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Editorial:
Living in changing times

Tony Keen

In his British Science Fiction Award-winning book *It's the End of the World: But what are we really afraid of?*, Adam Roberts use Thomas Bayes' Theorem to argue that, statistically, the end of the world is not likely to be in the immediate future, but that it becomes more probable in the longer term, perhaps a century or two (2020, 16-22). In the summer of 2021, as forest fires swept through Turkey, Greece, southern Italy, Provence, Lebanon, Israel, California and Siberia, following 2020 fires in Australia, India, China and elsewhere, the idea that the world is in imminent danger for a man-made climate catastrophe becomes really rather easy to believe. As I write this, the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) has just formally begun in Glasgow. There is much big talk, but it is hard to believe that such talk will actually result in action. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic has not gone away, despite the government of the UK often acting as if it has. As Juliette Harrisson noted in the editorial to the last issue (2020), we live in a time that will be looked back on as pivotal in the history of the planet.

At such a time, our work, like that of the 'straight' historian, is vital. We seek to understand, explain and demonstrate how a fictional version of the past is constructed. This becomes ever more important. Last week, the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, stood in the Colosseum in Rome and gave a speech that involved claiming that the Roman empire fell primarily because of uncontrolled immigration (Cordon 2021), a claim that few actual historians believe (though Tom Holland mounted something of a defence on Twitter), but which very much suits Johnson's post-Brexit attempt to demonstrate the benefits to leaving the European Union. Other politicians make statements that require their audience to forget about things that happened last year, or even last month. It is incumbent upon us as scholars of historical fiction to respond.

This special issue of the *Journal* looks at an element of the past that can be understudied; how it sounded. Inevitably, many of the contributors have chosen to engage with music. Gabriel Duckels underlines the important of contemporary pop music in novels of the early days of the AIDS crisis. Kevin Farrell looks at the figure of Bob Marley and his music in Marlon James' Man Booker

Prize-winning *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2014). Kristin Franseen's subject is portrayals of the composer Antonio Salieri in detective fiction. Tomer Nechustan examines the ways in which movie musicals recreate the past. Eric Lehmann looks at how Beck Hansen reconstructed a lost past way of selling music in his 2012 project *Song Reader*. Nodhar Hammami Ben Fradj goes beyond music to actually look at sounds in general in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, and show how sounds engage with colours and shapes in that novel.

This has also been a period of transition at the *Journal of Historical Fictions*. This special issue was begun by Juliette Harrisson, who then had to move on for the happiest of reasons (and we send our best wishes to Juliette, husband Justin and new arrival John). Jacobus Bracker then shepherded the issue through most of the production process, but was unable to stay with it, so I have stepped in to get this issue over the final hurdle. Once that is done, I too shall be on my way, and a new editor will take the *Journal* forward.

Rest assured, we shall continue our mission.

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Popular music and AIDS Crisis Revisitation in Young Adult novels

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Abstract: *This article considers the uses of popular music in three contemporary Young Adult novels about the first decades of the AIDS crisis in the United States of America: Carol Rifka Brunt's* Tell the Wolves I'm Home *(2012), Abdi Nazemian's* Like a Love Story *(2019) and Helene Dunbar's* We Are Lost and Found *(2019). In particular, the last two are notable as the first Young Adult (YA) novels to properly examine the early years of AIDS from the perspective of queer adolescent protagonists. As fictions of the recent queer past, these novels foreground different aspects of 1980s and 1990s popular music and gay culture as alleviative contrasts to the oppressive reality of AIDS. If AIDS in YA literature tended to be disarticulated from gay culture (de-gayed) to avoid homophobia, then memorialising the impact of AIDS on gay culture, with its connections to popular music, has political and pedagogical effects. By highlighting the ironic, nostalgic, melodramatic, pedagogical, material, social and multimodal uses of popular music in these novels, this article builds on the limited scholarship on the representation of musical experience in YA literature, as well as offering a critical perspective on the surprising emergence of AIDS Crisis Revisitation narratives in the past few years — an ongoing and important trend that demands further investigation.*

Keywords: AIDS Crisis Revisitation, HIV/AIDS, popular music, queer nostalgia, queer young adult literature, vicarious nostalgia

Introduction

This article examines the uses of popular music in several Young Adult (YA) novels about the early years of the AIDS crisis in America published in the last ten years: Carol Rifka Brunt's *Tell the Wolves I'm Home* (2012), Helene Dunbar's *We Are Lost and Found* (2019), and Abdi Nazemian's *Like a Love Story* (2019). These novels are part of present and ongoing cultural (re)investment in AIDS history after years of silence — a cultural moment that

Alexandra Juhasz and Theodore Kerr (2017) call 'AIDS Crisis Revisitation'. AIDS Crisis Revisitation, as I understand it here, describes the impulse to look back at the start of the crisis from the perspective of a precarious but ameliorated present in which the dust has settled on an original scene of trauma. First associated with the artistic responses of hard-hit communities, AIDS Crisis Revisitation has since culminated in a swathe of new novels, films, documentaries, memoirs, TV shows, YA novels, guides to queer history, and even children's picture books; renewed attention to the first years of AIDS has made the act of memorialisation an increasingly central narrative in popular entertainment. In the YA novels that I analyse here, various aspects of musical culture and musical expression at the end of the twentieth century are evoked to bring that first period of AIDS to life for an implied contemporary adolescent reader. This article, then, offers a study of the uses of popular music in the dramatisation of the recent past, and an analysis of the cultural politics of representing the start of the AIDS crisis for young readers in the twenty-first century — a crisis which continues, unended and ongoing.

Published in 2012, *Tell the Wolves I'm Home* is a crossover YA novel, chosen for the Oprah Winfrey Book Club. Set in the early 1990s in upstate New York, it tells the story of June, an adolescent girl grieving for her dead gay uncle Finn, who dies from AIDS-related complications at the start of the novel. *Like a Love Story* and *We Are Lost and Found* were published in 2019 and differ from almost all previous YA novels about the crisis by depicting it as a concern for queer adolescents. In *Like a Love Story*, a pair of queer adolescent New Yorkers take part in AIDS activism in 1990 and fall in love through a shared passion for the singer Madonna. Set in 1983 at the very beginning of the crisis, *We Are Lost and Found* is about a closeted gay adolescent called Michael beginning to experience the gay nightlife scene just as AIDS began to devastate it. While *Tell the Wolves I'm Home* provides a powerful example of the melodramatic possibility of musical expression in AIDS Crisis Revisitation narratives, *Like a Love Story* and *We Are Lost and Found* show how popular music can be used by writers of YA literature to re-centre queer experiences of AIDS in an area of popular culture that tended to disavow them.

Although none of these novels are autobiographical, the authors of these AIDS Crisis Revisitation narratives acknowledge their personal connections to the time period and their role as its witnesses. These novels reach through time; their resonance is tied to the fact that the last decades of the twentieth century are unknowable, even mythical, for the vicarious adolescent reader born in the 2000s. As Bryony Stocker would note (2019, 78), YA novels about AIDS are not historical fictions *per se*, because the beginning of AIDS is within living memory and after the author's birth. However, for the implied adolescent reader, the era that these novels summon might certainly *feel* like ancient history, not least because today's drastically different outcome for HIV infection reflects a totally different temporality. Before the mid-1990s, HIV infection virtually

always led to an AIDS diagnosis and then death, whereas most HIV-positive people with access to medication today live healthy lives. The availability of HIV-preventative medicine (PrEP) continues to transform the reality of AIDS in the world today, standing for a vastly different biopolitical context in which HIV infection can be avoided without using condoms for demographics who remain at risk. Returning to a time before PrEP and anti-retroviral medication is a return to a time before same-sex marriage and the rhetoric of equality that same-sex marriage represents; a return to a time in which LGBTQ+ people tended to be invisible in mainstream media and homophobia was weaponised by church and state alike in the United States of America. It is about showing young people the ways in which the world no longer resembles itself, for better and for worse; the language of ghosts. The YA novels I discuss here package up the recent queer past from the present, dramatising its conflicts and injustices as a newly representable chapter of a newly mainstream queer history. Popular music provides a useful framework for staging this past and helps articulate its difference and similarities to the world today. By turn ironic, nostalgic, melodramatic, pedagogical, material and social, the uses of popular music in these novels speak to the fraught and emergent cultural biopolitics of the era they represent.

Aaron Lecklider argues that popular music should be conceptualized as central to the social context of the AIDS crisis, rather than disregarded as 'inauthentic, unimportant, or politically disengaged' (2004, 111). The same might be said about YA literature: an important arena for political engagement and queer representation but one which only recently — in the 2010s — began to properly examine the early catastrophe of AIDS in America from the perspective of queer adolescent protagonists. Indeed, Gross *et al.*'s (2010) collation of YA novels about AIDS published between the 1980s and 2008 finds none featuring a protagonist who is both gay and HIV-positive, despite the obvious truth that young queer people have always been, and remain, on the frontline of the crisis. This minimalisation of AIDS is due to the prevailing pedagogy of the era that sought to reduce the homophobic conflation of AIDS with gay men by in turn not representing its impact on gay men or their collective response to it. However, this pedagogy had the knock-on effect of making the painful but culturally important relationship between gay men and AIDS almost entirely invisible in children's literature, as Robert McRuer (2011) so cogently notes. In the early 2000s, queer YA novels sometimes evoked AIDS as a shadow threat, as Thomas Crisp notes (2008), while David Levithan's *Two Boys Kissing* (2013) features a Greek chorus of dead gay men addressing the reader in between chapters. Even so, these depictions did not and do not solve the paucity of novels that authentically and explicitly depict queer experiences of AIDS — navigating sexual risk and uplifting HIV-positive people. It follows that AIDS Crisis Revisitation — in YA literature at least — is led by a pedagogy of communicating queer cultural history and recognising lost queer lives, rather

than navigating AIDS as an ongoing event in young people's lives. Popular music functions in these YA novels to invest their narratives with a subversive political sensibility as well as providing cues for historical authenticity.

Simon Frith, in his essay 'Towards an aesthetic of popular music' (1987; reprinted in Frith 2007, 257-74) argues that popular music has three social functions: firstly, it is bound up in identity formation, collective and individual; secondly, it accommodates the space between the public and private emotional lives of the listener; and third, it plays an important role in shaping popular memory and perceptions of time. To Frith, these have meaning due to popular music's fourth function: how it possesses the listener, and in turn, how the listener possesses it. When we listen to music that we enjoy and connect with, 'we make it part of our own identity and build it into our sense of ourselves' (143), in a way that Frith sees as more intensely personal than with other art forms. With Frith's social functions of music in mind, I want to explore how popular music is represented in these three YA novels to show adolescent identity formation in a world being changed by AIDS.

After establishing the relationship between AIDS Crisis Revisitation and YA literature, this article examines the melodramatic possibilities of popular music in AIDS Crisis Revisitation by exploring how music and playlists contribute to the implied affective demands of *Tell the Wolves I'm Home*. After that, I consider how these melodramatic connotations of popular music take on an explicit politic through the queer pedagogy of *Like a Love Story*, via the insights into gay identity that the main characters acquire through the iconic stardom of Madonna. Finally, I examine the relationship between popular music, vicarious nostalgia, and gentrification in *We Are Lost and Found*, which depicts the excitement of gay culture and popular music in a gritty, perhaps even gayer, version of New York, that explicitly no longer exists. The fact that it no longer exists is entirely the point. After offering close readings of these three novels, I conclude by offering a provisional typology of some uses of popular music in YA novels of the recent past, in the hope of providing an initial framework for future research into the representation of popular music and musical experience.

While *Tell the Wolves I'm Home* continues the long history of YA novels about AIDS which prioritise the growth of heterosexual protagonists, *Like a Love Story* and *We Are Lost and Found* depict the crisis in ways which are led by living queer characters (rather than dead or dying objectified moral spectacles, as Simon Watney might add). In doing so, these two novels gesture towards the realities and horizons of queer cultural life that popular music helped to envision and brought into being at the end of the twentieth century. Accordingly, popular music is integral to the queer world-building that these novels both contain and represent, although these queer worlds are limited: popular music is for the most part whitewashed in these novels due to the scope

of each narrative and presumably the personal perspective each author brings to it. While *Like a Love Story* pays a powerful tribute to the experiences of HIV-positive black gay men, these novels follow a different context than, for example, *Pose* (Murphy *et al.* 2018), the recent television series about the black queer ballroom scene in New York in the 1980s and 1990s, and so focus on mainstream popular music without interrogating its intersection with race and racism in America. Even so, situated at the intersection of the pedagogical, the political, the ironic and the nostalgic, these works of AIDS Crisis Revisitation use popular music to depict the start of the AIDS crisis as a crucial historical period for queer people that continues to reverberate today.

AIDS Crisis Revisitation in Young Adult literature

According to Juhasz and Kerr, AIDS Crisis Revisitation emerged in the 2010s with 'a notable increase in the production and dissemination of AIDS related media that *looks back* at the early days of the known AIDS epidemic' (2017, original emphasis). Crucially, this renewed interrogation of the beginning of AIDS followed a period in which the crisis had lost momentum as an issue worth exploration in contemporary culture — what Juhasz and Kerr call the 'second silence' after the late 1990s, when new antiretroviral medication rapidly reduced the number of AIDS-related deaths. AIDS Crisis Revisitation began with counter-cultural and activist art and documentaries but has since become a sort of zeitgeist for the dominant culture, leading to the 'sudden, rather unexpected deluge of representations of AIDS in popular media' (Cheng *et al.* 2020, xviii), such as *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013) and the iconic, pathbreaking TV series about the black drag scene in New York, *Pose* (2018). On the one hand, these examples of renewed investment in the production and circulation of images of AIDS implies that the crisis remains a beguiling moral spectacle, because the image of — for example — the socially abject, dying gay man has always had problematic currency in popular culture. However, the success of AIDS Crisis Revisitation as a renewed mode of queer representation (and a way of drawing attention to queer history) implies that the stigma of retribution that saturated AIDS has waned; or, at least, that it can now be critiqued through these new dramatizations not only of queer loss but of pride and celebration — with popular music playing a key role in both.

Historical representations of the AIDS crisis in popular culture speak to its lucrative reliability as a tragic and dramatic narrative, but the popularisation of AIDS Crisis Revisitation also implies a decision to pay attention to what was for a long time overlooked and marginalised. New YA novels about AIDS offer a mode of memorialization and mourning that was not available in YA literature at the time. As Cart and Jenkins note (2018, 85-86), the few YA novels published in the 1980s and 1990s that depicted the AIDS-related deaths of queer people tended to represent those figures as isolated caricatures of abjection

rather than autonomous subjects connected to queer cultural life and community. Gay HIV-positive characters were often represented as social pariahs with no access to the queer community that aspects of musical culture — such as gay nightclubs, or the diva worship of pop singers like Madonna — stand for. Perhaps the most obvious example of this pattern of alienation is that in many early YA novels about AIDS which feature dying queer characters — such as M E Kerr's *Night Kites* (1986) and Penny Raife Durant's *When Heroes Die* (1992) — those characters come home to the heteronormative suburbs to die, fleeing from an urban community that remains unseen within the pages of the novels themselves. While these communities, such as the gay enclaves of New York and San Francisco, were in fact sources of solidarity and power for queer people in the first decades of AIDS, within the suburban settings of early YA novels about AIDS they appear as distant and mysterious sites of contagion.

The emergence of AIDS Crisis Revisitation in YA literature is an example of the change in queer representation that Katelyn R Browne (2020) forecasts in the field: the slow transition from YA narratives that misuse and otherise tragedies of queer death — suicide, violence, symbol-laden accidents and AIDS — to a newer sort of queer representation that probes and challenges the relationship between queerness and the tragic. AIDS Crisis Revisitation tends to be reparative; the key difference in YA literature is that the pedagogy behind AIDS discourse in YA literature is no longer to de-gay the crisis to widen awareness among heterosexual young people *in the present*, but rather, to celebrate queer community and teach about its role in the fight against AIDS *in the past*.

With this aim in mind, AIDS Crisis Revisitation narratives emphasise the popular music of their historical period to help construct aspects of that period and signify the sometimes competing social narratives and cultural ideas that music and musical cultures gave shape and voice to. Indeed, popular music is a useful metonym for a gay culture that remains, for various reasons, complex to portray in a mainstream context. Music's deep association with melodrama, memory, sex and nostalgia means that the use of popular, as well as other types of, music in these novels goes hand-in-hand with their affective potential; fundamentally, these novels are led by grief and motivated around its exposition. These affective responses in turn constitute what I want to emphasise as the absolutely pedagogical motivation of AIDS Crisis Revisitation, as I see it; a sort of dialogue between generations of queer people, especially explicit when it takes place in the arena of YA literature, because that intergenerational transaction is so inherent to the scope and form of the YA novel. The desire to revisit and re-engage with AIDS is not only a history lesson but also a counter-narrative, rebutting the heteronormative and amnesiac narratives of AIDS in the mainstream, that forget the role of queer solidarity and pride, as scholars such as Sarah Schulman (2012, 1-20), Lucas Hilderbrand (2006, 307) and Deborah Gould (2009, 245-48) have powerfully argued.

Popular music, as Frith might note, has an obvious relationship to this attempt to *feel* history, because musical experience and an affiliation with popular music are so bound up in cultural identification, emotional connection, and popular memory.

While these novels cannot escape their context as simulacra of the recent queer past, the references each makes to popular music constitute found objects that nevertheless verify the truthfulness of the overall representation of an adolescent experience of a barely glimpsed queer world changed forever by AIDS. Bound up in melodramatic possibility, the songs in these novels are to be utilised by the implied reader as multimodal extensions of the affective experience of the tragic narratives and the vanished social worlds they represent.

As Frith puts it, popular music is organised 'around anticipation and echo, around endings to which we look forward, choruses that build regret into their fading' (1987, 142). The experience of listening to popular music is always the anxious joy of evanescence: the song ceases, it vanishes, and so the feelings it produced must be produced again, so the song is replayed. Like time itself, we cannot get enough of it. Textually, these popular songs are deployed to garner the sense of something that has *already ended* or that *can only represent its own ending*, the looping nostalgia of musical experience in a time and place that only exists in historical representation. Ephemeral but everlasting, the enduring value of twentieth-century popular music is its own kind of haunting, as Mark Fisher might tell us. Musical culture of the past, to Fisher, was 'central to the projection of the futures which have been lost' (2014, 27). In other words, in these novels, popular music provides an emotional connection not only with lost pasts, but also unrealised horizons.

Reading, listening, wallowing: *Tell the Wolves I'm Home*

Popular music is connected to melodramatic expression — the creation of a moment in which it becomes possible to declare moral truth and pathos without ambiguity or hesitation, the stuff of a million pop songs or what Peter Brooks calls 'the theatrical impulse itself' (1976, 40). In YA novels, the melodrama of popular music plays an important role in the affective responses that these novels invite in their implied readers. Musical expression can be used to support melodramatic moments by amplifying the emotional gravitas of the issues at stake, legitimising the desires and anxieties of young people. By bringing these anxieties and desires to the surface, musical expression offers a way to grieve the loss of an older gay relative, or provides a source of respite and community from the repression endured by closeted queer young people scared of AIDS.

Take for example the first work of AIDS Crisis Revisitation in YA literature, the crossover bestseller and Oprah Winfrey Book Club book, *Tell the Wolves I'm Home*. Unlike *Like a Love Story* and *We Are Lost and Found*, *Tell the*

Wolves I'm Home does not implicate a queer adolescent reader. As a fiction of the recent past, it is perhaps less concerned with the pedagogical demands of queer history as with redramatising the commonplace narrative of grief *for* heterosexual readers *about* dying gay men — emblematic of what Cindy Patton (1996, 36) might call an ideology of *compassionate heterosexuality* in early social responses to AIDS. This difference in reader can be gleaned from the peritext of the novel, which features reviews from women's glossy magazines. To be clear, I do not mean to imply anything pejorative about women's magazines — far from it — but wish to show how this novel belongs to a different tradition of AIDS representation than *Like a Love Story* and *We Are Lost and Found*.

As I have already mentioned, *Tell the Wolves I'm Home* is about a young female protagonist in upstate New York in the 1990s, who mourns the loss of her beloved gay uncle to AIDS. Both classical and popular music appears as a cue for setting the scene, building the affective dimensions of the narrative. For June, the adolescent protagonist, Mozart's *Requiem* is synonymous with her dying gay uncle, Finn, and becomes an obvious metaphor for his AIDS-related decline: 'It lulls you into thinking it's pleasant and harmless, it bubbles along, and then all of a sudden, boom, there it is rising up and menacing' (7). After Finn's death, June meets her uncle's mysterious partner, Toby, who has been hidden from her due to the homophobic context of their family life in the mid-1980s. Toby gives June her uncle's cassette tapes of the *Requiem*, and the music becomes a way to express their shared grief that is ultimately proven to be a point of commonality and unity between Finn's outcast HIV-positive lover and the suburban, heteronormative family. Brunt's novel is written with the quintessentially retrospective and even mournful logic of historical representation that typifies the objective of AIDS Crisis Revisitation. Yet it exemplifies what Browne would call an early cliché of AIDS representation, in which young people become better citizens — which is to say, responsible and compassionate heterosexuals — by bearing witness to the AIDS-related abjection and death of an older gay relative.

Interestingly, *Tell the Wolves I'm Home* contains various listen-along playlists in the paratext, which includes a discussion of the choices Brunt made when deciding to reference contemporaneous pop music in the narrative: 'If I wanted to be dishonest, I would have filled the book only with music I really liked, but I wanted to be honest, so instead I put songs in there that felt right for the time and place' (371). The listen-along playlists endorse what Katie Kapurch has called the melodramatic impulse of girl culture, in which the representation of music works to amplify (so to speak) the emotional lives of the girl characters, thereby 'building intimacy between reader and narrator' (2016, 102). The playlists literally encourage the reader to enter, in the author's own words, a suitably 'melancholic and wistful' (Brunt 2012, 372) mood, and so fulfil the basic tenet of melodrama (*song* and *drama*) by offering an aural backdrop to

amplify the pathos of the narrative. The role of popular music in these novels therefore speaks to the history of melodramatic expression, a maligned but crucial aspect of YA literature, because popular music helps draw out the affective potential of the texts themselves for the implied adolescent readers as well as adolescent characters.

Through these playlists, the implied girl reader of the novel is thus encouraged to identify with June's grief for her dead uncle through listening to suggested songs like Queen's 'The Show Must Go On' (375) and other 'teenage girl romantic' songs such as Kate Bush's 'Wuthering Heights' (374). Brunt's statement about the playlist implies that there are songs which would feel wrong and dishonest for the time and place, and so that the objective to render AIDS in a way that feels truthful can be achieved by going beyond prose and into the deeper truth of music. Drawing attention to the role of music in YA literature — whether for the character or the implied reader, to create the right scene or as a multimodal extension of the text itself — highlights the affective utility of YA novels in young people's lives. Likewise, heeding the role of music in AIDS Crisis Revisitation narratives — as an object of nostalgia and as the soundtrack to grief — makes space to recognise the worthiness of that nostalgia and the belatedness of the articulation of that grief.

The pattern established by *Tell the Wolves I'm Home* is replicated in other recent YA novels which take on the work of AIDS Crisis Revisitation from the perspective of the grieving adolescent girl who comes to understand her place in the world through bearing witness to queer death: Cornelia Jensen's *Skyscraping*, published in 2015, and J C Burke's *The Things We Promise*, published in 2017. Both novels make use of the same *Entwicklungsroman* narrative, to quote Roberta Trites' term (2010, 10-15) — a classic developmental narrative, which in this case involves an adolescent girl who experiences emotional maturation by bearing witness to the AIDS-related death of an older gay relative. As with surely most fictions of the recent past, popular music is used in each to help the impossible attempt at representing a vanished world; but the popular music of 1990s New York and Australia is not directly thematised as it is in *Tell the Wolves I'm Home*. Seen in retrospect as fictions of the recent queer past, the deaths of the HIV-positive relatives are imbued with unproblematic virtue and grieved with melodramatic pomp.

However, I will now consider two more recent examples of AIDS Crisis Revisitation in YA literature that foreground queer adolescent experiences, and which, in doing so, offer ways to examine the relationship between popular music and gay culture that AIDS Crisis Revisitation entails. David Halperin acerbically summarises the apparent sentiment that in the twenty-first century, 'young queers […] don't like to be labelled, they don't feel the need for a separate, distinct social world, and they don't identify with gay culture' (2012, 410). AIDS Crisis Revisitation undermines this because it unavoidably draws

attention to a biopolitical context in which gay life was not only separate from the mainstream — a subculture, rather than subsumed — but attacked by it. To use fiction to return to this previous temporality is paradoxical, because on one hand, it drums up the abjection and homophobia of AIDS, and yet on the other, it looks back nostalgically to a time in which the gay urban enclaves of New York City were abuzz rather than shrinking due to gentrification and the mainstreaming of gay identity.

Popular music as queer pedagogy in *Like a Love Story*

Popular music is key to the identity formation of the closeted protagonists in *Like a Love Story* and *We Are Lost and Found*. It provides a point of affiliation with queer culture that alleviates the pain and anxiety brought into their lives by the spectral threat of AIDS. As melodrama, the relief that popular music provides for young people is how it seems to perfectly articulate emotional responses to important and unfair situations, as with so many cliché-ridden love songs. In *Like a Love Story*, the melodramatic possibility that popular music opens up is immediate, obvious, and instructive, embodied by the subversive superstardom of Madonna. *We Are Lost and Found* also makes ironic and dismissive references to 'that new singer, Madonna' (4), presumably to deflect from the stereotypical conflation between gay identity and Madonna. *Like a Love Story*, however, transforms the stereotype into a source of power, foregrounding it as a useful politic for gay cultural and sexual identification rather than an embarrassing or irrelevant cliché. After his arrival in New York, Iranian immigrant Reza is obsessed with Madonna's music as soon as he discovers it; he expresses certainty that his obsession is bound up in 'something deeper, like she is saying all the things that I want to be saying' (91). While Reza is haunted by thoughts of 'dying men with lesions' (13) that he sees in the future that awaits him as a young gay man, Madonna's music and counter-cultural celebrity provide a symbolic release valve for the repression of the closet.

Indeed, the antidote to shame and fear that Madonna represents is key to what I see as the queer pedagogy of the novel. By queer pedagogy, I mean the deliberate, defiant messages about gay pride and culture that are woven throughout the narrative and which focus on the diva status of Madonna and the vitality of adolescent musical experience. Reza becomes friends with Art and Judy, two queer and queer-friendly Manhattanite adolescents who spend their time talking about Madonna and taking part in AIDS activism with Uncle Stephen, an HIV-positive older gay man. By meeting these three characters, Reza learns about gay culture in America, empowering him to learn more about who he has been all along. The trio read and discuss Uncle Stephen's 'Queer 101 notecards' (37), a narrative device that works as a sort of primer on gay culture shared among the three: '#28 Crawford, Joan, #53 Fucking Reagans,

The, #54 Garland, Judy' (56). Uncle Stephen discusses the index cards at numerous points across the narrative as he prepares to die from AIDS-related complications. The unsubtly pedagogical — even outright didactic — context of the cards is both ironic and all-too serious; a good-humoured but no less political allusion to the moral panic that homophobic politician Anita Bryant whipped up around older gay men and lesbians' supposed recruitment of young people in the 1970s, with added pathos due to Uncle Stephen's accelerating decline. The cards poke fun at the idea that queer culture is something that can be learned and revised like algebra, and yet demonstrate the very real *need* to pass down queer history from generation to generation, lest it be forgotten — particularly true of the 'plague years'. Moreover, the novel itself fulfils that need within the queer pedagogy of AIDS Crisis Revisitation in YA literature.

The index cards are represented within the narrative and discussed between the characters, as well as appearing in the paratext between chapters as direct address to the reader. Madonna's entry stakes a claim on the pop singer as 'not just a singer, not just a dancer, not just a performer' but 'a revolution' (330). Uncle Stephen's words invoke the plural pronoun to drum up the vision of a community of queer Madonna fans to which the adolescent protagonists (and implied reader) are now able to belong: 'She's turning this world around and showing us how to follow in her footsteps' (331). The plural pronoun is invoked again by Art in conversation with Reza about Madonna with his explanation that 'divas' are 'popular with gays' because 'we can see what's hiding behind the artifice' (66) — virtually paraphrasing Halperin's theorization of diva worship as a collective facet of gay identity. In this regard, the queer pedagogy of *Like a Love Story* is exemplified in how the novel successfully asks the implied reader to take popular music seriously, affirming its relationship to queer theory and the politics of repression.

The novel's representation of Reza and his friends' devotion to Madonna is an example of this queer pedagogy in action; the icon provides a point of affinity, community, and contemplation in a narrative which is otherwise structured around the melancholia of Uncle Stephen's abject decline. The singer is invoked as an ironic icon of gay identity, just as Halperin notes (2012, 112-14) that aspects of mainstream popular culture like Broadway and techno music (or in this case, Madonna) become shorthand for gay culture even while remaining part of an otherwise homophobic mainstream. Take, for example, Art's response to Reza's early denial that he is gay:

> No, honestly … WHAT THE FUCK? I know I read the signs right. MADONNA! (Nazemian 2019, 105)

As physical objects, Madonna's vinyl records bring into signification what cannot be spoken out loud while Reza remains isolated in the closet: 'I reach into the Madonna section to pull out another record, and as I do, our hands graze each other' (67). By holding the records together, Art and Reza's eyes 'are

locked in some secret shared space we never knew existed until just now' (67). In this vignette, their shared but unspoken knowledge of the potential that Madonna represents for the lives of young closeted people even provides a way of vacating the heteronormative world.

Uncle Stephen's queer pedagogy highlights derided or ignored connections between camp, melodrama, popular music, gay culture and politics, right up until his deathbed. Just before his death, Uncle Stephen surprises Art, Reza, and Judy with tickets to a Madonna concert — an event which transcends the fear and shame that AIDS and homophobia represent in Reza's life. He feels unity surrounded by 'mostly women and gay men' (343) and declares that 'we are dancing, we are singing, we are forgiven, we are glowing, we are understood' (*ibid.*), verging upon the gnostic. That sensation of a powerful mysterious catharsis is affirmed by his expression of 'faith' at the end of the Madonna concert because 'if the world could bring together this woman with these songs and these dancers in this place with me in it, then creation must be more powerful than destruction' (348). Political parallels are drawn once the trio return to Manhattan to tell Uncle Stephen about the concert as he lays dying, and draw an equivalence between Madonna's performance and their earlier participation at an AIDS protest:

> You were at the concert with us. And at the protest. (364)

In other words, popular music is represented as serious business for the challenge of gay identity in the biopolitical context of AIDS in the late twentieth century. In the final chapters, Uncle Stephen asks for popular music to be played at his funeral, calling for:

> Songs that are at once sad and celebratory. He explains to us that the best dance songs are full of longing. They're about the desire to celebrate desire, because a dance floor is a place to morph your sorrow into grace. (369)

His final words tie his death as a HIV-positive gay man in a homophobic biopolitical world to the freedom that popular music provides — an alchemy that transforms pain and abjection into power, virtue and beauty, like the alchemy of melodramatic expression that Linda Williams (1998, 42-88) describes elsewhere.

The end of the novel flashes into the future, or the year 2016; the recent queer past meets the politics of the present. A final reference to the Orlando massacre of that year — in which forty-nine people were murdered in a hate crime at a gay nightclub in Florida — explicates the queer pedagogy of the novel, speaking to the contemporary urgency of protecting gay culture. In the paratext, Nazemian then draws on his own adolescent love of Madonna as a parallel to Reza's, describing the singer as 'a portal into other queer art' which allowed him to see 'queerness not as a death sentence, but as a community and

an identity to be celebrated' (Author's note). The queer pedagogy of popular music leaves behind the dreamlike world of the text itself to be compounded by the reality of the tragic and the autobiographical.

As Halperin argues in his remarks about the under-recognised cultural power of the diva, 'those who are relegated to the ranks of the unserious have no reason to behave themselves' (2012, 253). *Like a Love Story* may seem unserious and over-the-top. This is because it makes use of tenets of melodrama that tend to be derided as unserious and over-the-top but which in fact play an important role in the novel's attempt to retrospectively portray the calamity of AIDS. The loss represented by AIDS in popular culture is a double loss — first, the loss of lives, and then the lost opportunities to represent AIDS in ways that feel authentic and affirm the virtue of those impacted. As an attempt to repair this second sort of loss, *Like a Love Story* manages to re-gay the tragedy of AIDS in America by making it into an affirmation of queer cultural history. As symbols of the traumatic past and the queer horizons of the future, the characters of *Like a Love Story* express the melodramatic vitality of queer expression in the face of AIDS rather than underplaying it. If previous representations of AIDS tended to de-gay the crisis, then *Like a Love Story* uses a pedagogy of popular music — and the superstardom of Madonna – to re-gay the crisis and centre queer experiences of it in YA novels.

Gentrification on the dance floor: *We Are Lost and Found*

Popular music is about vicarious nostalgia. By vicarious nostalgia, I refer to Christina Goulding's definition (2002), which describes the nostalgia of an individual who covets a time before they were born, such as the implied adolescent reader of these novels. This sort of nostalgia is as associated with retro culture as with perhaps more academically familiar theoretical conceptualizations of yearning: it draws attention to the quotidian role of 'things, objects, entities, items, *stuff*' (Cervellon and Brown 2018, 24, my emphasis). In the twenty-first century, the physical aspects of popular music are suffused with a collective sense of loss that surrounds an obsolete material culture and changing social worlds. Directed by this, the representation of popular music in *We Are Lost and Found* throws into sharp relief subsequent technological change and the gentrification of New York. Of course, an emphasis on material culture is part of the world-building in all historical narratives; in the 2010s, cassette tapes, vinyl records and CD players are important signifiers for an aesthetic attempt at a previous and increasingly retro world. For example, in *We Are Lost and Found*, Michael, the protagonist, speculates whether 'CDs are really going to be a thing' (106). Later, his friend James claims that 'the jury is still out' on CD players because there is something to be said for 'the scratches and pops' of vinyl (134). At the end of the novel, Michael loses his virginity with a college student, whose room is made up in

seventies décor: 'He takes the cassette out and puts it into a boombox on the dresser, the only thing here that belongs to this decade' (241). Michael's surprise is ironic. It draws attention to the vicarious practice of retro culture which has become commonplace since the 1990s, and which the novel itself exemplifies. These ironic depictions of musical material culture speak to the fabric of future nostalgia that the vinyl records, the CDs and the audio cassette have become woven into — the miscellany of the 'global epidemic of nostalgia' that Svetlana Boym (2001, 4) famously diagnosed in the late twentieth century and which the digitisation of musical experience in the twenty-first century only underscores.

The closure of record stores is connected to the advent of the internet; the birth of the first iPod predates the contemporary teenager, announcing a world in which everything is instantly accessible with a Wi-Fi connection. Nostalgic appreciation for old musical cultures is also to do with yearning for previous ways of life, and so connects to one of the most obvious underlying themes of AIDS Crisis Revisitation: gentrification, which Sarah Schulman calls 'the monster that ate New York' (2012, 19). Schulman argues a direct correlation between the mass death of many gay people in urban enclaves such as the West Village and the subsequent gentrification of those neighbourhoods. *We Are Lost and Found* portrays a dirty, seedy but vibrant former New York. The subway is evoked with 'the smell of piss and vomit, and lights that dim when we hit certain parts of the tracks' (Dunbar 2019, 5). Times Square is represented in accordance to its old image as a 'sexual playground' (Greteman 2018, 116) during a time before AIDS and before gentrification. Consider Michael's description of an impulsive trip there:

> There's a buzz here. A dark and sexy underground buzz highlighted by the groups of sailors cruising in groups, dress whites shining against the grime of the X-rated movie houses and hot dog carts. Prostitutes, tourists, people strung out in doorways, business people hailing taxi cabs with their squealing brakes and cigarettes roof ads, and plumbing smoke from the subways. (Dunbar 2019, 105)

The image evokes the long-lost, mid-to-late twentieth-century Times Square that Samuel Delany described as a vanishing place of sexual and social possibility (1999, xiii-xx), a time before what Eric E Rofes has called 'the Disneyfication of New York' (1998, 103) — a sexual and cultural gentrification. This old version of Times Square is the sort of gay sexual subculture that was — and indeed still is — complicated to represent within the scope of the YA novel and the pedagogy it works within, but Michael does not condemn it or express fear. Rather, he finds a certain peace in 'this crush, this hum', even going so far as to note that in 'the music of this noisy, gritty, frenetic city, somewhere is a place I belong' (Dunbar 2019, 106). Through the musical metaphor, the ungentrified city is painted as harmonious rather than discordant. The vignette avoids condemning the era of sexual hedonism that AIDS — alongside gentrification — was already beginning to undo, although Michael's

comments still imply there to be a final destination of sorts rather than open sprawl of possibility. The key irony of the scene is that, unbeknownst to Michael, the harmonious disharmony of the urban space around him will be broken by a future that he cannot yet imagine; a future that the implied reader is by definition trapped within.

The rhythm of the city speaks to its demise just as music always calls to its own ending; the representation of this older, queerer, unknowable New York is suffused with the intimation that it no longer exists and its implications. With this vicarious nostalgia of AIDS Crisis Revisitation, whether through AIDS or gentrification, New York is a city of ghosts. Of course, this obsession with loss is not without precedent. Especially read today, AIDS literature involves mournful old visions of New York and San Francisco. However, these new narratives address an implied adolescent reader of the twenty-first century, speaking into a publishing environment that was hostile to queer cultural life during the era they represent, offering up that history for belated recognition.

Perhaps the centre of this nostalgic turn towards a vanishing New York is The Echo, a gay nightclub which Michael and his friends attend throughout the novel, able to trick the bouncer with their fake IDs:

> New York is sticky hot in summer, and really, what did he care if one more I'm-queer-but-nobody-really-knows-it kid added his sweat to the already wet brick walls of the basement club? (Dunbar 2019, 23)

Music is everywhere in The Echo, even in the name, adding to its context as a space of freedom for the young queer adolescents to dance away their fears about the epidemic unfolding around them: 'I could go dancing every night and just forget, forget, forget' (41).

> Random people called to the same pulsing beat at exactly the same time […] Tonight, I need this mad crush of people and noise. (56)

The noise of the nightclub music is the opposite of language; it is the void that overwhelms it because 'it's too loud to talk, too loud to hear, too loud to think' (23). The nightlife runs throughout the novel as a seemingly never-ending party of anonymous bodies that transcends time and space, where 'time stretches and retracts' and 'you can lose yourself in the overlapping beats as one song bleeds into another' (25). Michael embraces his embodiment of what Judith Butler, referring to Mary Douglas, calls the polluted homosexual body of the AIDS crisis; a panic icon of 'pollution and endangerment' (1990, 180) that needed to be contained. Despite worrying that 'no one is ever supposed to have sex again' (Dunbar 2019, 52) because 'no one knows what's causing this damned thing' (53), for Michael, the dance floor is an arena of contagion and even public penetration:

> I'm aware of every beat. Every move of my arms. Every breath.
>
> […]
>
> I open myself up and let it fill me. (56)

Notably, Michael does not have sex until the end of the novel, yet his time on the dance floor clearly sublimates his libido, a rehearsal for his desire and the anxiety that orbits his desire. This fusion of the nightclub and his fears about AIDS alleviates the isolation of Michael's worries — which take place in a totally different setting as private scrawls on a wall in a bathroom at his high school — by transforming verbalised anxiety into the physical, nonverbal pursuit of constant pleasure. The fear of AIDS is not a reason to abandon the hedonism of the dance floor *per se* but rather an impetus to embrace the pleasure principle as a tonic itself.

Like *Tell the Wolves I'm Home*, the vicarious nostalgia that AIDS Crisis Revisitation elicits in the implied adolescent readership of *We Are Lost and Found* is perhaps most obvious from the paratext. In one of the novel's three afterwords, an AIDS activist speaks to the implied reader as a witness of the old New York that the novel attempts to convey; the city is described as 'exciting, if dangerous around the edges', a place where 'rents were relatively cheap, and gay life was thriving, at least in certain neighbourhoods' (271). The author acknowledges that The Echo was inspired by three different nightclubs that she frequented in the city, 'all of which have since closed' (*ibid.*). Therefore, while the remaining afterword pushes the reader to consider the devastation of AIDS and its ongoing effects in America and around the world, the novel is still motivated by ambivalence towards the recent queer past rather than exclusively tragic retrospection.

As Boym notes, nostalgia is like irony: 'not a property of the object itself but a result of an interaction between subjects and objects, between actual landscapes and the landscapes of the mind' (2001, 354). The vicarious nostalgia of AIDS Crisis Revisitation involves a precarious interaction between different interpretations of the past: the awful past, which we wish had never happened; and the grieved past, the world changed by AIDS, which should never have been lost. Through looking at the material and social contexts of popular music in these YA novels about AIDS, I have tried to show how AIDS Crisis Revisitation offers visions of the recent queer past that might be coveted by young queer people today within an ostensibly freer but in some ways more restrictive present. Above all, perhaps, this interaction between past and present social worlds is a quest for authenticity — a nostalgia for 'a time before nostalgia' (Boym 2001, 355). In particular, aspects of popular music and musical experience work in *We Are Lost and Found* to mourn the impact of gentrification on gay urban enclaves, even as the novel highlights the dangers of such a pivotal moment in the first years of AIDS.

Conclusion

In the cultural work of AIDS Crisis Revisitation, the intergenerational relationship between adult author and adolescent reader in YA literature has an obvious application with a decidedly reparative potential. As an interface between past and present, these novels grant the implied reader access to a scene of queer history that was for a long time unrepresentable in these terms within the pedagogical limitations of the YA novel as a social form at the end of the twentieth century. In these narratives, popular music becomes a sort of transactional archive of cultural memory between generations, as in other YA novels about the recent queer past that involve popular music such as the work of David Levithan and Eleanor Rowell. Reference to different songs and artists constitute found objects — a multimodal expansion of what is textually represented, for a publishing context in which one can summon more or less every song ever released in milliseconds. The contemporary reader is obviously unable to attend the concerts and nightclubs which are represented in *Like a Love Story* or *We Are Lost and Found*. That impossible longing of the vicarious nostalgic drives these novels as much as the ethically urgent project of mourning that constitutes AIDS memorialisation. (Indeed, that nostalgic yearning for live music and human connection has surely redoubled tenfold by the changes to youth culture brought about by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.)

Like the suggested playlist from the paratext of *Tell the Wolves I'm Home*, these novels describe, and rely upon, popular music as a metaphoric and actual soundtrack for the implied reader to instantly access on any contemporary streaming service. As a multimodal extension of the narrative experience, the inclusion of real songs, singers and bands — not only Madonna, but the niche British musical acts referred to in passing in *We Are Lost and Found* — imitates their cinematic rivals such as AIDS Crisis Revisitation film and television shows like *Pose* and *120 BPM* (2017). The popular music of the past, then, can easily be possessed in the present — or rather, summoned to haunt us with the memories and futures of the past. A sort of ekphrasis, these references to real-life popular music draw attention to the failure of the novels to represent what cannot be retrieved; the novels are mere simulacra, because 'the quest is impossible' and 'what we are searching for is a lost object, which really cannot be found' (Steedman 2001, 77). Popular music is integrated into both adolescent identity formation and the queer cultural memory of AIDS in America. Its representation in these novels provides an important interface between the ideological construction of adolescence and the cultural politics of queer consciousness; depicting queer experiences of the crisis as part of the pedagogy and values of the contemporary YA novel, rather than its opposite.

To conclude, I want to summarise the uses of popular music which I have identified in my readings of *Tell the Wolves I'm Home*, *Like a Love Story* and *We Are Lost and Found*. This summary provides a flexible and provisional

typology for future research into how popular music is used towards the representation of the past in YA literature.

These uses are: nostalgic and ironic, melodramatic, pedagogical, material, social and multimodal. *Nostalgic* and *ironic* uses of popular music involve deploying popular music to construct a sense of the past — a past which historical narratives can never retrieve but rather attempt to simulate through the inclusion of signs of the past. *Melodramatic* uses of popular music, meanwhile, are those that utilise music's power over our emotional lives — by affirming the affective response of not only the adolescent character but the adolescent reader, melodramatic uses of popular music amplify the moral stakes of the narrative at hand. Building on the melodramatic, *pedagogical* uses of popular music are those which deliberately foreground aspects of musical expression as key to the novel's overall message or advocacy. *Material* and *social* uses of popular music include allusions to disappearing musical artefacts and cultures that young people today cannot comprehend or remember. These include artefacts like CDs, vinyl, cassette tapes (what Simon Reynolds would call the retromania of contemporary culture). However, popular music also provides a means of exploring destroyed, forgotten or abject social worlds, such as the crucial relationship between popular music and gay culture in New York in the 1980s and 1990s. Finally, I have identified the *multimodal* use of popular music to describe the ways in which references to popular music augment the cinematic and affective scope of the narrative experience by functioning as a suggested soundtrack for the implied reader.

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‘If you listen carefully now, you will hear’: Spectral music in *A Brief History of Seven Killings*

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Abstract: *This study considers the role of music in Marlon James’* A Brief History of Seven Killings *(2014), applying Jacques Derrida’s notion of spectrality to James’ recurrent allusions to the songs of Bob Marley and contextualising those allusions in reference to the novel’s supernatural elements. James’ novel is, in its presentation of Jamaican history, ‘haunted’ by Marley’s music, particularly the songs ‘Natural Mystic’ and ‘Rat Race’. James uses that haunting presence to challenge Marley’s posthumous public image, constructed by Island Records and the Marley Estate, as a voice of ‘peace and love’, emphasising instead the singer’s political radicalism.*

Keywords: Bob Marley, Jamaica, Marlon James, reggae, spectrality

First published in 2014, Marlon James’ *A Brief History of Seven Killings* offers a sprawling, multivocal account of a tumultuous period in Jamaican history. Across its five chapters, each taking place on a single day, the novel covers nearly fifteen years, told through the perspectives of numerous distinct narrators. Ostensibly, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is about the 1976 assassination attempt on Bob Marley, but James’ narrative design uses that single, shocking event as something of an anchor for its formal and thematic sprawl, contextualising the incident with reference to Kingston’s internecine political and criminal feuds, Cold War geopolitics, the development of the international drug trade and the crack epidemic in urban America, while further contextualising these historical events and trends with reference to the experiences of fictional characters and fictionalised versions of real figures. As such, James’ novel plays with historicity, as the author warns us with the book’s second epigram, identified simply as a ‘Jamaican proverb’: ‘if it no go so, it go near so’ (James 2014, xiii).

Such play with historicity occurs in concert with James' construction of the novel's ontology, so that the interplay between fictional characters and fictionalised versions of historical figures — enacted at some remove from the genuine historical figures directly mentioned — supplements the novel's more profound moments of unreality. As a work of historical fiction, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* eschews both strict historicism and strict mimeticism, and James' oft-gritty realism exists concurrently with elements of the supernatural. The book's first speaker, Sir Arthur George Jennings, is a ghost, a murder victim who opens the book by admonishing us, from beyond the grave, to '*Listen*', because 'dead people never stop talking' (James 2014, 1).

This emphasis on the sounds of the dead is most immediately evident in the novel's musicality, a feature often noted by critics and admirers of James' work. John Schaefer, in an interview with the author, compared James' brand of narratology to 'a symphony', while Jason Frydman argues that the novel's 'shattered and spectral assemblage' of narrators presents 'voices dropping in and out like the basslines and vocal snippets of a dubbed-out dancehall re-lick' (Schaefer 2014; Frydman 2019, 48). James' many pop culture allusions feature a diverse selection of musicians, and the scope and breadth of those allusions suggest a novel built with something of a soundtrack in mind, a notion reinforced by the author himself. When speaking to Schaefer on New York Public Radio, James offered listeners his own handpicked soundtrack for the book, a brief collection of tracks by Marley ('Ambush in the Night'), Bunny Wailer ('Crucial'), Tenor Saw ('Ring the Alarm'), Boogie Down Productions ('The Bridge Is Over') and Damian Marley ('Welcome to Jamrock') (Schaefer 2014). Fans of the novel have gone even further, so that various playlists, typically drawing from James' musical allusions or from reggae records extant during the novel's timeframe, can be found on platforms such as YouTube and Spotify. The most impressive of these, a 108-song Spotify playlist constructed by user natfmagee101, features every song and artist referenced in the novel, resulting in over seven hours of music.

Such projects promote the sense that, while music may not be the central subject of *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, it is nonetheless inextricably a part of the novel's plot, theme and technique. So much is reiterated in the book's formal structure: its five chapters take their titles from popular music, and one of its two epigrams is taken from singer and guitarist Bonnie Raitt. Frydman has noted that some of the novel's characters, particularly those involved in the assassination attempt (Bam-Bam, Demus and Josey Wales), share their names with notable dancehall musicians (Frydman 2019, 40). While none of the book's speakers are musicians themselves, music continually shapes their speech and their experience, so that bits of quoted lyrics occur constantly in the words of the novel's many voices. One of those voices, Nina Burgess, claims to be the inspiration for Marley's 'Midnight Ravers'; another is a *Rolling Stone* journalist, Alex Pierce, who comes to Jamaica ostensibly to follow Mick Jagger.

Pierce ignores his assignment, convinced not only that Jagger and the Stones are washed-up, but that the real story is coming from Kingston's ghettos. 'The busiest, most vital music scene in the world is about to blow up,' he says, 'and not on the charts' (James 2014, 61). This expectation proves prescient: within twenty-four hours, that scene's most famous performer will be shot in a failed assassination attempt, an event that serves as the literal and metaphorical centre of *A Brief History of Seven Killings*.

As such, Jennings' advice to 'listen' to the sounds of dead people at the novel's beginning serves a metaleptic function, given that the book's centre involves a famous dead musician. Such urgings are all part of Jennings' sometimes enigmatic role in the novel: as Sherri-Marie Harrison notes, Jennings serves 'as a composite of preindependence-era Jamaican politicians' and a symbol for the lost possibilities of Jamaica's postcolonial future (Harrison 2017, 93). He is a haunting presence, occasionally felt and even seen by the book's living characters, and, as Harrison continues, something of a chorus, commenting on events with the broader ontological context death has given him and 'linking all the characters and events together' (Harrison 2017, 93). Jennings is therefore both a literal spectre and a metaphor for the spectrality of the past, urging us to train ourselves to hear the sounds of the dead.

Spectrality, a notion theorised by Jacques Derrida in his *Specters of Marx* (1994 [1993]), offers us a means to hear and understand those sounds of the dead in *A Brief History of Seven Killings*. For Derrida, the spectral serves to trouble our supposedly dichotomous notions of absence and presence and past and present, an effect that James' allusions to Bob Marley's lyrics produce throughout the novel. As such, should we heed Jennings' advice and listen, we will find that *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is a novel of Jamaica haunted not only by the fictional Jennings, but also by Jamaica's most famous dead person. As Anna Maria Tomczak notes, the combined effect of 'numerous allusions to Marley's songs and the musical quality of the novel's discourse create[s] the potential of a sensuous experience for the reader', so that the book's oft-cited musicality offers Bob Marley the means to speak from beyond the grave (Tomczak 2018, 176). While *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is not, strictly speaking, a novel about Bob Marley, its frequent allusions to Marley's songs urge us to view the novel's action in reference to both Marley's music and Marley himself, whoever (or whatever) Marley might be. Indeed, Marley often seems more a presence than a person in the narrative, a presence made manifest through persistent allusions to certain of his songs, the lyrics of which appear regularly and pointedly throughout the book. The sheer volume and force of these allusions suggest that James employs Marley as something of a revenant, a dead man whose voice haunts Jamaica, its people and James' readers.

This study considers the implications of what James' version of Marley has to say, drawing from Derrida's theories of spectrality to account for Marley's

haunting presence throughout the novel. *A Brief History of Seven Killings* repeatedly asks us to consider who Bob Marley is, and by focusing upon the songs most frequently and pointedly quoted in James' narrative, particularly 'Rat Race' and 'Natural Mystic', we can perhaps extrapolate James' answer to his own question. At issue for James, then, is not only Marley's role within the action of the novel, but Marley's place within broader popular imagination. Few figures in music are so widely revered as Bob Marley, but as we will see, the most popular and pervasive conceptions of Marley and his music are largely the result of a marketing campaign initiated by Island Records and continued by the Marley estate. This campaign has served to emphasise the singer's radio-friendly peace-and-love anthems over his more radical and revolutionary songs. James, by contrast, gives voice to Marley's militant protest music, so that his revenant urges us to reimagine our conceptions of the singer's legacy, to hear the radicalism that record executives sought to silence. The result is a novel that uses spectral music as ballast to historical and aesthetic revisionism concerning one of popular music's most extraordinary voices.

Bob Marley: 'The Singer' and the *Legend*

Most readers of *A Brief History of Seven Killings* know, as James expects them to, that while Bob Marley may have survived the assassination attempt in 1976, he would die from cancer less than five years later. While three of the book's five chapters take place before Marley's death in 1981, James' ontology suggests that the divisions between past and present and living and dead are somewhat fungible, so that allusions to Marley and, more importantly, his music, have a spectral resonance, as if *A Brief History of Seven Killings* were haunted by the music and lyrics of a man who, for much of the plot, is still alive.

This sense, that Bob Marley is somehow both living man and haunting spectre, originates in James' enigmatic, sometimes contradictory portrait of Marley, a peripheral figure the other characters refer to simply as 'the Singer'. By relegating the Singer to the margins of his novel, James construes him more as a presence than as a character, a narrative choice that spotlights both the Singer's otherness, as superstar and purported prophet, and his ordinariness. To the latter, James' Marley is clearly human in the most banal ways possible, as susceptible to bullets and cancer as other mortals, a man who eats, bathes, sleeps and has sex. The Singer's sexual appetite is of particular note: Josey Wales, the mastermind behind the assassination attempt, quips that 'if birth control is a plot to kill black people, then the Singer must be the plot to breed them back' (James 2014, 133).

While such traits emphasise the Singer's banal humanity, the Singer still seems transcendent of the ordinary. By referring to him by this grandiose moniker — a conceit punctured only twice, both times by the American Alex Pierce — James suggests something mystical about this figure. So much is

seemingly confirmed by other characters' awe of him, an awe that extends beyond mere admiration for the Singer's material success or unlikely fame. Nina, recalling her tryst with the Singer, describes first her desire to see him at his morning ritual of bathing naked in the waterfall at Bull Bay — 'something about it sounded so holy and so sexy at once' — and the sense that 'the moon must be sad too, knowing he would soon go inside' (James 2014, 101). Such powers over nature seemingly extend to his music as well. Demus, one of the would-be assassins, recounts using the Singer's music to soothe an injury sustained when he was tortured in prison:

> when the pain was so bad that only strong weed could help me, the only other thing that help was the Singer. […] Is not that music take away the pain, but when it play I don't ride the pain, I ride the rhythm. (James 2014, 56)

As Tomczak notes, such passages 'point to the immaterial, spiritual aspect of Marley's contribution to Jamaican (and international) culture' (Tomczak 2018, 182).

Moreover, within the novel's ontology, the Singer occupies a liminal space between life and death, so that cancer makes him something of a ghost before he actually expires. The sense that death, despite its finality, is not altogether a binary to life pervades *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, a notion reinforced by Jennings. We see as much when, in the aftermath of the assassination attempt, Demus is captured by Rastafarian vigilantes. Just before he is hanged, Demus sees Jennings. 'Those who are about to die,' Jennings says, 'can see the dead' (James 2014, 269). This is later confirmed by Kingston Don Papa-Lo, who also sees a 'white man standing across the road' moments before he is murdered (James 2014, 362); while James does not identify Jennings here, the implication is fairly clear. Such consort between the dead and the near-dead or soon-to-die evidently applies to Jennings and the Singer some years before the Singer's death from cancer. When Jennings quotes from Marley's 'Natural Mystic', he credits his source by saying, 'I stole those words from a living man who already has death walking with him, killing him from the toe up' (James 2014, 111). That death, the cancer under Marley's toenail, would not be discovered for some seven months, and it would not kill Marley for nearly five years, time enough to record and release four more albums and some of his best-known songs, including the one that Jennings quotes.

The fact that Jennings knows the lyrics to an as-yet unreleased song heightens the sense that music serves a spectral function in the novel, a function perhaps better explained by deconstructive theory than by the traditional tropes of ghost stories alone. Of particular use is Jacques Derrida's notion of *hauntology* from his landmark *Specters of Marx*. Borrowing both from Marx and Engels' famous claim in *The Communist Manifesto* that 'a spectre is haunting Europe' (Marx 1988 [1888], 54) and Hamlet's observation that 'the

time is out of joint' (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 5), Derrida posits what he calls 'a spectral moment, a moment that no longer belongs to time, if one understands by this word the linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present: "now," future present)' (Derrida 1994 [1993], xx). By troubling our notions of time and presence, Derrida offers hauntology as something of a replacement for ontology:

> If there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents and, especially, the border between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence, non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality, or even the simulacrum in general, and so forth. There is first of all the doubtful contemporaneity of the present to itself. Before knowing whether one can differentiate between the specter of the past and the specter of the future, of the past present and the future present, one must perhaps ask oneself whether the spectrality effect does not consist in undoing this opposition, or even this dialectic, between actual, effective presence and its other. (Derrida 1994 [1993], 39-40)

In so doing, according to Colin Davis, Derrida 'replace[s] the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive' (Davis 2015, 373). Such notions readily lend themselves to music by highlighting what Mark Fisher calls the 'opposition between two ways of hearing (or treating) the voice: the voice as (authorized and authentic) embodied presence versus the voice as recorded revenant' (Fisher 2013, 43-44). Recorded music, by its nature, is historical product and temporal phenomenon, but paradoxically, in our consumption and experience of it, it acts as a Derridean spectre, unbound or disjointed from the historical context in which it was created. This is particularly true of the music which remains culturally pervasive long after the expiration of its creator, music like that of Bob Marley. If anything, Marley's imprint upon popular music has only increased after death; his bestselling album, the compilation *Legend*, first hit shelves three years after he succumbed to cancer, and it has spent over 500 weeks on the Billboard charts, far longer than any record released in Marley's lifetime. At present, nine of Marley's songs boast over 100 million plays on Spotify, with his most widely played song, 'Three Little Birds', having registered well over 350 million listens. As Derrida notes, 'a masterpiece always moves, by definition, in the manner of a ghost' (Derrida 1994 [1993], 18).

So much is true of Marley's various masterpieces in *A Brief History of Seven Killings*. Snippets of Marley's lyrics appear throughout the novel, haunting the thoughts and speech of the novel's many characters and imposing considerable demands on the reader, so that intimate familiarity with Marley's catalogue often seems something of a prerequisite to understanding the novel. James' technique resembles that used by James Joyce in 'Clay' and 'The Dead', the two most overtly 'haunted' stories in *Dubliners* (1914), wherein the quoted

songs — 'I Dreamt that I Dwelt' and 'The Lass of Aughrim', respectively — provide significant meaning through those lines *not* quoted in the text. James, like Joyce, has similar expectations of his readers, though he reveals his technique more clearly than did his Irish predecessor. Early in the novel, as Alex Pierce complains that 'the real Singer' is impossible to capture, he points to song lyrics in place of biography:

> I could move in closer, get to the real Singer, but I'll just fail like every other journalist before me because, shit, there is no real Singer. That's the clincher there, that the real motherfucker right there, that he is something else now that he's in the Billboard Top Ten. An allegory kinda, he exists when some girl passes by the hotel window singing that she's sick and tired of the ism and schism. When boys in the street sing them belly full but them hungry, tailing off before the next line and knowing there's a greater threat in not singing what everybody knows. (James 2014, 82)

The two songs quoted above, 'Get Up, Stand Up' and 'Them Belly Full (But We Hungry)', are among the most revolutionary songs Marley ever recorded. The former, co-written with original Wailer Peter Tosh, is, in Timothy White's phrase, one of the Wailers' most 'dangerous, wailing Black Power songs', an incendiary rejection of both existing power structures and the Christian evangelism that serves to reinforce systemic inequity (White 2006, 260-61). The section Pierce quotes, originally sung by Tosh, expresses frustration with the 'ism and schism game', the various ideological divisions propagated by the powerful to maintain control, before implying that notions of 'dyin' and goin' to heaven in a Jesus' name' breed subservience (Marley and Tosh 1973). 'Them Belly Full (But We Hungry)' is perhaps even more blunt; the omitted line, which Pierce hears as a threat, notes that 'a hungry mob is an angry mob' (Marley 1974). With the threat comes a sort of promise, or at least hints of a potential revolutionary future. The system — or Babylon shitstem, as some of James' characters put it — has failed, but the prospects for genuine revolution haunt Jamaica just as Marx and Engels' spectre haunted Europe.

Indeed, one hears in these songs something approximating revolutionary Marxism, albeit a Marxism filtered through Rastafarianism, but close enough to sound either threatening or promising, depending upon the audience. One of these audiences is revealed to be the CIA, and the Company regards the Singer and his lyrics through the prism of Cold War geopolitics and national security fears, worrying that Jamaica could become another Cuba. In *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, the CIA first responds to this existential threat of Jamaican revolution with implicit threats of their own, directed at the Singer and his entourage. Papa-Lo recounts the appearance of an unknown 'white bwoi' at the Singer's mansion. This man asks about a number of Marley's songs:

> What I want to know is what happened to the man who sung sweet little songs like 'Stir it Up.' Is it because the other two left you? What happened to the love everybody vibes? 'Burning and Looting'? Is that like 'Dancing in the Street'? You know, angry nigger music. (James 2014, 130)

In coarse, racist and deliberately provocative terms, the white bwoi returns us to Alex Pierce's comments about 'the real Singer', shifting the conversation to Marley's apparently contradictory ethos. Is the 'real Singer' the Marley of 'Stir it Up', the radio-friendly voice of peace, love and ganga? Or is he the Marley of 'Burning and Looting', the revolutionary voice of the postcolonial Third World? While the white bwoi seems confused about the Singer's catalogue — the Wailers were, if anything, more revolutionary in their politics before the departure of Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer — his question is unconsciously prescient. Marley's most famous and popular songs — 'Three Little Birds', 'Is This Love', 'Jamming', 'One Love/People Get Ready' and 'No Woman, No Cry' — typically express those 'love everybody vibes', belying the anger and danger found elsewhere in Marley's music.

This kinder, gentler version of Marley is something of a marketing construction, traceable to Island Records executive Dave Robinson. Tasked to put together a Greatest Hits package of Marley's songs after the singer's death, Robinson set out to 'sell him to the white world' (quoted in Kornelis 2014). When market research confirmed Robinson's suspicions about Marley's music, finding that white suburban audiences were largely turned off by revolutionary politics and overtly Rastafarian songs, Robinson selected tracks to obscure those aspects of Marley's ethos. The resulting tracklist on *Legend* (1984), while not altogether free of politics, skews towards Marley's softer, more romantic side. As such, according to Michelle A Stephens, 'Island's packaging of Marley in *Legend* erased the fact that the singer was the product of a subversive collective consciousness in Jamaica' (Stephens 1998, 145). In his decision to '[take] "reggae" and the "revolutionary" out of the conception of the album,' Robinson 'isolated all the music's meaning into the body of the individual artist himself; hence Marley as the "body of reggae"' (Stephens 1998, 146).

The result was a clear commercial success across multiple demographics; as Chris Kornelis notes, *Legend* would become both 'the preferred dinner-party soundtrack for polite company' and 'the gateway drug for generations of Marley aficionados' (Kornelis 2014). While the wide appeal and enduring popularity of *Legend* suggest that Robinson was onto something, commercial success came with a cost: the Marley of *Legend* is a somewhat distorted and, in Field Maloney's term, 'defanged' version of the singer (Maloney 2006). 'Listening to *Legend* to understand Marley,' Maloney continues, 'is like reading *Bridget Jones's Diary* to get Jane Austen' (Maloney 2006). Defanged or not, Island's version of Marley has proven commercially viable well beyond the world of popular music; the Jamaica Tourist Board has used 'One Love/People Get

Ready' in its advertising campaigns for decades, and Marley's name and likeness have been ubiquitously marketed, applied to all sorts of merchandise, including incense, iced tea, headphones, turntables, coffee and cannabis.

'Rasta don't work for no CIA'

While James' presentation of the Singer seemingly leaves questions of 'the real Bob Marley' unanswered, his repeated allusions to Marley's revolutionary songs serve to challenge the more market-friendly vision of the Singer. Those who know Marley only from *Legend* may well wonder why such an innocuous voice would be targeted for assassination; why gangs, politicians and the CIA would care about so harmless a message. These allusions remind the reader that Marley's broader message, with its themes of Black Power and post-colonial insurrection, was potentially dangerous to existing power structures, making Marley a threat to the economically and politically powerful. Moreover, by establishing the dangerous side of Marley's ethos, James shoves aside the cuddlier and gentler versions of both Rastafarianism and Jamaica itself. The misconception, often found among white Americans, that Rastafarianism is all about peace and pot is severely undercut by references to Marley's more radical songs, culminating in the moment when Rastafarian vigilantes exact brutal revenge against the Singer's would-be assassins. A song like 'Burning and Looting' emphasises the poverty and consequent anger in Jamaican ghettos, subverting those Tourist Board images of sandy beaches and clear ocean water set to 'One Love/People Get Ready'.

While the mysterious white bwoi fails to provoke the Singer, Papa-Lo and others recognise the threat even before it is expressed:

> Last thing we need is a rabble-rouser setting off the wrong element. Rock and roll is rock and roll and it has its fans it doesn't need… Look, I'm trying to tell you people this nicely. But rock, well, rock is for real Americans. And you all need to stop trying to cultivate an audience… Mainstream America doesn't need your kind of message so think real hard about these tours… maybe you should stick to the coasts. Stop trying to reach real America. (James 2014, 130-31)

When describing this threatening visit, Papa-Lo alludes to another Bob Marley song: 'some people take that as a visitation from the devil himself,' he says, 'but this is 1976 and if Rasta don't work for the CIA then somebody else do' (James 2014, 131). The song in question, 'Rat Race', was the closing track on *Rastaman Vibration*, Marley's only album released in 1976, the year of the shooting. While *Rastaman Vibration* has several revolutionary songs, 'Rat Race' is unique in its explicit commentary about Jamaica's violent political feuds and the Cold War geopolitics that finance and manipulate those feuds. Noting how 'political violence fill ya city', a city living under constant threat of 'sudden destruction', Marley mocks the notion of 'collective security for surety' (Marley

1976). This reality, that the collective security sought by capitalist nations against communist ones fails to protect Jamaican victims of politically manipulated gang warfare, seemingly prompts Marley to dismiss political machinations altogether: 'don't involve Rasta in your say-say,' he sings, because 'Rasta don't work for no CIA' (Marley 1976).

There is, of course, a constant spiritual and religious dimension to Marley's music, as present in his songs about love or ganja as in his songs about revolution, but in 'Rat Race' Marley declares Rastafarianism to be above the pettiness of Jamaican politics and, more daringly, American interference. Such claims balance the song's cynicism with a vision of religious purity and independence from both foreign manipulation and the capriciousness of political violence. These notions become, in the aftermath of the assassination attempt, either a haunting reminder of a lost ideal or a joke about the uselessness of idealism, and James repeats the phrase 'Rasta don't work for no CIA' — or 'the CIA', since most characters mildly misquote the song — throughout *A Brief History of Seven Killings*. Alex Pierce, the one character to quote 'Rat Race' verbatim, uses it to wonder at the murkiness of Jamaican corruption and political violence, the clarity and directness of the statement clashing with the more shadowy underground he finds: 'the Singer,' he says, 'never one to pull punches sings Rasta don't work for no CIA. In Jamaica 2 + 2 = 5, but now it's adding up to 7' (James 2014, 62). Later, Pierce wonders 'if Rasta don't work for the CIA, does he know who?' (James 2014, 62). Jennings hears Josey Wales use Marley's line flippantly when talking to Peter Nasser, the Jamaican Labour Party strategist who contracts Wales to commit these acts of 'political violence'; when Wales himself is set to become a victim of such violence, the mysterious Dr Love, a CIA operative, uses it again before apologising for making a 'bad joke' (James 2014, 116, 664).

These recurrent allusions to 'Rat Race' position the track at the centre of the novel's spectral soundtrack. The song floats in and out of the narrative, taunting both James' characters and his readers with its unheeded warnings and lost idealism. It offers a persistent reminder that the Singer's principles were impotent against more powerful forces, that the CIA never needed Rastafarians to manipulate Jamaica and that there were enough willing collaborators to brush aside Rastafarian purism for sake of cash, guns and cocaine. To some, like Josey Wales and Dr Love, the passage of time renders 'Rat Race' an impotent warning and, by extension, a bad joke, a piece of pop culture ephemera from a lost moment in history. By the time Dr Love quotes it, 'Rat Race' is fifteen years old, a song that may have spoken to its own time but seemingly no longer speaks to the present.

And yet the spectral presence of 'Rat Race' throughout the broad historical scope of James' novel recalls Derrida's 'suggestion' that 'haunting is historical, to be sure, but it is not *dated*, it is never docilely given a date in the chain of

presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of a calendar' (Derrida 1994 [1993], 4). Readers can trace 'Rat Race' to the date of its first occurrence in James' novel (2 December 1976) or its last (22 March 1991), to its release, recording or composition dates, but recorded music cannot be so easily consigned to dates or times. In 1991 or 2014, a song like 'Rat Race' is both relic and revenant; its warning, if no longer immediate, becomes accusation and condemnation of those who failed to heed it. 'Rat Race' may be a bad joke to Dr Love or Josey Wales, but it need not be so to James' reader.

'A natural mystic blowing through the air'

'Rat Race' can serve such a function, in part, because Marley's lyrics are so direct. Such directness is not altogether typical of Marley's protest music, and James uses 'Rat Race' as a foil to 'Natural Mystic', the other most ubiquitous song in the novel's spectral soundtrack. The opening track to *Exodus* (1977), Marley's first album to be recorded and released after the assassination attempt, 'Natural Mystic' presents biblically-inspired eschatology in cryptic, borderline gnostic terms; the sound of a doomsday trumpet, either the first or the last, heralds the 'reality' that 'many more will have to suffer, many more will have to die' (Marley 1977). Greil Marcus, reviewing *Exodus* for *Rolling Stone*, compared the track to Bob Dylan's 'Blowin' in the Wind' (1963), arguing that 'where Dylan seemed to say the answers were blowing away, Marley is certain they are blowing straight to anyone whose soul is pure enough to receive them' (Marcus 1977). Indeed, Marley offers neither explanations nor answers, refusing to indulge his audience's questions ('don't ask me why'); nor does he explain, here or elsewhere, what a 'natural mystic' is. In lieu of explanations, Marley offers apocalyptic visions, explicable only through his advice that 'if you listen carefully now, you will hear' (Marley 1977).

The song's title would, somewhat anachronistically, become an appellation for Marley himself, eventually serving also as the title of a compilation CD, *Natural Mystic: The Legend Lives On*, released by Island |Records in 1995. This collection, presented as a sequel to, or continuation of, *Legend*, offers a more heavily political version of Marley, with glimpses of the hard-edged Rastafarianism and Pan-Africanism that the previous album lacked, but all while presenting Marley himself as, in Stephens' phrase, 'a deliberately ethereal icon, one removed from the very specific social and political context of reggae production in the 1970s' (Stephens 1998, 141-42). For Stephens, this vision of Marley was the inevitable product of Robinson's reinvention of the Singer for Island Records. 'The figure of the "natural mystic",' she writes, 'is the culmination of a posthumous ten-year process which first humanized Marley in the 1980s in order to immortalize him in the 1990s' (Stephens 1998, 142). The immortalised Marley, having become safe for white middle class consumption, would then become the marketable Marley, with even his most revolutionary

songs commodified in the form of licensed 'Natural Mystic' incense and 'Iron Lion Zion' onesies.

While James' Singer is, to some extent, an appropriation-cum-subversion of Marley-as-natural-mystic, the author's use of the song reclaims it from such misapplication. For James, the 'natural mystic' is not Bob Marley himself, but an inexplicable force extant in Jamaica in the time immediately before and after the assassination attempt. This is closer to Marley's meaning of the term than that promoted by Island Records or the Marley estate, even if James' characters use it without Marley's grim sincerity. The phrase 'natural mystic' appears twice in the novel, once delivered ironically by Josey Wales, as explanation for his evident first-hand knowledge of Marley's gunshot wounds; he heard it, he tells Alex Pierce, 'from the natural mystic blowing through the air' (James 2014, 391). Such a quotation is typical of Wales, who is both familiar with and dismissive of the Singer's work; however, the phrase is first uttered by, of all people, Claire Di Florio, the wife of CIA station chief Barry Di Florio. Confronting her husband about the CIA's plans in Jamaica, Claire avers that the Company's typical *modus operandi* seems not to fit somehow. She says:

> There's something else, something in the air. A natural mystic. (James 2014, 178)

The comment confuses her husband, whose question — 'what the fuck does that mean?' — echoes those questions Marley declines to answer in the song itself; like Marley, Claire also refuses to answer: 'it wouldn't even make sense to explain it to you' (James 2014, 178).

The entire exchange is curious, particularly since Marley had not yet recorded 'Natural Mystic' at the time of the conversation — as noted above, 'Natural Mystic' was recorded after the assassination attempt. The sense, then, is of something prophetic, a poor expression of the otherwise ineffable, laden with the very real threat of violence. While Claire does not quote further from the song, the use of the phrase implies that the song's apocalyptic vision of suffering and death will follow. Claire says it on the eve of the assassination attempt, the event that will lead to more death and destruction, ultimately cementing Josey Wales' place as don and his role in the international drug trade. The suffering and death, then, is recast as the fall-out from that event: the murders of the would-be assassins, the murder of Papa-Lo, the politicised gang violence resultant from failed attempts at reconciliation, the blight of crack addiction, the crack addicts murdered by Josey Wales and the murder of Josey Wales himself. In short, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* lives up to Marley's chilling prediction in 'Natural Mystic' that:

> many more will have to suffer. Many more will have to die. (Marley 1977)

Those exact words appear several times in the novel, serving as something of a refrain for the dead or soon-to-die. Jennings, as the first to utter them,

contextualises the Singer's lyrics as a chorus suitable for the end of the year and the onset of winter:

> And now we are in the time of dying. The year surrenders in three weeks. Gone, the season of wet hot summer, ninety-six degrees in the shade, May and October rains that swelled rivers, killed cows and spread sickness. Men growing fat on pork, boys' bellies swelling with poison. Fourteen men lost in the bush while bodies explode, three, four, five. Many more will have to suffer. Many more will have to die. (James 2014, 111)

The words come again when Jennings appears to Demus, just before the gang member's execution. Having been drawn to the jungle by Josey Wales' scent, only to find Demus instead, Jennings realises that the violence and cruelty that doomed him are unlikely to end any time soon. From there, the lines pass into the mind of Papa-Lo in the moments before his death as he tries to work out who was responsible for the assassination attempt on his friend the Singer. As he comes to understand that Josey Wales, his subordinate, has betrayed him, and that the powers beyond Wales are greater than Jamaican political parties or gangland dons, he repeats the Singer's words. The words return to Jennings at the end of the same chapter, as if responding to Josey Wales' ascendency and the novel's oncoming shift from Jamaica to New York:

> Now something new is blowing through the air, an ill wind. A malaria. Still more will have to suffer, and many more will have to die, two, three, a hundred, eight hundred and eighty-nine. (James 2014, 430)

'Marley's hot on the box'

Among those to suffer and die is the Singer himself, whose last days Jennings describes in the chapter. These vignettes of Marley in decline are juxtaposed with images of Jamaica under siege by political turmoil and brutal violence. Those images are themselves introduced by Jennings' revision of 'Natural Mystic': 'something new is blowing' (James 2014, 430). Such wording implies, somewhat paradoxically, the accuracy of Marley's apocalyptic predictions and the inadequacy of those predictions to account for the exact nature of this violence. The fact that the Singer's last days are spent largely abroad — in Paris, London, New York, Pittsburgh, Bavaria and Miami — suggests that international stardom has become a sort of exile, with the singer's voice finally silenced just as the CIA-supported Jamaica Labour Party wins the election. Employing the pathetic fallacy, James has the Singer's death punctuated by thunder and lightning in both New York and Kingston, implying yet again that the Singer, if not transcendent of death, is at least transcendent of ordinary death.

And yet, just before he expires, the Singer himself becomes the audience for a bit of spectral music. The song in question is, for a change, not one of his own making, but rather a song written about him. 'Something coming from out the

window,' Jennings reports, 'sounding like that Stevie Wonder tune "Master Blaster"?' (James 2014, 436). While Jennings' phrasing and James' curious use of a question mark make it unclear what, exactly, the Singer hears, the introduction of Wonder's 'Master Blaster (Jammin')', a hit single in the year before Marley's death, suggests that the Singer finds himself haunted by his own legacy on his deathbed. 'Master Blaster (Jammin')', though an evidently sincere tribute to Marley, de-emphasises the singer's radicalism and militancy: 'though the world's full of problems,' Wonder sings, 'they couldn't touch us if they tried' (Wonder 1980). Those problems are largely drowned out by the sounds of the reggae music — 'Marley's hot on the box' — that forms the soundtrack of a summer block party. While Wonder connects that party to post-colonial circumstances, including the recently ended civil war in Zimbabwe, and vague notions of Rastafarian solidarity ('joined as children in Jah'), the social and political power of Marley's music is sublimated to its escapism:

> They want us to join their fighting,
>
> But our answer today
>
> Is to let all our worries
>
> Like the breeze through our fingers slip away. (Wonder 1980)

This is, of course, the vision of Bob Marley that persists, the vision constructed, in part, by Island Records and the Marley estate, the vision that sells records, incense and coffee to the white suburban middle class. It is the vision used to sell Jamaica to tourists, a vision that belies the violence and oppression visited upon the Jamaican people as consequence of British colonialism and the Cold War. For the Singer to be haunted by this version of himself just before his death seems fitting, as James' novel is itself haunted by the sounds of a more radical Bob Marley and the Wailers. Perhaps, James speculates, that radicalism is no longer welcome in Jamaica or the United States, but Marley's ghost will continue to make its spectral music heard elsewhere. When Jennings makes his final appearance in the novel, he sees the Singer's fiery legacy 'doused out' by posthumous honours, particularly the Order of Merit and an appearance on a postage stamp (James, 2014, 601). And yet, Jennings concludes, the Singer's voice has not been altogether silenced:

> But in another city, another valley, another ghetto, another slum, another favela, another township, another intifada, another war, another birth, somebody is singing Redemption Song, as if the Singer wrote it for no other reason but for this sufferah to sing, shout, whisper, weep, bawl, and scream right here, right now. (James 2014, 601)

In this image, as Derrida would remind us, the time is out of joint, and the spectre haunting the world is the sound of a long-dead man's voice moving in the ghostly manner of a masterpiece.

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‘Everything you’ve *heard* is true’: Resonating musicological anecdotes in crime fiction about Antonio Salieri

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Abstract: *This article examines the recurring theme of unreliable anecdotes as historical ‘evidence’ in twentieth- and twenty-first-century fictional depictions of Antonio Salieri’s relationship with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Salieri’s later teaching career. These include appeals to supernatural experiences in Cedric Glover’s* The Mysterious Barricades *(1964) and the blending of historical documents and fictional interviews in David Weiss’s* The Assassination of Mozart *(1970). Many post-*Amadeus *literary defences of Salieri — including Dieter Kühn’s postmodern novella* Ein Mozart in Galizien *(2008) and Ian Kyer’s quasi-procedural* Damaging Winds *(2013) — also take on the quality of mysteries, with protagonists seeking historical truth as a form of justice. The conclusions of these stories depict the uncovering of some musicological ‘verdict’ as similar to the crime novel’s unveiling of a guilty culprit.*

Keywords: Antonio Salieri, biofiction, historical crime fiction, music, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Advertisements for the 1984 film adaptation of Peter Shaffer’s 1979 play *Amadeus* triumphantly proclaimed that ‘everything you’ve heard is true!’[1] The tagline referred to the commercial success of the play and film, particularly the film’s success during awards season. While it made no overt claims about truth in relation to the play’s content, musicologists, theatre critics and the general public were all quick to reinterpret it (favourably or otherwise) as a claim to

[1] ‘Everything you’ve heard is true’ can be found in some trailers and posters for the film version of *Amadeus*, as well as in several programme notes and advertisements for more recent productions of the play and performances of music by both Mozart and Salieri. For an early response to the tagline, see Polly Frost’s satire ‘The Salieri Variations’, published in *The New Yorker* on 14 April 1985.

historical accuracy, particularly when given the focus on hearing and hearsay in Shaffer's frame story.

Musicological responses to *Amadeus* — from corrective biographies by Mozart scholars H C Robbins Landon (1988) and Volkmar Braunbehrens (1989, in German; English version in 1992) to commentaries unpacking the film's impact on popular musical knowledge by Robert Marshall (1997) and Paul Henry Lang ('The Film *Amadeus*', 1997, 155-62) — tend toward the defensive, refuting aspects of Shaffer's screenplay on historical terms and/or promoting revivals of Antonio Salieri's operas — revivals which paradoxically owe their existence to the interest generated by the success of the film and which often trade on the kinds of narratives they overtly challenge. More recent works centred on the politics and business of Italian opera in the 1780s, including John Rice's *Antonio Salieri and Viennese Opera* (1998) and Ian Woodfield's *Cabals and Satires* (2019), construct narratives of professional life in Mozart's (or, perhaps more accurately, Salieri's) Vienna that counteract Shaffer's 'could-have-been' speculation with historical realities.

The sheer volume of musicological ink that has been spilled in reaction to an act of musical misinformation is particularly intriguing in light of pre-*Amadeus* depictions of Salieri in fiction. Many theatre critics and scholars noted the similarity of Shaffer's work to a detective novel. The onstage Salieri even explicitly (if anachronistically) suggests a mystery to be solved in the proposed title of his 'last work': *The Death of Mozart, or, Did I Do It?* (Shaffer 1980, 25). Yet the 'evidence' he presents in all versions of the play is largely psychological, with the one concrete written source — Salieri's false confession in the stage play — dismissed immediately. Two crime novels about Salieri from the 1960s and 1970s, however, reveal the slipperiness between (factual) musicological evidence and (fictional) criminal 'evidence', where the transition from one to the other can grant wholly fictional suppositions an air of legitimacy and academic grounding not present in surviving documentation or mainstream research. The blurring of historical research and invented criminal evidence is common in historical crime fiction; what Ray Browne and Lawrence Kreiser term 'present-day investigators revisiting, as it were, the past while standing in the present' (2000, 5). This article explores the construction of 'primary' sources and the references to scholarly research and musical knowledge through the 'investigations' in Cedric Glover's paranormal thriller *The Mysterious Barricades* (1964) and David Weiss's 'fictional inquest' *The Assassination of Mozart* (1970), positing that they reflect a kind of 'composer crime novel' that paved the way for both the depictions of conflict and conspiracy in contemporary composer biopics (including *Amadeus*) and more recent re-evaluations of Salieri set in the 1810s and 1820s.

I have selected these works because of their creative use of biography and their interpretation of real or imagined historical fact and treatment of Mozart's

and Salieri's music. While the musicological and criminal 'evidence' presented within the worlds of both novels is quite different, Glover and Weiss both inhabit the roles of historically removed protagonists evaluating the evidence before them, to come to some kind of conclusions about the circumstances of Salieri's relationship with Mozart and the nature of Mozart's death. Both use both real historical sources and invented interpretative frameworks in attempting to solve what they perceive as a historical crime. In short, the protagonists become both the detectives of crime fiction and, in a way, musicologists, sifting through shifting accounts of what is 'real' and fictional, decades after the fact. Both novels also respond to the trope of secret, alternative or hidden counter-histories and conspiracies, reflecting and drawing on the (perceived or actual) limitations in the musicological record and (often) in the ability of most authors to convincingly depict and invoke musical sound as a historical source. In what follows, I will briefly outline the kinds and use(s) of evidence in both narratives. I also posit that the appeal of secret, hidden or destroyed knowledge — and the potential of fiction to fill in attractive gaps left (as it may seem to the novelist) unexplored by musicologists — remains particularly relevant today.

In his work on Hungarian composer novels, Tibor Pintér (2013) draws a distinction between the *biographie romancée* (or straightforward fictionalised biography) and the *biographical fantasy* (or a blending of fiction, fact and an awareness of human life and subsequent histories beyond the documented biographical facts). Biographically-inspired crime fiction placing real historical figures in the roles of detectives, culprits or suspects is by no means unique to musical fiction, and is a common tactic for authors and showrunners to bring together fictional crime-solving with actual unknown aspects of a famous figure's life. Stephanie Barron uses the (factual) posthumous destruction of Jane Austen's letters by her sister Cassandra as the justification for what Anita Vickers describes as 'nested mysteries': the (actual) unknown facts of Austen's life between 1800 and 1804, the (fictional) mysteries Barron has her Austen solving during this time, and reader curiosity about 'what was Austen really like and what might have been Cassandra's reasons for destroying the letters' (Vickers 2000, 213). Part of the question of what any historical artist was 'really like' involves the question of inspiration. Mystery novels featuring authors and composers frequently make some attempt to explain their most enduring works through some connection to a fictional plot.

In many cases, it is the protagonist's artistic skills in the first place that grant them the insight into human nature necessary to be effective detectives. Barron's Jane Austen encounters a variety of scenarios and people who, it is implied, will later inspire her novels. Laura Lebow's Lorenzo Da Ponte series (*The Figaro Murders*, 2015; *Sent to the Devil*, 2016) has the librettist unwillingly investigating murders while at work on his most well-known collaborations with Mozart — murders which place the plots of *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage*

of Figaro) and *Don Giovanni* more squarely within the context of Viennese social and political life during the 1780s. One of the more fanciful instances of crime fiction featuring a historical detective — Robert Barnard's alternate history *Mr Mozart* series — imagines the composer/detective as a slightly embittered septuagenarian writing for the London music hall stage and solving problems for the royal family. Unlike the Mozart literature discussed later in this article — which by and large focuses on 'solving' Mozart's tragic death after the fact — Barnard pokes fun at the disconnect between fictional and real biography. His Mozart (rather like Shaffer's aged Salieri) bemoans what he sees as his neglected status and the grand successes he imagines he might have had under different circumstances. The reader with some knowledge of the historical Mozart finds an additional 'case' in teasing out what aspects of Barnard's novel are historical in-jokes: throwaway lines about opera titles that are clearly imagined English versions of German singspiels, non-existent symphonies and numerous references to a life and career stretching decades beyond that documented in our world. The final chapter of the second *Mr Mozart* novel, *Too Many Notes, Mr Mozart* (1995), ends with Mozart telling his young pupil Princess Victoria that 'only the other day an odd-looking man came to my apartment and commissioned me to write a requiem', giving the sense that history, perhaps, is catching up to this version of Mozart (1995, 179). This implication is toyed with and then playfully abandoned in the concluding short story 'Lovely *Requiem*, Mr Mozart' (2010), where an attempt on Mozart's life is but one element of an Agatha Christie-style case involving a factory owner who commissions the *Requiem* but tells each member of his dysfunctional family it will be in memory of a different (and still-living) dedicatee. In setting the historical *Requiem*'s famously mysterious commission in the context of an actual country house mystery, Barnard emphasises the intersections between music history and crime fiction. In his book on the work, Simon Keefe, in his essay 'The *Requiem* legend in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', argues that:

> the *Requiem* legend can brightly illuminate the fact-fiction continuum that is intrinsic to our collective understandings of the work; divisions between traditional 'scholarly' and 'popular' points of focus can be transcended by an interpretation (as in *Amadeus*) that is simultaneously relevant to both. (2012, 40)

Musicological interest in fictions about music history tends to fall into the identification of quasi-'musical' forms within novels on musical subjects (as in studies of Anthony Burgess's *On Mozart* of 1991 or Peter Härtling's *Schubert* of 1992) or, more commonly, in the realm of debunking untruths in biopics and biographical fiction. Unlike many such analyses by musicologists, this article does not aim to re-examine ground already covered by the excellent work done by the likes of Braunbehrens (1989), Stafford (1991) and Rice (1998) debunking Mozart death conspiracy theories or recontextualising Salieri's operatic career.

Instead, I want to propose a subset of the biographical novel that blends biographical fictions' concern with real or imagined musicological sources and the criminal evidence put forth in a mystery novel. This article explores two such works that (unlike those briefly mentioned earlier) position the historical composer as victim and potential culprit. Glover and Weiss do not attempt to explain Mozart's creativity by refashioning him into a detective or setting their plots during the composition or performance of his best-known works. In both novels he is long dead by the time the investigation begins. Instead, they attempt to use historical evidence (real or invented) and interventions by fictional characters to resolve a number of nested questions that are unknown to both their protagonists and readers: what was Mozart like, what explains his early death and why does his music survive to this day? These questions in some ways are appealing to the mystery novelist precisely because they are beyond the purview of most musicologists, whose explanations of musical biography and reception do not generally lend themselves to exciting plots and the unearthing of secret evidence.

Cedric Glover's *The Mysterious Barricades* (1964) provides multiple levels of pseudo-historical primary sources. It is ostensibly an account not of Mozart's death, but of the institutionalisation of a twentieth-century British cellist, Harry Pitland, during the Second World War, following a hallucinatory episode and the death of a young German composition student, Wolfgang Erbensee. The book begins with accounts by a fictional editor, Ellis Wotton (later revealed to be Pitland's erstwhile best friend), and Lena Merrow, the daughter of Pitland's landlady. These documents give an historical 'place' both to the narrative that follows and to Pitland's eventual historical, musical and supernatural claims. Some twenty pages into the novel, the source of Pitland's instability and guilt is revealed; he is a believer in psychometry, or the idea that one could sense the feelings of the dead by handling their belongings. Accompanying his friends Ellis and Norma Feygate to the opera in 1934, he sees a production of Rimsky-Korsakov's 1898 *Mozart and Salieri*. Pitland, secretly in love with Norma, quarrels with her over her professional life as a violinist and her love for Ellis. His jealousy over his friends' relationship is soon after conflated with the operatic depiction of Salieri's supposed jealousy of Mozart. Pitland turns to the established Mozart biographies (and Ignaz von Mosel's 1827 biography of Salieri), but finds them unsatisfactory — when he looks for evidence of the rumour to align with what he already feels to be true, he claims 'I had an intuitive conviction that the play […] was a bald statement of fact in a poetic guise'. This rejection of historical scholarship in favour of fiction sets Pitland down a path to find evidence — whether historical, psychical or musical — for his supposition. While Glover does not use the term 'conspiracy theorist' (which the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates to 1964), Pitland has become one, with the existence of counterevidence only reinforcing what he has already come to believe.

History for Pitland ultimately — and tragically — feels less true than his increasingly vivid musical responses and hallucinations, which coalesce around Mozart's *Requiem*. Pitland's therapist, unable to diagnose his patient's discomfort, refers him to a German colleague. This has disastrous results, as Norma and Ellis's announcement of their engagement and Pitland's befriending of a pair of music students — coincidentally named Wolfgang and Constanze, the names of Mozart and his wife — push him to become convinced that his experiments in self-hypnosis and violent emotional reaction to a performance of the *Requiem* serve some larger historical purpose. He starts to see 'evidence' for this take more (seemingly) physical forms — a scrap of paper stuck into an old cello appears to him as Mozart's and Franz Xaver Sussmayr's sketches for the *Requiem*. While playing these 'sketches', he hallucinates himself in 1791, where, as Salieri, he quarrels with Sussmayr about Mozart's death. Caught between his unreliable perceptions of the past and present, Pitland becomes uncertain whether an unconscious figure accompanying Sussmayr is Mozart or Erbensee, and himself collapses. Thereafter, the narrative reverts to Ellis Wotton, who offers his take on Pitland's subsequent institutionalisation and disappearance, and his and Norma's efforts to substantiate the rambling claims found in the Testament. Ellis's journey ends with the sudden memory of one more musicological idea:

> As I walked home, it occurred to me that Beethoven […] could never have dedicated his first violin sonatas to Salieri had he believed him to be the murderer of his beloved master. And Beethoven must have been in a position to know. (1964, 191)

These, the final sentences in the novel, encapsulate the constant interplay between historical fact and intuitive emotion throughout Glover's work. They are presented as sobering historical truth, an objective detail (Beethoven's studies with Salieri) meant to bookend Ellis's conclusions that Pitland's musical and historical convictions were symptoms of his delusions. Yet the sentence structure is full of uneasy speculation about motive and knowledge — Beethoven 'could never' have done something and 'must have' been in a position to know the reality of the situation.

While of a very different tone from *Mysterious Barricades*, David Weiss's *The Assassination of Mozart* (1970) raises similar tensions in its treatment of the gaps and conflicts between historical documentation and individual memory. Unlike Glover's Harry Pitland, Norma Feygate and Ellis Wotton — who all inhabit an arguably 'real' world of musicology and performance that predates and exists apart from Pitland's eventual supernatural convictions — Weiss's characters exist in a fictional version of 1825 where Salieri's presumed complicity in Mozart's death is generally (if secretly) assumed by many in Boston, London and Vienna to be part of a larger political conspiracy. The historical grounding and 'secret history' nature of the book are made clear from

the opening pages. In two short introductory chapters — titled 'The Death of Mozart' and 'The Death of Salieri', respectively — Weiss juxtaposes several short texts, presented without comment as snippets of translated newspaper accounts, gossip and other historical documents. These are not sourced in any direct sense, but have the *feel* of being grounded in primary source evidence, with the Mozart chapter appealing to alleged oral accounts from Mozart's doctors and friends and the Salieri one relying on excerpts from (supposed) documented accounts of the rumour. By positioning statements about Mozart's death from natural causes as conjecture alongside seemingly 'objective' suspicions directed at Salieri, Weiss hints at a conspiracy without making any direct claims, relying on the appearance of evidence to suggest what might or might not be a trustworthy source.

Although presented together as a kind of archive, some of these 'sources' are clearly fictional (Beethoven's spoken responses to the questions in his conversation books, for instance, have famously not been preserved in any authoritative format), while others are framed in such a way as to seemingly stand on their own with no external context (the accounts of Mozart's and Salieri's respective funerals). These chapters prime the reader for the subsequent ones, with the anecdotes 'producing the effect of the real' historical event as critiqued by Joel Fineman (1989, 61). Although this is clearly a novel with fictional characters investigating the supposed mystery of Mozart's death, the first two chapters specifically exclude reference to Weiss's protagonists or the invented plot about to unfold. Most of the characters — historical and fictional — in the novel do not interact with these 'documents', instead conducting research through interviews created by Weiss. By using the bibliography provided at the end of the novel, the sceptical reader can trace many of the accurate, semi-accurate (but out of context) and invented documents to their intellectual origins, from the monumental documentary and life-and-works biographies by Otto Deutsch and Alfred Einstein to the now-debunked anecdote collections by Beethoven's amanuensis Anton Schindler.[2]

The bibliography also reflects a curious combination of references. Weiss gives authors, titles and dates for his sources, but leaves out publication information or any sense of whether he regards the source as authoritative or reliable. Thus, Alexander Pushkin's wholly invented 'little tragedy' *Mozart and Salieri* of 1830 (the first work of theatre on the subject of Mozart's death to directly depict the 'poisoning' onstage) is cited alongside travel guides to

[2] Deutsch was no stranger to the presence of unreliable and conspiratorial Mozart anecdotes in the historical literature. In his commentary to an 1815 entry from Sulpiz Boisserée's diary, which alludes to Mozart believing he had been poisoned and claimed that Salieri spent much of his wife's inheritance paying to have Mozart's work 'whistled off the boards', Deutsch remarks dryly 'these reminiscences, which contain gross individual errors of fact, are also as a whole unreliable' (1965, 515).

Vienna, works by political scientists and social historians on censorship under the Habsburgs and sensational accounts from the criminal literature of poison as a murder weapon. The musicologists cited — including such familiar names as Emily Anderson, Eric Blom, Deutsch and Einstein — were all in reality strongly opposed to any sort of conspiracy theories around Mozart's death, with Blom even penning a sarcastic riposte to the Salieri rumour alongside an English translation of *Mozart and Salieri* that appeared in *Music and Letters* in 1957. Yet their place in Weiss's bibliography gives his own claims to historical insight a kind of authority.

These chapters essentially serve the same function as the 'everything you are about to read is true' notice at the beginning of a Dan Brown novel, using just enough historical-sounding language to evoke the *feel* of truth while hoping e reader isn't aware of too many of the established facts or real scholarly traditions. In an analysis and annotated bibliography compiled at the height of the *Da Vinci Code* craze and demand for 'read-alike' works in libraries, librarian Terry Beck observes the distinctions within Brown's audience between those who read Brown's work as purely fictional thrillers and those who read it as history. He also notes the deliberate ways Brown and other authors of conspiracy-adjacent fiction and academic thrillers seek to elide the difference between scholarly (or pseudo-scholarly) fiction and scholarly fact:

> That 'nothing more than a thriller' perception soon changed however. Brown culled a mix of information from books, monographs, documents, and art to create a work of fiction that many readers took as fact. While he was careful to note 'all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate,' many readers carried this statement a step further and assumed that the theories being discussed by characters were accurate as well. The line that distinguishes fiction and nonfiction just simply wasn't present for these readers, caught up as they were in the tantalizing mix of real and pretend that Brown created. (2007, 19)

Emphasising the accuracy of Brown's descriptions, while carefully omitting those aspects of said descriptions that come from more dubious and/or recent sources than his narrative suggestions, is reminiscent of the way Weiss (and, later, Shaffer) frame their fiction as research. All overtly state their fictional nature, but the focus on hidden or suppressed knowledge in their narratives very easily leads the unsuspecting reader to leave historical scepticism at the door. The seemingly impartial nature of Weiss's introductions and the concluding bibliography are at odds with the more obviously fictional narrative of the novel, in which Americans Jason and Deborah Otis, ostensibly sent by the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston to commission a new work from Beethoven, go to Vienna in 1825 to interview Mozart's and Salieri's surviving friends, family and students. They are hampered at every turn by the Viennese secret police, and

eventually uncover a larger antidemocratic conspiracy against both Mozart's operas and their present-day investigation.

While the Otises' fictional interviews mirror the travelogues of real-life eighteenth- and nineteenth-century musicologists (most notably Charles Burney and Vincent and Mary Novello, all cited in Weiss' bibliography), the oppressive framework they encounter and the sense of how each interview puts them both closer to the truth and in greater danger owes far more to the sensibility of a Cold War spy novel or an Alfred Hitchcock thriller, with a pair of naïve foreign tourists cast adrift against broader forces they do not understand and cannot escape. Weiss, presenting the Otises' quest as a series of interviews and misfortunes, has them killed off by the chief of the secret police at the last moment, seemingly to explain why their findings never made it into the official historical narrative. The closing chapters — their long-awaited interview with Salieri, departure from Vienna and 'accidental' drowning — are presented less as revelations of 'lost' history and more as the inevitable explanation for why these 'discoveries' have been lost. The concept of a quasi-historical conspiracy theory around Mozart's death is subsumed by the larger fictional plot invented by Weiss. Essentially, Weiss proposes two possible ways of reading the end of his novel:

1. Everything you've read for the prior 380 pages is fiction. The cover describes this as a 'fictional inquest', there never were any such people as Deborah and Jason Otis, and the accounts of interviews with Constanze Mozart, Franz Schubert, Ludwig van Beethoven and Antonio Salieri — while all based on primary sources reported by their friends and acquaintances from the 1820s — are pure invention. If you read the works cited in the bibliography, you will learn the truth.
2. Everything you've read for the prior 380 pages is fiction, but fiction that *could have* happened. While the characters and scenarios are largely either fictional or fictionalised, this is a story of a repressive government covering up a crime committed by one of its employees. Yes, you could read the biographies listed in the bibliography that would tell you otherwise, but they didn't consider what evidence could have been lost, hidden or destroyed.

Is *The Assassination of Mozart* a crime novel that plays with the possibility of conspiracy or a conspiracy theory masquerading as a crime novel? It is all too easy for a musicologist to catalogue the ways Weiss distorts or misrepresents the numerous historical sources listed in his bibliography. His book is, after all, a novel — as the cover to the paperback edition notes, a *fictional* inquiry into the mystery of Mozart's death. Unlike Glover, he was not a musicologist by training, and much of his professional career consisted of fictionalised biographies of various historical figures. But I do want to consider how Weiss and his protagonists take the aspect of Salieri's life that 'exonerates' him for

Glover — his teaching career in the first two decades of the nineteenth century — and re-present it in terms of Salieri's alleged hostility towards German-language vocal works. Weiss constructs telling interviews with two of Salieri's most famous composition students — Beethoven and Schubert. Here, the individual influence of pedagogy is presented as 'proof' of a malign force overshadowing Viennese musical life. As research by Christopher Wiley and Christopher Gibbs into Salieri's late teaching career and final public appearances suggests, the writing and rewriting of anecdotes about his pedagogical role constructs multiple possible interpretations. Gibbs notes that a single diary entry by Schubert contrasting Salieri and Beethoven 'came to assume disproportionate importance in Schubert's biography' (2003, 134), while Wiley traces how the retelling of Salieri's presence at Haydn's last public appearance eventually replaced him with Beethoven. Wiley observes that the inclusion of Beethoven and exclusion of Salieri in this anecdote is representative of Romantic shifts in ideas of musical greatness, celebrity, and canonicity:

> But Beethoven was evidently the character whom music historiography ultimately favoured for inclusion within the story, as a composer of a much greater status than Salieri and one whose posthumous reputation was unsullied by allegations of jealousy and murder. Conversely, the edging out of Salieri over time reflects the precarious position he came to occupy at the canonic periphery, as a musical figure of only minor historical importance. (2013, 175)

Where Weiss differs from these real-world interrogations of Salieri's pedagogical career is in his explicit linking of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century musical theatrical, nationalistic and language politics with his broader state conspiracy. Both Glover and Weiss play on the instability and unreliability of the historical record — memories deliberately or accidentally misrepresented, official and unofficial censorship and biases present in authoritative biography — to construct their plots. However, their conclusions present the reader with divergent views of what to do with these constructions of history. Glover ends his book — seemingly the more 'unnatural', with its psychic underpinnings — with speculation presented as corrective fact. By contrast, mirroring Glover's Pitland's dissatisfaction with von Mosel, Weiss comes across as convinced by his own fiction, concluding the book with a lengthy bibliography in which histories of poison, political accounts of the Habsburg empire and travel guides to Austria commingle with works by musicologists and biographies — most of whom would be horror-struck to find themselves cited in a book (even one ostensibly fictional) supporting the poisoning narrative.

It is telling that, in terms of the actual musical sounds referred to by both Glover and Weiss, both authors are firmly rooted in the Romantic reimagining of Mozart that so attracted both Pushkin and Shaffer. While this is in some ways obviously reflective of the limited access to scores and recordings of Salieri operas for general audiences prior to the 1980s, it also creates a kind of musical-

psychological extrapolation; Glover's Pitland refers to specific 1930s performances of vocal works by Rimsky-Korsakov and Mozart, while Weiss's protagonists are contemporaries of Beethoven and Schubert. Both authors fall into the trap of depicting now-canonical musical sounds as timeless, resounding across history unconnected to the mundanities of either the business of music or its historical context. Salieri's music goes noticeably unheard in both novels, emphasising his posthumous transformation from a musical colleague of Mozart's to a literary villain whose opposition to Mozart is seen as more linguistic or political than auditory.[3] The absence of Salieri's music in these narratives seems to serve as a kind of posthumous punishment for his supposed crimes against Mozart, and any influence of one on the another is presumed to be unidirectional.[4] In Weiss's novel, none of Salieri's operas are mentioned by name (despite occasional anecdotes where they are alluded to by his contemporaries), and an amateur performance of his instrumental music midway through the investigation only serves to further convince the protagonists of his guilt:

> Jason had the feeling, playing Salieri's score, that he was violating Mozart, then he told himself that this was absurd. Salieri's music was dull, uninspired, with slabs of sentiment that left him uninvolved.
>
> Deborah listened in the hope of hearing the grace, the assurance of a master, driven by a desperate need to prove Ernst wrong, and the more she heard the more she was bored. The sonata by Salieri was a tidy piece of craftsmanship and a musical vacuum. Only once did the music become melodic and pleasing, in the second movement, and suddenly she knew why. It was in imitation of Mozart. (1970, 200)

Despite occasional references to the emotional power (or lack thereof) of music, the sound of repeated gossip largely takes the place of music in both novels — the Otises' interviews with various composers and performers (which resolve the question of conspiracy to their satisfaction), and Pitland's internal wrestling with the poisoning rumour through allegedly psychometric encounters of concerts, sheet music and (eventually) a supposedly haunted cello (which convinces him but leaves both his friends and the readers wondering at the 'truth' of both historical and fictional events).

3 I would like to thank Eric Hung for asking me about the nineteenth-century reinterpretation of Salieri as more of a fictional character than a historical or musical one, even within non-fiction literature.

4 This assumption remains present in twenty-first-century productions juxtaposing Mozart and Salieri. In the liner notes to the Concentus Musicus Wien's recording of Salieri's *Prima la musica e poi le parole* and Mozart's *Der Schauspieldirektor* (both 1786), Ulrich Leisinger writes 'Salieri's stature as an opera composer was abundantly demonstrated by Nikolaus Harnoncourt when he conducted "*Prima la musica e poi le parole*" at the Mozart Week Festival in Salzburg in 2002 — but at no point was Mozart's own reputation impugned in consequence.'

The disconnect between what Pitland hears in the cello and an alleged *Requiem* fragment and what Ellis later observes could well be an allegory for belief in or scepticism towards historical conspiracy theories. Immediately before the psychometric or hallucinatory event of 1791, Pitland describes his most personal encounter with the material and aural experience of music:

> I did not recognise the music, but the harmonic sequence of the chords, which I could deduce from the figuring of the bass, was vaguely familiar. [...]
>
> I picked up the vocal score of the Mozart *Requiem* which I had inadvertently brought out with me and which was lying on the table beside me. […] The strip of paper from the interior of the 'cello was then placed gently against the open copy of the *Requiem*, and all was ready. I was delighted to find the strip quite legible and played the first four bars, a unison passage, with a growing sense of recognition. […] My eye wandered up to the top of the page of the Mozart *Requiem*, visible above the strip, and there I saw almost with horror the identical passage in its place, as the opening of the Hosanna. My surprise quickly turned to consternation. The Hosanna of the *Requiem* is said to have been put together by Sussmayr, after his master's death, from indications previously given to him by Mozart and from sketches found on the composer's writing-table. It was possible, of course, that the strip was just waste paper containing a discarded experiment by Sussmayr, but even more probable that it embodied the work of Mozart himself. (1964, 139-40)

Pitland's musical knowledge and assumptions inform what he believes to be true about the cello's and fragment's musical value, psychometric content and historical provenance. By this point in the novel, he has completely abandoned scholarly authority and documentation in favour of his seemingly supernatural convictions. Following Erbensee's death and Pitland's institutionalisation, Ellis's description of the papers in Pitland's rooms tells a different story:

> I remember that Fraulein [Constanze] Scheer picked up a small roll of dirty looking paper, which was lying in a corner of the room, which was lying in a corner of the room, blown there perhaps by the draught from the open window. She handed it to me, and I, imagining, probably correctly, that it was rubbish left behind by a former occupant of the room and overlooked by an inefficient housemaid, put the roll, without examining it, into the stove, where no doubt it was burnt up when the fire was next lighted. (1964, 162)

The focus on the possible *Requiem* fragment and the multiple perspectives on its authenticity and significance links Pitland's musical encounters to the quasi-supernatural invocation of music in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Mozart and Salieri*, wherein the doomed Mozart's performance of an excerpt of the *Requiem* for Salieri — supposedly taking place on a piano in a private room at a tavern — is

joined by an offstage choir with full orchestration. Keefe sees Rimsky-Korsakov's setting of this scene as an attempt to represent Salieri as 'the perfectly behaved nineteenth-century *Requiem* worshipper (albeit a murderous one) who can marvel at Mozart's genius and can immediately understand the full musical potential of the incomplete work' (2012, 34). Pitland's yearning for musical understanding eventually overpowers him psychologically. He — like his imagined Salieri — is a tortured figure preoccupied with and yet unable to see beyond his own perception of the truth.

In the final section of *Mysterious Barricades*, Ellis and Norma find themselves making distinctions between different criminal and musical truths: what 'really' happened to Harry Pitland and Wolfgang Erbensee, the (in)authenticity of the alleged (now destroyed) *Requiem* fragment, the possible explanations for Pitland's supposed psychical experiences and mental breakdown and (ultimately) the musicological truth about Mozart and Salieri. Only the last issue is resolved to their satisfaction, when Ellis reviews the existing Mozart literature and recalls Salieri's tutelage of Beethoven. For the figures outside of Pitland's mind, the more recent criminal and musical events are more of a mystery than whatever did or did not happen in 1791. In response to a friend of Pitland's theories about what he believed at the moment of his break with the present, Ellis muses, 'But this is all fanciful imagination… and we can never know now what complicated and tortuous processes brought our poor friend to his untimely end' (1964, 191).

This observation is telling — suggestive of similarly vague remarks made by memoirists, biographers, novelists, performers, and scholars about both Mozart's and Salieri's deaths, as well as about similar conspiracy theories and gaps in the musicological record. In the conclusions to the current *Grove Music Online* entry on Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky, another composer whose biography has been overshadowed by misinformation and misinterpretation blending fact, invention and speculation, Roland John Wiley equivocates on the (debunked) allegations that Tchaikovsky committed suicide:

> The polemics over his death have reached an impasse, one side supporting a biographer not invariably committed to the truth, the other advocating something preposterous by the mores of the day. Neither version withstands scrutiny, making all conclusions provisional. Rumour attached to the famous dies hard: Paganini's pact with the devil, Salieri's poison. As for illness, problems of evidence offer little hope of satisfactory resolution: the state of diagnosis; the confusion of witnesses; disregard of long-term effects of smoking and alcohol. We do not know how Tchaikovsky died. We may never find out, any more than we shall learn what killed the composer whose music first filled him with sacred delight. (2001)

This passage is an oddly fanciful literary moment for a work of academic music reference, and Roland Wiley's critics — most notably, the musicologist Richard

Taruskin — observe its lack of scholarly rigour. Taruskin, in his essay 'Pathetic symphonist: Chaikovsky, Russia, sexuality, and the study of music', finds in Wiley's prevarication a 'reprehensible concealment, if not of the truth, then at least of the most reasonable and plausible of the available hypotheses', and asks what is to be gained by engaging in a kind of biographical imagination.

> Why does the distinguished dictionary continue the game? Wiley's next sentence is exactly to the point. […] Subscholarly romanticism, alas, dies even harder. (2008, 104)

The crime novels discussed in this article are not acts of scholarly (or even subscholarly) research. But they are, even in their most cynical incarnations, expressions of romanticism, of wanting to believe that our favourite historical composers were both human and more-than-human in their personal, professional and artistic lives. Both Glover and Weiss set up their protagonists to mirror the appeal and limits of Romantic anecdote-collecting and biography. Pitland's unclear mental state and Ellis's scepticism are clearly modelled on the documented facts of Salieri's later-life hospitalisation and the defences of him mounted by Ignaz Moscheles and Giuseppe Carpani, neither of whom are mentioned in Glover's or Weiss's novels. The Otises, whose interviews with Constanze von Nissen in Salzburg mirror the real life 'Mozart pilgrimage' conducted by Vincent and Mary Novello, both rely on and resist the power of anecdotes as historical evidence, finding within them the ultimate proof of suspicions first experienced through music. These plots reflect nineteenth-century events through the lens of twentieth-century concerns with conspiracy and the nature of truth; what Barbara Korte and Sylvia Paletschek dub popular history's issue with certain kinds of stories that are 'more easily adapted to present concerns, desires and intentions than others, for example because they fit into existing narratives, because they help to legitimise societal or political aims — or simply because they will entertain and sell' (Korte and Paletschek 2012, 10).

The Otises' collection of anecdotes and Pitland's psychometric time travel nevertheless reflect a key desire of many real-life musicologists, biographers, and music fans that remains more elusive than conspiratorial thought about Mozart's death: finding some way of reconnecting with music written prior to the advent of recorded sound. It is perhaps not accidental that Glover and Weiss published their novels near the start of the historically informed performance (HIP) movement, which re-examined documentary evidence and surviving instruments in an attempt to recreate how Mozart's music would have sounded to eighteenth-century audiences.[5] Glover, an amateur singer and member of the Bach Choir under Ralph Vaughan Williams, was familiar with the transition from viewing historical performance as 'obsolete' (as Vaughan Williams once

[5] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising the question of early efforts at historically informed performance as a kind of historical fiction.

referred to the use of Baroque instruments during the 1920s) to a more historical approach (Keen 2016, 113-14). Although the attendant philosophical and methodological debates surrounding HIP are beyond the scope of this article, it is noteworthy that more recent contributions to the literature (Butt 2002; Le Guin 2005; Leech-Wilkinson 2020) critically evaluate the role of subjective interpretation and imagined or received wisdom within performance decisions.

The desire to find fact within fiction is by no means unique to postwar crime fiction, and finds both antecedents and descendants in the realm of fictional treatments of Salieri. Pushkin has his Mozart and Salieri debate similarly violent and historically dubious rumours about Beaumarchais and Michelangelo as 'evidence' of the incompatibility of artistic genius and crime, while the numerous stage revisions of Shaffer's *Amadeus* have two representative citizens of Vienna, the Venticelli brothers, presenting, spreading and ultimately discounting the poisoning rumour. In both cases, biographical and artistic truth are contrasted with both what one believes and what one hears (in words, music or both) from others.

In two more recent works on Salieri, the hunt for truth takes on a more reparative tone, acknowledging the problems of history and biography without proposing grand conspiracies. Intellectual property lawyer Ian Kyer's *Damaging Winds*, published by the Canadian National Arts Centre in 2014, follows a very similar structure to Weiss's fictional interviews, albeit to opposite ends. Kyer follows a fictional Viennese heroine swept up in the German versus Italian language politics of the 1820s, who winds up working with the real-life librettist, legal scholar, and reputed spy Carpani to defend Salieri's legacy. By contrast, the central mystery in Dieter Kühn's 2008 postmodern novella *Ein Mozart in Galizien* is not the Salieri-Mozart relationship as conventionally understood, but the life and career of Mozart's son, Franz Xaver Wolfgang Mozart (referred to throughout the novella as FXW). Placing the younger Mozart in the context of early Romantic reinterpretation of his father's music and interest in composer biography, Kühn imagines FXW's possible anxieties about his paternity and relationship to both his living relatives and his father's legacy. The format of the novel is less a straightforward mystery or biographical romance and more a meditation on how one would go about writing such a work in the first place. Kühn remarks at the start of the section on FXW's temporary return to Vienna that:

> although a meeting with Antonio Salieri is not recorded at this time, it is likely that one took place during this period. What possibilities for a novelist! (2008, 394, translation mine)

Kühn uses this imagined meeting to meditate on the transient nature of a successful musical career the similarities between what he posits as FXW's and Salieri's awareness of their relative uneasy positions in music history. Once again, however, Salieri is musically silent. Both he and his former student are

at a fallow point in their compositional careers; FXW is suffering from writer's block and Salieri has recently stopped composing altogether. When FXW admits that he has heard the rumours about his father's death (quickly stressing that he does not believe them), Salieri responds that he hopes the allegations will benefit later interest in this music:

> now, no one is interested in what that old man has composed. […] Ah, but if he had poisoned Mozart, now we would absolutely like to hear what he has written. Even if people no longer believe the story of poisoning, a drop of poison can nonetheless have an invigorating effect. Resonance, finally resonance! (2008, 395)

Why should musicologists care about any fictionalised approach to music history and biography so obviously removed from the truth? The first answer is that such novels are often the primary way in which the general public is made aware of humanities research in the first place. Arthurian scholar Norris Lacy notes in his survey of academic responses to Dan Brown in the wake of *The Da Vinci Code* that academic thrillers like Brown's work take issues and ideas that might otherwise be confined to relatively obscure scholarly debates to mainstream readers. Yet, he adds, while 'it is not easy to think of a popular book that has excited this much attention in years', 'Brown's ideas are elaborate, fascinating, and wrong' (2004, 89). Many scholars' first impulses, when faced with similarly 'elaborate, fascinating and wrong' notions in music research, are to loudly and persistently debunk musical misinformation if and when it appears. The real problem of fictionalised musicology, however, is not in the facts themselves, but in their interpretation and presumed repercussions. The question of Mozart's and Salieri's working relationship once again reached mainstream attention with the announcement of Timo Jouko Herrmann's 2015 discovery of the lost printed score to the chamber cantata *Per la ricuperata salute di Ofelia*. Although scholars have long since moved away from sensationalised readings of biography in music, many journalists and classical music fans neglected the work's musical features and historical context in favour of the idea that it might spark some heretofore neglected biographical knowledge. Musicologist Linda Shaver-Gleason, creator of the 'musicological myth-busting' blog *Not Another Music History Cliché*, observes that this impulse is often more psychological than musicological:

> The story resonates with viewers because it touches on one of our most powerful emotions, jealousy. We all know a Mozart — someone who is just better than you at something without even trying. No matter how diligently you work, someone will always be able to beat you, and it's particularly infuriating if they mock your efforts in the process. It's a common human experience projected onto famous historical figures, which is often a recipe for successful entertainment. It's historically false, but it's really good fan fiction. (2016)

On a related subject, A Peter Brown, in a 'debunking' of *Amadeus*'s historical claims, notes that many elements of the film come from nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideas of musical talent and production, rather than the ostensible eighteenth-century setting. As with other genres of historical fiction, the crime novel focusing on music history ultimately reveals more about its creators and readers than its subjects, presenting a world in which 'we are not without precedent in a world of crime nor in our attempts to control it' (1992, 10). Whereas the straightforward fictionalised biography may present its subject's status as monumental Great Man or tragic victim of unfair neglect, the mystery genre requires the certainties and uncertainties of music history to be reinterpreted in connection to some kind of crime, with historical figures recast as the attendant villains, victims, bystanders and red herrings. Many of the characters — historical and fictional, protagonist and antagonist — view themselves as engaging with or against the weight of musical greatness, of historical fact, fiction and memory, even when they disagree about what the actual 'truths' are that their detective work uncovers. The repetition of historical and historical-sounding anecdotes gives them an appealing resonance for both the fan of music and that of crime fiction, imitating the spread of gossip and fake news in more recent times, tempting even the most critically minded among us to wonder — if even for a moment — if everything (or anything) we've heard really could be true.

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L'écriture féminine in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*: Questioning the social and literary standards through the use of colours, sounds, and shapes

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Abstract: *In her novel* The Bluest Eye, *Toni Morrison reacts against the American white racist and sexist society which used to exclude the black race and marginalise the female sex, mainly in the decades that preceded the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. She attempts to voice the black female 'other' through the inclusion of a new linguistic mode, an innovative feminine style which subverts the social and linguistic rules of the past. She questions the bases of beauty as well as the standards of writing, revealing that they are by the same token grounded in a subjective standardisation. She shows a break with the traditional literary canon and uses a challenging form of writing where language becomes a tool to fight racism and sexism and a political weapon that leads to the attainment of freedom and independence. This article is chiefly concerned with the use of feminine writing as a political discourse that denounces a history of oppression, while attempting to closely examine the engagingly excessive and eccentric employment of colours, sounds and shapes as a discourse of resistance. Morrison uses linguistic irregularities in her new code of writing to deconstruct the traditional regular male linguistic code.*

Keywords: body, colours, discourse, feminine writing, shapes, sounds

Introduction

As a story narrating the plight of the black community in an oppressive white world, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) criticises standard values as conceived by the white community. Even though the events of the story happen in the 1940s, before the launch of the Civil Rights Movement, the novel conveys the premises of the 'Black is Beautiful' cultural movement that emerged in the 1960s from African Americans who strove to teach blacks to love their bodies, embrace their difference, stop internalising their physical inferiority, stop believing in whites' standards of beauty and desist from imitating whites in their

style, in order to hide their 'ugliness'. Being a black woman and female writer, Morrison suffers from a double oppression exerted by the interlocking systems that define a woman's life. In her narrative, she echoes history through the reproduction of discriminatory practices against blacks and against women, and struggles to reform minds to change her present, through the contribution of the novel to the Black is Beautiful movement, by persuading blacks to accept their difference as the core of their identity.

Morrison attempts to explore the reasons behind the troubled identities of black women in a racist and sexist society that locates them in hierarchies of power and privilege. The novel can be strongly read in the context of Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, to highlight the intersection between race and gender that underlies the subordination of Black women who 'are regarded either as too much like women or Blacks and the compounded nature of their experience is absorbed into the collective experiences of either group or as too different, in which case Black women's Blackness or femaleness sometimes has placed their needs and perspectives at the margin of the feminist and Black liberationist agendas' (Crenshaw 1989, 150). The suffering of the female characters in Morrison's narrative springs mainly from the intersectional interplay between different identity categories like race, gender and class. The novelist brings to the fore the intersecting patterns of discrimination and shows how intersecting identities reinforce each other. Through a black feminist lens, black females are positioned within structures of power that reflect the interaction between white supremacy and patriarchy, which makes the way in which they are oppressed fundamentally different from the way in which white women are oppressed.

Although the present article is framed by a consciousness of the historical context of African Americans, it does not explore the systems of discrimination in Morrison's novel as much as it examines the writer's attempt to raise her voice and restore the identity of the black woman. It shows how race and gender are transgressed through the power of language and how the writer can capture the individuality of black women through a style that blends femaleness and blackness. If the black feminist approach offers a reading in the systems of oppression as structured by a white sexist society, the French feminist perspective provides ways of challenging those systems. Even though French feminists do not stop at the difference between black and white women in the discriminatory apparatus, they propose a reading in women's style of writing through which 'woman must put herself into the text — as into the world and into history — by her own movement' (Cixous 1976, 875). Morrison uses a feminine mode of writing that reflects her identity as a woman and mixes it with black blood, skin, features and voice. French feminist theory proffers a ground, in this context, from which to grasp a female discourse that conflates biology and physicality as a way to erase women's multiple identities in favour of the creation of women's unique subjectivity. By recounting the story of a forgotten

black girl who suffers from a crisis of identity and eventually retreats into madness as a result of an oppressive social system, the author echoes painful sounds of the past. And in order to redeem the injuries of the past and regain the loss of the black woman's individuality, Morrison uses an unconventional style of narration that perfectly fits into what French feminists would call '*l'écriture féminine*'. It is a style that allows the feminine voice to cut through the reverberations of the past by the use of words, images and sounds that display the difference between a white male text and a black female text.

Morrison discards the biased standards of beauty and of writing as a black and a writer. At the same time, she attacks the standardisation of the social values that reinforce the exclusion of the black race and reacts against the traditional male literary canon which connects writing with maleness and excludes the female from artistic creation. As a challenge to a history of domination and oppression, Morrison discusses the grounds of standardisation in a white patriarchal society and questions the criteria of physical beauty and literary perfection as dictated by a white authoritative Father. In *The Bluest Eye*, the novelist is involved in a literary project that would at once invalidate the bases of beauty and standards of writing as subjectively and one-sidedly set by the dominating white male community. The latter is bigotedly devoted to its own system of belief, after creating a cultural code that keeps women apart from the public sphere and alienates them from the realm of art and literature, to leave them permanently anchored in the world of domesticity. The same dominant group displays racial resentment towards blacks and strives to entrench that feeling of inferiority in the minds of both women and blacks. As an outcome of this oppression, Morrison endeavours to subvert social and literary standards through the creation of non-normative social criteria and a different style of writing, that proclaims rebellion against irrational dictated laws.

The concern of the present article is to show how Morrison is engaged in a political venture that aims to overcome the resonating moans of the past, create a sense of identity and restore self-confidence among black women, through her use of the feminine as a rebellious literary mode that transcends traditional discourse. The focus is mainly on the manifestations of the feminine in relation to the themes of the narrative, wherein the theme of black beauty is conveyed through the use of three inviting symbolic elements that strikingly unite to add a feminine whiff to the text. These elements that help boost the novel's unmasculinity, irregularity and non-normativity are colours, sounds and shapes. They are appealing because skin colour, black music and black female physiognomy have a bearing on the context of racism. Moreover, they are a part of the text's feminine style, a mode of writing that intends to disturb the traditional order and deconstruct the absolute truths imposed by a white male ruler. These textual feminine signs are in unison with the idea of revising standards and transcending the rules; their inclusion in an unusual cocktail in

the novel might be political, aiming at integrating the black character as a new standard of beauty and the feminine style as a challenging way of writing.

This article breaks with previous critical works that generally engage with a thematic approach to uncover the themes of racism and gender inequality in the text, and adopts instead a different reading method to extract the themes of the novel and divulge Morrison's rebelliousness. The plot, setting, structure and representation of the characters are analysed through the thoughtful examination of the use of the carefully chosen elements of colours, sounds and shapes. Even though some critical works reserve particular attention for the uncharacteristic style of the novel, the present article creates an unprecedented attentiveness to such overlooked textual detail, which absolutely functions within the context of introducing a ground-breaking feminine mode of writing. The analysis of these three elements is based on Hélène Cixous's notion of '*l'écriture féminine*' as a counterpart to phallocentric masculine writing. Through this notion of feminine writing, Cixous argues that women writers do not merely reproduce the phallogocentric system of stable ordered meaning, which has already excluded them, but also include a new signifying system, a system characterised by more play and fluidity than the rigid existing traditional order.

Firing the male literary canon

A strict division of roles based on sexual difference was traced in patriarchal societies; while men were associated with creation and production, women were connected with procreation and reproduction. Therefore, the dominating male denied women their artistic talents and deprived them of their rights to contribute to public life. This 'male transgression and subsequent female silence' (Bloom and Miner 1990, 87) created a great sexual imbalance in society and placed women as passive subordinates to men. Harold Bloom and Madonne Miner comment on this social division:

> Men, potential rapists, assume presence, language, and reason as their particular province. Women, potential victims, fall prey to absence, silence and madness. (1990, 90)

Man used to consider himself a perfect writer who had to conform to a set of male-made rules and norms, which constituted a whole literary tradition. Lizbeth Goodman describes this firm belief in male literary perfection, claiming: 'men's writing (and nearly always white, middle-class men's writing in English) was positioned as "the norm", presented as if it were Literature, with a capital "L", somehow representative of all "great writing"' (Goodman 1996, ix).

Once woman could no longer tolerate social and artistic exclusion and found it hard to succumb to a masculine linguistic code, she sought ways through which she could express her indignation and voice her repudiation of such a

despotic system. She displayed a zealous combative spirit through engagement with a new shift referred to as 'firing the canon'. This is a feminist stream based on:

> a re-evaluation of the standards by which authors and texts have been singled out and 'canonized', followed by an active search […] [which] may lead to previously 'hidden' texts by women, people of colour and working-class writers. (Goodman 1996, ix)

Feminist thought 'has pointed out the historical "silences" of women authors not included in the "canon" […] in order to shake up static views about women's creative work and domestic roles' (Goodman 1996, x). It has worked on 'the project of "breaking the silences" of under-represented groups' (Goodman 1996, 148). According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, feminist thought is a rebellion against 'a long masculinist tradition that identifies female anatomy with a degrading linguistic destiny' (1989 [1985], 82). Feminist thinkers dig into women's texts to substantiate signs of femininity that go against literary conventions. Modern female writers display an awareness of the necessity of breaking the grounds of male traditional discourse through the inclusion of the 'new "woman's sentence"' for which Virginia Woolf appealed (Gilbert and Gubar 1989 [1985], 89). That new feminine mode of writing is often referred to by French feminists as '*l'écriture féminine*', as coined by Cixous. If Morrison adopts that style, it is to announce her rebuff of male standards of writing.

French feminist critics strive to authenticate the linkage between the use of language and the social and literary exclusion of women. They presume that texts evincing a different linguistic style seek 'to resist submission to patriarchal law by exploring a different mode of discourse that arises not from the Symbolic but from the Imaginary Order' (Booker 1996, 91). Jacques Lacan's Mirror stage and Julia Kristeva's Symbolic Order are defined as the moment of the child's recognition of itself as a linguistic entity, when it starts to classify people on gender basis. It shows fear of castration and obeys its father, 'relinquishing access to the *jouissance* of infantile fusion with the mother' (Booker 1996, 91). This is the process of the child's separation from the mother and identification with the father as the consequence of a forced recognition of its gender. Lacan thinks the Symbolic is 'the point where sexuality is constructed as meaning' (Mitchell 2000, 390). Language marks the transition from the pre-Oedipal or the Semiotic to the Symbolic, as Kristeva endeavours to explain in her book *Desire in Language* (1980). Lacan assumes that people get engendered through language and argues that there is an unfailing connection between language and sexual difference; therefore, language is vital in determining the subject's sexual identity. Based on Lacan's theory, French feminist philosophy bears the assumption that feminine discourse which extensively relies on the non-linguistic or the pre-verbal is able to deconstruct the myth of gender, as constructed through language. Writers who use a semiotic language, close to the

realm of music, rhythm and murmur, are able to re-fashion language in order to turn it into a means of de-gendering rather than engendering.

Luce Irigaray believes that it is necessary to erase the simple oppositions of theoretical systems. For her, to write the body or '*parler femme*' is 'to confront and displace this masculine "movement", to escape its definitions and confines to attempt a reformation of the Symbolic' (Millard 1989, 161). Although Irigaray does not rely on Lacan in her theories, because, as she claims, of his focus on the primacy of the phallus, she contends in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985b [1977]), as in other works, that the rules of syntax and grammar are a masculine construct. In her extensive empirical research, she demonstrates that language was modelled by patriarchal culture upon the male Symbolic Order, where any irregularity or multiplicity was deemed to tarnish its integrity. Contrary to male standards, which stabilise and rationalise language through a regular and linear narrative pattern, female discourse is distinguished by non-linearity, irregularity, instability and multiplicity. In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a [1974]), Irigaray connects the corporeal with the linguistic, believing that woman must produce a multiple and unfathomable language because she possesses a multiple body, as shown in her multi-orgasmic response. That feminine style advanced by some feminist scholars relies on multiplicity, excess, non-linearity, imagery, female corporeality and eroticism. Yet woman's sensitivity to colours, music and non-standard shapes in the novel creates an additional feature of the feminine.

As some feminist theorists claim, the traditional male sentence used to be colourless, dim, solemn, regular, strictly conforming to grammatical and syntactic rules, clearly carrying fixed meanings and measurably put in ready-made moulds. The colourlessness of the male sentence originates from the regularity of its structure: grammar, semantics and syntax are highly respected, according to a previously imposed linguistic code. According to Cixous, this kind of writing is marked within the Symbolic Order that is structured through 'dual hierarchical oppositions', including man/woman (Cixous 1989, 101). The phallogocentric discourse 'has always worked through opposition: Speaking/Writing — Parole/Écriture — High/Low" (Cixous 1989, 101). This binary system is the source of the orderliness and somberness of the male sentence 'in which the feminine is always repressed' (Klages 2001), and which lacks flexibility, variety and openness, and thus colour. As a result of man's arrogance and possessiveness, woman has felt it necessary to inscribe the feminine principle in her works, to proclaim her breaking of the law and revolt against the unique god of literature. Cixous describes the power of language written by women, saying: 'It is in writing, from woman and toward woman, and in accepting the challenge of the discourse controlled by the phallus, that woman will affirm woman somewhere other than in sentence' (1989, 111).

Morrison seems to apply to her novel what Cixous calls 'changing the rules of the old game' (1989, 116). This article extensively relies on Cixous because of the total correspondence between her theory and Morrison's text. Characterised by a non-linear structure, non-standard English and disorderly linguistic entities, and overcharged with a feminine note, musical tone and conversational tenor, *The Bluest Eye* conforms to Cixous's definition of feminine writing as 'scrambling spatial order, disorienting it, moving furniture, things and values around, breaking in, emptying structures' (1989, 116). The shrewd combination of the elements of colours, sounds and shapes helps constitute the presence of a feminine discourse in the novel through which she expresses her challenge to racial and sexual exclusion. Their joint thematic and stylistic function makes them strikingly attack sexism and racism all at once. Thematically speaking, they can be an attempt to turn white standards of beauty upside down, first by playing on the symbolic use of colours in relationship to race, secondly by including oral black heritage within American culture, and thirdly by favouring the frizzy hair and dense shapes of black traits over the delicate and steady physical features of the whites. On the stylistic side, the presence of these elements serves to subvert male literary traditions by providing colourful imagery and metaphorical language, foregrounding the spoken and discarding the regular shape of the written text.

The use of colours as a sign of the feminine

The use of colour in Morrison's narrative can be perceived in a literal and metaphorical way. Literally speaking, an abundant use of different hues, with their symbolic functions, can be traced. In a metaphorical way, colour can be detected through the radiating effect of the text; this radiation comes from the writer's elaborate weaving of metaphors and images, creation of a special linguistic code and reliance on the open nature of language. At this level of analysis, it is necessary first to handle the literal presence of colours, and then to deal with the metaphorical 'colour' produced by the feminine sentence, which complements the argument.

Colours are so copiously present in the text that the reader barely encounters a single paragraph devoid of them. The reader's visual perception of colours starts from the title of the novel, where the reference to the colour blue makes them anticipate that colourism is the subject matter of the text, especially given that it is written by a black writer. Shifting to the prologue, which reverberates with Dick-and-Jane passages, the reader comes across an aberrant reiteration of the colours white, green and red:

> Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. (Morrison 1990 [1970], 1)

Based on Jack Tresidder's statement that the 'colours that attract our attention most are red, yellow, green and blue (those preferred by children)' (1997, 50),

the colours chosen in these primers can be the colours most preferred by children and may therefore allude to Pecola, the novel's protagonist. Morrison deliberately builds her narrative around the connotative clash of colours that exists in the Dick-and-Jane passages and decides to take that meticulously-studied assortment of colours as a point of departure for the whole narrative. Symbolically speaking, the colour white could denote peace, 'light, purity and joy', as in some religious and cultural contexts, green stands for fertility and vegetation as found in certain myths and cultures, and red is, if we rely on Tresidder's account of colours (1997, 50), 'usually linked with the life principle, activity, fertility'. The idealised image of the white middle-class family represented through the use of these bright and cheerful colours stands in contrast to Pecola's dim and tough milieu. The prologue tends to reflect the novel's general theme of the exclusion of blacks, and foreshadows the tragedy of black girlhood, embodied in the personal experience of Pecola.

The deeper the narrative weaves its way through the four seasons, the more the reader collects a generous crop of colours. The reader becomes more and more focused on their presence and heedful of their symbolic functions. The repetitive references to specific colours such as white, blue, yellow and pink play a key role in reflecting the central theme of the novel. These colours are identified by the white hegemony to be criteria of physical beauty, while black-skinned people are considered as an emblem of ugliness; even blacks themselves are driven to thoughtlessly trust these absolutes. When Claudia says, 'All the world has agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 14), she flawlessly interiorises these racist ideas. The 'ugly' Pecola is similarly enchanted by the 'blue-and-white Shirley Temple cup' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 12), and is hence crazed with a wish for blue eyes. If one assumes that the colour blue stands for 'the sky, therefore the spirit and truth', as claimed by Tresidder (1997, 50), we can admit that Pecola's yearning for blue eyes symbolises her need for the care and affection any child needs. The decayed conditions of Pecola's family life impel her supplication for those blue eyes that would save her from misery and take her to a utopian world where she would find eternal happiness. If the colour blue stands for 'the sky', it may translate Pecola's childish idealisation of a non-existent world. Tresidder's reference to 'the spirit and truth' makes the reader think about the clash between Pecola's spiritual quest for an idealised world and her descent into a degraded real world.

Since, aesthetically speaking, colours, with their brightness and vividness, can be connected more with femininity, Morrison makes her female characters sensitive to colours. Pauline uses colours when she describes her romantic experience with Cholly. Despite the sordid picture of Pauline's marital life, the quarrels and exchange of violence between her and her husband and in spite of the cruel character of Cholly, who ends up raping his own daughter, Pauline records scenes of love and passionate moments of intimacy with her spouse. She

repeatedly adorns her talks about her former sexual life with colours to express her joyful mood and sexual pleasure:

> When I first seed Cholly, I want you to know it was like all bits of color. […] My whole dress was messed with purple. […] All of them colors was in me. (Morrison 1990 [1970], 90)

The use of colours romanticises and invigorates the narrative of Pauline, who feels happy with her own body and amorous in her sexual adventures. Pauline seems 'intensely responsive to color and visual images — the yellow lemonade with seeds floating in it, the streak of green made by the June bags, the purple of berries, and the rainbow after sex' (Melani 2009). Colours, in the text, turn into a medium of writing the female black body, with its sensuality, intimacy and ecstasy, and create a spectacular carnival that celebrates black femininity and shows blackness in colours, despite the bitter reality that surrounds the characters' lives.

Morrison spins an untraditional connection between colours and sexuality. The reference to 'the rainbow after sex' shows an unconventional way of handling a taboo topic. The rainbow contains all bright colours, which stand for exuberance and excitement. Pauline summons up all colours not only when she reports her love story with Cholly, but when she recalls her sexual experience too: 'I begin to feel those little bits of color floating up into me — deep in me' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 102). Colours are used in a romantic context to reflect Pauline's joyfulness, euphoria and *jouissance*: 'Then I feel like I'm laughing between my legs, and the laughing gets all mixed up with the colors' (101-2). Pauline's vivid depiction of her orgasmic pleasure and sexual contentment shows that the black female body is a source of pleasure rather than of frustration. Pauline exteriorises the human side in Cholly who is drowned by his dark self and driven in a world of crime and bestiality.

The writer's use of colours to convey black women's intimate experience is destabilising on the social and literary levels at one go. There is first an attempt to subvert the prejudices connecting black people with a natural sexual savagery and beastly comportment. Despite his pervasive behaviour, due to a psychological complex grounded in his childhood, Cholly is humanised, at least in some instances, when he shares moments of romantic intimacy with his wife. Black women live ecstatic sexual experiences with their male partners and marital life seems to be characterised by an understanding of women's sexual needs. Cholly's responsiveness to Pauline's sexual desire invalidates the association of blacks with animalism and asserts a mutual gratification. Second, by charging her book with erotic scenes, Morrison transcends the boundaries of the male tradition of writing which used to eliminate such taboo subjects from their texts. Cixous describes feminine writing as 'a cosmos where eros never stops travelling' (1989, 108). For her, women must write 'about their sexuality, about the infinite and mobile complexity of their becoming erotic' (1989, 112-

13). By writing the body, Morrison attempts to show that the body is no longer separated from the text; it becomes the text itself. This is corroborated in Cixous's phrase, 'Text, my body' (1989, 111), which indicates the identicality between the corporal and the textual. Chiara Briganti and Robert Con Davis elucidate the power of including female corporeality in the linguistic milieu and accentuate its political effect: 'The body entering the text disrupts the masculine economy of superimposed linearity and tyranny: the feminine is the "overflow" of "luminous torrents" […], a margin of "excess" eroticism and free-play not directly attributable to the fixed hierarchies of masculinity' (1994, 162).

Colours are not only used in reporting sexual scenes but also in describing settings, nature and characters. Morrison colours her sentences to craft an authentic painterly sight which powerfully affects the reader. The writer paints with words a visually coloured picture in her descriptions. The reader, for instance, can visualise the carloads of slag 'smoking into the ravine that skirts the steel mill' where 'the dying fire lights the sky with a dull orange glow' and where Claudia and Frieda 'lag behind staring at the patch of color surrounded by black' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 5). Moreover, the writer utilises nature to provide a genuine pictorial perception of colours; fruits like peach, pineapple, raspberry and melon are introduced in the text to create a flamboyant pastoral picture. Colours are similarly employed to depict the characters' joyful or gloomy moods; even misery gets coloured in Claudia's description of her mother: 'misery colored by the greens blues in my mother's voice took all of the grief out of the words…' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 18). Morrison's profuse and reiterative use of colours casts on her text the vividness and brightness that are missing in the traditional male text. It marks a feature of the feminine sentence which is characterised by what Cixous calls 'feminine light', a light which:

> doesn't come from above, doesn't fall, doesn't stroke, doesn't go through. It radiates, it is a slow, sweet, difficult, absolutely unstoppable, painful rising that reaches and impregnates lands. (Cixous 1989, 109)

The use of glowing, coloured images is coupled with an excess of imagery and metaphors to generate a varied and feminine language, capable of 'fight[ing] off opacity from deep within' (Cixous 1989, 109). The luminosity of the sentence does not exclusively spring from the literal reference to colours which are 'generally life-affirming symbols of illumination' (Tresidder 1997, 50), but correspondingly from the mottled imagery employed by the writer, especially nature imagery. The images of the marigold and dandelions epitomise the whole tragedy of the black Pecola. Based on the idea that the colour yellow could carry among its symbolic functions the meaning of 'corruption and degradation' (Gast 2000), as in certain religions and cultures, these two types of garden plants could be emblematic of the corrupt and degraded world which drives Pecola to insanity. The image of the ingrown sterile marigold seeds is circularly used in

the opening and closing paragraphs of Claudia's narrative to operate as a symbolic contour to Pecola's tragic tale. The failure of the marigolds shows that what destroys Pecola are the individuals and the black community itself, where the fault seems to be 'of the earth, the land, of our town' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 164). The symbolic image of dandelions equally reflects the hostility of both the society and nature to Pecola. When dandelions 'do not look at her and do not send love back' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 37), Pecola feels an outcast and realises her exclusion from the whole world.

The profusion of metaphors and diversification of imagery are set in an open linguistic context that adds more hue to the text. Morrison's language is unstable, non-fixed, irregular and open to a multiplicity of interpretations; it does not conform to previous laws of writing which assert the stability of meaning. This openness is a feature of the feminine style, where language outshines the black-and-white sentence of traditional male discourse. Cixous uses the opposition of colours to compare the multiple feminine sentence with the dim masculine one in the following statement:

> Neither black on white nor white on black, not in this clash between paper and sign that en-graves itself there, not in this opposition of colours that stand out against each other. This is how it is: there is a ground, it is her ground — childhood flesh, shining blood — or background, depth. A white depth, a core […], and this ground covered by an infinite number of strata, layers, sheets of paper — is her sun (*sol*…*soleil*). (Cixous 1989, 108–9)

The woman writer has a free hold of her own ground and is therefore able to create her private linguistic code. It is through her strategies of writing that the colourfulness of the discourse manifests itself, as a way to overcome the habitual grimness of male discourse.

The female writer, as Cixous claims, 'will always exceed the discourse governing the phallocentric system' (1989, 109). Her words 'will write themselves against the other and against men's grammar' (1989, 114). Cixous goes on to affirm that 'feminine strength is such that while running away with syntax, breaking the famous line […] that serves men as a substitute cord' (1989, 115). Breaching language rules sheds light on the text; it is that light which comes from 'deep within', from the depth of the body, of the flesh and blood. As Cixous puts it:

> Let her write! And her text knows in seeking itself that it is more than flesh and blood, dough, kneading itself, rising, uprising, openly with resounding, perfumed ingredients, a turbulent compound of flying colours, leafy spaces, and rivers flowing to the sea we feed. (1989, 109)

If we compare the characteristics of *The Bluest Eye* with the general features of most classical and traditional male-authored texts, we can seize the feminine pulse in Morrison's narrative; it is varied, perfumed and coloured. Her language

transcends patriarchal logic and obeys its own order, in which a clear violation of syntax and a special use of diction are traced. More 'play, more fluidity' and non-linearity (Klages 2001) typify Morrison's new signifying system, starting from the first page of the book where the primer text degenerates into formless and meaningless print with no space and no punctuation. It is a text with a non-linguistic mode, conforming to Mary Klages's description of *l'écriture féminine* as 'milk, […] a song, something with rhythm and pulse' (2001).

Unlike regular patriarchal discourse which strictly obeys semantic rules, feminine writing goes beyond the singleness of meaning to offer variety and plurality. In addition to Morrison's generous use of metaphors and symbolism, the reader perceives a transcendence of genre boundaries, which brings colour to her text:

> the novel becomes poetry. […] But *The Bluest Eye* is also history, sociology, folklore, nightmare and music. (Leonard 1970, 1)

The feminine principle disturbs the constancy of literary genre and makes it a painting of colourful blobs. The unstable feature of the narrative makes the language flow and 'fly', in Cixous's term, with no fixed destination (1989, 115).

Morrison's liberation of language implies her desire to liberate her own race from the dominance of whites. She describes, on the one hand, conflicts between whites and blacks, and reports, on the other, the discrepancy between blacks themselves. Blackness becomes a source of disgust and despite for white people, as seen in Yacobowski's treatment of the black Pecola: 'it is the blackness that accounts for, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 37). However, light-skinned blacks in their turn oppress the dark-skinned ones; this is an oppression based on what Geraldine calls 'the difference between colored people and niggers' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 67). These inter-racial exclusions and intra-racial segregations are determined by the colour of skin, where colour becomes a means of domination and oppression. As a reaction to this colour-based view, Morrison strives to turn colour into a means of liberation rather than domination, by imbuing her text with a hodgepodge of colours, associating colour with sexual pleasure, making language unfixedly fly and breaking the boundaries of orderly discourse.

The use of sounds as a feminine feature

The colourful feminine sentence in *The Bluest Eye* is branded with rhythm and musicality whereby writing and voice become tightly interwoven. Cixous describes the voice as an emblem of the feminine:

> First I sense feminine in writing by a privilege of *voice*: writing and voice are entwined and interwoven and writing's continuity/voice's rhythm take each other's breath a way through interchanging, make the text gasp or from it out of suspenses and silences. (Cixous 1989, 110)

The reader of the novel is enabled to hear the voice and sounds that are intermingled with the written script. Corresponding to Cixous's description of *l'écriture féminine*, Morrison's writing 'can only go on and on without ever inscribing or distinguishing contours, daring these dizzying passages on other, fleeting and passionate dwellings' (Cixous 1989, 108). The feminine floating sentence seems like the feminine laughter of Marie which 'came like the sound of many rivers, freely, deeply, muddily, heading for the room of an open sea' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 40). By recording the musical flowing laughter of one of her female characters, Morrison matches the female laughter with her feminine sentence.

Music and songs get in the way of the narrative and play an integral part in the life of the characters. Claudia portrays her mother's hypersensitivity to music and emphasises the interconnection between her emotional state and music:

> if my mother was in a singing mood, it wasn't so bad. She would sing about hard times, bad times, and some body-done-gone-and left me times. (Morrison 1990 [1970], 17).

Music touches all the social categories of the black community, including Poland the prostitute who is 'forever singing'; she sings 'I got blues in my meal barrel…' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 39). She never quits her daily singing, in spite of her hidden suffering and state of dejection caused by others' disdainful gaze. Music as an integral quotidian habit dwells within Morrison's fictional characters as in the black community as a whole, either in their joyful or hard moments:

> Music is important in Morrison's novels and in the Black community. The Blues are an outlet for feelings about hard times and a source of comfort. (Melani 2009)

In addition to the presence of music as a theme in the book, the reader discerns the musical features of language itself. The writer's employment of a poetic language and stylistic devices such as alliteration, assonance and consonance creates rhythm and musicality in the text, as this sample sentence shows: 'they [blacks] *f*ussed and *f*idgeted over their *h*ard won *h*omes […]; they *p*ainted, *p*i*cked*, *p*o*cked* at every corner of their houses' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 12, emphasis added). Onomatopoeia is similarly a highly noticeable feature in Morrison's language; examples like the 'clucking sounds of adults' (1990 [1970], 13), the 'whirr' of wheels (1990 [1970], 35), 'the clic-cloc of the women's heels' (1990 [1970], 120), and 'the "prop" of the beer-bottle cap' (1990 [1970], 41) make the reader hear the sound and feel the music of the word. Likewise, musicality is shown through the author's dexterous choice of rhyming words that are arranged with great harmony, as in the following sentence: 'the Candy Dance was a humming, skipping, front tapping, eating, smacking combination…' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 59). Morrison's inclusion of the

fragmented, sporadic and uninhibited feminine mode of writing becomes more visible when she once again attempts to blur the boundaries between literary genres. Borrowing from poetry while writing fiction makes the text a melting entity comporting all literary genres.

The sound effects are not only paralleled with the effect of heteroglossia in narration, but also detected in the characters' speeches themselves. An acoustic imitation of sounds can be perceived in the following examples of the reported oral performances of characters: Frieda 'made a *phtt* sound with her lips' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 18), Pecola produces a 'whinnying sound' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 19) and Claudia's mother says:

> Oh-Uh-huh-Uh-huh. Playing nasty, huh? (Morrison 1990 [1970], 22)

The reader freshly catches the sounds through the vivid reporting of characters' conversations and gestures. The reader, for instance, witnesses Frieda's beating scene when the power of the sound goes beyond the script to reach out to the reader's ear, while imagining the slapping of the mother's hands on Frieda's frail body when she shrieks:

> No, Mama. No, ma'am. We wasn't! She's a liar! No, ma'am, Mama! No, ma'am, Mama! (Morrison 1990 [1970], 22).

Similarly, the musical tone of the black boys' insult to the poor Pecola can be heard through the pauses between the syllables or the long-breath phrases:

> black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked... (Morrison 1990 [1970], 50).

These sounds well up in the surface of the text, coming from an inner corner of the body, from 'the depth'. Morrison speaks from the body, expressing and writing it, and aligns herself with Cixous's recommendation that 'woman must write her body' (1989, 113). Morrison's text reproduces the sounds and imitates the rhythm and flux of the human voice as a sign of the feminine, which is also identified as:

> voice! Exclamation, cry, breathlessness, yell, cough, vomit, music. (Cixous 1989, 112)

The text is replete with rhythm, music, intonation and orality; it comes from 'within' the body, from the throat and the mouth. As Cixous puts it:

> text, my body […]; it is the equivoice that, touching you, affects you […], it is the rhyth-me that laughs you […]; the part of you that puts space between yourself and pushes you to inscribe your woman's style in language' (1989, 111).

Morrison's invention of the feminine flowing, musical and free sentence comes to disrupt the regular, linear and gauged male discourse. It subverts patriarchal sensibility and messes up its orderly linguistic line, in a desire to liberate woman from cultural fetters.

The text is also impregnated with recordings of characters' use of vernacular language. Unlike male writers, who fear that the 'vernacular that their mothers, wives, and daughters also frequently speak […] might seem to vulgarise their noble subjects' (Gilbert and Gubar 1989 [1985], 92), Morrison provides a lively account of the oral tradition of the Afro-American community. She reports the verbal insults exchanged between Pauline and Cholly and records the gossipy conversations between black women. As the opening of Claudia's narrative, the expression 'quiet as it's kept' echoes a rite in storytelling and represents a common initiation phrase among women, to launch a story or a talk. This concern for orality is one feature of feminine writing where the reader is once again able to hear the voice, which Cixous describes as follows:

> Voice-cry. Agony — the spoken 'word' exploded, blown to bits by suffering and anger. (1989, 112).

Morrison seems to speak from the Imaginary Order; she produces sounds and babbles like those of a baby who has not yet entered into the Symbolic Order. Gilbert and Gubar claim that 'Women's imaginary languages arise out of a desire for linguistic primacy and are often founded on a celebration of the primacy of the mother-tongue' (1989 [1985], 95). Therefore, Morrison's instillation of spoken Black American English in her text is a way to fight the exclusion of the black race and a means to incorporate the cultural heritage of blacks into American literary language.

The use of shapes to write the black female body

The defiance of white male standards of writing parallels the challenge of white standards of physical beauty. Morrison questions imposed criteria of beauty which consider white-skinned and blue-eyed people as the beautiful race. The Breedloves 'wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 28). The author provides a detailed physical description of the Breedloves, where she cannot see their ugliness:

> The eyes, the small eyes set closely together under narrow foreheads. The low, irregular headlines, which seemed even more irregular in contrast to the straight, heavy eyebrows which nearly met. Keen but crooked noses, with insolent nostrils. They had high cheekbones, and their ears turned forward. […] You looked at them, wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. (Morrison 1990 [1970], 28)

To participate in the campaign of 'Black is Beautiful', Morrison makes blacks' physical non-normative features, which are described as 'irregular', 'crooked' and 'insolent' in the above passage, signs of self-indulgence for certain characters. China, for example, is 'forever curling her hair' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 39), perhaps to show that the irregular shapes of curls are a mark of

beauty rather than ugliness. She is aware that even in her commerce of illicit sex, these very curls remain appealing to her customers. In a similar way, Marie, another local whore, narcissistically admits the attractiveness of her own curly hair, saying:

> I'm rich and good-lookin'. They [men] want to put their toes in my curly hair. (Morrison 1990 [1970], 40).

To set that world of whoredom aside, these women's self-admiration stands against Pecola's self-loathing and her internalisation of the white gaze. Morrison seems entranced by the 'irregular' features of black people and deems them emblems of prettiness against the groundless standards created by whites. John Leonard succinctly illustrates this idea:

> Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is an inquiry into the reasons why beauty gets wasted in this country. The beauty in this case is black; the wasting is done by a cultural engine […]; *The Bluest Eye* refers to the blue eyes of the blond American myth, by which standard the black-skinned and brown-eyed always measure up as inadequate. (Leonard 1970, 1).

Irregular shapes such as curls and spirals are also used metaphorically in the narrative to uncover a desire for non-linearity and a longing for freedom; a detachment from a history of condemnation and dictation of standards. Instances from the text are: 'the scraps and curls of the laughter' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 81); the music which 'spiraled around the tree trunk' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 105); 'the clear sharp curves of air' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 7); and the words which 'move in lofty spirals' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 9). Morrison's fondness of these swerving shapes goes hand in hand with her use of the feminine writing which is 'never simple or linear' (Cixous 1989, 110). The female writer excludes the traditional regularity of the male discourse and includes instead an unsteady mode of writing.

Furthermore, Morrison seems to represent the cultural identity of blacks through the description of their physical features. By highlighting the flat nostrils, curly hair, thick lips as common facial features of blacks, like those of the Breedloves, and by stressing black women's large hips which make men assume that they 'will bear children easily and painlessly' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 65), the author makes a link between physiognomy and culture. These defining physical features of black people reinforce their racial belonging as well as their cultural identity.

Nevertheless, since the physical traits of blacks go against the white norms of beauty, some black women indulge in an imitation of these normative standards. To show the desire to fight the funkiness of being black, Morrison refers to the migration of Mobile girls to the urban areas of the North. The change of environment weakens their cultural belonging, especially when they attempt to mimic the northern physical and cultural norms. Seeing that they have

an unpretentious physicality, these black girls strive to be extremely neat while using consumer products for whitening and defect concealment: 'when they wear lipstick, they never cover the entire mouth for fear of lips too thick, and they worry, worry, worry about the edges of their hair' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 64). They struggle to get rid of their funkiness, 'the dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions'; they wish to 'wipe it away' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 64).

This category of blacks contributes to self-exclusion in a process of self-effacement; they are subconsciously motivated by self-loathing, a feeling which originates from a conviction of prejudiced white standardisation.

In her novel, Morrison censures the assimilation of the rules of white culture by the African American community, which seems lost within this popular subjective ideology. The black woman is caught in a feeling of self-aversion by adopting white standards of beauty. With her dark skin, kinky hair and fleshy hips, she places herself in an ungrounded comparison with white women, while blindly believing in her ugliness and strongly assuming her physical inferiority. Morrison exposes the perils of this crisis of identity and shows that the self-doubt of the black woman effaces her racial and cultural identity and makes her abandon her cultural belonging and sustain her specious appendage to another culture. Morrison hankers for a black woman who unfetters herself from these prejudices and delights in seeing her own charms: 'We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend this unworthiness' (Morrison 1990 [1970], 57). Morrison's contentment with her blackness and pride in her race and African heritage lie behind her questioning of the bases of ideals of beauty just as her sexual vanity exhorts her to wonder about literary standards.

Conclusion

Morrison proves to be subversive in theme and style while striving to find room for Afro-American culture within white hegemony. At the same time, she asks blacks to maintain their communal ties, preserve their racial belonging and hold on to their cultural identity. At the stylistic level, she displays a break with traditional literary canon and uses a feminine mode of writing through which language is liberated. The liberation of language is synchronised with the writer's keen desire to liberate her own race and sex. The concoction of colours, sounds and shapes is an aspect of feminine writing in *The Bluest Eye*. The writer creates a visual perception through her use of colours, literally and metaphorically. Multicolouring functions as an ironic countering to colourism. It is through colours that Morrison succeeds in writing the pleasantness of the female black body. The excessive employment of colours is also a feature of feminine discourse that tends to destabilise the dim and regular traditional male text.

As far as sounds are concerned, the narrative sustains acoustic properties by imitating the human voice first and conveying a strong sound effect second. Funk, blues and jazz are taken as a theme in the novel; music is feminised due to its vitality for the narrative's female characters. Music is equally used as an aesthetic feature to ornate the text with rhythm and pulse. Since musicality is more connected with women and since it does not adhere to the male solemn discourse, it becomes an emblem of the feminine. Likewise, the preference of spiral and coiled shapes contributes to the writing of the female black physiognomy while attempting to subvert the male standards of beauty. Mingling the corporeal with the linguistic creates a powerful mark of feminine writing. This article endeavours to show how the feminine weaves its way along the narrative through the inviting combination of these three signs of rebelliousness. Colourful sentences, rhythmical sounds and irregular shapes merge harmoniously in the text to include a purely feminine style that helps fight racial and sexual exclusion.

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Paper music: Reimagining Beck's *Song Reader* as a work of historical fiction

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Abstract: *This paper explores how Beck Hansen's* Song Reader *(2012) is what E L Doctorow calls a 'false document' or a work that improvises on historical fact to bring about a compelling narration of the past. In mimicking the economic and cultural production of the Tin Pan Alley era, Beck pushes the reader to perform a historical fiction. While this 2012 collection of twenty songs, published as a folio of sheet music, mimics the aesthetics of a turn of the twentieth century publishing industry, Beck also asks the reader to engage in the work beyond its retrochic possibilities. To hear the music, the reader needs to perform the music, displacing the ease of access of the recording music industry of today, where streaming music on phones and devices is the norm. Beyond this,* Song Reader *invites the reader to re-enact music production and consumption of the past by sitting around the piano amongst friends in a parlour or in participating in an on-line and crowdsourced version of song-plugging. Ultimately, by revisiting the printing press and exploring the possibilities of a twenty-first-century 'album' being released only on paper, Beck's* Song Reader *paradoxically allows his public to revisit the past via contemporary songwriting.*

Keywords: Beck, historical re-enactment, music publishing, retrochic, sheet music, Tin Pan Alley

Set just before the First World War and brilliantly painting a portrait of an early industrial America, E L Doctorow's novel *Ragtime*, published in 1975, challenges dominant historical narratives by improvising on actual events and historical figures within the stylings of a well-executed fiction. However, this form of historical play was disagreeable to many critics, as it seemed to falsify history by harmonising fiction with fact. Historian Cushing Strout critiques Doctorow's falsifying of history in *Ragtime*. As Berndt Ostendorf puts it, Strout complains that:

> Doctorow mixes 'fidelity to historical details in 1902' with his own inventions. Therefore 'the ragtime era is as frivolously manipulated as if it were only a tune.' (Ostendorf 1991, 582, citing Strout 1981, 188)

Doctorow does not contest this, but offers a defence in his essay 'False Documents' (1983, 16-27). While his approach may be perceived as dubious, and '[t]o offer facts to the witness of the imagination and pretend they are real is to commit a kind of regressive heresy' (1983, 21), it is a necessary act of the imagination to arrive at some semblance of truth. Doctorow concludes that '[t]here is no fiction or nonfiction as we commonly understand the distinction: there is only narrative' (1983, 26).

Like Doctorow in *Ragtime*, Beck Hansen, through creating a 'false document' of the American industrialised music business in his 2012 project *Song Reader*, creates a counterfeit historical representation of a collection of sheet music. Coined after the kitchen-like sound of out-of-tune pianos heard throughout Union Square and played by numerous ambitious songwriters trying to pen the next big hit (Shepherd 1982, 1-2), Tin Pan Alley defines the heyday of the New York music publishing industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, in the twenty-first century, tinny sounds heard on the streets are less likely to come from upright pianos than from earbud headphones connected to devices streaming Spotify or Apple Music services. Sound recording has replaced sheet song publication as the main mode of distribution and consumption of music. As Reebee Garofolo notes in his socio-historical account of the music business:

> […] technological developments […] enabled record companies to displace publishing houses as the power center of the music business, [because of this] the tendency is to use the terms 'music industry' and 'recording industry' synonymously. Initially, however, they were quite separate and there was little contact between the two. (2006, 319)

Even in the present day, when we think of the music business, we think of the record business or music streaming services, and when we think of a hit song, we think of radio or online plays. Sheet music publication is limited to musical instruction and orchestral or chamber works and is more likely associated with classical music and music education that the popular music industry. For that reason, Beck Hansen's release of *Song Reader*, a songbook collecting twenty original and unrecorded popular songs in sheet music form, is such an anomaly in the popular and industrialised music world.

Song Reader remains an early twenty-first century publication meant to reflect a mode of musical production from one hundred years in the past. While it is feasible to critique *Song Reader* as an example of Beaudriardian simulacrum where there are no faithful copies of a never-existing original work, or an example of retrochic which parodies the past through imitation and appropriation (Samuel 1994, 95), or retromania which appeals to our

compulsive and inescapable desire to revisit and archive the past (Reynolds 2011), it is equally feasible to see this publication as a piece of historical fiction. Moreover, *Song Reader* is an invitation to historical re-enactment as Beck's historical fiction can be experienced only through a performative and ongoing engagement with the text — by buying it, by holding it, by reading it, and by making a sound.

Song Reader is, as noted by many critics and journalists, less of an innovation than a return to form. Its publication is an attempt to recall and fictionalise a bygone music industry before the popularisation of records and radio and where musical commodities were sold as sheet songs by presenting music in an old and obsolete musical format. Through this, Beck recaptures aesthetically the character of Tin Pan Alley in the layout and design for the book, but more importantly, in publishing an 'album' in book format, he samples the mode of cultural production of the period where music publishers were still the forerunners of the music industry. By referencing the late nineteenth and early twentieth century print music publication industry, this article explores how the publication of *Song Reader* mimics the economic and cultural capital of a sheet music industry, as Beck Hansen copies the early twentieth century mode of music production by materialising a text in a time of digital music distribution, using his fame as a brand to create interest and then selling it to the public by enlisting a crowd of song-pluggers. It also explores how these imitations of the past also create narratives and fictions about the music publishing industry, through discourses surrounding the publication and performance of this songbook.

Book

First and foremost, *Song Reader* is a book. However, on 8 August 2012, when Beck announced his upcoming December release via his website, *Song Reader* was advertised as an upcoming album. As the website notice states, '[i]n the wake of *Modern Guilt* and *The Information*, Beck's latest album comes in an almost-forgotten form — twenty songs existing only as individual pieces of sheet music, never before released or recorded' (Beck.com 2012). This 'album' was unique in the sense that it would arrive at the consumer unperformed. It was also available only on paper. This newly rediscovered medium could not be ripped and burned, at least in so far as this terminology is understood to represent the copying and reproduction of digital music, and within a day or two of the announcement, music critics and business pundits were praising this new 'album' as a challenge to the downloading of pirated digital music files common before music streaming services. Furthermore, it would revolutionise the music industry through collaborative performances by normal everyday people. To cite Will Burns, reporter for *Forbes Magazine*:

> [i]t's more than an album. It's an invitation. (2012)

However, understanding Beck's work as an album is problematic. The collection of twenty songs held within a physical package does not make it an album in the contemporary sense of the word, and certainly not in the way we understand his previous two recorded albums, *Modern Guilt* (2008) and *The Information* (2006). *Song Reader* could not be played through the electronic means of a record player, cassette player, 8-track player, CD player, mp3 player, or streaming service, but would require the consumer to play the songs via a musical instrument and sing the melodies with their own voice. Curiously, when it was finally released on 12 December 2012, the exact words in the 8 August 2012 website notice appeared once again in the blurb on the back of *Song Reader*, only the word 'album' had been changed to 'project'.

Perhaps that is because *Song Reader* is only an album if we understand 'album' to mean 'book', as in a photo album. While it has been noted that the publication has been intended to resemble the aesthetic of a gatefold LP design (Maxwell 2016, 8; Maxwell and Mittner 2019, 313), the final product is far too bookish to sit comfortably within a vinyl collection as it does not mimic the 12-inch square dimensions of a record. Furthermore, it was not produced by a record label, but released by book publisher McSweeney's, which 'exists to champion ambitious and inspired new writing, and to challenge conventional expectations about where it's found, how it looks, and who participates' (McSweeny's 1998-2021). Beck himself refers to this collection of songs as a 'book' in the 'Preface to "Song Reader"', when he states, '[w]e've attempted to make a book that's able to stand alone as an object, aside from the music' (Hansen 2012b). This is an important distinction, since *Song Reader* is meant to function primarily, not as a recorded performance, but as a text, and as a visual and material text it is meant to be appreciated for its pretty packaging as much as its contents. As American studies expert Rieke Jordan, notes:

> *Song Reader* can work as a purely aesthetic or gimmicky object that does not depend on an audible interpretation to function or to have value. *Song Reader* speaks to the fault line between the subject position of the creative-industreous reader and its retrochic materialities. (2019, 99)

It is meant to function as a physical book in every aspect including to sit on one's shelf or coffee table, to impress friends, or to start conversations.

Furthermore, Nathaniel Braddock, who teaches *Song Reader* as part of the repertoire for the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago, Illinois, says that it is the physical nature of the project that is one its greatest pleasures. He rejoices in:

> Getting it, actually putting my hands on a copy of the *Reader.* Pulling the sheets out and flipping through the songs, and looking on the back and seeing how they've got gag songs and other fragments […] I remember buying sheet music from this era […] So seeing the *Song Reader* put together in that way, with the attention to detail and craftmanship. It

> continues to delight as I slowly work my way through the different songs. (Thibeault 2014, 46)

Much like receiving a request to attend a costume ball by mail, the physicality of the text is in many ways part of the invitation to re-enact the past. It is a visual cue that sends the reader off to journey through music history, albeit a parodied and reflexive version of this history, as they begin to perform the music-making and modes of musical production of the century past.

In addition to the materiality of the text, the title *Song Reader* itself also suggests that these works were not meant to be listened to but to be read, and a certain amount of literacy, in this case the ability to read musical notation, would be required to be able to make the book work. For those unable to read music, 'A Guide to Sheet Music Symbols' by Bettie Ross is included on the back of the introduction sheet of *Song Reader*. This inclusion is farcical and likely intended to be tongue in cheek, as if reading a cheat sheet on musical notation would enable the reader to immerse themself in the text. Much like handing an illiterate person a sheet with the alphabet on it, and then telling them they have in their hands all they need to know to read, musical literacy does not come naturally; it requires training and practice to acquire this skill.

Writing is also an abstraction. In the liner notes of *Paper Music*, a compilation of classical works conducted by jazz vocal improviser Bobby McFerrin, John Schaefer observes,

> [t]he composer of classical music puts splotches of ink on paper to suggest to performers what they must do to recreate the sounds heard by the composer in his or her inner ear. […] To capture sound in notation is an odd, abstract idea for people whose music exists because they keep it in their minds and hearts. (1995)

Beck himself noted this phenomenon in the first few sentences of the preface to *Song Reader*, and suggests that by beginning with the written text instead of a transcript from the performed text, perhaps literacy is facilitated. He says:

> After releasing an album in the mid-nineteen-nineties, I was sent a copy of the sheet-music version by a publisher who had commissioned piano transcriptions and guitar-chord charts of everything on the original recording. Seeing the record's sonic ideas distilled down to notation made it obvious that most of the songs weren't intended to work that way. Reversing the process and putting together a collection of songs in book form seemed more natural — it would be an album that could only be heard by playing the songs. (Hansen 2012b)

The question remains: is written music more 'natural' than its recorded performance? Rousseau answers this with a rhetorical question in his 'Essay on the Origin of Languages': '[a]n orator uses ink to set down his writings: does that mean that ink is a most eloquent liquid?' (1990 [1781], 279). Rousseau goes on to further note:

> Writing, which might be expected to fix [or to stabilise] language, is precisely what alters it; it changes not its words but its genius; it substitutes precision for expressiveness. One conveys one's sentiments in speaking, and one's ideas in writing. In writing one is compelled to use every word in conformity with common usage; but a speaker alters meanings by his tone of voice, determining them as he wishes. (1990 [1781], 253)

While Rousseau may not have been referring to the writing and performance of music *per se*, he does make a valid point about written and performed texts, noting that the oral intonation remains an integral part of the performed text. Therefore, releasing sheet music instead of a conventional album is something of a cold and elite offering. It reduces readership only to those who can decipher musical notation and, as Rousseau notes, privileges intellectualisation over sentiment.

Yet those who can read *Song Reader* are not meant to be read it passively or privately. It was intended for engagement and public performance. In closing the preface, Beck remarks that:

> […] not so long ago, a song was only a piece of paper until it was played by someone. Anyone. Even you. (Hansen 2012b)

This sort of commitment to the text is like the one lamented by Nicholas Carr in 'Is Google making us stupid?', where he criticises the postmodern attention span's inability to accomplish a 'deep reading':

> I'm not thinking the way I used to think. I can feel it most strongly when I'm reading. Immersing myself in a book or a lengthy article used to be easy. My mind would get caught up in the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I'd spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That's rarely the case anymore. Now my concentration often starts to drift after two or three pages. I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do (2008).

Yet music lovers no longer meet in a parlour to gather around a piano for a sing-along. Even the days of gathering around a television set as a family to passively consume the latest sitcom are of a bygone era. Today, many plug through computers and portable devices to engage with text, video and music completely isolated from real human presence. Pleasures are private and fleeting and consumers can quickly click onto the next stimulus through their laptops and mobile devices. Sven Birkerts in 'The Time for Reading' attributes this loss of engaged reading in part to distraction, disappearing traditions and a lack of pursuit for higher goals (1996). Yet, Braddock notes that *Song Reader* may represent 'a renaissance of community music making' by replicating music consumption of the early twentieth century where 'if you wanted music, you would play it yourself, and families would play and sing together' (Thibeault 2014, 47). *Song Reader* invites the consumer to participate in a public, focussed

and individualised way of engaging with the reading, producing and performance of music.

But does this offering constitute innovation? The critics and speculators are conflicted in presenting that endeavour as revolutionary. Will Burns defends the innovation of *Song Reader* by stating:

> Beck's innovation does not lie in the sheet music itself, of course. It lies in the fact that a recording artist like Beck would NOT record his album at all but invite the world to record it themselves (using the sheet music provided). The genius of this innovation is in Beck's sensitivity to the modern digital age and finding a novel way to light a viral fire. (2012b)

Shortly after the release date of *Song Reader*, some covers of the songs had 'gone viral' online. Furthermore, the viral video rests not on the laurels of the composer of the song (although, songs covered usually have had some fame or notoriety) but on the innovativeness of the performance. Beck's refusal to record the work would appear in some respects to do the opposite of innovation; it merely serves as a blueprint for other people's innovation.

On the other hand, *Song Reader* has also been dismissed as novelty or kitsch. Wallace Wylie, blog journalist for *Collapse Board*, pans the project by stating:

> I think it's bullshit. […] there's nothing interesting about releasing sheet music, even in this day and age. It happens all the time. (2012)

Wylie is correct in some ways. Printed sheet music has indeed been around since the beginning of the sixteenth century, when Ottaviano Petrucci first published *Harmonice Musices Odhecaton* in 1501 (2003). Furthermore, the inexpensive single song sheet was introduced at the end of the seventeenth century by Tom Cross and had become a popular way of distributing music by the eighteenth century (Kidson 1907, 303). However, what Wylie fails to note is that in recent years, the published popular songbook or sheet music has come after the release of a recorded work and has been made available mainly to music students interested in learning their favourite songs that they have heard on internet or traditional radio. The function of modern sheet music is not as a principal means of music distribution, but for instruction. If there is genius in *Song Reader*'s release, it is that Beck Hansen is revisiting sheet music as a means of music production.

Wylie further criticises *Song Reader* by stating the following:

> Beck selling sheet music is like McDonald's selling a recipe book. 'Hey, we're not going to sell you the Super-Ultra-Mega Big Mac, but you can buy our recipe book and make your own version.' Those recipes might even look complex on paper, but that doesn't mean you aren't consuming garbage. (2012)

Theodor Adorno, in his 'On Popular Music', critiques popular song of the twentieth century as standardised and piecemeal, where its parts are interchangeable without affecting the entire composition. 'The promoters of commercialised entertainment exonerate themselves by referring to the fact that they are giving the masses what they want' (1990 [1941], 310). This 'Big-Macification' of popular music is a common critique, and in has value in the sense that the popular song is a commodity, but also leads to elitism by creating a discourse of 'serious' music as having more artistic value over commercial music. As Nicolas E. Tawa notes in *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*:

> Songwriters did indeed work to fashion a saleable product, but in their finest products is also evidence of creative imagination. The usual definition of composer is one who writes music. A popular-song writer, however, fits a more expanded definition of the composer, one who orders and resolves conflicts within and between people (even as he hopes to resolve them in himself), one who eases tension in the senses and nervous system. None of these composers is or aspires to be a Bach or Beethoven. In an unassuming way the composer reaches out to the millions left untouched by the mighty ones of music. (1990, 35)

Neither 'bullshit' nor innovation is a sufficient term to define what *Song Reader* represents. 'Bullshit' reduces it to a modern sheet music publication like any other — a by-product of the sale of a recording. However, *Song Reader* is not a secondary text but the primary text itself. Innovation, like the use of the word 'album', is used to elevate the cultural status of the product — to exaggerate its importance and to make believe it more significant than it actually is, and what it actually is, is a book.

Bind

In purchasing *Song Reader*, the consumer acknowledges that they are participating in an obsolete and outmoded method of commercial music distribution. While still a book, *Song Reader* is not a traditionally bound codex songbook. Instead, it acts as a folio which houses twenty individual pieces of sheet music, an introduction by Jody Rosen and a preface by Beck. Both the introduction and the preface are individual sheets designed to have the appearance of sheet music. All the enclosed songs have been adorned with the images of one of a dozen artists whose illustrations both parody and reflect the lithographic prints on the music covers of Tin Pan Alley. The paper used for the music is matte finished, weighty and durable. What is produced through *Song Reader* is both eye-catching and tangible. Most importantly, it presents a counter-narrative to a contemporary music production discourse of online released recordings. By privileging the composition over performance, the consumer of Beck's project agrees to enter a time warp of sorts where they enter a discourse of and adopting a means of interacting with popular music which at

once dominates a classical and historical understanding of music and simulates music-making from the past.

Historically, and as a matter of intellectual property, the publication of the song holds a more sustainable economic capital than the sum of any of its performances. In 1908, Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes ruled in the case of *White-Smith vs. Apollo* that publishers had no legal right to prevent player piano manufacturers from creating mechanical reproductions through piano rolls, as they were not subject to copyright (Cummings 2010, 663). As Lisa Gitelman notes in 'Media, materiality, and the measure of the digital':

> Holes in a music roll, in other words, were not 'a varied form of symbols substituted for the symbols' used in music. It was not the perforated paper that published the composer's conception but rather the mechanical action of the player piano, of which the paper roll was adjunct, that made the music publicly available. (2005, 221)

In other words, not all paper was created equal under the law, as perforations were not considered to be the written word. Due to this ruling, song publishers in the early twentieth century made their money from the sales of sheet music and phonograph records (another mechanical reproduction), whereas piano roll companies profited from the sales of the performance. However, a year later, the 1909 Copyright Law would address the issue of mechanical reproduction rights, or simply 'mechanicals', by introducing a compulsory license where the songwriters and publishers would enjoy a couple of cents for each copy rendered (Garofolo 1999, 322; Cummings 2010, 664). Conversely, it wasn't until 1971, when the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) lobbied and won compulsory licenses for recorded works, that royalties would be granted for the mechanical reproduction itself (Cummings 2010, 673).

Yet, in many ways, traditional notation functions in the very same way that the holes in a player piano roll do. Both indicate which notes are supposed to be played. As David Suisman states in his article 'Sound, knowledge, and the "Immanence of human failure"':

> […] the musical education of pianists, opposed to that of composers, generally focused on standardized execution and submission to the authority of the composer's score. […] This stage of mechanization presupposed an extremely high degree of skill, but the point of the player's labor was, just as it would be later with increasingly mechanized technologies, reproduction of sounds determined earlier, by someone else. (2010, 21-22)

This 'standardized execution', brought about by piano lessons, creates for many a literal reading of the text. The function of the text is simply to instruct, not interpret. As Suisman goes on to note:

> [w]ith the piano, music was written into the dots and lines of musical notation; with the player-piano, inscription took the form of perforations in a paper roll; with the phonograph, sound was inscribed into a spiral groove on a cylinder or disc. (2010, 23)

For Suisman, there is no hierarchy of medium by which the text is presented; whether on paper, wax or vinyl, and whether the mechanism performing the function of creating the sound is a needle, a hammer or a human, all are used to produce a desired sound.

Furthermore, the printing press used to publish sheet music is also a mechanised process. Gutenberg's invention, even in its beginnings over 500 years ago, allowed for the written word to reach the masses efficiently and effectively. As Elizabeth Eisenstein notes:

> [a]fter printing […] both the hope of achieving lasting fame and the sense of losing control were intensified. In addition, the number of intermediaries who handled the text increased. (2011, 21)

The widespread distribution of the printed word made it possible for writers to become immortal, and gave them a chance to popularise and market their works. Yet by having the work go through editors, publishers, printers, booksellers and even pirates, the author also feared the loss of the authenticity of their text. Walter Benjamin refers to this authenticity as an 'aura' and attributes the destruction of the aura in the age of mechanical reproduction primarily to:

> […] the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. (1992 [1936], 669)

As Benjamin suggests, there is a desire to hold a material text in one's hand, even if it not the original but a copy. There is a heightened willingness in the digital era to accept the material reproduction as authentic when much creative content is dematerialised and dispersed over the World Wide Web. There is not only a loss of commercial value through digital reproduction but a symbolic loss as well.

For this reason, the rhetoric surrounding the materiality of *Song Reader* is notable. Will Burns observes that:

> [y]ou can't just download this album, you have to buy it. It's not digital, it's paper. Beck has successfully found a loophole in our digital addictions' (2012a).

Jody Rosen, in the introduction to *Song Reader*, notes that:

> [i]n the age of MP3s, music has become even less hands-on. Once we had a tactile *thing* to go with the sound — shellac 78, an LP inside a gatefold

> cover, a CD in a jewelbox. Today, recorded music is disembodied, dissolved into code; it has slipped the bounds of the earth. (Hansen 2012b)

Beck, in an interview with Laura Barton about the release of *Song Reader*, expressed:

> […] in recent years I've been paying attention to how records are affected by [MP3s]. Imagine if you were writing an article and someone was to take out half the words and they were going to put them in a really different font. That's what it's like. And it's a problem, I think. (Barton 2012)

Whether it is over-ease of access, a nostalgia caused by dematerialisation of the tangible qualities of the text, or an alteration of the original through the digitisation of the text, Burns, Rosen and Hansen all express a dissatisfaction of online music distribution and a fetishisation of the physical item. Gitelman observes:

> *[P]aper* was one way (and I think a major way) in which ordinary people experienced the materially diverse economy of meaning that modern communications entail — part of what gets called 'synergy' today. Paper remains vital to the 'social life of information' in our digital era, although the fact has slipped from our awareness in many ways. (2005, 220, emphasis original)

Yet on some level, the importance surrounding materiality is just spin. Paul Duguid aptly observes in 'Material Matters' (1996) that it is not the object, which is dematerialised, only the content. The box remains.

However, what is truly mourned is not really the physicality of the object, but the ownership of it. Burns, from the position of the consumer, comments that *Song Reader* is something that needs to be bought to be possessed. Rosen's list of 'tactile *things*' are all cultural objects that would need to have been purchased and collected to experience them. Beck's concerns surround authorship, where he expresses the slipping control over the artist's creation. There is a value in the object's materiality which is lost in the digitisation of the text and rests upon the shoulders of the person or party who owns the object. As Gitelman further observes, '[t]he specifics of materiality […] *matter* much more to authors, to publishers, to "labels" — that is, to potential owners — than they ever can, could, or will to listeners' (2005, 214, emphasis original). In other words, ownership of the text itself gives it its value. Digitised performances of music were perceived to have little or no value at the time of *Song Reader's* release as they are merely transferred from a laptop, to a tablet, to a smartphone or to an mp3 player. Often the content is acquired for free or for what feels to be a nominal service charge. Music is easily obtained and easily disposed of and MP3s are not owned; they are shared. By rematerialising music in a material form, Beck has provided the consumer with some *thing* to show for their money spent and a chance to own and perform a piece of his catalogue, even if it is only a reproduction.

Beck

Roland Barthes argued in 'The Death of the Author' that '[t]o give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing' (2006 [1967], 279). In many ways, the performative function of Beck Hansen's *Song Reader* allows for the text to continue without the limits of an authoritative figure imposed upon it. As Beck states in an interview with McSweeney's, '[…] these songs are meant to be pulled apart and reshaped. The idea of them being played by choirs, brass bands, string ensembles, anything outside of traditional rock-band constructs — it's interesting because it's outside of where my songs normally exist' (McSweeney's 2012). In this sense, Barthes is correct. This text has no real connection to its author because the performed music of the author was never released as a recording and has in no way influenced how these songs will be performed by others. As Michael De Certeau notes, '[…] the text has a meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them […]' (1984, 170). Contrary to Suisman's mechanised functional interpretations of sheet music, participants are free to interpret these pieces as they please.

However, freedom of the reader does not completely erase the importance of the author of the text. Imagine for an instant that the author of *Song Reader* was not Beck, but instead an unknown composer who was publishing a collection of well-written songs on sheet music without having released a successful album for which these songs would have garnered exposure. It would likely remain unheard of and it would certainly not sell out by Christmas. Beck's name alone gives weight to this project, and his role as author is important. After all, he had critics and journalists publicising *Song Reader* the day after its future release was disclosed. Michel Foucault remarks on the classificatory function to the author's name when he states:

> […] a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others. In addition, it establishes a relationship among the texts. (2006 [1970], 284)

Although the release of *Song Reader* may not have necessarily been predicted by Beck's fans or critics prior to its announcement, it was not uncharacteristic when compared to the rest of Beck's oeuvre. Or, in other words, critics may not have been able to foresee the actual release of *Song Reader*, but the notice of its release is in line with the trope of Beck's career.

First, Beck has engaged older modes of production in his past work. Beck's successful career kicked off with the 'slacker' hit 'Loser' from his 1994 album *Mellow Gold.* In the age of multi-track professional recording studios, *Mellow Gold*, which was recorded on an analog '8-track in Beck's living room, speaks of lowered expectations, and yet there's a sense of the empowerment derived from that cheap high technology' (Azerrad 1994). 'Loser' was instrumental in introducing the concept of 'lo-fi' record production to a mainstream audience.

Secondly, much of his career exposes a longing for a more tangible, canonised and permanent cultural era. As Beck told *Rolling Stone* reporter Mark Kemp just off the heels of his second major release *Odelay*, 'People, music, everything in our culture — it's so disposable now' (Kemp 1996). Much of this sentiment is mirrored in Beck's lyrical content, through referencing imagery of decay as in the song 'Dead Melodies' from *Mutations* (1998) where:

> Night birds will cackle
>
> Rotting like apples on trees
>
> Sending their dead melodies

and dated technology as in 'Devil's Haircut' from *Odelay* (1996):

> Something's wrong 'cause my mind is fading
>
> Ghetto-blasting disintegrating
>
> Rock 'n' roll, know what I'm saying

Thirdly, the idea of initiating musical collaboration to bring original readings to a text is not a new concept to Beck. In 2009, Beck started a project called 'Record Club' where he recorded five classic albums (*The Velvet Underground & Nico* (1967), INXS's *Kick* (1987), *Songs of Leonard Cohen* (1967), Skip Spence's *Oar* (1969), and *Yanni Live at the Acropolis* (1994)) with other recording artists, including Leslie Feist, Nigel Godrich (producer for Radiohead amongst others) and Thurston Moore (of Sonic Youth). Songs from the albums made available for free on the 'Beck's Record Club' website in video format, at a rate of one track a week. Finally, it is not the first time Beck has invited the consumer to participate in the production of his work. His album *The Information* (2006) contained graph paper as cover art, where the listener was enabled to develop their own album artwork with the stickers enclosed in the CD jewel case. Considering these four attributes of his work as an artist, one could argue few musicians could have pulled off a sheet music release, and that this project was a perfect fit for Beck Hansen.

Although generational research is problematic in categorically stereotyping and creating broad generalisations of a large group of people, in many ways Beck is the quintessential Generation X artist. Don Tapscott in his book *Grown Up Digital* almost completely dismisses Gen-X. In what could be easily regarded as comparative study between the Broadcast Generation (Baby Boomers) and what he calls 'The Net Generation' (children of Baby Boomers), Tapscott only dedicates half of a page to the group sandwiched between these two generations. The same dismissiveness in Tapscott's own work is what defines Generation X. Tapscott even notes this when he offers the following definition of X: '[…] a group that feels excluded from society and entered the labor work force only to find that their older brothers and sisters have filled all the positions' (2009, 14). Tapscott's ambivalence towards Gen-X suggests a lack influence in

this new technological era. However, Generation X were coming of age on the wake of change when what Tim Berners-Lee coined as the World Wide Web was launched in 1991 (Silicon Valley Historical Association 2012), and were a group who spent their formative years in a pre-online visceral state. In their early adult years, Gen-X played catch up with new technologies that would become so much a part of everyday life. This disconnect and reconnect contributes to this feeling of exclusion that Tapscott refers to. Perhaps this is what was at the forefront of Beck's mind when he optimistically said to Kemp in 1997:

> […] there were possibilities within the limitations of everyday life, with the things that we look at that are disposable. Our lives can seem so limited and uneventful, but these things can be transformed. We can appoint ourselves to be alchemists, turning shit into gold. (Kemp 1997)

Song Reader, a self-professed idea from the 1990s, is the actualisation of such an alchemy, offering everyday people a chance to revisit the past through forgotten material culture and transform the music from the page into a real sonic space.

Buzz

On the back of the individual sheet music in *Song Reader*, Beck simultaneously parodies and pays *homage* to old advertisements. The layout mimics the advertisements on old sheet music and features samples of fictional songs, such as 'There's a Sarcophagus in Egypt with your Name On It' by Teddy Nefertiti, and made-up collections such as *Prison and Mountain Songs (For Boys)*. The ads reference imagined publishing houses and include taglines such as 'Songs you won't be able to get away from and otherwise inescapable melodies' [Hansen 2012b]. Jody Rosen, in the introduction to *Song Reader*, recognises these as some of the collections 'funniest moments'. Yet, advertising in the time of Tin Pan Alley was a serious business indeed, and the quality of the advertisement could make or break a song. However, it became apparent that print advertising alone was insufficient for a music publisher to push copies of sheet music. After all, '[…] the public also had to hear and become familiar with the music' (Tawa 1990, 49).

'Song plugging' was introduced and became the most effective way to promote the sale of sheet music in the time of Tin Pan Alley. Tawa gives some examples of plugging:

> A plug might mean loudly singing a song on a major urban intersection or in front of a music store displaying the title in its window. A plug might be the sending of a singer-pianist to perform on a raised platform in a department store, in the midst of sheet-music counters. […] A plug might be negotiating with an Italian *padrone* to have his organ grinders push the song on the streets. Around the turn of the century, publishers might plug a song by recording it on a player-piano roll or on a phonograph cylinder or flat disk, then offering it for free to influential performers or at a competitive price to ordinary customers (1990, 49).

A 'plug' was a means of advertising on street level by which a song is publicly performed in hopes of making known a song to a potential buyer so they could later take the sheet music home and play it for themselves. Pluggers were in fact professional salesmen, and sometimes even professional entertainers, who would market songs '[…] in much the same way as Coca-Cola, clothes and carpets' (Sheppard 1982, 11). Often colourful antics would be performed to pitch a song. Jack Robbins, a professional plugger, sang 'It's an Old Horse That Knows Its Way Home' riding through town on the back of a hay wagon in farmer's garb (Sheppard 1982, 11). 'Stooges' would be placed, who were staged to get so carried away with a song that they would immediately break into song themselves (Tawa 1990, 52). At times a 'claque' or a professional audience would be used to applaud energetically at the end of a song (Tawa 1990, 52). The intent of these performances would be to create a 'buzz' around a certain piece of music, much like how the use of YouTube and social media can make a song 'go viral' today.

The unusual format of sheet music in the digital age and Beck's name and personality both went a long way to publicise this collection of songs before its release; however, music publisher McSweeney's, in hoping for a viral hit to give Beck's publication notoriety, adapted the song plugging convention for the twenty-first century in order to sell *Song Reader*. McSweeney's facilitated this by launching the now defunct website songreader.net, a collection of hyperlinks that provided access to fans' renditions of Beck's works from *Song Reader*. In this instance, the music publisher was still plugging songs in very much a traditional sense, except they were attempting to move the 'buzz' from the street to the information highway, and instead of hiring professionals, they were crowdsourcing to get the job done. This group of 'fans' were essentially crowdsourced pluggers, who were attempting to make their rendition of the song the one that got known. Some performances were straightforward, others comical, some professional, others amateur and some were simply generated by MIDI software. Yet, most captured the spirit of the antics used to sell a song in the time of Tin Pan Alley. Jackie Dandelion performed 'Old Shanghai' singing along to a recording of the song she made and using a mirrored videoed effect that made her look like a two-headed creature. Steve Wachner performed 'Why Did You Make Me Care?' silently as a card trick. Although it was performed in

a virtual space, the plug functioned in pretty much the same way as in Tin Pan Alley — the performance was offered up for free to sell copies of the publication. Jeff Howe, who is thought to be responsible for coining the term crowdsourcing, comments:

> […] companies grew up in the Internet age and were designed to take advantage of the networked world. But now the productive potential of millions of plugged-in enthusiasts is attracting the attention of old-line businesses, too' (2006, 2)

Music publishers are also taking advantage of the free labour crowdsourcing has to offer.

Crowdsourcing is displacing the need for the professional in the music industry, and marketing teams are not immune. American songwriter Sigmund Romberg remarked in a 1944 essay entitled 'So You've a Song to Publish':

> […] the publication and promotion of a hit take capital. Merely printing a song in the necessary number of arrangements and copies costs at least a thousand dollars; and before a song can become a hit, infinitely more will have to be spent in overhead, advertising, and 'plugging.' It's small wonder that the publishers can't support all the amateurs in the style to which they would like to become accustomed. (1944, 8)

During the time of Tin Pan Alley, a plugger was professional who was paid, and a necessary expense for the publisher to roll in with marketing costs to break in a song. In the digital age, promotion has become free labour. Daren C. Brabham recognises in 'Crowdsourcing as a Model for Problem Solving' that:

> […] crowdsourcing necessarily involves casualties. […] On the micro-level, crowdsourcing is ruining careers. On the macro-level, though, crowdsourcing is reconnecting workers with their work and taming the giants of big business by reviving the importance of the consumer in the design process. (2008, 84)

In the case of songreader.net, the 'fan' got to pick which songs got plugged and how they were presented. Although in a crowdsourcing arena, the fans are essentially exploited volunteers, the success of *Song Reader* depended not only on the purchasing power of the consumer, but also on the participation of the 'crowd.'

Buck

Beck wrote in the second paragraph of his 'Preface to *Song Reader*' on the success of sheet music sales for Bing Crosby's 'Sweet Leilani' in 1937:

> Apparently, it was so popular that, by some estimates, the sheet music sold fifty-four million copies. Home-played music had been so widespread that nearly half the country had bought the sheet music for a single song, and had presumably gone through the trouble of learning to

> play it. It was one of those statistics that offers a clue to something fundamental about our past. (Hansen 2012b)

Was this what Beck had in mind when he published *Song Reader*? Did he really believe that his work would garner this kind of success with the masses? Laura Barton in her interview with Beck suggests he may have when she stated, '[w]ouldn't it be wonderful, he thought, to try and recreate something like that?' (2012). Yet, beyond the initial economic capital acquired through the novelty of this publication, it has either not had the time or has been unable to create a viral success that would increase the cultural capital of *Song Reader*. Bourdieu expresses the opinion that:

> [s]ymbolic goods are a two-faced reality, a commodity and a symbolic object. Their specifically cultural value and their commercial value remain relatively independent, although the economic sanction may come to reinforce their cultural consecration. (1993, 113)

'Sweet Leilani' was a hit song which reinforced both its economic capital at the time and its cultural capital even to this day. Allmusic.com lists over a thousand recordings of this song by artists including Chris Isaak, Frank Zappa, The Platters, Benny Goodman, Les Paul and, of course, Bing Crosby. Nearly ten years later, none of Beck's ditties from *Song Reader* have measured up. As Bing Crosby noted about professional song pluggers:

> They'd come to your dressing room to demonstrate whatever song their company was concentrating on. […] They could sing and dance, they knew all the jokes. It was an amusing interlude. And they always had the same line: 'Bing, I promise you, this is going to be the number one song, there's no question about it.' (Shepherd 1982, 10).

Beck Hansen is a professional plugger capable of doing an entertaining song and dance. However, how many people bought it?

Economic profits for music have their roots deeply seeded both historically and currently in the materiality of an object. Today, Beck would have seen meagre returns on a new recording sold through download and streaming services and physical sales (and nothing from pirated downloads). When it came out, *Song Reader* listed at $39.95 CDN. The sale of *Song Reader* experiences disintermediation for which the money earned goes directly to the publisher and songwriter and bypasses the record label and artist along the way.

Wylie is critical of Beck's intentions, stating:

> [if Beck] meant this as a democratic process then surely he would have released the songs as actual sheet music that was available at a reasonable price. $34 is a lot of money. [...] Democracy should be cheaper than this. (2012)

Wylie has reason to be sceptical, because perhaps it is not democratisation that Beck is after, but capitalism. Beck has produced in a published book a format

that cannot easily be shared online (other than by scanning and posting). However, in terms of expense, Beck's *Song Reader* was certainly more expensive than filesharing or downloading through peer-to-peer networks via BitTorrent, where the content is obtained free of charge, but the price per song sheet only works out to $1.70 US a song (or $1.25 CDN as in my purchase through Amazon.ca). This was cheaper than most individual song sheets and just a little more than an iTunes download. As Geeta Dayal observes:

> *Song Reader* is as brilliant as it is obnoxious, a fuck you to the legions of MP3 downloaders who would have otherwise procured Beck's new album for free within seconds. Want to listen to Beck's new record? Too bad — you have to play it yourself. (2012)

'You', and not the author, are responsible for the performance.

It is likely that this or any collection of sheet music released in the twenty-first century will never match the success of the big hits of Tin Pan Alley like 'Sweet Leilani'. Furthermore, it is unlikely that successful performing artists will be hocking their instruments and take up the pen to become the next Scott Joplin or Irving Berlin, despite Will Burns' predictions of aging rock stars '[…] issuing this kind of sheet-music album to keep the flame alive' (2012a). Still, even if this publication is only a moderate success through initial sales and goes no further, it has been a reminder that money can still be made using traditional methods of distribution (or a hybrid of traditional and modern methods) and that a monetary value remains in a physical commodity.

Back

Song Reader's lasting importance to its contribution to historical fiction, if it is to have any, is rooted not only in its representation of a bygone era, but through the creation of lasting material culture that can be used as a medium to recreate the past. In an interview with Jian Ghomeshi on CBC's *Q*, Beck was asked what would happen if someone came across a stack of *Song Reader* songs a hundred years from now. Beck replied, 'if there would be no CD players or MP3s or computers next week, this would be the only thing left of all this music that I made' (2012). This text, freeze framed in time, represents to Beck his mark on history. Writing has permanence, whereas recorded performance is only temporary and bound by playback technologies. As Rousseau notes, '[a]n object, presented before anything is said, stimulates the imagination, arouses curiosity, holds the mind in suspense and anticipation of what will be said' (1990 [1781], 241). *Song Reader* is such an object that has stirred curiosity and the imagination from months before its release, to the reading of the text as a book, to the performance in private and public spaces, to the circulation of both amateur and professional recordings locally and worldwide. It proposes to the consumer a pleasure forgotten by a generation of samplers and MP3 downloaders — the invitation to be an active participant in the reading of a song.

That said, in July 2014, about a year and a half after the *Song Reader* sheet music collection was released, there emerged a recorded collection of the *Song Reader* songs performed by notable artists such as Jack Black, Norah Jones, Louden Wainwright III and even Beck himself. While these recorded performances remain covers or copies of the songs held within the *Song Reader* folio and do not represent original works in themselves, there is an officialness to this release as it was approved of and participated in by Beck and released by Capitol Records, a subsidiary of Universal Music, a predominant music label. As such, this recording offers closure to all previous experiments. In choosing to listen to recorded versions of Beck's compositions over performing them, the publication of *Song Reader* as a written text with historical re-enactment possibilities wanes from the public imagination. The community and private performance of these songs are now not the only option to the consumer and cease to gain foreground in favour of canned performances that can be played, copied and distributed mechanically or digitally. That said, even the recording itself is an homage to the possibilities of *Song Reader*. Ben Rayner, reporter and music critic for the *Toronto Star*, states:

> the best thing about *Song Reader* [the recording] is you could release a different version of this collection with fresh artists every year in perpetuity and wind up with a completely different program every time. Really, this thing only hints at the potential Beck intended his songbook to have in the first place. (2014)

While the CD release closes the project, it opens up the possibilities for revisiting it again in the future.

Therefore, it is not too late for the digital music consumer, with ease of access and an ephemeral and disposable experience with music, to make amends. Nathalie Caple expressed the following about the introduction of the e-book to traditional print publications:

> The amazing thing about the e-book is that it can augment the paper book and highlight what is precious about physicality. It doesn't require a system that replaces your ability to hold a book or to read. It only protects your right to this pleasure. (2011)

Digital or mechanical reproductions of music have functioned in very much the same way. They have not destroyed the ability to enjoy performing a song oneself, and the publication of *Song Reader* has not erased a hundred years of the recording industry, but only presented the possibility of reading the song for oneself and discovering something truly worthwhile. In the foreword of a 1907 collection of 'old time' *Heart Songs*, the editor states, '[t]he yellow sheets of music bear evidence of constant us; in times of war and peace, victory and defeat, good and evil fortune, these sweet strains have bended with the coarser thread of human life and offered to the joyful or saddened soul a suggestion of uplift, sympathy and hope' (Chapple 1907, vi). Much like, and complimentary

to, Doctorow's *Ragtime*, Beck's offering also reveals a 'constant us'. It is at once a glimpse into our past, a reaction to our present and a mark on history for future generations.

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Keeping time: Song and dance as phenomenological experiences of historicity in the film musical

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Abstract: *This article examines the ways in which film musicals recreate the experience of living in history through their song and dance sequences. These sequences offer their audience a collective complex phenomenological experience through cinematic presence, excess and repetition. Using Bergson's idea of multiplicity in duration, this article demonstrates how these musical numbers invite us as an audience to a historicity in which time is shared with others without erasing historical conflicts and tensions. This allows us to both identify with historical communities and also question official histories and to seek out additional alternative bodily histories through its non-narrative elements.*

Keywords: Dance, Experience, Film, History, Musical, Phenomenology

Song and dance are common in films that take place in both the distant and recent past. From recent international festival films such as *Cold War* (Pawel Pawlikowski, 2018) and *Jeannette: The Childhood of Joan of Arc* (Bruno Dumont, 2017), to classical Hollywood films such as *Meet Me in St Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1944) and *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen & Gene Kelly, 1952), and throughout most of the twentieth century in films such as *Grease* (Randal Kleiser, 1978), *My Fair Lady* (George Cukor, 1964), or *Absolute Beginners* (Julien Temple, 1986), the musical film and the historical or period film tend to coincide with each other quite often.

Despite the prevalence of this combination, or perhaps because of it, the two interlinked genres — musical and period films — have each been studied to the exclusion of the other. In studies occupied with defining the Musical genre, the historical backgrounds are considered merely a 'removal of the whole film in time and space […] to places, that is, where it can be believed (by white urban Americans) that song and dance are "in the air"' (Dyer 2005, 30). Studies that focus on the portrayal of history in film do not mention musical films, although

many of their conclusions apply to the historical musical film. As Robert Rosenstone demonstrates, historical fiction film's shortcomings are often the same as those of any written historiography, both tending to overly emphasise the narrative nature of history (Rosenstone 2006). According to these studies, the medium of film can compensate for its drawbacks by turning facts into memorable and emotionally charged moments. It may also offer us new ways of thinking about our histories.

In addition to the advantages mentioned above, musical films have specific elements that allow them to provide viewers not only with information regarding their historical context, but also a sense of historicity. The term *historicity* has been used with various meanings and interpretations in philosophy, film theory and other disciplines. This study relies heavily on the definition provided by phenomenologist David Carr, who defines historicity as the experience of living in historical time, asking what is it like to exist historically (Carr 2014, 47)? This definition helps us comprehend historicity as consisting of the different ways in which the personal and the public, text and body, past, present and future influence each other constantly as an experience.[1]

This experience of historicity is based on a constant contradiction. On the one hand, we perceive the world first and foremost through our own body and mind in a way that is more immediately accessible and powerful than any other person's subjective experience. On the other hand, meaning itself is created through shared experience and communication (Nancy 2000), and this sense of historicity requires sharing with others a sense of a common goal, which is often built on shared memories of the past (Carr 2014, 51-55). The historical musical offers viewers this complex collective experience that makes historicity possible, through its main generic feature: the song and dance number.

My aim here is not to propose a definition of the historical-musical genre, but rather to bring to light the aspects of musical film that express historicity itself. The films mentioned in this study belong to a variety of styles and time periods, both musically and cinematically. Many of them originated in successful stage productions.[2] These are intended to demonstrate the various possibilities of historical representation and experience in film, while simultaneously highlighting what it is these films have in common with each other. Previous

[1] Some definitions focus on the individual nature of subjective experience, rather than the shared, often narrative character of history (Heidegger 2010 [1927], 355-66), while others focus more on 'relations between the mode of historiography and the types of construction of history related by it' (Rosen 2001, xi).

[2] Not only are many musical films adapted from the stage, but these stage musicals are also often themselves based on literary historical and historical fiction sources (such as *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Cabaret*, *Les Misérables* etc). This abundance of sources contributes to what will later be discussed as the excess of information experienced by audiences while viewing the film.

studies have described and analysed experiences and representations of historicity in film musicals which are not necessarily aiming at fictional historical representation (Dyer 2005; Herzog 2010). Inquiring about the particular qualities of the musical number in historical fiction musicals, this study hopes to find a frame of thinking about the combination of music and history in film which may then be considered in the analysis of any film musical occupied with history.

To do so, I rely on phenomenological texts and methods, inquiring into the experiences of both film and history. The following pages will elaborate on historicity as an embodied experience that is heavily connected to our sense of time and place, as well as our sense of identity and community. These elements are demonstrated and used in the film musical in a way which does not cover up the complexities of the past, but rather deepens the way in which it is perceived.

Through the analysis of sound, repetition, rhythm and movement, I show how the audience is being invited to an a-linear experience of time in which memories, expectations and the present all mix. Instead of defining this mix as a utopia in which all conflicts are temporarily resolved through music, the musical number can challenge pre-existing histories while emphasising the possibility of sharing with others our sense of existing in time.

Historicity as experience

To do this, we must first begin to define what exactly historicity is and clarify how it is given to our perception. I would like to do so through the study of phenomenology, searching for the way in which the world is experienced by our consciousness. Rooted in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, phenomenological methods see our experience of the world as what may be understood of the world, and take into account our perception being grounded in a human body, placed in a certain time and space. Using the term *intentionality*, phenomenologists note how our consciousness is always *of* something — an object or an event, real or imagined. We think, remember, view and listen *to something*. The way we perceive this thing changes based on the relations between us and that which is being experienced.

The concept of intentionality assists us in describing, among other things, our relationship with time. How does our mind think, remember and imagine the past and the future, while constantly processing the sensory information of the living present? Husserl describes how we experience time as continuous, constantly moving from a remembered past in the direction of the future. In order to demonstrate this idea, Husserl gives the example of listening to music: we do not hear every note separately, but rather as a sequence that includes the sounds we have heard, and the expectation of more sounds to follow. Our very

perception of time is connected to the way we listen to music (Husserl 2012, 60-76).

David Carr's *Experience and History* (2014), which is dedicated entirely to the experience of historicity from a phenomenological perspective, defines historicity as the way in which we encounter the historical in our lives and the structures of consciousness and perception through which this encounter occurs. Carr assumes that our consciousness tends to perceive occurrences as narrative events with culturally specific inclinations. Those involved in the making of history act based on a narrative perception of reality. This claim gives new meaning to historiography, as a form capable of reflecting history in structures similar to the narrative nature of human intentionality (Carr 2014, 112-14). It is useful, in our case, to expand upon this claim and question whether our perception of shared history may be reflected also in the form of song and dance. The composition and writing of many a historical musical reflects primarily the popular music of its own time and is prone to anachronism and nostalgia, perhaps even expressing a certain zeitgeist, as demonstrated in Vera Dika's study of films produced in the 1970s which represent America in the 1950s (Dika 2003, 122-42). These will be discussed later, but this study first seeks the possibility of historicity within any musical composition or dance style. It is music and dance movement as cinematic phenomena which will first be examined for these experiences of shared historical time.

But is it even possible to speak of a shared experience, of time or otherwise? Phenomenologists have often occupied themselves with the question of intersubjectivity. Husserl claimed that our most basic experience of others is shaped by our desire (and inability) to perceive what they are perceiving. This frustrating experience is what makes them Other and not a part of our personal subjectivity. Heidegger argued that what constitutes our experience of social life is our perception of others as having a subjectivity like our own. This perception enables communication, and all other social and cultural activities (Zahavi 2001, 153-55).

In the experience of historicity, we are not only required to perceive others as having a similar subjectivity, but also a shared intentionality. We are not only existing in time with a past and future of our own, but in a common subjective perception of historical time. Carr notes that historicity is an experience possible only through the common intentionality of a community. This community does not have specific requirements or a formal definition. It only requires its participants to feel a part of a common subjectivity. This community he refers to as a 'We-subject', the very existence of the pronoun 'we' expressing the basic perception of a common intentionality (Carr 2014, 52). This 'we' may be a family, a gender, a social class, a nation, or a common profession. The we-subject can apply to different communities in the same temporal moment. For this reason, the experience of historicity as a collective experience does not have to be a

totalising, identical experience for all its participants. The contradiction between one's various collective identities creates a more complicated experience of historicity, often characterized by fragmentation or excess of meaning.

Henri Bergson uses the philosophical idea of *durée* as a sequence or moment in time in which our consciousness is aware of various qualities or activities, creating together an experience perceived as a whole. The different states of consciousness that influence and change each other constantly, according to Bergson, are what makes our perceptions of the world as rich and complex as they are. Bergson demonstrates *durée* using the experiences of music and movement which are perceived as complete works, but are made up of various qualities (instruments, sections, body parts) that influence one another (Bergson 1983, 70-71). Although Bergson himself claimed that this experience does not apply to film, several scholars (Deleuze 1986; Rodowick 1997; Olkowski 2014, 71-80) have shown that this multiplicity does in fact pertain to every film, as they are based on the elements of movement and sound.

The film musical offers us cinema in which movement and sound, the very exemplars of multiplicity, provide the viewer with the basic sensory experience required for a sense of a complex collective subject: the experience of a 'we' that contains various and contradicting qualities, and historical multiplicity that is not necessarily settled within a utopia. The following sections show the specific ways in which the complex collective historicity manifests in scenes of singing and dancing in the historical musical film.

Multiplicity in song

The act of listening, in the writing of Jean-Luc Nancy, emphasises the presence of the body which is surrounded by music or sound. This presence is, according to Nancy, what constitutes our subjectivity. Listening requires the body to encounter, in time, the reverberations of sound traveling in a specific space. The space is defined by the movement of sound through it, and so is the listening subject. In listening, the subject that perceives sound becomes a 'self'. The physical echoing of sound establishes the listening body as a self that does not have a unified subject but rather exists as a state, an occurrence, a fleeting feeling or tension. This self is temporal in its nature but is manifested through the entire body as a space for the sound waves to reverberate within (Nancy 2007, 17-19).

In these descriptions, Nancy sees the echo as a self, facing another. One creates the sound and the other listens. Both are called 'self' and both are united by the time and space of listening. The moment in which listening happens may create a subject that is made up of many listeners becoming a space for the reverberation of sound, becoming a self that exists as a momentary tension. In this

tension, the individual subjectivity and the collective one overflow, create an excess subjectivity.

The historical musical has its own way of demonstrating this excess subjectivity, through the melody of its songs. Joseph P Swain analyses the repetition of melodies in historical musicals. As opposed to a regular reprise — in which a melody may repeat later in the film in order to add relevance and context to its earlier content — in operas and musicals a melody can return as a *contrafactum*, in which it receives entirely different lyrical content and mood (Swain 2002, 322). Swain gives several examples of this in the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Norman Jewison, 1973), a musical based on a rock opera about the last week in the life of Jesus Christ. In these examples from the musical, Swain demonstrates how the followers of Jesus first worship him and then ridicule and curse him with the same melody. In this way, the melody becomes an experience that is not centred around a single meaning but is open to a multiplicity of qualities and meanings which influence each other in sound. As listeners, we become aware of this repetition and begin to hear the melody as having its own layers of history, folded into the moment it meets our bodies in time.

Another version of this idea can be found in the historical musical *Les Misérables* (Tom Hooper, 2012), a film about social conflict and revolution in early nineteenth-century France. The film presents several important characters who all come from different social backgrounds and represent many conflicting political positions. Over the course of the musical, the different characters trade melodies so that each song echoes previous ones and contrasts every situation with other perspectives. This type of composition is hardly unique to the historical musical, but what must be noted is the way these musicals employ the excess of subjectivity thereby produced. The musical film may offer a more complex representation and experience of its historical subject using these types of composition. Sharing the melody, we recall the different characters and situations that infuse the moment of listening and become a complex collective singing subject. Swain's study is of the composition for the stage musical, but its conclusions apply equally for both stage and cinematic productions. This experience is not unique to the film musical but is found in the historical musical on stage as well. Film, and film editing, can elaborate and emphasise the experience that this form of composition enables.

For example, in *Les Misérables*, many songs consist of several characters each singing their own song at once. Each character has their own lyrics and their own melody which influences the other and becomes a part of a single moment of listening. Such overlapping singing requires the listener to change their own intentionality while listening to the song. In a stage production one may decide as a viewer to focus only on understanding one character's singing, but the film's constant change of singing faces challenges this intentionality. In any attempt to stay concentrated on one character in this sequence, one must

concentrate on listening rather than seeing. It is possible that the film challenges this intent further, through the mixing of sound, which may prioritise one singing character over another. A different intentionality may have the viewer decide to let the layers of text and melody consolidate into one, the various texts disrupting each other's meanings in order to convey an experience of historicity as a collective temporality. As part of a we-subject, the individual text may become disrupted.

The film musical tends to fortify this experience through its medium. In *Les Misérables*, the editing and cinematography aligns with the musical experience so that no one character is preferred, and the characters are not placed before each other within a single physical space (as must happen in the stage musical). We see in these songs a sequence of close-ups, with the character in the centre of the frame, regardless of their narrative roles or where they stand in diegetic space. These sequences of faces unite the layers of narrative content into a collective temporal singing subject which shares two important aspects: having a face, and existing together in the historical moment. In such examples we see how a shared temporality is crucial for the experience of historicity, while the necessity of a shared space may be negotiated by the medium.

Layers of meaning are embedded into the musical experience totally, through the use of sound which is perceived from every angle and direction in space, as opposed to visual images and texts which we must turn and face in order to see (Ihde 2007, 51-55). The space belongs to sound (or its possibility), as its listener is already inside the space through which sound moves and does not need to tune in or place themselves as a centre in order to perceive sound. This is what allows sound to approach us from different channels and directions and yet be united in our perception of the musical moment. This basic experience places the listener inside sound, and not in front of it, as in the case of the image. Not limited only to the characters who are part of the collective singing subject, the listening audience is given a position of participation in musical time, instead of inspection from outside.

The historical musical almost always contains scenes of harmonious shared singing. These moments represent the we-subject as an experience of historicity. In these scenes the singing crowd not only functions as a background for the film's protagonists but is presented as a collective with a shared past and future which the protagonists may belong to, oppose, or both. While this applies for any kind of musical, we often see how these numbers are utilized in the historical musical, emphasizing the moment in which important historical moments unite the characters into a shared, synchronized time. Songs like 'Seize the Day' and 'The World Will Know' from the film *Newsies* (Kenny Ortega, 1992) represent singing as the moment the boys unite and unionise in a film about the 1899 Newsboys' Strike in New York City. Many of the songs in the film *Oh! What a Lovely War* (Richard Attenborough, 1969), a musical that represents the

First World War using songs which were popular at the time, show us soldiers singing together as part of the shared experience of fighting a war. Similar collective experiences are presented in the song 'It's the Hard Knock Life' from *Annie* (John Huston, 1982), which is set during the Great Depression, or 'We Go Together' from *Grease* (Randal Kleiser, 1982), a period film about American culture in the 1950s. These songs tend to repeat words such as 'we' or 'us'.

In many musical numbers, songs create sub-communities within the temporal collective. The film *Fiddler on the Roof* (Norman Jewison, 1971), also based on a stage musical, tells the story of a rural Jewish community living in Tsarist Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. The opening number 'Tradition' shows the community as divided into smaller communities based on age and gender. In musical numbers such as 'Summer Nights' from *Grease*, white American teens are clearly divided into smaller collectives based on gender. As previously mentioned, the singing collective in the historical musical does not have to represent a community to which the protagonist belongs, according to the narrative. In songs like 'Ted Ain't Ded' from *Absolute Beginners* (Julien Temple, 1986), a film about 1950s race riots in London, or 'Ascot Gavotte' from *My Fair Lady* (George Cukor, 1964), which takes place in London at the turn of the twentieth century, we see racist youth or a social elite, respectively, that may be opposed to the film's protagonist from a narrative point of view, yet share with the protagonist a common temporality. The simultaneous occurrence of sound is crucial here for the creation of collective subjects that are made up of multiple bodies, identities and conflicting histories.

These songs demonstrate the way the collective experience of historicity does not require affect or even emotional identification with others in order to belong to a common subject; only simultaneous existence in time and a conscious awareness of this shared temporality. All films reflect the time they were filmed in, so viewers throughout the movie are constantly aware of this filming time, the represented period and their own existence in time. This possibly disturbing multiplicity is synchronized into a complex temporal experience while listening to these songs as an audience. In these moments we can experience historicity, surrounded by the music, as it gathers both listening and singing bodies into a shared experience of existing in time.

Multiplicity in movement

In dancing, the experience of the we-subject becomes even more palpable for the viewer. This is achieved in several ways. The first, and simplest, of these ways is the feeling created by the synchronised dancing of a large ensemble. Most of the film *Newsies* is based on sequences of dozens of dancing boys, representing the participants of the Newsboys' Strike of 1899. We can understand the synchronised dancing not only as complete synchronisation with the community, but also as synchronised with the rhythm of their historical time and

place. In the film's very first shots, before we are even introduced to the protagonists, we are shown large industrial printing presses creating newspapers. The visual image of industrial machinery is not only a conceptual icon of the time, but its sound and movement echo the synchronised dancing of the striking boys. Several studies have noted that the dance of the Hollywood musical is characterised by the qualities of industry (McCarren 2003). In such an example, it is easy to point out how the common past and future align with the synchronised dance and the way its rhythm is experienced by a listener. The intentionality of viewing such a performance requires not a perception of every individual movement, but of the momentary whole. The mechanics of dance unite the boys together as a physical we-subject, inseparable from the industry that has historically constituted it.

How is such a we-subject, demonstrating the experience of historicity, created in cases of dancing that is a-synchronic, where the dancers are not necessarily united by a common narrative goal? The collective subjectivity is then formed through an embodied viewing of dance that is based on rhythm and the presence of the dancing body. It has been suggested that the dancing itself begins not in the body of the dancer, but in the listening body (Ihde 2007, 156). Both Ihde and Nancy describe the way in which music is experienced by the entire body and tends to make us aware of its presence. Ihde goes on to compare the act of listening as a kind of dance, with the body following and reacting to the sound, even if in small invisible ways. This participation is sometimes seen in actively moving one's lips, tapping fingers, or just following the tune in one's mind. All the bodies which music encounters in space move, each in their own way, simultaneously with the sounds. This helps us understand how the perception of rhythm is not only an understanding between the ear and the mind, but an entire bodily experience which operates on our most basic abilities and is capable of uniting us in a sort of synchronized inner dance.

Dancing in a film not only expresses the characters' willingness to dance, but also carries out the viewers' silent (or not so silent) dancing. In an article from 2010, viewers of different genres of dance were interviewed in order to discern a common experience by looking for similar phenomenological descriptions (Reason and Reynolds 2010). The interviewees included dancers, dance aficionados, and people who had never seen a dance performance in their lives. In these interviews, they described a wide range of ways in which they related to the bodies of the dancers, whether by comparisons such as 'can my body do this?' or descriptions of feeling as if they were actually dancing alongside the performers. The researchers confirm a similarity between these responses and those viewing experiences that 1930s dance critic John Martin termed as 'inner mimicry' and 'contagion'. This inner dance echoes Ihde's description of listening. This special identification in viewing invites the viewer to feel as if they are an active part of the dance. An identification with the dancer in the moment

of movement is formed, enabling a feeling similar to the shared subjectivity of synchronised dance.

As a result of the many ways bodies can identify with movement, in the act of viewing dance, viewers are often invited to relate and identify with the embodied collective histories of the dancing characters. In many a musical scene, we are confronted by dancing characters who lack neither virtuosity nor grace but are intended to represent the movement of bodies in a certain state, time and place. The subjectivity of the characters is conveyed to us by the qualities of these movements. In 'Perceiving subjectivity in bodily movement: The case of dancers', an analysis of interviews is conducted, examining the ways dancers described their perception of their bodies while dancing. This study by Dorothée Legrand and Susanne Ravn uses relatively recent phenomenological studies regarding intersubjectivity, and finds that we often perceive dance, and bodily gestures, as proof of others' subjectivity (Legrand and Ravn 2009, 389-408). When we see others performing movement, it reminds us of the way we use these movements to express our feelings and thoughts. The movement of others allows us not only to understand what others are feeling, but to relate to their ability to feel.

The act of identification occurs from within the lived body, and allows us to simultaneously become aware of our inhabiting a specific lived body with a need to share its own subjective experience, and to recognise through the similarity of gesture and movement an expression of the Other's subjectivity. This ability not only influences our relationships with others, but also the way we understand and use our own bodies in order to express our inner thoughts and feelings — knowing that they may be recognised and understood as such from without. During the dance itself, dancers describe a tendency to view themselves as if from the audience's perspective. The case is not a mutual recognition of subjectivity so much as an accumulation of sensory information. A similar, almost parallel process is happening for the audience, who simultaneously feel their own seated bodies as their senses are also hyper-attuned to the movements of the performing bodies, following each movement closely.

If we are able to relate to others while dancing, is that enough to create a we-subject? Can following the filmed movement really offer us a possibility of a shared goal or intentionality? And even if so, are these enough to be considered an experience of historicity? I would like to examine these questions — on the musical film's potential to create or even represent such experiences — through an interpretation of the dance as a text that demonstrates historically structured bodies and movements in the dance sequence of the song 'To Life' from *Fiddler on the Roof*.

This sequence takes place in a worn-down local pub, as the characters are celebrating the engagement between one local man and the main character's eldest daughter. This pub is full of men only, and at first it seems only Jewish

men at that. Suddenly, the revellers become aware of a group of local Ukrainian men who wish to join them in song and dance. The dancers in this scene are clearly divided into two embodied historical identities. The sequence begins with the dancing of the Jewish men, who are blatantly presented as unrefined, not even attempting to co-ordinate their movements with anything but the general rhythm of the song. These men dance with their backs tilted forward or back, eyes closed, and hands raised, presenting either the influence of drink, or a spiritual inclination, or both. They circle each other spontaneously, creating an additional rhythm using their hands and feet, which is not entirely synchronised with the musical number itself. The merrymakers beckon the other group of men to join the dance, and they do so, but in an entirely different form. This dance, the Ukrainian dance, is characterised by perfect group synchronisation, high physical fitness and the precise timing of sharp rhythms made via clapping and stomping. The contrasting dance styles represent the way histories are able to mould bodies and movements, as the narrative earlier establishes that the Jewish men are historically denied the ability to defend themselves, and are culturally encouraged to study and remain indoors in their spare time, as opposed to their Ukrainian neighbours.

The Jewish men appear in awe, some positively terrified. These responses are represented both through the men backing away and through a similar backing away movement of the camera. The *mise-en-scène* has the Jewish men literally framed by the new dancers. We then go through a few long minutes of music-less shot-reverse-shot in which the members of both groups are staring at each other, with only the sound of amplified heavy breathing. The characters' long inquiring looks back and forth echo the responses of the interviewed dance performance audiences, who claimed that they often respond to dance by comparing and contrasting their bodies and dancing abilities with those of the dancer they are watching (Reason and Reynolds 2010, 60-62). The gaze in both cases is similarly focused. As the men in the sequence begin dancing with each other, it is made clear that each group retains its former style of dance. The local villagers continue dancing with their hands held perfectly straight, parallel to the ground, while the Jewish men hold their arms close to their bodies, in no particular shape. The Jews dance shoulder to shoulder in small steps as the other men run and leap through the gaps the Jewish bodies create.

The movements of Jews and Ukrainians are woven into a single complex choreography that nevertheless maintains the integrity of each of those specific embodied experiences. This offers the audience the option of concentrating alternately on either group, particular dancers or the full dancing collective we-subject in time. Near the end of the sequence the camera participates actively in the choreography as it takes up the main character's point of view. First, it pans the dancers in a full circle, then speeding up faster than the dancers so that their personal, and collective, attributes become blurred entirely. The dancers become

a unified blur, embodying pure movement and dizziness. Such moments supposedly reflect Richard Dyer's idea of utopia as the overcoming of conflict through dance and song. Yet, this dizziness is not utopian, for it does not present the world as momentarily understandable and resolved, but rather as an experience of total anarchy. The lack of control over the speeding movement is experienced as a giddy weightlessness practically begging to be set back into the experience of singing and dancing historicity. This dizzy climax of the dance exposes how the dance may present us with the experience of collective historicity as an experience of personal bodies, moving in particular ways which reflect their time, place and past, and which cannot be truly united by the musical number itself because of the concreteness of their conflicting collective subjectivities. The dance sheds lights on the conflict between these bodies, presenting the simultaneous movement as a historicity in which violence may be delayed, but the conflict cannot be resolved.

The dance involves the dancers, viewers and time itself. The viewer, characters and different we-subjects express both a common temporal experience and its different historical points of view through their movement in the dance. Historicity is embodied in both the collectivity of the dancing moment, and in the complexity of the movement's different physical and historical identities.

Presence in sound and movement

At this stage I would like to propose an analogy, taken from the field of the philosophy of history. Eelco Runia has investigated the 'thirst', both social and academic, for meaning in the field of history, meaning which he believes is no longer available to us due to the politically and theoretically problematic nature of forming definitive historical narratives, processes and conclusions. Runia claims that the study of history has turned to discussions of trauma in order to grasp for meaning in our understanding of the past (Runia 2006). He suggests another option for contending with the lack of meaning, which he terms *presence*. The presence of an object or site from the past allows us to grasp our existence as both the continuation of our past and its complete Other. This presence applies to actual sites and objects of history, perceived in a non-narrative way. While the films in this study are all narrative fiction films, I would like to suggest that we examine the possibility of seeing the musical elements in the films as attempting to imitate the experience of presence as a source of historical meaning.

The concept of *presence* is commonly found in film and film studies, as the technology of film often attempts to not only recreate or represent the past, but also to present the very passing of time. The long take has been considered a conceptualisation of the present because it is occurring consecutively in time with us viewers. This is opposed to the edit, which may be representing the past,

but which, according to Mary Ann Doane, is experienced as a 'historical present' (Doane 2002, 104-05). Even before the editing process begins, the very technology of film has always contained the contradiction between the feeling of presence and the illusion of it. Doane adds that the close-up, aside from existing as a text, also 'transforms whatever it films into a quasi-tangible thing, producing an intense phenomenological experience of presence' (Doane 2003, 94). Despite this feeling, she also reminds us that the close-up by itself alerts us to the limitations of presence, pointing to the past's inherent lack of being-there.

One main strategy to overcome this limitation is through the use of sound, and particularly, through the voice. As opposed to the image, which is, at best, a convincing *representation* of a presence that has occurred in the past, sound is a *presence* in and of itself. There are many reasons why we tend to feel this.

First, sound occurs in time, and cannot be prolonged beyond its time the way a paused image may be lingered on. This immediacy gives the sound a power of presence, a sort of 'now' to go with 'here'. Additionally, as previously mentioned, sound travels through waves in space. As it echoes, it meets our bodies from every direction. This perception of space which occurs through sound for a fleeting moment only intensifies our experience (or illusion) of presence in the sound. The presence of sound is combined in the film musical genre with the close-up of a singing face or dancing feet. In addition to these, we are constantly bombarded with amplified Foleys representing the sounds of feet, arms, and bodies as they collide with the floor, the stage, the street or each other.

In the scene from *Fiddler on the Roof* described above, the characters' mutual hostility is expressed through emphasis on clapping hands and stomping feet, filmed in the centre of the frame and edited as the loudest sound channel on the soundtrack. Just as the singer's voice is critical to the presence of the singing image, the sound of clapping, stomping, or tap-dancing prevents the dance from becoming an abstract choreography of shape and colour. The dancing body becomes present through the sounds, which emphasise its weight, mass, texture and speed. The rhythm created by these sounds carries us into a silent participation.

In *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972), a film depicting the bohemian night-life of 1930s Berlin alongside the rise of Nazism, we encounter a wordless sequence that makes particularly interesting use of parallel editing dedicated to making the body present through sound. A dance onstage is integrated through editing into a scene of a club owner being beaten by a group of Nazis. The dance onstage is presented as supposedly light-hearted and comical, with slapstick gestures and various kicks and slaps in the choreography. The cinematography in both scenes is intentionally extreme — extreme close-ups and extreme angles, both high and low. These shots are edited together in a way which breaks all editing conventions of continuity. The musical soundtrack, which diegetically belongs to the dance happening onstage, flows across the entire sequence, as the

clapping and drumming alternate with the sounds of violent kicking and beating. The editing cuts back-and-forth between the scenes frequently, so that one almost unified sequence emerges. The rhythm combines the beating and dancing into a single dance, which contains two different (but not contradictory) situations that in turn interpret each other. This combination does not create a comforting utopian unity, but rather the experience of a rift between the need to keep a safe critical distance from the film's devastating historical narrative and the tendency towards sensory identification through rhythm and sound. The beating and clapping make present the real physical body represented in the visual. The rhythm is not that of a drummer, but a testimony to the movement and clashing of the body. Our bodily response to the sound is heightened by our instinctive response to sounds of violence, which indicate the presence of living bodies and their collision as the evidence of historical conflict.

The film explores the connection between body, history, and sound throughout. In the number 'Tomorrow Belongs to Me', we hear the singing at first as a voice without a body. This voice suddenly finds its embodied image-source in an extreme close-up of a singing boy. We follow closely the choreography of his singing face. The film reveals that this is the singing face of a young Nazi by using a camera tilt over his uniform, instead of a long or medium shot which would allow us viewers to place him in a context while distancing ourselves. The sequence continues in this fashion, showing us the boy's diegetic audience not together but as an assortment of close-ups. Acts of identifying politically with the boy, such as standing up or saluting, appear only in the margins of the frame, while the singing faces synchronised in song become 'micro-choreographies', to pluck a phrase from dance-film studies (Brannigan 2010). The close-up of the faces as the centre of the action, combined with the unique phenomenological qualities of sound, allow us to experience presence of individual singing voices instead of through the fascist image of the unified mass.

These experiences have already generated a good deal of criticism of the film (Mizejewski 2014, 208), but also recognition of the ways in which conflicting viewing experiences enrich the ways we perceive historicity in film (Pearlman 2012, 31). Our initial responses to the close up, music, singing and rhythm are those of identification and participation. While the narrative subjects of *Cabaret* cast this in sharp relief, these complicated identifications can also be found in other historical and period film musicals. Movement, sound and close-up involve the audience's bodies and give us sensory indication of the presence of historical time. The utopian pleasure is tainted by our knowledge of the grim historical consequences, and we are offered, instead, the opportunity to experience the presence of historical time. Without relinquishing identification with the singing and dancing we-subject, we are made aware of how excessively

complex and emotionally fragmented the experience of historicity can truly become.[3]

Excess, saturation and complex collectivity

This complexity of this experience is also achieved thanks to the musical number's excessive qualities, echoing Marion's description of how saturated phenomena are perceived:

> […] saturated phenomena […] must be allowed, then, to overflow with many meanings, or an infinity of meanings, each equally legitimate and rigorous, without managing either to unify them or to organize them. (Marion 2002, 12)

Many scholars have already commented on the film musical's potential to create alternative meaning through its sensory experiences. Rick Altman has suggested that the very existence of excessive experiences in film presents us with the possibility of an alternative interpretation existing alongside the text itself (Altman 1992, 34). These experiences usually occur when the cinematic spectacle overloads the viewer's senses. Brett Farmer has emphasised the potential concealed in such moments, in which the sensory overcomes the textual and allows the fragmentation of the text into multi-layered interpretations (Farmer 2000, 81). According to Vivian Sobchack, in film we encounter such a multiplicity of details, events and objects, which make it impossible for us to give each one its own separate meaning, or combine them into one total structured meaning (Sobchack 1990). Occasionally, we encounter one single moment in the film which is by itself charged with so many meanings, texts and experiences that it may be considered excessive.

Sobchack further elaborates on the experience of the historical epic film as one formed by excess, allowing the viewer to transcend time and experience the historical eventfulness. Instead of burdening us with historical facts, these films attempt to capture what witnessing an important historical event first-hand might have been like. Many of the attributes of the epic film recognised by Sobchack as excessive are also common in the film musical. The casting of well-known star actors, an unusually large cast of extras, an abundance of elaborate sets and costumes, commercial hype and emotional tones bordering on the hysterical are only some of these 'excessive' attributes. These excessive qualities of the films are often derided by historians and film critics alike. Yet, there is a

[3] Many musical films are complicit in creating historical absence and erasing historical conflict by not representing marginalised groups who were certainly present at the time and place shown in the narrative. *Oklahoma!* (Fred Zinnemann, 1955) is certainly such a film, and I am certain that as time progresses, we will learn to see the histories omitted from many other historical fiction musicals. This study is concerned with the experiences of conflicts that are present within the films, but it may prove just as fruitful to examine the experience of historical absence in film.

difference between the two genres in the way they allow their viewers to experience time, space and movement.

Like the epic, the musical film sometimes takes over two hours to watch in its entirety. Sobchack describes how sitting through a long film makes us aware of time passing, and of our bodies stuck in their seats. While this may ruin our ability to 'lose ourselves' in the world of the film, after such a long time we emerge from the theatre feeling that time itself has changed. The present is held back in order to transcend immediate-time through the extended viewing-time. I would like to suggest that, while the excessive experience of viewing-time exists for the musical as well, it is a slightly different experience of viewing-time. In the epic, historical and narrative time moves constantly forward, while the musical narrative is constantly paused and delayed in order to make room for song and dance. These song-and-dance numbers are themselves constantly fragmented, circling back to the chorus and repeating dance variations. The musical audience stays aware of their own bodies sitting for a prolonged viewing in their seats; but instead of inscribing historical duration onto these bodies, the musical interrupts the continuity of narrative viewing-time. The excess of time in the musical becomes an excess of a repetitive time, which spreads in every direction. Amy Herzog has pointed out how a Deleuzian reading of these musical numbers exposes them as creators of difference through the refrain (Herzog 2010, 145). The refrain is perceived as more meaningful by the end of the song than it was at first.

The importance of repetition to the experience of historicity appears in Sobchack's studies as well. She quotes philosopher Paul Ricoeur:

> in effect, repetition serves as a formal recirculation of signs that, when put to the service of linear and teleological 'content' — such as the chronology of historical events — does away with chronology and teleology and institutes a sense not of 'being-in-time' or 'being-toward-death', but of 'being-in-History'. (Sobchack 1990, 38)

The excess of movement is one final element of the film epic that makes an appearance in the film musical, but here too as a different kind of experience. The epic is often rich with movement — battle scenes, revolutions, horse racing and sea journeys — not to mention events which are based on the premise of covering a great distance, such as the Exodus or Manifest Destiny. In the musical, movement in space may sometimes occur within the narrative (in films such as *South Pacific*, Joshua Logan, 1958, or *Oklahoma!*, Fred Zinnemann, 1955), but this movement is usually not emphasised as part of the cinematography or musical numbers. The excess of movement in the musical film is simply found within the dancing body. These bodies move far beyond their diegetic requirements and create an excess of movement, all while practically staying in the

same place.[4] Brett Farmer claims that musical numbers are in excess to the narrative in general and therefore have the capability of subverting their linear historical progress. These numbers form a 'centrifugal' dimension, which bestows us with an experience of historicity as an excess of repeating time not bound for a single definitive future (Farmer 2000, 96).

Finally, we must address the issue of nostalgia, as period and historical films that sing and dance are automatically suspect of what Fredric Jameson dubs *nostalgia*. This nostalgia, as he defines it, presents the past, through cinema, in a manner that demonstrates our inability today to contact our past (or present) without the mediation of commercial products (Jameson 1991, 19-21). This nostalgia is motored by one of Jameson's main engines of late capitalism — the loss of historicity. The term *historicity* here is used with an emphasis on the awareness of one's collective past and future, particularly in the political sense. Jameson describes this state as 'a new and original historical situation in which we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images' (1991, 25).

Nostalgia itself may be perceived as an excess, especially if we consider the way it is defined by Jameson — not as a longing for the past but as a longing for our ability to long for something, a meaningful experience of time that had supposedly existed in days long gone (1991, 156). Agreeing with Jameson's descriptions of the fragmented character of both history and historicity in nostalgia film, we are also now aware that it is this dizzying fragmentation which is also able to contain and express the complexities of perceiving bodies living in historical time — undermining the idea of a single History which is formed of unequivocal facts and a totalising narrative for all humanity. We may find that by doing so, films, and especially musical films, present us with some of the experience of historicity, instead of representing its supposed loss.

Conclusion

In many ways, the musical (and not only when it is occupied with the past) palpably conveys the experience of shared historical time. Bergson's concept of the *durée,* which makes up time and contains a constantly contradicting multiplicity, is reflected in the period film-musical through song and dance, perceived by our senses in sound and movement. The sound and movement allow us to perceive the past as a presence.

[4] Richard Dyer has written several texts on the ability of the musical number to occupy itself with the conquering of space. As his analysis shows (2005), this is often done through a metaphor such as the museum in 'Prehistoric Man' (*On the Town*, Stanley Donen & Gene Kelly, 1949) representing colonial space. I would like to observe the experience of movement itself as we experience it, in which case 'Prehistoric Man' is still very tangibly about young people moving excessively within the close confines of the museum building, literally running into the displays.

The historical musical's we-subject exists as an experience of excess, which consists of bodies or consciousness joined in time but divided by their historical identifications. This we-subject forces together the conflicted or diverse collectivities into multiplicities that constantly change our viewing intentionalities, from that of an individual viewing self to that of a participant in historical time.

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