiasm for

personal expression by way of poetry and journals. Kristeva argues:

> that which in language [...] is feminine, is whatever has to do with the
> imprecise, with the whisper, with impulses, perhaps with primary processes,
> with rhetoric – in other words, speaking roughly, the domain of literary
> expression, the region of the tacit, the vague, and where one would escape
> from the too-tight tailoring of the linguistic sign and of logic.
>
> (Oliver, 1997, p. 370)

By definition, rap as a genre depends heavily on linguistic skill in the writing, and

verbal dexterity in the speaking. Do these facts validate the 'myth' of male

superiority of language, or do they problematise the male expression of masculinity

in the genre, insofar as they position the rapper as personally expressive and

hysterically verbose? It is probable that both of these interpretations have some

validity. The content is, of course, more often shouted or snarled than 'whispered',

and this contributes to a surface effect of a hostile, normative masculinity. Yet the

intensity of verbal play and the sometimes disjointed movement between topics in a

single song, can also give an overall effect of the 'vague'. Certain of Eminem's

songs have clear narrative trajectories,[51] but many others appear to be streams of (a

warped) consciousness, loosely tying together various twisted fantasies or

recollections (with the two of these blurring into each other).[52] We might see the

gratuitously violent lyrics which have brought rap into disrepute as an over-

determined surface message, begging for analysis. As we have seen, the use of

language in the genre opens up certain interpretations that challenge the construction

of masculinity in the lyrical content, and this adds to the confusion surrounding the

construction and representation of masculinity in gangsta rap and its descendants. It

seems as if the artist held up as the embodiment of antisocial evil, glorifying violent

misogyny and homophobia, may not be as straightforwardly evil as at first it might

seem.

3.3 Words as weapons

The lyrical content of gangsta rap music and related styles forms the basis of popular condemnation of such music, and the writing of Eminem is a notable example in this respect. As we have seen, however, the details of the use of language start to unpick the cloth of the construction and representation of masculinity in this kind of music, by figuring the rapper as potentially over-assertive of his own heterosexuality, and hysterically verbose (whilst also appearing to be heterosexual and a master of language as a rational structure). In fact, even the content of rap's lyrics is not quite as unquestionably heterosexist and unproblematically representative of conservative masculinity as has typically been presumed by critics of the genre, and it is at this point that the kind of masculinity actually constructed by the genre ought to come under close scrutiny. Of course, the rapper's genitals represent a crucial site for the construction of his masculinity, and many of the problems seen in rap lyrics have to do with the description of sexual acts or fantasies. As a typical example, Kon Artis of D12 boasts:

> Hoes say, "Kon Artis got a dick so big!"
> Man, I can persuade any bitch to have eight of my kids, shit
> Bitch, I should be locked up for havin' honeys' legs cocked up
> In the back of my pops truck
>
> > (D12, 'Nasty Mind', 2001)

Such boasting is extremely common in rap as a genre, and works in counterpoint with the technique of insulting another rapper known as 'dissing'. William Perkins describes the role of dissing in rap: "The put-down – shooting an opponent or competitor with words, while boasting of one's own lyrical and rhyming abilities – characterized the dis [...]. The dis element informs all rap styles, and MCs must be able to perform dis to gain a modicum of acceptance and respect" (1996b, p. 10). Perkins' description points also to the common practice in rap cultures of competitive rapping. As Haskins notes, the competitive aspect of rapping derives from the proto-rapping musical and verbal exploits of Jamaican DJs in the early 1970s:

> Following in the footsteps of the dub poets, the rapso artists and the reggae singers of their own island, Jamaican DJs rhymed to music [...]. Each system [the music equipment plus all of the people necessary to set up and run it] had its own loyal fans and 'battles' were common among different DJs and their sound systems. The various sound systems would travel around the island, playing and competing with other systems and their DJs.

These 'battles' [...] became the rage, with each trying to outdo the other in
music, toasting and verbal quips.

(2000, p. 44)[53]

What has continued to characterise recorded rap's lyrical content is a combination of
the rapper's self-glorification and his or her ability to insult another, whether that is a
particular rapper, some other individual, or even an institution such as the police. The
informal, but explicitly competitive form of this is known as 'playing the dozens',[54]
and a more formal competition is described as a 'battle'. Both of these practices are
usually performed on a freestyle basis, where the rhymes are not intended to be
carefully pre-written, but individualised to insult the particular opponent in question.
Rap music as a genre clearly raises questions surrounding the use of language, as I
have already argued. The interesting aspect arising is that, although as a form of
musical expression it has historically been deployed within environments rife with
physical violence (especially involving firearms), it also offers a physically safe
forum for one-on-one contests. This in turn sets up something of a mind/body
dualism, and while it would not be helpful to think in terms of these two being
mutually explicit, their longstanding separation is a point worth noting here. Clearly,
a level of linguistic ability and presumably a particular kind of intelligence are
required for successful rapping, especially if that is in a freestyle environment, where
quick-wittedness is an indispensable skill. Eminem himself says: "Nobody really
sees the talent, I don't think, not many people – especially reporters and [...]
journalists. They always concentrate on the negativity and the cuss words [...], and
they don't stop to think [...] what it actually takes to put that shit *in* my music"
(*Eminem: Hitz and Disses*). Contrary to this would be the common stereotype of
physically tough men as lacking in intelligence, and specifically linguistic mastery.

Eminem of course engages in the tradition of combining self-reification with
dissing. A typical example occurs in 'As The World Turns' (1999): "I told this bitch
in gym class / That she was too fat to swim laps, she needed Slim-Fast / Yeah bitch,
you so big you walked into Vic Tanny's and stepped on Jenny Craig".[55] This last line
in particular exemplifies the dissing tradition, in which references are made to
existing cultural information, establishing and building on a metaphor in order to
insult the opponent (see Haskins, 2000, p. 56).[56] Yet Eminem repeatedly constructs
himself in a troubled way, partly perhaps because of the constant tensions being
played out between his multiple characters, and various expressions of self-

deprecation therefore recur in his lyrics. Just as Kon Artis founded his boast on his genitals, the rapper's genitals emerge equally as a site for the construction of an inferior subject position in Eminem's work:

> As I got older and I got a lot taller
> My dick shrunk smaller but my balls got larger
>
> ('Criminal')

> My penis is the size of a peanut, have you seen it?
> Fuck no, you ain't seen it: it's the size of a peanut!
>
> ('Kids', 2000)

Furthermore, in a kind of accordance with the generic approval of the 'personal' in musical texts, many lyrics penned by Eminem in particular speak of personal difficulties throughout his life. In 'Kim', the overriding image is of the violent death of Eminem's wife, at his own hands, but the rapper also describes in painful detail the rejection he feels she has dealt him:

> You really fucked me Kim
> You really did a number on me
> [...]
> You loved him didn't you?
> [...]
> Kim, KIM! Why don't you like me? You think I'm ugly don't you?
> [...]
> How the fuck could you do this to me?
> CHORUS: So long, bitch you did me so wrong
>   I don't wanna go on livin' in this world without you

Apart from the expression of distress evident in the lyrics, the anguish in Eminem's voice is also central to the song, and the overall effect is of a man split between his desire for his wife, and his desire to destroy her. The tension between those desires clearly affects his mental state in the course of the song: "Oh my God I'm crackin' up / Get a grip Marshall".[57] David Stubbs describes the song as "a repugnant, yet blood-raw and gripping performance, draining for all concerned", in which Eminem is "clearly as much tormented as tormentor, confused and crumbling inside. [...] At times he's pathetic, cripplingly insecure" (2003, p. 74).

The theme of being tormented also spills over into a general expression and acceptance of mental degeneracy in Eminem's lyrics. Whereas the reference to a microphallus in 'Kids' might point us in the direction of the 'Marshall' character, 'Slim' persistently and deliberately operates outside of what is normally considered socially acceptable, or even sane. First, Eminem repeatedly vents normally unacceptable images, such as in "97 Bonnie & Clyde', or 'I'm Back' (2000), where

he – as 'Slim Shady' – unashamedly asserts: "I don't give a fuck if this chick was my own mother / I'd still fuck her with no rubber and cum inside o' her / And have a son and a new brother at the same time / And just say that it ain't mine". Second, 'Slim Shady' explicitly identifies himself as depraved in songs such as 'Amityville' (2000),[58] where one of the hook lines describes Slim Shady as "Mentally ill from Amityville". In the unrecorded freestyle 'Any Man', the point is made more obvious:

> I'm Slim, the Shady is really a fake alias
> To save me with in case I get chased by space aliens
> A brainiac, with a cranium packed full of more uranium
> Than a maniac Saudi Arabian
> A highly combustible head, spazmatic
> Strapped to a Craftmatic adjustable bed

(Eminem, 2000, p. 121)

Summarising the overall effect of Eminem's way of opening himself up in his lyrics, Wendy Case says, "For him it's just, 'This is me, I'm a freak, I'm insecure, I'm mentally ill, I'm suicidal'" (*Eminem: Hitz and Disses*).

Whether they are manifested simply through some physical or personal inadequacy, or whether they are transformed into extreme and inappropriate anger and violence, these expressions of inferiority or incapability could be described as undercurrents of masochism in Eminem's work, even as he describes ways in which he will overcome his enemies. While it may seem to undermine the male supremacy which rap's lyrics tend to endorse, male masochism has also been identified as a means by which superior masculinity has been constructed. Relating this to fin-de-siècle European culture, Suzanne Stewart describes masochism as a rhetorical strategy deployed to assert patriarchal authority on cultural and political planes. The model is initially radically different from the kind of means by which masculinity is normally constructed in rap:[59] "In its initial formulation in the 1880s [...] masochism denoted a particularly male affliction: it described the condition of those men who fantasized being either physically tortured or psychologically humiliated by a powerful, dominating woman" (Stewart, 1988, p. 2). This of course is in stark contrast to the powerfully overbearing male rapper whose descriptions of women are predominantly in negative and/or highly sexualised terms, with the rapper as dominant in any sexual scenario, and often violently so. Stewart describes, however, the potential for patriarchal dominance even in masochistic expression. Not only did masochism become "the site by and through which masculinity was not only redefined but again made hegemonic" (1988, p. 9), but it also "signified a novel form

of self-control", which "was the fundamental paradox at the very heart of the phenomenon" (p. 10). This is a cunning device not deployed by most rappers. When Eminem chooses to use it, then, the intended effect may be that the audience takes pity on the deprived and depraved creature he presents himself to be. His audience, encouraged to identify with him as disenfranchised urban youths, are led into identification with this temporarily masochistic stance.

Stewart points to the relevance of masochism to the construction of masculinity, at least in late nineteenth-century cultural expression. Perhaps more pertinently, the strategic deployment of masochism persists in modern cultural representations of masculinity, in an association with stamina and determination. Discussing films such as *Raging Bull* (dir. Scorsese, 1980) and the *Rocky* series,[60] Judith Halberstam argues:

> masochism is built into male masculinity, and the most macho of spectacles is the battered male body, a bloody hunk of ruined flesh, stumbling out of the corner for yet another round. The winner is always the one who has been beaten to a pulp but remains standing long enough to deliver the knockout punch.
>
> (1998, p. 275)

A similar tactic is deployed in the film *8 Mile* (dir. Hanson, 2002), which starred Eminem as Jimmy 'Rabbit' Smith in a semi-autobiographical role, and which has tellingly been described as "the rap *Rocky*" (Kennedy, 2003, p. 42). In the climactic scene, Rabbit competes in a battle against his nemesis Papa Doc. Given their already antagonistic history, Rabbit is duly concerned about some of the subjects which Doc may use against him in the battle. Rabbit is given the first turn, however, and soon launches into a self-deprecating rant based on recent run-ins with Doc and his gang, the Free World:

> I know everything he's got to say about me
> I *am* white
> I *am* a fuckin' bum
> I *do* live in a trailer with my mum
> [...]
> I *did* get jumped by all six of you chumps
> And Wink *did* fuck my girl
> I'm still standing here shouting 'Fuck the Free World'!

Rabbit uses this as a springboard from whence to destroy Doc's credentials, outing him as a private school graduate named Clarence with happily married parents. In the final seconds – *a cappella* because the battle's time is up – Rabbit proclaims, "I'm a piece of fuckin' white trash and I say it proudly / [...throwing the mic to Doc] Here,

tell these people something they don't know about me". Because Rabbit has already subjected himself to all the humiliation possible, Doc no longer has any tools to use against him, and is forced to surrender. In this sense, the masochism deployed in *8 Mile* and comparable films is not a permanent condition as in Stewart's descriptions, but a temporary status used as a device to reclaim power when the masochism is ultimately overturned.

In fact, *8 Mile* is more 'the rap *Karate Kid*' than 'the rap *Rocky*'. *The Karate Kid* (dir. Avildsen, 1984) tells the story of Daniel, a teenager who moves from New Jersey to California with a modicum of karate knowledge, and soon finds himself bullied by a local gang of his peers who are highly skilled in karate. Daniel suffers several significant beatings at the hands of the gang, known as the Cobra Kais, after their karate school. To postpone any further bullying, the old and wise Mr. Miyagi intervenes, and arranges with the gang's karate instructor that Daniel will compete in an upcoming local junior karate tournament in return for abstinence from bullying him in the meantime. The impending tournament propels the narrative, an all-or-nothing showdown between Daniel and the gang. Daniel thus commences rigorous training with Miyagi, who teaches the boy to think and fight outside of the westernised form of karate, with its focus on the fight as aggression. For narrative success, it is obvious that Daniel will win the tournament, pitted in the final round against the gang's leader, Johnny Lawrence (the most accomplished karateka in the gang, and the defending champion). The way in which that final moment of filmic gratification is achieved, however, is noteworthy. Of course, Daniel's chances at success are to be doubted at first by the viewer, and he therefore gets pushed out of the ring twice in quick succession in his first match. As he edges closer to the championship final, Daniel is seen fighting against some of the Cobra Kais, and increasingly struggling. In the semi-final, he is pitted against Lawrence's closest companion, who is ordered by his sensei to put Daniel "out of commission". Despite the inevitable disqualification, the opponent delivers a crippling blow to Daniel's leg, and it seems that Lawrence will win the tournament by default. Determined not to lose face against the Cobras, Daniel comes back into play for the final, albeit noticeably limping. In a tense match point, Lawrence, having clearly been aiming for Daniel's weak point, eventually grabs Daniel's leg and pushes the knee-joint back on itself. Yet Daniel finally wins the point, the match, and the championship with a

unique move learned from Miyagi that involves a clean and sharp kick to Lawrence's chin.

The themes of revenge, the underdog overcoming the champ, and determination to overcome all the odds are played out repeatedly in films aimed at a young male audience, and it is not surprising that all three characterise both *The Karate Kid* and *8 Mile*. Again, however, these themes also contradict the thoroughgoing masochism described by Stewart, in that they use 'masochistic moments' which are ultimately annulled in order to gain power. *Rocky* lacks an obvious revenge theme, and the ways in which the eponymous protagonist overcomes the champion in his narrative do not lead to him winning the heavyweight title for which he is fighting, but the general narrative trajectory is undoubtedly similar. What makes *Karate Kid* and *8 Mile* so very similar is the direct path from initial and spectacular defeat to a significant win. In *Karate Kid* the initial defeats are at the hands of the same opponents whom Daniel goes on to overcome in the final scene, whereas Rabbit's previous victor, Lil' Tic, is only aligned with the rival crew, the Free World, by appearing on stage (and on screen) directly after Papa Doc, the Free World's leader. Despite this discrepancy, the overall revenge narrative is well-established in *8 Mile*, as Rabbit is involved early on in the film in a physical brawl with Doc, who comments on Rabbit's total inability to perform at the previous night's battle.

In terms of the tactical use of masochism, *Karate Kid* and *Rocky* make different use of this strategy, common as it is in films of their genre. Rocky Balboa is characterised quite explicitly as a physically tough man lacking in traditional signifiers of intelligence: Stallone's diction throughout the film adds to the effect initiated by the script. With his physical abilities set up as the primary marker of his worth in the film, Rocky engages in the archetypal display of masculine physicality: heavyweight boxing. Towards the end of the film, he loses the desire to beat his opponent – the undisputed champion, Apollo Creed – and declares that his only wish is to "go the distance", because "nobody's ever gone the distance with Creed". (The audience have already been informed that no opponent has lasted more than twelve rounds with the champion, in matches that last a maximum of fifteen rounds.) Rocky no longer wants to win, only to survive, as he says himself. Just before the final fight commences, Creed confidently declares his intention to win in three rounds. On paper, the odds are certainly against Rocky, who has been deliberately picked for this

fight as an "underdog" fighter with no professional experience. His capacity to survive is of course what sustains the final scene, and much is made of Rocky's ability to continue the fight. The match commentators comment: "Balboa's taking a tremendous beating"; "His face is like a punch-bag"; and, as Rocky goads Creed, "He says he wants more". Visually, there are a great number of shots of Rocky against the ropes, taking punches, and bleeding. The ultimate display of masochism comes when Rocky's eye has been beaten such that he has trouble opening it. In a desperate attempt to relieve the symptoms and see enough to continue the fight he asks one of his entourage to "cut me, cut me". This undoubtedly painful procedure allows Rocky to enter the final and crucial fifteenth round. Here indeed is the 'bloody hunk of ruined flesh' of which Halberstam writes, the 'macho spectacle' of the 'battered male body', a temporary point of masochism on the path to greater power.

Karate kid Daniel similarly overcomes great pain, previously inflicted on him by an opponent, in order to survive his final match. Yet his determination to win persists into his final match, unlike Rocky's desire simply to survive. The masochism involved is in this way less explicit in *Karate Kid* than in *Rocky*, since in the latter film the prospect of the hero's victory is secondary to the inevitability of his physical suffering. That said, Daniel has suffered repeated humiliation throughout the film at the hands of the Cobras: even when they are bound not to harm him by the agreement made between their sensei and Miyagi, they are still able to taunt and shame him. Moreover, at the prospect of losing the tournament simply due to a physical inability to fight, Daniel articulates his desire to fight (and beat) Johnny despite his injury. He thus enters the match in obvious pain, and his victory is to be understood as even more deserved as a result (especially as he executes the winning blow using his injured leg).

Some physical injuries are also dealt to Rabbit in *8 Mile*, and he appears at the championship battle with a black eye from a recent beating by the Free World. Other significant blows have been dealt symbolically, especially in that his girlfriend has been seduced by a supposed friend, Wink. His general social situation is not vastly different from those of his peers but, notably, he is reduced at the beginning of the film to living at home in a trailer park, and he is seen to have a dull job at a car factory. After his physical beating, courtesy of the Free World, and his previous failure to utter a single snap, Rabbit therefore has to overcome not physical pain but

personal humiliation in order to appear at the championship battle. In a sense, his involvement in the event shows a tendency towards masochism, since insults at his expense are inevitable. Of course, the same may justifiably be said of engagement in any contact sport, and the spectacle of male masochism is in this way deeply inscribed in the idea of such sports as entertainment, even as a point on a course to victory. What Rabbit's final freestyle brings to the fore is the way in which blows received can be turned around into winning punches, the strategic deployment of moments of masochism. It is well-known that one of Muhammad Ali's winning tactics was specifically to take all the punches his opponent could deal, with the aim of tiring the opponent in the process, and dispensing a few choice blows with minimal physical effort, to win the match.[61] Yet the particular connection between taking punches and turning them around is not usually made explicit. In a parallel format, Rabbit demonstrates the ability to take insults and overturn them. In response to being called a Nazi, he counters, "So I'm a German, eh? / That's OK, you look like a worm with braids". Or, in response to a second round of racial insults, and with reference to his previous opponent, he dismissingly accuses, "Didn't you listen to the last round, meathead? / Pay attention, you're saying the same shit that *he* said". His final round is that in which he insults himself as the basis of his win. In a subtle twist on the boxing film trope, the 'macho spectacle' here is the male ego battered by his own words.

The spectacular nature of this display of masculinity also raises other issues surrounding the function of masochism. In a development of Laura Mulvey's theorisation of the gaze and classic Hollywood cinema, Mary Ann Doane considers the female spectator, and concludes that she has two options as a spectator: "the masochism of over-identification or the narcissism entailed in becoming one's own object of desire" (1992, p. 240). In films such as *Karate Kid*, *Rocky*, and *8 Mile*, the male spectator is subjected to identification with a masochistic subject, and thus colludes in his own masochism. In the wake of John Ellis's comments, we must recognise that the spectator's identification is a fluid, shifting process: "identification involves both the recognition of self in the image on the screen, a narcissistic identification, and the identification of self with the various positions that are involved in the fictional narration. [...] Identification is therefore multiple and fractured" (1982, p. 43). Yet this process may allow moments of temporary stability, settling on a narcissistic identification with Daniel, Rocky, or Rabbit. In the first two

cases, narcissism bleeds easily into masochism, initially because of the focus on the physical suffering of the protagonists. A subtle slippage occurs between the male body as offering a "powerful ideal ego" for the male spectator (Mulvey, 1992, p. 28), and the male body as a potentially erotic object, displayed as primarily a bodily entity. Moreover, the physically battered body exemplified by Rocky performs both of these functions, emerging as the embodiment of power and ability to survive as well as being put on display as a body for penetration by the fists of his opponent. This dual function demonstrates exactly what is at the heart of the problematics being proposed in this chapter: rap music seems to represent a site for the construction of a dominant and normative masculinity, but the way in which it achieves this often involves a circuitous route through modes of performing power that are more often figured as feminine. In *8 Mile* as a particular example, the moments of strategic masochism are clearly visible as points at which power can be reclaimed through the tactical deployment of a 'feminised' subject position. In *Rocky*, despite the clear erotic potential proffered by the final scenes, that potential is also forestalled in a typical cinematic move. Rocky's increasing activity serves to justify the spectacle he offers the spectator, as Dyer might posit: to keep "in line with dominant ideas of masculinity-as-activity", "images of men are often images of men doing something" (1992b, pp. 269-70). Specifically, the violent display in the final scene also displaces the eroticism. Writing about Anthony Mann's films, Steve Neale makes a point which could be extrapolated to the present argument:

> in a heterosexual and patriarchal society the male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed. The mutilation and sadism so often involved in Mann's films are marks both of the repression involved and of a means by which the male body may be disqualified [...] as an object of erotic contemplation and desire.
>
> (1992, p. 281)

If the male body in action is what displaces the erotic potential of the male body on display, *8 Mile* offers an interesting variation on this trope, since language stands in for physical activity: it is the male mind on display, and in action, that forms the basis of the crucial combat scenes in this film. Just as in *Rocky*, the notion of 'winning' the final contest is rather less conclusive in *8 Mile* than it is in the highly clichéd ending of *Karate Kid*. Rabbit's final challenge to Doc is preceded by a tirade of expletives that ultimately position himself as above the environment in which he finds himself competing, symbolised also by the fact that he is continuing to rap

despite having run out of time: "fuck this battle I don't wanna win, I'm outtie [out of here] / Here, tell these people something they don't know about me". Rabbit watches while Doc 'chokes', unable to retaliate at all, in a reversal of the initial battle scene. Rabbit thus wins by default and although he certainly enjoys his win at that moment, he returns to work after the battle, much to the chagrin of his crew. Nonetheless, the mind games being played out in this final battle scene are a display of masculinity comparable to the punches thrown in any boxing film. This is due to a combination of linguistic mastery, with its patriarchal associations, and masochism, which despite being currently formulated as a female affliction is, as noted, "built into male masculinity" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 275). Halberstam describes how, in *Raging Bull*, the specifically physical nature of the protagonist's masochism is essential:

> Jake La Motta declines from a fighting stud to a lonely, overweight, impotent abuser reduced to reciting little poems as a stand-up comic in a nightclub. [...] The raging bull has been reduced to insipid rhymes. The power of the punch has been replaced by the power of the punch line, and for the male fighter, that is no power at all.
>
> (1998, p. 275)

Comparable with the rhyming couplets of Muhammad Ali, the couplets offered by La Motta in *Raging Bull* also offer a point of comparison with *8 Mile*. Neither Rabbit nor his opponents are primarily physical fighters, and the 'power of the punch line' is absolutely the power they seek to possess.

As I have suggested, a dualistic construction of mind and body would not be entirely helpful, but their historic separation and the gendered implications of each are significant here. Not only does language enjoy an association on its own merits with patriarchal power, as I have described above, but the effective use of language also tends to imply a level of intelligence. This opens out into the mind half of the (problematic) dualism, and invites a comparison of the mental displays of masculinity at work in *8 Mile* with the physical displays in *Rocky*, *Karate Kid*, *Raging Bull*, and other such films. While the masochism on display in the fighting films is unquestionably the more spectacular, and foregrounds the idea of 'masculinity-as-activity', the mind has more of a longstanding association with notions of masculinity. Needless to say, negative associations of both mind and body are invariably set up as 'feminising': hysteria and other mental disorders are to be grouped with sensuality and vanity as being of the feminine. Yet the 'mind' has staunchly maintained its position on the 'male' side of a mind-body/male-female

dualism (see McClary, 1991, p. 153), as problematic as those dualisms transpire to be. Thus, despite the potential feminine associations of language discussed above, the battles in *8 Mile*, and particularly the final, are displays of mental agility that might be likened to chess or some other cerebral contest that allows for the spectacularisation of mental aptitude, and masculinises that display in the process.

One other ostensible 'fight film' also provides a useful avenue into some of the issues at stake when reading not only the closing scenes of *8 Mile* but moments of masochism at play in Eminem's work generally. *Fight Club* tells the story of Jack, whose mundane, conformist, consumerist lifestyle causes him to seek emotional catharsis in various self-help groups for those suffering or recovering from various potentially terminal illnesses. He meets the charismatic Tyler Durden, with whom he later moves in due to a 'random' explosion of his own flat, and together they form their own self-help group – Fight Club, an underground meeting of young men as disillusioned with the system as Jack, for the purpose of bare-knuckle (and -chest) fighting. The narrative trajectory of *Fight Club* does not parallel those of the other fight films noted, in that there is no singular enemy to overcome, or a single contest to be won as a marker of success. Rather, the 'enemy' is the corporate system which binds the Fight Club members to their various everyday tasks and forces them into conformity, apparently stripping them of fundamental aspects of masculinity.[62] Tyler leads Jack into creating a formal network of Fight Clubs, and the members become like soldiers in what Tyler dubs 'Project Mayhem', which is to be a long-term series of anti-capitalist 'pranks' in order to disrupt the workings of the society that forced the Fight Club members into their disenfranchised position. The culmination of the Project will be to destroy the buildings that house major credit companies, with the idea of confusing the consumer system utterly. On the surface, this too offers a variation on the normal fight film theme, in that physical fighting becomes a metaphor for 'fighting the system', and the winning or losing of the final 'challenge' is presented as (questionably) desirable. However, the final scenes reveal a crucial twist: Tyler is Jack. Specifically, he is everything that Jack wished he could be but was not.

Whether or not the Fight Clubs and Project Mayhem have 'really' existed is a question left deliberately unanswered at the end of the film. What is most significant here is that Jack has first created ('really' or in his imagination) this systemised opportunity for violent catharsis, and then used that to subvert the system which left

him requiring catharsis in the first place. The structures are thus similar to the moments of masochism in Rabbit's penultimate battle in *8 Mile*, where he explicitly uses the insults dealt him by his opponent to generate an even more biting comeback. Extrapolating the issues into Eminem's body of work, and the split identities which he uses to disseminate his thoughts, we can easily see that Tyler is not only Jack's ideal ego, but also an outlet for all of Jack's repressed frustration and anger: he can be said to be Jack's 'Slim Shady'.[63] It is in the ruptured existence of Tyler/Jack and Marshall/Eminem/Slim Shady that some of the core issues emerge. Clearly, Jack submits himself to untold physical abuse in order to gain a coveted release from the banality of his everyday life. 'Slim Shady' pushes outwards with his violent fantasies, describing the abuse which he would like to deliver to others. And yet there is also a sense that one of those others could be the pathetic, insecure and inept 'Marshall', just as the Fight Club is born after a fight between Tyler and Jack. The *Fight Club* narrative encapsulates what we have already seen to be at work in Eminem's split personae. There is no great moment of glory in *Fight Club*, and there is none to be expected from Eminem. A point of almost ejaculatory climax occurs in *Fight Club*, in the closing image of exploding skyscrapers across the city Jack lives in. Yet the glory is marred by the potential 'unreality' of it all. Jack stands and watches the pyrotechnic extravaganza, and the 'reality' of the event is maintained by the presence of another character, but the unsafeness of the triumph is signified by the fact that Jack has shot himself in the head, to rid himself of Tyler, and he watches the display with a gunshot wound to his head. Similarly, Eminem offers us in 'Slim Shady' an uncontrollable fiend who will probably lead to his own destruction. Although 'Marshall' is not directly positioned as the object of 'Slim's' fantasies – just as Jack is not subject to regular beatings from Tyler or the target of Project Mayhem (after their initial bout) – it might be suggested that the masochistic moments in Eminem's music are rested on an oscillation between the two characters. In acknowledging a weakness, 'Marshall' is invoked, while the anger with which Eminem retaliates propels him into 'Slim'. In this way, his split personae and the masochism he presents are in fact ideal bedfellows.

3.4 Queer(ing) masculinities in rap

At first sight, the music of Eminem justifiably embodies everything about rap which may offend, speaking of (and arguably glorifying and trivialising) misogyny, homophobia, drugs, brutal violence, rape, and murder. His lyrics take the listener into a dark and fantastic world in which the disturbing inner machinations of the disenfranchised and ineffective Marshall take shape in the sinister form of Slim Shady, with Eminem at the centre, putting forward the tensions between these two radically disparate sides of his personality. Yet this journey into his psyche entails a circuitous diversion through the various possibilities of the English language, through rhyme and word-association, with the invention of new language whenever the existing structure does not suffice. While the bulk of the linguistic content portrays a violently conservative masculinity, the use of language in Eminem's writing also mobilises discourses surrounding the gendered use of language: in its poetry, its 'lyrical' form, and in its often intensely personal content, his writing also operates in a mode normally styled as feminine. The tactical deployment of moments of temporary masochism further troubles the language's gendered content, such that the kind of lyric material we are faced with is not quite as traditionally 'masculine' as was first thought. Rather, Eminem's work emerges as an intricate layering of self-deprecation and self-glorification, of rational linguistic skill and hysterical loquaciousness, of control over language and the use of language in the pursuit of intensely personal self-expression.

To pursue the idea that the great pleasure-taking use of language in rap might introduce more subtle nuances of gender than the content's surface normally allows for, it might be helpful to exploit psychoanalytic theory. Here, it is not just that certain words, phrases, or uses of language maintain the 'male' as normative and positive, with the 'female' relegated to derivative and negative, as Spender argues (1985). More than this, the issues surrounding the uses of language are deeply embedded in the human psyche, insofar as language is figured as part of a fundamentally patriarchal structure. Dylan Evans describes Lacan's formulation of language:

> Lacan argues that language has both a symbolic and an imaginary
> dimension [...]. The symbolic dimension of language is that of the signifier
> and true speech. The imaginary dimension of language is that of the
> signified, signification, and empty speech.
>
> (1996, p. 98)

The Symbolic is the realm of law, culture, and religion, and is entered into by way of the mirror stage, which involves the subject's radical severing from his mother. It is on entry to the Symbolic that the subject acquires language, inasmuch as language is a structure of symbols, the relation between signifiers and signifieds. Despite the Symbolic aspect of language, the Imaginary order – that from which the subject has emerged into the Symbolic – is not entirely absent, as Evans makes clear. Instead, the Imaginary persists in language by virtue of the Imaginary element of the signified. At any rate, the catalysing crisis of the mirror stage involves the separation of the child subject from his mother. Toril Moi writes of how, at this moment, "the father splits up the dyadic unity between mother and child and forbids the child further access to the mother and the mother's body" (1985, p. 99). Consequently, although female subjects must negotiate entry to the Symbolic order, their ultimate and fundamental exclusion from it is also implicit. Thus, one of the principal criticisms of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis has been that it configures healthy subjectivity as patriarchal and accessible only to men, or to women who are prepared to adopt a male subject position. This male dominance of the Symbolic realm may well be part of what sustains the supposedly superior position of men in language, and is probably at the heart of the long-standing presumption of men's superiority in the use of language (despite there being little, if any, evidence to support such a claim). Certainly, such a configuration of language, as a principally male privilege, demands to be brought into the present debate over the construction and representation of masculinity in such a language-dominated music genre as rap.

Lacan's two-part configuration of language opens up a way for considering language on two levels: as message and as sound. These two aspects can be seen to work together to construct apparently conflicting gendered positions. In terms of language as message – its communicative content – we have already seen how masculinity in rap is constructed as synonymous with heterosexist male-dominance through violent misogyny and homophobia. Clearly, this is a highly problematic and potentially offensive expression of masculinity, but it is what might be seen as the logical extreme of a continuum of masculinity. The idea of language as sound, outside of its communicative dimension, recalls the 'geno-song' described by Barthes (1990, p. 295), that aspect of language not concerned with direct representation and communication. As I have suggested previously, Barthes's model should not be taken entirely at face value, as it is founded upon an ultimately

unworkable dualism between culture and non-culture. What is probably most useful to take from the model is not necessarily a pair of discrete and opposing characteristics in order to categorise sonic objects, but the fact that a great deal of sonic experiences have some kind of meaning or effect apart from the linguistic message which they carry, and that these moments are not exactly un-assimilated, but under-assimilated. Popular music is littered with this kind of moment, and we should not think in terms of a voice having or not having a 'geno-song', but in terms of geno- or pheno-processes being variable in visibility (audibility) and perhaps relevance. In rap music, the vocal interest very often emerges not simply from the linguistic content, but from the rhythmic work achieved by the vocal line. Indeed, this is frequently the very point of the vocal line: to provide a counter-rhythm to the driving drum and bass beats. At the same time, the lyrical content itself is frequently obscured by the intensity of rhyme and alliteration, and the rhythmic pace.

One outstanding example of this can be found in a close analysis of Eminem's 'Remember Me?' (featuring RBX and Sticky Fingaz, 2000). The rhythmic stability is already undermined by the beginning of the first verse. Bars 1-8 are an instrumental introduction followed by four bars of vocal material (that go on to form the chorus) and two bars of rest (see Figure 3.5; Track 5). As with much rap music, the primary instrumental and rhythmic action is generated by drum and bass parts. A conventional four-bar phrase structure is followed, but bb. 13-14 – the two bars of rest – serve to shift the instrumental and vocal parts out of synch with each other.

Figure 3.5
Drum and bass guitar pattern in 'Remember Me?': bb. 1-4, played twice

In bars 3 (and 7, in the repetition), the omission of the snare drum and the additional bass drum hit combine to disrupt the rhythmic continuity, giving an impression that the downbeat may have shifted to the second beat of the bar. The fact that this point of interest occurs on the second beat of the third bar (in a four-bar phrase) means that it occupies a particularly irregular position in the pattern. The ensuing two bars of rest in the drums (bb. 13-14), however, has the effect of shifting this rhythmic pattern by two bars, such that the anomalous bar now occurs in bar 1 of each four-bar phrase. With this comes further rhythmic instability, since the deviation is harder to gloss over aurally.

The most striking section of cross-rhythms comes in the second verse, rapped by Sticky Fingaz (Track 6). Here, the vocal rhythm tends towards a compound triple time, pushing against the predominating $\frac{4}{4}$ pulse. This rhythmic contrast works not only in terms of a juxtaposition between triple and duple time, but more noticeably in that the implicit triple-time bar-lines (tentatively marked by ‡ below) cut across those demarcated in $\frac{4}{4}$ (marked by |), because the $\frac{6}{8}$ tempo runs at approximately $\downarrow$. = 122 bpm, while the $\frac{4}{4}$ tempo is more like $\downarrow$ = 90 bpm.[64]

[Life's a bitch that'll fuck you if you let her]

| ‡ Better come better than ‡ better to be a com-‡ petitor

This vet is a- | ‡ head-o'

The shit is all ‡ redder, you deader and ‡ deader

A | ‡ medic instead-o' the ‡ cheddars and credda

‡ Settle ven- | detta one ‡ metal beretta from ‡ghetto to ghetto ‡

Evi- | dence? Nope, never leave a shred-o'

[I got the soul of | every rapper in me, love me or hate me

My | mom got raped by the industry and made me]

The vocal line starts to move back to a $\frac{4}{4}$ pulse with quaver rhythm, although a ghost of the cross-rhythms is to be found in "shred-o'", just as "let her" preceded the section. Rhythmic stability is not fully restored until the line "My mom got raped …", because from "evidence" until that point, the four beats of each bar cut across the beginning and end of each line of the lyric. Over four $\frac{4}{4}$ bars, roughly eleven bars of $\frac{6}{8}$ are implied,[65] and although there are anchor points of synchronicity where $\frac{4}{4}$ and

$\frac{6}{8}$ coincide, the quavers of $\frac{3}{8}$ rarely generate a straightforward triplet versus duplet syncopation.

These tensions between words and music might be viewed as a gendered conflict, if we were to read in the longstanding (and unhelpfully binaristic) terms of music as feminine, concerned with senses, and of language as masculine, a rational structure (observed by McClary, 1991, p. 17). An analogous division between male speaker and female singer is played out in a great deal of rap-derived RnB music, where a male artist's rapping in the verses is complemented by a female artist singing the chorus. Examples are countless,[66] and continue to reinscribe the distinction, but this would surely be to oversimplify the gendered work occurring in passages such as this. What is more significant in the case of 'Remember Me?' is that the speed of Sticky Fingaz' rapping, the intensity of his rhymes, and the ways in which they are juxtaposed with the prevailing $\frac{4}{4}$ pulse, all combine to make the linguistic content accessible only to those paying careful enough attention or with sufficient practice in listening to this genre. What we hear at this point is not primarily the words-as-message, but the words-as-sounds: the pheno-text is subsumed by the geno-text. If language (as direct communication, or at least an attempt at it) is inherently a patriarchal structure, as Lacan and others suggest, then geno-song is, in a sense (although probably not entirely), operating outside of that, thereby presenting a potential threat to the supremacy of the sign and patriarchy. Furthermore, sections where geno-song prevails force the listener to hear the voice-as-object, beyond the voice as a carrier of meaning. As I have already noted, Lacan's Graph of Desire positions the object-voice as an offshoot: it is that which is left over after meaning has been extracted, and is positioned in the Graph as subsidiary to the 'normal' process of developing subjectivity (the vector from $ to I(A); see Chapter One, Figure 1.1).

The example of 'Remember Me' is not unusual. There are many moments in rap music where words become incomprehensible, already undermining the patriarchal structure of communicative language by evading meaning, and where geno-song has a significant presence. In 'My 1st Single' (2004; Track 7), for instance, the sheer pace of the rapping is the first element which obscures the lyrical content. The speed is derived from a combination of the mass of lyrics presented, and the *presto* tempo of approximately 168 bpm, which allows for two verses of forty-

eight bars and one of twenty-four bars (plus choruses) in a five-minute track. The pace itself is artificially increased because of the syncopated and prominent percussion. Added to this, the words themselves are heavily distorted in several ways: they are often spoken in straight quavers over the beat, purposefully playing with the normal metric stresses of the language, or with certain phonemes elongated (2'47"-2'51"), and this is contrasted with sections where natural meter is more closely adhered to; certain words are given marked pitch inflections, to reinforce a rhyme and/or to cut across the pulse of the track, which is thereby further lost; and other parts of the lyric are essentially non-verbal utterances, to simulate the scratch of a turntable (1'58"-2'00"; 2'21"-2'23") or the rewinding of a tape (2'30"). The lyrics of the first sixteen bars of the first verse are laid out below (Figure 3.6). The column on the right denotes the rhythmic patterns by which the lyrics are delivered, with stressed beats indicated in blue and quavers grouped roughly to imply the syncopated effect of these lines. On the left, the lyrics are presented with diacritics to indicate what would be the normal stresses of the language.[67] As in normal speech, subtle shifts of volume, duration, and pitch play a part in the stresses felt in rap. Thus, the arrows below certain lines in the table below indicate noteworthy rises and falls of vocal pitch, which of course contribute to how stresses are felt in this performance.

Shády's the lábel

Áftermàth[68] | is a stáble

Thát the hór|ses cóme óutta *erra*[69]

Of cóu|rse we 'bòut to stír up

Some shít | thíck as Ms. Bútterwòrth's sýrup |

It's the 'Míster pícked on Chrísto|pher Réeves júst for nò réason

Ó|ther than(na) jùst to téase him'

'Cause | hé was his bíggest (burp) fán |

He úsed to be Súpermàn |

Nów I'm pòurin' líquor on | the cúrb in his náme fòr him |

"Éminèm[70] you wáit till we | méet up again

Fúcker I'm | kíckin' your áss for év'ry|thìng yòu've éver saíd"
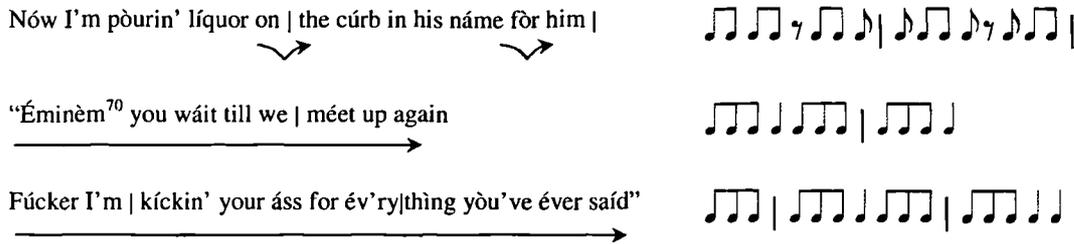
Figure 3.6
Stresses in lyrics and performance in 'My 1ˢᵗ Single'

In order to see more clearly how the rhythms and natural stresses of the language intersect in this part of the track, those syllables that would be stressed in normal speech are denoted below (Figure 3.7) in red, in the left-hand column, and are to be compared with the performance stresses in blue.[71] Clearly, there are a few occasions on which a naturally stressed syllable coincides with the strongest beat of the bar (possibly five), and very many more where the stress is on a particularly weak beat (either the penultimate quaver, or the sixth quaver). Furthermore, there are several occasions where a normally short syllable is sounded long, and vice versa, such as 'Reeves' (which is kept short, where it would normally be long in duration, and therefore more emphasised).
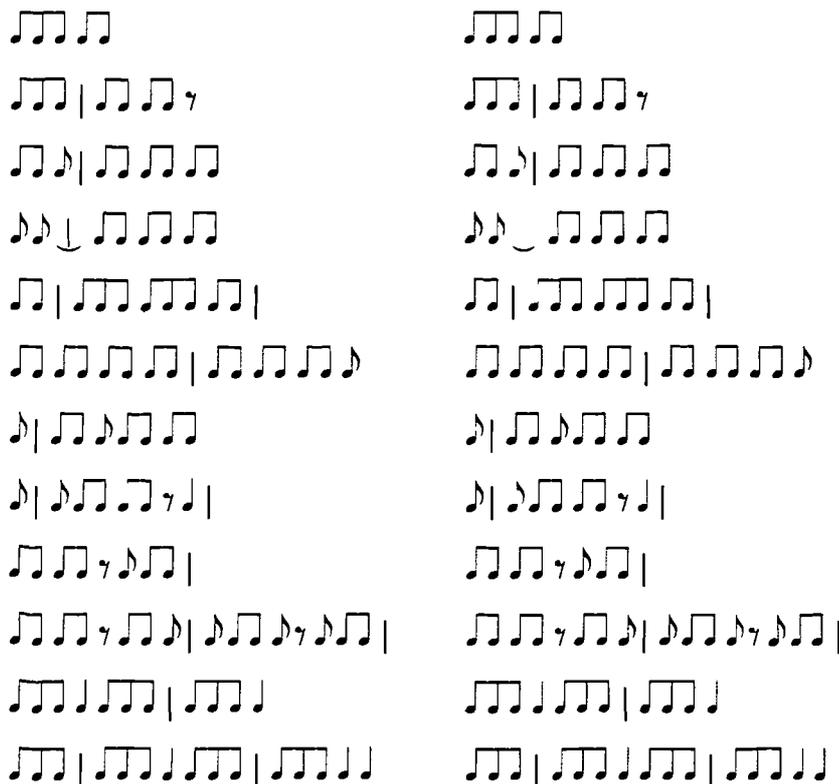
Figure 3.7
Musical rhythm versus language stress in 'My 1ˢᵗ Single'

Furthermore, the rhyming pattern cuts across both the natural language stresses and the forced (musical) stresses, and both of these cut across the rhyming patterns of the lyrics, such that the following representation (Figure 3.8) might describe the layering of emphasis on each level. Here, each block represents one quaver. Darker blocks represent primary stresses (musical or rhythmic), and lighter colours represent a secondary stress (musical or rhythmic). Similarly, with respect to rhyming patterns, darker blocks denote a full rhyme (e.g. 'label': 'stable'), and lighter blocks signify half-rhyme (e.g. 'reason': 'tease him'), words connected primarily by assonance as opposed to rhythmic or stress patterns (e.g. 'shit': 'thick'), or even significant groups of words repeated ('just for no [reason]': 'just to [tease him]').

	Sha-	dy's	the	la-	bel
Quavers					
Eminem stress					
Rhyme					
Natural stress					

	Af-	ter-	math	is	the	sta-	ble	ʔ
Quavers								
Eminem stress								
Rhyme								
Natural stress								

	That	the	hor-	ses	come	out-	ta	er-	ra
Quavers									
Eminem stress									
Rhyme									
Natural stress									

	Of	course	...	we're	bout	to	stir	up
Quavers								
Eminem stress								
Rhyme								
Natural stress								

	Some	shit	thick	as	Ms	But-	ter-	worth's	sy-	rup
Quavers										
Eminem stress										
Rhyme										
Natural stress										

	It's	the	Mis-	ter	picked	on	Chris-	to-	pher	Reeves	just	for	no	rea-	son'
Quavers															
Eminem stress															
Rhyme															
Natural stress															

	O-	ther	than-	na	just	to	tease	him
Quavers								
Eminem stress								
Rhyme								
Natural stress								

	Cos	he	was	his	big-	gest	(burp)	fan	...
Quavers									
Eminem stress									
Rhyme									
Natural stress									

	He	used	to	be	Su-	per-	man
Quavers							
Eminem stress							
Rhyme							
Natural stress							

	Now	I'm	pour-	in'	li-	quor	on	the	curb	in	his	ˀ	name	for	him
Quavers															
Eminem stress															
Rhyme															
Natural stress															

Figure 3.8
Rhythmic, linguistic, musical, and performance stresses in 'My 1st Single'

	Em-	in-	em	you	...	wait	till	we	meet	up	a-	gain	...
Quavers													
Eminem stress													
Rhyme													
Natural stress													

	Fuck-	er	I'm	kick-	in'	your	ass	we	meet	up			
Quavers								...					
Eminem stress													
Rhyme													
Natural stress													

	For	ev'-	ry-	thing	you've	e-	ver	we	said	...			
Quavers								...					
Eminem stress													
Rhyme													
Natural stress													

On several occasions, where certain factors coincide, other important factors are notably out of synch. For instance, the line "Other than(na) just to tease him" sees natural stresses coincide with the stresses put in place by Eminem, but these disrupt the emphasis expected in straight $\frac{4}{4}$, because the verbal emphasis is on the second quaver in each pair. Similarly, assonance and linguistic stress correspond with Eminem's emphasis at the syllables "Mister picked on Christo-", but the line begins on "It's the" – accentuated by Eminem and the first beat of the bar. The line continues: "-pher Reeves just for no reason", and here "-pher" is given undue emphasis by the rapper, while "Reeves" is left unstressed – a complete reversal of normal spoken stress, but in concurrence with musical rhythms – and this gives a knock-on effect of undue stress on the word "just", which falls on the weak second crotchet of this bar. In terms of rhyming patterns, the weight given by Eminem to the word "just" on both this line and the next means that the assonance between "reason" and "tease him" is arguably left 'underweighted' in favour an emphasis of the repetition of "just".

It becomes patently clear, then, that musical, linguistic, and performance stresses weave in and out of synchronisation with each other, and with the rhyming patterns in these sixteen bars. Of course, we knew this already about rap, but this section serves as a particularly noteworthy example because of the extremities to which it goes in these respects. The mutations of language which force 'stir up' to rhyme fully with 'syrup', and the non-verbal utterance '*erra*', demonstrate how language-as-message becomes secondary to the rhyme here. Similarly, the words are forced into rhythmic patterns outside of their nature, so as to fit in with musical norms (such as 'Christopher Reeves'). On other occasions, linguistic rhythms take precedence over musical (such as 'Other than(na) just to tease him). What occurs, then, is a constant battle for precedence between different forms of rhythm, and the language-as-message is subsumed at the same time as the act of utterance is foregrounded. The content of these lines is of course noteworthy, setting the stage for jokes at the expense of Christopher Reeves and other controversial lines later. Yet this is really of secondary importance when compared with the geno-processes set in motion by the delivery of these lines. To consider rap in these term starts to open up something of an irony: in the demonstration of their linguistic skills, which purports to confer patriarchal approval upon them, and in the delivery of misogynist and/or homophobic lyrics, male (gangsta) rap artists invoke a mode of utterance which

works in contrary motion to the hyper-masculine-male-centric world in which they profess to operate

'My 1ˢᵗ Single' is also an excellent example of rapid lyric delivery, which further adds to the dominance of the object-voice. At 168 crotchets per minute, Eminem works lyrically in quavers in this track, potentially resulting in 330 syllables per minute (around five per second). The result of this is near hysteria, an extreme verbosity which might leave the listener wondering exactly why the rapper feels the need for such loquaciousness. Moreover, this mode of speech has historically been associated with women, and the 'feminine', and herein lies one of the major paradoxes of rap as a genre. Language as a structure is, by its nature, at least in psychoanalytic discourse, a thoroughly patriarchal realm, as I have noted above. It is part of a matrix of phallocentric structures that intertwine language with Law, the Name-of-the-Father, *logos* (word: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (James 1:1)). Notably, Eminem's 'Evil Deeds' (2004) offers a fusion of these discourses. After the spoken lines, "Lord, please forgive me for what I do, for I know not what I've done", he sings: "Father please forgive me for I know not what I do / I just never had the chance to ever meet you". Eminem's own father is thus figuratively aligned with God the Father, and the association becomes clearer throughout the song. While the first of these sung lines falls neatly into on-beat quavers, with a quaver per syllable filling two bars of $\frac{4}{4}$, the next line starts with a quaver rest, which unsettles the rhythmic pattern, although the line is contained in the standard two bars, since it is one syllable – hence one quaver – shorter than the previous line (see Track 8).

It is useful here to reach beyond the modern psychoanalytic models and in to the legacy of archetypes bequeathed by (amongst others) Greek and Roman mythology. Language has been associated in mythologies with message: Gabriel (the Biblical winged messenger) merges with Hermes (Greek patron of orators), who was in turn reconfigured as Mercury (bringer of news) by the Romans. Hermes, writes William Doty, "is called 'loquacious,' 'skilled in words,' a 'persuader of the mind,' a 'bringer of good news' (angel or evangelist [...])" (1993, p. 128). Mercury's influence continues to be felt in astrological interpretation, where he signifies communication: Mercury rules Gemini, a sign associated with ability to communicate (as a positive element), with 'the gift of the gab' (as an element of the trickster, a characteristic also associated with this archetype), and with the possibly

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negative implications of a tendency to talk 'too much'. This connection between language and message – the passing on of news, the ability to communicate information – thus becomes an archetypal association stretching throughout history. More importantly, as an archetype, Hermes is "a rampantly phallic god" (Doty, 1993, p. 121), and is quite clearly figured as a male deity. Yet he also embodies certain characteristics more typically associated with the feminine, and this affords his "a more ambivalent masculinity that is to be found in Herakles or Ares" (p. 123).[72] He is a figure associated with the traversing of boundaries,[73] and he operates not as a clear and rational figure, but as an intuitive force:

> Hermes is most likely to appear in the twilight darkness, in mysterious hints and urges, in instances where one recognizes only afterward that one has been accompanied by a god. No wonder then that he is the deity to whom one dedicates the last libation before going to sleep, or that he is the male god who communicates through dreams. One doesn't *reason* with a hermetic insight; one has an intuition or feeling about something. [...] Already we pick up indications that the hermetic figure will not model the direct exertion of authority often associated with masculinity: his images are almost excessively masculine, yet he *acts* in ways that hint of more 'feminine' qualities.
>
> (Doty, 1993, p. 122. His emphasis.)[74]

This characterisation of Hermes arguably leads us back to contemporary psychoanalytic accounts of what constitutes the 'feminine' in language (as I have noted previously): we have come full circle back to Kristeva's 'vague', 'imprecise', 'feminine' 'whisper'.

Musical detail and the construction of masculinity

It seems that a hermetic influence may be felt in rap music, and not only through the mastery of language that partially defines the genre. Quite apart from the ways in which the voice in rap becomes intertwined with the specifically musical details, there are other important ways in which musical factors serve to undermine the ostensible hyper-masculinity constructed by rap's lyrics and visual imagery. Part of this has to do with the tendency in rap towards cyclic motifs. Although much popular music relies heavily on repetition of musical material, at different levels, it seems that rap has a particularly interesting relationship with its tendency towards repetition.[75] In Eminem's work, it is common to find a few small musical units strategically repeated and layered over the course of a track, with an effect of musical simplicity generated through an emphasis on cyclic patterns. Susan McClary has

famously noted the development in Western art music, beginning with seventeenth century opera, of a "musical semiotics of gender: a set of conventions for constructing 'masculinity' or 'femininity' in music" (1991, p. 7). McClary's book rests on this foundation, and taken as a whole it argues that teleological movement and musical gestures concerned with unproblematic closure have historically been associated with masculinity, while cyclic movement, repetitive gestures, and unrelenting undulations have been associated with the feminine. There are many points at which McClary seeks to move outside of the stereotypes which perpetuate (and are perpetuated by) these codes (see, for example, p. 10), and I am not suggesting that McClary endorses the associations on which the semiotic system is based. My point here is that the associations described by McClary persist in contemporary understandings of gender and musical representation: the connotations of certain musical gestures are undoubtedly gendered. The ebbs and flows of a lush, romantic string section, and a persistent, aggressive beat of a heavy metal drummer each have gendered associations in contemporary popular music deriving from their use in classical musics, and are surely both deployed and received with varying levels of knowing-ness. With this in mind, it is interesting to view the juxtaposition of almost excessively masculine appearance and apparently 'feminine' modes of (musical) being in Eminem's work.

'My Name Is' (1999), for example, operates musically well outside of the teleologically masculine model, even as the lyrics are based on a hypermasculine aggression and sexuality ("[I] stapled his nuts to a stack of paper"; "I'll fuck anything that walks"). Four main motifs dominate the instrumental action in varying combinations (see Figure 3.9; see Track 9). Motif 2, being the bass line, persists throughout, even at the beginning of the third verse, where the drums cease, such that the bass is the only support for Eminem's voice.

Figure 3.9
Main motifs in 'My Name Is'

Each motif is essentially a variation on the harmonic progression which constitutes the song: I-II-IV-♭III (F-G-B♭-A♭). While there are a significant number of Eminem's tracks that emphasise a tonic-dominant harmonic foundation,[76] 'My Name Is' is not unique in its refusal of the dominant: as examples, 'My Fault' (1999), 'Big Weenie' (2004) and 'Rain Man' (2004) each achieve this through a repeated movement between the tonic and subdominant chords (in minor keys). The relentlessly cyclic motifs consequently combine with an avoidance of the traditionally 'strong' (read 'masculine', in the musical semiotic system) perfect cadence, which typically signifies closure, to generate a sequence to be repeatable *ad infinitum*. If we were to accept the 'musical semiotics' which McClary describes, this harmonic behaviour could easily be seen to work against the traditional musical representation of 'masculinity'. The refusal of Western notions of musical tension and release, historically achieved through the tonic-dominant relationship, almost certainly has to do with the African-American inflections not only in popular music generally, but especially in rap music,[77] which as a genre maintains a particularly strong association with its African-American roots. A number of tracks whose harmonic relations work outside of the tonic-dominant relation thus also reveal a black musical history through jazz, reggae or soul inflected gestures, and riffs resting on blues scales (see 'My Name Is', 'If I Had' (1999) and 'Yellow Brick Road' (2004)).[78] Eminem's white-ness must not go unacknowledged here, as he is most definitely in a racial minority in the genre. The use of musical gestures to point towards a black musical heritage is arguably part of the construction of a musical authenticity, and this may

be a knowing move. I suspect, however, that it also originates from the rapper's personal background, in that his own history as a rapper is heavily influenced by his position as a white man in a predominantly black rapping community in Detroit. There is insufficient space here to explore fully the racial tensions mobilised by Eminem's work, although it would certainly be interesting to investigate how his solo work negotiates its black musical heritage, through musical gestures such as those mentioned, and how this compares with the work he has put out as part of D12. Racial identities clearly have a significant role to play in the construction and representation of gendered positions, and the relationship between these two facets of identity will be dealt with further below. My point here is one more directly concerning the musical representation of gender: it should now be quite clear that the tendency towards the cyclic in the treatment of musical motifs and harmonic progression in Eminem's work has a function which operates outside of the normative, goal-centred ('developmental') masculinity that is at the heart of the musical semiotics described by McClary. The extent to which these troubled gender-operations are explicitly perceived as such by a listener not seeking to analysing the text in this way is questionable. The refusal of normative tonic-dominant relations is not to be presumed as a consciously recognisable factor, but the harmonic foundation of 'My Name Is', for example, undoubtedly resists the kind of tension and release found in some other tracks: 'Puke' (2004), 'Kill You', and 'Under The Influence' (2000) all emphasise a i-V harmonic relation. The overall effect of layering the motifs in Figure 3.9 is one of constant repetition with subtle variation. The harmonies and layering combine with other musical factors (such as tempo and orchestration) to give a laid-back, almost placid air to the track that would not generally be associated with overt masculinity, and certainly not with the kind of hostile, destructive masculinity that rappers are normally seen to embody.

Notably, there are also occasions where the cyclical tendency assists also in undermining the rhythmic stability of the song, which, in the model noted by McClary could also be taken as a threat to hegemonic masculinities. We have already seen how 'Remember Me?' rests on a shaky rhythmic foundation, which is further destabilised by Sticky Fingaz' rapping. In 'Purple Pills' by D12 (2001), a single motif – itself repetitive, being based on melodic imitation – is repeated throughout verses and chorus, but its persistence also highlights a rhythmic shift that is put in place by the vocalists at the beginning of each chorus (see Track 10).

Figure 3.10
Central motif repeated in 'Purple Pills'

In Figure 3.10, the bar lines indicate the overall metric pattern of the song. This is established in the opening four bars, when the motif is heard with no vocals. At bar 5 of the song (0'10"), D12 first sing the chorus, and the anacrusis of their line coincides with the downbeat of the motif above. The dotted bar lines in the synth part in Figure 3.11 below coincide with the bar lines implied by the vocal line. The full bar lines in the synth line in Figure 3.11 denote the original metric pattern (as illustrated in Figure 3.10), and are included below to illustrate the exact nature of the rhythmic shifts.

Figure 3.11
Vocal line destabilises rhythmic pattern

Although, over the course of the song, the pattern is ultimately maintained as it is notated in Figure 3.10, the vocal elision of the end of each verse into the upbeat of the chorus has the effect of radically disrupting the rhythmic continuity. This is particularly obvious with the first vocal entry, especially because the rapped verses then proceed to realign the vocal and instrumental meter. If it were not for the continuation of the motif in Figure 3.10, the subtle change of rhythmic emphasis described in Figure 3.11 might not be nearly as noticeable. I am not proposing here a simple equation between normative masculinity and rhythmic stability. However, it is quite clear that examples such as this display a tendency to subvert dominant musical structures, which may be gendered, and that this is achieved through cyclic motifs and intense repetition. On a generalised level, the shifts of rhythmic emphasis

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give moments of an almost limping nature, arguably causing doubts about the 'perfect masculinity' of those articulating this message. In the semiotic scheme outlined by McClary, such musical behaviour would serve to undermine the construction of the kind of masculinity at stake in these songs. To return to the previously presented analogy with classical archetypes, these moments are truly hermetic, mercurial: just like Hermes, rap's images are 'almost excessively masculine', yet it operates 'in ways that hint of more 'feminine' qualities', or at least it enacts its hypermasculinity through modes of expression typically associated with the 'feminine', and this occurs on verbal and musical levels.

Is it queer?

Hitherto, I have explained ways in which traditional constructions of masculinity are subtly problematised in rap music, and how part of the problematic nature of traditional masculinity in the genre has to do with musical details. Two key questions thus arise. First, is there anything 'queer' (in any sense of that word) about the masculinity presented in rap, albeit conveyed through various problematising vehicles? And second, have the musical problematics I have depicted not rested entirely on an essentialist semiotics of music? (McClary herself makes it clear that the semiotic system she describes only serves to represent a particular formation of masculinity, by way of a few specific, essentialist codes.) Countering a traditionalist analysis of a Chopin polonaise, in which the emphasis on the 'weak' second beat is blamed for a 'limping', anti-masculine quality, McClary asserts that it is precisely that emphasis on the 'weak' beat that "gives the polonaise its arrogant swagger" (1991, p. 10). Similarly, it might be suggested that the cyclic musical tendencies displayed in rap serve to represent not 'the feminine', but an aggressive, stubborn, unrelenting, almost bullying kind of masculine expression: it is, in fact, the 'weak' second beat that is responsible for the rhythmic problematics in 'Remember Me?'. Although the system itself may be essentialist, I also propose that it still operates with remarkable currency in contemporary musical contexts, and in rap specifically. Therefore, I would argue that the musical means by which rap's notorious lyrics and attitude are put forward are both central and, crucially, problematising factors for consideration. On accepting the relevance of this semiotics as a system – even as we dispute the accuracy or relevance of the presumptions on which it is based – we also see that representations of masculinity are rendered in some ways queer in rap music.

We should not presume any kind of overtly homosexual activity by or between rap artists simply because they operate in exclusively male spaces and confirm their heterosexuality to a point verging on excess (whilst simultaneously deriding women and rebuffing their genitals). Rather, it is my contention that some sense of these troublesome factors – which has to do with that slippage between the homosocial and the homosexual that Sedgwick articulates – emerges alongside the problematic musical construction of masculinity in the genre. According to the system McClary describes, the musical details do little to reassure the listener of the rapper's unquestionably normative masculinity (which includes his status as heterosexual). Thus, it is the conglomeration of all of these factors which renders unstable any construction of masculinity in the genre. The male body and ego become, in many ways, so hyper-normatively-masculine that they spill over into the grotesque. And, in the raucous display of such masculinity – displays that are both verbal and visual – rap artists descend into an extravagant spectacle verging on the positively camp. Certainly, the male body and ego as 'to-be-looked-at', and in many cases deriding itself, is not a symbol of robustly heteronormative masculinity. In this way, 'queer' is not to be understood here as a direct denotation of self-aware homosexuality. Rather, as Niall Richardson summarises, it is used to describe "mismatches or incoherencies between sex, gender and sexuality" (2004, p. 50).[79] The paradox of overdetermined surface message and underlying means of representation, even (or especially) in the face of manifest misogyny and homophobia, may well give cause to respond to rap: methinks the rapper doth protest too much.

This is certainly the response of gay activist Peter Tatchell to Eminem, who writes:

> For someone who says he hates fags, Eminem is totally obsessed with gay sex. Almost every track on his *Marshall Mathers* album [2000] has a reference to homosexuality, much of it dwelling on oral and anal sex. [...] If he loathes homosexuality, why does he keep rapping about it all the time? [...] Eighty percent of aggressively homophobic men are self-loathing, repressed homosexuals, according to Prof Henry Adams of the University of Georgia.
>
> (Tatchell, 2004)

Tatchell also cites Eminem's image as evidence for his suggestions: "His short-cropped, bleached blonde hair, earrings, tattoos and white vests are typical gay club fashion. It would be easy to mistake him for a gay man". Although Tatchell concedes

that Eminem may well be an "exception to the general rule" of the extreme homophobe being a repressed homosexual, his overall argument is sound: that the lyrics of Eminem in particular – and heterosexist rap in general – seem like a "desperate attempt to prove [...] masculinity and heterosexuality". It is surely in the combination of lyrics, music, and image that the 'queer' in straight rap comes to the surface. The lyrics work counter-productively, being so extreme as to make a listener suspect over-defensiveness (although this response surely only materialises in listeners who are already suspicious in some way).[80] The musical details may also have a surface effect of anger, aggression and hostility, thereby portraying a stereotypically 'masculine' position. Yet within the semiotic system described by McClary, certain musical gestures also serve to challenge the construction of an unproblematic and 'conventional' masculinity.

Eminem is not the only example. On the cover of two of his albums (Figure 3.12), 50 Cent at first seems to strike an unashamedly dominant-male pose: his well-built muscular form is placed centrally and the viewer's gaze is drawn towards him. The most recent album, *The Massacre* (2005), shows a more well-defined physical form than the earlier *Get Rich Or Die Tryin'* (2003), but both display an unequivocally powerful physique that is undoubtedly intended to assure the viewer of his male, masculine, phallic power.
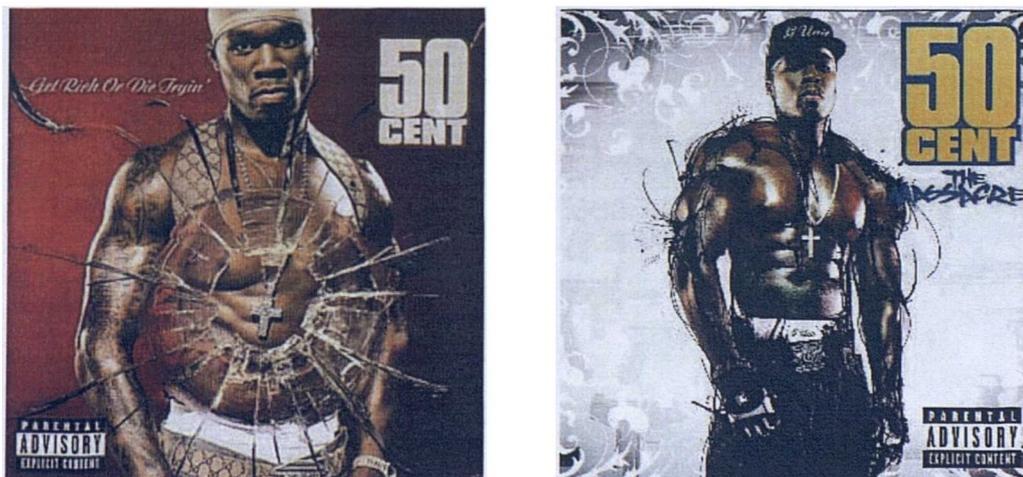
Figure 3.12
Covers of 50 Cent's albums Get Rich or Die Tryin' *(left) and* The Massacre *(right)*

Yet this erect, phallic male body quickly sees its identity as such destabilised. First, in both examples, 50 Cent's body is quite obviously 'to-be-looked-at'. In an attempt to deflect the potential for anxiety provoked by the male body 'on display', the male body is typically pictured as categorically heterosexual (by way of a token,

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complementary female body), or as *doing* something: "it's feminine to be on display" (Bordo, 1999, p. 173). This is the case also (especially?) in competitive male bodybuilding, where photographic representations of the male bodybuilder either see the male body "draped with a female model" or "straining against a heavy weight or else flaunting his strength through the flexed muscle" (Richardson, 2004, p. 52). Niall Richardson suggests that these strategies are used to deflect the anxieties generated by the figure of the male bodybuilder, and that the "iconography of soft porn" is used to draw attention away from the male body as explicitly on display (p. 52). The display of 50 Cent's body is not veiled in these ways: he appears at first glance to be relaxed, although the image "still promises activity by the way the body is posed [...], standing taut ready for action" (Dyer, 1992b, p. 270). Yet the fact of being poised and ready does not entirely defuse the danger of being inert at that moment, and 50 Cent's body is distinctly 'on display'. By superimposing another visual level, both album covers in some way rupture 50 Cent's body. *Get Rich* simulates a piece of glass splintering around a central hole (presumably from a gunshot) that is focused on 50 Cent's sternum, where hangs a crucifix.[81] In a similar move, *Massacre* sees his already obviously muscular frame accentuated by sketch-lines, outlining the major lines of muscle definition. At several points, these sketch-lines continue beyond the body's own frame, taking it outside of itself and adding further semiotic burden to an already heavily-laden site. In a sense, these rupturings perform a similar kind of work to the women or weights seen in bodybuilding photographs, acting as a veil which must be negotiated before the male body can be seen, and thereby defusing the male body's position as displayed and objectified. However, they might also be taken as visible metaphors for the 'ripped' body of the competitive bodybuilder. The 'ripped' body (also described as 'cut' or 'shredded') is one in which the bodyfat is "excruciatingly low to produce the paper-thin appearance of the skin to promote vascularity or veininess" (Richardson, 2004, p. 51), which is an effect achieved by bodybuilders for competition purposes. This, as Richardson argues, is part of what problematises the representation of masculinity in bodybuilding, for two reasons. First, 'ripping' is about the aesthetics of the body, as the competitive bodybuilder is not "judged on what his body can *do*" but on "how his body *looks*" (p. 51. His emphasis), a generally feminising position. Second, in the process of making his body suitable to be judged on its aesthetics, the competitive bodybuilder becomes "so weak that he can barely walk let alone lift heavy weights"

(p. 54). Arguably, the rupturing lines to which 50 Cent is subjected also have the effect of drawing attention specifically to the display of muscularity, especially in the case of the defining lines on the *Massacre* cover. This is to be expected, of course: "muscularity is a key term in appraising men's bodies" (Dyer, 1992b, p. 273). The muscularity on 50 Cent's CD covers is especially notable, however, since his body tips over into being 'on display', while this display is almost certainly for a primarily male audience. 50 Cent's muscular hardness may well incite discourses of phallic power. Despite being worked for, muscle is constructed culturally as "the *sign* of power – natural, [...] phallic" (Dyer, 1992b, p. 273). At the same time, his feminised position as 'on display', his consumption by a male gaze, and his muscularity combine to mobilise counter-discourses of homoeroticism, not through the 'reassuring' vocabulary of (heterosexual) soft porn that Richardson identifies but the more 'threatening' iconography of gay male pornography.

What seems to be at work in images such as these – and heterosexual rap as a genre overall – is a layering of discursive structures each struggling for some kind of hegemony. While the black male has historically been economically and politically subordinated in white western societies, he may still enjoy a culturally and historically contingent hegemonic gendered position: the apex of rap masculinity is arguably embodied by the straight black male. As Dyer observes, "images of male power are always and necessarily inflected with other aspects of power in society" (1992b, pp. 270-71). 50 Cent appears first as a powerful male, but he is also a powerful *black* male and his blackness in this context serves to confer authority upon him as a rapper, while also implicitly confirming his heterosexuality. Perhaps it is as a defence against his whiteness in a black-dominated genre that informs Eminem's extreme homophobia, for while Ice Cube asserts, "True niggaz ain't gay" (in 'Horny Lil' Devil', 1991), there is no equivalent presumption for the white man. On the contrary, with the Black Man figured as the "embodiment of bestial, violent, penis-as-weapon hypermasculine assertion" (hooks, 2004, p. 79), the non-Black Man potentially emerges as impotent, castrated, and effeminate. Eminem's disproportionate declarations of heterosexuality might be taken as an alignment of himself with his (supposedly) unquestionably heterosexual black colleagues. It is interesting, then, that Eminem's body contrasts so radically with 50 Cent's. Where 50 Cent's is the consummate erect, muscular, phallic body, Eminem's oscillates in performance between erect and positively flaccid. He uses classic rap gestures

designed to signify phallic power: extending his arms, and thereby expanding his bodily space; holding his crotch; or the metonymically associated pulling up of his trouser leg. In between these, however, there are frequent moments when he displays a loose, flexible, floppy body, frequently squatting on the floor with an underlying sense of the anti-phallic.[82]

The layers of meaning in the construction of gendered and sexualised identity through rap music are intricate. An apparently straightforward message of heterosexist male supremacy is quickly complicated by moments of self-deprecation, raising the ugly spectre of the *fin-de-siècle* male masochist (see Stewart, 1998), and by the rapper's verbosity, which in turn invokes images of the hysteric. The extreme nature of rap's assertions of heterosexuality may serve not as intended, but to question why these messages are so violently asserted, and one presumption may be that it is an over-zealous defence against repressed homosexuality. Supporting this fragile message is a brittle musical structure which at times gives an effect of belligerence and aggressive persistence – bullying, even – but which can also be seen as harmonically and rhythmically troubled and cyclic. These two levels – words and music – become particularly intertwined in rap, by its definition as a genre. The effect of this is that the already hysterical heterosexuality becomes even more frantic in its expression, with the message eventually subsumed by linguistic dexterity, which takes us back to the problems of the language-based expression of this supposedly unquestionable brand of masculinity. All of these factors are then embodied by men whose images may be intended to be as normative and categorically heterosexual as their messages are. Yet the result is equally contradictory, since extreme heterosexual masculinity blends into gay style, and the bonding of groups of such men blurs the gaps between the homosocial and the homosexual, particularly since the exchange of women between these men is also problematic. Without doubt, there is a great deal more work to be done here with regards to the relationships between race, class, gender, sexuality, and sex as they are played out in heterosexist rap music. It is quite clear, however, that the idea of a straightforward and unproblematic masculinity in the genre is indeed only an idea – an always-already lost gender formation, which the genre tries in vain to (re-) construct, enacting a kind of gender nostalgia. This applies not only to the masculinity constructed in rap music but, as Judith Butler argues, it is a thoroughgoing facet of hegemonic gender formations (1993, p. 125). Yet rap, as we

have seen, (unwittingly) deploys several strategies to bring this to the foreground. What is left in place of this lost gender is a construction where the primary signifiers point the casual observer in one direction, while underlying contradictions are also apparent, mismatching gender, sex, and sexuality, and allowing them to oscillate: homosexual or otherwise, such a construction of masculinity is indeed decidedly queer.

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[1] The connection with the name of his father, Marshall Mathers II, may also be a factor to consider in the rejection of this identity. Whatever Oedipal implications may be derived from this – and I will be considering some of these below – the rejection of his birth name arguably affords Eminem a way of rejecting the father who left him as a baby. It should be remembered, however, that his initials do persist in his default stage name – presumably having been changed to the current spelling for legal reasons – so a complete rejection cannot be presumed.

[2] The latter name may also be taken as an allusion to the practice of 'playing the dozens', a one-on-one competition in which the players trade witty insults to determine a winner, and from which freestyle 'battles' have derived. See Haskins, 2000, pp. 53-4.

[3] The primary criticisms of *Infinite* were that it tried too hard to be radio-friendly, and therefore – despite showing Mathers' rapping talent – lacked any substance to hook the listener (see Bozza, 2003, p. 15 and p. 69).

[4] From *The Slim Shady LP*.

[5] During the discussion of this film, I temporarily shed the inverted commas that have previously enclosed 'Slim Shady', 'Marshall', and 'Eminem', because their statuses as characters is implied by the context of the film, and because their characterisations in the film are quite specific, rather than the generalised tropes that they represent throughout Mathers' recorded work.

[6] Celebrities in *The Slim Shady Show* invariably have their names changed slightly, often to insult them further: Matt Damon becomes Matt Bramon, and is seen holding hands with Ben Affleck, who becomes Ben Assfuck; and Christina Aguilera becomes Pristina Gagulera.

[7] Aunt Sue could easily be a proxy for Mathers' own mother. Sue's days are spent comatose from alcohol abuse and trying to ascertain whether what she is smoking at any point is a cigarette or a tampon. Mathers has frequently slated his mother in his raps, saying that her drug usage is worse than his ('My Name Is'), her drug usage is the *cause* of his ('Marshall Mathers'), and she had inadequate breasts with which to feed him as an infant ('My Name Is'), amongst other comments.

[8] The same insulting moniker is given instead of Ms. Aguilera's own surname in the D12 song 'Ain't Nuttin' But Music' (2001), in the line "So what? Christina Gagulera – kiss my grits". 'Grits' refers to some aspect of male genitals, and/or possibly buttocks.

[9] They have uncovered a secret plan to dispose of all poor entertainment products.

[10] The 'Marshall' in this line is sung by the female chorus, to underline the Batman reference.

[11] The 'Ǝ' is a logo which Mathers has adopted repeatedly. See the covers of *The Marshall Mathers LP*, *The Eminem Show*, and *Encore* (2004), all of which feature the 'Ǝ' as the second 'e' in his name, and *Ǝ*, a collection of his videos (2000), the cover of which is simply a green-glowing white 'Ǝ' on a black background.

[12] The projected 'Ǝ' in the first of these pictures also has resonances with Soviet Constructivist artwork, the key signifiers of this being the choice of colours and the letter reversal (which resembles the З, Э, and Я of the Cyrillic alphabet), as well as in the bold and geometric styling. To align Batman with this Soviet aesthetic invites a series of problematic connections, because of the frequency with which Batman's enemies were depicted in Communist terms (see Darius, 2005, p. 22; and Read, 2000, p. 201 n55).

[13] My comments here refer specifically to the 1960s television series, which Mathers' video references, and are not intended to encompass the comic strips from which the show derived, or the series of films which have followed. Recent film versions have tended to figure Batman as more stereotypically masculine (according to late twentieth-century stereotypes, and Hollywood stereotypes in particular, of muscularity, taciturnity, and seriousness). See *Batman* (dir. Burton, 1989); *Batman Returns* (dir. Burton, 1992); *Batman Forever* (dir. Shuhmacher, 1995); *Batman Begins* (dir. Nolan, 2005).

[14] See <www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Hills/7537/bward.htm> [Accessed 22 June 2005]. See also <www.geocities.com/~1966/episodes1.htm> ff. [Accessed 22 June 2005]. It should be noted that in a graphic novel follow-up to the original comic series, *The Dark Knight Returns* (Miller, 1986), the character of Robin is taken up by a girl, Carrie Kelley, whose life had previously been saved by Batman. Also, in the first television episode, the Riddler, one of Batman's enemies, kidnaps Robin and plans to make a false face and costume of the Boy Wonder, to be worn by the Riddler's henchwoman ('Hi Diddle Diddle', *ABC*, 12 January 1966). See Brooker, 2000, pp. 139-40, on the "sidekick-as-hostage device". It may also be worth noting that the name 'Robin' is gender ambiguous, perhaps subtly allowing for greater fluidity in gender roles in the narrative.

[15] This formulation is based on several passages from the Bible: John 14:16-17, 14:20, 14:26; John 15:26; John 16:7; and John 17:3.

[16] To a certain extent, 'Slim' arguably emanates also from 'Marshall', as the bearer of all the negative experiences which have led ultimately to the creation of 'Slim'.

[17] The contentious fourth aspect of the trinity is The Word: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The connection here with rap as a loquacious genre is probably one that ought to be noted, although its significance should not be overestimated.

[18] Or, "I Am What I Am" (New International Version).

[19] Admittedly, this comes with the limitation: "if ever there was such a thing".

[20] The case of the murder of toddler James Bulger springs to mind. It is significant that *The Guardian* felt it worthy of mention that Bulger's killers, aged 11 at the time of their convictions in 1993, "knew right from wrong" (12 November 1993). On sentencing the boys, the presiding judge described their actions as being of "unparalleled evil and brutality" (25 November 1993). After time for the public and media reactions to calm down, the same paper announced "James Bulger's killers are once again being branded monsters" (1 November 2000). An archive of articles on the James Bulger case is held at <www.guardian.co.uk/bulger/archive/0,3332,195312,00.html> [Accessed 22 June 2005]. See also Smith, 1995, p. 180. For other examples, see Stanford, 1996, pp. 276-8.

[21] The violin especially seems to have been cast as a demonic instrument over the course of music history. See 'The Devil Went Down To Georgia' (by the Charlie Daniels Band, 1979), and Giuseppe Tartini's *Sonata for Violin in G minor*, commonly known as the 'Devil's Trill' sonata. See Noles, 2002, pp. 29-30 on the violin as the 'devil's instrument'.

[22] The Stones' performance of 'Sympathy For The Devil' appears to have spurred extreme violence amongst the audience at the concert, although it should be noted that their performance was not necessarily a direct cause of the violence. The results of the violence included the murder of a black teenager within the crowd, which was caught on television cameras which were filming the event.

[23] The mention of a 'split personality' is a point that should be emphasised in the context of comparison with Mathers.

[24] An allusion may be being made here to 'Just Don't Give A Fuck' (1999).

[25] See Jones, 2002, pp. 111-2, for more notes on this film.

[26] The reference to 'asking if they liked violence' is to the opening lines of 'My Name Is': "Hey kids, do you like violence?"

[27] 'Marilyn' here is Marilyn Manson. The mention of bullying is a reference to the Columbine High School massacre of 1999 in which two students shot and killed twelve fellow students and a teacher before killing themselves.

[28] Taylor sees the shamanic tradition as a precursor to modern entertainers, as noted previously in relation to Madonna.

[29] Taylor alludes to a similarity between shamanism and psychoanalytic theory when he writes: "to move or change from one state into another, we must pass through a third condition, which is neither one thing nor another" (1985, p. 15). The 'third state' may be seen in terms of the shaman's journeys or the psychoanalytic subject's intermediary stage.

[30] The concept of the 'ideal ego' is considered in a few of Freud's early papers, and by the mid-1930s it is replaced in his work by the 'super-ego'. See Strachey, 1974, p. xvi.

[31] See Leviticus 17:7 and 2 Chronicles 11:15.

[32] Eminem now denotes 'the rap artist known as Eminem', rather than 'Eminem' the persona constructed in interplay with 'Marshall Mathers' and 'Slim Shady', as before.

[33] Over recent decades, several works have been published precisely in response to this imbalance. See Gaar, 1993, and O'Brien, 1995.

[34] Interestingly, Tamsin Wilton has written a book entitled *Finger Licking Good: The Ins And Outs Of Lesbian Sex* (1996).

[35] A reference could also be made to 'cock', either by way of the term for a male chicken or by virtue of the somewhat phallic appearance of the chicken thigh, or both: a semantic slippage from chicken to male chicken to cock to phallus, an attendant slippage from (chicken) thigh to *male* genitals, and a visual resemblance between the chicken thigh and a penis. This would generate some interesting results in terms of the male body yielding to the 'power' of the female body, especially the mouth, and here mobilises discourses of male masochism and anxieties about female sexuality (especially the *vagina dentata*) which will be considered further below.

[36] In a self-referential move, and similarly bringing into question the intent of his lyrics, 'White America' (2002) challenges Middle America to confront his popular status, despite the controversy he generates. After an outro in which he declares that he will "piss on the lawns of the White House", and shouts, "Fuck you Ms Cheney [who once slated Eminem's lyrical content], Fuck you Tipper Gore [co-founder of the Parents' Resource Music Center]", he concludes: "I'm just playin', America, you know I love you". See Bozza, 2003, p. 40, p. 105, and p. 107, on Lynne Cheney's significance in Eminem's work.

[37] This spoken intro is extremely reminiscent of the opening of 'Still Don't Give A Fuck' (1999), and this was a conscious move on Eminem's part in order to infuse the later track with the some of the same meaning as the earlier one (Mathers III, 2000, p. 67). Furthermore, it would be worth noting the interesting potential here of the intersection of criminality and 'authenticity', which would draw in issues about 'street cred' and urban 'authenticity', including the associations between black masculinity and criminality (see Daniels, 1996, p. 94).

[38] See also the first verse of 'Stan' (2000) and 'Mosh' (2004) as two examples.

[39] Armstrong himself notes that this is based on a "both/and" approach, saying that "only" 22% contain *both* violence *and* misogyny. It can be presumed that the percentage of songs that contain only misogyny (or only violence) may well be higher than 22%, although we might suspect that misogyny is very frequently represented in violent terms in this genre.

[40] See also 'As The World Turns' (1999), which enacts a short but graphic rape scene.

[41] It is worth noting that Kaniff is not quite a complete dumping ground in Eminem's work: D12's 'American Psycho' also offers a sinister sequence of perversions from pimping, through murder and child-abuse, to eating a miscarried foetus. 'Amityville' (2000) also speaks of the rapper 'fucking his cousin in his asshole'.

[42] See Rose, 1994, p. 147, for a further sense of the tensions between the sexes in rap.

[43] It is only through standardising dictionary texts, with their historical roots in the sixteenth century, that there is even such a thing as an approved spelling, making this broadly a historically-located concept. It is, of course, in reaction to this that the 'alternative' spellings have arisen, and only in this sense that they can be described as 'alternative'. Moreover, in certain (feminist separatist) communities, such spellings have themselves become standardised.

[44] A-level exams are not compulsory in the English education system. Figures indicate number of entries of pupils aged 17 at 31 August 1999 from all schools in England, including City Technology Colleges, Independent and Maintained Special Schools, and are compiled from National Statistics, 2001, pp. 90-92. Part of the reason for the female-weighting of the results may be a slightly higher number of girls than boys in the overall number of entries: girls constituted 52.5% (N = 228 542) of entries, while 47.5% of entries were boys (N = 206 974). However, this cannot account for the whole of these large gender discrepancies.

[45] Figures indicate grades achieved by pupils aged 15 at 31 August 1999 from all schools in England and are compiled from National Statistics, 2001, pp. 38-9. English Literature and English Language are compulsory GCSE subjects in the majority of schools. French may be optional, sometimes on the proviso that it be substituted for another modern language. However, the high number of entries in the subject at GCSE makes it worth consideration here. Results from D to U (Unclassifiable) are not collated in Table 3.2.

[46] Lyrical writing modes are taken here to denote any "fairly short poem expressing the personal mood, feeling, or meditation of a speaker", including but not limited to the words of a song (Nielsen, 2003, p. 2).

[47] 'Battle' is a hip-hop term for competitive rapping between two MCs. Winners are declared on the basis of rhyming skills and the ability to determine a position superior to the other MC by way of insults and self-glorification.

[48] The incapacity to communicate by speech, typically as a result of some neurological disease or damage.

[49] See also Appignanesi and Forrester, 1992, pp. 398-9, and Martin, 1987, esp. pp. 18-9 and pp. 36-40. See Gilbert and Gubar, 1985, on gender, language and the ir/rational.

[50] Petersen is quoting Schiebinger, 1993, p. 146.

[51] See "97 Bonnie & Clyde' (1999), 'Guilty Conscience' (1999), 'My Fault' (1999), or 'Stan', as examples.

[52] See 'Cum On Everybody' (1999), 'Drug Ballad' (2000), or 'Just Don't Give A Fuck' (1999) for example.

[53] 'Toasting' is described as "talking over [...] records to encourage people to respond vocally or to dance to the music" (Haskins, 2000, p. 43).

[54] Other terms include: "bagging, capping, cracking, dissing, hiking, joining, ranking, ribbing, serving, signifying, slipping, sounding and snapping" (see Haskins, 2000, p, 54).

[55] Vic Tanny's: American gym chain. Jenny Craig: prototypical weight-loss guru whose diet program, started in the early 1980s, was central to the development of the weight loss industry.

[56] Classic examples noted by Haskins include: "You're so dumb, if you spoke your mind, you'd be speechless"; and "You're so dumb, you think Taco Bell is a Mexican phone company".

[57] It is of note that it is Marshall who has once again risen to the surface.

[58] An obvious point of reference here is to the film *The Amityville Horror* (dir. Rosenberg, 1979 and remade dir. Douglas, 2005), a horror film with a significant demonic element to the narrative.

[59] One possible exception might be D12's 'Nasty Mind' (2001).

[60] *Rocky*; *Rocky II* (dir. Stallone, 1979); *Rocky III* (dir. Stallone, 1982); *Rocky IV* (dir. Stallone, 1985); *Rocky V* (dir. Avildsen, 1990).

[61] See <http://www.ali.com/article.cfm?id=30> [Accessed 2 July 2005].

[62] I say this to describe an interpretation of the film, rather than to suggest that this is exactly what is at work in society generally, or that expression of violence through pugilism is a basic and appropriate expression of masculinity.

[63] Remember, perhaps "there's a Slim Shady in all of us" ('Real Slim Shady').

[64] See also Robert Walser's (1995) analysis of polyrhythms and duple-time/triple-time tensions in Public Enemy's 'Fight the Power'.

[65] The above attempt to represent the implied triple-time bars does include one bar of $\frac{3}{8}$ ["deader / A"]. The point here is not to define exactly where these implied bars fall, but the fact that such timing is implied at all. Therefore, it is quite possible to interpret the triple-time bar-lines as being situated differently, but the overall effect would remain approximately equivalent.

[66] See, for example, 'Favorite Things' (by Big Brovaz, 2003), 'Always On Time' (by Ja Rule and Ashanti, 2002), or 'I'll Be Missing You' (by Puff Daddy, featuring Faith Evans, 1997). City High's 'What Would You Do' (2001) is a particularly interesting example, because the male rapper speaks a chorus previously sung several times by a female vocalist. Thanks to Toby Haslam for helping find these examples.

[67] Acute accents represent primary stresses and grave accents represent secondary stresses in each line. These stresses are not absolute, and depend in part on national and regional accents. Bar lines in each column denote musical bars in $\frac{4}{4}$, and not metric feet. The metric structure of this section is complicated, shifting between diametric, trimetric and tetrametric lines. Feet in this passage tend to be dactylic or trochaic, with a few sections of repeated iambic feet. Given the complexity and irregularity of the meter, I have chosen not to consider it directly in my analysis here.

[68] This could also read 'Àftermáth', with a different national or regional accent: either way, the emphasis in this line would be on the word 'Aftermath', and not the ensuing 'is', as Eminem renders it.

[69] This is an attempt to represent a guttural noise sounded by Eminem that mostly rhymes with 'syrup' (and his pronunciation of 'stir up'). The noise may be a real word, although it is extremely unclear what that would be. I can only presume that the noise is an attempt to force a rhyme with the ensuing two lines.

[70] This could equally be represented 'Èminém'. I believe the two to be divided largely on the basis of accent: British speakers tend towards 'Èminém', while North American speakers tend towards 'Éminèm'. As with the quibble over 'Áftermàth' /'Àftermáth', the point is one relating to the overall distribution of emphasis across this line of the lyrics.

[71] The left-hand column is notated in rhythmic form simply for the purposes of easy comparison with the right-hand column. Any implications of emphasis due to duration or placement within a bar are not to be taken here.

[72] See Doty, 1993, pp. 86-102, on Herakles (the Roman Hercules), "named 'Mr. Hypermasculinity'" (p. 88). See pp. 138-51 on Ares (Mars) as 'Aggressive Militarist', or "hell-bent-for-leather war god" (p. 138).

[73] He is therefore also patron of travellers, his speed in this respect signified by his winged feet and cap in visual representations. In the story of the Trojan War, for example, it is Hermes who guides King Priam safely back to Troy with the body of his fallen son Hektor.

[74] Thus, returning to the story of the Trojan War, it is unsurprising that Hermes appears to Priam in disguise.

[75] The spectre of Adorno's pessimism is clearly looming here. However, it is worth admitting that, as a rule of thumb, popular music does tend towards repetition without significant variation or development. By comparison, Western art music privileges development and varied repetition of motifs, even when it also depends on repetition in both the musical foreground and at a large-scale structural level.

[76] Examples include: 'Still Don't Give A Fuck' (1999); 'As The World Turns'; 'Criminal' (2000); 'I'm Back' (2000). Traditional Western chordal progressions are used to good effect in 'Drug Ballad', in which simplistic, child-like imagery is conjured up by the harmonies, and this is juxtaposed with the lyrics, which take a humorously critical stance towards anti-drug campaigns. With D12, examples include 'Nasty Mind' and 'Ain't Nuttin' But Music' (2001).

[77] As a point of interest, compare this tendency with 'One Shot 2 Shot' on Encore, which features strings and an Alberti-bass-style accompaniment, giving something of a Classical air to the track.

[78] In the wider rap repertoire, see the following examples: 'Tha' Lunatic' (by Tupac Shakur, 1991); 'Nappy Heads' (by The Fugees, 1996); 'Temple' (by The Fugees, 1996); and 'No Vaseline' (by Ice Cube, 2005).

[79] Richardson takes his own use of 'queer' from Jagose (1996).

[80] This same sarcastic suspicion of the supremely homophobic also seems to have informed the writing of 'The Night I Fell In Love' by The Pet Shop Boys (2002), which tells the story of a schoolboy who falls for and has a one-night stand with a gay rapper who is never referred to by name, but who is clearly intended to represent Eminem.

[81] This effect only appears on the American release cover. The UK cover shows 50 Cent in the same pose, but not layered beneath the shattered glass. The reason for this is not clear, but may well have to do with the violence implicit in the American version.

[82] See, for example, the videos for 'My Name Is' (dir. Atwell and Dre, 2000) and 'Real Slim Shady' (dir. Atwell and Dre, 2000), or the All Access Europe tour DVD (2002).

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CHAPTER FOUR
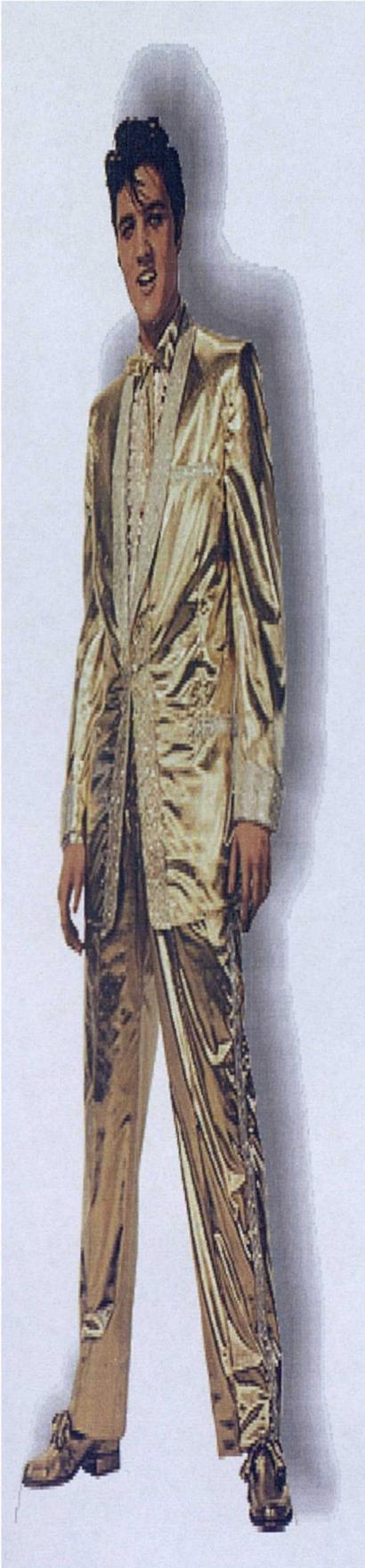
ELVIS/'ELVIS'

4.1 Ideal ego, ideal Elvis

Everyone knows that Elvis isn't dead. The question of whether Presley's body is actually six foot under may itself only be laid to rest when normal human life expectancy eventually catches up with him (unless we are expected to believe that he is truly immortal). Yet buried or otherwise, Elvis – or at least 'Elvis', a certain culturally constructed and sustained idea and image of Elvis – is still very much alive and kicking, permeating popular culture now more than ever. As Gilbert Rodman observes, "For a dead man, Elvis Presley is awfully noisy. His body may have failed him in 1977, but today his spirit, his image, and his myths do more than live on: they flourish, they thrive, they multiply" (1996, p. 1). Elvis has become reproduced beyond all reasonable (and possibly unreasonable) reproduction: the only male body that is reproduced on anything like the same scale is that of Michelangelo's David (South Bank Show, 2003). The already elusive original – a deified, unattainable idea of Elvis, the ür-celebrity – is fading ever further into the distance.
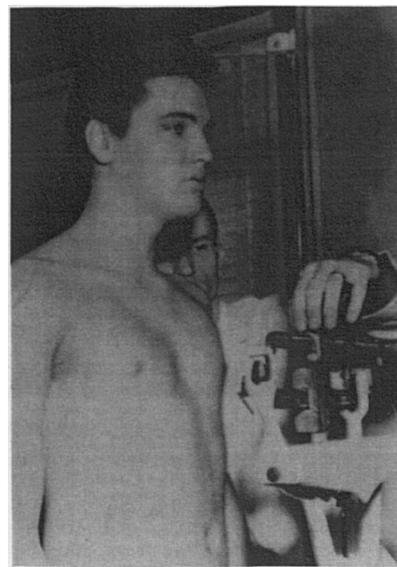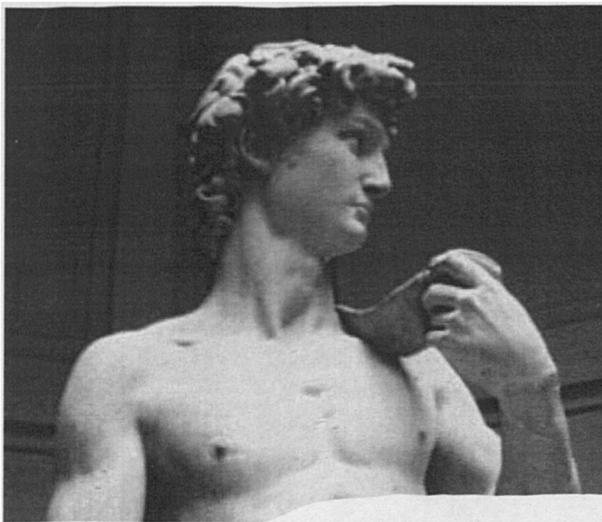

Figure 4.1
Comparable facial profiles:
David before battle with Goliath;
*Presley's medical before entering the US Army*
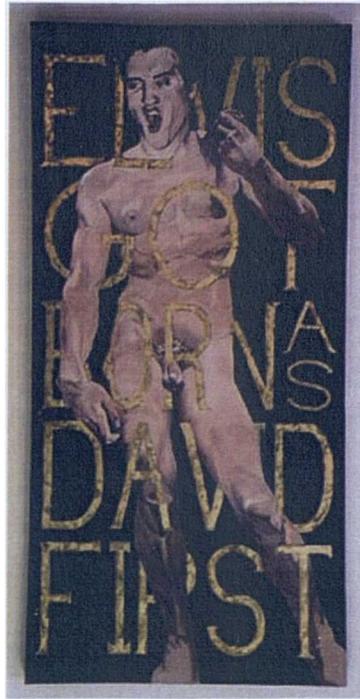
Figure 4. 2
The connection is made more explicit by visual artist Kathleen Vaughan
in Elvis Got Born as David First.
<http://www.akaredhanded.com/kv3a-elvis.html>

Arguably the most palpable and sustained manifestation of Elvis's continued presence in the world of popular entertainment can be found in the cultural phenomenon that is Elvis Impersonation. Six-year-old Elvis, the Flying Elvi (a team of skydiving Elvis Impersonators), drag king (King?) Elvis Herselvis, Mexican Elvis (El Vez), Chinese Elvis, Jewish Elvis (Elvis Shmelvis), obese and frequently naked Extreme Elvis, North-East Englishman Jarrow Elvis: Elvis has been deconstructed, reconstructed, thrown up in the air and pieced back together in a cubist collage of shapes, colours and sizes. In a bizarre reconstruction of Presley's biography, there is at least one documented instance of a 'Priscilla Impersonator' and an Elvis Impersonator marrying (see Rodman, 1996, p. 6). EIs themselves are advised on how to 'become' the King more 'totally' – by eating his favourite foods, using the same toiletries, and so on – in books such as *Be Elvis! A Guide To Impersonating The King* (Marino, 2000). In some cases, the idea of Impersonator-as-Elvis has been taken on by the audiences: although presumed dead for many years, "Fans of the King, Jarrow Elvis, were [...] given hope as he was allegedly spotted in South-Shields ASDA" (Dr. Rocker, 2004), a humorous though somewhat heartfelt take on the cliché of Elvis-sightings. The vast majority of Elvis Impersonation relies heavily on visual

factors: thick sideburns and a thick waist, plus a sequined white jumpsuit and the crucial crotch-thrusting stance.

Yet, just as our idea of Elvis can be reconstructed – and continues to be constructed – visually in this way, there is equally a certain lip-curled 'uh-huh', a characteristic vibrato, or a release of breath, that can conjure up his spectre aurally. The EI has a tool bag of vocal props just as he or she has a dressing-up box, although the emphasis on vocal impersonation is highly variable between Elvi. One EI in particular focuses quite explicitly (but in an unusual way) on vocal impersonation, and his success is to be judged primarily on this basis. Irishman Jim Brown's performance name is The King, and he demonstrates his vocal skill by playfully refusing the Presley canon. The sleeve-notes to Brown's first album, *Gravelands* (1998), describe an imagined conversation between The King and the ghost of Presley, in which Presley declares, "Ah'm sick of being dead [...] Ah wanna make one more record", and he commands The King to make that record on his behalf. *Gravelands*, and Brown's follow-up album *Return To Splendor* (2000), are collections of songs by now-dead artists, sung as cover versions by (supposedly) the spirit of Elvis come-alive in Brown, who is figured as a spirit medium, channelling the voice of Elvis.[1] None of the songs were performed by Elvis in his life, and several were not even written during his life. Thus, Brown's capacity to impersonate Presley is both tenuous and remarkable. We have no point of direct comparison, only a very limited frame of reference for how Presley might have performed any given song. Some tracks are at least on the edges of Presley's typical genres: there is something strangely familiar about 'The House Is Rockin'' from *Return To Splendor*,[2] perhaps in its allusion generically and lyrically to 'Jailhouse Rock' (1958), as well as in Brown's deliberately referential spoken interjection of "Let's play house now baby" (see CD4/Track 1).[3]

However, in the same way that so many EIs refer visually to a post-1970-Elvis, Brown leans vocally towards the kind of vocality found in Presley's later recordings. Although, as Middleton notes, there are several threads of continuity in Presley's voice throughout his career, it is worth noting that the vocal 'boogification' present in Presley's early recordings (see Middleton, 1983, pp. 157-62) declines in his later work. As he tended towards sentimental ballad material performed in a full, thick voice with an almost operatic quality at times (see 'Bridge Over Troubled Water' (1970)), and when he performed early hits later on his career, the rhythmic

punches effected by his voice in the earlier recordings are much reduced: compare, for instance, Presley's 1956 single version of 'Hound Dog' with his performance of the song on *Aloha From Hawaii* in 1973 (see Tracks 2 and 3). It is mostly the later style of performance that Jim Brown imitates on his recordings, even on tracks that might have invited boogification under Presley's interpretation, so although 'The House Is Rockin'' is a convincing enough choice of song in terms of genre, the voice used feels somewhat anachronistic. Thus, as we do not have any way of confirming how Presley might have recorded (for example) Nirvana's 'Come As You Are' (on Brown's *Gravelands*), we must turn to songs of his that are in any way similar in terms of phrasing, tessitura, melodic range, and so on: despite the unusual circumstances, we can still clearly hear aspects of Presley's voice coming out of a track like 'In The Ghetto' (1969) and being imported into 'Come As You Are' (see Tracks 4 and 5). The majority of the vocal line in Presley's song is contained within a perfect fifth from B♭ to F ($\hat{1}$-$\hat{5}$ in B♭), although it peaks at D♭^{1} in the bridge. 'Come As You Are' is similarly contained (for the most part) within a perfect fifth, but from C to G in Fm (i.e. $\hat{5}$-$\hat{2}$). The bass line oscillating between F and E♭ (I-♭VII), seeming to imply a superimposition of Cm over Fm and thereby confusing the tonal centre. Without wishing to enter into a detailed reading of the Nirvana track, which would clearly raise some interesting points with respect to its tonal centre, the similarity of its vocal range to the Presley track suggests 'In The Ghetto' as a reasonable point of comparison between Brown (covering Nirvana) and Presley, even though the two tracks are fundamentally different in terms of genre. Kurt Cobain almost truncated each line of the verses, refusing to sustain the final words past a crotchet, but Brown imposes Presley's phrasing onto 'Come As You Are', sustaining the ends of those lines and using them to allow a Presley-esque vibrato to intrude.

There are clearly certain signs which have come to point to an encrypted variant of Presley that we now understand in some way as 'being Elvis'. The codes by which to gesture towards Presley are easily identifiable, and may be systematically grouped as they are here into both aural and visual codes:

Aural	Visual	
	Vestimentary	*Gestural/Bodily*
Southern 'drawl'	Sequined jumpsuit	Karate-inspired moves
Slurred diction in both speech and song	(Co-ordinating) belt, usually wide and co-ordinating with jumpsuit	Crotch-thrust
Portamento, to contribute to effect of slurred diction	Two-piece black leather suit	Lip-curl

"Thankyvermuurch"	Sideburns (various lengths, depending on era)	Holding one hand at face level and slightly in front of body, in a semi-fist
"Uh-huh"	Untied monochrome silk scarf around neck	Pained look on face, usually to accompany above
'Boogification' (Middleton, 1983, p. 157)	Quiff (various styles, depending on era)	Signalling end of song to band with kick or other grand bodily gesture
Sudden falsetto, vocal hiccoughs and squeaks (stylistically associated with Country music, and often with 'boogification')	Hawaiian lei	
Vibrato at end of phrases	Gold lamé jacket/suit	
Vocal 'bounce' to a particular pronunciation of 'I' from a preceding consonant[4]	Aviator sunglasses	

Signs such as these are built up in a kind of *bricolage*, ultimately combining to produce an outline of 'Elvis', the gaps in which can often be filled by the onlooker. Certain signs clearly carry more weight than others, with certain vestimentary factors being most effective, and other details merely adding to an established outline. That is to say, the sequined jumpsuit alone could signify 'Elvis', and the aviator sunglasses or lei could add to the outline drawn by those symbols. The idiosyncratic pronunciation of 'I' would not work on its own, but it contributes to an effect put in place by other visual and vocal signifiers. One possible way of trying to understand the kind of cultural work being executed here might be to turn once more to Freud's model of the ego ideal. The potential of such a model in the present case study would be to transpose it to what might be termed the *alter-ideal*, an analogous model representing our perception of what the essence of any given Other is. EIs rely on a complex layering of self and Other, describing various perspectives of Elvis while always understanding the potential for their own vocality and physicality to disrupt the illusion. Moreover, these factors may be inserted as a deliberate 'feature' of a particular EI. Black Elvis, Chinese Elvis, six-year-old Elvis: all such EIs make explicit and unapologetic reference to a factor that distinguishes them from Presley himself. The cultural phenomenon of Elvis Impersonation invites an interrogation of how the ego ideal (and alter-ideal) work, the ways in which the images of the self (or Other) are constructed and sustained, questions left largely unanswered by Freud.

Freud describes the ego ideal as an after-effect of normal childhood narcissism. The subject seeks his mirror image in the construction of his ego, and attaches himself narcissistically to it, using it as a focal point for his libidinal instincts. A point comes, however, when the so-called 'actual ego' becomes

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displaced by the creation of an ego ideal: "This ideal ego is now the target of the self-love which was enjoyed in childhood by the actual ego. The subject's narcissism makes its appearance displaced on to this new ideal ego, which, like the infantile ego, finds itself possessed of every perfection that is of value" (Freud, 1914, p. 558). Although Freud describes how the ego ideal emerges, he does not seek to describe the psychological processes that work to sustain it. The role of the mirror is emphasised as a precipitating factor, but it is probable that not only visual, but also audio and other miscellaneous sensory factors are at work in the construction and maintenance of the ego ideal (and of the alter-ideal). An exploration of these factors and their functions underlines the fact that there is a significant discrepancy between our ego ideal and an outsider's perception of us as Other. Moreover, this discrepancy – or rather our perception of this discrepancy, that is to say our perception of the outsider's perception of us as Other – brings with it the potential for abjection, that extreme and rupturing disgust which Kristeva likens to the skin on the surface of milk (Oliver, 1997, p. 230).

To start as Freud does with the mirror, it seems obvious enough to state that what we see in our respective mirror images is not the same as what others see as they look at us. This incongruity is already enough to render our subjectivities unstable, fragile structures resting on shaky foundations. That is to say, if the mirror image is central to our subjective development, then the counterfeit nature of that image must bring into question the state of our subjectivity as compared with others' perception of us. If the mirror image represents something approximating the ideal self, and is central to the playing out of our mental 'footprint' of ourselves, then the photographic image (which is on the whole closer what others see when they look at us) represents something more abject. Indeed, it seems that abjection arises precisely at the point where the subject's mental image of his image (or voice) is forced to confront the different image (or voice) perceived of that subject by an Other. When those two disparate objects meet, abjection invades.[5] The photograph forces a confrontation with a version of oneself very different from one's mental image of oneself (which is informed primarily and from infancy by the *mirror* image), and it lacks the physicality of the mirror: it captures but a millisecond, in which we can look more *or less* like we imagine ourselves to look. A video recording brings even more abjection with it than the photograph. The Thing on the screen, pretending to be the subject, moves, is alive. So is the mirror-image, in a sense, although the

subject feels as his mirror-image moves – he has control over the mirror-image. The video 'subject', by comparison, works independently. One cannot feel the weight of its limbs or the strain of its muscles, nor the emotions which lead to its facial expressions, yet all the while it is posing as the subject.

An equivalent set of processes is at work in the voice, which also contributes to our 'mind's eye' version of ourselves (or perhaps, in this case, a 'mind's ear' version). Just as the mirror and the gaze render different faces, what I hear as I speak is different from what another hears, and I mean this in the sense of geno-song, and of vocal qualities, rather than in the sense of the content or message being subtly misunderstood or misinterpreted. Since the invention of the phonograph in 1876, the discrepancy between the speaker's experience and the listener's experience of the same voice – what Stephen Connor describes as "the voice's split condition" (2000, p. 7) – has become readily available through the popularisation of tape-recording technology. The experience of that discrepancy is an uncomfortable one (until it is practiced enough, perhaps): "People who hear their own recorded voices [usually] find them alien – ugly, piping, thin, crude, drawling, barking, or otherwise unattractive" (p. 9). The subject's mental audio-image of his sounding voice may persist in the act of speech or song – the singer or speaker may continue to impose on his vocal action a certain conception of what the effect of that action will be – but it is disrupted by the playback of his recorded voice, and this may be the site at which abjection makes its assault (since it again represents a confrontation between the subject's perception of his voice and what the Other hears). The disruption might more accurately be described as dismemberment, as the voice is cut from the body and is rendered devoid of physicality. For example, on playback, the subject no longer experiences his bones vibrating, his tongue moving against his teeth and palate, or the air passing across his lungs and larynx.[6] At this point, it should of course be acknowledged – indeed, it goes nearly without saying – that all of an Other's perceptions are inaccessible. Tastes, touches, smells, vision, hearing, and emotion are entirely internal and intangible from the outside. The observer's perception of another's feelings are based on the superimposition of his own experience onto the image he sees. If the Other looks or sounds a certain way, the observer fills in the gap – the unknown 'reality' (which is to say the Other's *sense* of the 'reality') of the Other's position – by overlaying his own experience onto the information available.

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If we have thus far identified the roles played by image, voice, and other miscellaneous sensory experiences in the workings of the ego ideal, we can see that an inverted set of processes comes into play when considering the alter-ideal, a subject's perception of what the Other is. Again, what one sees when one looks at another is different from what the Other sees in the mirror, and it bears little resemblance to the Other's mental image of himself (as constructed through the mechanisms noted above). Similarly, what one hears when the Other speaks is very different from he hears. And once more, all of his collective perceptions are only understood by way of transmutation, by the superimposition of one's own experience onto the projected image of the Other.

The question is thus raised as to how to extrapolate these processes to illuminate impersonation as an exceptional site of relations between ego ideal and alter-ideal. In the case of Elvis Impersonation, the Other in question is one of the most widely recognised bodies on a global scale, and the ego is already 'averaged out' across the global culture that consumes him. As noted above, there are clearly certain markers in place to point towards 'Elvis', and covertly allowing for certain discrepancies between the EI's performance and the implied 'original'. I do not wish to partake in a lengthy comparative analysis of the successes and failures of the innumerable EIs to reproduce 'faithfully' the Presley 'look' and 'sound', but it is certainly worth selecting a few in order to try and assess specifically what codes are being utilised in the process of Elvis Impersonation. The most common articulation of Elvis by EIs is the Presley of the late 60s and onwards. A number of EIs represent Presley's performances in the late 1960s,[7] especially alluding to the Las Vegas 'comeback' performance of 1968, and this is signified by the donning of a black leather suit, usually with the jacket open down the chest. The sideburns of this Elvis are elongated and thick, and the hair longer than that of 'Army Elvis', but with the quiff less distinct and sharp-cut than the very early Elvis. More common than 'Comeback Elvis', however, is the 'Jumpsuit Elvis' of the 1970s. During the last years of Presley's life, he frequently performed live, especially in Vegas, and his self-designed jumpsuits became his trademark from their first appearance in 1970, until his death in 1977. This represents a period of extravagant excess in Presley's performance history. His stage outfits were elaborately sequined, often incorporated a co-ordinating cape, and his performances involved grand physical gestures, often derived from the martial arts he studied. He also developed a routine involving the

donation of a silk scarf – worn during his performance – to young women in the front row of the audience. These gestures have all proved to be easy to adopt by EIs, perhaps because of their simplicity, and pre-existent theatricality, and this may well have contributed to the preponderance of 'Vegas Elvi'. Comparatively few EIs attempt to reproduce the very early Presley, and this may well be to do with the relatively subtle markers of that incarnation. Before the distinctive gold lamé suits appeared in 1957, Presley's visual style was – with the possible exceptions of his quiff and his dancing – in many ways similar to many of his (black) musical peers. A 'successful' impersonation of this Presley might require not only a facial similarity,[8] but also a slim and supple body, with hips and legs flexible enough to effect the idiosyncratic 'gyrations' infamously censored on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. In reality, a very large number of EIs already physically resemble the increasingly over-indulgent Presley whose fluctuations in weight made the jumpsuits such a flattering and therefore practical solution (Stanley, 1998, p. 94). To hold one hand aloft while standing with legs slightly apart and bent (see Figure 4.3) may well be easier than it is to replicate his very distinctive and quite unique pelvic movements, that extended beyond the hips and appeared to involve his whole body. And if a gesture – physical or vestimentary – is distinctive and yet simple, it can be deployed effectively by a wider range of people than if it is complex and/or common. Thus, as an example, an increasing number of Chinese Elvi are still able to succeed in their 'impersonation' by using these characteristic signs of 'Elvis', because these particular signs – the markers of a particular phase of Presley's career – are so utterly and indisputably *of* *'Elvis'*, as well as being easy to replicate.

Figure 4.3
Distinctive poses, from Aloha From Hawaii,
and the 'look of intensity'

Presley is thus pared down and stripped back to a core of gestures and images, detachable symbols built up in *bricolage*, recipes for any given Presley. The effect of this is to detach Presley from the culture which sustains him (or rather, sustains 'Elvis' and *therefore detaches Presley*). In this way, Elvis Impersonation represents the textbook simulacrum. Each invocation of Elvis refers less than the last to an 'original', and reinforces the phenomenon of Elvis Impersonation to the point that we might refer to it instead as Elvis Implication. Crucially, a common alternative term for EIs[9] is 'Elvis Tribute Act', or ETA. This distinction in nomenclature is also one of ideology, since it sets up a discursive stance on the part of the ETA whereby he or she is positioned as 'paying tribute' to Presley, rather than attempting to achieve an absolute and detailed impersonation. The notion of an ETA may afford the performer the status of 'artist' in his or her own right, as s/he can import a level of 'interpretation' into the performance, whereas the concept of impersonation may be confining, restrictive, implying little or no creative enterprise by the impersonator/artist. Roy Shuker argues that tribute acts are an "extreme example of cover bands", and that cover bands "are generally accorded little critical artistic weight". He says of 'cover bands', "The common view is that reliance on someone else's material concedes that you have nothing of your own to say" (1994, p. 107), a position that is surely exacerbated if the performance of someone else's song is not creatively re-interpreted but instead copied as closely as possible. From a Baudrillardian perspective, the negotiation of interpretation and reiteration as different modes of musical experience may be precisely where the appeal of the now cult practice of impersonation (or 'paying tribute') lies:

> Appearances, which are not at all frivolous, are the site of play and chance taking, the site of a passion for diversion – to reduce signs is here far more important than the emergence of any truth. Interpretation overlooks and obliterates this aspect of appearances in its search for hidden meaning.
>
> (Baudrillard, 2001, p. 152)

The context in which this analysis appears is a part of Baudrillard's text concerned with the idea of seduction, and how 'interpretation' is "characteristically opposed to seduction". In the case of Elvis, one proposed analysis might be that the "interpretive discourse" enacted by the ETA is "unappealing" (Baudrillard, 2001, p. 152), whereas "the aleatory, meaningless, or ritualistic and meticulous, circulation of signs on the surface" brought into play effectively by the EI is indeed "seductive" (p. 153). This positioning of style over content, signs over substance, is also a kind of logic similar

to that at work in the construction of camp and kitsch. Susan Sontag directly asserts that Camp "incarnates a victory of 'style' over 'content'" (1999, p. 60), while Clement Greenberg describes kitsch as "ersatz culture", the art of "vicarious experience and fake sensations" (quoted in Kleinhans, 1994, p. 182). Kitsch seems to have a capacity to be camp in nature, but not all camp cultural objects necessarily appear kitsch, and any distinction may be partially a result of context. For example, the 1980s children's television show *Rainbow* (ITV, 1972-92) had a certain camp quality to it,[10] a Zippy keyring used by a young person adopting a retro fashion style may signify the kitsch properties attributed to the show in retrospect, while a baby-fit *Rainbow* T-shirt worn by a genderqueer[11] young man (perhaps along with flared trousers and eye makeup) may represent a deployment of Camp through a kitsch icon of mass culture.

In the case of 'Elvis'/Presley, both the 'original' and the plethora of EIs have enacted aspects of Camp and kitsch. Although it is the Presley of early years that most obviously toyed with contemporaneous constructions of gender identity – his long hair, the wearing of eye make-up – the same incarnation has since become that which represents unbridled masculinity. The Presley of later years has, by contrast, been discursively constructed as signifying a neutered masculinity, the spirit of a wild stallion over-marketed, constrained and thus 'castrated' by Colonel Tom Parker (see Wise, 1990). Further discussion of the interplay of masculinities in Presley and EIs will follow below: for now, we should at least note that his construction and display of his gendered identity were never unproblematically 'masculine', in certain traditional senses of that word. Presley may not have embodied the same kind of camp performed by Larry Grayson, Kenneth Williams, or Mr. Humphries,[12] but his multifaceted brand of gender may well be what has allowed the importation of a camp element to subsequent recycled versions of his image. The (over-)reproduction of his image in recent years – his face appears on cards, coasters, clocks, handbags, tumblers, mugs, and his body is transformed into keyrings, hanging ornaments for cars, and Catholic-shrine-style figurines, amongst others – represents his move into the kind of mass culture that is now known as kitsch. During his lifetime, he was at times massively popular, but he was at least consumed. Since his death, he has become cultural carpet: everywhere and essential, but walked on, and yet unnoticed for being used every day, ignored precisely because of its importance. EIs have contributed to this, and have been responsible for the injection of camp and kitsch

into the Idea of Elvis. There can surely be nothing ordinary or everyday about a collection of EIs in full regalia, whether it is 'Three Kings' (Figure 4.4) or an ETA convention.[13] Moreover, EIs have propagated the phenomenon of impersonation as spectacle, which involves the fluctuation of ego ideal and alter-ideal noted above. This psychic process remains distinctly strange despite its proliferation, although it has become somewhat normalised, and it is this paradox that has given rise to Elvis Impersonation's apparent queerness. Not only because of the extravagance and excess of the original (especially when that original is Vegas Elvis), but also because of the open performativity of male subjectivity and of a particularly unstable kind of masculinity, Elvis Impersonation represents a productive site for the negotiation of and play with gender. It is in this respect that the term 'straight male drag' might be a useful way of conceiving of the phenomenon,[14] again pointing towards a camp element.[15] It may also be due to the opportunities presented for gender play that Elvis Impersonation lends itself particularly well to implementation by female artists.[16]

Figure 4.4
Three 'Kings'

As good a career move as it may have been (see Tosches, 1992, p. 275 and p. 279), Presley's death also saw the beginning of a journey to emptied-out vessel, into which may be poured any number of other subject positions: it is only by virtue of there being very little 'Presley' left in the current existence of 'Elvis' that the bizarre extremities of Elvis Impersonation can exist, through which the King has been well and truly demoted to Court Jester. Yet the spectre of Presley still haunts the phenomenon. Whether they are termed Elvis Impersonators or Elvis Tribute Acts, they still operate with reference to Presley, if not always with respect to the same.[17]

4.2 The contours of vocal impersonation

It seems that the voice may lend itself particularly well to impersonation, to being part of a masquerade. In an almost perverse kind of logic, this may be in part because of the culturally-embedded notion that the voice is profoundly associated with 'self', meaning, a concept of reality and self-expression (as noted in previous chapters) and, as such, a vocal impersonation may have a greater capacity to 'convince' than a purely bodily one: "Voice quality may be seen as a marker of individuality" (Zetterholm, 2002, p. 80). Although the relationship between voice and masquerade is thus one that appears paradoxical, given the voice's status in culture as apparently 'revealing of the self' (see Koestenbaum, 1991, p. 224), it is also possible that in the process of adopting a performative stance, the voice becomes entirely performed, performative, and less readily 'revelatory'. That is to say, the voice-of-one-performing may equally reveal the performative nature of the context, and the 'voice revealing the self' may only reveal a performing self. This would be in contrast to what common wisdom might suggest, or what Koestenbaum's observations might logically imply, that the voice-of-one-performing reveals a 'real' person 'behind' the performance. The revelation only of a performing self establishes something of a mask, further to Lucy Green's observations (1997, pp. 21-2). Just as the performer sets up a layer of mask in the act of display, the performing voice adopts its own deceitful nature as it purports to reveal a 'truth' and tautologically reveals only its own performativity. The web of power already in place between performer and onlooker, described by Green, is already complicated by the confounding power of the performative voice, and to introduce impersonation into the multiply-layered adds another layer of mask. As we have seen in the case of Madonna, the relentless visual transformations seem to add a further mask – 'changer of masks'. A similar effect is brought about in the case of vocal impersonation, where the mask also becomes a consciously manipulated device, and exacerbates the mutual power differential between the parties involved.[18] The great potential of vocal impersonation may also be explained in part by a process described by Stephen Connor:

> As I speak, I seem to be situated out in front of myself, leaving myself behind. But if my voice is out in front of me, this makes me feel that I am somewhere behind it. As a kind of projection, the voice allows me to withdraw or retract myself. This can make my voice a persona, a mask, or sounding screen.

(2000, p. 5)

If the 'self' is withdrawn in the projection of the voice, leaving a wide-open space for impersonation to occur, performance – especially vocal performance – and imitation may well be perfect bedfellows. If the projection of the voice invites the retraction of 'myself', a space is opened up in which deliberate imitation may just as well happen as not. Why should a performer be any more 'himself' for projecting his own voice in a performance, than if he impersonates another in that performance? The impersonating voice is (simply?) even more explicitly mask-like than the usual voice of the impersonator.

Once again, it is useful to turn to Lacan's Graph of Desire to understand this formulation of 'voice' as a strategy by which layers of meaning are constructed. Essential to Lacan's configuration of desire is the deferral of its fulfilment, and he posits the voice as a part-object, capable of initiating desire. We have already seen how, in the Graph of Desire, the voice is positioned as a left-over, a remnant, something which is not contained (or containable) within the circuit of rational discourse (see Chapter 1, Figure 1.1), and it is this vestigial status that affords it the power of the *objet petit a*. Also, the performing-voice's tantalising nature may have the effect of triggering desire, offering to reveal something – a 'true' self – but fluctuating between revealing this and revealing only itself, and thereby deferring completion and resolution. Once the signifying chain is anchored and pinned down, after the multiplicitous possibilities of the message are contained by (retroactive) comprehension, the voice *as object* remains unaccounted for, culturally unassimilated. It is in this way the object-voice behaves as a part-object, in Lacan's sense of the term. Whereas the breast, the faeces and the urinary flow (previously identified as part-objects by Freud) had been considered partial because they are part of a whole object, Lacan argues that they are in fact partial "because they represent only partially the function that produces them" (1989, p. 349). The object-voice indeed represents only partially that which produces it: the body from which it emanates; that which is being spoken; and the Symbolic realm which in turn produced that-which-is-being-spoken and allows it to exist. Lacan is thus able to add voice to the list of part-objects, along with the gaze, the phoneme and the phallus (p. 349).

At this juncture, the structural discrepancies between the voice and the gaze as part-objects should be identified and elaborated upon. Although in Lacan's work,

the gaze and the voice share their status as part-objects, there has not yet been identified a *direct* aural equivalent to the gaze. We might turn, however, to the model of the 'acoustic mirror', proposed by Guy Rosolato and taken up by Kaja Silverman (1988) in her response to the female voice in cinema. Silverman describes how "the double organization of the vocal/auditory system [...] permits a speaker to function at the same time as listener, his or her voice returning as sound in the process of utterance" (p. 79). Silverman goes on to explain how the voice of the Mother functions in the development of the subject, describing how the child "learns to speak by imitating the sounds made by the mother, fashioning its voice after hers" and how "the child could be said to hear itself initially through [the maternal] voice – to first 'recognize' itself in the vocal 'mirror' supplied by the mother" (p. 80). Yet, as a result of the inconsistencies between the voice we hear and the voice other people hear when it emanates from our mouths, there is a great inaccuracy in 'hearing oneself speak', which Mladen Dolar suggests may be "the minimal definition of consciousness" (1996, p. 13). The maternal voice may operate as a rudimentary 'mirror', but to hear *oneself* speak sets up something of a disjuncture. As Dolar continues: "if there is a surface that returns the voice, the voice acquires an autonomy of its own and enters into the dimension of the Other, it becomes a deferred voice, and the narcissism crumbles" (p. 14). Turning this back on Silverman's explanation of the 'acoustic mirror', the 'crumbling narcissism' of which Dolar writes may be connected with that 'double organization' of the vocal/auditory system:

> The simultaneity of [speaking and listening] makes it difficult to situate the voice, to know whether it is 'outside' or 'inside'. The boundary separating exteriority from interiority is blurred by this aural undecidability by the replication within the former arena of something which seems to have its inception within the latter. [...] What [Guy] Rosolato suggests is that since the voice is capable of being internalized at the same time as it is externalized, it can spill over from subject to object and object to subject, violating the bodily limits upon which classic subjectivity depends
>
> (1988, p. 79)

Despite certain structural differences between the gaze/mirror and the 'acoustic mirror', each can be seen to operate as part-objects. In a sense, the gaze chooses whole bodies as its object, although it typically dismembers them into (fetishised) part-objects. The 'aural-gaze' hears the already-part-object voice – there is no dismemberment to be done, since the object-voice is already disembodied. Given that the (visual) gaze privileges part-objects – by fetishising them, and

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attaching them to woman as 'to-be-looked-at' – it is no more surprising that the part-object 'aural-gaze' also objectifies a part-object – 'voice' – and fetishises it. Returning to Freud's model of the fetish, it is the simultaneous absence and (simulated) presence of the lost object – the always-already lost maternal penis – that constitutes the fetish. A fetish object is thus a substitute for something lost, which was never there in the first place. Mladen Dolar writes:

> [M]usic, with all its seductive force and irresistible appeal, is [...] an attempt to domesticate the object, to turn it into an object of aesthetic pleasure, to put up a screen against what is unbearable in it. "If we make music and listen to it, ... it is in order to silence what deserves to be called the voice as the object *a*" [Miller, 1989, p. 184]. But, one should add [...], this gesture is always ambiguous: music evokes the voice and conceals it, it fetishizes it.
>
> (1996, p. 10)

The fetishisation of the voice renders the object as grotesque as any other fetish renders its (physical) target. Where the traditional fetishistic model may tear apart the human body and transform it into a collection of disembodied part-objects, the object-voice is similarly always at odds with its bodily origins. The invasion of the grain of the voice may have the effect of re-grounding the voice in the body, and it may only be the truly – impossibly – disembodied voice that is the *objet petit a* in full force. Voice as part-object is thus engaged in a struggle with its own embodied-ness, refusing its own body just as it speaks of the body: "Always standing apart from or non-identical with the body from which it issues, the voice is by definition irreducible to or incompatible with that body. And yet the voice is always in and of the body" (Connor, 2000, p. 208). Despite its being 'in and of the body', then, the voice also always exceeds the boundaries of the body. To be sounded at all, it must leave the body and be projected, disconnecting itself from the body which produced it, like a child breaking free from its mother. This rupture from the creator already produces abjection: "As Kristeva describes the process of separation [...], the infant must go through a stage of abjection in which it 'abjects,' or finds abject, its mother's body. In order to be weaned the infant must find its mother's body both fascinating and horrifying" (Oliver, 1997, p. 225). The voice then acquires the power to roam at will and launch itself into another body, by way of the passive ears, and thus assumes the role of an invader, a contagious entity. While Dolar argues that the voice is "the paramount source of danger and decay" (1996, p. 20), and that "the core of the danger is the voice that sets itself loose from the word, the voice beyond logos, the

lawless voice" (p. 18), it should be noted that the voice must first set itself loose from the body, and that may well be the very root of the 'danger'.

The dangers of an 'unnatural' object-voice have long been associated with the art of ventriloquism, a word which literally means 'speaking from the stomach'. (If we are thinking of etymological derivations, the *im-* negates the 'person': it is not so much that the impersonator becomes another person in his act, but that he becomes a non-person, for being neither himself nor really the other.) Some of the historical discourse surrounding ventriloquism is useful for considering the art of impersonation. Leigh Schmidt notes, "the ventriloquist's art shifted the focus of learned attention from the divine struggle over the soul to the protean malleability of personal identity, the fears and attractions of imposture, and the sheer pleasures of amusement" (1998, p. 274). It is the 'imposture' here that is a central part of the fear surrounding ventriloquism. As Schmidt continues, "From later antiquity into the eighteenth century, ventriloquism was deeply embedded in Christian discourses about demon possession, necromancy, and pagan idolatry" (p. 27). The vocabulary in which ventriloquism was discussed, the idea of an other's voice emanating from someone's stomach, might invite some tentative connections between the fears surrounding ventriloquism and the issues raised by impersonation. Moreover, these connections could easily be drawn out to consider ventriloquism – and, by extension, impersonation – as examples of the voice exceeding the boundaries of the body. Indeed, the voice always exceeds these boundaries, in that it is only on leaving the body that the voice is sounded: the voice can only be heard as soundwaves which extend beyond the confines of the body. At the same time, the notion of a voice's grain might indicate a sense in which the body is carried along with the departing voice. In Freud's writings, those things which can be described as 'uncanny' (*unheimlich*) are those which disturb borders (1919). As I have discussed in relation to the Carpenters, this includes the cyborg, and Madonna and Eminem also both offer examples of the unsettling capacity of the 'multiplied object', the doppelganger, or alterego. Barbara Creed observes that "The horror presented within each category [of the uncanny] can be defined in relation to a loss of clear boundaries" (1993, p. 53), but it is also true that the 'uncanny' "is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression" (Freud, 1919, p. 394). The uncanny is "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (pp.

369-70). What connects all the examples given by Freud, then, is a persistent sense of the familiar existing just beneath the surface of something disturbing, or frightening. Specifically, "An uncanny experience occurs either when repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed" (p. 403). The ventriloquist represents the uncanny by displaying the voice – a familiar thing – in an altogether unfamiliar manner. The impersonator, of course, leads the listener back to a familiar voice, but with an inevitable element of the unfamiliar brought about by the points at which the impersonator's own vocality breaks through. Or, in the 'perfect' impersonation, with no 'errors' or 'deviation', the familiar voice is presented by an unfamiliar body. This hypothetically 'perfect' impersonation may be more 'uncanny' than the 'flawed' version. At least with the points of 'failure', we as listeners are reassured of the impersonator's own self being sustained, whereas with a 'perfect' impersonation the voice would be even more 'familiar' (more 'of' the one being impersonated), and even more distanced from the body of the impersonator, and the result may be more disruptive of boundaries. The psychological aspect in effect here may be the infantile development of the concept of vocal authority. That is to say, by entering into a self-actualised (post-traumatic) state, the subject may be required to develop the belief that 'voice' and 'self' are intimately linked and inseparable. The act of impersonation interferes with that belief and in a variation on Freud's summary, it could be said that the 'uncanny' element here is a primitive belief (one which is to be valued) being contested.

In considering vocal impersonation, the true object of study is of course the object-voice, a thing which in itself represents the disruption of boundaries in its uncanny negotiation of the body – it at once extends beyond the body and is brought to the fore by those moments at which the body is present (as the grain). In Presley's voice, certainly in his early recordings, his technique of extreme 'boogification' brings the *objet petit a* to the fore. Writing about 'Heartbreak Hotel' (1956; Track 6), Richard Middleton notes:

> As in boogie-woogie, the basic vocal rhythms are triplets [...] and, again as in boogie-woogie, the *off*-beat quaver is often given an unexpected accent [...], producing syncopation and cross-rhythm. The effect is physical, demanding movement, jerking the body into activity. Elvis, however, extends the technique. He adds extra off-beat notes not demanded by words or vocal line, often splitting up syllables or even consonants, slurring words together, disguising the verbal sense.

(1983, pp. 157-62. His emphasis)

It is in the 'disguising of the verbal sense' and the integration of boogification with "vocal orchestration", or "romantic lyricism" (p. 158), that the relevance of this vocal technique to the present study becomes apparent. The *objet petit a* is "the leftover, the remainder [...] the remnant left behind by the introduction of the symbolic in the real" (Evans, 1996, p. 125). The Symbolic order is that realm which is "determinant of subjectivity" (p. 203), entered into from the Real by the maturing subject. The Real still persists in the Symbolic, albeit as something impossible and unattainable. It is "that which resists symbolization absolutely" (Lacan quoted in Evans, 1996, p. 159), and is therefore impossible to imagine since it exists solely in terms outside of those which define the Symbolic. The *objet petit a* thereby operates at the intersection of the two realms,[19] being the 'remnant' left behind on entry to the Symbolic, while gesturing towards the Real ('resisting symbolisation'). Indeed, it also intersects with the Imaginary, "the order of surface appearances which are deceptive, observable phenomena which hide underlying structure" (Evans, 1996, p. 82), and in which the illusions of wholeness, autonomy, and unity are sustained. In Lacan's work, the *objet petit a* was originally conceived of as the *object* of desire, and later emerged as the *cause* of desire, "any object which sets desire in motion" (p. 125). It is, in these respects, to be compared with the part-objects, which have an Imaginary function, having no specular image and therefore no alterity (Lacan, 1989, p. 349). In Presley's 'boogification', there are points at which the voice as a communicative vehicle, as an agent of assimilated meaning, is unashamedly subsumed by the object-voice. His vocal hiccoughs, sudden falsettos, and seemingly gratuitous rhythmic additions represent a great amount of leftover, of uncanny offshoot.[20]

The voice as object can be seen to be a subsidiary element of the subject's transition through the Imaginary stage, as depicted in the Graph of Desire. It is at the point of confrontation with *A* – the 'big Other'; (M)Other – that a deviant course may be taken. In the way that Imaginary functions persist into the Symbolic realm, the remnant object-voice rears its head at moments in Symbolic existence. The 'healthy' circuit of rational discourse is not a one-time experience, but a model of existence. Consequently, the threat of diversion represented by the object-voice is to be confronted constantly, and this is the seductive power of the object-voice. Indeed, the Imaginary as Lacan describes it always has connotations of seduction, and perhaps

we might usefully take this back to Baudrillard, whose distinction between seduction and simulation offers a productive model for the analysis of Elvis Impersonation, and of vocal impersonation in particular. In Baudrillard's formulation, simulation is not illusory, but is in fact the way in which the world is realised, being the mediation of the real and the only mode of perception of the real. The relationship between the simulation and the real – indeed the changing nature of this relationship – is an issue that is dealt with by Baudrillard in 'The orders of simulacra' (1983). In that essay, he proposes that simulation has occurred in three historical 'orders' or stages. The first of these orders is that of the counterfeit, historically running from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution. The relationship between the simulating sign and the real in this stage is one that relies on a difference between the sign and the real, and is exemplified by forms such as stucco, the automaton, and *trompe l'oeil*. In these examples, the sign's appeal is to be found in the fact that it is not quite the same as the real: "What we admire in stucco [...] is not simply its resemblance to the real but precisely its minute difference from the real. [...] The automaton charms or moves us not because it imitates humans or is meant to be mistaken for them, but because of the uncanny difference between it and humans" (R. Butler, 1999, pp. 36-7). The second order, occurring through the Industrial Revolution, is one based on the equivalence of sign and reality. Here, "The sign does not merely allude to the real via its difference from it, but wants to be the *same* as it" (pp. 37-8. Butler's emphasis). As a result of this equivalence, the copy or simulation is no longer a copy, but another original, even as all copies are also unoriginal (since they are copied), and the original loses its status as such. The metaphor offered for this is the assembly line, which aims to produce copies that are equal to the original (p. 38). In the third order, which has run since the Industrial Revolution, and continues to do so, the relationship between sign and the 'real' is once again based on a difference between the two, as in the first order. But crucially, in this third order, the 'real' itself is also simulated, and this is because of the status of the relationship that characterised the second order. There is a limit to how closely a copy can resemble the original before it cannot have a relationship with it. As in the second order, if the copy resembles the original too closely, it ceases to be a copy, but another original, because difference sustains resemblance as opposed to equivalence: "the copy only resembles the original insofar as it is different from it" (p. 25). The limits of resemblance, the distance between the sign and the real that allows it, are what is termed seduction,

precisely that "limit we cannot go beyond in our relationship to the other (another person, the real) if we still want to maintain a connection with it" (p. 72). Seduction is thus inscribed in the process of simulation: it both allows simulation and depends on simulation.

To take this model of simulation and seduction – of difference and resemblance, and their limits – and to apply it to the phenomenon of Elvis Impersonation suggests that the same kind of relationship is enacted between EIs, 'Elvis' and Presley as those in place between signs and reality in Baudrillard's writing. Just as the third order simulacrum gestures towards a real-which-is-simulated, the EI gestures towards an 'Elvis' which in turn implies the no-longer-authoritative Presley. The following is a diagrammatic representation of these relations:

$$\text{Simulacrum 3}$$

$$\text{Simulated real} = \frac{\text{Simulation}}{\cancel{\text{real}}}$$

$$\text{Elvis Impersonator}$$

$$\text{'Elvis'} = \frac{\text{'Elvis'}}{\cancel{\text{Presley}}}$$
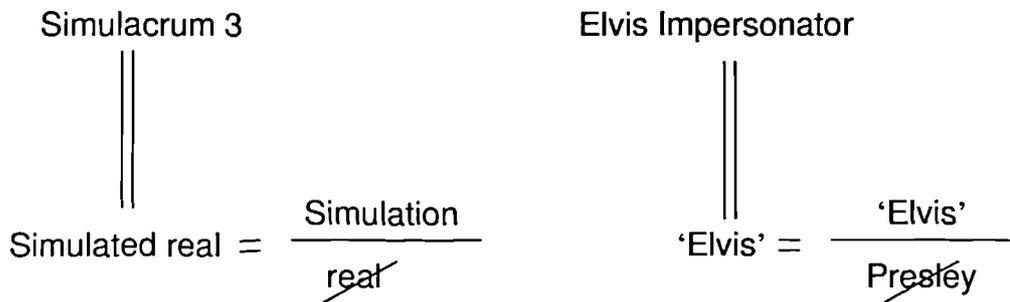
Figure 4.5
Elvis Impersonators as third order simulacrum

The structure of relations between the sign and 'reality' are the same in each case. The third order simulacrum (on the left) points to a simulated real, which equates to a simulation layered over an always-already erased real. Similarly, the EI points to the idea of Elvis, which equates to a nostalgic form of Elvis layered over an always-already erased Presley.

A similar process is at work in vocal impersonation. The impersonation voice gestures towards an idea of the original voice, but that original voice only represents an idea of the person who speaks or sings it, who again is always-already erased in the act of impersonation. This is because impersonation relies on the absence of the real-original, and the persistence only of an idea-of-the-original. Arguably, a body singing to impersonate an other will always fail in some respects, since a different body is present in the voice as it sings (see Barthes, 1999, p. 299). This failure is the difference between the copy and the original, the impersonator and the impersonated

– it is seductive in this way. The construction of an idea-of-the-original is a device to hide the seduction. The idea-of-the-original is itself different from the original, and has implicit in it its own layer of seduction. But the idea-of-the-original also poses as a bona fide original, and thereby leads to the illusion that the copy (impersonator) is equivalent to the original itself. Vocal impersonation is certainly nothing less than a Baudrillardian chain of simulacra. The relationships at stake here might usefully be illustrated by conceiving of the voice – the original, impersonated voice – as a randomly drawn scribbly line. (I am forgoing for a moment the problems implicit in the conception of that voice as in any way unproblematically singular or 'real', an issue that will be dealt with below.) The line should not be thought of in terms of pitch, amplitude, attack and decay, or any other aspect which might normally be considered when attempting to describe the qualities of a voice. Rather, it represents everything about a voice – it is all of the voice's characteristics, the voice as a whole, translated into a line, and I have called it Voice-Zero (V^0). The imitation of V^0 would not be represented by an exact copy of the line (see Figure 4.6) as the impersonator's own vocal qualities are always at risk of breaking through into the copy, representing a deviation from the original contour.
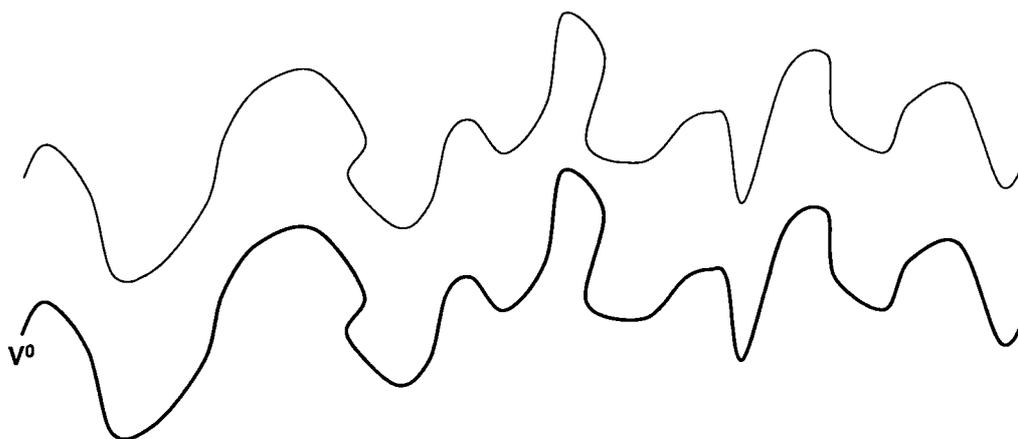

Figure 4.6
Invalid representation of impersonation

The imitation might be better represented by tracing the contours of the line as closely as possible (see Figure 4.7). As the line is traced again and again, its shape becomes less and less detailed, and less like the original. It retains the basic structure of the original line, with the major peaks and troughs still being perceptible in roughly the right area (marked by the black dotted lines), but the finer details are lost very quickly. The darker lines (V^3 and V^5) show the levels at which the troughs become overall upward gradients, and the peaks take on downward gradients (these

points are marked with dotted red lines). Eventually, the contours will be lost altogether, a flat line, not representing 'no voice', but a different voice altogether, perhaps only similar in pitch, gender, and/or regional accent (as examples).[21]
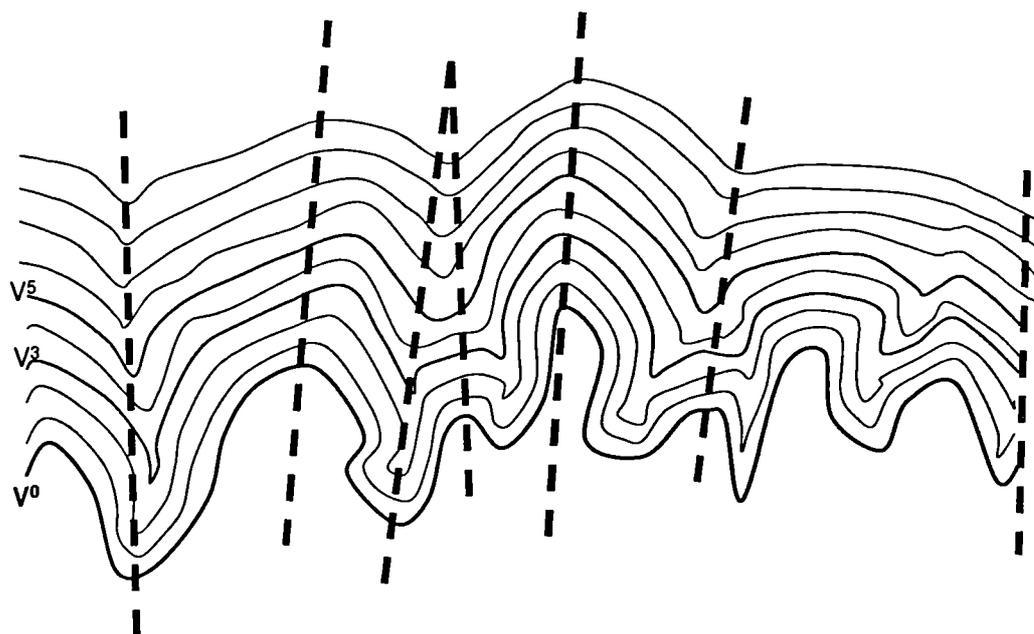

Figure 4.7
Levels of imitation of V^0

This diagram is not intended to represent the imitation of an imitation (of an imitation, *ad infinitum*), although this is worth considering as an aside. As I have already argued, Elvis Impersonation has increasingly erased Presley, and Elvis Impersonators are as much enacting an impersonation of other Elvis Impersonators as they are attempting to impersonate Elvis, which in itself already experiences a distance from Presley. The main aim of this diagram is to sketch out some kind of relationship between a voice and any given imitation of it that may occur, representing the imitation's distance from V^0. If V^0 in this case was Presley, we might place Jimmy Ellis ('Orion') quite close to that line, perhaps representing his voice as V^1 or V^2: Ellis's voice was strikingly similar to Presley's, as can be heard on his recording of 'If I Can Dream', for instance (see Tracks 7 and 8).[22] By contrast, Jarrow Elvis (who made little or no attempt to sound like Presley) might be placed somewhere above the top line of this diagram – V^∞, perhaps, as his voice was similar to Presley's only inasmuch as they were both male.

To relate this back to Baudrillard, simulation and seduction can also be illustrated by way of these lines and their relationship. Taking simply V^0 and V^1, we

can see that if V^1 represents a simulation, then the gap between V^0 and V^1 can be read as the realm of seduction:
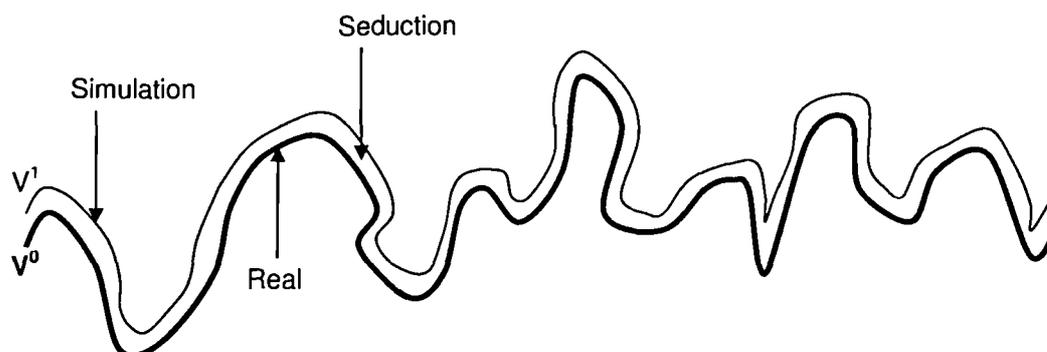
Figure 4.8
$V^1 - V^0 = seduction$

Crucially, what has not yet been factored in, if we are to consider this in terms of the third order simulacrum, is the already simulated nature in this case of V^0: there is no absolute and indisputable V^0. The act of impersonation may rely on the idea of a direct and strong line of connection between an original and the impersonated result, yet the enactment of this relationship also triggers a chain of signifiers. We therefore think not only of the original artist's most well-known performance of the song (presumably an album recording, or similar), but also of different performances of the same song by the artist (such as live or alternative versions), other songs performed by the artist, subsequent and previous performances of the same song by different artists, and so on. In the case of Elvis Presley, his catalogue of recordings is so vast – including live performances (on video as well as in audio formats), musical films, and collections of alternative takes – that the association between V^1 and V^0 is already extremely tenuous.[23] If we were then to re-consider the case of Jim Brown (The King), then V^0 almost ceases to exist, since Brown's efforts make more explicit the same erasure of the V^0 line that other impersonations rely on implicitly. Vocal impersonation relies on an adequate 'mental footprint' of the star in the minds of audience members, but not *too* adequate a footprint, lest the illusion be disrupted too often. That is to say, if the listener has too clear a memory, then the chasm of seduction becomes readily (uncomfortably?) apparent and conscious. It should be noted, however, that an (unconscious) acceptance of that same gap is almost certainly at work in Elvis Impersonation,

which often operates as a kitsch phenomenon in and of itself, with limited expectations as to the 'reality' of the impersonation.

The dubious existence of V^0 is part of the structure of vocal impersonation as third order simulacrum. We might more accurately consider V^0 to be doubled, in the way that simulation doubles the world (in the first order simulacrum). The diagrammatic representation of this might be as follows:
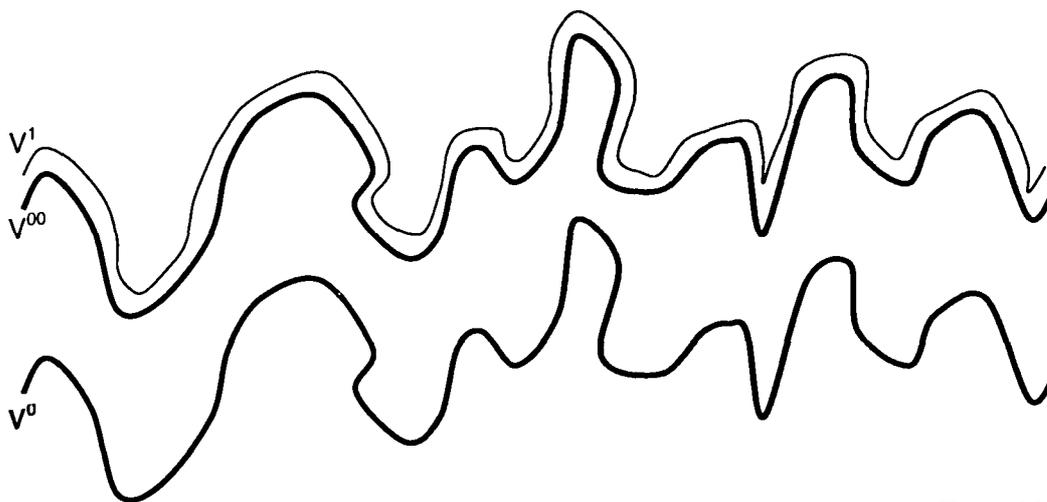

Figure 4.9
Doubling of V^0 to V^{00}

This doubling at work in the simulation of V^0, and the extent to which it is or is not accepted consciously, impact upon the cultural work performed by vocal impersonation. A noteworthy cross-reference might be made at this point from Elvis Impersonation to the prime-time show *Stars In Their Eyes* (ITV1, 1990-present), a show fuelled by the idea that a star's vocal presence can be recreated by another person. Scores of karaoke superstars have found their fifteen minutes of fame on *Stars* by 'becoming' a pre-established star, inserting themselves into a pre-existing text. The show is essentially competitive, with the studio audience voting for the most successful impersonation each week, and a live grand final at the end each series, where the weekly winners are pitted against each other at the mercy of the general public's telephone vote. Every week, the same reminder is given to the voters by presenter Matthew Kelly: that the sole factor to be considered when voting should be the success (or failure) of a contestant to mimic their chosen star *vocally*. Although the contestants are transformed visually for their performance – dressed like the star, encouraged to stand, move, and gesture like the star, perhaps even given a guitar to (pretend to) play – the show explicitly emphasises vocal impersonation, as opposed to physical imitation, and success is measured by the extent to which a star's

vocality is sensed as usurped. In this instance, the putative existence of a direct relationship between V^1 and V^0 is the very foundation of the programme, since without it the criteria by which success is judged collapse.

A video produced to celebrate ten years of *Stars In Their Eyes* provides a fascinating opportunity to see some of the processes of vocal impersonation at work, as we see juxtaposed three 'Celine Dions', two 'Frank Sinatras', three 'Chers', and three 'Tom Joneses'. The video-makers' point seems to be to show the popularity of certain stars, and demonstrate that the show is still exciting and entertaining even when the same star may be chosen in several series. Yet this section of the video reveals something much more interesting than that: that any given imitation of the same star may convince the audience at times, in certain ways, and by pointing to specific vocal characteristics of that star, but that there remains a constant threat of the impersonator's own vocality breaking through. Returning to the contours diagram, these few minutes of video may approximate to tracing V^0 several times over, and comparing the results:
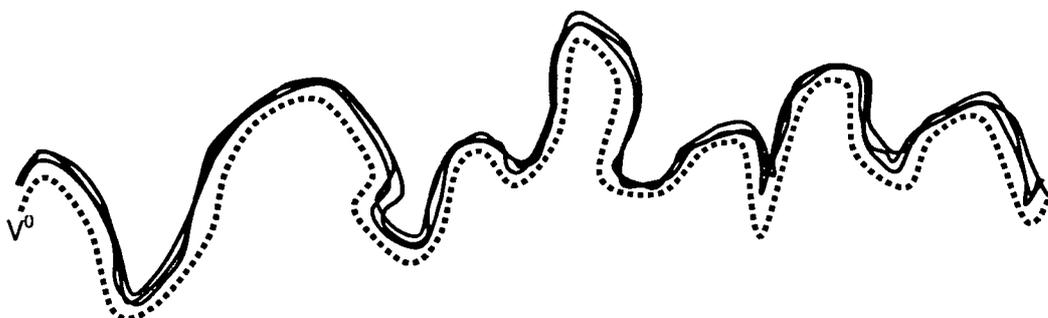
Figure 4.10
Comparing impersonations

There are points when each of the three lines (in this case, perhaps, Celine Dions) resembles most closely and least closely the original line (Dion herself), and all of the *Stars* contestants resemble it closely enough to win the approval of their audience on the night. Indeed, there may be moments at which V^0 and any of these V^1s seem to intersect. Clearly, however, none of the lines *is* V^0. If we then consider that V^0 is simulated, doubled as V^{00} (hence V^0 is marked in the above diagram as a dotted line), then it could be suggested that the three impersonating lines combine to circumscribe what we believe the (always-already lost) V^0 to be. Similarly, in certain cases of Elvis Impersonation, a great discrepancy exists between the original (or the idea of the original) and the impersonation, and it is up to the listener to pick out the key

signifiers of the original and use them to justify (or not) the impersonation. One of the most obvious cases of this is with female Elvis Impersonators. Despite the vocal restrictions of her biological sex, female Elvis Impersonator Janny James still manages to invoke something of 'Elvis' in her performance of 'All Shook Up' (2005; see Tracks 9 and 10). In fact, it seems that the oscillation between moments of 'success' and 'failure' is exactly what exposes what we understand Presley's voice to be. It is those points at which the listener can say, "That's not like Elvis", that the listener reveals what he believes 'Elvis' to be.

Yet the impersonating voice also brings into play a dialogue between the ego ideal and the alter-ideal, which in turn underlines the sense of identification between the two. An oscillation is initiated between them, in which presumptions are made as to how it feels to make a gesture (vocal or physical), and how one will be perceived when one generates that feeling, whether the result as perceived by one's audience will be equivalent enough to the results of the original gesture. This is further complicated vocally by the continuing dissociation between how one hears one's own voice, and how an outsider hears it. That discrepancy may be overcome with recording technology, albeit in the face (or ear) of resistance of the speaker, who refuses to claim the voice he hears played back as entirely his own. Even if this discrepancy can be negotiated through technology, any adjustments to be made are experimental as they happen. That is to say, if the playback of an imitating voice does not sound close enough to the voice being imitated, then when the imitator re-attempts the act of imitation, he must still wait for the playback to confirm or refute his success. While engaging in the act of imitation, the alter-ideal is always the goal to be achieved, while the ego ideal also shifts to incorporate the alter-ideal. That is to say, while imitating, one's own ego ideal is always constructed temporarily by way of the alter-ideal.

The loss of an Other, and the ego's subsequent relationship with it, is taken by Freud to represent part of the structuring of the ego, albeit with origins in the choice of sexual object:

> When it happens that a person has to give up a sexual object, there quite often ensues an alteration of his ego which can only be described as a setting up of the object inside the ego [...]; the exact nature of this substitution is as yet unknown to us. It may be that by this introjection [...], the ego makes it easier for the object to be given up or renders that process possible. It may be that this identification is the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects.

(1923, p. 19)

To summarise, Freud describes "an object which was lost [which] has been set up again inside the ego – that is, [...] an object-cathexis [...] replaced by an identification" (p. 18). The resonances with Elvis Impersonation are easy enough to sense. If we put to one side the sexual element of the process, it could easily be suggested that since Presley's physical death in 1977, he has assumed the role of the 'lost object', and has thus been 'set up' inside a global ego, such that the process described by Freud has almost occurred on a broader cultural level (see also J. Butler, 1999, p. 73). This may be a particularly crude and simplistic analogy to make, but using it as a tenuous starting point, certain other points of interest emerge. The process described above – the substitution of object-cathexis for identification – has its roots in Freud's writing in his 1917 essay 'Mourning and Melancholia', and in both essays Freud notes certain points of connection between this process and cannibalism:

> An interesting parallel to the replacement of object-choice by identification is to be found in the belief of primitive peoples, and in the prohibitions based upon it, that the attributes of animals which are incorporated as nourishment persist as part of the character of those who eat them. As is well known, this belief is one of the roots of cannibalism [...].
>
> (1923, p. 19, n2)

The allusion in the earlier essay is a passing one: "The ego wants to incorporate this object [which it has chosen] into itself, and, in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development in which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it" (1917, p. 587).[24] To take the analogy with Elvis Impersonation to the next stage, then, if we suggest that Presley represents on some level this chosen (and subsequently lost) object, then his 'consumption' by culture assumes a metaphorically cannibalistic aspect. It could easily be suggested that he has been 'devoured' by his audiences, both since his death and as served up by Tom Parker during his life. Again, it should be emphasised that the analogy must not be taken too literally. However, the idea that the over-exposure (and concomitant consumption) of a star results in a fall from distinction into mediocrity is not to be overlooked, and Freud's model might usefully be taken as a metaphor for some of the processes at work in the cultural over-consumption of Elvis. 'Elvis' represents the model taken to its logical extreme. To return briefly to the idea of the impersonating voice as uncanny, we could think of it also in terms of a substitute for a lost object. In the case

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of Presley, the live version of this voice was of course lost on his death. In a Baudrillardian sense, as I have argued, the voice as a thing to be reconstructed in impersonation is always-already lost. The impersonating voice is not simply a simulation, but a true fetishisation in its position as a proxy for the lost and desired object. In the impersonation of 'Elvis', EIs engage in a communal morbid fetishisation. The group nature of this effort is elucidated upon by one Elvis Impersonator, who says, "Far from being merely an oddity or a sideshow, the Elvis Impersonator is important for keeping alive an important cultural presence in American history, and that's the cultural presence of Elvis Presley" (*Almost Elvis*). Yet this putative sustenance of the 'cultural presence' of Presley is based entirely on the cultural slaying of Presley's 'true' cultural presence. His 'cultural presence' now is that which is created by the culture. If he has been consumed by culture, he has also been well and truly regurgitated.

4.3 Re/de/constructions of masculinity

If, as I have argued, Elvis Impersonation as a cultural phenomenon is part of a systematic (re-)construction of Presley into 'Elvis', an idea of Presley, then Presley's own relationship with masculinity – or at least this relationship *as constructed and mythologised* – is significant, and significantly impacted upon. Just as multiple impersonations of the same voice have the effect of delineating that which we believe the original to be (since the 'original' is in a sense always-already lost), then multiple enactments of a particular form of masculinity have an effect of (re-) constructing and (re-)inscribing that masculinity. A great deal may be said about the desirability of the body of Elvis Presley. If it is indeed only even approached in reproduction by Michelangelo's David (as noted above), we might presume that in this way it is also one of the most consumed bodies. Even if the reproduction of Presley's body is not always sexualised, or obviously put on display for sexual consumption, any reproduction will in some way motion towards (at least one of) the various bodies of Presley throughout his life. Moreover, although the body most often brought back into action, by EIs, is the bloated Elvis of the mid-seventies, the one for which he gained initial fame was the same one notoriously condemned by Ed Sullivan for its gyratory motions, a sexualised body apparently very aware of its position *as body*. Two interpretations of the intense physicality of early-Elvis's body are prevalent: first, that it was quite explicitly a motion intended to persuade his (female) audience into desiring him sexually; and second, that it was an 'innocent' expression of his powerful relationship with his music. It was on the basis of the former interpretation that Sullivan and others condemned his dance-style, and the latter which was given by Presley in his defence: "It's hard to explain Rock & Roll music. If you feel it, you can't help but move to it. That's what happens to me, I can't help it" (quoted in Stanley, 1998, p. 203). In an effective tactic, he further suggested that it was the church of his boyhood that taught him this physical relationship with music, thereby depriving the church critics of their instruments of condemnation: "'The preachers cut up all over the place, jumping on the piano, moving every which way,' Elvis told an interviewer in the mid-fifties. 'The crowd responded to them. I guess I learned from them'" (Marcus, 1991, p. 51).
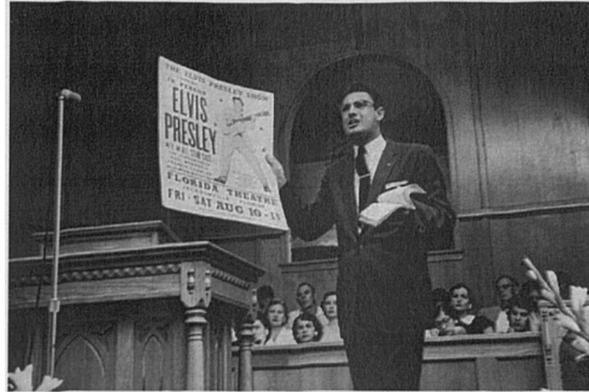
Figure 4.11
Baptist preacher Robert Gray denounces Presley
<http://www.life.com/Life/classicpictures/elvis/6.html> [Accessed 4 July 2005]

On the surface, the young Presley represents quite the archetypal Mulveyian male hero. Sue Wise writes: "Elvis's appeal is traditionally depicted as an appeal to young girls who, overwhelmed by his animal magnetism, were able to lose their sexual inhibitions and, albeit in the safety of a concert hall, 'respond' to being turned on by the male sexual hero" (1990, p. 392). Meanwhile, his male audience "identified with him and his supposed ability to 'lay girls' easily and without consequence" (p. 392). So, while young women are clearly intended to desire this Presley sexually, although remaining subject to his sexual powers, young men are to exalt him as a heroic representative of their sexual potential, and to desire only his capacity in this regard. The male body in action, deflecting the erotic gaze by "doing something" (Dyer, 1992, p. 270), maintains Presley's masculinised subject position in Mulvey's model: "A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are [...] not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego" (1992, p. 28).

Yet Mulvey's model also underlines the position of women as 'to-be-looked-at'. In classic Hollywood cinema, it is women that are fetishised and put on display for the male gaze. Thus, being positioned as 'to-be-looked-at' is a particularly female – or at least feminising – subject position. The male body on display is a curious thing, and Presley offers a particularly troublesome example of this throughout his career, in different ways. In terms of the display of Presley's masculinity, we must first acknowledge the uses and conventions of visual technology throughout his career. Despite Sullivan's initial protestations that he would never show the controversial singer (Stanley, 1998, p. 34), Presley appeared three times on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, and his first appearance, in 1956, drew an historic 82.6% of the

television audience (Guralnick, 1995, p 338). Yet his appearances were very obviously censored, as noted by critics the day after the first *Sullivan* appearance (p. 338). In one short clip from his appearance on the show in 1957, it is easy to see how Presley's sexuality is suppressed. Singing 'Too Much' (Track 11, video) he is – of course – shown only from the waist upwards, denying the home viewer any glimpse of the infamous pelvis. Until the guitar solo break, his movements are mostly stilted – almost certainly, he is aware of restrictions placed on his bodily expression. There are brief points at which his gestures seem to suggest a desire to move more than he does, but on the whole he remains within the boundaries placed upon him. At the beginning of the third verse, for example, a characteristic shudder across his upper body indicates a possible move into more substantial display, and very soon the shot is cut to one of Presley's shoulders and head. At the guitar break, however, Presley ceases to control himself, and begins to move passionately, swinging his arms, and (presumably) shaking his hips and legs also. He begins to click his fingers, and looks up with a cheeky, knowing smirk, at which point the camera cuts directly to a shot of the guitar being plucked. The audience's screams are all that is left to suggest what else is happening on stage, and Presley apparently manages to pull himself back in line in time for the penultimate verse. From then, he is generally more active than in the first verses, swaying further from left to right, and up- and down-stage. After a chuckle at the words "flip, flip" – has he been warned? – he contains himself briefly, only to veer further towards 'prohibited' movements, until the end of the song, which he closes with a final, joyous flourish. It may be that a reason apart from sexual conservatism played at least a minimal part in the physical restrictions apparently placed upon Presley. Excessive movement from left to right would inevitably be generated by too much gyrating, and this in turn would require either concurrent movement from the camera (unfeasible for physical and aesthetic reasons), or a wider shot of the stage, which would always include Presley's troublesome nether-regions. The technology may thus be considered as a further factor, although not necessarily a primary motivating cause for the physical constraints.

In modern music videos, traditional formulations of gender, display, and gaze are carefully sustained (if precariously at times) using such techniques as the filmed 'live' performance. Especially in rock acts, it has become almost clichéd for a video's 'narrative' to focus on a 'live' (or rather simulated-as-live) performance of the song, in front of a crowd of enthusiastic fans.[25] The camera's position typically

varies between being on-stage with the band, displacing the gaze and allowing male spectators easy access to the rock star's subject position, and being in the audience, seeing the lead singer parade in front of hordes of adulating fans. Meanwhile, because many of the fans are often pictured as female – drawing on the accepted model of male star/female groupie[26] – the viewer is persuaded to identify with that model, and conventional subject-positions are invited by both male and female viewers. The clip of Presley on *Ed Sullivan* is bound not to make use of the same strategies as modern music videos, for both technological and aesthetic reasons. Quite apart from the fact that music video as a definitive genre (as opposed to the co-incidence of music and visual texts) and its attendant modes of display (charts programmes such as BBC's *Top Of The Pops*)[27] have only enjoyed rapid development since Presley's death, the cumbersome nature of 1950s television cameras meant that to have a camera on-stage with Presley, looking out at the audience, would not have been entirely practical. Portable cameras that were suitable for synchronised sound were not developed until the 1960s, and would therefore have been unavailable at the time of shooting the clip in question. Undoubtedly, this represents a circular set of issues: the technology allows for certain visual approaches, while an underlying demand for a certain kind of filming technique may well motivate the development of capable technology. More significantly – since I am keen to avoid a technologically deterministic approach to the issues at stake – the very 'liveness' of the television performance should be taken into consideration. At the time of Presley's *Ed Sullivan* performances, television was primarily live in two senses: being aired in synchronisation with the filming; and very often in front of a live studio audience. Philip Auslander suggests that, partly because of television's theatrical history, early television producers consciously turned to theatrical models of visual representation rather than the cinematic style which has influenced modern music videos (1999, pp. 19-22).[28] Caren Deming concurs, arguing that the vaudeville tradition continues to inform the style of televised comedy (2005), and we might justifiably extrapolate this point to incorporate musical performances, since they too were a cornerstone of vaudeville entertainment. Finally, given the financial expense of television for the audience, it might also be supposed that watching another audience watching Presley would not have been a desirable convention in that era of television: home audiences had presumably tuned in to see Presley (and other acts), even if only from the waist up.

The overriding image, then, is of the gaze directed at Presley. For the most part, he in turn seems to be gazing out at his studio audience, but the home viewer is clearly positioned in alignment with that audience, through the positioning of the camera. Certainly, there are points at which he looks directly back at the camera, but these are few, and the looks are sexual and inviting, rather than defiant or powerful. The deflection of the gaze directed at Presley is, as Dyer would suggest, achieved through his action: he is a man 'doing something', which is singing. It is convenient in this sense that the camera turns away from him in the instrumental break, when the audience would be forced into holding a threatening gaze, as he would be 'doing less', and what he would be doing – 'gyrating', we can guess – is highly sexualised and feminised (see McClary, 1991, p. 153) which could render him the object of an erotic gaze. Gilbert Rodman summarises: Presley's "onstage behaviour celebrated the 'feminine' pleasures of the body over the more 'masculine' practices of the mind" (1996, p. 67). Furthermore, at those few moments where we do see Presley *not* singing, where his energies are focused on his own moving body, he generally looks downwards, attending to his body, a gesture traditionally configured as submissive and passive, and one which positions him quite notably as the object of an (almost) eroticised gaze.

Degeneration

Already, then, we are starting to see how Presley's own masculinity is problematic on several levels. Even this supposed epitome of rampant, uncontrollable virility, as the early Elvis is often figured, occupies a fluid position in terms of a gendered gaze. Furthermore, accounts of his physicality often describe him in feminising terms, outlining his ability (conscious or otherwise) to cross boundaries of gender representation. Much is made of his long, groomed hair, tended to by a beautician rather than a barber (Middleton, 1983, p. 165), and his penchant for eyeshadow (Guralnick, 1995, p. 108 and p. 124). In his pre-fame years, he is described as being obsessively concerned with his appearance, and as having a great fondness for stylish clothes (p. 50). In addition, "He was constantly fooling with his hair – combing it, mussing it up, training it, brushing the sides back" (p. 51), perhaps the ultimate signifier of his vanity.[29] Despite the repeated descriptions of the young Presley's capacity for androgyny and effeminacy (Rodman, 1996, pp. 67-71), the young Elvis is still frequently exalted as the apex of unequivocal masculinity (Wise, 1990, p.

392). Presley's relationship with masculinity has often been described in terms of a degeneration from the embodiment of virile masculinity to an impotent eunuch. Even the image of his sexualised body being forced into inhibition for television airing is a story of two characters: the uncontrollably physical Presley; and the sexually conservative authorities who tried to tame him. Cast as the great catalyst in the putative castration of this virile young specimen is 'Colonel' Tom Parker. Rogan Taylor describes it plainly when he writes how Parker "castrated Elvis artistically as effectively as Elvis's mother had castrated him emotionally" (1985, p. 183). Taking on the role of Presley's manager in 1955, Parker quickly established an Elvis brand, which was not founded upon the young man's physical expressivity, but on the effect he was capable of having. Instead, the story involves Presley's easily-avoidable conscription to the army, and the making of films criticised for being formulaic. The character that emerges from the US Military and the Hollywood studios, ready to make a musical 'comeback' in the late 1960s, is regularly configured as radically different from the young 'untameable' Adonis who, in 1958, was billed as being happy to do his 'national duty' for two years (see Stanley, 1998, p. 45).

The army conscription appears to be a turning point, and Parker – the motivating force behind the narrative of Elvis's story – is blamed for the effects of Presley's service:

> Indeed, fantastic though it sounds, it appears that Parker was the chief mover to instigate Elvis's disastrous call-up into the armed services in 1958. As John Lennon said, when he heard of Elvis's death, "Elvis died when he went into the army". It looks as if it was the Colonel who 'killed' him in this way, purely to further his manipulative intentions.
>
> (Taylor, 1985, p. 183)

Taylor goes on to accuse Parker of using the two years of Presley's absence from direct cultural activity to concoct "the perfect plan for translating Elvis the Pelvis into a watered-down combination of Dean Martin and Bing Crosby" (p. 183). Richard Cortliss sums up the transformation and sets Parker at the centre of the story: "Parker's determination to slip Elvis into the old show-biz mainstream effectively neutered the emperor of sexual and musical threat" (p. 81). What such various characterisations of Parker demonstrate is the sense in which not only Presley's physicality but also his musicality and creativity are seen to have 'degenerated' into a neutered or feminised form. As Richard Middleton notes, "most rock critics [see] Elvis's career as a progressive sell-out to the music industry, a transition from 'folk'

authenticity (the Sun singles of 1954-55) to a sophisticated professionalism (epitomised by the ballads and movies of the 1960s) in which the dollars multiplied but musical values went by the board" (1983, p. 155). Middleton is careful to identify how vocal styles run more coherently through Presley's career than is usually allowed for, across the putative divide between the Sun and RCA output (p. 164). But the point from which he starts demonstrates the weight carried by the dominant interpretation, of a shift in musical sound and style heralded by the move to RCA, which was facilitated (of course) by Parker (see Guralnick, 1995, pp. 224-7 and p. 229). Although he continued to perform many of his early hits until late into his career, the style of song performed did change overall, and many of his live performances throughout the 1970s included motivational ballads (such as 'My Way', 'American Trilogy', or 'Danny Boy'), or generally slower tracks which allowed for a greater use of his powerful vibrato (such as 'Spanish Eyes', 'And I Love You So', or 'Unchained Melody'). Robert Matthew-Walker sums up Presley's relationship in the 70s with his early hits, by commenting of his performances in June 1977, in Rapid City, "one cannot escape the suspicion that some of the earlier rockers are put in – in very abbreviated form – for old times' sake; the performances are little more than sketches, with hectic, garbled words" (1979, p. 106). The capacity for singing in the ballad style which the later Presley favoured may have been always present under the surface, as Middleton argues, but in allowing it to come to the fore, Presley missed the change in popular music heralded by the Beatles and ended up existing musically more in the manner of Bing Crosby or Dean Martin (as Taylor suggests), or Frank Sinatra ('My Way'), or Matt Monro ('Spanish Eyes'). Matthew-Walker demonstrates some concern about Presley's fading musical masculinity in his comments on 'Love Letters' (1966; Track 12), a cover of a Ketty Lester song from 1962: he describes it as "a magnificent performance" but concludes "it is difficult to accept this as a man's song" (1979, p. 69). Matthew-Walker offers no justification for this gendering of the song, although some presumptions could be made as to his reasoning. I would suggest, for instance, that the narrative of the song is outside of normative constructions of a male subject position. One senses, though, that perhaps a different rendition by Presley could have 'saved' the track from this gender 'mismatch'. Certainly, Matthew-Walker uses the term "manly" to describe Presley's recording of 'Indescribably Blue' in 1966 (although, again, he offers no definition of or justification for this term). Could a more 'manly' performance have

'rescued' 'Love Letters'? It seems that it did manage to save 'In The Ghetto', in which "Presley's manly voice has both authority and tenderness" (Matthew-Walker, 1979, p. 79). The song could easily have been described as "mawkishly sentimental", the words used to describe 'Don't Cry Daddy' (p. 78), recorded at the same session, but somehow the 'manliness' prevails. Also in the same session, Presley "reveals unsuspected depths in the lyrics of the Dean Martin hit 'Gentle On My Mind'. Presley is rugged as opposed to the bland sophistication of Martin" (p. 79). The gendered codes at work here are easy enough to sense, as they are in a connection drawn between expressive sexuality and the earlier recordings. Of 'Power Of My Love' (1969; Track 13), Matthew-Walker writes, "Solid and raunchy, Presley's performance is irresistible: full of sly innuendoes and *double-entendres*. There are a few singers who can manage this, yet it stems from the Presley of 1954/1955" (p. 81). Overall, it is clear to see a general conflation in perceptions of Presley's work between the early (Sun) recordings and a raw sensuality, and similarly between the later (RCA) recordings or live performances and over-sentimentality. At the same time, the gendered terms in which these musical experiences are described serve to outline a deterioration of masculinity over the course of Presley's career.

Ultimately, Parker acts as a metaphor for what is seen as a 'corporate castration' of Elvis (see Marcus, 1991, p. 32). Parker may have encouraged the national service, but the 'system' of the Army is also considered a player: it is notable that Lennon identifies the Army, not Parker, as the more direct facilitator of Elvis's 'death'. The 'system' of Hollywood also contributes,[30] and the change of record label is perhaps the final nail in the coffin. Parker sold Presley's contract to RCA, and the company is figured as part of an industry to which Presley apparently 'sold out'. Richard Middleton effectively dispels the myths surrounding the oft-alleged differences between Presley's early Sun recordings and the RCA catalogue, but outlines those myths first: "All too often commentators stress a change in 'sound' (for example, the 'primitive' – hence 'authentic' – acoustic of the Sun records giving way to the 'sophisticated' – hence 'manipulative' – methods of RCA, with their more elaborate use of amplification, vocal backing groups, strings)" (1983, p. 156). Although a combination of decisions obviously contributed to the change seen in Presley (and constructed in the myths of Elvis), Parker is positioned in the story as the orchestrator of those decisions. In Taylor's shamanistic retelling of the story, Presley is a "youthful apprentice", with all the hallmarks of a shaman in the making:

an only child with a psychic twin;[31] an increasing sense of his own importance; and, starting in his mid-teens, sleepwalking with strange and powerful dreams (Taylor, 1985, p. 180; see also Guralnick, 1995, p. 269). As Taylor argues, these are some of "the traditional signs that, in a shamanistically-orientated society, would have clearly marked him out as a prospect for magical initiation" (1985, p. 180). In this Elvis-as-shaman version of the story, Parker is still cast in the same old role of the destroyer of Elvis's potential. Typically, Parker's experience in the carnival industry is offered as evidence of his manipulative capitalist expertise (Guralnick, 1995, p. 169 and p. 190). For Taylor, Parker takes on a much darker version of a similarly manipulative role, with his carnival background affording him similar qualifications:

> Elvis-the-apprentice got hooked up to Tom-Parker-the-master. [...] For Elvis, Parker was a malevolently modern version of a classic 'black' shaman. It was he alone who ensured Elvis remained forever the youthful apprentice. Parker pickled Elvis in adolescence, and Elvis never developed the courage to throw off this parasite that so limited his growth. [...] He lost his soul to Tom Parker and he never got it back.
>
> (1985, p. 182)[32]

The distended Presley of the mid-70s, then, is figured as an extension of the 'castration' or 'soul-catching' which Parker enacted at Elvis's expense.

Crucially, it is partly his 'unfortunate' degeneration that has allowed Presley's posthumous relevance. It is important to note that the majority of EIs focus on the last decade of Presley's life for their choice of material. Certainly, the stereotype of EIs is an overweight, middle-aged, sequined-jumpsuit-clad man, not someone decked out in the bolero jacket and dress trousers that characterised Presley's early style, or even the iconic gold-lamé suit from a few years later. The Las Vegas performances of course offer a great spectacle, a sweet-shop full of treats for imitation: the visually enticing jumpsuits; the accompanying capes; the grand musical gestures; the karate-inspired moves. Why, though, do EIs turn more to this later showmanship than to the devastatingly intriguing moves of the young Presley, the likes of which had not been seen before? Part of the answer may be found in the gendered implications of each stage of Presley's career. Marjorie Garber astutely identifies the cultural processes at work that have allowed for the continuing circulation of 'Elvis', and in doing so opens up certain significant gendered functions. Noting that the word 'impersonator' is most commonly prefixed by the words 'Elvis' and 'female', Garber compares the capacity for each to be subjected to systematic disembodiment:

Why is 'Elvis', like 'woman', that which can be impersonated? From the beginning Elvis is produced and exhibited as parts of a body – detachable (and imitable) parts that have an uncanny life and movement of their own, seemingly independent of their 'owner': the curling lip, the pompadour, the hips, the pelvis [...].

(1992, p. 372)

Gilbert Rodman expands on Garber's initial observation, by arguing that it is his capacity for androgyny that allows for the circulation of Elvis-as-parts. The logic that Garber's argument is founded on, Rodman argues, "applies to Elvis only because his sexual persona is sufficiently feminine to make such appropriation feasible" (1996, p. 70). The key difference is this:

When, for example, Elvis is reduced to a hairstyle, that detached part still signifies a named and identifiable whole body; when a woman is reduced to a hairstyle, however, that detached part typically works to transform the woman in question into an anonymous and interchangeable object (e.g., a blonde, a redhead, a brunette).

(p. 71)

To take the argument further, I would suggest that the story of his 'castration' deprives 'Elvis' of any last vestiges of significant masculinity. Thus, it is not just that he is 'sufficiently feminine' as to enable this widespread fetishisation, but that he is in a sense devoid of any markers of sex. The tendency to impersonate Presley in his later years may be founded upon the androgynous potential that was fulfilled in the body of the deteriorating Presley, by virtue of its emasculation. Finally, in the repeated impersonation of this later Elvis, the detached body parts become part of a comic project: elements of an already-castrated Elvis are not just imitated, but parodied, and Elvis Impersonation of this kind thus colludes in Elvis's continued castration.

A paradox exists at the heart of the impersonation of the late-Vegas-years Elvis. It is not the "more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego" of which Mulvey writes that is being imitated, that might be represented by the early Elvis – quite the contrary. Why, then, the proliferation of Vegas-years-EIs? Perhaps the young Presley is *too* ideal. Arguably, because of his unprecedented nature at the time of his early fame, it is significantly more difficult to capture effectively the 'essence' of 'Elvis' encapsulated by that body. Access is thus deflected to the Vegas Elvis, who may retain a little 'ideal-ness' by association. The passing of time has seen more EIs offering 'the early years', often as part of a 'complete Elvis package', in which 'all eras of Elvis' are offered by a single EI.[33] Yet the EIs still persist in offering to

emulate arguably the most undesirable of Elvi, and re-enact the performances of 'the castrated King'.

Part of the effect of this may be to deflect the homoerotic threat posed by the early Presley. Where there is a line of identification, there is arguably the potential for a level of desire to invade, whether that is knowingly sexualised or not. The line between identification and desire may always be ready to be crossed, but Presley may be especially well-equipped to push one over that line because of the position he occupied as an androgynised epitome of male desirability:

> In the opening scene of the 1993 film *True Romance* [...], Clarence Worly (Christian Slater) perches on a stool in an anonymous, rundown bar. Addressing his comments to no one in particular, he soliloquises about 'the King'. Simply put, he asserts, in *Jailhouse Rock* (1957), Elvis embodied everything that rockabilly is about. 'I mean', he states, 'he is rockabilly. Mean, surly, nasty, rude. In that movie he couldn't give a fuck about nothin' except rockin' and rollin' and livin' fast and dyin' young and leavin' a good lookin' corpse, you know.' As he continues, Clarence's admiration for Elvis transcends mere identification with the performer's public image. He adds, 'Man, Elvis looked so good. Yeah, I ain't no fag, but Elvis, he was prettier than most women, most women.' He now acknowledges the presence on the barstool next to him of a blank-faced, blonde young woman. Unconcerned that his overheard thoughts might have disturbed her, he continues, 'I always said if I had to fuck a guy – *had to* if my life depended on it – I'd fuck Elvis.' The woman concurs with his desire to copulate with 'the King', but he adds, 'Well, when he was alive, not now.'
>
> (Sanjek, 1997, pp. 137-8. His emphasis)

The point at which "Clarence's admiration transcends mere identification" points to the pre-existence of such identification, while the rest of the quote clearly points to the potential for sexual desire here. Perhaps similar tensions and tropes come into play with Presley as may be in place with Madonna (see Chapter 2, Figures 2.24 and 2.25. Desire and ego-identification undergo a moment of extreme fusion (and confusion), and Sedgwick's male homosocial continuum (1985) is traversed in a style closer to that of Rich's lesbian continuum (see Chapter 2, section 2.4).[34] Presley's body undoubtedly represents a site for the negotiation of desire and identification, for men and women of any gendered persuasion, and the Elvis Impersonation phenomenon brings this very much to the fore.

Perhaps the most interesting facet of the phenomenon is that it extends so far beyond practice by straight, white, adult males. Many such EIs exist, of course, but there are a significant number of EIs who come to Elvis from a position far removed from Presley's own position. Naturally, issues pertaining to Presley's class –

described as "poor white trash" (Guralnick, 1995, p. 24) – and his Southern-ness (see Brock, 1992; and Pratt, 1992) arise. Were we to consider these two factors, we might be seeking counterparts in 'Midwestern Elvis', 'East Coast Elvis', 'Aristocratic Elvis', or 'Middle Class Elvis'. Examples like the first two suggested do exist, to an extent, in the adverts of EIs who bill themselves "Mississippi's favorite", "New York's King", or "Minnesota's Elvis".[35] Often, however, these taglines are devices to identify the locality of the EI in question, rather than acting as statements of an identity which is part of the impersonation act. That is to say, we should not expect anything idiosyncratically 'New-Yorkian' to inflect consciously the New York King's performance. Given this, and the simple non-existence (to my knowledge) of EIs playing deliberately on their socio-economic backgrounds, I have chosen to ignore the factors of class and location within the US. As significant as they may be, a wide range of other identities find themselves superimposed on what has seemingly become the emptied-out vessel of Elvis, and arguably with greater impact in terms of the cultural work being done.

To consider first the aspect of race, a fascinating variation is to be found in the form of Black Elvis. I have found two EIs who bill themselves as 'Black Elvis'. American Bibby Simmons displays a trophy to demonstrate a somewhat dubious achievement (dubious because of the lack of obvious competition), bearing the inscription "World's No. 1 Black Elvis".[36] Apart from the initial description of himself as "the rocktastic *Black Elvis!*", the website of London-based Colbert Hamilton seems to make more of his Elvis-ness than of his blackness, using music- (and specifically Elvis-) associated achievements to qualify Hamilton as an EI (<http://www.blackelvis.co.uk>, last accessed 4 July 2005. His emphasis). The idea of a black Elvis is especially interesting given the racial discourses which shaped early responses to Presley's act. The racial divisions in popular music in the mid-50s are well-known. Radio stations were classified according to whether they played 'race music' or 'white music' (see Douglas, 1999, pp. 90-99), and the division extended into the circulation of recorded music. As part of a slow process of deterioration of the social divisions between blacks and whites, music became a site for the negotiation of some of the prevailing discourses. Possibly one of the most well-known (and probably misquoted) music quotes is the pre-Presley statement of Sun producer Sam Phillips, astutely identifying the tensions between the musical demands and the socially enforced prejudices of white audiences: "If I could find a

white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars" (quoted in Marcus, 1991, p. 52).[37] It is equally well-inscribed in popular music history that Presley was the man to end Phillips' search. The pioneering recording that was 'That's Alright Mama' caused Phillips to ponder, "it's not black, it's not white [...] where do we go from here?" (quoted in Guralnick, 1995, p. 99). The impact of the single, released with a version of the country song 'Blue Moon Of Kentucky' on the reverse side, seems to indicate the accuracy of Phillips' initial famous observations. Marion Keisker, secretary at the Sun records office, mused: "both sides seem to be equally popular on popular, folk, and race record programs. This boy has something that seems to appeal to everybody" (quoted in Guralnick, 1995, p. 108). The intriguing thing about Black Elvi as EIs is the reflexivity they inject into the modern experience of 'Elvis'. The connection is not quite so obvious with Bibby Smith, but photographs of Colbert Hamilton reveal the legacy of Little Richard in Presley's existence (see Figure 4.12).

Figure 4.12
Colbert Hamilton (left) and Little Richard (right)

In terms of the contours of masculinity to be sensed here, a profusion of gendered inflections intermingle in this one figure. To start with Presley, we already have his youthful androgynous appeal to contend with. Layered over that is the emasculated personage of the Vegas years, although this might be in the background of the gender mix as Hamilton strikes a distinctly 50s-Elvis pose, and wears the lamé suit, and thus also connects us with Little Richard chronologically. Little Richard's

brand of masculinity then comes into play: "In bizarre pancake make-up and flashy clothes, he belted out songs like a man possessed. [...] He appears to exist on the very borderlines between outright homosexuality and ordinary masculinity" (Taylor, 1985, p. 174). The ambiguity of his gendered identity seems to have pervaded his musical performance as well as his choice of costuming: "the almost incredible range of his voice [...] gives the impression that when men's and women's voices were handed out, Little Richard somehow got both" (p. 175). Yet behind any attempt to unpack Little Richard's gendered identity must be a consideration of him as a black man. As Judith Halberstam observes, "Arguments about excessive masculinity tend to focus on black bodies (male and female)" (1998, p. 2). If we take black masculinity to signify something more 'intensely masculine' than white masculinity, what is embodied in the above picture is a black (read, 'over-intensely-masculine') man claiming to pay tribute to a white man who blurred racial and gendered boundaries but who was equally accused of racial colonisation,[38] with the ultimate effect of resembling an ambiguously-gendered and -sexualised black man (one of the white middle-man's 'victims' of colonisation).

Turning from here to Chinese Elvi presents some equally interesting fluidity in terms of gender construction. Unlike Black Elvi, Chinese Elvi are apparently plentiful. EI Paul Elvis Chan nonchalantly reveals, "Some of the other Chinese Elvises are my friends, but I am the original Chinese Elvis since 1988" (quoted in Rohrer, 2002). Paul 'The Wonder Of' Hyu, a Chinese Elvis himself, has even spawned his own tribute act: Harvey Harris, the Non-Chinese Chinese Elvis.[39] The Chinese-ness is ultimately more or less entirely erased, since Harris offers very little to explain how he is a 'Chinese Elvis' without actually being of Chinese heritage. Nonetheless, Harris may represent the integration of an emerging cultural trope of 'Chinese Elvis'.[40] By way of contrast with the black body, a site of anxieties surrounding excessive masculinities, the Asian body is instead commonly figured as insufficiently masculine (Halberstam, 1998, p. 2). Paul Hyu himself identifies, "I believe that Chinese people are not sexually threatening in the West" (quoted in Rohrer, 2002).[41] In a variation on the confusion caused by Black Elvis, Hyu, Chan and other Chinese Elvi represent oriental (read, 'sexually non-threatening', 'insufficiently masculine') men reviving the image of an uncontainable and absolutely threatening sexual presence embodied in androgynous terms who has ultimately been figured as castrated and therefore non-threatening. In this way,

perhaps Chinese Elvi play out what is at work in Elvis Impersonation in most forms: the repeated emphasis on the non-threatening sexuality of Elvis. Pre-adolescent Elvi seem to carry equal fascination: six-year-old Steven Pelleriti and seven-year-old Sean Sharp are just two examples.[42] Pelleriti and Sharp offer an unequivocally anti-sexual Elvis for consumption: to attribute any kind of sexual identity to child EIs would overstep widely-accepted sexual boundaries. The steady popularity of non-sexual EIs seems to me to be something of a hysterical response to the sexual 'threat' posed by Presley in the first place, a hyperbolic extension of the story of his initial supposed 'artistic castration'. Accepting the conspiracy theory momentarily, it is not enough that Tom Parker colluded with the US Army, Hollywood, and RCA to castrate Presley in his lifetime. Neither is it sufficient to insist on the replaying of the already-castrated Elvis in the bodies of other fat middle-aged men. What is needed in order to finish the man off is a profusion of Chinese and child EIs, who in adult Western society represent a minimal sexual threat.

Another radical reformulation of 'Elvis' can be found in the female Elvis Impersonator. The female EI potentially offers a similar formulation of Elvis to that cast by Chinese and Child Elvi, defusing any possible remaining sexual threat posed by 'Elvis' himself. Yet artists such as the American lesbian Elvis Herselvis and the British EI Janny James present something with much more potential in terms of understanding Elvis Impersonation and constructions of gender (both as two separate issues and as interweaving phenomena). Assuming for a moment no other imposing identity factors – presuming that the female EI in question is white and adult – the female EI, of all the EIs, arguably brings the questions of the construction of masculinity most obviously to the foreground in Elvis Impersonation. We may already accept gender as performative, as a cycle of 'repeated imitations', but the female EI forces this upon the spectator, donning a series of signifiers of a particular kind of masculinity. This observation of course draws on a long history of drag kinging and 'male impersonation' which, as I have noted previously (see Chapter 2, section 2.1), stretches back visibly at least as far as the late-nineteenth-century and, crucially, exposes the "theatricality of masculinity" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 232). But the specific example of female Elvis Impersonation is arguably even more self-consciously 'performative' than a non-specific drag king, because it references a particular man, and the implication of his particular gendered position. What emerges in the initial images of Janny James and Elvis Herselvis is a struggle between the

possible threat posed by the drag king, as trying to lay claim to a hegemonic masculinity, and the ultimately non-threatening figure of any female-to-male transformation. FTM drag does not signify a woman with abject castrating power, but an already-castrated being. In this way, the threat to hegemonic masculinity is essentially defused, an effect only added to by the underlying comic role played by Elvis Impersonation in modern culture.

Elvis Herselvis consciously adds another layer to the performance of 'Elvis', because she is openly a lesbian. The drag king figure of the female EI already invites the audience to question the sexuality of the performer, since it is women's Mulveyian duty to want to be *with* Presley, not *be him*. Moreover, female masculinity and lesbianism tend to be conflated (see Halberstam, 1998, p. 46 and p. 119), even if this is not always appropriate. Yet to acknowledge her lesbianism in her act is still an important factor. Part of this is what the woman behind Elvis Herselvis, Leigh Crow, identifies as the role of 50s and 60s male icons in lesbian culture:

> Men had a little more glamour then. Elvis was very primped and had a definite feminine side. The fifties and sixties teen idol works for dykes because they were the sensitive rebels, the little boy lost. It works into a not really butch image but a very dreamy one. Elvis is going to become the dyke icon like Marilyn is for the boys. Like k. d. lang, the whole image that she's got, I think that's where it came from.
>
> (quoted in Bashford, 1997)

What seems to be at work here, then, is a sub-cultural demand for the reconstruction of a particular gender formation, the 'sensitive rebel', 'little boy lost', embodied also by James Dean or Marlon Brando, for instance. It is of note, then, that Crow chooses the early Presley in her experimentation with lesbian and male formulations of gender. Although she declares a hope to portray Presley in his three most famous incarnations (Young Elvis, Hollywood Elvis, and White Jumpsuit Elvis), Crow also identifies the particular cultural power acquired by playing with the early Elvis image: "The original Presley prototype however was more of a cultural terrorist [than the bloated and burnt-out 'whalevis' [*sic*]], a 'dangerous boy who was crossing the race barrier, the sex barrier and scaring all the people'. Consequently this is the Elvis that Crow prefers to interpret" (Bashford, 1997, quoting Crow). The added dimension of her lesbian identity arguably affords Crow a great capacity to follow in Presley's footsteps. Replaying just some of that 'scariness' in the body of a lesbian surely increases the risk involved.

An especially interesting EI is El Vez, mentioned above as 'Mexican Elvis'.

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Yet this identification of the act of Robert Lopez does not reveal the extent to which El Vez engages with several key issues in the impersonation of Elvis. First, the idea of a Mexican Elvis is, for Lopez, already implicit in Presley's own work: "When he was a child, Lopez maintains, the style Elvis adopted in movies like *Roustabout* made him think that 'Elvis must be Latino, like me. He looks like my uncles!'" (Rubin, 2003, p. 213, quoting Lopez). He appears determined in his image to fuse the two identities, Elvis-ness and Mexican-ness, juxtaposing obvious signifiers of each (see Figure 4.13).
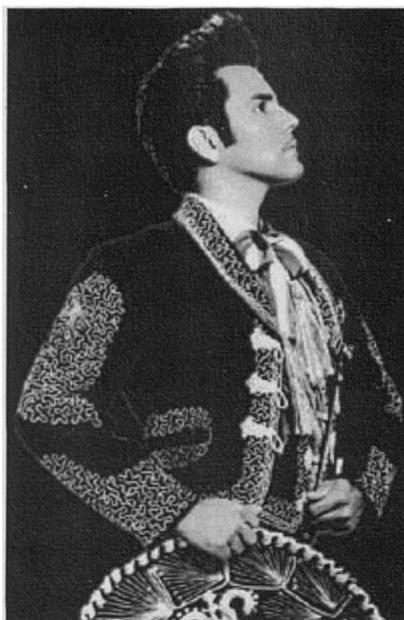

Figure 4.13
El Vez

Furthermore, he works the idea of Mexican-ness into the impersonation act in a direct way, as he reworks some of Presley's most famous songs (hence, 'Esta Bien Mamacita', 'You Ain't Nothing But A Chihuahua', and 'Mexican American Trilogy') and album titles (*G.I. Ay, Ay! Blues* (1996)). Interestingly, the moustache he wears – in a stereotypically 'Mexican' style – is drawn on with marker pen, exposing the constructed-ness of both gender and ethnicity. So, layered here already are notions of Presley's masculinity – and, I suspect, primarily that of his earlier years, given El Vez's quiff – and notions of Latino masculinity which, as Alfredo Mirandé argues, are linked with negative models of *machismo* (1997, p. 66). Given his pro-Mexican stance – "When people leave an El Vez show, I want them to be happy to be Mexican even if they're not" (quoted in Rubin, 2003, p. 213) – it could be suggested that Lopez is attempting to use a positive image of masculinity,

signified by the early Presley, to boost the image of a national masculinity which has a distinctly negative media image. In this respect, it becomes particularly notable that Lopez identifies his sexuality as different from El Vez's: "I'm gay, but El Vez is straight" (quoted in Rubin, 2003, p. 214). Perhaps homosexuality, as an identity with attendant gender implications (however stereotyped they may be), would complicate the matter too much for Lopez (and/or his audience). In his act, he takes on a number of social issues, "safe sex, immigration policy, gender roles, Chicano pride" (Rubin, 2003, p. 214), some of which are clearly highly relevant to a gay audience. Yet the overriding sense is of a Mexican Elvis, not a Gay Elvis, and this has interesting implications for any understanding of what Elvis 'means' here.

I have already noted some of the ways in which rap artists collude (unwittingly?) in a kind of gender nostalgia, attempting to (re-)construct a hegemonic masculinity which is always-already lost. A similar effect is achieved by the female EI, and Crow might suggest that the nostalgic longing for a particular gender formation is part of both her Elvis-ness and her lesbianism, placed at the intersection of the two identities. Judith Butler writes:

> To claim that all gender is like drag, or is drag, is to suggest that "imitation" is at the heart of the *heterosexual* project and its gender binarisms, that drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, but that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations. That it must repeat this imitation, that it sets up pathologizing practices and normalizing sciences in order to produce and consecrate its own claim on originality and propriety, suggests that heterosexual performativity is beset by an anxiety that it can never fully overcome [...]. In this sense, then, drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality.

(1993, p. 125)

This would seem to suggest that hegemonic gender operates in the manner of a third order simulacrum, inasmuch as 'gender' is always simulated, even as it attempts to naturalise its hegemonic formations and suggest that there is a 'genuine original'. The always-already-lost-ness of 'Elvis' and Presley's problematic construction of his own masculinity (as mythologised as that is) are crucial to what makes him an ideal site for the contemporary negotiation of masculinity, and in particular the negotiation of masculinity-as-construct.

Whatever intersection of subject positions comes to Elvis Impersonation, the construction of masculinity is always inevitably held up for close scrutiny. A white,

straight, adult male appears as if in drag, while desperately trying to achieve something of the zenith of hegemonic masculinity that he believes Elvis to represent, although that is quite clearly a problematic assumption to make given the frequent acknowledgements of Presley's effeminacy or androgyny. Black (straight, adult male) EIs expose the legacy of black musicians in Presley's early work, while also bringing racialised gender discourses into play and offering a rapid oscillation between over-determined and under-determined masculinity. Chinese Elvi and child Elvi have effects similar to each other, in defusing the sexual threat posed by the figure of the young Presley, and this may well be at the heart of the Elvis Impersonation phenomenon as a whole. Female (white, adult) EIs bring the constructed-ness of masculinity right to the top of the agenda, despite masculinity's attempts to naturalise itself (Halberstam, 1998, p. 234). Specifically lesbian EIs further add to the distinct queerness of the phenomenon. I eagerly await the emergence of other Elvi, intersecting the identities already at work: Chinese Girl Elvis or Female Black Elvis would certainly be interesting places to start. Whatever other recastings of Elvis we are treated to, what remains at the heart of the Elvis Impersonation phenomenon is the emptied out, always-already-lost 'Elvis', his emptiness and castration continually – hysterically – assured by the practice itself. It is the emptiness that sustains the phenomenon, since it allows the pouring in of whatever gender (or other identity) formation one wishes, and it is this that makes Elvis Impersonation so decidedly and inevitably queer.

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[1] Lynn Spigel takes the religious elements to Elvis's continuing presence and describes EIs as "medium[s] who [channel] the spirit of a savior" (1990, p. 193). Gilbert Rodman notes how, for Spigel, "These performers [...] serve as a conduit between the spirit of Elvis and gatherings of his fans" (Rodman, 1996, p. 113).

[2] Originally by Stevie Ray Vaughan, 1989.

[3] Derived from an identical moment in Presley's 'Baby, Let's Play House' (1955).

[4] This is a very specific feature, rarely heard in EIs. It is, however, a distinctive identifying vocal gesture and is therefore worth mentioning here. EI Jesse Aron's performance of 'Rags To Riches' makes use of this element. It may be compared to Presley's 'Wooden Heart' (1960), at the line "'Cos I don't have a wooden heart" (before the first German-language section) and with "Oh how much I need you" in the first bridge of 'I Gotta Know' (1960). The pronunciation of "I" sounds from the very front of the mouth, as an "iiy", as if it has travelled from the very back of the throat. This is in contrast to the Southern-accented "aaa" pronunciation of the phoneme, which tends to characterise at least the speech of many EIs, and often their song also. Essentially, EIs usually put this effect in wherever Presley did, as part of an overall attempt to replicate the diction and delivery of the Presley original, as well as the timbre and grain of his voice. Compare Presley's 'Wooden Heart' with that by female EI Janny James (2005).

[5] It should be noted that when we look at or listen to ourselves from 'outside', as with the video recording or played-back voice, we will not see or hear *exactly* as the Other does, for at least two reasons: first, because we know that we are seeing or hearing ourselves, we are unable to experience it

objectively; second, we see or hear the event through the eyes of someone suffering abjection, and this will inevitably contribute to the impossibility of perceiving the event in question objectively. For the purposes of simplicity, however, I will not maintain this problematisation in following work.

[6] If the sounding voice has the potential to generate psychological effects similar to those produced by the mirror image, is there a vocal equivalent to the photographic image? To take it literally, the 'still' voice might be the written word, which might also bring some sense of abjection. On re-reading his own written work, for example, an author may feel some aversion – again, a sensation which may decrease with practice.

[7] It should be noted that the clean-cut teen-idol that was Presley between his release from the Army in 1960 and his 1968 'Comeback' is also occasionally replicated by EIs. The large number of film projects he was involved in held back his musical career at this point, despite many of the films featuring Presley singing. Many releases were songs from his films, including 'Blue Suede Shoes' (*G.I. Blues*, dir. Taurog, 1960), 'Can't Help Falling In Love' (*Blue Hawaii*, dir. Wallis, 1961), and 'Return To Sender' (*Girls! Girls! Girls!*, dir. Wallis, 1961). Perhaps the emphasis on film narrative, and the relative lack of success of his cinematic efforts, make 'Movie Elvi' comparatively unpopular choices among EIs. *The King Of Las Vegas Show* (16 August 2005) did however include 'The Movie Years'. See <http://www.elviselviselvis.com> [Accessed 22 August 2005].

[8] Here, we might understand a 'successful' impersonation to be one which is validated by the audience.

[9] I am still using this acronym to denote Elvis Impersonators, despite 'EI' also being able to stand for Elvis Implication.

[10] The pink hippo George was quite clearly almost-gay; the 'rainbow' itself might be taken as a knowing reference to a symbol of gay pride; Zippy, George, and Bungle – all male characters – shared a bed. The camp qualities of the show were brought into effect partly through such allusions to homosexuality and homosexual culture, which operated at a level beyond that of the young children for whom the show was primarily intended. Moreover, as per Sontag's comments, these aspects are seen more clearly with historical distance.

[11] See the definition at wikipedia.com.

[12] *Are You Being Served?* BBC1, 1972-85.

[13] For example, see < http://www.elviscontest.co.uk> [Accessed 22 August 2005].

[14] My thanks go to Ms. Cullagh Warnock for this helpful description.

[15] A similar effect is brought about by the costuming of Liberace. Compare the cover of Presley's *An Afternoon In The Garden* (1972) with plate 15 – Liberace spreading his cape – in Meyer, 1992. See also Garber, 1992, pp. 353-374. The similarity has also been briefly noted by Guilbert (2002, p. 118).

[16] Ginger Gilmore, Elvis Herselvis, Amy Beth Parrabano, Patty Elvis, and Toni Rae are just five of many female EIs.

[17] I am not here suggesting that respect is necessarily due to Presley, simply by virtue of his status as cultural icon (during his life or since his death). Rather, I am pointing out that ETAs may operate with a sense of derision, aimed at Presley('s iconic status) or at the notion of their activity.

[18] Indeed, the visual element of Elvis Impersonation also contributes to this effect, especially (but not solely) if an EI offers multiple eras of Elvis in the act.

[19] See Lacan's reference to the Borromean knot, a group of three (or more) rings which are linked such that if any one is broken, all three become disconnected. Lacan's formulation of Borromean knot demonstrates the interdependence of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. The *objet petit a* is placed at the centre of the knot (see Evans, 1996, pp. 18-20).

[20] Perhaps this has something to do with why, vocally, the majority of EIs perpetuate the middle-aged voice of Presley in the mid-70s.

[21] The association between a flat line and death – the flat line represents an asystolic state: cardiac standstill with no cardiac output – may also be worth noting here.

[22] The similarity between his voice and Presley's proved to be something of a double-edged sword for Ellis, when seeking out his own independent career during Presley's lifetime: see <http://www.orionjimmyellis.com> [Accessed 22 August 2005].

[23] See the collection *Such A Night* (2000), or note that the *Aloha From Hawaii* concert was pre-recorded the night before a live transmission, 'just in case'.

[24] The ego is 'in' the oral phase of development inasmuch as it has regressed to this stage as part of its melancholic state.

[25] For a handful of examples, see the following videos to accompany songs by Bon Jovi: 'Living On A Prayer' (dir. Isham, 1986); 'You Give Love A Bad Name' (dir. Isham, 1986); and 'Wanted Dead Or

Alive' (dir. Isham, 1987). See also the videos for 'Live And Let Die' (dir. Richman, 1991) and 'November Rain' (dir. Morahan, 1992) by Guns 'n' Roses.

[26] See especially the Bon Jovi videos listed in n25.

[27] *American Bandstand* (WFIL, 1952-1957; ABC-TV, 1957-1989) and *Oh Boy!* (ABC-TV, 1958-1959) both preceded *Top of the Pops* (BBC, 1964-present). The point I am making here is not to do with *live* (or simulated-live) music performances on television, but to do with music *video* as a medium, which – as we understand it today – did not come to the cultural foreground until the mid- to late-1970s, mushrooming as a format in the early 1980s with the advent of MTV.

[28] Editing technology also plays a part. According to David Tetzlaff, the creation of a technological system to allow multiple edits to be carried out quickly was developed by George Lucas who, like Steven Spielberg, "wanted video editing that worked like film editing" (Tetzlaff, 2005).

[29] So concerned was Presley with his hair that, in his early touring days, he apparently used three different hair products to achieve the desired effect (Guralnick, 1995, p. 172).

[30] Hollywood as a 'system' may be blamed (by those wishing to place it) for other stars' ruinations, including Judy Garland and Marilyn Monroe (Dyer, 1998, p. 44).

[31] It is often recounted that Presley had some kind of ongoing bond – possibly extending to communication – with Jesse Garon, his stillborn twin brother. See Stanley, 1998, p. 161, and Taylor, 1985, p. 179.

[32] On the 'pickling of Elvis', it is notable that Guralnick implies Elvis to be 'the boy' in Parker's mind as late as 1973, the year Presley turned 38 (1999, p. 496).

[33] See <http://www.e-impersonators.com/impersonators_listings.html> [Accessed 4 July 2005].

[34] Is this part of why Elvis has such powerful lesbian meaning?

[35] Again, see <http://www.e-impersonators.com/impersonators_listings.html> [Accessed 4 July 2005].

[36] <http://www.theblackelvis.com/indexb.htm> [Accessed 4 July 2005].

[37] Greil Marcus goes on to debate the potential misquoted-ness of this, suggesting the alternative "white boy who sang like a nigger" (1991, p. 52).

[38] The similarities between Presley and Eminem in this respect are worth noting, since both are suspected of colonising a 'black' music form, and detracting from the prior achievements of their black musical predecessors. Eminem himself makes references to the similarities: "I'm not the first king of controversy / I'm the worst thing since Elvis Presley / To do black music so selfishly / And used it to get myself wealthy" ('Without Me', 2002). Eminem's character Rabbit is also called 'Elvis' (as an insult) in the film *8 Mile*.

[39] See <http://www.non-chinesechinese-elvis.com> [Accessed 4 July 2005].

[40] See also Vincent Phung, at <http://www.myhampstead.co.uk/hampstead/restaurants-elvis.htm [Accessed 4 July 2005].

[41] Specifically, Chinese *men* are not constructed as threatening in Western cultures: Chinese women are typically figured as servile (the geisha figure) or – as with most manifestations of 'Eastern Woman' – as 'dragon ladies'. See Prasso, 2005.

[42] See <http://www.e-impersonators.com/impersonators_listings.html> [Accessed 4 July 2005].

EPILOGUE

This thesis started with the idea of fragmentation, splitting, or rupture, brought about by the voice – the object-voice and the creative voice – and has concluded with the idea of the uncanny. In fact – of course – the two are linked, particularly *by* the object-voice.

As determinedly consistent and coherent as the Carpenters may appear to be musically, the way in which they construct this as an idea in their work raises a great many problems. In attempting to control the geno-song and thereby create a sense of uniformity, they use technological means which in fact open their work up to a sense of fragmentation. The cyborg voice which emerges from their control of the 'natural' – their constant attempt to circumscribe what 'natural' is – is a boundary concept which in fact can be seen to disrupt the sense of unity being aimed for. In a psychoanalytic reading, the cyborg differs radically from the human model of subjective development, with no point of original unity. The cyborg is implicitly disruptive, and little sense of reliable unity can therefore be achieved with the cyborg voice. The Carpenters' music is essentially a site where the path from unity through fragmentation and to reunification is distilled through technological processes, and it could be argued that many musical moments presented by the artists selected in this thesis engage with an expanded notion of the cyborg as a broader kind of supplemented voice – supplemented by linguistic and musical rhythms; supplemented by training; or supplemented by the ghost of an other's grain).

Madonna appears to represent a similar process at work, inasmuch as she very obviously mutates on a visual level, but vocally and musically she seems to remain consistent. Her name and music seem at first to have been constant where her image has always fluctuated. However, again, another story can be told by looking just beneath the surface. It seems that musical tactics have been used to aid her visual transformations, with musical signifiers pointing to ideas which run in parallel with her image at any given moment. At the same time, her vocal development may present a challenge to the long-standing ideology of vocal consistency, with attendant implications for the listener's understanding of her identity. Moreover, her ever-changing visual image ultimately challenges the very notion of a unified identity. In the persistency of her transformations, she offers a way of questioning the stability of the subject. In addition, this allows for a fluctuation of subject-position on

the part of her audience members, as we see multiple possibilities for desire and identification in relation to her as an object.

Eminem represents another example of apparent unity being disruptive beneath the surface. Rap music as a genre (particularly the gangsta rap from which Eminem's work is descended) apparently represents a vehicle for heteronormative masculinity, extolling misogyny and homophobia as part of the construction of masculinity. Yet the excessive nature of that ideology invites closer examination, after which it can be argued that the genre, and specifically Eminem's work as an extreme example, are not so easily aligned with this kind of masculinity. The verbose nature of rap may be associated with traditionally female/'feminine' modes of writing, and the hysterical protestations of heterosexuality may easily be regarded as unnecessary for supposedly self-assuredly heterosexual men. Musically, the object-voice plays a great part, especially given the great focus on the voice that rap demands. Plays-on-words, intense alliteration and concentrated rhyming patterns combine to bring about a sense that the voice as an object is very much at the heart of this genre, alongside the lyrical content. The object-voice coalesces in rap with rhythmic patterns which, according to a traditional gendered semiotics of music, do not serve to assure heteronormative masculinity. Taken in conjunction with the homosocial arena in which rap is constructed and performed, these factors lead easily to a distinctly queer reading of the genre. What emerges from this is an underlying sense of nostalgia for an always-already lost gender, similar to the deconstruction and reconstruction of gendered signifiers played out in Madonna's work, but in a less playful manner.

Elvis Impersonation is clearly visible as an example of fragmentation, in a way similar to Madonna, since by definition it represents the dispersal of a single image across a variety of planes. In another sense, the reverse may be true. As with an initial reading of Madonna, what ties Elvis Impersonators together as a cultural phenomenon is – again by definition – a single, unified image of 'Elvis'. Yet, the first reading appears to prevail, since the image of 'Elvis' is also already multiple, or allows for multiplicity. It is multiple in that several key images of 'Elvis' exist, ranging from (but not limited to) the early, virile youth of the 50s, through the powerfully 'masculine' adult of the '68 'comeback', to the bloated, artistic eunuch of the 70s. It allows for multiplicity in that, over the course of the history of Elvis Impersonation, 'Elvis' has been repeatedly 'castrated' even further, and emptied out

of inherent meaning, allowing for any formation of identity to be inserted instead. Presley has been fragmented *by* the culture that consumes him. The object-voice contributes heavily, whenever a vocal impersonation is enacted, and it is in vocal impersonation that we see how voice and fragmentation are intimately linked.

The uncanny runs throughout each of these examples of fragmentation as a recurring theme. Each of them disturbs borders in some way, and presents something familiar in an unfamiliar manner. As normalised as they may have become, the intense overdubbing and extremely close harmonies which characterise the Carpenters' sound do sound odd when compared to the vast majority of other popular music examples. Even when compared with other examples of similar intensity – for instance, in 'Bohemian Rhapsody', or much of the Beach Boys' work – the persistence with which the Carpenters used these techniques and the way in which it pervades almost every track of theirs mark them out as atypical. Thus, they present what we may think of a very familiar thing, a voice, in a particularly unusual manner, and can be read as fragmenting in the process. Madonna's constant changes often give me the sense that I am looking at someone I think I know, but have to take a minute to recognise, a most uncanny feeling. She has the effect of being at once familiar and unfamiliar, and trying to sense some underlying core beneath the proliferation of surfaces is the only defence. What results from Eminem's mismatch of gender signifiers – in which the surface depicts an unquestionably dominant masculinity, but the methods by which that is constructed are less obviously heteronormative – is again something familiar and unfamiliar. The mode of masculinity being offered has recognisable elements, and yet its extremist nature is such a caricature as to render it slightly bizarre. In playing out this kind of masculinity through possibly more 'feminine' means, and by splitting the result into three characters, the effect is distinctly uncanny. Elvis Impersonation also obviously disrupts boundaries, again having the effect of recognising something familiar, 'Elvis', while also forcing us to question what we believe 'Elvis' to mean, bringing in the element of the unfamiliar.

Crucial to Freud's uncanny, though, is the idea of some 'repressed infantile complex' or some primitive fear which we believed we had overcome being reawakened. In this sense, another central element of the uncanny is that of fear. It is, after all, a 'class of the terrifying'. Apart from Eminem's adventures in the form of Slim Shady, nothing in the four case studies presented here is, on the surface,

'terrifying' or frightening. Yet, in the senses in which they all serve to undermine basic understandings of identity, they all offer a possible assault on concepts central to Western notions of the self. In the case of the Carpenters, a specific infantile complex is indeed revitalised: as I have argued, the foregrounding of the pheno-song in their work represents a structure similar to Freud's model of the fetish, and in this sense it could be argued that the castration complex is revived. Madonna arguably takes us back to the moment of self-actualisation, reminding us that the self is fundamentally split following the (mis)recognition of the Mirror Phase, and thereby compelling us to recognise the split nature of our own selves, which we may have pretended to be unified thus far. Similarly, playing out three alter egos (and apparently no single 'ego' behind them), Eminem represents one way of negotiating the repression of instincts: Slim Shady becomes a way of playing out those impulses which would normally be repressed, and we as onlookers may therefore confront our own repression. Elvis Impersonation also challenges the belief in a single unified ego, but vocal impersonation also has the effect of challenging the ideology of vocal exclusivity. In foregrounding the object-voice, which is the true object of consideration in such a phenomenon, vocal impersonation also takes us back to the Lacanian *point de capiton* where 'voice' is a potential misfire. In the Graph of Desire, it is the point at which the subject meets the Other that voice as a leftover becomes a possibility, and in this way vocal impersonation may revive the point of trauma represented by that meeting. So, in different ways, all four of the cases here offer something uncanny by means of the object-voice, exposing some of the contradictions in what we understand 'voice' to be.

Undoubtedly, further work can be done, both on the idea of popular music as a site of the uncanny, and on each of the case studies here as examples of that idea. For example, in relation to the Carpenters, I have barely considered the ways in which Karen's anorexia interacts with understandings of the female body, feminine identity, and the discourse of control that runs throughout her biography. Significant questions also remain to do with the intersection of the queer subjects Madonna presents and the queering of the notion of subjectivity: is there a sense in which the sexually queer subject presents a particular threat to dominant notions of identity and ego construction? Eminem's relationship with race also deserves significant further consideration, as there has not been space to consider fully the intersection of race and gender in the chapter presented here. Many further cross-references could also be

made, for instance to Jim Morrison (as the Lizard King), from whence the theme of the Dionysian spirit could be drawn out: the live-fast-die-young aesthetic pervaded the 60s counter-culture just as it contributed in part the deaths of rappers Tupac Shakur (in 1996) or Notorious BIG (in 1997). The intersection of this phallic spirit with black masculinity, and in turn with 'white trash' masculinity opens up another field of potential study. In response to the supposed 'feminisation' of Elvis, we should also open up the question of race. If he started as the "white man with the Negro sound" that Sam Philips was searching for (quoted in Marcus, 1991, p. 52), Presley ended up as a white man singing white men's songs, and it could be speculated that the musical 'degeneration' parallels a musical 'whitening' over the years: it would certainly be interesting to investigate such a speculation with further research, drawing on modes of representation of racialised bodies.

Ultimately, what I have presented here are some exploratory readings of the challenges presented by the voice in popular music, using psychoanalytic theory as one tool amongst several with which to open up some readings, while recognising it as a structure of archetypes and using other such structures in conjunction with psychoanalysis. These case studies demonstrate the problems of the "ideology of 'voice' as original and identity-bestowing" (Koestenbaum, 1991, p. 205), insofar as that ideology also implies 'voice' to be a coherent and unified/unifying element. Rather, I offer the examples here as evidence in a case for "the voice's split condition" (Connor, 2000, p. 7), as fundamentally synonymous with fragmentation.

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APPENDIX I

LETTER FROM AUTHOR TO RICHARD CARPENTER
2 JUNE 2004

Dear Mr. Carpenter,

Re: Doctoral research

I am currently reading for a PhD in popular music at the University of Newcastle in England. As part of my research, I have found the music recorded by you and your sister to have been extremely fruitful in terms of the kind of analysis that I am undertaking, and your work forms the basis for approximately one quarter of my dissertation. One of my specific interests is in understandings of the voice and how technological factors in recording might impact upon the listener's perception of it. In this respect, I have found overdubbing to be a particularly fascinating approach to the production of the voice, and this has led me naturally to your work.

One aspect of your work that continues to interest me is the juxtaposition I sense in many tracks between heavily overdubbed, quasi-choral sections and those sections in which Karen's voice was apparently unadulterated technologically (a division that seems broadly to mirror the chorus/verse division). It seems to me that the use of overdubbing engulfs many aspects of a voice which make it unique, and distinctly human, such as breaths. Thus, when the intensely overdubbed sound is placed immediately next to (what feels like) such an intimately human voice as your sister's, the result is intriguing. As I understand that your production decisions were crucial to the Carpenters' 'sound', I felt it appropriate to approach you for your input, and I hope you will not feel interrogated here.

- What other kinds of technological manipulation, if any, did you apply to either your own voice or Karen's?
- Ray Coleman, in his biography of your sister and yourself, suggests that on 'Goodbye to Love', there was a conscious decision made on your part to leave in Karen's breath before her opening phrase. To what extent was that kind of decision – to leave in or to remove a breath – commonplace in your production technique? As just one example, on 'I Just Fall in Love Again', it seems that the phrases are very long, as on 'Goodbye', and I wondered whether some breaths were removed on that track. More to the point, what kind of reasoning led to your decisions in those cases? I appreciate that the specifics are not likely to be at the forefront of your mind 20 years on, and am mostly interested in the reasoning behind the choices.
- What is your feeling about the idea of Karen's voice as 'intimate'? It seems to be a common description of her voice (as in Coleman's biography), and one I understand to be partly based on her singing very close to the microphone. Is this the true extent of the relationship between her voice's 'intimacy' and the

technology, or, to what extent did your production try to emphasise her naturally 'intimate' vocality?

- Finally, as part of my thesis, I am including scored musical examples at relevant points. Due to the very close harmonies and the added overdubbing, I am finding transcription difficult, and I wonder if you have copies of any scores which you would be prepared to let me see. In particular, I am hoping to include 'Baby It's You' [especially the lines, 'Don't want nobody / Cos baby it's you' from the second chorus].

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this letter. I do hope that you will respond in some form, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Freya Jarman-Ivens (Ms.)

APPENDIX II

LETTER FROM RICHARD CARPENTER TO AUTHOR
12 AUGUST 2004

Dear Freya,

I have received your letter and request for details of Carpenters sound and production techniques to include in your Doctoral Thesis. I have not been asked these questions previously, and am happy to answer in detail. I hope my responses will be useful in your research.

Q: What other kinds of technological manipulation, if any, did you apply to either your own voice or Karen's?

A: None, other than over-dubbing at times.
You pointed out, correctly, that at times we used Karen's non-overdubbed lead, but only on certain songs. There are generally two types of modern-day songs (modern being in the last forty or so years), and you don't hear much of the older type being written anymore; it's "AABA" – first verse, second verse, bridge, and third verse – 32 bars in all, with exceptions such as Cole Porter's "Begin The Beguine" or Irving Berlin's "Let's Face The Music And Dance.". So think of just about any standard, including some of ours such as, Rainy Days And Mondays, "funny but it seems I always wind up here with you...", Merry Christmas Darling, "the lights on the tree, I wish you could see, I wish it every day..." and there you have AABA – 32 bars.

Most of the time, if it were just a bridge song, and didn't build like a more modern type of tune, which incorporates a chorus (in industry slang, a 'hook') in lieu of a bridge, I wouldn't over-dub Karen. But when we did a 'hook' song such as "Yesterday Once More", "Superstar" et al. (you note "a division that seems broadly to mirror the verse/chorus division"), you correctly state we did incorporate overdubbing on the hooks.

Ray Gerhardt, our seasoned engineer who worked with everyone from Percy Faith to Doris Day (Que Sera Sera), The Byrds, (Turn, Turn, Turn and Eight Miles High) to us, was, of course, amazed at Karen's voice and used the grand old microphone, still the mic of choice today for many things, the Neumann U 87. He took Karen "flat", which means he hooked the mic into the board and that was it. No equalization...she was born to be recorded. No manipulation.

Karen and I both had almost super-human hearing for this kind of stuff. If there was one little rub, one little note where there was a slight rub where it wasn't perfect, we would do it over. Even if it was something that once it got into the mix you thought you would never here, I believe that in a way you would because ultimately there is a sparkle to our things, and I think that's because I wouldn't let one little note by anybody that wasn't right get by.

Q: To what extent was that kind of decision – to leave in or to remove a breath – commonplace in your production technique? What kind of reasoning led to your decisions in those cases?

A: The breaths – as much as I could, I tried to leave in because, of course, they're natural. There's a story on "Goodbye To Love". The breath is there on the multi-track, but we couldn't use it in the original mix as there was drumstick leakage from the count-off audible in Karen's headphone, so when we went to remix it in 1985 I put the breath in.

We get letters every now and again regarding certain sounds, especially on acoustic guitar moves, where there would be little squeaks sometimes from the fingers rubbing over the strings, and to me that's a natural sound. Some people don't like it at all, but we would leave it in.

You note examples where phrases are very long as in "I Just Fall In Love Again" and "Goodbye To Love", questioning whether some breaths had been removed. The thing is, very now and again, we would do what is called "punching-in", or in England "dropping in", where let's say the singer liked most of a lead, but wanted to get one word or two over. Now it's easier that ever, but back then, if you had a good second man or good first engineer, you would sing into it and out of it as well, and you knew where to take the breath and he (the engineer) would "punch" in very quickly to get one or two words, and every now and again a "breath" just went away. This may be what you refer to. One definitely does not hear every breath that was ever inhaled, as hard as we tried.

But Karen, along with Andy Williams and Johnny Mathis, could take one breath and do the super-human but where they just kept singing and singing. You are absolutely right in your mention of "Goodbye To Love" which has some very long phrases. Other singers would come up to Karen and comment on this; I remember John Davidson asking, "Do you have three lungs?" because Karen took a breath and sang, "time and time again the chance for love has passed me by and all I know of love is how to live without it..." and that Karen just did naturally. "Live", as well. It's not like we had to get it in multiple takes in the studio.

Q: What is your feeling about the idea of Karen's voice as 'intimate'? Is this the true extent of the relationship between her voice's 'intimacy' and the technology, or, to what extent did your production try to emphasise her naturally 'intimate' vocality?

A: It has nothing to do with singing closely to the microphone; that would just make for a more present sound. Karen had the intimacy built right into the sound of her voice and her brain, so it was her born sound that so beautifully interpreted a lyric. The writer, Tom Nolan, who did the cover piece on us in Rolling Stone wrote (of a concert in Las Vegas), "Out comes that marvellous voice, exactly on record.... A marvel, youth

combined with wisdom." Tom nailed it. It's not singing close to the mic. Singing close to the mic just made it sonically better.

Q: ...including scored musical examples ... In particular, "Baby It's You" (especially the lines, "Don't want nobody / Cos baby it's you" from the second chorus.

A: The vocal parts were never written out. We had a Wurlitzer electric piano and we put it in the vocal booth or in the studio where we were doing the background vocals. I would just play Karen her part a couple of times, and she would pick it by ear, by "rote". I knew the parts because I had arranged them, so I would play them over once or twice, but they were never written down, never transcribed, to the chagrin of many people.

Regarding your request for scores; I have written out and enclosed that portion of the score.

Sincerely,

Richard L. Carpenter

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