

## OVERTURE: The Singing Subject

Hollywood's soundtrack is engendered through a complex system of displacements which locate the male voice at the point of apparent textual origin, while establishing the diegetic containment of the female voice.<sup>1</sup>

In *The Acoustic Mirror*, one of the few film theory books that considers the female voice in cinema, psychoanalytic film theorist Kaja Silverman ascribes the female voice a place firmly within the narrative of 'classic' Hollywood (and other realist) films.<sup>2</sup> But as a cinematic spectator, I have experienced films where a woman's singing voice has for me transcended such limitations. My first experience of such a feeling was motivated by *Songcatcher* (Maggie Greenwald, 2000), a story about a 19th century musicologist, Dr Lily Penleric (Janet McTeer), who travels to the Appalachian Mountains to collect folk ballads. In *Songcatcher*, the women characters' singing is pleasurable and moving, but also transports me emotionally beyond the narrative.<sup>3</sup> Such experiences of singing scenes<sup>4</sup> provide for me a feeling that is analogous to, but also different from, the 'transcendence' of numbers in classic Hollywood film musicals.<sup>5</sup> In the classical musical, singing performances are not only expected, because of the genre, but also assisted by the use of nondiegetic music to lift the musical experience beyond the 'real' world of the narrative to a space that is most often a utopian realm. However, in *Songcatcher*, singing remains of the diegesis and yet for me reaches beyond the narrative world.

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<sup>1</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Silverman extends her discussion to later films *Klute* (Alan J Pakula, 1971), *Blow Out* (Brian de Palma, 1981) and to French film *Diva* (Jean-Jacques Beineix, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Anahid Kassabian reports a similar emotional experience with the singing sequences in *A Woman Under The Influence* (John Cassavetes, 1974) in Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music*, New York, Routledge, 2001, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> I use the terms 'scene' and 'sequence' interchangeably, following David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's definitions: a scene is a 'segment in a narrative film that takes place in one time and space, or which uses crosscutting to show two or more simultaneous actions' while sequence is 'commonly used for a moderately large segment of a film, involving one complete stretch of action; in a narrative film, often equivalent to a *Scene*.' David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 2nd edn, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1989, p. 388.

<sup>5</sup> By classic or classical musicals, I refer to Hollywood musicals of the 1930s to the 1950s, or those that adhere to such a style. The category of musical film is very much a contested one. I define the musical genre in more detail in chapter 1.

My experience of singing sequences, where female characters' diegetic singing moves me somehow beyond what might be expected of a realist narrative text, has inspired me to investigate the phenomenon of women's singing voices, especially in contemporary films that are not classical musicals. My research attends to performances where singing potentially affords other experiences besides containment, and to how singing might influence representations of subjectivity. Particularly where women sing together or for themselves, songs performed are potential 'sites for the negotiation of subjectivities,'<sup>6</sup> sometimes functioning in opposition to the narrative trajectory of the protagonist. In this thesis I want to examine such sites to determine whether singing can be a transformative experience for women characters. In doing so I develop the notion of the *singing subject* as a way of understanding representations of subjectivity. I consider whether the act of singing is transgressive or empowering for women characters. I examine how singing relates to women's expression and how singing disrupts or reinforces the unspoken patriarchal hierarchies that dominate communication and women's behaviour.

My thesis sets out to consider where and how representations of women singing diegetically open up the opportunity for acoustic authority and communicative potential in terms of expressing subjectivity for women. Drawing on feminist, film and psychoanalytic theory, as well as on aspects of film music theory and formal analysis techniques, and recognising the importance of sound and how it works with images in 'synchronesis,'<sup>7</sup> I examine a number of contemporary films that feature what I argue are significant singing sequences or scenes, and consider how such sequences serve as sites for the negotiation of represented female subjectivities. Singing utilises language, a semiotic system, and music, a meaning-making system to which it is harder to ascribe definite meanings. As such, singing can be conceived

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<sup>6</sup> I have adapted the phrase from Guthrie P Ramsey, Jr, 'Muzing new hoods, making new identities: film, hip-hop culture, and jazz music,' *Callaloo* 25, no. 1, 2002, p. 309. I discuss this in more detail in the following chapter.

<sup>7</sup> 'Synchronesis' is a term coined by Michel Chion to describe the way images and sound work together. Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 5.

of as a liminal space that successfully negotiates overlapping discourses. I argue that these overlapping discourses, made even more complex when combined with images, are rich sites of investigation. Songs have been characterised in film musicals as stopping the narrative flow, and yet songs are not always a halt on action in narrative films.<sup>8</sup> I explore the diverse domain of the singing subject and consider how her diegetic singing might be operating other than as a way of expressing emotion while the story is suspended. The liminal aural space of the diegetically performed song is evident in a number of films and is one of potential power, sometimes able to subvert the gendered control of language that is suggested by psychoanalytic and feminist film theories.

## FEMALE VOICES IN FILM

Silverman identifies the different relationships that male and female subjects have to language: while '[b]oth are spoken by discourses and desires which exceed them,' the male has a more powerful relation to language.<sup>9</sup> The male can take up a position in film representations as a speaking subject, exemplified by the position of extradiegetic narrator. The female voice, however, is subject to three operations that serve to 'reinscribe her into the narrative.'<sup>10</sup> The female voice is 'doubly diegeticized' in 'what is overtly indicated as an inner textual space, such as a painting, a song-and-dance performance, or a film-within-a-film.'<sup>11</sup> Or, in films where the female voice is required to speak involuntarily, what Silverman calls the 'talking cure,' she is anchored to a 'fantasmatic interiority.'<sup>12</sup> Lastly, 'Hollywood reinscribes the opposition between diegetic interiority and exteriority into the narrative itself by depositing the female body into the female voice in the guise of accent, speech

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<sup>8</sup> Both Laura Mulvey and Claudia Gorbman characterise songs' functions as distinct from the action of the film. See Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. 19–20, and Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema,' in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> Kaja Silverman, 'Dis-embodiment of the female voice,' in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 309.

<sup>10</sup> Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 56.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

impediment, timbre or “grain”.<sup>13</sup> Acoustic authority is achieved for Silverman only through the nonsynchronisation found in experimental feminist cinema, where women’s voices are separated from bodies.<sup>14</sup>

While Silverman’s work is compelling, and remains extremely influential, her description of containment does not seem to fully explain the effects that singing women in film can produce in contemporary films. Sequences where singing women characters have an impact on the narrative, and where women exhibit power through the use of singing, at times offer a different perspective to Silverman’s notions surrounding women and voice in cinema. Many powerful singing sequences are largely neglected or ignored both in commercial and academic considerations of films in comparison to visual and other elements. There is a need to develop alternative methods of making sense of singing sequences. My thesis explores a variety of singing scenes that I argue enable communication and expression for female characters that is potentially transformative or empowering. A singing sequence can subvert the conception of a female voice always being contained within the diegesis, when an embodied voice creates a different kind of singing space during performance. My thesis asks in what ways representations of singing can be understood as offering a potentially powerful way of ‘speaking’ for female representation.

The neglect of singing sequences is to be expected for a number of intertwined reasons. There is a continued dominance of vision in the taken-for-granted ‘hierarchy of the senses,’<sup>15</sup> and most usually a parallel dominance of emphasis on the visual in academic theorising and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>15</sup> Kalinak describes how the ancient Greeks were the first to prioritise sight over hearing, and to equate hearing with emotionality. Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film*, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1992, pp. 20–22.

media reviews of cinematic texts.<sup>16</sup> Mary Ann Doane, exploring the ideological underpinnings of sound in Hollywood cinema, notes that '[i]n a culture within which the phrase "to see" means to understand, the epistemological powers of the subject are clearly given as a function of the centrality of the eye.'<sup>17</sup> However, she goes on to consider that this 'ideology of the visible,' which is rational and factual, is countered by an 'ideology of the audible,' which is placed on an opposing side, along with emotions.<sup>18</sup> From Western conceptions of knowledge, then, sound, and therefore music, is identified as more difficult to quantify and to explain.

Language used in film studies also continually reinforces the image/sound hierarchy. The bias inherent in a 'spectator' 'reading' a film 'text' remains largely unchallenged in film writing.<sup>19</sup> Anahid Kassabian uses the term 'perceiver' to refer to what is most commonly described as the 'spectator' to indicate the importance of the soundtrack without merely inverting the hierarchy of sight over hearing.<sup>20</sup> Kassabian asserts that perceivers are importantly different from psychoanalytic 'spectators':

[T]hey engage films, complete with visual, verbal, sound and musical tracks, in a flow of conscious and unconscious operations. And their unconscious are not ... organized around sexual difference conceived from the perspective of the penis-cum-phallus ... [but] by the particular differences that strain the match between their subjectivities and the subject positions offered by dominant modes of textuality and narrativity which organises the unconscious of the perceiver.<sup>21</sup>

Following Kassabian, I prefer to use the term 'perceiver' to reinforce the need for an increasing awareness about how previous language choices have shaped and influenced the directions of film research in ways that remain largely unacknowledged. Likewise, I have

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<sup>16</sup> For example, a recent film studies textbook devotes one chapter to all facets of sound while *mise en scène*, cinematography and editing each have a separate chapter. See Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, *The Film Experience: An Introduction*. Boston, Bedford/St Martins, 2004, pp. 166–211.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Ann Doane, 'Ideology and the practice of sound editing and mixing,' in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. John Belton, New York, Columbia University Press, 1985, p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> Chion, p. xxvi.

<sup>20</sup> Kassabian, p. 173 fn1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

attempted to find other ways of writing about ‘reading’ cinematic narratives, to foreground my own awareness of the aural aspects of the film experience.

Other theorists working in the field have sought to challenge the adjunct status of sound, also developing a more detailed vocabulary to express the complexities of what happens when a film is experienced. Sound theorist and practitioner Michel Chion names such an experience *audio-vision*, summarising his point that ‘We never see the same thing when we also hear; we don’t hear the same thing when we see as well.’<sup>22</sup> Chion discusses what he calls the ‘added value’ of sound working with image, where sound is not, however, just a support for the images. Sound is often categorised through its relation to image. James Monaco, for example, notes the historical binary of ‘parallel’ sound, which is ‘actual, synchronous and connected with the image’ or ‘contrapuntal’ sound, which is ‘commentative, asynchronous and ... in counterpoint to the image.’<sup>23</sup>

‘Parallelism’ and ‘counterpoint’ have also been used to describe how a specific kind of sound, that of music, works in film narratives, a binary which film music theorist Claudia Gorbman seeks to problematise. She calls the elements of a film, including image and aspects of soundtrack, a ‘*combinatoire* of expression,’<sup>24</sup> and argues for a notion of ‘*mutual implication*’ to describe the relationships between music and narrative.<sup>25</sup> Chion also rejects any simplification of the relations between the aural and the visual, as for him there is a ‘synchresis’ of sound and image: the ‘forging of an immediate and necessary relationship between something one sees and something one hears.’<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Kathryn Kalinak notes that music (and by extension, singing) doesn’t reinforce what’s happening in a sequence, but

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<sup>22</sup> Chion, p. xxvi.

<sup>23</sup> James Monaco, ‘The language of film: signs and syntax,’ in *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, Multimedia*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 214.

<sup>24</sup> Gorbman, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>26</sup> Chion, p. 5.

'is part of the process that creates it.'<sup>27</sup> While Chion is discussing sound in general, and Gorbman and Kalinak are writing about classical film scoring, I argue in this thesis that the effect of synchresis is relevant to diegetic singing performances. The combined effect of the audio and the visual tracks should be considered, rather than regarding them as separate elements.

Concomitant with the dominance of vision equalling knowledge is the alignment of music with emotion, a concept that developed strongly with the rise of 19th century Romanticism and particularly through the writings and work of composer Richard Wagner.<sup>28</sup> Although music is a sign system, sounds do not have meanings as words do: music is not a 'denotative sign system,' and connotative meanings are frequently 'well-worn clichés.'<sup>29</sup> The theme music from *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975), for example, now stands for 'ironic danger.'<sup>30</sup> Meanings are culturally or conventionally established, but are more widely open to interpretation than language. As a more abstract semiotic system in comparison to language, there is a tendency to associate music with emotion, with the intangible, with 'woman.'

In this thesis I use the term 'woman' in inverted commas to indicate the category, which, like music, has been positioned as 'other' to the rational and logical, and paralleled with the emotions. Later in the thesis I discuss in more detail the easy slippage between these 'othered' conceptions. The concept of 'woman' is a construct, a mythical category that allows a way of talking about an impossible universal notion. For postmodern feminism, terms used to describe difference, such as 'woman,' 'women'<sup>31</sup> 'femininity' and 'femaleness' are all problematic, if a sense of a common identity is assumed. Yet there is often a desire by

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<sup>27</sup> Kalinak, p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia and Hollywood Film Music*, Princeton, New Jersey. Princeton University Press, 1992. p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Kassabian, p. 110.

<sup>31</sup> Judith Butler points out that 'women' has also become a debated 'troublesome term, a site of contest.' Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York and London, Routledge, 1990a, pp. 3–4.

feminists to possess some kind of collective identity, at least for political reasons.<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Grosz and Gayatri Spivak both argue that essentialist or universalist assumptions, which are aligned with patriarchal models, need to be negotiated rather than rejected.<sup>33</sup> In my thesis I concentrate my attention on representations of women and girls singing, understanding that while differences between women are multiple, in the representations that I will discuss the characters are culturally identified as women (or girls). I work from an assumption that there are similarities between women in their diverse use of language, as distinct from that of men. In discussing ‘woman’ and music I likewise acknowledge that ‘woman’ is a problematic term, but find its use necessary when considering how previous discussions about music have been shaped by gendered conceptions. It is important to note that the cultural tendency to devalue what is considered as ‘other’ applies also to the apparent lack of critical interest in all cinematic sound.

The realisation of the importance of the soundtrack and the number of texts concerned with sound are growing, but there is still a great deal to be explored to equal the amount of detail that visual approaches to cinema have produced. In theorising about film, sound is generally divided into three basic categories: dialogue, music and noise. These categories belie both the complexity of what sound can do in cinema and the layers that make up what is generally known as the soundtrack. Similar complexities are true of music, yet the standard terms remain simplified. At its most basic, music cues<sup>34</sup> are categorised as either diegetic, emerging from within the narrative, or nondiegetic. However, there are many situations where this binary is inadequate to explain the complexities of film scoring. In *Songcatcher*, for example, a sequence that begins with a tracking shot of Lily and Deladis walking together on a bright day and singing

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<sup>32</sup> See Grosz on the paradox of feminism’s need to characterise women in some general way. Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism,’ in *Space, Time and Perversion*, ed. Elizabeth Grosz, New York, Allen & Unwin, 1995, p. 55.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57. Grosz quotes Spivak.

<sup>34</sup> A cue is the industry term for a section or piece of music used for a given sequence. See Elizabeth Weis, ‘Sync tanks: the art and technique of postproduction sound,’ available from <<http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Academy/4394/sync.htm>>, accessed 18/3/04.



‘Matthy Groves,’ then sitting together and singing, also encompasses an image of them working together noting another woman’s singing, a long shot of a mountain cabin, a wide shot of the mountains at dusk (where the sound becomes mixed down as if Lily and Deladis are just out of shot); the final edit returns to the earlier, brightly lit image of them sitting and singing. The music cue ends just after the next sequence begins, when Lily and Deladis are threatened at gunpoint and the click of the firearm overlaps with the sound of their singing. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson provide a good basis for classifying different aspects of diegetic sound in visual and spatial terms as ‘onscreen’ or ‘offscreen’ and ‘internal’ or ‘external’ (in relation to character) but also point out that these diegetic/nondiegetic categories are not always clear.<sup>35</sup>

Employing Earl Hagen’s industry terms, ‘source music,’ ‘source scoring’ and ‘dramatic scoring,’ Anahid Kassabian goes some way towards bringing the inadequacies of the diegetic/nondiegetic binary to the attention of film music studies. Source music, a term equivalent to diegetic music, comes from within the world of the narrative – for example, from a radio, a CD player, or a musician. Source music can be ‘visual,’ where the source is clearly seen, or ‘implied,’ where sound can be inferred as emerging from the diegesis, as, for example, when a band has been seen playing earlier in a sequence.<sup>36</sup> The second term, source scoring, ‘combines aspects of source music and dramatic scoring in terms of both its relationship to the film’s narrative world and its coincidence with the onscreen events.’<sup>37</sup> Dramatic scoring is an alternative term for nondiegetic music, which originates outside the film world and is more closely related to visual images.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, ‘Sound in the cinema,’ in *Film Art: An Introduction*, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1989, p. 244.

<sup>36</sup> Kassabian, p. 44. An example, as I explain in chapter 4, is Cressy’s (Rachel Maza) arrival at her mother’s house in *Radiance* (Rachel Perkins, 1998). Nona (Deborah Mailman) is seen putting on a CD, and as Cressy emerges from a taxi at Nona’s house, she looks towards the house as if she can hear the music, yet inside and outside the house the volume remains constant.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43–45.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Many texts that consider cinematic sound in general, or music in particular, often begin either with claims that sound is still ‘unheard,’ or with challenges to that claim. The continuing need to comment on sound and music’s status suggests that there are still inequalities in relation to analytical emphasis.<sup>39</sup> Recent work, such as James Tobias’s article ‘Cinema, Scored: Towards a Comparative Methodology for Music in Media,’ has again highlighted the need for more attention by film and media analysis to the ‘musicality’ of a film, and the redundancy of ‘seeing’ a film and ‘hearing’ a soundtrack, particularly given the intertextuality of converging media forms.<sup>40</sup> To me this reinforces the notion that more work on film sound needs to be done, although many significant texts on film sound have emerged since the 1980s. A number of these texts have informed my understanding of sound in film generally, although they are not all referred to specifically in this thesis. These include works edited by Rick Altman,<sup>41</sup> and by Elizabeth Weis and John Belton,<sup>42</sup> as well as the ‘Cinema/Sound’ special edition of *Yale French Studies*.<sup>43</sup>

The division of sound into dialogue, music and noise often also extends to separation of the aspects of sound in theoretical work. Texts regarding music and film have most often concentrated on classic Hollywood cinema and ‘classical’ scoring, or the musical genre:<sup>44</sup> I have found a range of these works useful in examining how they discuss musicality without necessarily relying on extensive musicological knowledge. Works by Kalinak, Gorbman and Caryl Flinn, for example, are regularly cited as having laid much of the groundwork regarding nondiegetic film music, and serve as foundational reading for classical film music scoring. All three consider aspects of gender in relation to film music. Kalinak describes how particular

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<sup>39</sup> Kassabian, writing in 2001, considers there is ‘far too little work’ on contemporary film music. *Ibid.*, 3. A recent anthology claims that it ‘celebrates the long-awaited abundance of writing on music and film.’ Kay Dickinson, ed., *Movie Music: The Film Reader*, London and New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> James Tobias, ‘Cinema, scored: towards a comparative methodology for music in media,’ *Film Quarterly* 57, no. 2 2003–2004, pp. 27–28.

<sup>41</sup> Rick Altman, ed., *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, New York, Routledge, 1992.

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Weis and John Belton, eds., *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, 1985.

<sup>43</sup> Rick Altman, ed., ‘Cinema/ Sound,’ Special issue, *Yale French Studies* vol. 60, 1980.

<sup>44</sup> Rick Altman is one of the primary theorists regarding the Hollywood musical genre. See Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1987. Jane Feuer has also been influential. See Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 2nd edn, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993.

kinds of nondiegetic music and instrumentation signified dangerous female sexuality in the classic Hollywood film score, employing ‘musical practices which carried implications of indecency and promiscuity through their association with so-called decadent forms such as jazz, the blues, and ragtime.’<sup>45</sup> Gorbman and Flinn utilise elements of psychoanalytic frameworks, along with other methodologies, to consider music’s affect and effect. Gorbman’s *Unheard Melodies* is still considered one of the primary texts on film music.<sup>46</sup> She deals with how music functions within film narratives, as a signifying element amongst others in the textual system of film.<sup>47</sup> Although remaining concerned with classical scoring, her semiotic approach serves as an introduction to understanding the ways music can work in conjunction with film images. Gorbman recognises how music’s meanings and functions change, and points out at the end of her book (which was published in 1987) the need for new ways of understanding how contemporary songs, often with lyrics, work to shape how a film is perceived.<sup>48</sup>

In *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia and Hollywood Film Music*, Flinn discusses how nondiegetic film music, particularly of the 1930s and 1940s, has been conceived as having a ‘utopian function’: historically, music has been considered as existing in a ‘transcendent’ space, outside the ‘material facts of culture.’<sup>49</sup> Flinn critiques the ways the Romantic<sup>50</sup> (music) tradition has influenced diverse frameworks, such as aesthetic, psychoanalytic and practitioner discourses, to claim that abstract film music performs a unifying function.<sup>51</sup> She argues that this unifying function is due to music’s ‘interaction with other elements, or more

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<sup>45</sup> Kalinak, p. 120.

<sup>46</sup> Robynn J Stilwell, ‘Sound and empathy: subjectivity, gender and the cinematic soundscape,’ in *Film Music: Critical Approaches*, ed. KJ Donnelly, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2001, 167–169.

<sup>47</sup> Gorbman, p. 30.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Flinn, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> Romantic music refers to a creative sensibility, the Romantic Movement of the 19th century, that privileged ‘the expression of emotion over the element of beauty of form.’ Percy A Scholes, ‘Romantic.’ in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, ed. John Owen Ward, London, Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 491.

<sup>51</sup> Flinn, p. 48.

precisely, *from the claims that classical criticism has made* about this interplay.<sup>52</sup> These claims of music's unifying function are also found in the work of psychoanalytic theorists, which is ironic, she argues, given the emphasis on a 'decentred, destabilized subject.'<sup>53</sup> However, although she is critical of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva's work, she utilises elements of a psychoanalytic approach in her analysis of *Detour* (Edgar Ulmer, 1945).<sup>54</sup> Neither Flinn nor Gorbman discusses diegetic singing in detail,<sup>55</sup> but their work is insightful for understanding the foundations of how classical film music has been theorised.

Since 2000, edited works that have also made important contributions to the exploration of sound on film include *Film Music: Critical Approaches*,<sup>56</sup> *Movie Music: The Film Reader*, and *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*.<sup>57</sup> Other influential texts, such as the *Cinesonic* series and *Screen Scores: Studies in Contemporary Australian Film Music*, have a largely Australian focus.<sup>58</sup> All of these texts include a diverse range of approaches that are invaluable in understanding the changing debates about film music. The impact of commercial factors on soundtracks, the increase of 'needle drop'<sup>59</sup> soundtracks and the use of contemporary pop music are also beginning to be addressed with texts like Jeff Smith's *The Sounds of Commerce*.<sup>60</sup> The effect of new media forms such as DVDs and increasingly sophisticated Internet entertainment has been to expand areas under consideration when discussing sound and representation.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Flinn's italics.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 118–132.

<sup>55</sup> In her discussion on male subjectivity in *Detour*, Flinn interestingly describes a scene in which female singer Sue (Claudia Drake), the piano-playing protagonist Al's (Tom Neal) soon-to-be-lost love interest, is positioned as both visually and aurally dominant: a low camera angle is used to position her above Al, and her singing associates her with language, while his piano playing isolates him with sound, 'reversing Hollywood's standard paradigm.' Ibid., p. 124. Flinn's comments here seem to suggest that singing can be understood as outside the pre-symbolic space of music.

<sup>56</sup> KJ Donnelly, ed., *Film Music: Critical Approaches*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2001.

<sup>57</sup> Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight, *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2001.

<sup>58</sup> Philip Brophy, ed., *Cinesonic: The World of Sound in Film*, North Ryde, Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS), 1999; Philip Brophy, ed., *Cinesonic: Cinema and the Sound of Music*, North Ryde, AFTRS, 2000; Philip Brophy, ed., *Cinesonic: Experiencing the Soundtrack*, North Ryde, AFTRS, 2001; Rebecca Coyle, ed., *Screen Scores: Studies in Contemporary Australian Film Music*, North Ryde, Australia, AFTRS, 1998).

<sup>59</sup> A 'needle drop' soundtrack is a common term for soundtracks composed of pre-recorded popular music tracks.

<sup>60</sup> Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1998.

The recent publication of Kassabian's book, *Hearing Film*, and the translation of Michel Chion's *Audio-Vision* also suggest an increasing interest in various aspects of film sound.<sup>61</sup> Although neither of these works discusses singing in any great detail, I use a number of their concepts in an attempt to write more precisely about the more abstract elements of music's meanings. Chion's work suggests new terms for ways of talking more precisely about the details of sound. Specifically, I have found Chion's conceptions of the *acousmêtre*, empathetic and anempathetic music, and his other terminology for more specific aural effects on film helpful when exploring character vocalisations in more detail.

Kassabian considers how film soundtracks can be understood as offering what she calls 'assimilating' or 'affiliating' scores.<sup>62</sup> According to Kassabian, assimilating scores are often specifically composed scores, and serve to close down perceivers' opportunities to identify with characters, encouraging identification with the hero of the film. Affiliating scores, usually compiled scores of previously recorded ('needle drop') tracks, can be understood in ways that allow for more diverse readings of characters. I utilise the concept of assimilating and affiliating scores in addressing how the act of diegetic singing can also be a site where character subjectivity is negotiated, and how repetitions of songs can engender an assimilating process. Contemporary films often use a combination of these two kinds of scores, and Kassabian's concept of a film score having an 'internal music language' also enables ways of discussing how singing or songs within a film work together as a whole.<sup>63</sup>

Few of the works cited above engage at all with diegetic singing practices in films that are not (clearly) musicals, and some that mention diegetic singing don't differentiate it from other

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<sup>61</sup> Pivotal French sound theorist and practitioner Michel Chion has been writing about sound since the early 1980s, and although his work has been drawn on by theorists such as Claudia Gorbman in *Unheard Melodies*, English translations of only two of his books are available, *Audio-vision*, and *The Voice in Cinema*.

<sup>62</sup> Kassabian, p. 2–3.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

diegetic aspects.<sup>64</sup> Explorations specifically regarding the voice in cinema, particularly the singing voice, are still limited.<sup>65</sup> Alan Warner notes in his eclectic record of cinematic singing in Hollywood films that songs from ‘dramatic motion pictures’ are rarely mentioned or discussed in reviews.<sup>66</sup> James Buhler has suggested recently that the greater theoretical attention paid to nondiegetic music is because diegetic music’s relationship to the narrative is more obvious:

Precisely because it is an object of the narrative, diegetic music does not generally narrate ... Consequently, there is little need to devise theoretical explanations for the existence of diegetic music: its motivation is patently obvious ... The justification of the voice on the soundtrack is simply the image of the singing body.<sup>67</sup>

I will argue in my thesis that motivations for diegetic singing can encompass much more than ‘simply’ the image of the singing body, particularly in relation to representations of women.

One important article that does provide detailed analysis of the function of singing is Anastasia Valassopoulos’s essay exploring the representation of singer protagonist Alia<sup>68</sup> in the Arabic film *The Silences of the Palace* (Moufida Tlatli, 1992).<sup>69</sup> Valassopoulos considers the importance of the songs that the main character Alia sings; she also discusses the way that these songs offer new positions of power to the character that can only fully be recognised by an Arabic audience familiar with the songs chosen. In the context of Valassopoulos’s specific film example, she considers singing itself as empowering, as well as the importance of the

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<sup>64</sup> For example, in my understanding of Pamela Robertson Wojcik’s interesting article, she conflates the use of the ‘phonograph’ (playback technology) with diegetic singing. See Pamela Robertson Wojcik, ‘The girl and the phonograph; or the vamp and the machine revisited,’ in *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, eds. Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2001, pp. 433-454.

<sup>65</sup> In the 1999 translated edition of *The Voice in Cinema*, Chion states in the ‘Author’s note’ that music and the singing voice are to be considered in a separate book, although he does briefly consider the function of a mother’s use of song in *Sancho the Bailiff* (Mizoguchi Kenji, 1954). *Ibid.*, p. ix, pp. 109–114.

<sup>66</sup> Alan Warner, *Who Sang What on the Screen*, North Ryde, NSW, Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1984, p. vii.

<sup>67</sup> James Buhler, ‘Analytical and interpretive approaches to film music (II): analysing interaction of music and film,’ in *Film Music: Critical Approaches*, ed. KJ Donnelly, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2001, pp. 40–41.

<sup>68</sup> Valassopoulos does not specify the actor’s name.

<sup>69</sup> Anastasia Valassopoulos, ‘*The Silences of the Palace* and the anxiety of musical creation,’ in *Movie Music: The Film Reader*, ed. Kay Dickinson, London and New York, Routledge, 2003.

history of the songs, which were originally sung by a famous and politically and culturally powerful Arabic female singer Umm Kulthum.<sup>70</sup>

In Valassopoulos's analysis, she concentrates on the historical context and background of the songs and how these inform the narrative and the empowering potential of singing due to extratextual associations. In my thesis, I discuss the practice of singing as potentially transformative, and the importance of musical context and particular choices, but in addition I incorporate where possible more specifically how film images are also working with music cues, and set my discussions within the broader frameworks of psychoanalytic and feminist theorising. As I will discuss, women have traditionally and theoretically, through frameworks of feminist theory, been shown to have a problematic relationship to language and expression. The importance of 'voice' and 'being heard' is a central concern of feminism. As Leslie Dunn and Nancy Jones note in their edited collection of essays on female vocality and embodiment, voice is 'a metaphor for textual authority.'<sup>71</sup> In my thesis I argue that particular representations of the singing voice enable acoustic 'authority' for female characters, and that collectively women can be empowered through their singing practice.

## THE SPEAKING SUBJECT

Both psychoanalytic and feminist theorising have examined the importance of language for realising subjectivity, and the difficulty for women to achieve subjectivity. Jacques Lacan's rereading of Sigmund Freud's work has been influential for French feminist approaches to subjectivity, focusing as Lacan does on language. His understanding of the subject is as a speaking subject, one who is constituted in language.<sup>72</sup> The three theorists centrally identified

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>71</sup> Leslie C Dunn and Nancy A Jones, eds., *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1990, p. 148.

as ‘The French Feminists’, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray,<sup>73</sup> are all concerned with issues of language and subjectivity, and use Lacan’s work although they are critical of it.

Lacan understands stages of a child’s development as moving from the ‘Imaginary,’ a pre-Oedipal stage, to the ‘Symbolic.’ The speaking subject is created through the ‘Symbolic,’ which signifies the entry to language, separation from the mother, and encountering what Lacan names as the ‘Law of the Father.’<sup>74</sup> In the Imaginary, the child experiences a fragmented self, but is in a ‘syncretic unity with the mother,’ unaware of its own bodily boundaries.<sup>75</sup> Subjectivity is achieved through what Lacan identifies as the ‘mirror phase,’ a stage where the six to eighteen-month-old child recognises itself as separate from the mother, yet misrecognises itself as complete. This misrecognition, as the child moves to language and the symbolic order, is the split between self and other, which is never resolved by the adult speaking subject. As Grosz explains:

The child is no longer in that happy state of satisfaction, protected by and merged with the m(other). From this time on, lack, gap, splitting will be its mode of being. It will attempt to fill its (impossible, unfillable) lack ... This gap will propel it into seeking an identificatory image of its own stability and permanence (the imaginary) and eventually language (the symbolic) by which it hopes to fill the lack.<sup>76</sup>

Lacan’s work opens up conceptions of subjectivity beyond the humanist (masculine) notion of subjectivity.<sup>77</sup> Subjectivity in his work, and in this thesis, pertains to a concept of the subject which is multiple, fragmented and ‘in process,’ the product of language.<sup>78</sup> However,

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<sup>73</sup> The complexities of the use of the phrase ‘The French Feminists’ to describe Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, none of whom is French, or identifies unproblematically with ‘feminism,’ are comprehensively explained by Kelly Oliver, ‘Importing “The French Feminists” and Their Desires.’ in *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-Bind*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993, pp. 163-180. Because the three theorists arguably remain the most influential, I have retained the collective label, but identified it as such with quotation marks.

<sup>74</sup> Pam Morris, ‘The construction of gender: Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan,’ in *Literature and Feminism*, Oxford and Cambridge, Blackwell, 1993, p. 104.

<sup>75</sup> Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, p. 34.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>78</sup> Mary Eagleton, ‘Finding the Subject,’ in *Working with Feminist Criticism*, London, Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p. 190.



Lacan's 'Law of the Father' is the 'law of patriarchy,'<sup>79</sup> privileging the masculine. Central to Lacan's work is the conception of the 'phallus' as a signifier of language: although symbolic, it is the male that has the phallus, while the female is positioned as being the phallus.<sup>80</sup>

Kristeva reworks Lacan's stages of the 'Imaginary' and the 'Symbolic,' positing instead 'the semiotic' and 'the symbolic' as two 'modalities' that form the 'signifying process that constitutes language.'<sup>81</sup> As I take up in more detail in chapter 4, Kristeva's 'semiotic' is implicated as somewhat of a poetic and musical space in the development of the speaking subject, and is aligned, through her conception of the *chora*, with the mother. However, for Kristeva, her examples of the use of revolutionary poetic language are from male writers, seemingly undermining women's position in relation to the subversive use of language. In 'Women's Time' she notes that sexual difference results in a difference 'in the relationship to power, language and meaning,' and she valorises women's 'research' to 'break the code, to shatter language, to find a specific discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnameable repressed by the social contract.'<sup>82</sup> Later in the same article Kristeva is wary of the 'pitfalls' of women's writing:<sup>83</sup> her work is often characterised as distinctly different from that of Cixous and Irigaray because she has been critical of the assumption that language and theory are phallogentric.<sup>84</sup> Despite these apparent contradictions noted by Kelly Oliver and others,<sup>85</sup> Kristeva's reworking of Lacan has been pivotal for feminist theory and explorations of the speaking subject.

For Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, language constrains women's expression. As I consider in chapter 2, both are concerned with finding a new way for female expression, a way that is

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<sup>79</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 2nd edn, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1990, 20.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

<sup>81</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Revolution in poetic language,' in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986, pp. 92–93.

<sup>82</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Women's time,' in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 196, p. 200.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>84</sup> Oliver, pp. 176–177.

<sup>85</sup> I note here that my emphasis has specifically been on Kristeva's earlier work.

potentially disruptive and excessive, because language is phallogocentric, rational, linear and limiting for women. While readings of their work are considered essentialist at times, because both connect women's use of language to the specificity of women's bodies, their work surrounding female expression through writing and speaking suggests ways into a female subjectivity which is denied, in psychoanalytic terms, through language. In chapter 2, I highlight some of the similarities and connections between singing and *écriture féminine*, an evocative strategy to subvert the phallogocentricity of language, and singing, suggesting that filmic representations of singing can function as a musical *écriture féminine*.

Because of conceptualisations of the mother's voice, sound is an important aspect of psychoanalytic theory, even though both Lacan and Freud rely on visualising difference. French psychoanalytic theorists Guy Rosolato and Didier Anzieu<sup>86</sup> have posited the significance of the 'sonorous envelope' of the mother's voice that has psychic repercussions for the adult.<sup>87</sup> This has repercussions again for the associations of women, emotionality and music, because the space of auditory pleasure and comfort is established as a feminine place, made available by the mother. Silverman particularly points out the allusions in Rosolato's work to a musical maternal voice, a voice that is operatic.<sup>88</sup> As I discuss later, the sonorous envelope of the mother's voice has both negative and positive connotations, and the notion can usefully be employed when considering representations of motherhood.

Psychoanalytic theorising on sound has been utilised by theorists analysing aspects of film, particularly Silverman on the female voice and Gorbman on classic film music, but not to any great extent with regard to singing. Edward Baron Turk noted in 1994 that there was little

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<sup>86</sup> Gorbman's text suggests that 'sonorous envelope' is Didier Anzieu's phrase. Gorbman, p. 62.

<sup>87</sup> Doane and Silverman's texts suggest the phrase is Rosolato's. Mary Ann Doane, 'The voice in the cinema: the articulation of body and space,' in *Movies and Methods II*, ed. Bill Nichols, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985), p. 573. Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 72. I have been unable to access Anzieu's or Rosolato's original texts.

<sup>88</sup> Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, pp. 84–85.

psychoanalytic writing on singing in film musicals,<sup>89</sup> apart from his own work on Jeannette MacDonald. Silverman's foundational text, *The Acoustic Mirror*, is one of the few that discusses the female voice in cinema and its effects, but it concentrates on characters' speech.<sup>90</sup> Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva rework aspects of psychoanalytic theories and offer ways into conceptualising the debates surrounding women's voices, although not in relation to representations.

Sarah Kozloff and Amy Lawrence have also written about female speech and women's voices in cinema, with an awareness of gender issues.<sup>91</sup> In Kozloff's book, *Invisible Storytellers*, she considers the reasons why there are so few extradiegetic female narrators, suggesting that to be heard and not seen is an escape from 'erotic scrutiny.'<sup>92</sup> In Amy Lawrence's wide-ranging book on women and voice in classical Hollywood film, she is concerned with three dimensions of women's voices: 'voice' in relation to making sounds and those sounds being reproduced; the potential relationship that women have to language; and the authorial point of view expressed in a text.<sup>93</sup> Lawrence concentrates on films that in her view emphasise women's voices as a 'source of textual anxiety,' and on the role that sound technology, which she argues has a history that has rendered reproduction of women's voices as being 'difficult' (to record and reproduce satisfactorily), plays in disrupting representations of women's speech.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Edward Baron Turk, 'Deriding the voice of Jeanette Macdonald: notes on psychoanalysis and the American film musical,' in *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, eds. Leslie C Dunn and Nancy A Jones, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 105.

<sup>90</sup> The singer's voice in *Diva* (Jean-Jacques Beineix, 1981) is understood by Silverman to operate in the same way as women's speech, a way for the male protagonist of the film to disavow 'his own castration' rather than having any acoustic power. I discuss Silverman's work in relation to the maternal voice in more detail in chapter 4. Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 87.

<sup>91</sup> Sarah Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-over Narration in American Fiction Film*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988; Sarah Kozloff, *Overhearing Film Dialogue*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000; Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991.

<sup>92</sup> Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-over Narration in American Fiction Film*, p. 101.

<sup>93</sup> Lawrence, p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Lawrence discusses aspects of the singing female voice, but only in regard to the Hollywood musical of the 1950s, and specifically the film *Miss Sadie Thompson* (Curtis Bernhardt, 1953), revealing how the character Sadie's speaking voice is repressed, while her singing voice is not.<sup>95</sup> In the early stages of sound reproduction, women's singing voices were more acceptable to the purchasing public than speaking voices. Lawrence suggests that this was because singing women already had an acceptable presence in society, as opera and music hall singers.<sup>96</sup> She notes that singing in the 1900s was 'part of a young lady's "accomplishments" and as such, a "decorative" feminine art.'<sup>97</sup> Lawrence draws a distinction between singing and speaking, positing speaking as a site of authority, one that was problematic for women radio announcers and later for women in classical sound film.<sup>98</sup> In her book, she asks whether a woman can be truly heard in classic Hollywood representations.

In my thesis I consider whether singing can be a strategy for women to be heard, and argue that there are contemporary films in which singing can be understood as a potential site of authority for women's voices. Lawrence's work has also informed my thinking in relation to methodological approaches to women's voices and cinematic representation, as she takes a feminist approach to representation while concurrently using formalist analysis.<sup>99</sup> I have attempted to take a somewhat similar approach, utilising contemporary theorising on sound and music analysis, along with feminist and psychoanalytic film theorising. Rather than adhering to a single framework, I have attempted to use the theories that best resonate with the films that I discuss in terms of gender and subjectivity.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

## SINGING IN FILM

In modern Western society, music and singing are now more often consumed by listeners rather than made by participants. This has an economic basis: as Victoria Moon Joyce explains, '[m]usical practices have always been reflected in bourgeoisification, whereby being able to pay someone else to produce the music we consume, rather than produce it ourselves, becomes a marker of status.'<sup>100</sup> Yet even in secular Western societies, there is an intuitive understanding of music as powerful and able to cause emotional and physical effects.<sup>101</sup> David Sonnenschein describes, for example, how loud music can raise the body temperature, and how sound generally can affect pulse, circulation and breathing.<sup>102</sup> There are also cultural limitations about when and in what contexts singing is appropriate behaviour, and when it may indicate a troubled psychological state: therefore, of itself singing can be a transgressive or subversive activity.

As a consumable object, singing in film has been present since the birth of cinema. Even for the earliest silent films, performers were often behind the cinematic screen synchronising dialogue, singing and sound with the images, before the advent of the 'talkies' in 1927, when other sound systems came into play.<sup>103</sup> The Hollywood musical, which has fluctuated in popularity since its cinematic advent in the 1930s, is the most obvious genre in which singing takes place. The death and revival of the musical form is contested regularly, and contemporary examples are often unusual and sometimes controversial reworkings of the form, fuelled in part by the impact of music video. I agree with the editors of *Soundtrack Available*, who advocate a strategy of understanding relations between forms and genres

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<sup>100</sup>Victoria Moon Joyce, 'Bodies that sing: the formation of singing subjects,' available from <<http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~mjoyce/bodies.htm>> accessed 31/10/01. (Elsewhere she omits her first name Victoria).

<sup>101</sup> For a popularised account of the physical, emotional and spiritual effects of music. see, for example, Don Campbell, *The Mozart Effect*, Sydney, Hodder, 2001.

<sup>102</sup> David Sonnenschein, *Sound Design: The Expressive Power of Music, Voice, and Sound Effects in Cinema*, Studio City, CA, Michael Wiese Productions, 2001, p. 71.

<sup>103</sup> For a brief overview of the history of sound, see Ephraim Katz, *The Film Encyclopedia*, 4th edn, vol. revised by Fred Klein and Ronald Dean Nolen, New York, Harper Resource, 2001, p. 1278. Despite the variety of work on film sound's history, there does seem to be a general consensus now that 'silent films' were not often truly silent.

rather than strict definitions: ‘Rather than erect a false barrier between musical and nonmusical films, or between post-1950s compilation soundtracks and diegetic performance in nonmusical film, we need to consider how these various practices are related.’<sup>104</sup> However, in my thesis I have been drawn to films that are not easily categorised as musicals, about which perceivers potentially (at least initially) have no genre expectations regarding how they should understand the singing that takes place.<sup>105</sup>

Historically and cinematically, singing women have been represented as being dangerous to men. The ancient Greek legend of the Sirens, who lured sailors to their deaths through song, is the reference point for a continuing stereotype.<sup>106</sup> The word siren is now used to describe ‘any alluring or seductive woman.’<sup>107</sup> Chion notes the recurrence of women’s singing and speaking voices operating as ‘siren song’ in cinema: an unseen soprano foretells the hero’s death in *Sauve qui peut (la Vie) / Every Man for Himself* (Jean-Luc Goddard, 1980), and a woman’s voice urges a submarine to surface into a trap in *Mysterious Island* (Lucien Hubbard, 1929).<sup>108</sup> A more direct use of the myth of the Sirens occurs in the comedy *O Brother Where Art Thou?* (Joel Cohen, 2000). The film is an adaptation of Homer’s *Odyssey*, in which three singing women are implicated in the disappearance of one of the male protagonists. In chapter 3, I discuss the figure of the singing siren in film noir<sup>109</sup> and neo-noir in relation to Dorothy (Isabella Rossellini) in *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986). The female voice can also save and protect: Jo Conway (Doris Day) finds her kidnapped son through singing his favourite childhood song ‘Que Sera Sera,’ in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*

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<sup>104</sup> Wojcik and Knight. *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, p. 5.

<sup>105</sup> The musical provides a particular structure regarding how that genre should be understood, where singing is entirely expected behaviour.

<sup>106</sup> Dr J Lemprière, ‘Sirens’ in *Lemprière’s Classical Dictionary*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984, p. 586.

<sup>107</sup> A Delbridge and others, eds., *The Macquarie Dictionary*, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia, The Macquarie Library Pty Ltd, 1998.

<sup>108</sup> Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, ed. Claudia Gorbman, New York, Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 115.

<sup>109</sup> In accordance with the Macquarie Dictionary, I have not italicised common foreign words such as ‘film noir’ and ‘femme fatale.’

(Alfred Hitchcock, 1956).<sup>110</sup> As I shall argue, collective singing can also serve a seemingly protective or comforting function for some women characters. This dichotomy of the function of women's singing voices has echoes in psychoanalytic conceptions of the mother's voice, alluded to above, as one of entrapment, or one of protection and pleasure. However, the female singing voice in cinematic representations is not limited to this binary choice, as I will show.

Throughout the thesis I use the term singer to include a range of representations. The term can refer to someone who appears to sing, or who is identified in the narrative as a singer, and this can mean one who sings for whatever reason: to perform for others, publicly (onstage) or privately (offstage), or for their own pleasure or expression. For my purposes singing includes lip-syncing and post-dubbing of songs by another voice, as technological aspects of film-making mean that the (apparent) singer is not always the (vocal) originator of the song. Even if the voice and body 'belong,' they may be recorded separately and put back together in later processes of sound and image editing. My research considers the complexities of the representation of singing in film, and the different levels of skill and expertise it can encompass.

As a character, the singer is obviously prevalent in musicals and music biographies but appears in many other narratives as well. The character may sing as an 'everyday' behaviour, as a quotidian practice. Victoria Moon Joyce has suggested that singing should be understood as a practice rather than as performance, to uncouple it from considerations of 'goodness' or 'badness' that hinge on performance expectations.<sup>111</sup> Filmic representations of 'offstage' or private singing, by an untutored voice, can be potentially more empowering for the singer, because it can be considered transgressive behaviour. Sometimes the figure of the singer does

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<sup>110</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, pp. 117–118.

<sup>111</sup> Moon Joyce, 'Singing Our Way Home: The Strategic Use of Singing by Women.' *Sounds Australia* 51, 1998, p. 12.

not sing within the film but the character's position as a singer in the narrative is reinforced with the use of her recorded voice, as with Cressy (Rachael Maza) in *Radiance* (Rachel Perkins, 1998).

## THE SINGING SUBJECT AND GENDER

In the logic of phallogocentric binaries that dominate discourses,<sup>112</sup> particularly the Cartesian dualism of mind/body that continues to inform Western thought, music and the feminine are continually contrasted with language and the masculine. Walter Murch, for example, in a foreword to Chion's *Audio-vision*, unproblematically genders the senses with sound as 'queen' and sight as 'king' of sensory perception.<sup>113</sup> Claudia Gorbman, Kathryn Kalinak, Caryl Flinn, Anahid Kassabian and Heather Laing<sup>114</sup> have all discussed in different ways how nondiegetic film music is aligned with the feminine and used to represent and define the feminine in cinematic representations. Musicologist Susan McClary has also explored how music operates as a way of playing out and performing gender.<sup>115</sup>

Possible connections can be made between the work of 'The French Feminists' and the act of singing. Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray all allude to singing and song in their work, in relation to the feminine and the maternal. For the latter two theorists, *écriture féminine* is also connected to music and voice, particularly the maternal voice.<sup>116</sup> As mentioned above, *écriture féminine* is a strategy for women's writing or speaking, which allows for an expression of subjectivity that is not possible for women through language as it is usually engaged. Likewise, singing is significantly different to speaking, a different way of using language.

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<sup>112</sup> Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, pp. 62–63.

<sup>113</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, pp. xii–xiii.

<sup>114</sup> Heather Ann Laing, 'Wandering minds and anchored bodies: music, gender and emotion in melodrama and the woman's film,' PhD thesis, University of Warwick, Warwick, 2000.

<sup>115</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

<sup>116</sup> Cixous and Clément, 93–94. Phallogocentric language keeps women excluded. See also Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1985.



Simon Frith points to the ways in which singing creates ‘a form of intensity’ that is evident even in the everyday practice of singing.<sup>117</sup> Singing is a ‘loss of control,’ in terms of not being able to produce the sounds and words as one would wish; yet in singing, language is controlled by the musical demands of the song.<sup>118</sup> As Frith comments, ‘to sing is to feel vulnerable ... and to be a trained singer, to enjoy singing in public, is, precisely, to feel in control.’<sup>119</sup> His sociological account alludes to the potential acoustic authority that singers can wield, in either onstage or offstage performances.

*Écriture féminine* is also a way of speaking ‘with the body’ that is specifically feminine, and this sense of embodiment is also used to describe singing, further linking it to ‘nature.’ Mary Clawson notes:

Because it seems so immediate a product of the body, cultural understandings of singing are framed by associations with physicality and feeling and contrasted to rational thought, linked to nature as against culture or skill, and to woman rather than man. The metaphoric linking of man with culture and woman with nature need not be seen as universal in order to be recognized as a recurring theme in post-Enlightenment Euro-American culture ... Thus singing has at least the potential to be gendered female regardless of the actual identity of the practitioner.<sup>120</sup>

Clawson’s essay considers how female rock singers negotiate their positions in bands where the singer is frequently considered the lowest position in a hierarchy of musicianship. Her work suggests how the different meanings of ‘music,’ both the different instruments played and the styles of music (for example, in contemporary music, rock versus pop), make the linkage of women and music multi-layered and complex.

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<sup>117</sup> Simon Frith, ‘Songs as texts,’ in *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*, ed. Simon Frith, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996, p. 172.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Mary Ann Clawson, ‘“Not just the girl singer”: women and voice in rock bands,’ in *Negotiating at the Margins: The Gendered Discourses of Power and Resistance*, ed. Kathy Davis, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1993, p. 237.

Robynn Stilwell argues that the complete soundscape (dialogue, music and effects) has a part to play in representing subjectivity and gender, although in previous work these three elements of the soundtrack have usually been considered separately.<sup>121</sup> As Stilwell acknowledges, the multidisciplinary tools required for discussing all elements make any discussion of soundscape extremely complex.<sup>122</sup> Within my thesis, I have largely concentrated on diegetic music to specifically examine the position of the female singer, and have extended my attention to nondiegetic singing and dialogue where there is an important connection to a singing sequence.

Both Caroline Abbate and Caryl Flinn also discuss the metaphor of music as feminine, finding it problematic.<sup>123</sup> Abbate is critical of what she calls the ‘dogma’ of psychoanalytic and feminist writing that equates the feminine and *écriture féminine* with music, and the association of presymbolic speech with ‘nonrepresentational’ music.<sup>124</sup> She understands such ideas as ‘taken for granted’ assumptions<sup>125</sup> without, I think, fully exploring the reasons behind the emergence of this gendered perspective. However, she goes on to argue that a female authorial (singing) voice can be heard through the work of male operatic composers, and explains that there is ‘dispensing’ of the acoustic ‘authority,’ particularly in live performances.<sup>126</sup> Abbate considers it possible that female voices can take on authorial power, indicating that they can make the (male composed) music their own. Her discussion suggests, as I argue in the thesis, that women singers can utilise acoustic power in their own way.

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<sup>121</sup> Stilwell, pp. 168–169.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>123</sup> Carolyn Abbate, ‘Opera; or, the envoicing of women,’ in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Caryl Flinn, ‘The “problem” of femininity in theories of film music,’ *Screen* 27, no. 6, 1986.

<sup>124</sup> Abbate, pp. 230–233.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

Flinn, in her essay ‘The “Problem” of Femininity in Theories of Film Music’ is also critical of theorists ‘deploying gendered metaphors’ to attempt to explain the role of film music.<sup>127</sup> Flinn is concerned that feminist theorising about music and ‘woman’ that emphasises ‘disordered unsignifiability,’ pushes both to a place of ‘meaninglessness and social ineffectivity.’<sup>128</sup> For her this is both a danger to women as social subjects, and ‘woman’ as theoretical construct, and leaves film music unexamined.<sup>129</sup> However, the pervasive nature of the alignment of music and the feminine suggests that it is a relationship that needs to be approached in a critical and detailed way, which my thesis sets out to do.

I refer to these debates and discussions surrounding the question of the gender of sound to highlight the pervasiveness of gendered binaries that shape discussions about singing and music. While ‘music’ and ‘singing’ encompass a multitude of acts and styles that work against a simplistic equation of women and music, the persistent links between women and singing and music suggest that the act of singing and its representation may be an important means of expression for women in way that differs from spoken language. As Stilwell observes, the gendered way sound and sight are perceived and their relationship to subjectivity are ‘deeply ingrained’ and so must ‘affect the way films are constructed and therefore the way we see and hear them.’<sup>130</sup> My purpose is to consider whether singing may operate for female characters as a musical *écriture féminine*, potentially liberating for female subjectivity. I argue that through some representations of musical expression women can be ‘heard’ in a way that is often denied through female characters’ use of language.

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<sup>127</sup> Flinn, ‘The “problem” of femininity in theories of film music,’ p. 57.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>130</sup> Stilwell, p. 183.

## ACOUSTIC AUTHORITY OF THE FEMALE HOMOSOCIAL

Other theorists have suggested the importance of considering women and film music in relation to subjectivity, positing new ways of thinking that hint at particularly feminine acoustic spaces. Flinn, discussing *All That Heaven Allows* (Douglas Sirk, 1955), describes the female protagonist's playing the piano as producing an 'erotic moment unmediated by phallic intrusion,' which is suggestive of a special narrative space.<sup>131</sup> Heather Laing explores the importance of nondiegetic music for female subjectivity in melodramas of the 1940s. She argues that theory must:

move beyond the idea of the potential powerlessness of the nondiegetic space and the framing of musical-emotional representation within the 'rational' masculine discourses of medicine, psychiatry, respectable love and marriage. If it is possible that a particular sense of female subjectivity may be located in the interaction of meanings conveyed by the woman's words, behaviour and music, then a more specific idea of what this could mean for any individual female character should become apparent through a study of this dynamic.<sup>132</sup>

Developing this idea enables a redefinition of 'the female protagonist's position in relation to narrative and narration.'<sup>133</sup> Laing suggestively posits the idea that in melodramas, female characters are 'caught' between the nondiegetic representation of emotion and the restricted choices that the character has within the narrative: 'The frustration of the woman may therefore be seen to be contained in the dynamic between the diegetic world and the nondiegetic soundtrack.'<sup>134</sup> While Laing is writing about a specific kind of nondiegetic music, once again there is an allusion to a 'between' sound space that is significant for women.

Lawrence, writing about the speaking female voice in *Rain* (Maxwell Anderson, 1932), suggests that visual spectacle has its counterpart in 'audio-spectacle,' which 'guides us away from "content" (language, character psychology, exposition) and towards the quality of the

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<sup>131</sup> Flinn, 'The "problem" of femininity in theories of film music,' pp. 70–71.

<sup>132</sup> Laing, p. 57.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

sound, irrespective of whether music, voices or effects are on the soundtrack.’<sup>135</sup> Although Lawrence suggests with this particular example that the character’s subjectivity is negated through her spoken vocal performance, there is a hint here of the possibilities of sound working with image *within* the diegesis to create an evocative space of expression.

Laing and other theorists have written about what Rick Altman calls the ‘supradiegetic’ space of musical numbers in Hollywood musicals, where diegetic and nondiegetic sound worlds join together (which I discuss more fully in the following chapter).<sup>136</sup> All of these suggestions conceive of a space between diegetic and nondiegetic realms. In a similar way, but without recourse to the supradiegetic dimension, I argue that there is a space that at times is created when the singing remains in the diegetic realm, but that works beyond the level of narrative. These kinds of singing sequences are often what I identify as audiovisual singing spaces of the female homosocial, where women’s acoustic authority is enabled. Creation of these between/beyond singing spaces happens particularly when women sing, and occurs in the films I discuss in this thesis. Displays of acoustic authority can take a singing scene to another place, like the transcendent supradiegetic space created in musicals, but without recourse to nondiegetic music. It is these singing spaces that I propose to examine in my thesis.

## OUTLINE

Throughout the thesis I examine singing scenes that have had a direct impact on me. I have used these scenes to develop a notion of an audiovisual singing space that creates or strengthens a female homosocial. Expectations of conventional femininity overlap with singing performances: a number of theoretical threads that apply to both singing and an exploration of ‘the feminine’ recur in the thesis. I consider notions such as ‘spectacle,’

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<sup>135</sup> Lawrence, p. 96.

<sup>136</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, pp. 65–67.

‘excess,’ ‘masquerade,’ ‘the sonorous envelope of the maternal voice,’ and concurrently develop my own theorising about the possibilities of the female singing subject and the acoustic dimensions of the female homosocial.

I have considered predominantly Australian films; the remaining films (from the US, France and Britain) range from Hollywood product to ‘art house’ or independent,<sup>137</sup> while mostly retaining the styles and practices of a realist (classic) narrative cinema. As Mary Ann Doane notes in relation to sound, the film-making practices of the Hollywood studio system have become the ‘“normalized”’ aesthetics, and have impacted on other national cinemas and on independent film-making.<sup>138</sup> However, the films that I consider are not the kind of experimental or feminist counter cinema that Kaja Silverman proposes use women’s voices differently in a way that allows for acoustic authority. In addition, except for the Aboriginal female characters in *Radiance*, the films I have analysed largely feature representations of white, Western women. This predominance unfortunately reflects both the biases of representations of women characters and of film availability. A broader focus could also take in issues of class and race that I acknowledge are vitally significant. With a small sample of films I aim to concentrate more closely on developing ideas pertaining to understanding singing spaces and their relation to a female homosocial. My aim is not to negate differences between the representations of women, but rather to present a point from which to examine women and voice in greater detail.

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<sup>137</sup> The definition of ‘independent’ cinema is difficult to pin down precisely. Michael Ward, former Film Finance Corporation (FFC) policy manager states that, with exceptions, an independent production is one that ‘involves creative control in the project being exercised by a producer and/or creative team that is somehow autonomous; and secondly, related to that, the finance for the film being raised on a picture-by-picture basis – that is, it’s not part of some kind of arrangement that allows the team to be producing a slate of pictures; and the third factor is that the team is not part of some vertically integrated system of production and distribution.’ Cited in Mary Anne Reid, *More Long Shots: Australian Cinema Successes in the 90s*, Sydney and Brisbane, Australian Film Commission, Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, 1999, pp. 117–118.

<sup>138</sup> Doane, ‘Ideology and the practice of sound editing and mixing,’ p. 54.

In chapters 1 and 2, I approach the topics of performance and performativity in relation to singing subjects. Both chapters consider in different ways how notions that apply to both cinema and conventional conceptions of femininity can be used to understand the significance of diegetic singing scenes. In chapter 1 I consider the importance of identifying different kinds of performances and propose and explore my notion of singing spaces of the female homosocial. Attempting to comprehend how gender performance and performances can be differentiated, I consider the subject of performance and how it relates to issues surrounding ‘spectacle.’ As I have outlined earlier, various aspects of psychoanalytic film theory posit the female character as one perpetually inflicted by containment within the narrative. In my discussion I attempt to challenge the notion of containment as inevitable for women characters, by examining in detail singing scenes that can be understood as offering some kind of power for them. Both at the level of the narrative and on a broader understanding of the cinematic apparatus, singing scenes reveal a challenge to or exceed the limits of female containment.

Using Judith Butler’s conception of performativity, in chapter 2 I consider how certain women characters and their singing contribute to the production of gendered selves. Taking into account aspects of drag performances, I explore the ways in which gender is constructed and the expectations that are challenged by the singing subjects in these films. I assess how *écriture féminine* can be related to the embodied practice of singing. I also consider ‘masquerade’ in relation to gendered singing representations. In both chapters I examine scenes from the films *Songcatcher* (Maggie Greenwald, 2000), *Paradise Road* (Bruce Beresford, 1997), *Little Voice* (Mark Herman, 1998) and the featurette *Only The Brave* (Ana Kokkinos, 1994).<sup>139</sup> By using the same films in different ways, I aim to show the complexity

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<sup>139</sup> As a featurette, *Only The Brave* is much shorter than the other films that I discuss, with a running time of 56 minutes, but has a strong narrative trajectory and singing performances that I believe justifies its inclusion.

of how singing can be perceived in terms of performance and in relation to gender performativity.

In chapters 3 and 4 I consider particular singer stereotypes and how female singers transgress or conform to gendered expectations of characters. Where singing does provide examples of subversive behaviour, I examine where and in what ways singing scenes offer possible alternative readings of female characters' subjectivities through the syncretic effect of singing and images. I compare the empowering possibilities of singing for three individual singing subjects in chapter 3, examining how the use of singing to 'say' what cannot be expressed in language is explored through girl characters in *Amy* (Nadia Tass, 1998) and *A Ma Soeur!* (Catherine Breillat, 2001). The girls who sing in these films are depicted as untrained singers who mostly sing 'offstage' for their own and others' private pleasure. In the same chapter, I contrast a character who seems to sing largely for men, and only in public 'onstage' performances. I situate the 'dangerous' figure of the female singer in a brief overview of 'her' history in fiction and film and show how the female singer is often equated with destruction. While the history of film noir provides many potential examples, I have concentrated on a rich and multi-layered contemporary film, *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986).

Equating singing women with societal transgression also has implications for the analysis of the films in the chapter that follows. In chapter 4 I address issues surrounding stereotypical expectations of motherhood and gender in relation to singing characters who are mothers, and the power attributed in psychoanalytic theory to the 'sonorous envelope' of the mother's voice. I examine three Australian films: *Radiance* (Rachel Perkins, 1998), *High Tide* (Gillian Armstrong, 1987) and *Only The Brave* (Ana Kokkinos, 1994). In these films each of the mothers is a 'professional' singer, getting paid for what she does. I explore the divided



subjectivities of the singing characters who are represented and the ways in which singing highlights the conflict of motherhood with a ‘creative artist’ trajectory.

Attending to a different but related concept of singing, in chapter 5 I consider how two lip-syncing scenes are also sites of powerful expression for women characters, and connect to issues of women’s subjectivity and their relationships with each other. In *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001), the lip-sync/singing sequence disrupts expected subjectivity. In *Muriel’s Wedding* (PJ Hogan, 1994), the triumphant lip-syncing sequence is celebratory and suggests the power of female collectivity and the strength available to women ‘singing’ together in synchronicity. I consider what these acts of lip-sync and the display of the split between body and voice suggest about female acoustic authority, and explore how the female homosocial is also evoked through such scenes.

To conclude, in the ‘Coda’ I consider the diversity of singing subjects and the ways a greater awareness of the importance of diegetic singing for women, both in terms of the narrative and how particular singing sequences function, can be useful for the analysis of the representation of women characters in film. In exploring the nexus between women, voice, song and language, I show how an approach that recognises ‘the audiovisual contract’ can be more informed about sound and how sound works with images, thereby continuing to challenge the dominance of the visual in film studies. By examining how women perform in singing scenes, and the ways in which characters’ singing scenes can transgress or undermine stereotypical gender stereotyping, I suggest that singing is an important means of communication and expression for women. The equation of women, emotionality and music/singing is disrupted and contested on a number of levels in filmic representations. Such an equation needs to be explored to fully comprehend the importance of the soundtrack working in conjunction with visuals of female characters. Taking a more sound oriented approach, an awareness of the

female singing subject provides alternative understandings of female characterisation. Within these sites of emotional display and 'typical' feminine behaviour, there is an audiovisual space that provides a site of resistance and/or a potential place for a display of acoustic authority.

# 1. Singing, Songs and the Female Homosocial

For both a diegetic audience and cinematic perceivers, singing performances in film operate on multiple levels, drawing attention to the singer(s) and the role of music in a film. Songs can be understood as performing a variety of roles through the relationship of aural and visual elements working together, and the act of singing itself can be an empowering move within the internal logic of the narrative. As I will detail in this chapter, much psychoanalytic and feminist theorising on traditional narrative film, particularly classical Hollywood cinema, suggests for various reasons that women are almost always contained or restrained in cinematic representations, held within the male gaze of the spectator and the cinematic apparatus and restricted by women's own problematic relationship with phallogocentric language. As my thesis sets out to show, there are also singing scenes in contemporary films that for me seem to disrupt notions of the containment of women characters, in performances with various locations and audiences. Far from being unable to express themselves with 'men's' language, and singing only at the level of spectacle, these women are 'singing subjects': they are able to access empowerment or can transgress or subvert the containment of the realist text through their singing.

In this chapter I consider the usefulness of theories that identify women's representations as always contained: Laura Mulvey's pivotal theorising on the force of the male gaze and the ways that women stop the narrative, particularly when performing; Teresa de Lauretis's work on how language disables women's potential to be the represented subject; and Kaja Silverman's theorising about the containment of women's voices. Silverman particularly identifies the song and dance number as a primary way that containment takes place. Taking these theoretical positions as a starting point, I show how recognising the importance of aural pleasure provided by female characters can add to the understanding of singing scenes. I want

to challenge the notion that women characters are always contained in film narratives, by examining singing scenes that I experience as disrupting and as offering pleasurable communication spaces that are not always recognised as important.

With singing scenes in contemporary films that I analyse in this thesis, it is often the voices and singing that are ‘spectacular’ rather than what is seen on screen. At times scenes are more impressive because of the ‘everydayness’ of what is seen juxtaposed with what is heard. The word ‘performance’ can encompass a wide range of singing situations and styles. After exploring aspects of aural and visual spectacle, I consider the different ways that singing performances can be categorised, utilising Jacque Schultz’s taxonomy of songs as a starting point to investigate how identifying singing spaces contributes to an understanding of singing performances, particularly in relation to various permutations of what I call singing spaces of the female homosocial. Singing can create or express solitary, intimate, or collective aural spaces that are potentially subversive or transformative. Singing spaces don’t only have a physical dimension, although the specificity of physical location is often important. The singing spaces I consider are examples of songs in film that seem to extend beyond the narrative, while remaining part of it. I argue that the type of performance is instrumental in understanding how a female singing subject can be perceived. The importance of both intimate or offstage and public or onstage spaces, in addition to the way that singing women can use these (aural and visual) spaces, is often not considered, even when the emphasis is placed primarily on visual aspects of a female singer’s performance.

I draw examples from *Little Voice* (Mark Herman, 1998), *Paradise Road* (Bruce Beresford, 1997), *Only The Brave* (Ana Kokkinos, 1994) and *Songcatcher* (Maggie Greenwald, 2000). These films show the contrast of a range of onstage and offstage, public and private performances, and provide examples of singing spaces of the female homosocial as

representing feminine intimacy. Sound designer David Sonnenschein suggests that there is a ‘subjective/emotional space’ that is the ‘space around the sound [that] connotes a relationship that can be heard and felt on a narrative level.’<sup>140</sup> Practitioners are aware of the emotive content of sound space. But describing and engendering emotion is only a part of what performances of songs can do in film. The films I discuss foreground singing within their stories although the singing characters are not ‘professional’ singers, and my discussion centres on the level of narrative performance: in the next chapter I deal more specifically with the question of singing as a feminine or feminised practice, and how Judith Butler’s theorising on gender performativity can enhance a greater understanding of singing subjects.

## AGAINST CONTAINMENT

Women’s metaphorical and narrative lack of power inherent in the structure of representations has been categorised and discussed in disciplines from philosophy to literary theory. Teresa de Lauretis, for example, looks at how language across the disciplines is used to contain ‘woman,’ in a ‘violence of rhetoric’ that is ‘engendered in representation.’<sup>141</sup> She discusses Jurij Lotman’s literary theory: he posits two essential components of texts, the hero and what challenges the hero; this challenge, or ‘other,’ is immobile, a ‘closed space [that] can be interpreted as ‘a cave,’ ‘the grave,’ ‘a house,’ ‘woman’ (and, correspondingly, be allotted the features of darkness, warmth, dampness) ...’<sup>142</sup> Thus in this semiotic assessment, ‘woman’ can never be the subject:

In the mythical text, then, the hero must be male regardless of the gender of the character, because the obstacle, whatever its personification (sphinx or dragon, sorceress or villain) is morphologically female – and indeed, simply, the womb, the earth, the space of his movement. As he crosses the boundary and “penetrates” the other space, the mythical subject is constructed as human being and

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<sup>140</sup> The other aspects of perceiving space that Sonnenschein identifies are all physical properties: ‘size, distance, perspective, directionality ... and movement.’ Sonnenschein, pp. 83–87.

<sup>141</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, ‘The violence of rhetoric: on representation and gender,’ in *Technologies of Gender*, Bloomington and Indianapolis. Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. 32–33.

<sup>142</sup> Lotman quoted in *ibid.*, p. 43.

as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter.<sup>143</sup>

Theorising on the impact of gender in cinematic representations has previously echoed this seemingly immutable situation. The cinematic performance usually confers on the female performer the position of being the centre of attention, the one who is being looked at, but conversely, who is understood as passive or powerless. Such a position has been and continues to be gendered feminine, even on a technical level. Patricia Mellencamp, for example, has noted the influences of classical Hollywood's 'continuity style' of editing on gender differentiation: for women the close-up serves to exhibit beauty, and technological demands exacerbate the gender division of active/passive, as the make-up, lighting and lenses needed to achieve this require that women remain still.<sup>144</sup>

The theoretical basis for understanding this gendered position emerges primarily from Laura Mulvey's influential article of 1975, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.' Mulvey examines the signifier of 'woman' in relation to psychoanalysis and cinema, where 'woman' with her 'appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact,' connotes '*to-be-looked-at-ness*.'<sup>145</sup> This has implications for spectatorship, and for understanding a performance spectacle. The typical binaries of active/male and passive/female, Mulvey asserts, dominate and control pleasure in looking. In most traditional narratives (a) man is both the active protagonist and 'the bearer of the look of the spectator' and so is doubly empowered.<sup>146</sup> According to Mulvey, the appearance of 'woman' within a diegesis causes a break in the narrative, freezes the flow of action and, within a singing performance, accentuates her as

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Quoted in Alison Butler, *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen*, London and New York, Wallflower, 2002, p. 29.

<sup>145</sup> Mulvey, p. 33. Similarly, John Berger, in a Marxist analysis of images of men and women, argues that '*men act and women appear*.' Berger discusses European oil paintings but extrapolates his claims to journalism, advertising and television. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin, 1972, p. 47.

<sup>146</sup> Mulvey, p. 34. While psychoanalytic theory has developed and diversified from Mulvey's arguments in this essay, her early work remains highly influential.

passive display.<sup>147</sup> She notes that in the musical, numbers ‘break the flow of the diegesis’ and similarly a female character’s ‘visual presence’ works to ‘freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.’<sup>148</sup> Even without taking sound into consideration, however, singing scenes can often further the ‘flow of action’ as singing occurs. Many singing scenes are integral at the level of narrative, as, for example, in *Little Voice*. The story of *Little Voice* revolves around an extremely shy woman Laura (Jane Horrocks), nicknamed LV (Little Voice) who lives at home with her loud and insensitive mother Mari (Brenda Blethyn). LV’s primary enjoyment in life is being safely holed up in her bedroom listening and singing to her late father’s record collection. Her only acquaintance is telephone technician Billy (Ewan McGregor), whom she meets when he and his workmate install her mother’s first telephone.

LV’s ability to mimic the styles of singing divas such as Judy Garland and Marilyn Monroe is revealed by accident to sleazy talent promoter ‘agent to the stars’ Ray Say (Michael Caine), Mari’s new boyfriend. While Ray is downstairs, in the darkness of her upstairs bedroom LV sings ‘The Man That Got Away’ to a picture of a man later revealed to be her father. During her performance, Ray’s questions to Mari about LV’s singing and his subsequent actions set the story in motion. While up until this point in the narrative LV has been somewhat of a passive and virtually silent character, the practice of her singing skill mobilises her and those around her.

Later, LV refuses to audition for club owner Mr Boo (Jim Broadbent) and, upset at her mother’s resulting anger, she whispers for her father. He appears to LV at her bedroom door and she sings ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’ to him. Her singing is overheard by Mr Boo, Ray and Mari as they are leaving Mari and LV’s house. Ray plans to exploit LV’s skill by putting her on the stage. Although LV’s first attempt to perform onstage is a disaster because

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

she is so frightened, Ray convinces her to try again by suggesting she could ‘just once’ perform as a tribute to her father. Ray invests his own money to produce a sophisticated show. LV is unable to sing until she ‘sees’ her father in the audience. The concert is a fantastic success, but LV collapses when Ray starts immediately planning a second concert. When Mari is unable to get LV to cooperate, Ray takes out his frustration on Mari, brutally rejecting her affections. Ray attempts to force LV to her second concert, slapping her when she won’t get up out of bed. LV vocally erupts with the voices of her singing idols, rejecting Ray and forcing him out of their house. A fire starts downstairs as a terrified Ray leaves the house. LV seems unable to save herself, but Billy rescues her and takes her away. LV returns to the house later to check on her father’s LP records and has an explosive argument with her mother when she realises that Mari has destroyed them. LV leaves and returns again to Billy in his pigeon loft.

LV’s private offstage singing, upstairs in her bedroom, depicts solitary moments as she communicates with her father’s memory, while the story and action also continue through the other characters downstairs. When characters stop to listen to LV, the depiction of the recognition of her talent furthers the narrative. It is not only LV’s onstage singing that shapes the narrative. Her private, offstage songs mark pivotal points in the narrative and create action.

There are many singing scenes in films that have a realist narrative structure in which the presence of a performing (singing) female cannot be so easily relegated to a passive role of ‘*to-be-looked-at-ness*,’ particularly when aural aspects are taken into account. Theoretically, the visual spectacle is often foregrounded at the expense of considering aural aspects of the spectacle. There are performances where the visual spectacle also cannot be categorised as



stasis.<sup>149</sup> Additionally, as with dialogue, there may be little or no movement, but still plenty of narrative activity.<sup>150</sup> A valorisation of voice can disrupt the primacy of the visual spectacle of performance, and advance rather than halt the diegesis. Exemplifying the visual bias of film theory, Mulvey makes no mention of the aural aspects of singing female performers, explaining in visual terms what she calls ‘the device of the showgirl.’<sup>151</sup>

The diegetically (singing, dancing) performing woman functions as ‘erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium’ in a kind of double display.<sup>152</sup> Mulvey’s notion, somewhat like Kaja Silverman’s theorising about the containment of women’s voices in cinema, describes women as encapsulated by the diegesis. Both Mulvey’s and Silverman’s arguments are largely focussed on an earlier Hollywood cinema, compared to the more contemporary and nationally diverse films that I examine, and to some extent their theorising is historically contingent. However, both Mulvey’s and Silverman’s work is frequently employed as the groundwork for considering visual and aural representations of women.

In *The Acoustic Mirror*, Silverman argues that classical cinema soundtracks inscribe gender: ‘sexual difference is the effect of dominant cinema’s sound regime as well as its visual regime, and ... the female voice is as relentlessly held to normative representations and functions as the female body.’<sup>153</sup> From a psychoanalytic perspective she discusses how cinema constructs male subjectivity at the expense of female subjectivity. For her, the ‘cultural institution’ of classic cinema demands ‘woman’s lack, specularly and (diegetic) containment,

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<sup>149</sup> For example, Dyer’s discussion about Rita Hayworth’s use of dance/movement in *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946) enabling an ‘escape’ from the controlling male gaze. Richard Dyer, ‘Resistance through charisma: Rita Hayworth and *Gilda*,’ in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E Ann Kaplan, London, BFI Publishing, 1980, pp. 97–98.

<sup>150</sup> Murray Pomerance, ‘“The future’s not ours to see”: song, singer, labyrinth in Hitchcock’s *The Man Who Knew Too Much*,’ in *Soundtrack Available*, eds. Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight, Durham and London, 2001, p. 66.

<sup>151</sup> Mulvey, p. 33.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. No mention is made of aural aspects in her follow up article. Laura Mulvey, ‘Afterthoughts on “Visual pleasure and narrative cinema” inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946),’ in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London, MacMillan, 1989.

<sup>153</sup> Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. viii.

while associating man with potency, vision and (diegetic) exteriority.<sup>154</sup> Silverman only allows acoustic authority for women through disembodied or nonsynchronised voices, the kind that she finds in certain feminist films:<sup>155</sup> for Silverman, synchronicity means containment for female voices. As I've noted earlier, for Silverman the female voice is held within the diegesis, in what she calls 'inner textual space.'<sup>156</sup> One example of this is the song and dance performance, where the female voice is 'doubly diegeticized.'<sup>157</sup> While it is the female voice that is the reason for Silverman's discussion, unlike Mulvey's emphasis on the visual, Silverman's argument is also largely based on an adaptation of the Oedipal narrative and the Freudian prioritising of castration, which relies on assumptions of sight and looking, and which can be understood as prioritising the visual over the aural.

Silverman's interpretations of female representation have been critiqued. Certain theorists have a different sense of how women's voices function in the cinema. For example, reviewer Paula Rabinowitz questions the inevitability of containment, when her own pleasure from women's voices in cinema challenges Silverman's claims regarding women's lack of acoustic authority. As Rabinowitz notes, feminist documentaries that utilise direct address effectively, and musicals where women draw attention to themselves through their singing (for example, Ginger Rogers in Robert Lord's *Gold Diggers of 1933* and the extreme close up of her mouth as she sings 'We're in the Money' in pig Latin) both fall outside Silverman's theorising.<sup>158</sup> Amy Lawrence, in her review of *The Acoustic Mirror*, also notes that Silverman's valorisation of the nonsynchronisation of voice/body in early feminist films is useful in relation to only a small number of films.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., pp. 141–186.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Paula Rabinowitz, 'Seeing through the gendered I: feminist film theory', *Feminist Studies*, Spring 90, review, available from <<http://web3.epnet.com/citation.asp>>, accessed 30/06/03.

<sup>159</sup> Amy Lawrence, 'The Acoustic Mirror,' *Film Quarterly* XLII, no. 3, review, 1989, p. 52.

As I discuss in chapter 5, in an article written after her review of Silverman, Lawrence considers the splitting of body and voice as a site of recognition of alienation for a female performer, rather than as an empowering force, and as a way of understanding the process of the production of the ‘impossible female image’ of Hollywood.<sup>160</sup> The use of sound technology and the possible resulting nonsynchronisation of post-recording mean women lose control of their voices, as Lawrence suggests with her analysis of *Inside Daisy Clover* (Robert Mulligan, 1965). These critiques hint at the challenges presented by a range of films when they are considered in relation to these aspects of Mulvey’s and Silverman’s psychoanalytic feminist film theories. I argue that since the publication of *The Acoustic Mirror* in 1988, there are films that, while adhering to many of the formal expectations of dominant cinema, can be understood to be using singing beyond Silverman’s conceptions of women’s voices.

Recognising the power of the female voice, which Silverman herself hints at, offers possibilities for expanding on the consequences of her theoretical position. Silverman understands that cinematic control of the female voice is ‘a defensive reaction against the migratory potential of the voice – as an attempt to restrain it within established boundaries, and so to prevent its uncontrolled circulation.’<sup>161</sup> Nowhere in her discussion is there space to explain the exhilarating/uplifting/exciting moments of power I feel as a perceiver of certain singing scenes, where subject positions of control or containment are transgressed.

Brett Farmer reworks Silverman’s phrase, suggesting that the ‘migratory potential of the voice’ can be found expressed in the voices of singing divas, which can exhibit the ‘migratory potential of diva vocality.’<sup>162</sup> Farmer’s article allows for female acoustic authority through singing, but only where the voice is ‘full, strong and powerful.’<sup>163</sup> According to Farmer, it is

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<sup>160</sup> Amy Lawrence, ‘Losing her voice: silencing two daughters of Hollywood,’ *Style* 35, no. 2, 2001, p. 219.

<sup>161</sup> Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 84.

<sup>162</sup> Brett Farmer, ‘Little Voice and the transgressive pleasures of diva vocality,’ *Metro*, no. 123, 2000, p. 56.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

only the physically powerful voice that has this migratory potential to break out of the containment, to circulate ‘with an independent force and mobility that far outstrips the needs or demands of narrative economy.’<sup>164</sup> I think that Farmer unnecessarily limits the ‘migratory potential’ to the powerful voice, and I argue that it is not only the ‘diva,’ the spectacular performer or excessive performance that has potential acoustic authority within the narrative and beyond. Other singing women break out of the gendered expectations of cinematic representation, even if only momentarily. For example, vocal performances in the films I discuss such as *Paradise Road*, *A Ma Soeur!* and *Only The Brave* feature untrained voices that may not have the ‘diva’ strength but still, through a combination of visual and aural aspects, have powerful effects.

## MAKING A SPECTACLE

Mulvey’s article specifically aligns the issue of spectacle with expectations of femininity and musical performance, where ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ informs the typical show-stopping number. However, while singing is arguably a gendered and gendering practice, a discussion I take up in the next chapter, to perform is not always to be feminised. The film musical genre often explicitly positions the male performer in what Mulvey has categorised as the ‘showgirl’ position, women’s ‘traditional exhibitionist role’ where they are ‘looked at and displayed.’<sup>165</sup>

Theorist Steve Neale agrees that the male musical star is feminised through his position as performer.<sup>166</sup> However, Steven Cohan’s arguments to the contrary, that the male performer is not feminised in the same way as female stars, allows for a different way of thinking about such a position for both male and female performers. A male performer like Fred Astaire

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Mulvey, ‘Visual pleasure and narrative cinema,’ p. 33.

<sup>166</sup> Steve Neale, ‘Masculinity as spectacle: reflections on men and mainstream cinema,’ *Screen* 24, no. 6, 1983, pp. 14–15.

attracts not ‘conventional objectification’ but, Cohan argues, a knowing attention connected to the elements of show business performance, proving the appeal of superior (dancing) talents.<sup>167</sup> In a footnote, Cohan goes on to admit that some female performers, particularly Judy Garland, also disrupt the customary ‘showgirl standard’ that usually went with a star image, because they were not considered conventionally attractive.<sup>168</sup> Both male and female performers may flout the position of expected feminine spectacle that is ordinarily assumed to be predominant in musicals and, by association, in singing performances.

Significantly, Cohan is obliquely suggesting that the notion of the (erotic) spectacle is disrupted because the performer is chosen for voice or other talents rather than looks. Therefore, it is not only male performers who provide exceptions to the feminisation of the spotlight. While being ‘in the spotlight’ may be a gendered position, it is not always one of a conventionally feminine spectacle. Garland’s persona is a fascinating example of an ‘unglamorous’ musical star who attracted extraordinary popularity. Richard Dyer’s exploration of Garland’s image in relation to gay male fandom, post 1950 (after Garland’s first suicide attempt), positions her as having a ‘special relationship to suffering, ordinariness, normality’<sup>169</sup> that makes her particularly appealing to gay audiences because of her ‘outsider’ status. She was signed to MGM studios at the age of thirteen without having a screen test, after studio head Louis B Mayer heard her sing.<sup>170</sup> Reportedly, he called her ‘our little hunchback’ (she had scoliosis, curvature of the spine). She had ‘difficulties’ with weight, depression and drug addiction.<sup>171</sup> Such descriptions suggest her unsuitability for ‘the spotlight’

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<sup>167</sup> Steve Cohan, ‘“Feminizing” the song-and-dance man: Fred Astaire and the spectacle of masculinity in the Hollywood musical.’ in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, eds. Steve Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, reprint 1996, pp. 47–48.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>169</sup> Richard Dyer, ‘Judy Garland and gay men,’ in *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, London, MacMillan Education Ltd, 1987, p. 143.

<sup>170</sup> Katz, p. 512.

<sup>171</sup> Adrienne L McLean, ‘Feeling and the filmed body,’ *Film Quarterly* 55, no. 3, 2002, p. 3.

or being the subject of the gaze, and yet her voice and the ‘authenticity’ of her singing and of her ‘unglamorous’ persona enabled her to become an iconic star.<sup>172</sup>

Garland serves then as an example of an aural spectacle, where acoustic elements are prioritised even before singing starts. Adrienne McLean argues that Garland’s dancing body reveals the painful physical restrictions of the ‘limited and limiting ideology of female beauty and desirability’ that were imposed on Garland.<sup>173</sup> Additionally, the conventional expectations of the American film musical’s dancing styles favoured a ballet performance style that demanded a flexibility Garland was unable to produce because of her physical structure.<sup>174</sup> Garland was forced to wear painful corsetry and consistently reminded of her bodily shortcomings in relation to more glamorous stars, but biographies seldom mention that Garland’s physique was perfect for singing, as her singing coach Rogers Edens noted.<sup>175</sup> All these perceived shortcomings again point to the possibilities of disrupting the position of the ‘showgirl’ through the talented singing voice that Garland exemplifies.

These connotations surrounding Garland as singing persona are significant when considering the protagonist in *Little Voice*. LV’s mimicry of Garland includes not only her stunning vocal style but also an imitation of her performance gestures, particularly her raised forearm, observed in the film as LV intently watches a televised Garland performance of ‘The Man That Got Away.’ Garland is the only artist that LV is seen watching, and Dyer’s discussion of Garland as being of particular importance to gay men also resonates with the sexually ambiguous father figure in *Little Voice*.<sup>176</sup> LV’s own suffering through the difficulties of her relationship with her mother is also underlined by the use of Garland. Through Garland’s

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<sup>172</sup> McLean discusses how a sense of Garland’s authenticity has been understood as being connected to what Dyer calls ‘neurotic’ gestures, while she argues Garland’s suffering body offers authenticity on ‘another level.’ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>176</sup> Farmer understands the father as queer in his reading of the film. Farmer, p. 60.

signature song, 'Over the Rainbow,' LV sings of her desire to be elsewhere to the 'ghost' of her father. He 'appears' at her bedroom door when she refuses her mother's wish that she perform for Ray and club manager Mr Boo. Later in the film, Ray's sentimental storytelling evokes the image of the 'happy little bluebird' as he attempts to cajole LV into performing. These resonances align LV with Garland.

For much of the film LV's skill is, however, in vocal performance rather than in satisfying the traditional visual expectations of a female singing star. Her offstage performances are enacted for herself and seemingly for her father, but attract others around her. Her successful onstage performance also evokes, for her, her father's presence. The extratextual information that Jane Horrocks sings as well as acts the character of LV, provided onscreen at the end of the film, adds to the powerful effect of LV's performances both offstage and onstage.<sup>177</sup> LV's singing can be understood as powerful because it enables her to communicate in a way that she is seemingly unable to with language most of the time, and to express her relationship with her father. LV's singing takes place in the darkened, shadowy confines of her bedroom, until her onstage concert performance.

Ray's first attempt at getting LV to sing onstage also takes place in the dark. She can't make a noise until the spotlight is turned off, and then she can only sing snatches of songs, running off the stage in terror when the house lights are again brought up. When LV does fulfil the position of 'showgirl' as onstage spectacle, the aural diversity of her performance makes the singing central, whether admired as an excellent lip-sync or by the more knowledgeable perceiver as well-executed mimicry. This is in spite of her use of performers' mannerisms and her radically changed appearance as she masquerades or drags hyper-femininity (a point I take up in the following chapter). The concert singing sequences largely fulfil Mulvey's

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<sup>177</sup> The original play was written for Jane Horrocks because of her singing ability. Charles Taylor, 'I feel a song coming on,' available from <<http://dir.salon.com/ent/movies/reviews/1998/12/04review.html>>, accessed 25/10/04.

assertion of songs stopping the diegesis, as the internal audience and perceivers enjoy the concert within a film, and the diversity of LV's talents. During the concert she sings a range of songs for her father,<sup>178</sup> whom she sees in the audience and, for the initial song fragments, to whom she directs her performance.

The singing scenes in *Paradise Road* also don't allow for the typical display of female 'star' bodies, and there is a denial of visual spectacle with the presentation of aural spectacle. The vulnerability and subjection of female bodies to starvation and torture provide the visual spectacle within the diegesis. Based on the true story of women interned during WWII by the Japanese on the island of Sumatra, the film reveals women's use of singing as a means of survival during years of capture. A disparate collection of ages, classes and nationalities, this group of women has to withstand constant indignities and cruelties inflicted by the Japanese prison guards. When two of the women, Adrienne Pargiter (Glenn Close) and Miss Drummond (Pauline Collins), realise their mutual knowledge and appreciation of music, they decide to put it to good use. With some of the other prisoners they form a 'vocal orchestra,' producing singing that is notably different to what is usually performed in singing sequences. Women's voices 'sing' arrangements of orchestral and piano compositions without words, using vocalisations such as humming and 'ah' noises.

The prison camp, where only women and children are held, functions as a female homosocial under pressure. As the narrative progresses, there is a split between the women who remain in the camp, many of them remaining in the vocal orchestra, and the women who agree to 'escape' the camp through prostituting themselves. As I discuss in the following chapter, at the moment of choice between these two situations, singing is held up within the narrative as

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<sup>178</sup> The songs include 'Big Spender,' 'I Wanna Be Loved By You,' 'Falling in Love Again,' 'Sing As We Go' and 'Get Happy.'



a resistant alternative to the seductive lure of the hot water and food provided by the officers' club.

The musical practice of the vocal orchestra has the ability to bring together participants who do not all speak English, overcoming language barriers. The vocal orchestra has a largely cohesive effect on the group of prisoners who participate. The extratextual information provided onscreen at the end of the film, that the singing in the film uses the arrangements created and voiced by women who were actually interned during the war, underscores the strength of the singing as an empowering practice within the film narrative. As with *Songcatcher*, the music is intrinsic to the story in *Paradise Road*, and is the reason the film was initially developed.<sup>179</sup> While the scenes of torture do offer spectacles of violence, the scenes of the women singing in the two main performances of the vocal orchestra prioritise the aural dimension created and its visible effect on singers and listeners, through both editing and the use of sound. The 'aural' spectacles of these films provide a certain intimacy that singing creates, even from the wordless orchestra's public performances, as I discuss below.

## SPACES AND SINGING: MUSICAL INFLUENCES

While in some ways all performances on film are public, the diegetic audience is needed for a performance to be understood as a spectacle. Thus the issue of performance space and who else is within the physical space is of great importance in understanding singing performances and the functions of songs. Beyond the space of the diegesis there sometimes seems to be an added dimension to singing, the song remaining both embedded in the narrative and extending beyond it, created through diegetic singing. My attempt to identify such spaces emerges from my own responses to women singing, where it seems that attention is directed

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<sup>179</sup> On the liner notes for the CD soundtrack to the film, the director Bruce Beresford states that he was inspired by a recording of the original arrangements. *Paradise Road: Songs of Survival*, (CD recording). Sony Classical SK 63026, 1997.

to the character by means of her voice rather than for visual pleasure. By remaining in the narrative but able to reach out beyond it, singing sequences offer female characters a chance at acoustic authority and use of space that allows an access to power. In some respects such singing spaces must remain intangible, because each perceiver brings different musical experiences and awareness to a singing scene. However, numerous film writers have theorised about space or spaces that are connected to and yet in some senses 'outside' a film.

Mary Ann Doane depicts films as having three spaces: the 'space of the diegesis,' the 'visible space of the screen' and the 'acoustical space' of the cinema theatre.<sup>180</sup> In this third space, sound '*envelops*' the perceiver, and although sound may come from certain points on the screen, sound cannot be framed as the image can.<sup>181</sup> I think it is in this third space where singing scenes resonate with perceivers, enabling a connection with and a distancing from the diegetic world of the screen.

In relation to the film musical, Mulvey understands this happening through the visual spectacle of 'woman.' The creation of new space takes place through the presence of the 'erotic object' of the 'showgirl,' whose performance halts the action: 'For a moment the sexual impact of the performing woman takes the film into a no-man's-land outside its own time and space.'<sup>182</sup> For Mulvey, domination of the performance space does not equate with any sense of acoustic authority. She suggests Slim's (Lauren Bacall) songs in *To Have and Have Not* (Howard Hawks, 1944) as an example of such a space, but doesn't comment on the effect of Slim's singing voice, or the exchanges of looks that take place between Slim and Morgan (Humphrey Bogart) during, for instance, the song 'Am I Blue.' For me, Bacall's seductive singing voice, in conjunction with the looks exchanged in the sequence, undermines a reading that Bacall is the only object of erotic contemplation.

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<sup>180</sup> Doane, 'The voice in the cinema: the articulation of body and space,' p. 570.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. Doane's italics.

<sup>182</sup> Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema,' p. 33.

Rick Altman suggests that film musicals have a ‘third musical level’ beyond singing and ‘not-singing’: a ‘place of transcendence where time stands still, where contingent concerns are stripped away to reveal the essence of things.’<sup>183</sup> This is what he calls the ‘supradiegetic,’ producing something ‘above’ what is in the narrative.<sup>184</sup> The film musical leads the perceiver to the supradiegetic through the use of the ‘audio-dissolve,’ the use of voice and/or sounds that bridge the gap between the ‘real’ world of the diegetic track and the ‘romantic realm’ of the nondiegetic music track.<sup>185</sup> For example, in the classic Hollywood musical *Singin’ in the Rain* (Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen, 1952), the musical number ‘Moses Supposes’ begins as an elocution lesson for two silent film stars, Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly) and Cosmo Brown (Donald O’Connor), coming to grips with the demands of ‘new’ talkie technology.<sup>186</sup> Their elocution teacher reads their speech exercise: ‘Moses supposes/his toes-es are roses/but Moses supposes erroneously.’ Don reads the exercise too, and is joined by Cosmo, and their rhythmic chanting of the song is then joined by nondiegetic music as the song begins. For Altman, the supradiegesis, where the diegetic and nondiegetic meet, is a utopian space, one where the expression of emotion is most possible. The ‘reversal of the image/sound hierarchy’ that usually occurs through the use of this transcendent supradiegetic music is a defining element of the musical, where movement is subordinate to the music.<sup>187</sup>

Heather Laing describes musical transcendence of the supradiegesis as the ‘logic of the emotional’ taking over from rational narrative, creating a ‘new space’ as diegetic and nondiegetic sound overlap.<sup>188</sup> She characterises the space as potentially subversive, as the distance between the nondiegetic soundtrack and the diegetic performer is diminished,

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<sup>183</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, p. 66.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.65–67.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62–65.

<sup>186</sup> In the film, Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly) and Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen) are Hollywood’s leading romantic couple of the silent screen. When the technology of talkies overtakes their latest film, Lina’s shrill voice and thick accent threatens their careers. Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds), the aspiring actress Don meets and falls in love with, rescues the film when her voice is dubbed for Lina’s. She is forced to remain unacknowledged, and is disillusioned by Don, until Don and his childhood friend and fellow screen star Cosmo (Donald O’Connor) reveal the truth.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>188</sup> Heather Ann Laing, ‘Emotion by numbers: music, song and the musical,’ in *Musicals – Hollywood and Beyond*, eds. Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell, Exeter, England, Intellect, 2000, p. 8.

suggesting closeness between the performer and the ‘emotional level’ of the text.<sup>189</sup> Laing understands a number in a musical as a ‘strangely paradoxical moment’ that is both excessive and contained by the predictability and ‘formulaic’ nature of the music, which drains the excesses of singing of its potential danger and disruption.<sup>190</sup> She regards musical numbers as having an ‘excess-control dynamic’: the most energetic performance, like Kelly’s famous ‘Singin’ in the Rain’ number, or the most emotionally draining, for example, Judy Garland’s passionate numbers like ‘The Man that Got Away,’ won’t become a ‘full emotional breakdown’ because of the musical’s structure.<sup>191</sup>

For me, the kind of singing spaces created by diegetic singing offers a comparable kind of uplifting experience to that offered by musicals, although there is no escape to the supradiegetic realm. When singing is entirely diegetically sourced, what will happen musically is not necessarily as predictable as is expected by perceivers of a musical number. Songs can be interrupted and may not be performed perfectly (as is always expected in a musical number, whether the performance is coded as spontaneous or a ‘rehearsal’ performance, or not). While the aural is often prioritised over the visual in a musical number, it is usually accompanied by some kind of visual spectacle. Female diegetic singing can prioritise the voice, without the need for a visual spectacle. A song can offer a way of expressing subjectivity at the level of narrative, and can also reach to something beyond to reveal the complex identity of a character, potentially transgressing or subverting the character’s position in the diegetic realm.

For example, in *Little Voice* LV’s first singing sequence is startling because her behaviour is completely unexpected given her earlier timidity. In the scene, LV’s TV-watching of Garland is disturbed when her mother arrives home with Ray. Mari and Ray are both inebriated. LV

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

escapes to her bedroom, and soon after the recorded voice of Garland is heard singing 'That's Entertainment.' Mari is incensed, and to counter LV's music puts her own musical selection on her record player downstairs, Tom Jones singing 'It's Not Unusual.' Mari and Ray start dancing and both songs combine to cause a cacophony. Eventually a fuse blows and the house is left in darkness. Ray and Mari fall onto the couch laughing. What sounds like Garland's voice is then heard singing 'The Man that Got Away.'<sup>192</sup>

The scene begins with a mid shot of LV singing in the dark, the top of her head lit like a halo. She walks in front of her bedroom window, and she can be seen silhouetted against the window as she raises her forearm in a gesture Garland has used in the previously seen TV segment. Ray ignores Mari's amorous attentions and asks if LV has her own radio. When he realises that it is LV singing, which he can hardly believe, he leaves Mari on the couch to stand at the bottom of the stairs, gazing towards LV's room in amazement. At first, LV's singing silhouette is all that the perceiver can see, and she is only an aural spectacle for Ray. The second image of LV is a frontal close-up, but she looks screen right, not directly at the camera. As she sings the words 'the man that got,' a reverse shot reveals what she has been looking at: a photograph on the wall of a smiling man. The end of the vocal line, as she sings 'away,' is matched with a long shot of LV looking at the photograph. Although Mari has spoken about having a husband, it is not clear at this point in the narrative who it is depicted in the photograph. LV's lyrics suggest she has lost someone, and meanwhile her mother downstairs has already 'lost' Ray to the pleasure and commercial potential of LV's voice. In the privacy and darkness of LV's bedroom, her vocal power transcends her timorous character, drives the narrative and foregrounds a relationship of pleasure in which, in contrast to her adversarial relationship with her mother, she can share her singing talent and mutual musical tastes with her father.

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<sup>192</sup> See Appendix A for lyrics to 'The Man That Got Away.'

Definitions of the musical genre are continually debated. While it is beyond the scope of my thesis to fully consider that debate, it is important to acknowledge film musicals' history and how the genre continues to influence the production and perception of singing in film. The everyday understanding of the term refers to the films that Hollywood produced from the 1930s to the 1950s. Types of musicals are categorised in a number of ways, most prevalently as 'backstage' or 'integrated' musicals, a division that concerns how a film handles the move between narrative and musical number. Backstage musicals revolve around the narrative of 'putting on a show,' with a separation between story and song.<sup>193</sup> In 'integrated' musicals, the song ostensibly occurs spontaneously, 'in surroundings apparently not intended for performance, and which acts as an agent of both characterisation and narrative progression.'<sup>194</sup>

Contemporary musicals continue to renegotiate what 'a musical' might mean, as Adrian Martin suggests with his discussion of 'mutant' musicals.<sup>195</sup> However, a 'traditional' musical, in the classic Hollywood style of the backstage or integrated musicals, brings with it expectations about how a film of the genre should look and sound. Although genres are always evolving, with a musical there is always an escape to a space beyond the narrative created through the supradiegesis, the crossover from diegetic to a melding of source music/singing (the diegetic) and dramatic scoring (the nondiegetic).

An example of this occurs in *Singin' in the Rain*: when Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly) kisses and leaves new love Kathy (Debbie Reynolds) to walk home in the rain, his nonverbal vocalisations, 'do de do doodle doodle/ do de do doodle doodle,' underscored by nondiegetic orchestral accompaniment, lead into the song, 'Singin' in the Rain.' The song exemplifies the tensions between the (realist) narrative world and the (fantasy) musical number: as Sutton

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<sup>193</sup> Martin Sutton, 'Patterns of meaning in the musical,' in *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman, London, Boston and Henley. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, p. 191.

<sup>194</sup> Laing, 'Emotion by numbers: music, song and the musical,' p. 6.

<sup>195</sup> Adrian Martin, 'Musical mutations: before, beyond and against Hollywood,' in *Cinesonic: Experiencing the Soundtrack*, ed. Philip Brophy, North Ryde, AFTRS, 2001, pp. 67–104.

notes, the appearance of a policeman near the end of Don's performance returns the film to the realist plot, where singing and dancing in the rain is not allowable behaviour.<sup>196</sup>

When singing remains in the diegesis, it offers the perceiver a different kind of 'musical' experience, one that can be understood as creating something other than the utopian (or sometimes dystopian) spaces found in the musical. Accepting Laing's proposal that musical numbers are contained by the predictability of the musical genre, I suggest the unpredictability of diegetic singing allows for a potentially liberating or otherwise transformative experience. The notion that the character has 'chosen' the song, aligning the music more closely with the character's subjectivity or mood, is much stronger when it is not melded with nondiegetic scoring. When LV first sings 'The Man that Got Away,' a lament of lost love, the song functions to suggest depths to her character and experience that remain literally unspoken until she sings. For the perceiver, her subjectivity is transformed, because her powerful singing voice undercuts her timidity and silence.

Theoretical analysis of Hollywood musicals, particularly the work of Rick Altman and Jane Feuer, has dominated discussions surrounding singing in film.<sup>197</sup> Adrian Martin summarises the elements Altman and Feuer have outlined as integral to the musical film form: 'song and dance as emotional release and utopian imagining; the syntactical relationship of numbers to the plots that contain them; "self-reflexive" entertainment.'<sup>198</sup> Martin suggests a more useful genre category would be the '*music-film* ... any film which feels as if it is *driven* by its music (whether instrumental or lyrical), where the guiding role of music in relation to image is especially foregrounded.'<sup>199</sup> Martin's category usefully describes films like *Little Voice*,

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<sup>196</sup> Sutton, pp. 191–192.

<sup>197</sup> Laing suggests that in-depth discussion on sound in musicals is 'largely untouched' and cites the work of Jane Feuer and Rick Altman as exceptions. Laing's own thesis ('Wandering minds') considers in part diegetic singing. Laing, 'Emotion by numbers: music, song and the musical,' p. 6.

<sup>198</sup> Martin, p. 71.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

*Songcatcher* and *Paradise Road*. Each of these three films has been described as a musical, despite the fact that in all three films singing remains grounded in the space of the narrative rather than accessing the supradiegetic.

The singing sequences that I address remain largely embedded in the diegetic soundtrack, with songs used as source music or source scoring. Films like *Only the Brave*, *A Ma Soeur!* and *High Tide* do not fit with Martin's proposed genre, as the singing that occurs is not necessarily an ongoing dynamic of the whole film. Yet the singing scenes in these latter three films are vital points of synchresis, and allow for whole songs to be performed within the diegesis by 'untrained' singers in a manner that might be considered as excessive to narrative requirements. Martin suggests that one element of 'mutation' of the musical is achieved through restricting song to the diegetic world, which negates 'the traditional unity of plenitude of a musical number.'<sup>200</sup> Martin's 'plenitude' resonates with Altman's 'transcendence,' accessible only through the supradiegesis. For me though, diegetic singing can have enormous plenitude, in terms of richness of meaning and pleasure. LV's private performing of 'The Man That Got Away' is an example of the plenitude that diegetic singing can create.

While in the classic musical there is a gap between story world and song world that needs to be bridged (Altman's audio-dissolve), a song that remains in the diegetic world does not have the easing transition of sounds or voices that usually occurs before the character 'bursts into song.' Martin uses Jonathon Rosenbaum's description of the move from story to song as sometimes inciting 'queasiness,' an effect that can also happen for some perceivers even when the singing in the story world does not extend to the supradiegetic realm.<sup>201</sup> I think the threat of 'queasiness' should also alert the perceiver to the possibility that what is expressed

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 92.



in such moments can be significant. When the singing is unexpected, as, for example, LV's first act of singing in *Little Voice*, or when singing either does not directly form a part of the narrative or is not motivated by the narrative, as in *A Ma Soeur!*, the ways in which such singing can be apprehended by perceivers is open to interpretation that cannot be wholly satisfied by film musical genre expectations. The perceiver is without the comforting predictability of the musical structure that Laing suggests can contain the potentially disruptive elements of song.

## SONGS

The work of film music theorists in relation to songs is useful in considering the parallels as well as the distinctive traits of the use of diegetically placed songs in films that are not 'traditional' musicals. Guthrie Ramsey Jnr, writing about black subjectivity in relation to filmic representations, considers how the scores of *Do The Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989) and *Love Jones* (Theodore Witcher, 1997) are 'sites for the negotiation of personal identity and self-fashioning on the one hand, and the making and negotiation of group identity,[sic] on the other.'<sup>202</sup> While he is writing about songs in film scores that don't include diegetic singing, I argue that his notion can also be employed in relation to singing a song where the 'conscious' choice of the character performer is even more apparent. Adapting Ramsey's phrase, examining songs as 'sites for the negotiation of subjectivities,' concentrating on expressions of the primary singing subject opens up ways of understanding the importance of the singing that takes place in these films, on a meta-filmic level.

Those who sing are apparently making direct choices regarding how they want to express themselves, even more intimately than characters using technological devices in the narrative to introduce source music, like LV and Mari playing records, whereas the dramatic score is

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<sup>202</sup> Ramsey, p. 309.

beyond the character's control. Obviously this perception of choice is illusory, as the creators and producers of a film have made any musical 'choices' for the soundtrack. However, the connection of character to deliberately performed source music is ostensibly more important because it is more likely to be noticed by perceivers, and because there is an assumption it will say something about the characters. Singing is a possible site for subversive expression of character, because meaning in song is more ambiguous than spoken film dialogue. There are always multiple possibilities as to who is the 'I' of the song: the songwriter, the singer, and, as Sean Cubitt points out, the listener too.<sup>203</sup> Cubitt suggests that the ambiguity of the term 'I' allows self-identification, which is encouraged by the intimacy of the singing voice that in performance is engaged in a bodily and potentially vulnerable act.<sup>204</sup> Andrew Goodwin also notes that the singer can be both 'character' and 'storyteller.'<sup>205</sup>

The intimate offstage performances that take place in LV's bedroom serve narratively explicit purposes and work as sites for the negotiation of LV's subjectivity. She tells Mari that singing is something 'private,' but her life changes drastically once she has been overheard. Her bedroom performances of 'The Man That Got Away' and 'Over the Rainbow,' through the songs' lyrics and the visible representations of her father in his photograph and his appearance at her bedroom door, express her desire and longing for her previous familial relationship, and serve to present an aspect of LV as being able to speak for herself.

While lyrics themselves are significant, how the words are performed is a vital way of understanding the function of songs in cinema. Simon Frith has suggested that previous academic scholarship on pop music has concentrated on lyrics, and that this is a valid way of

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<sup>203</sup> Sean Cubitt, ' "Maybellene": meaning and the listening subject,' in *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*, ed. Richard Middleton, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 145.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 145–146.

<sup>205</sup> Andrew Goodwin, 'The structure of music video: rethinking narrative analysis,' in *Dancing in the Distraction Factory*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1992, p. 75.

remembering and talking about songs.<sup>206</sup> However, he notes that it is the way that songs are sung that give them meaning: as he argues, ‘in lyrical analysis it is not words, but words in performance.’<sup>207</sup> Likewise with diegetic singing in film narratives, meaning is generated through both lyrics and context. Jane Feuer regards the often-reflexive song of the musical as a form where ‘language becomes transfigured, lifted up into a higher, more expressive realm.’<sup>208</sup> Building on Feuer’s work, Heather Laing understands the relationship between words and music as pivotal for the musical, as structurally it:

constructs its own emotional and narrative rules for how songs work making an explicit point about the distinct qualities that music and lyrics can lend each other, and how this can affect a character’s mood and behaviour.<sup>209</sup>

For Laing, a musical foregrounds, through lyrics or song set-up, the ‘genre’s musical-emotional philosophy.’<sup>210</sup> Through the genre of the musical there is a learned association between singing and the expression of emotion. Singing increases the intensity of the words being used, because they are accompanied by music.

Representations of amateur, professional or ‘everyday’ singing create different expectations for the perceiver. Jane Feuer explains that for Hollywood musicals the ‘aura of amateurism,’ when accomplished professional performers are narratively placed as amateurs, is highly appealing for the perceiver.<sup>211</sup> Feuer argues, for example, that Judy Garland’s ‘child-like qualities’ were utilised by her films’ narratives such as *Babes in Arms* (Arthur Freed, 1939) to evoke an ‘amateur feeling’ to her performances: this enhances perceiver enjoyment because it narrows the distance between professionals (depicted as talented amateurs) and perceivers.<sup>212</sup> Musical narratives also serve to position certain singing sequences as rehearsal or spontaneous events, despite the fact that sequences are scripted, polished and competently

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<sup>206</sup> Frith, p. 159.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>208</sup> Feuer, p. 52.

<sup>209</sup> Laing, ‘Emotion by numbers: music, song and the musical,’ p. 5.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Feuer, p. 15.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

performed,<sup>213</sup> like ‘Make em Laugh’ and ‘Moses Supposes’ from *Singin’ in the Rain*. In films that are not musicals, the use of the voice without other musical accompaniment, a cappella, likewise suggests a more ‘everyday’ practice that anyone could perform, and yet such singing can also produce a transformative experience. Singing as an everyday practice occurs in both *Songcatcher* and *Paradise Road*.

In *Songcatcher*, musicologist Dr Lily Penleric (Janet McTeer), having been passed over for promotion once again, leaves her university for the mountains to visit her sister Elna (Jane Adams). To her great excitement she discovers that the mountains are full of the folk music of England, still sung in a ‘pure’ form that she is anxious to preserve. She sets about ‘scientifically’ collecting the songs, particularly from wise woman Viney Butler (Pat Carroll), with the help of orphan Deladis (Emmy Rossum), and so becomes involved in the Appalachian mountain community. Her involvement includes a prickly relationship and eventual romance with cynical mountain man Tom (Aidan Quinn), Viney’s grandson. Lily stoically endures a number of setbacks until a fire at Elna’s schoolhouse finally defeats her research ambitions. The importance of her work as a musicologist is vindicated in the final scenes, but only for her to discard her career in favour of a life with her newly found ‘family,’ Tom and Deladis, and a desire to now record and sell sung music. Lily’s act of collecting songs drives the narrative, and thus each time she collects or hears another it is an intrinsic part of the story action.

Deladis and Viney are happy to sing for Lily, without any preamble. Initially, the opening sequences of the film as Lily teaches her class, which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, set up one side of a musical binary (‘high’ versus ‘low’ or ‘cultured’ versus ‘natural’) that is problematised as the film narrative progresses. The ‘purity of emotions’ expressed in

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., pp. 11–13.

the folk songs of the ‘common people,’ so described by Dr Lily Penleric to her students, is revealed by the film to be a simplistic description of the role songs play within mountain culture, particularly for the women. The music of the mountains is so much a part of the characters’ lives that the line between the practice and performance of singing is blurred.

## SINGING SPACES OF THE FEMALE HOMOSOCIAL

A taxonomy such as Jacque Schultz’s ‘categories of song’ combines an awareness of performer, lyrics and place of performance to consider the function of songs in classical musicals. In his work he examines a song’s ‘conditions of address,’ identified by who hears the song, encompassing audiences both within the film and the film’s perceivers. I utilise his four main categories, consisting of the ‘introspective’ and ‘private’ performance and the ‘introspective’ and ‘public’ spectacle, in the discussion below.<sup>214</sup>

Schultz is aware that his categories are ‘a jumping-off place’ from which to begin analysis, rather than fixed types.<sup>215</sup> His categories are initially useful because they take into consideration the physical space where the performed song occurs, suggesting the importance of where and to whom the song is performed. My own divisions of solitary, intimate and collective singing spaces also relate to who sings and who hears. Schultz’ categories also suggest the complexities of the functions of songs. Contrary to the concept of breaking the diegetic flow of the story, the singing performances often have both action and complicated patterns of gazes being performed in conjunction with the singing that occurs, while lyrics and/or the sound of the song work in a multiplicity of ways.

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<sup>214</sup> Jacque Schultz, ‘Categories of song,’ *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 13, no. 1, 1980, pp. 15–18.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

In both film musicals and realist narratives that feature diegetic singing, the song and the space in which it is performed are significant in functioning to express a character's subjectivity. Schultz's categories are, however, designed for the specific genre of 1930s to 1950s Hollywood musicals. Within the same genre, patterns are more likely to emerge. The films I discuss cover a range of genres, and thus my less specific categories remain fluid to encompass a greater diversity of singing sequences. In addition, for me his categories do not fully explain the intimacies and intensities that are generated in certain situations when women sing together diegetically, or where one is the audience for the other, because of the diversity of singing sequences in dramatic narratives. Also, there is often a sense of increased intimacy even in collective singing, because there is no mediation of music. Nevertheless, applying Schultz's musical song categories initially opens up the potential for increasing awareness of the complexities of song function, beyond lyrical content.

Schultz defines the 'private performance,' where all participants perform, as functioning 'to confirm a friendship or establish a common bond between participants,' or to act as a 'prompt ... to action or to celebrate the victory of their common efforts.'<sup>216</sup> The first musical moment within the confines of the prison camp in *Paradise Road* occurs as Adrienne and Miss Drummond connect through music, when Miss Drummond names the musical piece that Adrienne is humming; what she calls 'Elgar's concerto.'<sup>217</sup> The two women take a stroll together in the compound, and the scene ends with them both humming together. As a kind of 'private performance,' the music functions to establish a bond between the two 'musical' women, and brings about a partnership that creates the vocal orchestra that in turn increases the women prisoners' resilience. The sequence creates an intimate aural dimension to the female homosocial as the two women share their musical histories.

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>217</sup> Edward Elgar's Cello concerto in E minor, op 55.

Using Schultz's terminology, the concert performances of the vocal orchestra in *Paradise Road* are examples of a 'public spectacle,' functioning to directly address the perceiver, and so draw the perceiver into the film.<sup>218</sup> A 'public spectacle' is performed onstage or some other 'distinct display space,' with a physical distance between the diegetic audience and the performers, and with the sequence also 'bracketed' with shots of the staged location, including the audience.<sup>219</sup> The use of shots of the audience listening to the first public performance of 'New World,' and the physical location of the vocal orchestra under a well-lit outdoor shelter, position the singing sequence as public spectacle. However, the singing of 'New World' functions to bond the women of the orchestra and of the camp. Like Schultz's 'private performance,' 'New World' is a celebration of 'common efforts' as the choir exhibits the women's bravery and resistance in the face of brutality and hardship. In this collective singing space of the female homosocial, the singing women are strong.

While LV's singing onstage in *Little Voice* largely fits the criteria of Schultz's 'public spectacle,' her private offstage singing combines elements of the 'introspective performance' and the 'introspective spectacle' but satisfies neither. Her overheard voice attracts an audience, and yet she is alone in her own physical space of the bedroom. An 'introspective performance' is realised by a character who is alone, or who is ignored or 'unheard' by other characters, or sings 'thoughts,' and functions to prompt action from the singing character, or to release emotional energy.<sup>220</sup> For the 'introspective spectacle,' singing is directed at an 'involved audience' that is closely related by familial or emotional ties to the performer.<sup>221</sup> Schultz confirms the heterosexual imperative of the classical musical, and inverts the gender of the myth of the Sirens, describing the introspective spectacle as a 'Siren's song, a web to

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<sup>218</sup> Schultz, p. 18.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

be spun by the predator with which to catch his prey.’<sup>222</sup> LV’s first singing sequence of ‘The Man That Got Away’ attracts Ray to LV, and is a prompt for him to act, but also functions as a release of LV’s emotion towards the man in the photograph, her father. With LV’s solitary singing, she transgresses expectations of her timid character, and her mother’s distaste for her father and his music, to express herself.

Female characters’ singing spaces have differing levels of sociability. Like musical song categories, it is significant to whom and where the performer sings. Women sing together collectively, to each other intimately, or for themselves in solitude, creating a sense of closeness for both diegetic participants and film perceivers. Such singing can be transformative and at times transgressive, allowing women’s voices to be heard where they otherwise might not be. Women singing together develops bonds between women and functions as an expression and a practice that is empowering, as with the vocal orchestra in *Paradise Road*, and in *Songcatcher*.

In *Songcatcher* and *Paradise Road*, the narratives of the films centre strongly on a female homosocial, where women work and live together on intimate terms, and give each other strength and encouragement. For both films, singing works as a cohesive element for the female societies within the story, as well as part of the film performance. The aural space of the female homosocial is often about female togetherness. Singing spaces of solitude or intimacy can also be about the singing female making a space for herself where she is not under scrutiny or shows no awareness of her visibility, allowing for an intimacy that is not necessarily sexualised.

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.



Laing, writing about film representations of female musicians, differentiates between ‘conventional performance’ and ‘personal performance,’ where the latter is performed somehow in isolation and with the presence of a ‘middle distance’ stare.<sup>223</sup> A retreat to the personal parallels the notion of a female homosocial or at least a withdrawal from a heterosexual visual economy. It can be an empowering use of the acoustic to create a space from which to reject visibility as spectacle. Such an aural space can also delineate relationships of a heterosexual economy. For LV in *Little Voice*, singing is something that is private, and she initially recoils from the idea of singing onstage. As discussed above, her singing in the dark prioritises her voice over her appearance, and reveals an acoustic authority that initially it seems unlikely that she possesses.

Richard Dyer identifies an intimate acoustic space similar to Laing’s, without giving it a name, when discussing the importance of the initial singing performance of Gilda (Rita Hayworth lip-syncing to Anita Ellis’s singing) in *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946). The film constructs what he calls the ‘“private” moment,’ which is, in Hollywood film-making terms, a moment of ‘truth,’ and which allows ‘a moment of privileged access to Gilda’s character.’<sup>224</sup> In the sequence, the presence of the men’s room attendant and the appearance of Johnny (Glenn Ford), her tormentor and former lover, at the end of her performance, doesn’t detract from Gilda’s connection with perceivers through the use of the song ‘Put the Blame on Mame.’

The way in which the singing sequence is framed and edited, privileging close-ups, creates an intimate relationship with the character. Dyer asserts that close-ups work to construct ‘the private’ in films, and that the performance gives the perceiver information that undermines

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<sup>223</sup> Laing, ‘Wandering minds’, p. 190.

<sup>224</sup> Dyer, ‘Resistance through charisma: Rita Hayworth and *Gilda*,’ p. 95.

Johnny's disparaging voiceover as events unfold.<sup>225</sup> The song provides a new way of understanding Gilda's subjectivity, not as femme fatale but as a woman under patriarchy that always, as the song's lyrics suggest, blames women. Dyer's 'private moment' is a film noir example of a solitary singing space of the female homosocial, as Gilda sings for herself of the unfairness of a woman's position, and provides another way of understanding the character and later performance of the same song when produced as a 'public spectacle,' when she sings onstage in a nightclub.

A created singing space is not necessarily bounded by a physical space, and is not necessarily a gendered space. However, another element of a song's conditions of address, the location of where the singing takes place, is an important element for understanding a singing sequence. The solitary, intimate and collective spaces of the female homosocial can take place both publicly and privately.

Expressions of female closeness often occur in places of safety and privacy. The bedroom is a prime location for such private singing to occur, as happens in *Little Voice*, *Only the Brave*, *Songcatcher*, and is implied through dramatic scoring in *Radiance* (Rachel Perkins, 1998). In *Songcatcher*, wise woman Viney dispenses advice through song to abandoned wife and new mother Alice Kincaid (Stephanie Roth Haberle), after Alice has experienced a painful and bloody childbirth, with assistance from Viney and Lily. After the birth Viney counsels Alice that having so many children is going to kill her if she doesn't take more care of herself. She hopes that the baby should be single 'like Lily,' then begins to sing 'Single Girl': 'When I was single / went dressed mighty fine / now that I'm married/ go ragged all the time / I wish I was a single girl again.'<sup>226</sup> The lyrics to 'Single Girl' express a somewhat depressing picture of what it is like for some women who are married and suffering poverty and violence. Use of

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> See Appendix B for lyrics to 'Single Girl.'

the first person and the narrative of female struggle, thematically repeated in other song fragments that Viney and Deladis sing, seems to represent the difficulty of life for Appalachian Mountain women. Many of the songs that Viney and Deladis sing articulate the results of a dominant (and sometimes violent) heterosexuality for women, with songs warning of violence, unwanted pregnancy and negotiating relationships. For example, Deladis sings 'She cried out with a thrilling cry/ lord o lord I'm ruined' a number of times as Lily transcribes the line, the lyrics offering the suggestion of personal female tragedy.

Despite the lyrics, the way 'Single Girl' is sung and the rhythm of the tune make it a sympathetic and almost humorous kind of comfort for the new mother and her unsupported brood. The incorporation of other sounds, such as Lily's laugh as she joins in, undercuts the pathos of the words. There is a strong sense of 'women's space' that is disrupted when Alice's unfaithful husband Reece Kinkaid (Michael Harding) returns and interrupts Viney's song. The performance transgresses expectations of motherly advice. The song is subversive as the lyrics directly express displeasure at the dominant discourse of heterosexual relationships that result in disempowerment for a married woman. 'Single Girl' has a simple structure of verse and chorus, the chorus normally effecting a closure that is not allowed when Reece interrupts mid verse, leaving the song unresolved.

'Single Girl' is one of the most important songs in the film, functioning as a pivotal moment for Lily. Singing heard up to this point in the narrative has only been fragments of folk ballads, except for Lily's own classroom performance of 'Barbara Allen' that begins the film. Snippets of the songs are heard as they are sung for Lily, either to be documented or recorded with Lily's phonograph and wax cylinders. However, Lily participates in singing 'Single Girl,' due to Viney's encouragement. Lily's involvement is in contrast to her previous academically motivated behaviour of musically notating songs. When she records the songs,

she disrupts performances, needing constant repetition from both Deladis and Viney to get the information she needs. Lily's first experience of Appalachian singing is through Deladis's performance of 'Barbara Allen,' requested by Lily's sister Elna (Jane Adams), when Lily first arrives. For Lily, Deladis's initial performance becomes not one of musical entertainment but one that ignites her academic imagination, and she interrupts Deladis's performance. However, Lily's singing of 'Single Girl' with Viney generates a sense of inclusion that has previously been absent during Lily's 'scientific' collection of songs. The barrier between Appalachian and Lily as 'outlander' is traversed through the intimacy of the singing sequence, as Lily is embraced by the female homosocial of the mountain community.

The female homosocial in *Only the Brave* is one characterised by an intimate friendship between two teenagers. The narrative centres on Alex (Elena Mandalis), whose mother Athena (Mary Sitarenos), a singer in a band, left when Alex was young.<sup>227</sup> Now a rebellious teenager, Alex dreams of finding her mother in Sydney and of escaping her life, along with her friend Vicki (Dora Kaskaris), with whom she wags school. Vicki wants to be a singer, and at Alex's place she dresses up in Athena's clothes to perform in Alex's bedroom. Both Alex and Vicki have troubled relationships with boyfriends. The attentions of Kate (Maude Davey), Alex's English teacher, also complicate Alex's life. Alex is attracted to her teacher, and when invited out one night, goes out with Kate, instead of running away with Vicki as previously arranged. Alex's attempt at intimacy with Kate while staying at the teacher's house is rebuffed. Returning to school after their night out, Alex is challenged about her relationship with Kate and fights with both her school rival Tammy (Peta Brady) and with Vicki in the toilets at school.

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<sup>227</sup> In the credits her name is Athena, but this isn't heard during the film, so I have tended to identify her as 'Alex's mother'. She is always aurally identified by her biological status to her daughter, in contrast to the use of her song and the more complex way she is depicted visually – as singer, wife and mother.

The following night, out by herself, Alex goes to Vicki's. From outside Vicki's bedroom Alex witnesses Vicki's father raping her, and Vicki sees Alex watching. Alex goes to Kate for help, but runs when Kate's boyfriend Paul (John Brumpton) opens Kate's door. The next day at school, a disturbed Vicki slashes off her own hair with a blade. She responds to Alex's attempts to talk to her by putting the knife to Alex's throat, and then running away. Alex decides to leave for Sydney. She discovers her father Reg (Bob Bright) has been lying that her mother doesn't care about her, and that she wants to see her. Alex searches for Vicki, and finds her just as Vicki sets herself alight. Alex is unable to stop Vicki's suicide, and gets burned in the process. Alex's mother visits her in hospital, but no words are exchanged between them, and the reasons for her mother's departure remains unresolved. Alex then leaves home alone.

The closeness of the two girls' relationship underlines Vicki's singing as an expression of both their desires for escape through the fantasy of finding Alex's mother. Vicki's singing within the film is her way of expressing her desire to leave home, as well as sharing the dream of Alex's mother's return. Vicki sings when the two of them are together in Alex's bedroom, and when they are hanging out in an empty train carriage wagging school. Both places of physical confinement are also places of sanctuary for the two girls. Vicki's intimate singing performances to Alex alone allow both of them transformative moments where they imagine themselves as possessing a different identity and existence. Vicki's singing contrasts with her defiance of school authority and the sullen silence that she fails to communicate with the rest of the time. Their relationship contrasts with Alex's relationship with her teacher Kate, where both are attracted to each other, an attraction that Kate is unwilling to admit to, as she ultimately rejects Alex's attempt at physical intimacy. While there is a sense of intimate and intertwined subjectivities of Vicki and Alex, not overtly represented in sexual terms, Alex's desire for Vicki is intertwined with her desire for her mother. Vicki's singing performances

operate as a kind of conduit for Alex's relationship with her missing singing mother, a point I deal with in more detail in chapter 4.

In *Paradise Road*, most of the singing that takes place is about the creation of a collective female subjectivity, both at the level of the story trajectory and on an extradiegetic level (because it is based on a true story and uses the original musical arrangements performed during the war). The women use singing to differentiate themselves from the brutality of the guards and their use of force. For the prison guards, the women are the most despised of creatures: as Miss Drummond specifies, the Japanese hate prisoners, Europeans, and women, and most of the captives fit all categories. The guards' violent masculinity is constantly played out on the bodies of the women, who are able to have only moments of rebellion, such as urinating in the water that they are forced to take to the guards' bath house. The vocal orchestra is a more sustained example of their defiant behaviour.

Forbidden to gather together or write anything down, singing in the prison camp is a subversive act that places their lives in danger. The vocal orchestra's singing practice and performance also enables the women to rise above their situation, giving them a way of fostering their hopes to continue to survive. The wordless orchestra's practice sessions and concert performances enable the creation of community in a harsh and violent environment, and also serve to dissolve differences between the women that are initially the cause of tensions and resentments.<sup>228</sup>

One of the criticisms levelled at the film was that the large number of women of importance to the story meant that characters were not sufficiently developed.<sup>229</sup> The realist narrative's

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<sup>228</sup> The ABC TV series *Changi* (producer Bill Hughes, 2001) is similar in many ways to *Paradise Road*, and although it is beyond the reach of this thesis to consider the series in any detail, it is noteworthy that both texts use singing to communicate not only emotion but also how a community can be created in environments where it would be difficult for one to exist.

<sup>229</sup> Stephen Holden, 'Paradise Road,' review, available from (footnote continues over)

imperative for a 'star' is thwarted with the multiple characters foregrounded in the film, which highlights the subversive and communal power evoked through singing spaces of the female homosocial. The strength of the collective works against prioritising an individual, and although much of the film centres around the biggest 'star' Glenn Close as conductor Adrienne, there are significant storylines concerning a number of other characters such as nurse Susan (Cate Blanchett), Dr Verstak (Frances Mc Dormand), and Rosemary Leighton-Jones (Jennifer Ehle). The casting and the multiple narrative threads of the story suggest the importance of the collective versus the individual; this is paralleled through the representation of the vocal orchestra's collective public singing performances.

Adrienne conducts the first public singing performance of 'New World.' To achieve this performance, the women have taken great risks to practice. The performance is not only an outlet for the expression of emotion but also a site of defiance and of the development of a collective subjectivity. The majority of camera shots in the sequence are of the vocal orchestra, particularly looks shared between the singers and the conductor, underlining the sense of collectivity that epitomises the women singing together. Multiple shots of the audience, consisting of the other prisoners and of the prison guards, show everyone completely attentive to the performance. Prisoners who have been sceptical about the formation of the orchestra are also seen stopping to listen to the harmonising voices.

There are two main shots that are removed from the physical space of the performance, a long shot of the prison compound, and one of the cemetery outside the prison gates. For each of these shots the sound volume or mixing<sup>230</sup> remains constant, as if the singing space created by the women's voices has acoustic power beyond its realistic reach. The source music becomes

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<<http://www.nytimes.com/library/film/road-film-review.html>>, accessed 31/07/02.

<sup>230</sup> Mixing refers to volume changes in a scene, with music or sound mixed up or down and thus directing audio attention. See Randy Thom, 'Randy Thom in conversation: designing a movie for sound,' in *Cinesonic: Cinema and the Sound of Music*, ed. Philip Brophy, North Ryde, AFTRS 2000, pp. 2-3.

source scoring (from within the narrative but used nondiegetically), suggesting the strength of the voices singing out, overcoming the physical boundaries of the prison camp.

During the vocal orchestra's performances, when closer shots of the women in the vocal orchestra are aurally matched by a prioritising of the voices of individual singers, the mixing attracts attention. This is an example of what Chion terms a 'synch point,' when 'the effect of synchresis ... is particularly prominent,' marking the audiovisual flow.<sup>231</sup> Altman terms this kind of aural intimacy 'for-me-ness':

The quality of sound with a high ratio of direct to reflected sound, like speech that is directed straight toward me from relatively close up. This quality characterizes most Hollywood sound, recognizing the auditor's presence while refusing to acknowledge the presence of the spectator.<sup>232</sup>

Aural intimacy with dialogue is usual in conversations between characters in Hollywood sound practice, where the uniform level soundtrack remains standard regardless of the perceiver's distance from characters.<sup>233</sup> Singing, however, is different to speaking. As an already revealing or intimate form of communication, singing is made more so when the perceiver hears in close-up what would normally be heard at a performance level further from the sound source.

Even more specifically, Altman's concept of 'point-of-audition' sound describes the change in volume level in the sequence. 'Point-of-audition' sound is sound 'as it might be heard by a character within the film,' indicated by a cut to a shot of the auditor.<sup>234</sup> In the performance sequences, Adrienne's position as conductor is as the primary internal auditor, and so the perceiver is drawn into her position in front of the vocal orchestra. There is a paradoxical effect in being brought aurally closer to individual voices in the vocal orchestra. Being closer

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<sup>231</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, pp. 58–59.

<sup>232</sup> Altman, ed., *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, p. 250.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.



to the sources of sound, foregrounding one part of the harmonising while making available for the perceiver an aural position of intimacy, is not as enjoyable as hearing the collective sound, aurally suggesting the importance in this context of the group over individual performances.

The orchestra's first public performance does seem to have a physical effect on the guards, prisoners and singers. In the sequence, as the singers are getting ready to perform, a group of guards begins to approach to break up the gathering, as has occurred previously when the vocal orchestra has attempted to practice. The guards are literally stopped in their tracks by the sound that emerges as the vocal orchestra begins to sing. The first shots of the sequence show the guards stopping, followed by shots from a position within the audience, looking at the vocal orchestra with Adrienne's back to camera. Of the forty-four shots in the sequence, which is just under four minutes long, seventeen are of the diegetic audience, including the guards, the Japanese colonel of the camp, the guard Snake (Clyde Kusatsu), and women prisoners who are not attending the performance but are still listening to it. Both diegetic audience members and the singers themselves are seen with tears in their eyes during the performance.

The vocal orchestra's music is also used as source scoring at dramatic points in the narrative. When Susie (Cate Blanchett) survives having been tortured and threatened with beheading, the sounds of the vocal orchestra performing 'Bolero' acts as a sound bridge to the next scene where the vocal orchestra is again performing to the camp. Finally, in the last moments of the film, as the women in the camp are told the war is over, the uplifting cheerful tune of 'Handkerchief Dance' from 'English Country Garden' is used as what is apparently dramatic/nondiegetic scoring. The song is then utilised as a music bridge. Images of the women hugging and celebrating the announcement that the war is over are intercut with images of an earlier vocal orchestra performance, not shown during the film, where everyone

was present. The singing becomes source music, retrospectively making the earlier dramatic music source scoring. The song acts as a coda bringing the vocal orchestra together, including those who didn't survive, to end the film. The mood of elation that is evoked by the last singing performance again enacts the collectivity that the vocal orchestra's singing has created, temporarily eliding the deaths of some of the singers.

In disturbing contrast to the collective female homosocial that is engendered by the women singing together in public is the singing performance that the brutal guard Sergeant Tomiashi, known as Snake, forces on Adrienne. Prior to this sequence, Snake has been seen brutally attacking the singing women when they are caught practising. In *Paradise Road*, this intimate singing performance is one that suggests potential danger for Adrienne. In relation to Schultz' categories, the number is an 'introspective spectacle' where the singer sings to an involved audience: Snake's singing is a kind of disturbing Siren's song to impress Adrienne. However, the intimacy that is evoked is unwanted. Narratively, the sequence occurs after the vocal orchestra's first public performance. Snake takes Adrienne alone at gunpoint into the forest. Preceding this sequence Adrienne has been attacked by one of the guards. The implication that she is about to be attacked once again is thwarted when Snake begins to sing a (presumably) Japanese song, his tone sounding mournful and sad.

Like other sections of Japanese dialogue, there is no translation for the lyrics to the song. Chion discusses what he calls the 'relativising' of speech, where the use of an untranslated foreign language serves to direct the audience to a 'secondary text.'<sup>235</sup> In this sequence, the sound of Snake's voice is the 'secondary text' that draws attention to the music, and the unknown language underlines Adrienne's confusion as to what is happening. The scene is a paradoxical comment on the universality of the 'language' of music: Snake seems to have

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<sup>235</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 180.

been affected by the vocal orchestra's music, which uses sounds that make it a universalising language to connect the female prisoners of different nationalities, and yet Adrienne is depicted as unsure how to understand the music that Snake presents to her.

The sequence is aurally and visually striking. Although mostly composed of shot/reverse shots, the longest shot in the sequence is a slow tracking back of the camera. The two of them are seated on a tree root, and the slow camera movement lessens the sense of danger as to what might happen to Adrienne. Snake sets down his gun and begins to sing. Snake's body language, his neck exposed as he sings out, suggests a man completely absorbed in his own performance. The uncertainty of Snake's intentions still carries a sense of threat as Snake continues to sing. Adrienne stiffly nods in agreement when Snake seeks her approval for his performance. She is disempowered as much by his singing as by his earlier violence, and Snake's singing is possibly more disturbing, as it seems like an attempt to communicate and/or prove dominance in the only field in which Adrienne has any power. This is a creation of unwanted intimacy, an aural echo of her experience of physical assault. The notion that Snake has been changed by the vocal orchestra's music is complicated by his continuing aggression, although this is less frequently directed at the women prisoners. At the orchestra's third performance, when they sing 'Bolero' after Susie has been tortured, Snake violently pushes another guard who interrupts his listening, problematising any change in character.

Considering singing scenes in a way that moves beyond the visually dominated approaches of much psychoanalytic theory employed by Mulvey, de Lauretis and Silverman, I have proposed an understanding of the aural spaces created by singing sequences involving female singers. I have used various aspects of theoretical work on Hollywood musicals and from film sound theory to examine more closely the kinds of performances that I have responded to and which seem to me to function in ways that are similar to but distinct from the musical number

of classic film musicals. Adding to Schultz's categories of song, I suggest that female singing sequences in non-classic films can be loosely grouped as solitary, intimate or collective performances in relation to a female homosocial. As with Schultz's categories, such groupings take into consideration who listens, who performs and who is affected by the singing, but are only an initial indicator of the complexities of songs and their functions within films.

Representations of singing often enable or strengthen a female homosocial, and female collectivity suggested through the singing in *Songcatcher* and *Paradise Road* provides examples of the empowering effect of singing for female representation. The films that I've discussed centre around the lives of non-professional singers whose singing forms part of their daily lives and routines and can be understood as a transformational practice for the characters. I've suggested ways that singing scenes can be understood to be in some ways subversive or empowering for singers and other characters. Within the logic of the narratives of *Songcatcher*, *Paradise Road*, and *Little Voice*, singing is a potentially transformational practice. In the following chapter I discuss how a consideration of female performances brings with it questions surrounding gender and performativity, and how this shapes representations of singing performances. To adequately comprehend singing sequences, the relationships between understandings of gender and music need to be more closely examined.

## 2. Gender Practice(s) and the Body

In the previous chapter I considered issues surrounding the representation of singing in relation to performance, using films which foreground the act of singing in the narrative. In this chapter I consider aspects of singing as a gendered and gendering practice, and examine how representations of gender are played out through the cinematic singing sequences in *Paradise Road*, *Only the Brave*, *Little Voice* and *Songcatcher*. The already gendered nature and ongoing gendering of singing take place in these films at the level of narrative as well as through the performances of gender of the characters. In my analysis I draw on Judith Butler's theorising about performativity to consider women and gender in relation to the act of singing and its connection to both 'performativity' and 'performance.' My use of singing scene examples is designed to clarify the complexities of these two enmeshed terms. Singing is already aligned as a feminine practice but its performance can allow a reiteration of femininity and be a vehicle of agency.

Butler's work is important because her arguments in both *Gender Trouble*<sup>236</sup> and *Bodies That Matter*<sup>237</sup> deal with the significance of performing gender as a constituting act. Butler challenges 'compulsory heterosexuality' and assumptions about gender identities in a way that fruitfully opens up questions surrounding gender. Her work has been criticised by some theorists for not being applicable to 'real' lives in any meaningful political sense.<sup>238</sup> However, her theorising can be applied to representations of singing in order to appreciate the complexities of singing scenes. Like drag, Butler's primary example of performativity, singing is an act where performance and performativity overlap in interesting and complex

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<sup>236</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

<sup>237</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* New York and London, Routledge, 1993.

<sup>238</sup> Both Lloyd and McNay are critical of the lack of political action that is afforded by Butler's work. See Moya Lloyd, 'Performativity, parody, politics,' in *Performativity and Belonging*, ed. Vikki Bell, London, SAGE Publications, 1999, pp. 195–213. See also Lois McNay, 'Subject, psyche and agency: the work of Judith Butler,' in *Performativity and Belonging*, ed. Vikki Bell, London: SAGE Publications, 1999, pp. 175–194.

ways. And as with performance, aspects of masquerade, spectacle and excess are relevant to the notion of performativity.

In the first part of the chapter I examine Butler's definitions of performance and performativity. The issue of performativity is intertwined with performance, particularly through Butler's primary example of drag as exemplifying her ideas about gender, although for Butler performativity relates to everyday behaviour. Her work doesn't consider the stage performance aspects of drag such as lip-sync and singing, but her notion of performativity is relevant for discussing how gender is created through the practices that singing entails. As with drag, singing provides a more excessive display that more obviously reveals gender performativity. In singing, the physical performance of the body is crucial to the production of the singing voice. I consider in more detail these aspects of physicality and how they relate to Butler's discussion of performativity. I then consider issues of masquerade, excess and drag, and the possible connections between singing and *écriture féminine*.

The singing sequences I examine both challenge and reflect stereotypical gender expectations, and represent how gender is constituted. In each of the films, the singing that certain female characters produce has a powerful effect within the diegesis on those around them and for themselves. In this chapter I further develop the notion that singing creates 'singing subjects' who sing alone, to and for each other, and collectively with each other. These ideas resonate with Butler's notion of performativity and the generative aspects of gender through repetition of gestures and acts. Beyond the diegetic world of the film, the representations of female singers singing are a site of empowerment, a display of aural power that is not necessarily tied to the external appearance of their bodies.

I complete the chapter by suggesting how the concept of performativity can be useful for understanding singing scenes. Examining gender performances within the four chosen films, I explore how singing reinforces or problematises the traditional play of gender. In these film stories the act of singing is of particular importance to the represented subjectivities of the women characters. Butler explains that gender performativity can be a site of resistance, allowing for ‘the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power.’<sup>239</sup> I suggest how singing scenes can be apprehended in the same way.

## PERFORMATIVITY

Butler’s work on gender and sexuality and the instability of gender categories is valuable for contemplating gendered and gendering performances, and has been extremely influential in a diversity of academic fields in relation to identity. The power of her ideas has influenced thinking on subjectivity and ‘compulsory heterosexuality,’ and her work has been foundational for queer studies. A core element of her work is the notion of gender performativity and the way it constitutes the subject. Butler’s notion of performativity is instructive for contemplating how a singing sequence can work at a metatextual level to enable a questioning of the kinds of ‘gender fables’ that are offered by gender representations, whether potentially subversive of heterosexual gender binaries or not.<sup>240</sup> In my thesis I relate the concepts of ‘performance’ and ‘performativity’ to representations of singing, as the two notions can describe what happens in singing sequences on the level of narrative, and on a metafilmic level. As used in the previous chapter, performance is what happens in a singing sequence, while ‘performativity’ describes how the singing character’s gendered and/or gendering behaviour is represented. A performance is the ‘conscious’ act of singing, but the

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<sup>239</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 33.

<sup>240</sup> The phrase ‘gender fables’ is Butler’s; she wants to map the way they produce what is considered ‘natural’ about gender identity. *Ibid.*, p. xi.

performative aspects relate to how that performance is enacted, as a constitutive display of gender.<sup>241</sup>

Butler's example of drag can, I think, be aligned with the representation of vocal performances. In contemporary Western societies, the act of drag is most frequently associated with singing (or lip-synching) drag queens, reinforced by popularised representations such as those found in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Stephan Elliott, 1994) and to a lesser extent in drag king performances, where hyper-masculinity is performed, often in a public performance context.<sup>242</sup> Because both lip-synching and singing are associated with drag, both can be considered potential sites for gender transgression or subversion.

In Western societies there is a generally consistent understanding of what is considered suitable as traditional masculine and feminine behaviour, and powerful controlling discourses operate to deem what is socially acceptable within these binarised gender roles. Such behaviours are not necessarily tied to a particular sex, although that is the way that society generally understands them to be exhibited correctly. In Western societies gender stereotyping dictates behavioural expectations based on a presumed biological binary of male and female sexes. Such cultural constructions prescribe that women should, for example, be nurturing, quiet, gentle, and work for the collective good. Women are also expected to be less physically and technically able than men, want to look 'feminine,' and want to attract a man. Kay Schaeffer notes that '(being emotional, looking feminine, acting as if motivated by maternal

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<sup>241</sup> I use 'conscious' to mean a deliberate or intentional act, as prescribed by the film script.

<sup>242</sup> Lauren Hasten broadens Judith Halberstam's definition of drag king beyond costume, defining it as someone (male or female) 'who expressly performs maleness by hyperbolising the signs of masculinity.' See Lauren W Hasten, *Gender pretenders: a drag king ethnography.* Masters thesis, Columbia University, New York, available from <<http://www.laurenhasten.com/genderpretenders.htm>>, accessed 16/01/05. While more of an American phenomenon, drag kings have been involved in a recent Adelaide Fringe Festival, as Vicki Crowley discusses in her paper, 'Drag kings down under: musicality and the making of masculinities.' Presented at the *Sonics/Synergies: Creative Cultures* conference, Adelaide, July 2003.



instinct) are marks of femininity within a masculine economy.<sup>243</sup> In the logic of this gender binary, men are the opposite: Buchbinder notes that masculinity is about proving invulnerability, and being successful in competing against other men, in all aspects of life.<sup>244</sup>

Butler's work centres around what she identifies as a need for feminism to describe how 'categories of identity are regulated and contested,'<sup>245</sup> and examining how gender and sex are defined is integral to this process. According to Butler, sex is just as constrained and regulated by society's discourses as gender, rather than being indicative of a binarised biological division. For Butler, gender is not 'the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established.'<sup>246</sup> In *Gender Trouble*, she develops linguist J.L. Austin's notion of the performative, which he originally posed in relation to language, to explain how gender operates. Phrases such as 'I now pronounce you husband and wife' or 'I promise' are performative, as they are speech acts that produce the effects they describe.<sup>247</sup> In the same way, gender is performative in that it constitutes the subject.

Rather than define sex and gender as natural and cultural categories respectively, Butler upsets claims that there is anything natural about identity:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being ... No longer believable as an interior "truth" of dispositions and identity, sex will be shown to be a performatively enacted signification (and hence not "to be"), one that, released from its naturalized interiority and surface, can occasion the parodic proliferation and subversive play of gendered meanings.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Kay Schaeffer, *Women and the Bush*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 14.

<sup>244</sup> David Buchbinder, *Performance Anxieties: Re-Producing Masculinity*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1998, p. 132.

<sup>245</sup> Judith Butler, 'Lana's "Imitation": melodramatic repetition and the gender performative,' *Genders* 9, Fall, 1990b, 2.

<sup>246</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 7.

<sup>247</sup> Eva Veith, 'Performative,' in *Critical Dictionary of Film and Television Theory*, eds. Roberta E Pearson and Philip Simpson, London and New York, Routledge, 2001, p. 324.

<sup>248</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 33.

Performativity occurs through repetitious acts to produce a coherent display of gender, ostensibly generating a cohesive identity; however, according to Butler, there is no true identity beyond performative acts.<sup>249</sup> The formation of a subject is constituted through ‘*a regulated process of repetition*’ that remains largely invisible, and that operates to conserve ‘compulsory heterosexuality.’<sup>250</sup> Subversion of such ‘hierarchical binarisms’ (of compulsory heterosexuality and existing power structures) is only possible ‘*within* the practices of repetitive signifying.’<sup>251</sup> These acts and gestures are repeated, and it is within the citationality or iterability (a term she reworks from Derrida) of performance that subversion is possible.

The notion of iterability has parallels with the repetitious practice of performance and the production of a coherent performing body. Singing performances of hyperbolised femininity, such as that of LV onstage in *Little Voice*, or where gender norms are destabilised, such as in the courageous performances of the vocal orchestra in *Paradise Road*, are sites where gender performativity is foregrounded. Reluctance to give up the notion of a person’s identity as being coherent and having some basis in a ‘truth’ of self makes Butler’s theorising impossible from a humanist position.<sup>252</sup> Such fluidity creates anxieties in a dominantly heterosexual society, but the lack of fixity of a gendered position allows identity flexibility. Butler’s work enables a questioning of the expectations and demands that surround gender; I think this questioning offers powerful possibilities for a less rigid and more tolerant understanding of gender roles and the ways in which women have been positioned in those roles.

Butler summarises that the distinction between performance and performativity is that ‘the former presumes a subject, but the latter contests the very notion of the subject.’<sup>253</sup> However,

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., p. 145. Butler’s emphasis.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> See, for example, Sabrina Barton, ‘Your self storage: female investigation and male performativity in the woman’s psychothriller,’ in *The Film Cultures Reader*, ed. Graeme Turner, London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 311–330.

<sup>253</sup> Peter Osbourne and Lynne Segal, ‘Gender as performance: an interview with Judith Butler,’ *Radical Philosophy* vol. 67, 1994, p. 33.

the ways in which these two terms are used complicates this distinction. For example, Butler describes gender ‘as a corporeal style, an “act” as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where “performative” suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning.’<sup>254</sup> The word choice of ‘act’ suggests a conscious choice of behaviour by a subject, and has the added connotations of a public or entertainment performance. Many readers interpreted Butler’s definition of performativity to mean voluntarist behaviour. Butler has acknowledged that her example of drag became a ‘paradigm for performativity,’ which was not her intention.<sup>255</sup> In *Bodies That Matter*, she clarifies that performativity is not to be interpreted as a conscious performance, a matter of searching through the wardrobe and making a choice, but conversely, that ‘gender is part of what decides the subject.’<sup>256</sup>

Valid questioning of Butler’s work centres on the ways in which she defines ‘performance’ and ‘performativity,’ on understanding how performativity is enacted, and on its political implications. Annamarie Jagose summarises Butler’s work on performativity and how others have used it, noting that the differences that Butler intended between ‘performativity’ and ‘performance’ have been elided by enthusiastic use that emphasises ‘theatricalised stagings’ of gender.<sup>257</sup> The notion that gender can be chosen was and is very appealing to theorists and others. In her succinct criticism of Butler’s work, Moya Lloyd suggests that misunderstandings about gender being something freely chosen are in part due to the lack of clarity defining the relationship between performance and performativity.<sup>258</sup> Clearly the issues of performance and performativity are intimately entwined, and further imbricated by the use of drag.

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<sup>254</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 139.

<sup>255</sup> Osbourne and Segal, p. 33.

<sup>256</sup> Butler, *Bodies*, p. x.

<sup>257</sup> Annamarie Jagose, ‘Queer,’ in *Queer Theory*, Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 1998, p. 86.

<sup>258</sup> Lloyd, p. 199.

The complexities of interpretations of Butler's definitions of performance and performativity suggest that investigation of 'theatricalised' acts in relation to performativity also need to be understood to be regulated by gender rules that prescribe behaviour. I want to foreground how an action that can be considered theatrical, that of singing, is nevertheless important for considering displays of gender performativity. Moon Joyce's conceptualisation of singing as practice rather than performance is useful when considering aspects of performativity.<sup>259</sup> Singing scenes are not always coded as theatrical performances, but both onstage and offstage performances reveal something about gender performativity and are potential sites of subverting dominant gender hierarchies.

For Butler, the gendered body is always performative, and drag exemplifies how gender categories are 'imitative' and conditional on their very performance.<sup>260</sup> Not all drag performances are necessarily subversive, and Butler argues that it is the context and reception of a parodic display that will decide whether the parody is subversive or not, as some repetitions can become 'domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony.'<sup>261</sup> This can be extended to singing sequences, where not every situation of singing may be an expression of subjectivity or power. Singing sequences are potential sites for the negotiation of subjectivities, but not all singing performances will have the same effects. As suggested in the previous chapter, where the singing takes place, and to whom it is directed, has an effect on how the sequence can be understood. Both onstage and offstage singing can be understood as performances that exhibit the performativity of gender, questioning the 'naturalness' of what it means to be female and feminine.

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<sup>259</sup> Joyce, 'Singing our way home: the strategic use of singing by women,' p. 12.

<sup>260</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 139.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

The performativity of singing contributes to the way ‘gender fables establish and circulate the misnomer of natural facts’ that Butler investigates.<sup>262</sup> But it can also subvert ‘gender fables’ and the stereotypical expectations of what is expected of feminine behaviour. Representations of the practice of singing may also displace gender norms that regulate compulsory heterosexuality. If variation within repetition of acts makes agency and subversion possible,<sup>263</sup> singing, like drag, might be an available site where such binaries can be contested.

## THE SINGING BODY

Within Butler’s work in *Gender Trouble*, the material body can seem somewhat concealed, with her assertion that there is no ‘doer behind the deed’ but that ‘the “doer” is variably constructed in and through the deed.’<sup>264</sup> Butler discusses the difficulty of using the term ‘women’ because a ‘subject’ is already ‘produced and restrained’ by power discourses, and because of the impossibility of the universality that is suggested by using such a term.<sup>265</sup> She recognises that the complexities of associating the physical with a universal assumption about ‘women’ becomes restrictive for women.<sup>266</sup> While many critical theorists find Butler’s discussion about ‘real’ bodies unsatisfactory,<sup>267</sup> within the context of her discussion she clearly refutes the notion of a ‘passive’ body that is ‘prior to discourse.’<sup>268</sup> Her discussion points out how the boundaries of bodies are culturally maintained, and that maintenance of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ understandings of the body serves as cultural control.<sup>269</sup> It is drag that ‘fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., p. 2–3.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., p. 11–12.

<sup>267</sup> Sara Sahlin provides a comprehensive summary of critiques regarding Butler’s work in Sara Sahlin, *Judith Butler*, London and New York, Routledge, 2002, pp. 137–152.

<sup>268</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 129.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., pp. 131–134.

expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity.<sup>270</sup> Holding on to the dichotomy of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ for Butler is a reinforcement of the fantasy of a stable boundary or coherent identity.<sup>271</sup>

With the practice of singing, what is ‘inner’ – the voice emerging from the body – is at the same time ‘outer’ – heard outside the body. The voice produces an expectation that something core or essential is being expressed, but through a discursive practice that uses language and music which is practiced and repeated. With onstage drag singing or lip-syncing performances, the issue of vocal identity problematises this expectation of fit between voice and body, between inner and outer. The voice of a ‘star’ diva can be used for a convincing lip-sync performance but a knowledgeable audience will hear that there is a split between singer and the vocalisation of the song, once the star voice is recognised.

This potential confusion of inner and outer is paralleled by considerations of singing that dichotomise notions of ‘naturalness’ and discipline. As a form of music, singing is already aligned with the feminine, the emotional and the body, as I have discussed. For some theorists there is also a direct physical correlation: the location and appearance of the organs that generate the voice have been compared to female sex organs. In Wayne Koestenbaum’s fascinating book on his experience of diva culture, he includes photographs of the vocal chords, which look very much like labia.<sup>272</sup> Koestenbaum suggests that the voice is understood as feminine because the organs that produce sound are hidden.<sup>273</sup> Above the vocal chords or vocal folds there is another pair of folds, known as the ‘false’ or ‘ventricular’ folds,<sup>274</sup> suggesting even more closely an anatomical association with female genitalia.

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>272</sup> Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat: Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire*, London, GMP Publishers Ltd. 1993, p. 160.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>274</sup> Johan Sundberg, ‘Where does the sound come from?’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. John Potter, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 233.

Another way in which the voice is interrelated with the female body is that in representations of singing, more so than representations of speech, the mouth is prioritised as a site of attention and of potential adoption into the body. Rosalind Coward discusses the mouth as ‘the most intimate orifice’ for women, where pleasures and prohibitions combine.<sup>275</sup> In a psychoanalytic framework, the oral drive is one of primary motivation. Echoes of the mouth and throat, and confusion with the female genitals, the *vagina dentata*, as horrifying entrance to the female body, are prolific in Western cultural forms. Sources range from TS Eliot’s poem, ‘Hysteria,’<sup>276</sup> where the poet writes of being ‘drawn in’ and ‘lost’ and ‘bruised’ by the throat of a laughing woman, to the myth of the toothed vagina as it pertains to Freudian theory and horror films.<sup>277</sup> Koestenbaum inverts the notion of being engulfed or swallowed by the female mouth, and conceives the voice of the operatic diva as one that enters his own body: his ‘listener’s body is illuminated, opened up; a singer doesn’t expose her own throat, she exposes the listener’s interior.’<sup>278</sup> As both entrance and exit (for the voice), the open singing mouth has consistently been understood as potentially erotic and frightening.

The importance of ‘lips’ and more obvious sexualised connotations also resonates in Luce Irigaray’s ‘This Sex Which Is Not One.’<sup>279</sup> In reclaiming female sexuality, in contrast to the psychoanalytic conception which places ‘woman’ as ‘lack,’ she valorises the female body and ‘her’ lips as significant sexual organs: ‘Woman “touches herself” all the time ... for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two...’<sup>280</sup> In this way Irigaray describes female sexuality as plural and directly relates the female body to a female language that is able to subvert the rigid codes of phallogentrism.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Rosalind Coward, ‘The mouth,’ in *Female Desire*, London, Paladin Grafton Books, 1984, p. 117.

<sup>276</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘Hysteria,’ in *Collected Poems 1909–1962*, London, Faber & Faber Ltd, 1963, p. 34.

<sup>277</sup> Barbara Creed, ‘Medusa’s head: the *vagina dentata* and Freudian theory,’ in *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, London, Routledge, 1993, pp. 105–121.

<sup>278</sup> Koestenbaum, p. 43.

<sup>279</sup> Luce Irigaray, ‘This sex which is not one,’ in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1993, pp. 22–33.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

In her paper on the ways in which voice is gendered, taking a linguistic and culturally aware approach, Cate Poynton points out that women in English speaking cultures ‘are expected to not speak loudly, to not use the highest range of pitch – and definitely to not speak loudly at high pitch, if they are to be taken as “ladies”.’<sup>282</sup> She also notes that the availability of the spaces where women can speak in public, supposedly more available to English speaking women, are usually ‘restricted’ or ‘distorted’ in some way.<sup>283</sup> Part of the ‘unattractiveness’ of LV’s mother Mari’s characterisation in *Little Voice* is due to her committing such transgressions of volume, pitch and place on frequent occasions. This underscores how the physical action of singing allows female singers the ability to challenge traditional vocal stereotypes of femininity, by drawing attention to themselves to be heard and not (just) seen. Singers may employ a whole range of volumes, pitches and sounds, in a context that is not as restricted or so easily controlled for women as speech, although such a strategy may still be risky in terms of acceptable cultural codes.<sup>284</sup>

Gender performativity and singing are directly connected, particularly in relation to the development of the voice, usually understood as a ‘natural’ part of biological development. However, musicologist Suzanne Cusick disputes that ‘change of voice’ for boys during puberty is due to bodily changes (such as the increase of testosterone), proposing instead that they chose their own vocal registers, and that often they perform their ‘manliness’ by rejecting singing outright.<sup>285</sup> Girls do not expect voice change, and so although their bodies and voices do physically change, that change is not acknowledged: ‘what they perform is actually much closer to the idea of gender, for they perform their culture’s *ideas* about the

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<sup>282</sup> Cate Poynton, ‘Talking like a girl,’ in *Musics and Feminisms*, eds. Cate Poynton and Sally Macarthur, Sydney: Australian Music Centre, 1999, p. 120.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Female vocal performer Diamanda Galàs, who screams, cries and uses guttural sounds, as well as a wide vocal range, is an example of a female singer who has consistently disrupted notions of what a female voice should sound like and what a singing voice should produce.

<sup>285</sup> Suzanne G Cusick, ‘On musical performances of gender and sex,’ *Sounds Australia* 51, 1998, p. 23.



nature of female puberty.<sup>286</sup> Although I think that Cusick elides the differences between conscious performance and performativity, she sees Butler's work as particularly useful for apprehending how 'musical performances might be among the ways that performances of gender and sex are learned, rehearsed and reiterated.'<sup>287</sup>

Singing emanates from the body directly, precipitating the notion that singing is something that happens 'naturally.' As I've discussed, gendered conceptions of 'nature' and 'culture' mean that what is of the body is aligned with the feminine, and what is of the mind is aligned with the masculine. The physical connections and conceptions of singing, the female body and 'naturalness' are complicated by other accounts of singing as something that must be learned and practised. The binary of natural versus trained voices occurs in representations and also in musicological and sociological accounts of the ways in which musical roles in contemporary music are gendered. For example, Mary Ann Clawson posits the idea that singing, perceived to be 'natural,' contrasts with the conception that playing an instrument requires knowledge and skill; this exemplifies how the roles in rock bands are gendered, and the difficulties that female singers face in rock bands where instrumental but not vocal expertise is recognised.<sup>288</sup>

Cusick understands the discipline of singing as another way that gender is enforced:

Girls further perform their gender by continuing to sing – continuing, that is, to perform an embodied practice that requires them to accept the imposition of many cultural disciplines deep inside the borders of their bodies.<sup>289</sup>

Such a description suggests that singing as a practice is invasive, allowing for little acknowledgement of any authorial control of the voice. In contrast, another discourse that operates around the notion of singing particularly for women is the powerful sense of release

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Clawson, p. 236.

<sup>289</sup> Cusick, p. 23.

or *jouissance*/pleasure for both performer and listener that is often made visible in film representations. The vocal orchestra's public performances in *Paradise Road* are examples of such joyous expression. This sense of freedom and transformation has been discussed by voice trainer and singer Frankie Armstrong and singing teacher and academic Victoria Moon Joyce. Each describe how singing is both a physical and mental release, empowering women who sing.<sup>290</sup> Armstrong claims that for women learning to sing and produce their voices at volume, 'much more [is] released than the singing voice.'<sup>291</sup> Similarly, from her research on how people, and particularly women, come to identify themselves as singers or non-singers, Joyce states that 'the silencing of the singing voice is very often connected to the silencing of the voice in other ways,'<sup>292</sup> suggesting how powerful singing can be for participants. These practitioner accounts of the developing singing voice accentuate how the practice and performance of singing provides access to acoustic authority that is otherwise often denied women.

Both these singing practitioners, Joyce and Armstrong, describe the experiences of singing in ways that I think that can be connected to the philosophical and poetic work of 'The French Feminists', particularly Hélène Cixous, understanding it as both an embodied and a feminine practice. Ruth Salvaggio and Kelly Oliver, among other theorists, have characterised that although the work of 'The French Feminists' is very different, one of the central similarities between them is their use of the metaphors of sound and music.<sup>293</sup> In the opening chapter I discussed Kristeva's notion of the 'semiotic' and its relation to sound. Here I want to consider Cixous's' specific use of language that directly invokes music and singing. Allusions to the singing and musical voice are woven through her work, in a way that makes any definitive

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<sup>290</sup> Frankie Armstrong, 'Bodies under siege,' in *Well-Tuned Women: Growing Strong through Voicework*, eds. Frankie Armstrong and Jenny Pearson, London, The Women's Press Ltd, 2000, pp. 64–82; Joyce, 'Singing our way home: the strategic use of singing by women'; Joyce, 'Bodies that sing: the formation of singing subjects,' (accessed).

<sup>291</sup> Armstrong quoted in Joyce, 'Bodies that sing: the formation of singing subjects,' (accessed).

<sup>292</sup> Ibid. (accessed).

<sup>293</sup> Oliver, p. 179; Ruth Salvaggio, 'Resounding bodies,' in *The Sounds of Feminist Theory*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1999, p. 63.

explication difficult. (As Toril Moi notes of Cixous, ‘her central images create a dense web of signifiers that offers no obvious edge to seize hold of for the analytically minded critic.’<sup>294</sup>) In examining singing as a means of expressing female subjectivity, however, it is instructive to consider how Cixous uses musical metaphors, and how they relate to her understanding of how female subjectivity, outside of phallogocentric discourses, might be achieved.

In Cixous’s work, *écriture féminine* (women’s writing) is the way in which female subjectivity can be achieved. Her complex notion of *écriture féminine* is something which is not defined but which works beyond phallogocentric control:

*defining a feminine practice of writing is impossible with an impossibility that will continue; for this practice will never be able to be theorized, enclosed, encoded, which does not mean it does not exist...But it will always exceed the discourse governing the phallogocentric system; it takes place and will take place somewhere other than in the territories subordinated to philosophical-theoretical domination.*<sup>295</sup>

Although Cixous disavows essentialism, identifying that ‘[t]here is “destiny” no more than there is “nature” or “essence” as such,’<sup>296</sup> she connects the practice of *écriture féminine* to the female body. ‘Woman must write her body,’ Cixous suggests.<sup>297</sup> For Cixous, *jouissance* (pleasure) is a central concept in the process, understood as ‘woman’s libidinal economy’ and ‘the feminine Imaginary,’<sup>298</sup> and is that which distinguishes a woman’s sexual difference.<sup>299</sup> *Ecriture féminine*, women’s writing, is a way of accessing this *jouissance*: ‘it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal.’<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Toril Moi. ‘Hélène Cixous: an imaginary utopia.’ in *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London, Methuen, 1985. p. 102.

<sup>295</sup> Cixous and Clément. p. 92.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>300</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘The laugh of the medusa,’ in *New French Feminisms*. eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, Amherst. The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980. p. 250.

Singing and music may also be an expression of *jouissance*, taking place beyond the phallogocentric system. Cixous employs musical allusions in her discussion of *écriture féminine* that suggest writing as a kind of singing, and connect writing to singing as an expressive practice. In *The Newly Born Woman*, Cixous conceives of the *feminine* writer as having multiple identities, ‘the wonder of being several,’ and that this writer is ‘spacious singing Flesh.’<sup>301</sup> Feminine speech, Cixous writes, resonates with song, ‘the first music of the voice of love, which every woman keeps alive.’<sup>302</sup> This voice of love has maternal and pre-Oedipal connotations, and is present before the subject’s move to language: ‘The Voice sings from a time before the law, before the Symbolic took one’s breath away and reappropriated it into language under its authority of separation.’<sup>303</sup> Cixous’s intentions with writing are to use language in a way that is ‘as musical as possible,’ and to ‘always privilege the ear over the eye.’<sup>304</sup> The song is also within and part of the body:

In me the song which, the moment it’s uttered, gains instant access to language: a flux immediately text. No break, soundsense, songsound, bloodsong, everything’s always already written, all the meanings are cast.<sup>305</sup>

Singing then, like *écriture féminine*, a writing that embodies ‘abundance, creative extravagance, playful excess, the physical materiality of the body,’<sup>306</sup> may be said to have a role in describing a female subjectivity that is not subject to phallogocentric discourse. The practice of singing, both public and private, resonates with Cixous conceptions of women’s writing: ‘my body knows unheard-of songs. Time and again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst ...’<sup>307</sup> Representations of singers ‘bursting into song’ resonates with these conceptions of *écriture féminine*.

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<sup>301</sup> Cixous and Clément. *The Newly Born Woman*. p. 88.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>304</sup> Cixous quoted in Salvaggio. p. 65.

<sup>305</sup> Cixous quoted in Françoise Defromont. ‘Metaphorical thinking and poetic writing in Virginia Woolf and Hélène Cixous.’ in *The Body and the Text*. eds. Helen Wilcox, Keith McWatters, Ann Thompson, and Linda R. Williams. New York. Harvester Wheatsheaf. 1990. p. 121.

<sup>306</sup> Pam Morris. ‘Writing as a woman: Hélène Cixous. Luce Irigaray and *écriture féminine*.’ in *Literature and Feminism*. Oxford and Cambridge. Blackwell. 1993. pp. 122–123.

<sup>307</sup> Cixous. ‘The laugh of the medusa.’ p. 246.

The voice itself has been described as being between a bodily presence and what is culturally constructed. Kaja Silverman, for example, regards the voice as ‘perhaps the most radical of all subjective divisions – the division between meaning and materiality.’<sup>308</sup> In his essay, ‘The Grain of the Voice,’ Roland Barthes describes the ‘very precise space (genre) of *the encounter between a language and the voice*’ as the ‘grain.’<sup>309</sup> The ‘grain’ is the ‘body in the voice as it sings’: it has both physical and meaning-making aspects.<sup>310</sup> Simon Frith understands the voice in four modes: as a ‘musical instrument,’ a ‘body,’ a ‘person’ and a ‘character.’<sup>311</sup> Discussing the voice as body, he points out that the ‘natural’ singing voice is culturally coded, creating expectations of gender, race and class, and is also surrounded by generic conventions.<sup>312</sup> Each of these conceptualisations of the voice brings together the physical and the performative in a way that prioritises neither.

## MASQUERADE, EXCESS AND DRAG

The detailed examinations and circulation of Butler’s work serve to suggest its importance. For me, Butler’s explications of performance and performativity can be directly related to representations of women singing, where gender is a shaping element of how singing is understood. Singing can be understood as exemplifying gender performativity, and as a practice that is embodied. By practicing or performing singing, representations of female singers are exhibiting the performativity of gender and, like drag, in a more excessive and noticeable way than everyday gender display. The practice and performance of singing are already connected to the notion of excess, wherever singing takes place. As I’ve suggested, music and the feminine overlap with the characterisation of music as a non-representational

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<sup>308</sup> Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 44.

<sup>309</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘The grain of the voice,’ in *Image, Music, Text*. London, Fontana, 1977, p. 181.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>311</sup> Simon Frith, ‘The voice,’ in *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*, ed. Simon Frith (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 187.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

form that nevertheless enables the expression and pleasurable enjoyment of emotion. Dominant organising discourses place these as opposites to the rational, and to language.

Similarly, what are constructed as acceptable vocalisations for adults do not include singing unless it takes place in particular ways and in particular forms; even then, although the use of words places it partly back into a 'rational' system, it still connects to something that is considered intangible. In this way both music and the feminine can be construed as excessive, operating beyond the bounds of the rational and logical. It is a behaviour that is primarily acceptable as a (pleasurable) onstage performance, one for others, that draws attention to the singer. Singing's connections to the body and emotionality mean that it is also excessive exposure of what is private and intimate.

The film genre that most obviously foregrounds music, the Hollywood musical, is shaped around displays of spectacle and excess. Even though it may be 'contained' in a musical through generic conventions, a musical number still represents 'emotional, physical and formal excess.'<sup>313</sup> Kristin Thompson has characterised the notion of cinematic excess as comprising those elements that are not directly explained through narrative motivation.<sup>314</sup> When the perceiver is drawn to 'style for its own sake or watch[es] works which do not provide such thorough motivation, excess comes forward and must affect narrative meaning.'<sup>315</sup> Thompson identifies four ways that elements can surpass motivation, the first of which is that 'narrative function may justify the presence of a device, but it doesn't always motivate *the specific form that individual element will take*.'<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Laing, 'Emotion by numbers: music, song and the musical,' p. 10.

<sup>314</sup> Kristin Thompson, 'The Concept of Cinematic Excess,' in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Phillip Rosen, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 131.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135. Thompson's emphasis.

Considering Thompson's first mode of excess in relation to *Little Voice*, LV's onstage performance is narratively motivated, yet the duration and manner of the multiple edited performances draw attention to the singing itself, as she takes on the various personae of the divas that she mimics. LV represents a range of singing divas and various femininities through her singing and through her display as a glamorously dressed woman. LV's onstage singing performance is one of conventionally feminised spectacle, but LV exhibits physical and vocal excess in representing 'so much' femininity. This excessiveness of femininity is distinct from LV's offstage singing in her bedroom, where it is her singing alone that exceeds the narrative. The representation of LV's public performance can, I think, be understood as an example of taking up a 'masquerade' that foregrounds the constructedness of femininity.

The conception of masquerade reverberates through feminist theory, bringing with it doubts about gender 'authenticity.' Joan Riviere, who theorised about the concept of masquerade in 1929, discusses how women may 'put on a mask of womanliness' to protect themselves when in positions more frequently associated with masculinity.<sup>317</sup> Butler suggestively posits that ' "women" who perform femininity are as much "in drag" as "men".'<sup>318</sup> Mary Anne Doane identifies masquerade as the gap between 'oneself and one's image.'<sup>319</sup> Masquerade, she writes, 'in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance' and so breaks the alignment of femininity and body or 'presence-to-itself.'<sup>320</sup> Excessive displays of femininity, then, can reveal the masquerade taking place.

The publicly performing singing woman may produce an excessive femininity because the element of masquerade is often apparent in public performance. Within this place of excessive

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<sup>317</sup> Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as masquerade,' in *Formations of Fantasy*, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, London and New York, Methuen, 1986, p. 35.

<sup>318</sup> Butler, 'Lana's "Imitation": melodramatic repetition and the gender performative,' p. 2.

<sup>319</sup> Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the masquerade – theorizing the female spectator,' in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990, pp. 47–48.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

femininity, though, is the chance for a subversion of masculine hegemony, because of the knowingness of the performer who masks herself. In Doane's discussion of masquerade, she explicitly associates the femme fatale with a knowing type of masquerade which is an 'excess of femininity.'<sup>321</sup> Luce Irigaray too speaks of femininity's '*disruptive excess*' as a way of 'jamming the theoretical machinery' that disallows subjectivity for women.<sup>322</sup> For Irigaray, understanding the feminine and challenging the phallogocentric economy are inextricably bound with what she terms mimicry.<sup>323</sup> Mimicry, or mimesis, is to 'assume the feminine role deliberately' as a way of subverting the dominance of the masculine economy, and through repetition 'make "visible" ' that the 'feminine in language' is concealed.<sup>324</sup> Assuming a connection between singing and the feminine, to take up the masquerade through singing, then, is potentially a site of transgression or empowerment.

While LV's performance does not appear to transgress an acceptable femininity, it is excessive in terms of the multiple female divas that she performs, contrasting dramatically with her earlier character representation. As with drag, the representation of her onstage performance foregrounds gender performativity. It is not that her character exhibits any kind of knowingness in her performance, except that of 'knowing' how to perform Marilyn Monroe, Marlene Dietrich, Judy Garland and Gracie Fields, but that the representation of her performance reveals an enactment of feminine masquerade.

However, while excessive, her onstage performance is one that is allowable in terms of hegemonic feminine behaviour, while her private offstage singing is not so conventional. LV's private singing is transgressive in relation to narrative expectations, particularly her first performance when Ray Say (Michael Caine) overhears her. LV's performance of 'The Man

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine,' in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Ithica, New York, Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 78. Irigaray's italics.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.



'That Got Away' is the first real expression of LV's otherwise largely silenced subjectivity. Her offstage singing is a response to her mother's behaviour and serves as a way of accessing her father's comforting presence. Although not transgressive in the way in which her offstage singing functions, LV's onstage singing also offers a temporary sense of acoustic authority for the character. Yet her acquiescence to this excessive and yet conventionalised performance leads to her collapse at the end of the concert.

Onstage, she accesses acoustic authority through her vocal representations of Monroe, Dietrich and Garland, depicting a range of femininities and overtly displaying a gender performativity that foregrounds the masquerade of femininity. Offstage, in her bedroom, her singing, initially unexpected, and surprisingly accomplished, reveals an expression of her subjectivity not realised through her character in any other way, and enables a connection to her father, transgressing normal behaviour through her singing. Her private singing is a resistance to her lack of voice in relation to others.

LV's gendered body in onstage performance exemplifies Butler's conception of gender performativity, as her reproduction of each diva's song brings with it accompanying actions and movements, suggesting each performer as a coherent identity. Butler proposes that:

acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitutes its reality.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 136.

For each fragment of song that LV sings, emulating a different diva, she adopts not only vocal identities but also physical gestures of each diva. As her concert starts and she emerges from the huge gilt cage set at the back of the stage, her shoulders are slumped and her head is down. The image of her father in the crowd prompts her to sing, and she begins, using expansive arm gestures for Shirley Bassey's 'Big Spender.' Enacting the hyper-femininity of Marilyn Monroe singing 'I Want To Be Loved By You,' she crouches down slightly to the microphone, hands on her thighs, throwing forward her chest and physically placing herself in a position of sexualised vulnerability. In low throaty tones and hands on hips she performs Marlene Dietrich's 'Falling in Love Again.' She physically mimics the singers that she emulates, and through these alternative identities as well as the brilliant mimicry of her voice, she draws attention to herself and recalls the performers she evokes. For the perceiver her performance is hardly reconcilable with LV's timid public self, although her vocal authority has already been experienced through her private performances. LV's onstage performance then is very much a drag performance in the sense of the constructedness of the female singing identities that LV emulates.

Although Butler is against the notion that gender performance is in any way voluntarily chosen, her emphasis of what is enacted on the 'surface of the body' suggests that clothes have an important part to play in constructing gender as an outward display. Marjorie Garber writes specifically about 'the ways in which clothing constructs (and deconstructs) gender and gender differences.'<sup>326</sup> Although Garber's work is centrally about cross-dressing and transvestism, her emphasis on clothing is pertinent in relation to LV's onstage performance. The stunning glamour of LV's onstage appearance not only signifies a more intense display of femininity but also alludes to the glamour of drag, which contrasts so markedly with her

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<sup>326</sup> Marjorie Garber, 'Introduction: clothes make the man,' in *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. London. Penguin Books, 1993, p. 3.

previous appearance and demeanour. Before the concert she has been dressed in jeans and plain shirts, or her demure nightgown, displaying a more androgynous appearance.

The significance of the singer's dress in assisting to produce a particular kind of onstage femininity is also represented in *Only The Brave*. When Vicki puts on Alex's mother's red dress, the singing performance that she enacts in Alex's bedroom is in excess of her everyday sense of subjectivity as a teenager. Putting on the dress and taking on the song of Alex's mother allows her to express a life and a world imagined beyond her own existence. As I consider in chapter 4, this 'trying-on' of the mother's dress and her creative expression, her song 'Seasons of Gold,' result in a reaction from Alex's father that silences Vicki's song.

## SINGING AND GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

Representations of the act of singing can work to reinforce an acceptable femininity but can also allow a way of speaking out that is otherwise not easy or even available for women. The singing together in *Paradise Road* and *Songcatcher* is an important sharing of intimacy between women under the threat of violence. In *Songcatcher*, both overt and covert violence is enacted on Lily, Deladis, Elna and Harriet because they fail to perform their gender correctly and do as men want.<sup>327</sup> The lyrics that Viney and Deladis sing express violence against women generally that is enacted but not discussed within the film.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the stereotypical gender performativity of motherhood is disrupted by the lyrics and performance of 'Single Girl' that Viney sings to Alice Kincaid (Stephanie Roth Haberle) after Alice has just given birth. Just before Alice's wayward husband arrives home, Viney sings a verse of 'Single Girl' that describes domestic violence:

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<sup>327</sup> The violence is not only directed against women, however, as the adulterous Reece Kincaid is shot by his jealous mistress, and Viney threatens Earl Giddens, an ostracised Appalachian working for the coal company to buy land cheaply, with a gunshot over his head.

‘When he comes in it’s a curse and a row/ Knockin’ down the children and pullin’ out my hair.’ Through song the violence of their community can be expressed and partially defused through the humour of Viney’s performance.

Singing also evokes a female homosocial and a sense of community and is paralleled with work and pleasure for women. Lily’s insistence on recording the songs from Deladis and Viney and the repetition required for Lily to achieve precise musical notation creates work for the two singers. Harriet (E Katherine Kerr), Elna’s lover and fellow schoolteacher, complains that she cannot finish her paper on child exploitation while Lily has Deladis sing lines over and over so that they can be recorded. Deladis, Viney and Fate (Gregory Cook), Lily’s assistant, all express incredulity that people would be paid for singing, while Tom, who has been off the mountain, and knows the value of commodities in the ‘outlander’ world, questions Lily’s motives in recording their songs.

The title of ‘songcatcher’ given to particular singers suggests that the songs exist beyond their performance, although before Lily’s intervention they are not ‘caught’ in written form, but passed down orally. There is a matrilineal passing-on of the songs as an inheritance: Deladis, the orphan, tells Lily that her songs were given to her by her Grannie. Viney Butler describes how her mother used to sing them while working, and she herself has passed on her musical talents to her grandson Tom, teaching him how to play the banjo. He doesn’t sing her love ballads though. She identifies them as ‘my’ songs when Tom insists that Lily pay for collecting the songs. Although he tries to be proprietorial about his grandmother giving her songs away for free, she is adamant that she controls the songs.

Charlotte Greig has written about the difficulties of women songwriters incorporating their experiences of and relationship to motherhood, and considers a ‘submerged’ tradition clearly

traceable from the late 60s and early 70s, but perhaps evident in earlier folk song history.<sup>328</sup> She discusses a particular British folk song 'Gathering Rushes in the Month of May' whose lyrics describe the experience of unplanned pregnancy honestly and without moralising. While she doesn't specifically address the American folk song tradition (which derives from sources from the United Kingdom) in her article, the narrative telling of stories to do with women and sexuality in the songs from *Songcatcher* resonates with her example. The subject matter and the directness with which they are sung would suggest that at least certain songs were typically an oral tradition that centred on women and their domestic and familial experiences.

The violence of the heterosexual economy of the mountains is finally successful in silencing the voices of the singing women in the film. Men show constant resistance to Lily's project. Back at her university, her professorial lover, who has not supported her application for promotion, doesn't encourage her enthusiasm at discovering ballads being sung in the mountains. Tom resents her relationship with Viney. Lily's assistant, the young man Fate, attempts to stop her from doing what she is doing by resisting and deliberately sabotaging her work. He shows his resentment of what Deladis has done for Lily by breaking the fan that was Lily's gift to her. He is also instrumental in firing the schoolhouse and destroying Lily's work. This silences the female voices that had been collected on the wax cylinders, which, along with the burning sheet music, are seen to melt and bubble as the schoolhouse is destroyed. It is a double silencing, and all women, both professional 'outlander' and mountain songcatchers, are put back into their place.

In *Paradise Road*, traditional femininity is both transgressed and reinforced by the act and pursuit of singing. The question of what is an appropriate display of gender within the vocal

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<sup>328</sup> Charlotte Greig, 'Female identity and the woman songwriter,' in *Sexing the Groove*, ed. Sheila Whiteley, New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 169.

orchestra is raised when Adrienne is challenged about her motives in becoming the conductor, at a period in history when such a position was not available for a woman. Some of the women are disapproving of a woman taking on a 'male' role like conducting. Part of the resentment about the orchestra from one woman revolves around Adrienne just wanting power for herself, when Mrs Tippler (Pamela Rabe) accuses her of wanting to 'lord it over the rest of us.' Adrienne can't be a conductor, some of the women think, because there 'aren't any' women conductors, but Adrienne and Miss Drummond refuse to agree to such a limitation. Gender stereotypes are also questioned through other character roles within the camp. Nurse Susie acts more like the camp doctor, and is encouraged to study medicine by Dr Verstak (Frances McDormand), who turns out to be a doctor of philosophy, but feels constrained by her family's need for her on their sheep station. One of the nuns at the camp is a better mechanic than her Japanese guards. However, I acknowledge that other aspects of singing in the film connect it to traditional expectations of the feminine, like 'good' or moral behaviour, and playing a nurturing and educational role.

Within the logic of the film narrative of *Paradise Road*, singing is seen as uplifting and something that becomes an indicator of honour. Music is understood as ennobling, an activity that allows the human spirit to continue in the face of deprivation, torture and tragedy. The connection between music and personal integrity is made early in the film. As Miss Drummond prays at bedtime, she hears Adrienne humming and discovers that she was a violinist at the Royal Academy. It is after this that their musical partnership is established. Singing becomes a motivation to continue in *Paradise Road*, used by Adrienne as a reason to persuade her American friend Topsy (Julianna Margulies) not to join the 'Satin Sheets' brigade when the younger more attractive women prisoners are offered a 'job' in the Japanese officers' club. The action of singing becomes a way of protecting moral virtue, and in this way enables the female characters to retain a sense of respect. More transgressively, it also

allows for the women to express courage and resistance in the face of capture, in that they hold onto their sense of self and a sense of 'civilised' culture (as opposed to their Japanese captors) through the performance of 'classical' pieces of music. Flouting the rules of the camp exhibits the choir's impressive bravery, particularly when the brutality of the guards is established early in the story.

Both the private practising and public performances of the vocal orchestra effect a female collectivity amongst the female prisoners that transcends class and race, suspending hostilities at least temporarily. After the initial gathering as the women try out for the vocal choir, practice takes place in secret, in small groups. There is both a sense of moral uplift and of gender performance in the practice sessions. Because practice must take place discreetly to ensure the personal safety of the orchestra and of nonparticipants, it happens while women are cooking or sewing together, stereotypically female gendered tasks that provide a camouflage of innocuous behaviour. Singing and its practice are seen as a healing process. During the first practice all nationalities are seen to be working together, and resentments and tensions between the different nationalities of the camp, primarily with the Dutch who control the food distribution, are partially dissolved. The vocal orchestra transforms individual women's attitudes to each other, particularly the character of Mrs Roberts (Elizabeth Spriggs), a racist who begins to accept women of other nationalities as equals partly through her involvement in the vocal orchestra. Those who are against the choir are depicted in an unfavourable light, such as the character of Mrs Tippler, who is relentlessly negative.

The concerts give the women a reason to get dressed up and put on make-up, and think about themselves as women who have sexual feelings, as is revealed by the conversation between the younger Australian nurses as they prepare for the first concert marking the anniversary of their second year in the camp. The lighting choices for the choir's public performances make

the faces of the singers and conductor luminous, as if a light was shining from within, reinforcing the underpinnings of music as ‘good.’ Despite this visual aspect, the women cannot easily be viewed as a pleasing visual spectacle. The singers cry during their performance of ‘New World,’ and Adrienne, who prior to the concert is attacked and then tortured for attempting to protect herself, has visible marks on her face from the guards’ violence as she conducts. The spectacle of the vocal orchestra is aural, as the strength of their singing as they stand and sing is what attracts the most attention.

There is also a principled underscoring in *Songcatcher*, where Lily justifies her ambitions, whether academic or capitalistic, as ‘saving’ a dying musical culture. From the opening credits of the film, music and singing are associated with education. The nature of the editing for the initial singing sequence that takes place during the opening credits, depicting a female character (later revealed as Lily) playing piano and singing the folk ballad ‘Barbara Allen,’ foregrounds the importance that music will play in the film. Lily’s musical performance at the beginning of the film initially places her as a woman performing the societal position of a middle class woman of the early 20th century in America (1907), playing the piano in her drawing room. The playing of the piano has a long history as an expected accomplishment for women of the middle and upper classes in Western societies. Lily is ‘correctly’ performing a genteel femininity with her playing. It is not until the end of the sequence that the camera pulls back to reveal a room of mostly young men, and her dialogue makes clear that she is actually teaching rather than entertaining or practising. Any specularisation of the female image is undercut by the revelation at the end of the song that the performance has been that of a musicologist teaching her pupils. Likewise, her justifiably aggressive attitude to her lover, a professor who has not supported her academic promotion, undercuts a stereotypical performance of femininity.



In the opening sequence, Lily instructs both her class and the film audience on how to consider the music that will be heard during the film. She tells her class that such folk music as she has just performed is quite 'primitive' but that 'you must learn to appreciate not only the sociological value, but the simple purity of emotions.' What initially appears to be a private performance is discovered to be a very public one, telling her class and film perceivers about a hierarchy of music in a very academic way, a hierarchy that is disrupted by the film.

The singing, which takes place in the initial moments of the film as the credits are displayed, serves as both a visual and an aural contrast to the singing of the mountain people, particularly the female songcatchers that are featured. Within the narrative and musical logic of the film, singing is much more than an expression of emotion, as I've suggested earlier: it provides a space for the creation of female collectivity, and also has educational aspects in warning women what to expect from heterosexual relationships.

Sabrina Barton argues that in cinematic representations, performativity is more readily associated with women, because feminine behaviour has been emphasised 'in terms of body parts, costume, make-up, masquerade, seduction and makeover plots.'<sup>329</sup> I think her assessment elides performativity with a sense of an overt performance of gender, as she draws a contrast between characters whose performativity is foregrounded while other character representations are for her 'coded as authentic.'<sup>330</sup> However, the masculine is just as performative as the feminine, according to Butler's theorising. Theorists such as David Buchbinder, Yvonne Tasker and Chris Holmlund have also considered the performative aspects of a range of constructions of masculinity.<sup>331</sup> As I've mentioned, Buchbinder identifies

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<sup>329</sup> Barton, p. 312.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Chris Holmlund, 'Masculinity as multiple masquerade: the mature Stallone and the Stallone clone,' in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, pp. 213–229; Yvonne Tasker, 'The body in crisis or the body triumphant?,' in *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*, London and New York, Comedia/Routledge, 1993, pp. 109–131.

one of the central traits of masculinity as ‘invulnerability.’<sup>332</sup> Thus, any display of vulnerability is to a certain extent feminising. Men who sing in the films I discuss in this chapter are most often vulnerable or in some way marginalised, and an association with singing underscores their vulnerability or more overt sensitivity.

The gendering of singing as feminine practice is largely consistent within the narrative world of *Songcatcher*. The men who are identified as having knowledge of the songs (ballads) are marginalised or ‘outsider’ characters. A young boy is identified as a songcatcher, but unlike the young Deladis, Lily considers him too young to be a reliable source. Within the film, singing is perceived as transgressive behaviour by the character of Uncle Cratis (Danny Nelson). He knows ‘all the love songs,’ but has giving up singing because he is now a preacher and condemns singing, even to the extent that he censures his niece when she sings out his name when Lily and Deladis call on him. Ironically, his preaching performance takes on some of the techniques of singing, resonating with the musical form of ‘call and response,’ inviting the participation of the congregation. Uncle Cratis’s ostensibly moralistic approach doesn’t extend to any control of his niece who is having an affair with Alice’s husband.

Tom, an outsider because he has travelled and gone to war, has musical knowledge but significantly doesn’t sing the ballads that his grandmother Viney claims as hers. Tom sings his ‘own’ song, accompanying himself on guitar, and the track he sings, ‘When The Mountains Cry,’ is the only song performed diegetically that is not a ballad. The song is used both as source music and source scoring, as Reece Kincaid’s funeral takes place. However, his singing is not afforded the same detailed visual attention that the women’s performances throughout the film are given. Men’s singing is given attention as a public performance only once in the film. At the barn dance, Earl Giddens, an educated and despised Appalachian who

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<sup>332</sup> Buchbinder, p. 33.

now works for the coal company swindling people out of their land, sings the first verse of 'Conversation with Death.' He does not appear again after he has sung, and the other man that also sings a verse is an unknown character.

Within each of the films discussed, for the women singing is a disruptive act: in *Paradise Road*, it flouts the demands of the women's captors; in *Songcatcher*, the violence and unequal power relations of the Appalachian mountain's heterosexual economy is expressed through song; Vicki's singing in *Only the Brave* facilitates Alex's fantasy of the absent (and by her father, forbidden) mother; and in *Little Voice*, LV's singing talents create the space that allows her to learn to speak out for herself. Beyond the narratives of these films, singing is an act that creates spaces, often within a female homosocial, where expression of self and subjectivity are enabled.

Butler's complex and influential discussion about gender performativity is a useful framework from which to consider how singing is both an already gendered and an ongoing gendering practice. Butler's conception of performativity, that performance is gender, can be utilised to identify the ways in which singing as a practice and in onstage performance both supports and challenges stereotypical understandings of feminine behaviour. Representations of singing offer potential sites for the expression of female subjectivity that can be interpreted as challenging women's position in relation to language, given the French feminist analysis of women's disadvantages within a phallogocentric culture. Like *écriture féminine*, the embodied practice of singing is potentially an excessive, transgressive and pleasurable means of enabling women's voices to be heard. Singing subjects producing individual and collective performances can access acoustic authority that also has the potential to be destructive, as for the character of Vicki, or to be empowering, as for other singing subjects. In the next chapter I

consider three individual singing subjects who use the force of singing to communicate more directly in ways that they cannot with language.

### 3. Singing Girls, Singing Sirens

In the previous chapter, I examined both public and private performances (onstage and offstage) of individual singing subject LV in *Little Voice*, and of women singing together, to discuss how gender performativity is revealed in singing performances. In this chapter I explore three diverse representations, individual singing subjects whose characters represent three different narrative approaches to singing, offering different pleasures and possibilities of transformation through their singing. In these three films the characters seemingly influence both the diegetic and nondiegetic musical soundscape. The singers in question are Amy (Alana de Roma) in *Amy* (Nadia Tass, 1998), Anaïs (Anaïs Redoux) in the film *A Ma Soeur!*, also known as *Fat Girl* (Catherine Breillat, 2001), and Dorothy (Isabella Rossellini) in *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986). I argue that the young singers in *Amy* and *A Ma Soeur!* present uncommon and thought-provoking representations of girlhood concerned with identities and agency that are not tied to ‘looking good’ or the kinds of ‘girl power’ discourses that often dominate representations of young girls, and that these singers at times show an adult-like awareness through their singing. Conversely, the adult singer Dorothy seemingly has less agency in singing for men, and is not empowered by her singing, and yet her singing voice permeates the film.

The first singing subject, Amy, is a young girl who, like LV, has a strong and important musical connection to her father; her singing is tied to her father’s memory and his demise. Amy’s character is different, however, as she not only sings with her father, but also sings to communicate with others, with songs and sung dialogue. The second, Anaïs, also a young girl, sings for herself, as she is largely ignored or discounted by her family and the people around her. For both these characters, singing is a practice that assists in establishing their identities for themselves and, for Amy, in relation to others. Lastly, Dorothy, an adult ‘sexy’

singing woman, sings to please others, and her onstage performances reveal little sense of empowerment. Drawing attention to the effect of aesthetic and technical choices surrounding these three representations, I consider how their subjectivities as individual singing subjects are played out in relation to their singing. I argue that both Amy and Anaïs reveal transgressive elements through their singing, while Dorothy's representation as a 'siren' depicts singing as a performance largely for men, and so for her any transgression from the dominant gendered power structures is less possible. I consider how the trope of the adult singing siren is represented as posing a threat to established societal norms, and how diegetic and nondiegetic music works to create adult female character subjectivity through the use of 1960s pop music.

As I've previously discussed, developing Guthrie Ramsey's notion, songs simultaneously suggest and create character, particularly so if the character 'chooses' the song herself. Ramsey's discussion suggesting how songs operate as sites for negotiation of both the self and group identity uses Anahid Kassabian's work that differentiates between the composed score and the compiled score. Kassabian's central thesis is that these two main types of scores engender different effects on perceivers. While composed scores comprising music written specifically for a film 'condition ... *assimilating identifications*,' compiled scores of pre-existing songs 'bring the immediate threat of history,' offering '*affiliating identifications*.'<sup>333</sup> She argues the composed score works to 'assimilate' film perceivers by encouraging perceivers to identify with a particular identity position in the film, often one outside their experience, while the compiled score produces the opportunity for 'affiliations,' with pre-existing songs more likely to open up a variety of subject positions, because the songs may have connections for perceivers beyond the film.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Kassabian, pp. 2–3. Kassabian's italics.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

Each of the three films has a combined score, using both music scored specifically for each film, and pre-existing music. There is also singing that does not fit easily into Kassabian's categories: for instance, due to the demands of the story, Amy's dialogue is mostly sung, which makes it more than just dialogue, but seemingly not scored as music. Kassabian's approach to understanding how music cultivates perceptions is useful for appraising how the individual singing subjects in *A Ma Soeur!*, *Amy*, and *Blue Velvet* sing their identities, because she identifies how music that has a 'history' with perceivers works differently to tracks composed specifically for a film. Except for characters singing along to pre-existing tracks, as in *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), diegetic singing falls outside Kassabian's discussion.<sup>335</sup> However, her classifications of assimilating and affiliating scores have resonances with the songs that singing subjects 'choose' to sing, and are repeated within the films, as I consider later in the chapter.

## SINGING AND A GIRL'S POWER

The rise and demise of English pop group the Spice Girls in the late 1990s has renewed academic interest in girls' singing and the ways feminism has been manipulated to encourage fans and sales.<sup>336</sup> 'Girl power' was a slogan espoused by the Spice Girls which evoked a position for young girls to express themselves, but was ultimately a softening of feminist claims to agency as a marketing tool for selling music, fashion, magazines, make-up and accessories. The kind of 'power' offered is one largely predicated on appearance and consumerism, and so seems to be little different to the dominant phallogentric discourses that have maintained pressure on girls and women to 'appear' rather than 'act.'

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>336</sup> See for example Germaine Greer, 'Girlpower,' in *The Whole Woman*, London: Doubleday, 1999, pp. 310–319; Susan Hopkins, *Girl Heroes*, Annadale, NSW, Pluto Press Australia, 2002.

In both *Amy* and *A Ma Soeur!*, the motif of the girl singer is used in an entirely different way, offering potential empowerment not through exploitation of young sexuality displayed in public singing performance, but one that relies on the practice of singing to express identity. In the eponymous film, Amy is eight, and represented as not yet aware of her sexuality, although when she sings she has a sophisticated singing voice. Twelve-year-old Anaïs's growing awareness and her declared views on sexual behaviour, contrasting with the actions of her sister, are a source of torment for her. For both Amy and Anaïs, singing is not represented as a sexualised performance, as it often is for adult female singers, or even young woman singers such as Vicki (Dora Kaskanis) in *Only the Brave* (Ana Kokkinos, 1994), or Julie (Toni Collette) in another Australian film, *Cosi* (Mark Joffe, 1995).<sup>337</sup>

The behaviour of both Amy and Anaïs, who use singing to communicate with others or to externalise emotion only for themselves, narratively positions them (in the realist narratives they inhabit) as significantly different to the characters that surround them. Neither of them fit a 'girl power' discourse that would allow for singing to be acceptable. In *Amy* and *A Ma Soeur!*, the girls' singing is unsettling and enigmatic. Within the narrative, Amy's singing makes people stop and listen to her where they otherwise might not. Anaïs's singing to 'herself,' intimately framed and miked in close-up, provides compelling audiovisual sequences that draw the perceiver to Anaïs's emotional perspective. Anaïs uses singing to obliquely express attitudes towards sexuality and relationships, with the effect of enabling the perceiver to better understand and potentially connect to her emotionally. Amy and Anaïs's singing as a practice, rather than as a performance, appears to offer a potentially richer source of representing identities that transgress the expected behaviour of young girls.

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<sup>337</sup> In *Cosi*, rehabilitation worker Lewis (Ben Mendlesohn) helps mental asylum patients prepare and perform Mozart's *Cosi Fan Tutte*, despite their obvious limitations of resources and talents. The character of Julie is a patient who reveals she is a talented singer, particularly with her rendition of the Hunters and Collectors' song, 'Throw Your Arms Around Me.'



In *Amy*, the practice and performance of singing and music are intrinsic to the formation of relationships, and are the cause of a traumatic death within the film. Amy ostensibly cannot speak or hear. As the story unfolds it is revealed that Amy's silence began with the loss of her rock musician father, Will Enker (Nick Barker), although initially it is not clear whether he has just left his family or died. Staggered flashbacks, each revealing a little more of the backstory, show that Amy has witnessed the death of her father onstage during a concert.

When she and her mother, Tanya Enker (Rachel Griffiths), are forced to move from the country to the city, to escape the child welfare authorities, Amy comes in contact with her new neighbour Robert (Ben Mendelsohn), a guitarist. Robert discovers that Amy can hear and can communicate through singing, a revelation that upsets her disbelieving mother. Initially Tanya sees Robert as a threat, accusing him of abduction when he entices Amy out of her house in an effort to prove she can communicate. Tanya wants to have him arrested, refusing to listen to him when he knows Amy can sing. When Amy proves him right, Tanya becomes more sympathetic and a tentative relationship begins to develop between them. After Robert's encouragement, Amy starts to sing with others to communicate, and can hear when people sing back to her in response.

Tanya also seeks the help of a sympathetic doctor, Dr Urquhart (Frank Gallacher), in an attempt to keep her child out of an institution. Eventually Amy's growing friendship with a young neighbour Zac (Jeremy Trigatti) has tragic repercussions. Sarah Trendle (Kerry Armstrong), Zac's mother, is attacked by her husband one night while she looks after Amy, and Amy runs away. When Amy is found, she is removed to an institution by the welfare authorities. Amy escapes, and again has the police and the people from her street out looking for her. Tanya finds her at an outdoor rock concert while searching with Robert and Dr Urquhart. While one of Will's songs is being played by the band onstage, the doctor forces a

distraught Amy to tell him what happened on the night that her father died, and discovers that she thinks she is responsible for his death. When she has been convinced that she was not to blame, having 'relived' the moment of her father's death, she calms down and is then able to speak. Tanya, Robert and Amy return to their street to a waiting crowd of neighbours and searchers. Amy thanks the crowd, now speaking instead of singing.

A very different film, *A Ma Soeur!* portrays the lives of two French sisters, Anaïs, who is twelve, and her beautiful fifteen-year-old sister Elena (Roxane Mesquida). Holidaying with her family, Anaïs experiences the turmoil of romance and sex vicariously, through Elena's relationship with university student Fernando (Liberio de Rienzo), who is older, more experienced and sexually demanding. Anaïs accompanies her sister everywhere, painfully aware that she is an encumbrance as well as necessary to her sister's love life. The girls' freedom rests on Anaïs's presence as a surrogate chaperone. Anaïs's relationship with her elder sister is close, but love combines with antagonism. Anaïs sings when she is ignored by Elena in favour of Fernando as they hang around the pool and go to the beach. The holiday affair turns ugly as Fernando's romantic promises, successfully employed to take sexual advantage of Elena, are exposed as lies. Anaïs tries to tell her sister that the ring Fernando gives her and his declarations regarding marriage are highly suspect. Meanwhile, the girls' father (Romain Goupil) has returned to work because he can't stand holidays. When Fernando's mother (Laura Betti) appears demanding that her ring be returned, the girls' mother (Arsinée Khanjian) cuts the rest of their holiday short, angry at Elena and what she suspects has happened. They drive into the night, eventually stopping in a lay-by to get some sleep. They are attacked by a truck driver, who kills Elena and her mother, and rapes Anaïs. When Anaïs is discovered by the police the next morning, she denies that she has been raped.

Unlike Anaïs's singing in *A Ma Soeur!*, Amy is not the only singer in the film *Amy*. What makes her the most significant singing subject in the film is that others must sing in response to her, for her to be able to hear. Her distress is both relieved and exacerbated by her proximity to another guitarist/musician like her father, as her neighbour Robert plays both acoustic and electric guitar. His playing attracts her, and Robert realises that despite what he has been told, she must be able to hear. In attempting to communicate with Amy he sings outside her front door, eventually enticing her to respond. They communicate by each singing their words to the other, and then Robert takes her to the park.

Like LV in *Little Voice*, singing is linked to the love and attention Amy has shared with her father. In the opening montage her father is up on stage in front of screaming fans. Flashbacks depict a younger Amy (Melissa Wright) and her father singing together in the musician's trailer. The song 'You & Me' begins the film, introducing Will and a young Amy. The lyrics, speaking of 'you,' 'I' and 'we,' allow multiple reading positions,<sup>338</sup> but the initial flashback of Will and Amy singing it together, and Will's declaration that it was written for Amy, make it very much her song. The integral nature of Amy's singing and her character's relationship to the musical score as a whole are foreshadowed in the opening montage of the film and the use of the song 'You & Me.' Within the context of the film, it can be understood as a song about their father/daughter relationship as well as about romantic love.<sup>339</sup> It is also the first song Tanya hears Amy singing, after Robert has told Tanya that Amy can sing and she doesn't believe him. She finds Amy sitting in their tiny backyard singing along to the song on the radio.

Amy's singing of her song evokes Will's memory for both her and her mother. Amy cannot talk about what has happened, or indeed anything, until her 'cure' in the final moments of the

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<sup>338</sup> Cubitt, p. 145 As I've mentioned, Cubitt, Frith and Goodwin all consider the multiple positions offered by song texts.

<sup>339</sup> See Appendix C for lyrics to 'You & Me.'

film. Tanya is also unable to speak of what has happened to her husband. The circumstances of Amy and Tanya's experience of loss is reinforced through the use of the song, as source music near the beginning of the film, and as dramatic scoring to end the film. Ramsey, developing Kassabian's work on composed and compiled scores and the respective assimilating and affiliating identifications that they engender, suggests that in *Do The Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989) through the repetition of Public Enemy's song 'Fight the Power' the song is able to assimilate identifications, lessening the song's 'threat of history,' or the way that multiple and diverse perceivers may already 'know' the song, by its placement and repetition in the film.<sup>340</sup> Perceivers are assimilated to understand the song as signifying Afro-American political engagement, even while the song's extrafilmic history also initially allows affiliating identifications.<sup>341</sup> Musician Nick Barker, who plays Will in the film, wrote 'You & Me' for *Amy*,<sup>342</sup> and so the song already conforms to one tendency of an assimilating music cue. However, the song's repetition directs the perceiver to understand it as representing Amy's relationship with her father and her ability to communicate about it. By its use at the end of the film, as dramatic scoring, with Will and Amy's voices singing together, the song's meaning has been encoded to signify Amy's recuperation of communication. In this way the song serves an assimilating function, drawing the perceiver to identify with Amy.

The symbiotic relationship between Amy and her mother is established at the beginning of the narrative and is reinforced by Amy's knowledge of songs like 'You & Me,' 'Ain't No Sunshine,' and 'Stand By Your Man.' In an early sequence, a doctor's conversation with an older man about someone's health is assumed to be about Tanya, who is lying dispiritedly on the couch in her pyjamas. It is not until the end of the sequence that the perceiver first sees the person who is being discussed, the silent Amy. Amy is another dimension of Tanya's grief

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<sup>340</sup> Ramsey, p. 316.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Nick Barker is a well-known Melbourne musician, who, with his band The Reptiles, reached a peak of popularity in 1994. Beyond Films, 'Amy Press Kit,' available from <<http://www.beyond.com.au/pdfs/amy.pdf>>, accessed 15/3/05.

that neither of them can express directly. She is also a rival; Robert takes the trouble to almost woo Amy to prove she can sing, before he becomes involved with Tanya. Like Amy, Tanya suffers guilt about the death of Will. Amy's silence can be seen as her defence, while Tanya has to deal with the world on her behalf. When Robert suggests that Amy will respond to singing, Tanya only half-heartedly tries.

Robert's discovery that Amy can sing is not immediately made apparent to others. When Robert and Amy return from the park they find that Tanya has called the police. The police are initially mocked as two officers are forced by their sergeant to sing on bended knee to Amy, in a Gilbert and Sullivan style. Amy doesn't respond to their nonsense lyrics. The sequence is played for comic effect, heightened by the inappropriateness of singing by someone in an official position. In a later sequence, as a group of police men and women search by lamplight for the lost Amy, their lyrics are directed specifically at Amy ('little Amy/where did you go') and signify the police reciprocating Amy's way of communicating.

Once Amy begins to sing, her effect on others is to have them sing back to her. Amy's move to singing is accompanied by her being seen more often outside the home, and having more freedom. Before this she is seen a number of times looking out from behind the bars on the windows of their house when she remains indoors, as she has been instructed to do by her mother. She connects to other people through her singing more easily than her mother Tanya seems to be able to achieve with language. Amy communicates successfully with Robert, while Tanya initially refuses to deal with him. When Tanya takes Amy to find Dr Urquhart, Amy sings desperately to her mother that she needs to go to the toilet, and it is the woman behind the information counter, with whom Tanya is arguing, that sings the directions to the bathroom in reply. Tanya's relationship to language, in contrast, is troubled. In an introductory flashback, Tanya is taunted by one of her husband's band members that she has

plenty of competition for her husband's affections. Record company executives patronise her. Tanya is also silenced by the weight of official censure, with educational experts telling her that she doesn't have the skills to teach her daughter. The chase by the child welfare authorities is institutional proof that she is not considered a 'good' mother.

Sarah Trendle (Kerry Armstrong), Mrs Mullins (Mary Ward) and Robert's sister Anny (Susie Porter), other female characters who are Tanya's neighbours, also have their speech ridiculed and discounted. While searching for Amy, where all searchers must sing out her name, Mrs Mullins reveals a rich operatic singing voice, disrupting her representation as a mean old woman. However, Anny undermines this magnificent voice by reminding Mrs Mullins that they are searching, not auditioning for the opera, effectively silencing her. Her silence re-establishes the force of the phallogentric order in relation to language, as earlier exemplified by Robert's aggressive reaction of playing louder to her expressed disdain for his music. The difference between public and private speech is exemplified by the positions of authority held by the female educational expert and the female child welfare officer, both of whom are seen to work against Tanya. In terms of French feminist theorising, the maternal is devalued by phallogentric public speech.

While the song 'You & Me' establishes the importance of music to the film, and of Amy as a singer, other aspects of the music soundtrack also relate to Amy. Robert is introduced in the narrative with a sound bridge leading to his image as he plays guitar, tracking from a long shot as Tanya and Amy arrive in their new street. The lyrics of Robert's first song describe 'a girl who's lost all feeling, she's gonna take a lot of healing,' lyrics which suggest Amy's (and Tanya's) situation. Robert uses music as a way of expressing anger but his communication is not reciprocated by any of the characters. His singing, along with his loud guitar playing, is

effective in driving away the welfare worker who is looking for Amy. He retaliates and plays loud electric guitar to Mrs Mullins when she criticises his music.

Other aspects of the soundscape are connected to Amy's aural perspective. Amy is first attracted to Robert through the sound of his guitar. She hears him playing while Tanya discusses renting the house, and is drawn to the sound. Later, she looks through the window on hearing Robert's guitar, but an increase in volume when Robert decides to annoy Mrs Mullins visibly disturbs Amy. White noise is used on the soundtrack to represent Amy's anxiety and her subjective experience of the traumatic incident of her father's death. Chion identifies such sounds as 'subjective-internal,' connected to the character's mental and physical interiority.<sup>343</sup> Whereas the dissonance of the radio, not tuned in properly to a station, seems to please Amy, Robert's continued playing initially causes Amy anxiety. The soundscape becomes 'subjective-internal' in relation to Amy, and an industrial two-tone buzz is heard increasing in volume and discordance, distinct from the initial diegetic sound of Robert's guitar but developing on the soundtrack from his loud and careless playing. The feedback-like noise is heard as getting louder as the camera tracks in on her sitting in the corner of her room, as she rocks herself to and fro in an agitated state. Amy is then seen walking up the hallway, again attracted to Robert's music making. A later segment shows Amy rocking again in a distressed state to the same noise, followed by a sequence where Robert is seated on his porch, playing guitar. The flashbacks to Will's death later in the film suggest that the noise that Amy hears is similar to the guitar and amp buzz she remembers during her father's onstage accident.

In *A Ma Soeur!*, the singing sequences serve to present an intimate aural relationship that encourages a perceiver's sympathetic understanding of Anaïs. Within the narrative of the

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<sup>343</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 76.

film, Anaïs is regarded as overweight and sullen, the ‘fat girl’ of the film’s English title. Her ‘unattractiveness’ in comparison to her sister means that she does not conform to the expectations of a conventionally acceptable protagonist. Written and composed by Catherine Breillat, the film’s director, Anaïs’s songs are obviously an important part of the character’s subjectivity. Anaïs’s singing always takes place when she is alone or being ignored by her family.

From the opening sounds of the film, prioritised by the use of a black screen, Anaïs’s singing voice is the first voice heard. The first song that she sings ‘Moi je m’ennuie’<sup>344</sup> is used as the soundtrack for the opening credits. She begins to sing (in French) ‘I get so bored ...’ and her singing voice is associated with the ‘I’ of the songs she sings. The song’s lyrics describe one who dreams of finding someone ‘alive or dead/ a man, a body/ an animal/I don’t mind/just to dream.’ As I have mentioned in chapter 1, the ‘I’ of a song has multiple identities: the singer, the character of the song, the composer/lyricist, and the perceiver.<sup>345</sup> In the context of the film, with the songs written for Anaïs, rather than as pre-existing songs, the ‘I’ is persuasively that of Anaïs. Anaïs’s singing voice is highly pitched and tuneful, but without the power of a trained voice. The same song that opens the film is continued in a different sequence a short time into the film, as Anaïs swims by herself in her family’s holiday home pool.

The lyrics, enigmatic but clearly suggesting the singer/persona desires a physical other, are contextualised by Anaïs’s opening conversation with her sister, when they discuss sex, and her play-acting in the pool in this sequence. She sings to herself of wanting to find someone even after death ‘just to dream.’ She swims between the diving board support post and the metal pool stairs, conversing with and kissing each inanimate object as if they are imaginary lovers who desire her. To one she tells: ‘You make me sick. How can you disgust and attract me so much? You’re the one I’ll give it all to.’ Elena and Fernando lay nearby, but are

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<sup>344</sup> See Appendix D for lyrics to ‘Moi je m’ennuie.’

<sup>345</sup> Cubitt, p. 145



oblivious to her presence. She sings the second song, 'J'ai mis mon coeur a pourrir' as she waits on the beach for Elena and Fernando to return from petting in the sandhills. She is the only one who sings in the film, and within the film the singing takes place in the 'everyday,' without any coding as 'performance,' and with no audience except that of the cinematic perceiver.

As with *Amy*, in *A Ma Soeur!* Anaïs's singing is significant in relation to the context of the complete soundscape. The film is dialogue-intense, with little other music besides Anaïs's singing in the film. 'Vene Carnevale,' an upbeat song by Italian world music/folk group Tavernanova primarily serves as the dramatic score. Anaïs's singing provides the source music, apart from a burst of a David Bowie rock song from the car radio, as the three drive home on the frighteningly busy motorway, near the conclusion of the film. The girls' mother argues with Elena and tells her that Elena's father wants her 'examined' because of her sexual relationship with Fernando. Anaïs tells her mother she feels sick, and they pull off the road so that Anaïs can vomit. Elena helps her, railing against their mother: 'I wish she'd die. I don't care, I'll die with her.' They return to the car and their mother switches on the radio, and David Bowie's 'The Pretty Things Are Going To Hell' is heard, starting at the chorus: 'you're still breathing but you don't know why ... Don't hold your breath but the pretty things are going to hell.'<sup>346</sup>

Using one of Chion's terms, in this sequence the radio music is 'empathetic' with the characters' distress. Empathetic music describes music 'whose mood or rhythm matches with the mood or rhythm of the action onscreen.'<sup>347</sup> The volume of the song matches the mother's anger, while Anaïs tells her the music is 'horrible' and wants her to turn it off, which she refuses to do. The track begins as source music from the car sound system, and becomes

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<sup>346</sup> See Appendix E for lyrics to 'The Pretty Things are Going To Hell.' There is another song listed in the credits: 'Social Climber,' sung by Laura Betti, is not noticeably heard on the DVD soundtrack.

<sup>347</sup> Chion. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 222.

source scoring, acting as a music bridge to the next sequence. As they eat in a roadside cafe, the song fades after Bowie sings ‘I found you out/ before you get old ...’ and an electric guitar screams over a steady drumbeat. In part the lyrics, like the dialogue that occurs before the song is heard, are prescient, in retrospect perhaps warning Anaïs of the violent deaths of Elena and her mother, who are the ‘pretty things’ within the narrative logic of the film.

The importance of Anaïs’s singing is indicated by the use of her singing voice at the opening of the film, but is also most fully comprehended in retrospect. Anaïs’s self-disclosure through singing is available to the attentive perceiver. In some ways this is underlined by the presence of subtitles for the lyrics of the songs that she sings. Translations rely on another (not necessarily the director) to describe for non-native speakers what the language suggests. Although certain subtleties might be lost, a non-French speaker must make meaning from what information he or she is given. The specifically composed songs sung by the character of Anaïs draw attention to the lyrics that suggest Anaïs’s attitudes to sex and love, and assimilates the perceiver into a position to better understand Anaïs’s character through the intimacy of sound and emotion.

In Breillat’s film, the most striking singing sequence is of Anaïs as she sits in the surf facing out to sea, while she waits for her sister and lover to finish their petting in the sand dunes. Anaïs sings for herself. A long shot initially taken from behind her creates a sense of distance but also consternation that she is being spied on and listened to by an unknown voyeur – just like the cinematic audience. The sequence is uncomfortably long, composed only of two static shots as she sings the song, and forces the acknowledgement of the perceiver’s complicity in spying both visually and aurally on a private moment.

Anaïs's singing of 'J'ai mis mon coeur a pourrir'<sup>348</sup> in this sequence, through the minimal editing working with the lyrics of the song, suggests the singing subject's inner fragility and yet awareness of adult topics like the end of love, describing intense emotion. The tone of her singing suggests a mournful state of mind, and the lyrics a sense of tragedy, as she sings of hoping crows will peck 'her' heart. Although a clear meaning cannot be ascribed through the lyrics to why she feels so upset, the singing of the song completely trains the perceiver's attentions on Anaïs and her private expression of emotion. The way the sequence is edited supports the notion that she is singing of her own despondency. Chion explains that 'synch points,' important moments of synchronicity between image and sound, define the 'audiovisual phrasing' of a sequence.<sup>349</sup> A powerful example of a synch point occurs in this singing sequence. The long shot of Anaïs sitting at the water's edge, taken from behind her, cuts to a midshot of her downcast face and wet hair which is maintained for the rest of the song, as she sings of 'my heart' as a 'lump of raw meat,' synching to suggest that it is her own heart of which she sings.

The intimacy suggested by her singing on the beach is partly due to the perceiver's aural intimacy. The closely miked voice, regardless of where the camera is positioned for the sequence, whether at a distance and from behind Anaïs, or shooting a close-up of her face, means that the sound effectively places the audience's ears up close. This is usual for dialogue, employing what Rick Altman calls the 'for-me-ness' effect of sound, which dominates Hollywood and realist narrative film-making practice, where sound reproduction with low reverb directed towards the perceiver makes 'eavesdropping' acceptable.<sup>350</sup> But like the voyeuristic intimacies made available through visual close-ups, this aural voyeurism in relation to Anaïs's singing is compelling and unsettling. The sense of closeness to Anaïs's

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<sup>348</sup> See Appendix F for lyrics to 'J'ai mis mon coeur a pourrir.'

<sup>349</sup> Chion. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 191.

<sup>350</sup> I also discuss 'for-me-ness' in chapter 1. See Altman, ed., *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, p. 61.

singing, enhanced through sound and image working together, is even more pronounced than with her previous singing.

As I've discussed in chapter 1, Altman's term 'point-of-audition' sound describes sound heard as if by a character within the narrative.<sup>351</sup> In this singing sequence, the perceiver is placed in an intimate aural relation with Anaïs's private solitary performance. It is as if the perceiver becomes an 'internal auditor,' locating the perceiver in the 'body of the character,'<sup>352</sup> hearing her own voice and the sound of the waves as Anaïs would hear these sounds. Even in the occurrences of LV's singing in her bedroom in *Little Voice*, or Vicki in *Only the Brave*, the perceiver is not so 'close' to the voice as in this sequence. With Anaïs's singing, the intimacy created is perhaps undesired and yet cannot be avoided.

This sense of 'being there' is enhanced by the use of 'territory' (ambient) sounds of the sea. Anaïs's intake of breath as she sings, an example of what Chion calls 'materializing sound indices,' marks Anaïs clearly as the source of the singing. Materialising sound indices 'refer to the concrete process of the sound's production,' and the professional singer's goal is usually to remove all extraneous sounds in performance, other than that of the voice.<sup>353</sup> The liminal space of the lonely beach is a setting that allows for this solitary performance, produced through the aural 'everyday' presentation of Anaïs's singing. Like other acoustic spaces of the female homosocial, this aural space is one that is distinctly feminine, disrupted by the intrusion of Fernando when he returns with Elena, but which resonates here with her isolation and sense of unhappiness. Her singing doesn't express empowerment but does negotiate her subjectivity as a strong and complex human being, unlike the opinion that her parents have of her, and what her image might suggest to others, as an unknowing and ungrateful child.

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., p. 60. See chapter 1 for further discussion of Altman's notion of 'point-of-audition.'

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 114.

Anaïs's anguished singing resonates with the singing history of songs of unrequited love, 'torch songs,' that have both French and American roots.<sup>354</sup> 'Mon Homme,' a popular song in France heard after World War I, provided the structure or 'formula' that was adopted by the musical 'assembly line' of Tin Pan Alley in New York.<sup>355</sup> But torch singers 'converted [songs] into areas of contestation, and used the lyrics as instruments with which to probe power relations.'<sup>356</sup> The unrequited love of a woman for an indifferent or cruel man, a man that she cannot stay away from, shapes such a song's thematic spine. And while the female singers are despairing, there is often a 'hint of narcissism,' of pleasure at being in such an emotional state.<sup>357</sup>

1930s French singer Edith Piaf exemplifies overlapping song histories of torch singing as a *chanteuse réaliste*, a realist singer, who sang of women's tortured emotions and desires.<sup>358</sup> As a film character in French cinema of the 1930s to 1950s, one of the *chanteuse réaliste*'s functions was to signal the trajectory of the story.<sup>359</sup> *Chanteuses réalistes* most usually had deep, powerful and 'imperfect' voices, 'frequently large bodies,' and 'public images as transgressive women.'<sup>360</sup> Anaïs's singing of 'J'ai mis mon coeur a pourrir' also suggests simultaneous emotional torture and defiance, the singer/persona's heart a 'raw lump of meat /o'er which you thought you held sway.' The lyrics hold multiple meanings as to whom Anaïs directs such a torturous and graphic song, suggesting a cynical opinion of romance that she observes through her sister's sexual exploitation, and a sense of abandonment by her sister,

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<sup>354</sup> The complex histories of torch singers and *chanteuses réalistes* and their differences share resonances with torch singers/blues singers and transgressive women. See for example Kelley Conway, 'Flower of the asphalt: the *chanteuse réaliste* in 1930s French cinema,' in *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, eds. Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2001, pp. 134–160, and Stacy Holman Jones, 'Torch,' *Qualitative Enquiry* 5, no. 2, 1999, pp. 280–304.

<sup>355</sup> John Moore, ' "The Hieroglyphics of Love": the torch singers and interpretation,' in *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*, ed. Richard Middleton, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 263.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>358</sup> Conway, p. 135.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

whom she has 'lost' to Fernando. Once again Anaïs expresses adult emotions through her singing voice.

In analysing *A Ma Soeur!*, a question about the differences between media forms arises, because there is a significant difference between the VHS and the DVD versions of the film that impacts on how the singing is heard. (In addition, a DVD listened to through headphones is far more accurate than a video reproduction of sound, which might be played on a variety of sound systems). It is useful to consider both media, as a way of exemplifying how small changes can make differences in the way a sequence can be perceived. In the VHS version, the film begins with a black screen on which the opening titles are projected. A voice begins to sing a song a cappella, in conjunction with the black screen and red titles. In the English version of the film, subtitles for the translation of the opening song are also seen on the bottom of the screen. Thus the film commences with a voice without a body or an age. The disembodied singing voice does sound high enough to be assumed to be female. The age of the singer is less certain, as the untrained voice might suggest youth, while the lyrics suggest a more sophisticated attitude to sexuality and desire. The opening song is accompanied by ambient sounds such as crickets and the faint cries of playing children, implying that the singing is source music (within the film world) or source scoring (ambiguously positioned but potentially related to the narrative world),<sup>361</sup> rather than dramatic scoring. The way the sound is produced suggests that the source of the voice will be revealed. The identity of the singer in the opening credits is made clear later when Anaïs continues the song, nine minutes into the film.

The DVD begins in the same way as the VHS version of the film, with titles appearing on a black screen as a voice begins to sing, but then the image of a round and emotionless face of a young girl fades up, coinciding with the name of the actor (Anaïs Reboux) who plays the part

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<sup>361</sup> Kassabian, p.47. Kassabian considers that source scoring usefully describes 'musical events open to interpretation.'

of Anaïs. The face is dramatically lit with a single key light from screen right, placing the other half of the face in shadow; her neck cannot be seen. Visually, the head is completely isolated from the body, like a ghostly apparition, although the ambient sounds and a blurred light to the right of the screen suggest the head is positioned in a physical location. The girl appears to be chewing gum, and her movements are played in slow motion.

In terms of audio-visual analysis, these two beginnings are significantly different. In the VHS version there is a sense of not knowing who the singer is, and it takes longer for the owner of the singing voice to be revealed, even though the subtitles to the song's lyrics make it clear textually that what the perceiver hears is important. As Chion describes, one of the driving forces for perceivers with regard to cinema and the human voice is the desire to identify the source.<sup>362</sup> In the DVD version, in retrospect the hints of a physical location, the ambient sounds, and the girl's chewing reminds the perceiver of the end of the film and the temporal and spatial location of Anaïs's rape. (She is eating when her family is attacked). When considered retrospectively, the lyrics to 'Moi je m'ennuie' contain hints about Anaïs's later spoken attitude to sex. As she and her sister discuss sex and love, Anaïs is adamant that she wants to lose her virginity to someone without the encumbrances of love. The singing voice, which desires a 'werewolf' or 'an animal' so that she can stop being 'bored,' is of a similar attitude.

The temporal location of the song is not clear, as it is not certain when the song is taking place within the narrative, although the singing of it continues within the film narrative. Once the complete film has been seen, there is a suggestion of circularity, as the sexual 'knowingness' of the persona of the song is now true of Anaïs, the singer. This is reinforced by the DVD version, which places the start of the film at the scene of the final crime. By the

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<sup>362</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 6.

end of the film Anaïs has now experienced sex for herself. Her rape has given her access to experiential knowledge because of ‘an animal.’ Her secret desires, known only to herself and her sister, have been fulfilled in a violent and disturbing way, and yet the musical scoring, working with the images and dialogue, undercuts understanding the rape in a solely negative way.

In the final moments of the film, a handheld shot that tracks back as Anaïs emerges from the bushes, supported between two policemen, follows as she is brought to their male superiors. One officer says disbelievingly ‘She says he didn’t rape her.’ She replies with her back to the camera ‘Don’t believe me if you don’t want to’ and turns to face the cinematic audience. A freeze frame close-up of her face is held for nearly thirty seconds. The opening bars of upbeat pop tune ‘Vene Carnevale’ are heard, in conjunction with the freeze frame image of Anaïs’s face, then the screen cuts to black on the beat of the song and the voice of the male singer begins to sing as the end credits roll.

Anaïs’s denial and her apparent lack of distress, although her face has dark circles under her eyes, coupled with the stylistic choice of the freeze frame, make for a very confrontational ending that is difficult to decipher clearly. At least one theorist understands the freeze frame as revealing Anaïs’s ‘defiant’ face, and that the director’s choice accesses French film history as a reference to the similarly defiant ending of François Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows* (1959).<sup>363</sup> The selection of the song ‘Vene Carnevale’ supports the notion of Anaïs’s defiance. The song is heard as the girls first walk past the camera in the opening sequences of the film, and then again partway through the film after Anaïs, Elena and Fernando return from the beach.

Whatever associations the pop song may initially have for perceivers, the repetition of the song, as the girls experience life away from their parents’ control, means that it has come to

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<sup>363</sup>Ginette Vincendeau, ‘Sisters, Sex and Sitcom,’ available from <[http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/2001\\_12/soeur.html](http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/2001_12/soeur.html)>, accessed 1/10/03.



signify the girls' freedom, and assimilates the perceiver to recognise Anaïs's defiance. The ending of *A Ma Soeur!* is narratively daring in having such a pivotal and unresolvable event to end the story, rather than to begin it. While the ending of the film was deemed unsatisfying because of its open-endedness,<sup>364</sup> it means that Anaïs cannot be defined by her sexuality, and refuses the category of victim, denying the role that the police want to ascribe to her. She retains a sense of defiant subjectivity in not allowing her sexual experience, although potentially traumatic, to be labelled by others.

Understood in the context of the film, there is a triumphal element for Anaïs in the violent ending, although for myself as a perceiver the cost of her self-awareness is almost too high for comfort. Ginette Vincendeau suggests that the killing of her mother and sister 'represents the most brutal male violence, but also, shockingly, Anaïs's freedom.'<sup>365</sup> Anaïs's rape, in comparison to Elena's sexual experiences, the first of which is depicted in 'real time,' is quicker and, shockingly, perhaps more honest in its display of power relations. Elena is flattered and coerced into giving in to her Italian boyfriend's demands, and her requests to Fernando to 'be gentle' are ignored outright. A comparison of the two sisters' experiences suggests that the illusory closeness of love and relationships is potentially more damaging than sex.

Linda Williams, in her review of the film in *Sight & Sound*, suggests that the final rape sequence is a dream (or nightmare) because it so completely satisfies Anaïs's strongly stated views on relationships.<sup>366</sup> Anaïs's denial suggests the veracity of the sentiments that she has both sung and spoken, of the desire for her first sexual encounter to be with someone she doesn't love. Williams suggests that the ending indicates Breillat's ongoing cinematic

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<sup>364</sup> For example, see Erica Abeel, 'Fat Girl,' review, *Film Journal International* 104, 2001, 96, and David Stratton, 'Fat Girl,' review, *Variety*, February 19–25 2001, p. 41.

<sup>365</sup> Vincendeau. (accessed).

<sup>366</sup> Linda Ruth Williams, 'A Ma Soeur!,' review, *Sight & Sound* 11, no. 12, 2001, p. 40.

representation of rape fantasies,<sup>367</sup> and Breillat herself describes the rape sequence as ‘real.’<sup>368</sup> Disturbingly, Anaïs’s rape means that she was in some ways ‘chosen,’ rather than her mother or sister, previously represented as more desirable in terms of the usual representations and requirements of femininity.

Breillat’s work is known for provocative depictions of French female sexuality. An earlier film, *Romance* (1999), graphically depicts a woman exploring sexual fulfilment outside of an unsatisfactory monogamous relationship. The woman, Marie (Caroline Ducey), participates only in relationships where she has no emotional involvement, and her experiences include bondage and rape. One of Breillat’s self-declared motives for film-making is to explore ‘female shame,’ to say things that are ‘hushed up and shut down.’<sup>369</sup> Anaïs disavows the ‘shame’ of being raped through her denial to police, underlined by her challenge for them not to believe her denial in the final moments of the film. Whether ‘real’ or imagined, Anaïs’s song of wanting sex without intimacy or connection becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The ending suggests that young girls’ sexuality is difficult, complex and cannot always be contained in the ways in which Western society expects. As Anaïs commiserates with her sister near the end of the film, ‘It’s sick people think it’s their business. It’s sick being a virgin.’

Whereas in *Amy* the young girl uses singing to effectively communicate with other characters within the film narrative, Anaïs’s singing power relates to the expression of her subjectivity that she otherwise only shares with her sister. Her impassive and emotionless expression is seen in close-up a number of times, while her singing allows the perceiver not only access to the emotional turmoil she is experiencing during her sister’s affair with Fernando, but also to the complicated relationship she has with her sister. Anaïs’s private use of public space

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> Nick James, ‘Looks that paralyse,’ *Sight & Sound* 11, no. 12, 2001, p. 20.

<sup>369</sup> Robert Sklar, ‘A woman’s vision of shame and desire: an interview with Catherine Breillat,’ *Cineaste* 25, no. 1, 1999, p. 26.

through her singing underscores the adult nature of her emotions, despite her age. Her singing reinforces the sentiments she expresses in conversations about sex that she has with her sister, and in contrast to the words that she exchanges with her parents, who both seem largely unaware of the lives and feelings of their children.

## SINGING AND SEXUALITY

In *A Ma Soeur!* and *Amy*, the girls sing ‘adult’ songs, in terms of lyrical content, although they are both still very young. This is not to denigrate the strength of emotion that children and young women can feel, but to give consideration to the ways in which the two girl characters express emotion at a more ‘sophisticated’ level than their ages might suggest. They both produce an aural rather than a visual spectacle with their singing. Neither Anaïs nor Amy is depicted as being sexually desirable in their respective films. However, Anaïs is older than Amy, and presents a more complex and challenging representation of a young girl’s sexuality, as she clearly has sexual fears and desires.

*Amy*’s representation of a pre-pubescent girl does not reproduce the dominant ideology of female spectacle (where the girl/woman is most usually significant to cinema for her ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’). When Amy sings, her audiences are mostly those who are listening so that they can communicate with her, not looking to her for entertainment. Due to the demands of the story, Amy’s dialogue is mostly sung, more directly revealing her character than does her use of ‘God Save The Queen,’ ‘Stand By Your Man’ and ‘Ain’t No Sunshine’ when her singing takes place in more public arenas. In these three singing sequences her singing is coded as a performance within the narrative. The first is when Zac, the young boy living in Amy’s street, entices her out of her house by singing ‘Stand By Your Man.’ accompanied by his own found percussion instruments (his prized hubcap collection). The performance

amuses Amy enough to bring her out of the house and get her singing along as well. Other adults in the street observe what is happening without becoming involved in the performance. In narrative order, the third performance is when she becomes lost after running away, and she busks to earn money to eat. While her potential audience is large (as commuters rush past her), no one stops to listen. Like the beggars beside her she is largely ignored as she performs 'Ain't No Sunshine,' her vocal range, strength of voice and choice of song creating a disturbing effect from one so young.

Interestingly, the singing sequence where she does make a 'spectacle' of herself, in terms of drawing attention to herself publicly through her singing, is when she sings 'God Save The Queen,' imitating the neurotic medical specialist whom she has just been to see with her mother. An older woman on the tram they are travelling on is impressed, but a young boy voices his (and possibly a Republican audience's) disgust by yelling at Amy that 'she's not our queen.' Audience disapproval is of no concern to Amy, who doesn't stop until her mother, who is embarrassed, physically gags her by putting her hand over her mouth. Amy's singing, from her joyous expression and her disinclination to stop, despite resistance, suggests that it is the pleasure of making a noise, rather than the actual song and what it might mean, that motivates her performance. The singing sequence also suggests how singing inappropriately is considered excessive. Tanya feels compelled to control the vocal excesses of her daughter, when she has previously been overjoyed at whatever noise the previously silent Amy has made. The actions of the other characters demonstrate how the use of a pre-existing song can have different implications for an audience. Like Kassabian's affiliating scores, the song allows for a range of interpretations and a positioning of the diegetic audience (and perceivers) in relation to it.

Rather than vocal excess, in *A Ma Soeur!* it is Anaïs's physical 'excess' which causes comment. The attention that Anaïs receives from her own family is largely negative, as she is criticised for her love of food and her unhappy demeanour. The film's alternative English title, *Fat Girl*, critically labels Anaïs's physical size and forewarns the perceiver of her eating habits as a constant source of discussion within the film narrative. Food is used as a solace by the females of the family, and yet appetite control is connected to desirability. The girls' mother encourages her husband, worried about his business while he is away on holiday, to eat: 'It'll take your mind off things.' However, Anaïs's eating is condemned by both her sister Elena and by her parents. Elena is constantly criticising her about her lack of self-control, and yet at other times encourages her to eat. When Fernando and his mother eat a meal with the family, Elena humiliates Anaïs about her eating, calling her a pig. Later, when Anaïs is upset after arguing with her sister about Elena's behaviour with Fernando, Elena tells her to eat and feeds her some bread, telling her 'It'll do you good.' As with the young women in *Only the Brave*, the boundary between child and adult woman and is blurred, and there is confusion about desire. Anaïs espouses seemingly quite clear views about wanting sex without love, criticising her sister's sexually teasing behaviour. Her demand for a shorter hem on her new dress is a visual expression of her wish to be desirable; her dialogue as she sings and plays by herself in the swimming pool suggests that she worries that she is not appealing enough to attract men.

The lyrics of both songs that she sings, along with the conversations she has with her sister, suggest a cynical attitude to sex and love, seemingly incompatible with her age. Yet her singing performances are compelling because of the intimacy of audition and the intensity of emotion expressed. In *A Ma Soeur!*, Anaïs's self-exposure through song is paralleled with exposure of her body. This is coupled, in the film, to a visual connection between Anaïs's singing and water, an element that is related to the feminine in Irigaray's discussion in 'The

“Mechanics” of Fluids,<sup>370</sup> and also resonates as a safe amniotic-like environment. During her first singing sequence, either nothing of Anaïs is seen at all, or in the DVD version, her disembodied face is seen. The second singing sequence takes place when she is in the pool and she is wearing bathers. For the third singing sequence, on the beach, she wears her new dress as she sits on the shoreline, getting splashed by the waves. After her song, when Elena and Fernando return to her on the beach, they find her squatting naked, her arms around herself, as her dress, hanging on a large piece of driftwood, dries in the breeze. The exchange of looks with Fernando positions her as something of disgust, something that should be covered up.

One reviewer, recalling this scene as Anaïs urinating (although this interpretation is not clear from the images shown on screen), describes this as ‘a moment that somehow conveys some primal male horror of femaleness.’<sup>371</sup> Fernando’s look of repulsion speaks of Anaïs’s position. She is frozen out of the heterosexual economy because she is not valorised as an acceptable item of exchange, at least in comparison with her more desirable sister. It is largely only her sister who listens or notices her, and then usually only to disagree. In terms of empowerment, the songs problematise the strategy of dismissing her representation as a child in an adult story. Of all the characters she seems most aware of the potential dangers of heterosexual love. Out of her mother’s hearing she exhibits a more realistic attitude than Elena about relationships and sexual awareness, realising the pathetic nature of Elena’s exchange of her virginity for a ring and hollow promises. Anaïs’s singing is a way of voicing her feelings about ‘adult’ emotions in terms of relationships, when Elena ignores or abandons her.

For both Amy and Anaïs as individual singing subjects, the transgressive or empowering potential of their singing practice has its limitations, but is still evident in their respective narratives. Amy is able to communicate through singing and have people respond to her in

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<sup>370</sup> Luce Irigaray, ‘The “mechanics” of fluids,’ in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1993, pp. 106–118.

<sup>371</sup> Abeel, p. 96.

her own way. While Dr Urqhart's cure leads her back to speech, her singing brings people together and provides her, at least for a time, with an acoustic authority usually not afforded to young girls. Anaïs, whose singing has expressed 'adult' emotions and a kind of secret inner life that her parents are not aware of, survives a rape with her understanding of sexual relations confirmed, and her desire for losing her virginity without emotional complications fulfilled. With both representations there is a sense that their practice of singing is an act that they participate in for their own senses of self, not to impress or draw attention to themselves.

Like the girl singers, the adult singer Dorothy in *Blue Velvet* seems to aurally influence the nondiegetic soundtrack. Yet in contrast Dorothy is a sexy siren who is represented mostly in relation to satisfying male sexual desire. She sings for men rather than singing as a way of expressing herself to others, although at times she is in control of what is happening in her sexual life and onstage. Her own apparent masochistic desires and her connections to undesirable criminals position her as threatening a 'respectable' moral order. But as a singing subject she herself is placed in danger through her singing and its attractiveness.

## THE DANGEROUS/ENDANGERED SINGING SUBJECT

The correlation of danger and singing women has a long history. According to Ancient Greek mythology, the Sirens were three half-woman/half-bird creatures whose seductive singing caused the death of sailors, luring ships to destruction on the rocks of the Sirens' island. They appear in Homer's *The Odyssey*, and in numerous other texts and in varying forms. In the narrative of *The Odyssey*, Odysseus is warned against the Sirens and their power by Circe, a powerful goddess who, although not known for her own moral scruples, nevertheless suggests

the real threat of the Sirens' song is an end to domestic harmony which puts them 'against the family and thus against social order.'<sup>372</sup>

The concept of magic song in Greek mythology is distinguished from other kinds of song and music making such as bardic narrative compositions (sung by men), and is equated with weaving, also a 'magic' occupation pursued by women.<sup>373</sup> French feminist Xavière Gauthier has reclaimed the figure of the witch, the woman who can do magic, as a potentially positive motif, equating witches with empowered women who are not controlled by the 'phallogocentric system,' and who 'dance' and 'sing' in ways that transgress that system.<sup>374</sup> Women and/as witches are a danger to society because they exhibit 'female strength' through their activities that relate to a knowingness of the body: 'they are in direct contact with the life of their own bodies and the bodies of others, with the life force itself.'<sup>375</sup>

In originating mythology the Sirens were not attractive, represented as birds with women's heads, sometimes sporting beards. It was their aural attractiveness that was their dangerous power. Visual representations changed in Hellenic and Classical art, when they became 'beautiful, melancholic creatures,' and one of the associations with these figures was that they represented sexual sin.<sup>376</sup> In cinema history the mythological imbrication of sexy singing women and danger is embodied in the figure of the femme fatale. She is found in a number of noir films of the 1940s and 1950s such as *Gilda*, and in contemporary cinema, such as the character of Dorothy in *Blue Velvet*. In many cinematic representations, but particularly in film noir, the femme fatale is a recurring stereotype: a sexual and powerful woman who is seen as dangerous and a threat to be contained. The femme fatale in film noir and other

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<sup>372</sup> Siegfried de Rachewiltz. *De Sirenibus: An Inquiry into Sirens from Homer to Shakespeare*. New York and London. Garland Publishing Inc. 1987. p. 18.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>374</sup> Xavière Gauthier. 'Why witches?.' in *New French Feminisms*. eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. New York. Harvester Wheatsheaf. 1981. p. 199.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 200–203.

<sup>376</sup> Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth. 'Sirens,' in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Oxford. Oxford University Press. 2003. p. 1413.



cinematic genres was also often described as a siren, in certain narratives literally a (nightclub) singer with alluring and destructive powers that were visited upon men. Frank Krutnik, in his work on film noir, notes that examples of the singing siren in film noir include Kitty (Ava Gardner) in *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak, 1946), Coral (Lizabeth Scott) in *Dead Reckoning* (John Cromwell, 1947), and Rita Hayworth as Elsa in *The Lady From Shanghai* (Orson Welles, 1948).<sup>377</sup>

The critical arguments about film noir that continue in contemporary film theory suggest that far from being a genre or style appropriate only to a particular time and place (1940s America), the elements or tropes of the style or genre still frequently appear.<sup>378</sup> Elizabeth Cowie and others also argue that predominant assumptions positing film noir as only about crises of masculinity are questionable;<sup>379</sup> this is of importance when considering the singing figure of the femme fatale/siren, because there are other ways of understanding such a character beyond that of a threat. Assumptions that shape such a long-lasting stereotype need to be questioned. Janey Place strongly argues that these ‘evil’ women characters, although often not able to survive the narrative, were often the most memorable characters of a film. This is not only because of the strength of the characters but also because of the ways in which they were framed, lit and edited on screen.<sup>380</sup> Place emphasises here the way the femme fatale’s visual representations allowed for alternative readings of the characters.

The singing of the femme fatale is one of the few areas outside of the musical genre structure where singing has been theorised as playing a particular function within the narrative. Krutnik suggests that torch songs sung in a number of 1940s thrillers function as a performance of

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<sup>377</sup> Frank Krutnik. *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*. London and New York, Routledge, 1991. p. 117. Another earlier ‘dangerous’ singing nightclub siren is Lola Lola (Marlene Dietrich) in *The Blue Angel* (Josef von Sternberg, 1930).

<sup>378</sup> See for example, Elizabeth Cowie. ‘Film Noir and Women.’ in *Shades of Noir: A Reader*, ed. Joan Copjec. London and New York, Verso, 1993.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>380</sup> Janey Place. ‘Women in film noir.’ in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E Ann Kaplan, London, BFI Publishing, 1980. p. 54.

desirability.<sup>381</sup> As I have discussed in relation to French singing history, torch songs are songs of ‘unrequited love.’ The term torch brings with it definitions of destruction (‘to torch’) and of fire (‘a light to be carried in the hand, consisting of some combustible substance’), while to ‘carry a torch’ for someone is to suffer unrequited desire.<sup>382</sup> However, Krutnik discusses the performance of torch songs in American Hollywood films primarily in terms of how the singers looked. Krutnik categorises such singers, with the exception of Gilda (Rita Hayworth) in *Gilda*, as both glamorous and ‘passive.’<sup>383</sup> ‘Erotic’ displays by ‘Siren-figure’ women mark an important narrative moment before the downfall of the male protagonist.<sup>384</sup> As with Place and her emphasis on the visible representation of the femme fatale, Krutnik describes the performance of singing of these film noir torch songs more as a function of visibility rather than of aurality, considered in terms of what that singing does to masculinity, rather than what it may mean for femininity.

In a contemporary noir example, *Blue Velvet*, Dorothy’s (Isabella Rossellini) performance resonates with the notion of a passive, glamorised performance, and if her songs are not strictly torch songs, her performance style is one of smouldering intensity that evokes a torch song history. David Lynch’s film created a great deal of comment and controversy at the time of its release, and continues to generate a diversity of contemporary analyses.<sup>385</sup> It is a multi-layered film that has been interpreted through a variety of frameworks; the film seems to exemplify Freudian tropes, and to portray characters and sexual behaviour considered by society to be beyond what is acceptable. Lynch’s complex use of soundtrack (music, sound

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<sup>381</sup> Krutnik, p. 117.

<sup>382</sup> Delbridge and others, eds., p. 2231.

<sup>383</sup> Krutnik, p. 118.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>385</sup> Analyses that take a psychoanalytic perspective include Lynda K Bundtzen, ‘“Don’t look at me!”: woman’s body, woman’s voice in *Blue Velvet*,’ *Western Humanities Review* 42, no. 3, 1988, pp. 187–203 and Lynne Layton, ‘*Blue Velvet*: a parable of male development,’ *Screen* 35, no. 4, 1994, pp. 374–393. Postmodern approaches are employed by Paul Coughlin, ‘*Blue Velvet*: postmodern parody and the subversion of conservative frameworks,’ *Literature Film Quarterly* 31, no. 4, 2003, pp. 304–311 and Jane M Shattuc, ‘Postmodern misogyny in *Blue Velvet*,’ *Genders* Spring, no. 13, 1992, pp. 73–89. Others, such as Kenneth Pellow, have taken a thematic and narrative theory approach. See Kenneth C Pellow, ‘*Blue Velvet* Once More,’ available from <<http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=9608071188&db=ufh>>, accessed 28/3/04.

effects and dialogue) is part of his signature as an auteur, and he is considered by some theorists to be one of the first directors to really understand the potential convergence between music video and film.<sup>386</sup> The film uses and reworks its pastiche setting where aural aspects of the femme fatale are as important as the visual, suggested in the ways that the song 'Blue Velvet' is used in the narrative.

The synopsis of *Blue Velvet* concerns protagonist Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle McLachlan), who returns home to Lumberton to help out with the family business after his father is taken ill. Walking home from the hospital, Jeffrey finds a severed ear, which he takes to the police station. Although he is warned by Detective Williams (George Dickerson) to forget about what he's discovered, when virginal Sandy Williams (Laura Dern), the detective's daughter, tells him that she's overheard details about what he's found, and that it involves a nightclub singer called Dorothy, he decides to get into the singer's apartment to see if he can find out more. Caught in Dorothy's apartment when she arrives home from her nightclub performance, part of which he and Sandy have observed, he hides in her wardrobe, peering through the venetian slats. He sees Dorothy get undressed and take a phone call that distresses her very much, and from which he discerns that Dorothy's husband Don (Dick Green) and son Donny (Jon Jon Snipes) have been kidnapped. Dorothy discovers Jeffrey and orders him out of the wardrobe at knifepoint, forces him to strip, threatens him and then begins to seduce him, still with the knife in her hand. They are interrupted by Frank (Dennis Hopper). Dorothy orders Jeffrey into the wardrobe to hide. He watches as Frank abuses and attacks Dorothy. Jeffrey tries to comfort Dorothy once Frank has left, but leaves when she asks him to hit her as they begin to make love.

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<sup>386</sup> Chris Rodley and David Lynch, 'She wasn't fooling anyone, she was hurt and she was hurt bad,' in *Lynch on Lynch*, ed. Chris Rodley, London, Faber & Faber, 1999, p. 125.

Later, Jeffrey follows Frank, and returns to Dorothy's apartment, wanting to 'help' her and to continue their sexual liaison. When Frank finds Jeffrey in Dorothy's apartment, he takes both Jeffrey and Dorothy on a nightmarish ride, along with his gang, to Ben's (Dean Stockwell) place. Dorothy is allowed to visit her son who is being held in a back room, while Jeffrey is attacked. Ben lip-syncs to 'In Dreams' for Frank, who leaves in a frenzy. Frank and his gang take Jeffrey to a deserted waste ground, beat him up and leave him. Still romantically involved with Sandy, Jeffrey suspects that her father and his partner are involved in Frank's underhand dealings, fuelled by Frank's conversation with Ben about drugs. When Dorothy appears naked and distraught at Jeffrey's house, revealing their affair to a horrified Sandy, they take her to Sandy's place to call for an ambulance. Jeffrey, not waiting for the police, whom he doesn't trust, returns to Dorothy's apartment, finding Don and Detective Williams' partner shot dead. When Frank appears, Jeffrey shoots him. Jeffrey and Sandy remain together, and Dorothy is seen playing in the park with her young son.

In analyses and reviews of *Blue Velvet*, a film that has a number of film noir tropes, Dorothy is described as the siren, femme fatale, or 'spider woman' who is a danger to men.<sup>387</sup> As a nightclub singer who has a knowing sexuality and exotic looks (compared to the general Lumberton populace), she's easily labelled as such, and characterised as a threat or danger to Jeffrey, regardless of the fact that it is he who pursues her. Dorothy is discussed in terms of her visibility (as a desirable or available object for the male gaze) and her sadomasochistic sexuality. Michael Atkinson's description of Dorothy as representing a number of archetypes, for example, condemns her sexuality and relationships with men without allowing for any recuperation of her character, and simultaneously denigrates her singing voice:

Down to her druggy cabaret act, she's an ageing harlot and classic Jocasta [mother and wife of Oedipus] figure, a forbidden yet frighteningly available mother figure seen purely in terms of

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<sup>387</sup> Betsy Berry, 'Forever in my dreams: generic convention and the subversive imagination in *Blue Velvet*,' *Literature Film Quarterly* 16, no. 2, 1988, p. 83.

seductive dread. At the same time, she's a pathetic victim, a wife and mother disoriented, whored and edged into sadomasochistic psychopathy by her circumstances, and longing for release through death.<sup>388</sup>

Such a misogynistic interpretation is an extreme version of the characterisation of Dorothy as only an object of (visual) desire, trapped between Frank and Jeffrey, exemplified by the scene in which both men watch her stage performance.<sup>389</sup> Examining her position as a singing subject helps to tease out some of the complexities surrounding her character, to see how her position is created through aural as well as visual means. Her onstage singing and the use of the song 'Blue Velvet' afford limited agency in a film where the singing subject largely performs for and conforms to the male characters' desires. However, her singing voice ends the narrative through dramatic scoring, commenting on the effects of the story on her character and marking her as a survivor of Frank's violence. She reclaims the song 'Blue Velvet' from both Jeffrey and Frank.

Dorothy is perceived as victim and perpetrator, both having and not having agency. She is forced, Jeffrey tells Sandy, to do 'horrible things' for Frank, but her replication of his violent sexual behaviour with Jeffrey suggests that she likes at least some of the things that Frank does to her. Initially, when she finds Jeffrey in her wardrobe, she is quite clearly in charge of the situation, and indeed takes on a powerful role that mimics Frank. She insists, with knife in hand, that Jeffrey does not look at her while she forces him to strip and then, unseen by the film audience, begins a sexual act (fellatio or masturbation – it's not clear which). In this initial sequence she has the means to kill or castrate the man, the huge knife functioning as an exaggerated Freudian phallic symbol. While her toxic relationship with Frank can be explained as a necessary evil to save her husband and child, her relationship with Jeffrey is

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<sup>388</sup> Michael Atkinson, *Blue Velvet*, BFI Modern Classics, London, British Film Institute, BFI Publishing, 1997, p. 35.

<sup>389</sup> Shattuc, p. 79.

problematic, representing her apparent desire for masochistic behaviour or, perhaps, her displaced anger at Frank acted out with another man.

Like Catherine Breillat's character of Anaïs, in her relationship with Frank Dorothy has divorced sex from intimacy. As in *A Ma Soeur!*, the question of rape, control and 'shameful' desire centres on a female who is represented as encouraging brutality. There is a combative element to Dorothy's initiation of sex with Jeffrey, and also later when she demands that Jeffrey hit her when they are having sex. Taking control with the knife is subverting a cinematic rape fantasy. It is Jeffrey who feels the shame of enjoying such brutalised desire, depicted as he awakens crying from the dream or memory of hitting Dorothy. However, while Anaïs as the central protagonist is the subject with whom perceivers are encouraged to identify, in Lynch's film it is Jeffrey who is the eyes and ears of the film. Dorothy's singing does not give access to her character in the way that the private singing of Anaïs does, or the communicative singing of Amy achieves.

Lynch's representation of female humiliation is easier to dismiss as misogynist because it is experienced through the character of Jeffrey, and his sense that such violence in lovemaking is wrong is stronger than hers – the film has a male sensibility and judgemental morality about Dorothy. In *A Ma Soeur!*, the character of Anaïs is harder to consider in the same way because pivotal sections of the film are understood from her perspective, something that strengthens perceptions that she does create her final survival when the other female members of her family are murdered. Her secret 'offstage' singing also allows more of a sense of comprehending her character for perceivers, compared to Dorothy's 'onstage' singing performances that operate to fascinate both Frank and Jeffrey, but which position the character at a distance.

## LANGUAGE AND PERFORMANCE

One of the fascinations with Lynch's work is the ways in which his dialogue is not always clear in terms of what is heard or what is intended by the words spoken by his disturbed and disturbing characters. Chion calls such dialogue 'emanation speech,' which serves to suggest an aspect of character, like a 'silhouette,' important but not essential for understanding.<sup>390</sup> Dorothy's relationship to the spoken word is a complex one, at times bordering on incomprehensibility, in contrast to her singing performances. Her use of the 'linear verbal continuum' is disrupted, as the logic of what she says is not always immediately apparent.<sup>391</sup> Her difficulty with words functions as a further obscuring of her character and motivations. Dorothy's faltering speech connects to a feminist perspective, particularly that of 'The French Feminists,' that language is phallogocentric, and so is difficult for women to use to express themselves adequately.<sup>392</sup> Jeffrey's first encounter with her reveals that she can be witty: after Jeffrey has entered the apartment pretending to be the bug man, there is another knock on the door, which she questions drolly with 'what is this? Grand Central Station?' In this opening sequence she is confident and visually coded as very much the archetypal *femme fatale*.

When Jeffrey breaks into her apartment he sees her naked and hears her speech change rapidly. Speaking to Frank on the telephone she is frightened and conciliatory. When she drags Jeffrey from the wardrobe she commands: 'Take off your clothes,' and echoes Frank's later words to her, 'Don't look at me.' Although her anxiety at Frank's appearance in her apartment is entirely believable and understandable, her adaptability within the sequence as she acquiesces to Frank's demands alerts perceivers that her actions are a performance she finds necessary for survival. The sense of action in the apartment as staged is underlined by a

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<sup>390</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 177.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid. Chion's phrase suggests a phallogocentric use of language is what is expected now in sound cinema.

<sup>392</sup> See for example Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, p. 93. Understanding language as phallogocentric is the reason for Luce Irigaray's and Hélène Cixous' (separate) calls for a different way of writing or speaking for women. I discuss the notion of *écriture féminine* in the opening chapter ('Overture') and chapter 2.

repeated shot of a billowing red velvet curtain at Dorothy's apartment window, a curtain which is reminiscent of the backdrop curtain of The Slow Club.

Dorothy performs at The Slow Club and of necessity in her own apartment as Frank comes to visit, with his own dogmatic, dangerous and perverted requirements shaping how she acts. On the phone she must call him sir, and he is both 'Baby' and 'Daddy.' His aggression plays itself out on her body, Jeffrey's body and his own body, and verbal concessions to him make no difference. Frank's sexual attack is problematised by Dorothy's apparent willingness to play the masochistic partner to his sadism, and while she is damaged by the experience, visually the sequence suggests her pleasure as she leans back her head, murmurs and smiles as Frank begins to touch her.

As the film progresses, Dorothy's hold on language seems to become more tenuous. She tells Jeffrey clearly she 'doesn't like that' when he attempts to cover her as she lies curled up on the couch after Frank's attack. But at their second meeting when Jeffrey appears at her door she tells him 'I looked for you in my closet tonight. It's crazy I know ...' The third time they meet in the apartment, after they have had sex, she talks about having Jeffrey's 'disease' in her and seems slightly deranged, although she explicitly denies that she's 'crazy.' Finally, when she appears naked at Jeffrey's house, her speech is confused and at times unclear, although it does reveal her relationship with Jeffrey to Sandy.

Dorothy's use of the words 'hit me' are also excessively repeated, as are the accompanying images that are shown of her as she says these words, with red open mouth and blue eye shadowed lids closed, head thrown back seemingly in pleasure. Even the first time that Frank hits her, her initial response is a smile as she leans her head back. Shattuc understands the stylisation of the violence around Dorothy as working to provide 'visceral pleasure' which



prioritises the male gaze.<sup>393</sup> The focus on Dorothy's mouth eroticises the words that she whispers and the image is repeated in Jeffrey's nightmare, after he is attacked by Frank. As suggested earlier, the mouth is a significant site of fear and desire. In *Blue Velvet*, the fragmentation of the repeated image of the open mouth is a disturbing and perhaps pleasurable one, and can be understood as the *vagina dentata*, the toothed vagina, suggesting danger for Jeffrey. Barbara Creed notes the scene in *Blue Velvet* that directly 'draws a playful connection between the heroine's sensually parted lips and an ornamental carving of a toothed vagina hanging on the hero's bedroom wall.'<sup>394</sup> Lynch's visual and aural focus on the female mouth is a motif repeated in *Mulholland Drive*, which I discuss in the following chapter.

Whispering brings with it a kind of intimacy that draws the perceiver into the action, closer, perhaps, than he or she would like to be. Dorothy's whispers to Jeffrey ('Hit me') fall into Altman's categories of both 'for-me-ness,' intimate sound that is directed towards the perceiver, and so coded to be heard, and sound that positions the perceiver as an intimate 'internal auditor.'<sup>395</sup> The perceiver's ears are up close as if to hear what Jeffrey hears, although the close-up of Dorothy's upturned face does not match his visual point of view. Aurally the perceiver is drawn into an intimate and intimidating situation. The perceiver is also drawn into the narrative world of Dorothy (and Frank) through the use and reuse of early 1960s pop tunes.

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<sup>393</sup> Shattuc, p. 80. She confuses the two sexual sequences with Jeffrey in making her claims regarding the 'visual abstraction' of the representation of violence, stating that after Frank's violent visit, Dorothy 'seduces the protagonist at knifepoint.' However, Jeffrey walks away from Dorothy when she asks him to hit her.

<sup>394</sup> Barbara Creed. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London, Routledge, 1993, p. 107. The cover of her book also replicates the same kind of fragmenting of image that parallels the close-ups of Dorothy's mouth, and of Rita in *Mulholland Drive*.

<sup>395</sup> Altman, ed., *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, p. 60.

## THE BLUE LADY ONSTAGE

Dorothy's singing takes place on the stage of The Slow Club, firstly witnessed by Sandy and Jeffrey, as they wait to implement Jeffrey's plan of getting into Dorothy's apartment, and then later in the film as Frank and his gang attend her performance, and Jeffrey watches both Dorothy and Frank. With the figure of the femme fatale, the visual aspects of feminine masquerade are often excessive, and this is the case with the character of Dorothy, who wears her make-up and wig as part of her persona as sexual singing woman. She is always dressed for public performance. Even when she is with her son little Donny in the park once she has been 'rescued' from Frank, she still wears her black curly wig, suggesting the sequence of maternal bliss as she plays with little Donny in the park is not quite the restoration to normality that it appears to be.

In this final scene Dorothy is restored to the position of motherhood and safety in the film, without her mask of make-up and her ultra feminine outfits.<sup>396</sup> However, the wig is an indication that her subjectivity restored is not necessarily returned to a single note of motherhood. In this way, the character of Dorothy retains a glimmer of dangerousness and ability to unsettle. This is reinforced by the dramatic scoring of the last line of her version of 'Blue Velvet,' as considered in detail below. During the film she removes the wig after Frank's first phone call, when she is at her most desperate, having spoken to her kidnapped husband and son. In the sequence, she rips the wig off her head and crawls on her hands and knees as if she has been punched in the stomach. Dressed only in her underwear, she looks at something hidden under the couch. Jeffrey's later investigation under the couch reveals a portrait of her family, and a copy of her wedding certificate. The removal of her wig and the

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<sup>396</sup> Isabella Rossellini interpreted Dorothy as a woman masking herself because she 'is afraid of what she looks like.' Rodley and Lynch, p. 126.

revelation of the bandaged hair underneath disrupt the possible erotic pleasure of seeing Dorothy naked.

Dorothy's make-up is also part of the excessive femininity that a siren may exhibit, with heavy blue eyelids and bright red lips. Chion describes Dorothy's make-up as looking like a 'poisonous flower.'<sup>397</sup> Make-up, most usually a signifier of femininity, is also used by both Frank and Ben, both of whom have an overt relationship to music in the film. Drug dealer Ben's weird suburban club, called both This is It and Pussy Heaven, is where little Donny is held captive, and where Ben lip-syncs 'In Dreams' at Frank's insistence. Ben seems to impress Frank, who calls him a 'suave fuck.' Ben wears eyeliner, earrings, and a frilly white shirt, and the theatricality or excessiveness of his behaviour (the widening of the eyes as he is talking, although he is softly spoken) all suggest a feminised display, perhaps even homosexuality. However, these signifiers are complicated by Ben's actions. Any easy assumptions are disrupted by the casual violence with which Ben punches Jeffrey in the stomach, without needing any encouragement from Frank. Frank also uses make-up, heightening anxiety during his attack of Jeffrey, after they leave Pussy Heaven. Frank smears Dorothy's red lipstick on his own lips before kissing, 'singing' to, and beating Jeffrey, while 'In Dreams' plays on the car stereo.

Lynch is recognised as a talented user of 'found' music, in the way that he creates a powerful syncretic relationship: 'Not only are his images transformed by the sounds and sentiments of the music, but these images in turn re-invent the music itself – twisting its meaning or complicating its often simple emotive intent until the two become inseparable.'<sup>398</sup> Lynch's use of 1960s pop music and of diegetic singing sequences as 'onstage' performances or otherwise, and the layering of images, dialogue and use of other sound effects, continually

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<sup>397</sup> Michel Chion, 'Welcome to Lynchtown (*Blue Velvet, The Cowboy and the Frenchman, Twin Peaks*).', in *David Lynch*. London, BFI Publishing, 1995, p. 87.

<sup>398</sup> Rodley and Lynch, p. 125.

draw the perceiver's attention to sound. Lynch wants his chosen songs to have the effect of 'digging in' to the story.<sup>399</sup>

In the opening moments of the film, as Bobby Vinton sings 'Blue Velvet,' a montage of stylised images of small town Lumberton are seen, in a style comparable to a music video aesthetic.<sup>400</sup> A number of early images and narrative choices also alert the perceiver to the importance of sound and hearing within the context of the film: Don's severed ear, Jeffrey's ear as an image of entering and leaving a dream or a fantasy, Sandy's ability to 'hear things,' Jeffrey's inability to listen to Sandy's warning honks on the horn.<sup>401</sup> All of these elements continually alert the perceiver to consider the importance of sound and music in a film that is praised for its visual aesthetics.<sup>402</sup> Most obvious is Frank's obsession with three songs that are played and performed as source music, source scoring and dramatic scoring.

Introduced as 'The Blue Lady,' Dorothy performs her songs in a deep throated and languorous way. As with LV in *Little Voice*, in some ways Dorothy's onstage singing can be understood as excessive femininity heard and displayed for the male gaze, and so not transgressing the expectations of patriarchal hierarchies. The singer caresses herself as she stands in front of the old fashioned microphone, almost as a parody of an archetypal nightclub singer.<sup>403</sup> In comparison with the 1960s upbeat pop version sung by Bobby Vinton that is heard in the opening moments of the film, 'Blue Velvet' is slowed down to a torchy, bluesy version for Dorothy's performance in The Slow Club. Dorothy's singing is sexualised through the tempo of her performances, the lower pitch of her voice, her languid gestures, and her costuming of revealing evening gowns. She closes her eyes and exposes her neck as she

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>400</sup> Fred Pfeil, 'Home fires burning: family noir in *Blue Velvet* and *Terminator 2*,' in *Shades of Noir: A Reader*, ed. Joan Copjec. London and New York, Verso, 1993, p. 233.

<sup>401</sup> The beeping of the car horn echoes the warning honks heard in the film noir classic *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944).

<sup>402</sup> Although his analysis of the film is negative, Kenneth Pellow notes the prominence that visual aspects of *Blue Velvet* generate in reviews and commentaries. Pellow, (accessed).

<sup>403</sup> Lynda Bundtzen describes this as one of her 'heavy impersonations.' Bundtzen, p. 192.

caresses the microphone stand, much like she does when asking Jeffrey to hit her. Dorothy's two renditions of the song and her bodily gestures while onstage provide a visual and aural connection to her sadomasochistic sexual relationships with both Frank and Jeffrey.

On the publicly sanctioned space of the stage she has everyone's attention but she is also temporarily 'safe' from Frank's violence; he remains mesmerised as she sings. On the telephone she tells Frank that she likes to sing 'Blue Velvet,' suggesting that she sings the song at his request. However, any power over Frank is fragile and transitory. There are two nightclub sequences, but neither contains complete performances of a song. The fragments of Dorothy's performance are 'Blue Velvet' (Bernie Wayne, Lee Morris) and 'Blue Star' (Lynch/Badalamenti). Her first performance of 'Blue Velvet' is watched by Jeffrey and Sandy. The lyrics to the first part of the song that she sings in this sequence, describing herself 'in past tense, third person, a faded memory of male desire,'<sup>404</sup> already link back to her earlier appearance dressed in a blue robe.

The title of the film, the use of the Bobby Vinton version of the song, Dorothy's velvet robe, and her singing of the song 'Blue Velvet' signals the multiple ways that the phrase and the song become meaningful as the narrative unfolds. By her second performance, as both Jeffrey and Frank watch her, the sequence begins half way through the song, as the lyrics describe the end of a relationship, and the emotion that the 'she' of the song evokes: 'But when she left / gone was the glow / of blue velvet ... And I still can see blue velvet through my tears.'<sup>405</sup> In this second singing sequence in The Slow Club, Dorothy first sings to Jeffrey, then, noticing Frank, she looks concerned for a moment, then sings to him, afraid of him even in his docile state as he watches and listens, transfixed. There are clear limitations to her acoustic authority.

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>405</sup> See Appendix G for lyrics to 'Blue Velvet' as performed by Dorothy (Isabella Rossellini).

Jeffrey and Sandy's first date at The Slow Club, ostensibly to make sure it is safe to invade Dorothy's apartment so that Jeffrey can 'investigate' the mystery of the severed ear, superficially sets up a binary between Dorothy and Sandy. As the siren 'seduces' Jeffrey from the stage, Sandy hugs herself and rubs her arms, looking Dorothy up and down, as if she is chilled and disturbed by the singing performance she is seeing and hearing. Jeffrey meanwhile is totally absorbed, lips slightly parted, as he observes Dorothy's performance. He is drawn to her and his subsequent actions and tortured dreams attest to his attraction to Dorothy.

However, the binary of good, blonde 'all-American' girl-next-door versus bad dark-haired European femme fatale has been questioned in a number of critiques, pointing out that Sandy emerges from the darkness of the night to first introduce herself to Jeffrey, as he leaves her house after talking to her detective father. She is initially the one who gives Jeffrey the information to start him on his 'investigation,' so for some critics she also functions as a 'dangerous temptress' for Jeffrey.<sup>406</sup> Sandy is crucial in assisting him to break the law, by passing on overheard information that whets Jeffrey's desire to find out more. Michel Chion goes further to suggest that Sandy and Dorothy are two parts of one woman, because of the parallels between them, which has the effect of once again positing all women as dangerous.<sup>407</sup> Chion's evaluation serves to suggest a universalising of all women as a threat to masculinity, in a way that negatively implies the need for their control. Identifying the representations of Dorothy and Sandy as having more complex subjectivities problematises the 'bad'/'good' binary that limits female characterisations.

The aural aspects of the film position Dorothy and Sandy differently. Except for Dorothy's nightclub performance, which she finds unsettling, Sandy has no connection to the pop songs used on the soundtrack. Sandy is associated with the Julee Cruise track 'Mysteries of Love.'

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<sup>406</sup> Berry, p. 83.

<sup>407</sup> Chion. 'Welcome to Lynchtown (*Blue Velvet, The Cowboy and the Frenchman, Twin Peaks*).' p. 91.

The song is first heard as Sandy recounts her sentimental and naïve dream to Jeffrey of robins bringing light to a 'dark' world. During the sequence, an instrumental version of the song is heard, initially as source music emerging from the church that is visible behind their parked car. The song is heard a second time as romantic source music as she and Jeffrey dance together at a party, and near the end of the film as the montage of 'small town Lumberton' is seen again. The floating, ethereal sound of the song seems innocently romantic, distinctively different in style and genre from the 1960s songs that the perceiver may previously have thought of as innocent but which by the end of the film are imbued with Lynch's darker meanings.

Chion asserts that the songs 'Blue Velvet,' 'In Dreams' and 'Love Letters' are used for their lyrics,<sup>408</sup> but their function also works on a syncretic level, working with images to suggest more complex associations. The repetition of the three songs 'Blue Velvet,' 'In Dreams' and to a lesser extent 'Love Letters' results in a crossover of affiliating to assimilating identities for the perceiver. Again, in the same way that Ramsey suggests in his analysis of the use of music in *Do The Right Thing*, the repetitive use of the three songs, and the ways in which they are repeated, means that what are compiled songs that have associations for perceivers become part of an assimilating score. The three pivotal songs in *Blue Velvet* encourage the perceiver to take on Lynch's version of what these songs mean within the context of the film and the disturbing images that accompany these tracks. The perceiver has the songs' meanings changed through the film's use of them. Atkinson suggests that 'In Dreams' in particular 'can never be listened to calmly again.'<sup>409</sup>

By the time Dorothy begins 'Blue Velvet' in The Slow Club, Bobby Vinton's version of the song has already been heard by the perceiver at the opening of the film, providing a contrasting performance. While the 'innocent' Vinton version initially can be understood as

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>409</sup> Atkinson, p. 61.

part of an affiliating score, as a song with a history, Dorothy makes the song her own. The song becomes an assimilating part of the score as it becomes associated with her and a darker meaning evoking a brutalised sexuality and her tortured relationship with Frank.

Frank's use of songs and his own diegetic 'singing' create the most disturbing aspect of *Blue Velvet*'s diegetic soundscape. There is repetition of three songs, 'Blue Velvet,' 'In Dreams,' and 'Love Letters,' that are associated with Frank, although 'Blue Velvet' ultimately belongs to Dorothy. Although Frank has a fascination for the song, witnessed by Jeffrey when he observes Frank watching Dorothy's performance of the song, he does not sing or speak it himself, except the title. In Frank's sexual encounter with Dorothy, he tells her 'Baby wants blue velvet,' a phrase that resonates in multiple ways in the film.

Dorothy's singing visibly influences Jeffrey, Sandy and Frank. I argue that the use of the song 'Blue Velvet' is significant in relation to the representations of all three characters, as well as to Dorothy herself. Most critical analyses concentrate on Frank's connections to and the use of the songs 'In Dreams' and 'Love Letters' in the film. Employing Chion's term, Stan Link convincingly argues that music choices that seem to be anempathetic<sup>410</sup> (that is, diegetic music that is seemingly 'indifferent' to what is seen on screen) can work to suggest 'the individuation of the psycho-killer's personality.'<sup>411</sup> Frank uses 'In Dreams' as a kind of self-motivator for violence: Ben lip-syncs the song for Frank, which drives Frank into a frenzy; Frank also plays the track on the car stereo while he brutalises Jeffrey.

Link suggests that with the character of Frank Booth, this individuation takes on the form of self-actualisation, as Frank's use of 'In Dreams' suggests that the tune 'articulates Booth's

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<sup>410</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 221.

<sup>411</sup> Stan Link, 'Sympathy with the Devil? Music of the psycho post-*Psycho*,' *Screen* 45, no. 1, 2004, p. 7.



damaged past.<sup>412</sup> This seems true also of 'Love Letters,' the lyrics of which Frank speaks while 'In Dreams' is heard as he terrorises Jeffrey. However, the power of Dorothy's version of 'Blue Velvet' extends beyond the narrative of the film; the track is used in the final moments of the film to undercut the 'happy ending,' not only for Dorothy, who is now reunited with her son, but for the rest of the characters as well. The last line of the song is heard, 'and I still can see blue velvet through my tears,' suggesting that the effects of what has gone before will resonate with the characters within the film and the perceivers who have just experienced it.

Dorothy's stage name draws attention to David Lynch's use of colour, during the singing sequences and throughout the film. Blue lighting contrasts with the red velvet curtain seen behind her onstage at The Slow Club. The image of swaying blue velvet of the opening and closing titles might be a stage curtain, but it is also the same material of Dorothy's bedroom robe, and the crushed blue velvet of Frank's obsession. As Jeffrey watches Dorothy from the wardrobe, and she puts on the robe after Frank's phone call, he notices a section torn from the hem. This fragment of material makes a physical contribution to Frank's sexualised/brutal pleasure, Jeffrey's torment, and the death of Dorothy's husband Don. Frank caresses the torn piece of blue velvet robe as Dorothy sings, a public but contained display of his fetishistic behaviour. He later drapes blue velvet over his gun, before he attempts to shoot Jeffrey.

While Dorothy's performance of 'Blue Velvet' has a physical effect on Frank, she is not the only performer to hold Frank's attention. At Pussy Heaven, Frank requests Ben's lip-sync performance of 'In Dreams,' which Frank calls 'Candy Coloured Clown.' To a certain extent Frank controls Ben's performance. Frank asks Ben twice to 'sing,' and he possesses the 'voice' for Ben, providing a cassette of Roy Orbison singing the song. In a striking lip-sync

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

sequence, Ben picks up a light attached to a power chord hanging on the wall, which casts his face into frightening shadows, and using it as if a microphone, convincingly mouths along to the words. Ben stands under an archway, a proscenium-like space, and his performance is watched and at first accompanied by Frank, who also mouths the words while standing off to one side of Ben's performance. The song at first seems to placate Frank, but then Frank's face contorts, indicating a tormented interiority. Frank ends Ben's performance before the song reaches the coda that describes disappointment of loss: 'But just before the dawn, I awake and find you gone...' <sup>413</sup> Frank rips the tape from the cassette recorder, yelling obscenities before demanding that they all leave to continue Jeffrey's hellish ride.

As Atkinson notes, the film's songs 'mean something radically different to Frank than they do to anyone else.' <sup>414</sup> Frank brutalises Jeffrey, when their car ride ends in a deserted wasteland, with 'In Dreams' playing on the car stereo. He explains to Jeffrey, twisting the lyrics to another 60s tune, 'Love Letters': 'Don't be a good neighbour to her. I'll send you a love letter, straight from my heart ... you know what a love letter is? It's a bullet from a fucking gun ...' He then continues to threaten Jeffrey with the words of 'In Dreams': 'in dreams I walk with you, in dreams I talk to you, in dreams you're mine, all the time ...' Not only does Frank speak the lyrics as the Roy Orbison track plays, but he also ventriloquises his own words using his hand like a puppet to 'speak' the lines, underlining the importance of the message for Jeffrey to stay away from Dorothy, and his own disturbed mental state. 'Love Letters,' <sup>415</sup> in which the original line is 'Love letters straight from your heart ...' is heard in its original pop version (sung by Kitty Lester) nondiegetically later in the film, when Jeffrey returns to Dorothy's apartment to find Frank, and discovers both Dorothy's husband Don and Detective Williams' partner have received Frank's idea of 'love letters,' although it is not clear from whom: both are shot dead. Although men and singing are not the focus of this

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<sup>413</sup> See Appendix H for lyrics to 'In Dreams.'

<sup>414</sup> Atkinson, p. 61.

<sup>415</sup> See Appendix I for lyrics to 'Love Letters.'

thesis, the transgressive sexualities of Frank and Ben that seem to find expression in song resonate in some ways with women's singing and subjectivity.

In feminist film criticism surrounding the film, Dorothy is most often understood solely as the object of the male gaze.<sup>416</sup> Linda Bundtzen, however, notes the importance of Dorothy's voice, although she sees its significance only in language rather than in song. Using Mary Ann Doane's work regarding the voice-off, where the voice works as a signifier and creates an unseen space in the diegesis, she argues that Dorothy's voice-off introduces 'a new meaning and space to the feminine via the ear.'<sup>417</sup> Bundtzen understands this moment of voice-off as one where Lynch has 'defetishized Dorothy through her voice,' if only momentarily.<sup>418</sup> Her words to her real son, 'Mommy loves you,' replicate her speech to Frank and recall Frank's desire to be both 'Daddy' and 'Baby.' While Bundtzen points out that Dorothy's words to little Donny are a 'helpless protest,' their repetition in this context provides Dorothy with a different identity to those ascribed to her through Jeffrey and Frank.<sup>419</sup>

Bundtzen's implication, that the voice without the female body is temporarily empowered to create a different subjectivity, conflicts in part with Kaja Silverman's argument in *The Acoustic Mirror* regarding the synchronised voice. As I've discussed in the opening chapter, Silverman argues that the disembodied female voice in cinema allows for an acoustic authority that is not possible when female voices and bodies are synchronised and therefore contained within the narrative.<sup>420</sup> However, for Silverman, the voice-off is still within the diegesis, as the body with which it belongs occupies a 'potentially recoverable space,' and so operates in a similar way to the synchronised voice, remaining contained.<sup>421</sup> In *Blue Velvet* the

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<sup>416</sup> See for example Shattuc.

<sup>417</sup> Bundtzen, p. 199.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., pp. 199–200.

<sup>420</sup> Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 141–186.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

absence of Dorothy's sexualised body is replaced with her maternal voice, whose protest to her son reclaims the language that Frank has extracted from her, and yet she remains powerless to change the situation she is in, her speaking voice commanding no power.

Dorothy's positioning in the oedipally shaped narrative suggests that she is the mother, with Jeffrey as the son and Frank the father. Given her position, her calming and seductive singing could be considered in some respects as an enveloping 'maternal voice.' This potentially maternal singing voice is used for only Frank and Jeffrey, her sexual attackers/partners, and not for her son Donny. Her maternal voice for her 'real' son is heard as a pleading, begging voice, an offscreen voice as she entreats him from behind the closed door at Ben's place.

Lynne Layton challenges Bundtzen's claims that Dorothy's maternal offers any agency, understanding the maternal voice as placing the son in the position of power: all that can be allowed, she argues, given the context of the film, the culture (in which the film is set) and Freudian theory.<sup>422</sup> For Layton, Dorothy's singing is the source of her loss of agency.<sup>423</sup> For me, the evocation of Dorothy's speaking 'maternal voice' is less powerful than her singing voice, however limited that power is, because it has less effect on those around her than her singing voice appears to have. But the limited power her singing has is questioned again by the end of the film. The images of reunited mother and son at the end of the film are undercut by the soundtrack of Dorothy's rendition of the last line of 'Blue Velvet': 'And I still can see blue velvet through my tears.' The last line of the song is heard after the song, 'Mysteries of Love' ends, as Dorothy hugs her son, and the camera pans up to the blue sky. While Dorothy is the last aural and visual presence through the use of her song, the lyrics suggest her continuing vulnerability in relation to events. However, the lyrics can also be understood as describing Dorothy's development, moving from singing of herself in third person, as 'she' in

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<sup>422</sup> Layton, pp. 385–387.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

blue velvet, to an experiencing 'I' at the end of the song, who must suffer 'my' tears, and yet in a sense has a restored subjectivity. Dorothy has survived. She reclaims 'Blue Velvet' as a song for herself and not for other men.

The representation of female singers in *Amy*, *Blue Velvet*, and *A Ma Soeur!* reveals different narrative depictions of singing that produce a range of effects in relation to a sense of empowerment for the character. The exploration of the effect of these individual singing subjects reveals claiming empowerment or subversiveness is not always possible, and that there are different ways that singing can be understood as a transgressive act. Close examination of the three films reveals how individual singing subjects affect the soundscape both diegetically and nondiegetically. My analyses of *Amy* and *A Ma Soeur!* suggest that the imbrication of singing and sexuality is disrupted by girl singers who do not fit the mould of 'girl power' discourse, who express themselves through song without the singing necessarily being a public or sexual performance. For *Amy*, it is her private singing that most convincingly communicates to other people, while for Anaïs, secret singing to herself allows for an outward expression of her subjectivity when she is ignored by her parents.

In contrast to the girls' singing, in the performances of the siren Dorothy, singing and sexuality are closely linked, and yet while her singing performances attract the (male) gaze, they also attract the ear. In *Blue Velvet*, the eponymous song is imbued not only with the knowledge of Frank's fetish, but also of Dorothy's performance of the song for others, and in the final scenes, potentially for herself (and the perceiver). The song finally operates to give Dorothy the last word on the events that have transpired. The lyrics are imbued with a sense of tragedy but enable reclamation of a sense of 'I' that was previously taken from her. While the presence of the adult singing female can be considered as a 'maternal voice,' in this chapter I have only briefly indicated the possibilities of Dorothy's voice as an enveloping

‘sonorous envelope.’ In the next chapter I consider in detail the ways in which the maternal voice operates, particularly in the case of the absent or abandoning mother.

## 4. Singing and the Maternal Voice

In the previous chapter, my discussion of *Blue Velvet* considered in part Dorothy's complex subjectivity, but with an emphasis on her sexual masochism that conflicts with her protective role as a mother. The demands of motherhood are often figured by societal norms as properly being all consuming, leaving no time for the self, career or sexual pleasure. Pre-1978, cinematic representations (generally directed by men), depicting what Lucy Fischer calls the 'struggle of the artist-mother,' usually end with an unhappy resolution of divided roles.<sup>424</sup> There are some contemporary examples where a woman's creative career can eventually exist successfully along with mothering, such as *Grace of My Heart* (Allison Anders, 1996) and *Feeling Sexy* (Davida Allen, 1998). In three recent Australian films, *High Tide* (Gillian Armstrong, 1987), *Radiance* (Rachel Perkins, 1998) and *Only the Brave* (Ana Kokkinos, 1994), the conflict between singing career and the expectations of motherhood is still shown as largely unresolvable. The singing mothers in these films don't express themselves to their daughters as competently as they can publicly through song. But while relationships are fraught with difficulty, both narratively and through the soundtrack singing creates a connection with their abandoned daughters.

In this chapter I explore mothers' voices and the potential acoustic authority that they can demonstrate. I consider the characterisation of singing subjects as abandoning mothers. The mothers are not always condemned within the films, but all reveal mother-daughter relationships that have gone 'wrong' in some way. A complex interweaving of daughters and 'surrogate' mothers impact on the singing mothers. The sexuality of singing mothers, often expressed through singing performances, is complicated by the desire of daughters for a mother. In each film there are also other singing subjects who act as mother surrogates: in

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<sup>424</sup> Lucy Fischer, *Cinematernity: Film, Motherhood, Genre*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 217.

*High Tide* and *Radiance*, it is grandmothers who narratively replace the missing mothers, while in *Only the Brave*, a daughter's friend aurally takes the mother's place through singing 'her' song. I assess the ways in which characters' diegetic singing and other use of film music operate as sites for the negotiation of representations of character subjectivity. The mother's singing can evoke a character's sexual and maternal identities, and allows a space for the expression of subjectivity that is at times unavailable elsewhere in the narrative.

Kaja Silverman's discussion about the persistent trope of the maternal voice as one of containment is relevant to these films where mothers' singing voices play a pivotal role in the narrative, and I use her work to consider the affect of these singing voices. I discuss how singing functions to evoke each mother's character and the effect that it has on those around her. Examining *Only the Brave* and *Radiance*, I extend my discussion to encompass other relevant aspects of the soundtrack, as I suggest both of these films evoke the mother through source scoring and dramatic scoring. I again use Kassabian's distinctions between affiliating and assimilating scores to consider how the use of dramatic scoring disrupts representations of motherhood. Significantly, the absence of the mother leaves an aural lacuna that is sometimes compensated by a mediated representation of the mother's voice, and I examine how this is played out in the three films. The absent mother is at times, using Chion's term, a kind of '*acousmêtre*,' a figure heard rather than seen. Finally I consider the importance of singing spaces and the difference that private performances can afford for singing subjects, and the disruption if not transformation that singing can accomplish for the often-maligned mother.

## BRILLIANT CAREERS: SINGING MOTHERS & THE DIEGETIC WORLD

In all three films there are elements of maternal transgression that are understood as concomitant with singing as a career choice. The mothers have been absent from their daughters' lives for reasons that are not always made clear, but involve the complete



abandonment of their daughters. Narratively, singing has provided an escape from mothering, although not necessarily the reason for it. In each story there is a sense of mystery surrounding the mother's reason for her absence. Abandoned daughters don't know their mothers but admire and are attracted to them when they appear. The end of these narratives allows for the mothers to return, even if these returns are not entirely successful in re-establishing the mother-daughter relationship or providing a sense of closure.

In *High Tide*, Lilli (Judy Davis), a backing singer with an Elvis tribute band, is sacked by her boss Lester (Frankie J Holden) for being a troublemaker. She finds herself stuck in the coastal town of Eden with little money and a broken-down car. Forced to stay in Eden's Mermaid Caravan Park while she deals with these problems, she discovers that her daughter Ally (Claudia Karvan), whom she abandoned as a baby after the death of her husband, is living in the caravan park with her former mother-in-law, Bet (Jan Adele). Ally believes that her mother is dead. Bet tries to prevent any relationship forming between Lilli and Ally, and Lilli is at first happy to acquiesce with Bet's demands, preoccupied with having to earn money and diverted by a liaison with local man Mick (Colin Friels). However, she finds herself drawn to Ally, and takes advantage of Bet's temporary absence to take Ally out to dinner. When Mick, whom Lilli has rejected, tells Ally that Lilli is her mother, Ally confronts her but Lilli denies it. Her car fixed and paid for, thanks to the only work that she could get at the local club, a couple of strip performances, Lilli packs up to leave town but on the spur of the moment offers Ally, who comes to see her again, the chance to come too. But while reunited mother and daughter leave together, their future together is far from certain.

Secrets surrounding maternal absence are also revealed in *Radiance*. Based on the play by Louis Nowra, it is the story of three Aboriginal half-sisters reuniting after many years for their mother's funeral. Mae (Trisha Morton-Thomas) has been looking after their mother

Mary, who has been ill, while Nona (Deborah Mailman) has been in Sydney. Cressy (Rachael Maza) is an international opera star and has rarely been home. Nona is happy to be 'home' as she is pregnant, and wants to have her baby in her mother's house. After the funeral, family tensions surrounding their relationships with their mother and each other simmer as Nona tries to convince her sisters that they should scatter their mother's ashes on Nora Island, Mary's ancestral home, which sits across the bay and is visible from Mary's front window. Emotions reach a climax as Mae and Cressy burn down their mother's house, which Mae admits is to be reclaimed by Mary's lover Harry Wells, the real owner of the house. Cressy finally tells Nona that she is her mother, not her sister, and that the 'Black Prince,' whom Mary had told Nona was her father and whom Nona has fantasised about, was one of Mary's boyfriends who raped Cressy when Cressy was a girl. Nona refuses to believe that Cressy is her mother, and runs to Nora Island to scatter Mary's ashes. When she returns, the film concludes with the three women leaving together.

*Only The Brave*, which I've introduced earlier in relation to Vicki's singing performances, is also shaped by maternal absence and return. The mother is an enigmatic figure, but again a crucial character in the narrative. Teenager Alex (Elena Mandalis) dreams of finding her mother Athena (Mary Sitarenos), a singer, whom she thinks is somewhere in Sydney. With her best friend Vicki (Dora Kaskaris), she attempts to negotiate a life complicated by difficult parental, school and sexual relationships. Her reluctance to accept the sexual demands of her boyfriend, and her attraction to teacher Kate (Maude Davey), reveal her rejection of the dominant heterosexual milieu. Alex and Vicki dream of escaping their lives. The night after Alex and Vicki fight about Alex's relationship with Kate, she witnesses Vicki being raped by Vicki's father. Vicki's emotional spiral ends in suicide, and Alex is injured while trying to stop her. Alex's mother's eventual return to visit her in hospital provides Alex with no resolution to their relationship. Alex rejects both her parents and leaves home alone. As in the

other two films, the resumption of motherhood is fraught with difficulties. In *Radiance*, the revelation that Cressy is Nona's mother does not take place until the climax of the film and although the film ends with the three women together, Nona refuses to call Cressy 'mum.' Lilli's return to a motherhood role in *High Tide* is hidden, denied and refused by Lilli herself, and its resumption is precarious.

In each of these film stories there are both professional singers and amateur singers, who produce a variety of public and private performances. Cressy in *Radiance* is an international opera singer. Cressy's international success impresses Nona, and her status as a diva is revealed through Nona's description of Cressy's televised performances and Mae's CD recording of Cressy singing *Madama Butterfly*. In *Only The Brave*, Alex's mother's career is suggested through the posters on Alex's walls, the repetition of the song 'Seasons of Change,' and Alex's memories, dreams and nightmares. Lilli in *High Tide* is a paid backup singer but her talents are not so valorised. She agrees with Mick's harsh assessment of her talents as a 'hooper in a sleazy band.' Although she does have an agent, her singing is not good enough to save her position in Lester's group.

For these three characters, singing has provided an alternative option to motherhood, allowing a legitimate if not socially acceptable reason for abandonment of their daughters. Singing has enabled a career path for Cressy, Lilli and Alex's mother, but to simultaneously be 'good' mothers, as societies' gender stereotypes demand, is represented as impossible. The singers have left families behind, and while their singing has provided independence and, in Cressy's case, success, Cressy, Lilli and Alex's mother have difficulty emotionally expressing their relationships with their daughters. Physical absence is echoed by aural absence or aural distance in the ways their singing voices are represented. Cressy is only heard singing through the technological mediation of the CD that Nona plays, and she adamantly refuses to sing on

demand in church at her mother's funeral, or at home. Similarly, the song implicated as Alex's mother's is visually associated with an LP record playing when Alex dreams of her mother. Cressy and Alex's mother are experienced by their families as 'authentic' repeatable selves through music recordings, making them paradoxically real and yet distant. Through technological reproduction they create an aural presence that is distinct from the visual. The playing of their recorded performances makes them accessible and brings them closer while simultaneously suggesting that they are also inaccessible.

These three singing subjects are not the only mothers or singers within the films' diegetic worlds. In *High Tide*, Ally's grandmother Bet is an amateur singer who performs regularly in the local club talent quests. In *Radiance*, Nona speaks of her assumed mother Mary as a singer, and there are sequences where Mary's singing self is suggested in the film, as I will discuss later. Nona also reveals her talents when she parodies an opera performance. Earlier, she has tried to convince Cressy that she can sing. In *Only the Brave*, Alex's friend Vicki sings the song associated with Alex's mother.

Each of these characters also has connections to motherhood, and has acted as a surrogate mother in the diegetic world, or is linked to 'real' mothers through aural and oral identification and film techniques. Mary is Cressy and Mae's mother and is to them the abandoning mother, and has pretended to be Nona's mother without telling her the truth, that she is her grandmother. Bet has been like a mother to Ally, and is her paternal grandmother, but has lied to her that her mother is dead. Vicki in *Only the Brave* is imbricated with Alex's absent mother, singing Alex's mother's song that is directly connected to Alex's fantasies and dreams of her mother, and wanting to be a singer herself. As I consider below, for singers/surrogates Bet, Vicki and Mary, their singing is indicative of their own subjectivities and relationships with their 'daughters.'

In the three films the maternal transgression of absence from the site of the family is connected to prioritising singing over family duty and responsibility. Singing is transgressive for Lilli, Cressy and Alex's mother at the narrative level of career choice; as singers, the tension between being a mother and 'doing' motherhood is impossible for them. As abandoning mothers they are 'bad.' Anne Summers convincingly argues in *Damned Whores and God's Police* that in Australian culture, the stereotyping binary of 'good' and 'bad' woman is bound to the nuclear family structure and a woman's relation to it.<sup>425</sup> Such a binary, prevalent in Western societies that are permeated by Christian ethics and narratives, continues to delineate film representations, and reinforces what epitomises a 'good' mother. A recent historical survey of films (from 1900 to 1988) has suggested that the 'good mother' has been prevalent in representations of motherhood in Australian cinema, except for the 1970s when the impact of feminism was felt on Australian society.<sup>426</sup>

While as a tendency this may be true, more recent characters such as Nadia (Sacha Horler) in *Soft Fruit* (Christina Andreef, 1999) and Vicki (Susie Porter) in *Feeling Sexy* (Davida Allen, 1998) provide representations of mothers who refuse their motherhood as dictating the end of sexual desire. However, it is interesting that the absent mother is a strong preoccupation in Australian cinema, particularly in recent work from women filmmakers.<sup>427</sup> In the three Australian films discussed here the absent mothers return, and, represented as a singing mother, each is allowed to have some voice, even if she remains an absent presence in the film. Their fragmented subjectivities are beyond a bad/good dichotomy. As singers, mothers and sexual beings they present a more complex picture of female representation. Yet often the

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<sup>425</sup> Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, 2nd revised edn, Camberwell, Victoria, Penguin, 2002, pp. 197–198.

<sup>426</sup> Caroline M Pascoe, 'Screening mothers: representations of motherhood in Australian films from 1900 to 1988,' PhD thesis, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1998, pp. 83–84.

<sup>427</sup> Collins notes 'the motherless daughter is pervasive in Australian women's films from *Maidens* (Jeni Thornley, 1978) to *Night Cries* (Tracy Moffat, 1989) to *Radiance* (Rachel Perkins, 1998).' Felicity Collins, 'Brazen brides, grotesque daughters, treacherous mothers: women's funny business in Australian cinema from *Sweetie* to *Holy Smoke*,' in *Womenvision: Women and the Moving Image in Australia*, ed. Lisa French, Melbourne, Damned Publishing, 2003, p. 181. There are many others such as *Love Serenade* (Shirley Barrett, 1996) and *Shame* (Steve Jodrell, 1986).

echo of condemnation remains as perceiver sympathies lie with the abandoned daughters more so than with the singer mothers.

As Lucy Fisher points out, the study of maternal melodramas has been the primary focus of work on representations of motherhood.<sup>428</sup> Molly Haskell's ground-breaking 1974 study of the representations of women, *From Reverence to Rape*, suggests that one of the prevalent themes of the 'woman's film' (discussing Hollywood melodrama) is sacrifice, and this sacrifice is of '(1) herself for her children ... (2) her children for their own welfare ... (3) marriage for her lover ... (4) her lover for marriage or for his own welfare ... (5) her career for love ... or (6) love for her career ...'<sup>429</sup> The theme of sacrifice is still instrumental in defining a 'good' mother, particularly as a final redemption if the mother has 'failed' in other ways.

In the three films that I consider in this chapter, lack of the mothers' sacrifice for their respective children enables a perception of the characters Mary, Cressy, Lilli and Alex's mother as unsatisfactory mothers. For the latter three characters this is at least partly because they are singers. They have made the 'wrong' sacrifices in relation to their motherhood because they've prioritised themselves and (perhaps) their careers. Mary has had to give up Cressy and Mae who are members of the 'stolen generation,' Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their families because of government policies. But in recounting their childhood history, Cressy understands this as her mother's easy capitulation and abandonment that Cressy cannot forgive. Cressy complains that her mother didn't fight for her but, as it is later revealed, Cressy herself is also an abandoning mother. She has kept the terrible secret of Nona's conception and parentage to herself, and with good reason, and yet Nona's knowledge of her heritage is based on lies. Cressy tells Nona that sacrifice is what is needed to succeed at singing and for her this has meant her life for her voice. Nona's challenge to Cressy about a

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<sup>428</sup> Fischer, p. 6.

<sup>429</sup> Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*. reprint, 2nd edn, Chicago and London. The University of Chicago Press, 1987. p. 163.

magazine article that makes no mention of Cressy's past suggests Cressy is complicit in the continuing abandoning of her family. Cressy's auditory power has come at a cost but she has chosen to make this sacrifice for her career, not, as 'properly' required, for her (unacknowledged) daughter.

Lilli in *High Tide* has chosen not to lead a 'normal' life because of her own grief at the death of her husband; she is only able to survive through transience and impermanence. Her abandonment of Ally is tempered with her own acknowledgement of her own emotional unavailability for a mothering role. Stephen Crofts points out that unlike the usual melodramatic trope there is no 'easy alignment of sympathies' in the emotional competition between Lilli and Bet for Ally.<sup>430</sup> Similarly, Collins suggests that *High Tide* 'refuses to recognise melodrama's strict alignment of the good mother with sexual fidelity and the public woman with sexual visibility.'<sup>431</sup> Both Lilli and Bet's complex characterisations as public performers and as sexually active women mean that neither is the exemplary 'good mother' that cultural constructions tend to require. Both accuse each other of being 'bad' mothers for abandoning their respective children when they were needed. Lilli asks Bet where she was when her son, Lilli's husband John, died. Bet is exasperated by Ally's allegiance to Lilli: 'Some bloody mother! Where has she been all these years?' Bet's boyfriend Col (John Clayton) describes Lilli as a 'bloody no-hoper.' But Lilli herself declares her ambivalence about motherhood, telling Mick and Ally separately that she would have been a 'bad' mother. Her misrecognition of Ally underlines her status as a 'bad' mother too, because of unrealistic expectations that a biological connection should always be recognised and that a mother should 'know' her own child.

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<sup>430</sup> Stephen Crofts. 'Genre, style and address in *High Tide*.' *Metro* 88, 1991–2, p. 18.

<sup>431</sup> Felicity Collins, *The Films of Gillian Armstrong*, *The Moving Image* no. 6, Melbourne, Australian Film Institute, 1999, p. 53.

Both Lilli and Bet act in ways that deny the stereotypical ‘good’ mother: they smoke, drink (sometimes excessively), and both have transitory sexual partners. Lilli is willing to obliquely proposition the mechanic fixing her car, suggestively asking him ‘There isn’t any way you could just let me take it?’ when she discovers how much her repairs will cost. Lilli’s transgression against motherhood is accentuated when she accepts the only performance work she is able to get in Eden to pay for her car repairs, that of a stripper. She’s not a completely compliant participant though, telling her new friend Mick that ‘I’ve written get fucked all over my tits’ before she performs, suggesting her defiance at how she has to earn money. But she does so to enable her own escape from the town of Eden, not as a ‘sacrifice’ for her daughter that would legitimate her acceptance of having to perform in this way.<sup>432</sup> Ally’s knowledge of her mother’s new kind of performance increases her interest in her mother.<sup>433</sup>

In *Only the Brave*, the absent mother is a mysterious figure, and is condemned for her absence by Alex’s father. The allusions to her singing career provide a purpose for it, although no reason is given in the film. Alex’s father denies Athena access to Alex. He rages at Alex when she leaves home to look for her: ‘She’s the one that left, she walked out on ya.’ Even in Alex’s remembering, the presence of a whisky bottle and her mother’s slumbering during the day evoke a dissolute lifestyle. The mother is a pervasive ghostly presence, and yet her absence and appearance through flashback and dream is the core around which the film revolves. In *Radiance*, it is one mother’s death that brings the three women together at the start of the narrative and precipitates events that reveal the presence of other mothers: Cressy, as Nona’s mother, and Nona’s own pregnancy. However, as with Alex’s mother in *Only The Brave*, Mary’s absence is a structuring presence within the diegetic world of the film. Being absent is not the only way mothers are positioned as ‘bad’ mothers in these films – other aspects of the film texts serve to cast doubts on their abilities to be both singers and mothers.

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<sup>432</sup> Fischer, p. 223.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.



## DESIRE AND THE MATERNAL SINGING SUBJECT

By putting their own desires (to sing/to escape) above care of their daughters, Alex's mother, Cressy and Lilli do not behave as mothers 'should.' In Western societies, the force of Christian narratives reverberates through societal expectations and continues to powerfully shape conceptions of women, sexuality and desire. In 'Stabat Mater,' Julia Kristeva explores how the Virgin Mary has shaped conceptions of motherhood and discusses the 'incredible construct of the Maternal that the West elaborated by means of the Virgin.'<sup>434</sup> As an unspoken role model, the Virgin Mary presents an impossible dichotomy that restrains mothers' sexuality. Summers's description of Australian societal demands is relevant for Western societies in general: 'It is conveniently forgotten that married women must have sexual intercourse in order to reproduce: a general Australian Puritanism has managed to convince itself that Mothers are not sexual creatures and female sexuality is either denied or else relegated entirely to the Damned Whore stereotype.'<sup>435</sup>

When motherhood and sexuality overlap, women are traversing roles that are expected to be kept separate, as mothers and as sexual beings. Even in these films where physical sexual desire is depicted obliquely, if at all, the singing mother transgresses the expectations of 'good' mothering because she puts her sexuality overtly onstage. Singing as a physical bodily expression is an acceptable but still risky externalisation of overt sexuality (as is the kind of 'dressing up' or masquerade that accompanies onstage performances).

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<sup>434</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Tales of Love,' in *Tales of Love*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1987, p. 256.

<sup>435</sup> Summers, p. 199.

In *Radiance*, after the three women return from their mother's funeral, Cressy escapes the tensions of the household where Nona and Mae have been fighting to take a walk on the beach, and Nona joins her. Nona brings up Mae's opinion of her as a 'slut,' and Cressy stops her by asking 'aren't you? It's only a word, Nona.' When Cressy asks Nona her plans for the future, Nona tells her she might take singing lessons, and that she's sung in a few bands: she sings a line or so of 'Island Home' in a tuneful but thin voice. Grabbing her, Cressy places Nona's hand on her throat and tells her to feel it, to squeeze it 'hard, like you're strangling me.' It disturbs Nona that Cressy's throat is 'like concrete.' Nona undercuts Cressy's grave declaration of 'sacrifice' to explain her throat, her voice and her success, saying 'Jeez, you'd be able to give great head.' Singing, physicality and sexuality overlap, and parallels are drawn between giving oral and aural pleasure. Cressy's laughter at Nona's comment is uncharacteristic: Cressy's formal suit dress and upright manner have suggested a character who is conservative and guarded, despite her passionate recorded singing voice. She particularly praises Nona for her 'free' acting ability when she performs her special version of 'Un bel di.' Singing and 'slutdom' are also associated through Nona's discussion of Mary, when Cressy refuses Nona's comment that Mary gave her an ability to sing, snapping 'She gave me nothing.' As the conversation continues, Nona associates herself with Mary as a slut, and that 'sluts don't write, we fuck.' Cressy slaps Nona's face, Cressy's actions denying her own assertion that slut is 'just a word.' It is logical that the word might have been used for twelve-year-old pregnant Cressy.

In *High Tide*, Lilli's parodic display of sexy femininity as backup singer in a stylised blonde wig and figure-hugging outfit, dressed identically to her two singing colleagues, suggests an interchangeability of the women supporting their Elvis impersonating boss. Her individualistic offstage appearance, criticised by her boss as 'daggy,' exhibits a kind of reluctance to engage in an overt display of femininity, exuding a less compliant sexuality that

Mick finds attractive. Her overt sexual masquerade onstage continues when circumstances force her to strip for the first time to pay for her car repairs. Her use of body and voice to entertain is stripped back only to the body, and yet her wearing of the blonde wig, previously worn while singing, suggests a connection between her onstage singing persona and her second stripping performance. Using sharp jerky movements she signals her non-compliance with an accommodating performing sexuality, even as she performs it.

Singing, sexuality and desire for the mother in *Only the Brave* are enacted visually at the level of narrative through the use of an iconic dress. (I address the aural aspects of the scene later in the chapter.) A red velvet dress is used to suggest the sexuality of singing and its connection to the body, as well as to evoke the abandoning mother through Alex's friend Vicki. Vicki puts on the red velvet dress as part of her transformation into a singer when she first sings in Alex's bedroom. Flicking through Alex's wardrobe, she begins talking about the red velvet dress that she takes out. Vicki is incredulous that someone could abandon such a beautiful garment: 'I'd never leave this behind – no way.' As the sequence continues it becomes clear that the dress's owner is Alex's missing mother, and it is Alex the daughter, who should be a mother's most prized 'possession,' that has been left behind.

As Vicki predicts, like Cinderella's slipper the dress fits her perfectly. The red velvet fabric is sensuous, with areas of ornate beading drawing attention to shoulders, waist and belly. Vicki's wearing of the singer's dress suggests a growing adult sexuality, which is accentuated by a close-up 'crotch shot' as her hand smooths the fabric over her thigh, spinning around for Alex to see. Vicki wants to be a singer: she asks Alex if she thinks Alex's mother will let her sing if they find her, and later tells Alex that if they run away she can make money singing in clubs. As Vicki begins singing, the red dress is visually associated with Alex's mother and an adult sexuality. The large colour photograph of the performing mother wearing a similar red

dress, her mouth open, holding a large microphone in her hand is the first image of Alex's bedroom seen in detail. In the mother's red dress, Vicki ventriloquises the mother's song but with her own interpretation, bringing together sexuality, singing and escape for both Vicki and Alex's mother.<sup>436</sup> What Vicki unleashes with her singing ultimately proves to be forbidden. Alex's father, Reg, interrupts. He is silent but for the door slam as he leaves the room, putting an end to Vicki and Alex's mutual enjoyment, and chastises Alex once Vicki leaves, demanding 'Don't you ever do that again.' The quick removal of the dress also reveals its significance in the forbidden evocation of the mother.

The red/orange of the flames in the opening sequences is echoed in the colour of the mother's dress. Red connotes sexuality (and perhaps even prostitution), romance, love and danger: the dress signifies the mother as erotic and exotic. Alex remembers and dreams of her mother as always in the red dress and with long flowing black hair. When Alex leaves her father, after he confesses that her mother wants to see her, she packs the red dress and the photograph of herself and her mother, her two most important possessions. But the dress not only stands in for the mother, but can also be read as a seductive force for Alex too, suggested when she tenderly lifts Vicki's hair back as they both stand looking at Vicki in the mirror in the first singing sequence.<sup>437</sup> When Alex's mother finally appears to visit Alex in hospital, she is still dressed in a red dress, but it is now covered with a drab green coat, and her hair is tied back. Neither Alex nor her mother speaks, and their troubled relationship remains unexplained. Although Alex has desired her mother's return, Athena's silent appearance offers Alex no consolation or explanation for their separation.

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<sup>436</sup> As with Nona's operatic parody, the element of singing for another singer, a kind of ventriloquising, can be understood as both the original singer given a voice through the imitative singer, and allowing the imitator a means of expression.

<sup>437</sup> Alex is tender with Vicki in this scene. As with Vicki's later singing scene, after which as Alex strokes Vicki's hair as they sit in the abandoned railway carriage, there is a connection to Alex's mother, which complicates Alex's attentions as an expression of queer sexuality. The exploration of her sexuality is curtailed when Alex's teacher rejects her advances, although there is an attraction between the two.

From the opening moments of the film, as Vicki dances seductively before the fire she and her friends have lit, Vicki is represented as possessing a knowing sexuality. She tells Alex that 'you can't be a virgin all your life,' but Vicki's active heterosexuality has a destructive effect on her own life. Performing fellatio is not enough to keep her boyfriend Dazza (Nik Pantazopoulos), the one she declares she is going to marry, from the attentions of Tammy (Peta Brandt), Vicki and Alex's school gang rival. The revelation of Vicki's father's incestuous attack suggests that her sexualised self has been due to her father's attempts to control her sexuality through violence.

The final sequence of the film shows Alex hanging the red dress on a fence (at the girls' derelict hang out), then walking alone down a country road, looking defiantly into the camera as the camera tracks back and away from her. The action of hanging the dress on the fence to blow in the breeze is a memorial to Vicki and to the 'fantasy' mother of her memories and nightmares. The singer's dress is left behind, just as the singers' voices, of both her mother and Vicki, have now been silenced. Alex's actions also signal her embracing of her own sexuality. Alex herself is unable to 'wear the red dress' and to take on the heterosexual performance that has been expected of her from her friends and teachers. In her heavy coat, with her backpack on her shoulder, she walks towards a future, rejecting a heterosexuality that has been destructive for her relationship with her mother and for her friend Vicki.

#### **THE MOTHER'S VOICE: 'SONOROUS ENVELOPE' OR 'UMBILICAL WEB'?**

Drawing on a number of theoretical strands from the work of Julia Kristeva, Michel Chion and Guy Rosolato, Kaja Silverman examines the significance of the maternal voice and how it relates to male subjectivity in cinematic representations. She contends that the characterisation of the maternal voice as a 'blanket of sound' rests on a fantasy of 'infantile

containment' prevalent in both classic cinema and psychoanalytic theory.<sup>437</sup> For Silverman, the work of Rosolato and Chion provides opposing conceptions of how the mother's voice can be conceived. Chion uses the metaphor of an 'umbilical web' to describe the pervasiveness of the mother's voice for an infant, evoking a notion of entrapment.<sup>438</sup> While the voice may be like an 'umbilical cord, as a nurturing connection,' it services a 'trapped subject.'<sup>439</sup>

Alternatively, for Silverman, Rosolato's conception of the 'sonorous envelope' is a much more soothing, gratifying space, aligned directly with the physical body of the mother, and one that accounts for adult pleasure in music, providing the 'original atmosphere [for auditory pleasure], which might be called a sonorous womb, a murmuring house – or *music of the spheres*.'<sup>440</sup> Silverman identifies this as aligning the maternal voice with opera.<sup>441</sup> In her understanding of these 'negative' and 'positive' conceptions of the 'maternal voice fantasy,' the maternal voice is only recognised in retrospect, once it is lost to the subject, and so is always desired, a lack to be fulfilled.<sup>442</sup> For Silverman, concerned as she is with male subjectivity, 'the female voice becomes a receptacle of that which the male subject both throws away and draws back towards himself.'<sup>443</sup> However, in *High Tide*, *Radiance* and *Only the Brave*, there are no significant male subjects or voices that desire the maternal voice as much as do the daughters. Each daughter desires an absent mother, one who returns initially through sound. That unknown maternal voice is literally operatic in *Radiance*, where Nona thinks it is her sister's voice that she so admires and knows. For Alex in *Only the Brave*, the mother's voice moves through stages of comforting envelopment, distorted sound, and finally silence. In *High Tide*, it is Lilli's speaking voice that alternately upsets but finally soothes

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<sup>437</sup> Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 72.

<sup>438</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, p. 61.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>440</sup> Rosolato quoted in Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, pp. 84–85.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73, p. 85.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

Ally. For each of these daughters, the mother's voice is neither one nor the other, but reverberates between satisfying and unsatisfying modes.

Like the 'sonorous envelope' or 'umbilical web,' sound can surround and engulf the listener. For Claudia Gorbman, the 'melodic bath of the sonorous envelope' can be linked to the 'oceanic feeling of adult music listening; this pleasure of music invokes the (auditory) imaginary.'<sup>444</sup> The phrase 'oceanic feeling' also suggests a state where bodily boundaries are not so clearly defined, one that mimics the physical truth of the voice for the speaker or singer being both inside and outside the body simultaneously.<sup>445</sup> The analogy of music and fluidity emerges in other theoretic writings. Caryl Flinn, although critical of the 'feminisation' of music, notes Chion's regard for sound as 'a potential "space of liberty"... rich in meanings and pleasures, fluid, and opposed to the category of writing ...'<sup>446</sup> Luce Irigaray notes that 'historically the properties of fluids have been abandoned to the feminine.'<sup>447</sup> Fluids can envelop and surround as can sound and music, again reinforcing music as gendered.

The title of Silverman's book uses Rosolato's phrase 'acoustic mirror,' with which he describes the physical truth of the voice for the speaker (or singer) as both inside and outside the body at the same time, so the speaker is simultaneously a listener.<sup>448</sup> Like Lacan's mirror phase, in which subjectivity is achieved through a child's misrecognition of the self as whole, enabling a move from what Lacan calls the 'Imaginary' to the 'Symbolic,' Rosolato's acoustic mirror is also a site of subjectivity development, reflecting the subject's voice back to the self to complete it. However, because of the voice's doubled ability to be sent and

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<sup>444</sup> Gorbman, p. 62.

<sup>445</sup> Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 80.

<sup>446</sup> Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia and Hollywood Film Music*, p. 61. The phrase in double quotation marks is Chion's, from the original edition of *The Voice In Cinema, La voix au cinema*, Editions de l'Étrole, 1982, which is different to the recently translated version.

<sup>447</sup> Irigaray, 'The "mechanics" of fluids,' p. 116.

<sup>448</sup> Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 80.

received by the same subject, this aural dimension also has the ability to confuse subjectivity by confusing the boundaries separating subject and object.<sup>449</sup>

Silverman understands the acoustic mirror as directly applicable to the ways in which the female voice works for male subjectivity in dominant cinema, and for female subjectivity in ‘alternative’ cinema.<sup>450</sup> For Silverman, the female voice in dominant cinema acts as a fetish, functioning (psychoanalytic and feminist perspectives argue) as the female body does. The female voice and body are ‘filling in for and covering over what is unspeakable within male subjectivity’ and more often ‘obliged to display than to conceal lack.’<sup>451</sup> The maternal voice is the primary acoustic mirror, not only by facilitating the child’s entry to language, but even before birth.<sup>452</sup> The child ‘hears itself’ through the auditory reflection provided by the mother.<sup>453</sup> Later, however, the maternal voice works ‘as the acoustic mirror in which the male subject hears all the repudiated elements of his infantile babble.’<sup>454</sup> Using Kristeva’s theorising about subject formation and the role of the chora, Silverman apparently leaves little hope for the female subject or her aural representation in dominant cinematic practices:

The theoretical and cinematic equation of the maternal voice with “pure” sonorousness must therefore be understood not as an extension of its intrinsic nature, or of its acoustic function, but as part of a larger cultural disavowal of the mother’s role both as an agent of discourse and as a model for linguistic (as well as visual) identification.<sup>455</sup>

In the three films discussed in this chapter, all concerned with feminist issues and independently produced in Australia (although largely adhering to dominant narrative techniques), the displaced maternal voice also has a powerful effect for female subjects, the abandoned daughters who are enveloped by the mother’s voice.

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., p. 80, p. 101.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., p. 100.



A recurring notion of envelopment is significant in Julia Kristeva's work.<sup>457</sup> Her reworking of Lacanian theorising poses the notion of a speaking subject, formed by the child's movement from what she terms 'the semiotic,' which includes the '*chora*,' to 'the symbolic.' The semiotic, aligned with the feminine, and the symbolic, aligned with the masculine, are 'modalities' that enable language for a subject, which is a process of signification. For Kristeva, music is a non-verbal system that is from the semiotic, from which emerges disruptions of language that are potentially subversive, such as poetry.<sup>458</sup> Yet the subject is never entirely of either the symbolic or the semiotic.<sup>459</sup> For Kristeva, 'poetic language' needs to be examined to determine the complexities of the practice of language (its 'heterogeneousness'):

we must analyze those elements of the complex operation that I shall call poetic language (in which the dialectics of the subjects is inscribed) that are screened out by ordinary language, i.e., *social constraint* ... language, and thus sociability, are defined by boundaries admitting of upheaval, dissolution, and transformation.<sup>460</sup>

Singing is necessarily between these two modalities, utilising both a non-verbal sound and rhythmical system and that of language. Much of Kristeva's work is concerned with the maternal, and her conception of the *chora* plays a significant part. As she herself describes it, the *chora* 'as rupture and articulations, (rhythm), precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality and temporality,' while later she describes it as a 'rhythmic space,' following Plato's definition of the *chora*, that has 'nourishing and maternal' connotations.<sup>461</sup> The *chora* is instrumental in forming what Kristeva identifies as a subject-in-process, the subject formed by the interaction of these modalities.<sup>462</sup> From Kristeva's work in *Revolution in Poetic Language* and *Desire in Language*, the *chora* is characterised as a space, rhythmic yet chaotic,

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<sup>457</sup> My use of Julia Kristeva's work only touches upon some of her complex ideas concerning the speaking subject. For a lucid and in-depth account of Kristeva's early work, see Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*.

<sup>458</sup> Kristeva, 'Revolution in poetic language,' p. 93.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid.

<sup>460</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. and trans. Leon S Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 25.

<sup>461</sup> Kristeva, 'Revolution in poetic language,' p. 94.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

posited in relation to the mother's body. '[T]he mother's body ... becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*.'<sup>462</sup>

Using Mallarmé's writing as an example, Kristeva describes the 'semiotic rhythm within language': '[i]ndifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation: it is musical.'<sup>463</sup> Poetic language is also evidence of the semiotic *chora* working within the 'signifying device of language.'<sup>464</sup> The linkages between the semiotic, poetic language and the sense of a maternal musical space resonate with singing as a means of expression that is of both the semiotic and the symbolic, and a powerful means of communication.

Silverman describes Kristeva's notion of the enveloping *chora*, within which both mother and child reside, and in which the mother must stay, 'stripping her of all linguistic capabilities' as the 'choric fantasy.'<sup>465</sup> Without a place in the symbolic, the female subject is forever disadvantaged. Silverman asserts that in Kristeva's work, '[w]oman-as-speaking-subject is finally nowhere to be found [in the symbolic] ... to speak is thus necessarily to occupy a "male" position; even the maternal voice can be heard only through the male voice.'<sup>466</sup> Such a denial of the possibility of female subjectivity attained through language is suggested through Silverman's own work in relation to dominant cinema: female subjectivity in feminist/experimental cinema is (only) created through specific techniques that employ the nonsynchronisation of female body and voice. As I have argued earlier, female singing can produce a cinematic space outside of this containment that at times differs from Silverman's account of lack of female vocal authority and the negativity of synchronisation for female voices. The singers in *Paradise Road*, Viney and Deladis in *Songcatcher*, and Amy in *Amy*,

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<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>465</sup> Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, pp. 103–105.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

all produce music on their own terms, in a way that I experience as defying the notion of containment. However, there are aspects of nonsynchronised and synchronised singing maternal voices in *Only the Brave* and *Radiance* that support in part Silverman's argument, as I argue below.

There is a strong desire that voices in cinema must be accounted for, especially those that are not synchronised with a visible body. As Chion has pointed out, '[s]ound in film is voco- and verbocentric,' because human hearing prioritises words and the voice above other sounds in any sonic environment.<sup>467</sup> Nonsynchronised voices in narrative cinema prove to be problematic (and interesting) as they are more difficult to explain than 'naturally' synchronised voices. Descriptors such as 'voice-over,' describing the sound of a narrator who may or may not be part of the diegesis, or 'voice-off,' explaining the voice of a character speaking from within the diegesis but who is not at the same time seen on screen, recognise these aural elements in relation to image. There are other relationships that nonsynchronised voices have with the image that cannot be described by these terms.

Chion has coined the term *acousmètre* to describe an aural presence that is heard but not seen, that is on the edge of the film action and powerful because of its visual absence. The 'acousmother' in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) is a prime example, although Chion does not limit the power of the *acousmètre* to women's voices.<sup>468</sup> The 'acousmother' is Chion's term for the mother's voice that berates Norman (Anthony Perkins) in *Psycho*, a character that ultimately is exposed to exist without a 'real' body. The power of the *acousmètre* in cinema Chion ascribes to a connection to before birth and early childhood, when 'the voice was everything and it was everywhere'; later, he explicitly names this proto- *acousmètre*, 'the Mother.'<sup>469</sup> Once again, the enveloping voice of the mother is evoked as having auditory power.

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<sup>467</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 6.

<sup>468</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, pp. 140–151.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

The auditory (but not visual) presence of the *acousmètre* has potential power in its nonsynchronisation. Chion's theorising regarding this powerful presence, who differs from an external (outside the diegesis) or internal (inside the diegesis) narrator, in some ways corresponds to Silverman's theorising on the power of women's voices that are nonsynchronised. Silverman contends that the synchronicity of voice and body for women in film representations means a lack of acoustic authority, while experimental feminist films, such as *Film About A Woman Who ...* (Yvonne Rainer, 1974) and *The Gold Diggers* (Sally Potter, 1983), where asynchronous sound is used, potentially liberate the female voice from containment: 'the female voice has enormous conceptual and discursive range once it is freed from its claustral confinement within the female body.'<sup>470</sup> In *Only the Brave and Radiance*, which voice feminist concerns (although not experimental films), what can be regarded as nonsynchronised singing voices are driving forces within their narratives.

For Silverman, synchronicity is about women's bodies and voices being matched at any stage during the diegesis. Silverman claims that in classical cinema the female voice is always matched with the female body, 'even if only retrospectively,' which confirms synchronisation and confinement for the female subject, and that the only exception to this is music.<sup>471</sup> She does not go on to expand what she means by 'music' (diegetic? nondiegetic? singing?), but her comment does allow for the suggestion that singing proposes a potentially beneficial expression of women's subjectivity through acoustic authority. For Chion, synchronicity is body and voice being unified through 'the sight of the speaking face.'<sup>472</sup> The ultimate confirmation of synchronicity is to see the speaking face speaking: to be able to observe the 'temporal co-incident' of a mouth's movements with the sounds heard.<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 186.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164–165.

<sup>472</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 130.

<sup>473</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, p. 127.

The theoretical notion of power through nonsynchronisation is relevant with regard to the characters of Cressy and Alex's mother in their respective films. Although both Cressy's and Alex's mother's singing voices are matched to bodies, neither is seen singing, and their singing voices remain mediated by other sources. For me then, these two characters are versions of Chion's *acousmètres* or of Silverman's disembodied voices, as they remain nonsynchronised with their singing voices. As Silverman suggests, nonsynchronisation allows these women to resist containment, at least temporarily. This lack of synchronicity between maternal bodies and singing voices in *Only the Brave* and *Radiance* can be understood as allowing Alex's mother and Cressy auditory authority to express themselves indirectly while they are simultaneously silenced in other ways. Alex's mother and Cressy are empowered through the valorisation of their disembodied singing voices. Silverman suggests that in dominant cinema, for a woman to be 'heard without being seen' would pose dangers to 'male interpretation': 'it would disrupt the specular regime upon which mainstream cinema relies.'<sup>474</sup> The acoustic authority of these characters is suggested through their singing voices. For Alex's mother, her song evokes Alex's memories of her, and the ventriloquising of her song through Vicki's performance pleases Vicki and Alex but enrages Reg. Cressy's singing, through the use of her CD of *Madama Butterfly*, shapes the soundtrack of the narrative and matches the release of emotion and fiery conclusion to the narrative. Cressy's refusals to sing, either at her mother's funeral or for the amusement of her sisters, constitute a withholding of her acoustic authority and a refusal to be controlled.

These characters' singing allows an outlet for expression that is denied them in other ways. Cressy is silenced through her guarding of her awful secret, in which Mary and Mae have been complicit. Alex's mother is silenced through Reg's displeasure that he voices to Alex, and when she 'really' appears to Alex in hospital, she remains (visibly) unsynchronised with

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<sup>474</sup> Silverman, 'Dis-embodiment of the female voice,' p. 313.

her voice. The voice of the singing mother, through her recorded song, is associated with Alex's idealised memory/dream of a young attractive mother. Thus initially the singing voice is aligned with a body remembered, imagined, and visually depicted through Alex's posters and photographs, but a representation different to a 'real' body that definitively accounts for the voice.

The 'dream' mother's speaking voice and body are synchronised only momentarily as she laughs and speaks one word in Alex's flashback memory/dream. For Chion, de-acousmatisation (the embodiment of a previously bodiless voice) equals losing power in narrative terms: the body's appearance 'attests through the synchrony of audition/vision that the voice really belongs to that character, and thus is able to capture, domesticate and "embody" her (and humanise her as well).'<sup>475</sup> Such an embodiment, though, is a 'sort of enclosing of the voice in the circumscribed limits of a body – which tames the voice and drains it of its power.'<sup>476</sup> Chion suggests that when a voice is de-acousmatised (that is, synchronised with its body), it is an 'unveiling' that is dramatic, as the *acousmêtre's* mysterious powers and 'aura' are lost.<sup>477</sup> In *Only the Brave*, Alex's mother's visual presence in the diegesis is at a remove until the final sequences of the film. Although Alex's mother is not aurally synchronised with her image when she 'really' appears at the hospital, a kind of de-acousmatisation takes place, as her appearance marks the loss of 'aura' that has surrounded Alex's dreams of her. Alex's mother is acoustically disempowered when she cannot synchronise her own voice (one which Alex has remembered as singing) to her physically present body at Alex's hospital bedside. Her inability to speak to Alex means there is no realignment of the bond that Alex has felt through her mother's song.

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<sup>475</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 130.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*

## THE MOTHER'S SONG AND THE MEDIATED MATERNAL VOICE

In *Only the Brave*, the sonorous envelope of the maternal voice is provided not only by 'the mother' but also through Vicki's singing. The song 'Seasons of Change' is a site of negotiation of both Vicki's and the mother's subjectivities. The song is established early in the film as Alex's mother's song. The song's repetition acts as an aural signifier of the absent mother, and aligns Vicki as a kind of surrogate mother for Alex, allowing for pleasure and pain at the memory of the mother's voice.

In Anahid Kassabian's terminology, the film's score is mixed, with both 'composed' and 'compiled' elements. The composed score uses film music produced specifically for it, and the compiled score uses pre-existing songs.<sup>479</sup> Perceivers' knowledges of pre-existing songs means more open interpretations of what songs may mean in a film. In *Only the Brave*, the repetition of 'Seasons of Change' marks it as working to assimilate perceivers to understand the song as Alex's mother's voice, inspiring Alex's dream for her mother and Vicki's dreams of escape.

'Seasons of Change' is a number from an Australian 1970s rock band Black Feather.<sup>480</sup> As a pre-existing track, it allows for perceiver recognition, and the images that accompany its first performance suggests it is a 1970s track, with the posters on the wall, along with the image of a woman singer, showing clothing and design styles of the decade. Another poster, for Uriah Heap, reinforces the 1970s iconography. By the end of the song's first rendition by Vicki, Reg's adverse reaction suggests that the song has particular importance, although at this stage the significance of the song is not completely clear.

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<sup>479</sup> Kassabian, p. 2–3.

<sup>480</sup> Philip Samartzis, 'Avant-garde meets mainstream: the film scores of Philip Brophy,' in *Screen Scores: Studies in Contemporary Australian Film Music*, ed. Rebecca Coyle, North Ryde, AFTRS, 1998, p. 61. See Appendix J for lyrics to 'Seasons of Change.'

However, through its repetition, the perception of the song takes on a specific trajectory, assimilating identification with the song as Alex's absent mother's voice. The song is used as source music, source scoring and dramatic scoring, anchored in the diegetic world of the narrative through Vicki's singing of it, and yet transcending into an oneiric realm and the nondiegetic soundtrack. In *Only the Brave* there is basically one song but two singers.<sup>480</sup> Through the song Vicki sings her desire for escape into a life as a singer, demonstrated through the mutually pleasurable performance that she and Alex enact, and also ventriloquises the absent mother, as a kind of 'acoustic mirror,' allowing Alex to access her desire for her mother.

The shared performance in Alex's bedroom is the first arrangement of the song, after Vicki has put on the red dress, light falling on her from above as if she stands in a spotlight. The opening bars of the track are first heard faintly as dramatic scoring when Alex closes her eyes and orally sets the scene with her evocative description of the band warming up and the impatient audience expressing their desire for the singer. Later in the film her English teacher acknowledges her writing talents and their mutual attraction by taking her to a poetry reading, where Alex says she wants to make words sing. In this sequence, Alex addresses her description to 'you': 'The band's warmin' up, but you don't hurry ...' The visuals suggest that the 'you' is both Vicki and the absent mother. Alex looks first to screen left where Vicki stands (out of frame) with her back to Alex, and then to screen right, an eyeline match connecting her glance to the large poster of her mother singing, wearing the red dress (or one very similar). The faint nondiegetic musical accompaniment to Alex's words fades out and is replaced by Vicki's vocals. Philip Samartzis describes the arrangement as 'underscoring the sense of loss expressed by Alex.'<sup>481</sup> However, Alex smiles as she describes the sequence of

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<sup>480</sup> There are two other diegetically sourced songs in the film. 'Basia' (written by Chris O'Connor and Vladimir Juric, performed by the Painters and Dockers) is heard on the girls' boom box as they discuss the forthcoming party, and 'Agoraphobia' (written by Annie Packer and performed by The Sharons) is heard while they are at the party.

<sup>481</sup> Samartzis, p. 61.



the singer going onstage. Her own spoken performance, perhaps recounting a memory of her mother observed from backstage, sounds practised as if a familiar pleasurable ritual for her and Vicki. She also smiles as she watches Vicki, who is out of shot, just before her father opens the bedroom door.

While Vicki sings, the sounds and images continue to connect Alex, her mother and Vicki. A two-shot of Vicki with Alex behind her is followed by a close-up pan of a black and white photo of the mother and a young girl. A return to the two-shot and a cut to a band poster where the mother looks out draw connections between the three characters. While Vicki's voice is strong, she changes key as she sings, identifying it as an amateur performance that contrasts with Alex's mother's 'recorded' version that is heard later.

The second arrangement of the song is heard as nondiegetic sound – and yet because it has been heard earlier it is a form of source scoring, having originated in the world of the film and given strong visual associations with the abandoning mother. A female voice, with backing band accompaniment, sings, the soundtrack starting part way through the song, carrying on from soon after where Vicki's rendition was interrupted, as Alex walks around her bedroom and then lies down. The photograph of the mother and a young Alex, seen soon after the music cue starts, reinforces the song as the mother's. Alex's eyes are open, but an abrupt change to vivid colour signals to the perceiver to expect a dream or a memory.

Through Alex's dream, the musical track is again aligned with the mother. The young girl from the photograph shown earlier on Alex's bedroom wall opens the bedroom door and sees her young glamorous mother, again in a red dress, asleep on the couch. An LP record is seen playing next to the sleeping mother, suggesting that it is her recorded voice that is being heard, and a visual connection to source music also. The mother's version is raunchier than

Vicki's version, with the vocalist belting the chorus.<sup>483</sup> When the song reaches the rising chorus 'you don't know where you are,' composer Philip Brophy electronically alters it. The last word is repeated and changes tone while a looped track beneath the altered vocal accentuates its pulsating quality. The song builds tension because the voice is suspended, unable to resolve musically, and yet the music ends with the mother's laugh. Within the dream/memory, the mother speaks in Greek to her young daughter. Her words are untranslated, but her laughter and smiling face suggest love. So despite the tension generated by the electronic alteration of the song, here it is more directly associated with the mother's love.

In the third repetition, Vicki's singing of the second verse of the song (the same as that heard on the record during Alex's dream/memory) while she and Alex are in an abandoned railway carriage, is the precursor to Alex's second dream about her young mother. Alex's dream of being on a moving train, passing her mother on the platform and unable to be heard as she yells out to her, syncretically melds with the pulsating, electronically distorted mother's singing voice as heard in the earlier dream and which replaces Vicki's singing. Later, in Alex's last dream, her young mother and Vicki, along with her younger 'self' of the photograph, disappear, and only the distorted sound of the last word of the chorus, 'are,' is heard over the electronic music.

Finally, the distorted remnant of the mother's electronically altered voice is heard again as dramatic scoring when Alex searches for Vicki at the power station. Returning to the idea of the sonorous envelope, the repetition of the song enacts a breaking down of the maternal voice as soothing. Within the soundtrack the mother's voice moves further away from being understood as the narrative progresses, and is no longer harmonically or rhythmically satisfying, with the final distortion most difficult to recognise. The mother's silent appearance

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<sup>483</sup> Belting is a way of singing that is heard as untrained and forceful, with the sound emerging from the chest rather than the head. See Stephen Banfield, 'Stage and screen entertainers in the twentieth century,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. John Potter, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 66.

and Alex's subsequent rejection of her is a logical conclusion to this distortion in the nondiegetic soundtrack.

### 'THIS IS SO OPERATIC'

Silverman's summation of the maternal voice as operatic applies directly in *Radiance*, as Cressy arrives back at her mother's house after a long absence to the sound of 'her' own singing voice playing on Mae's CD player. It takes the narrative much longer to get to the truth of the relationships between the sisters. The diva's voice resonates through *Radiance* although little diegetic singing takes place. Carolyn Abbate has suggested that in opera, women possess the authorial voice through their powerful singing.<sup>483</sup> In *Radiance*, it is Cressy's singing voice that alludes to what Cressy cannot say in language. It is after the operatic gesture of the burning house complete with operatic musical accompaniment – her own recorded voice – that Cressy can access emotions connected with her own destructive childhood experiences. In this film, her singing authority as an international opera star is expressed through the diegetically sourced soundtrack of her voice on CD.

Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly* is a shaping force of the film. The use of the opera is an example of what Kassabian terms a musical '*allusion*': a musical quotation that evokes another narrative.<sup>484</sup> The opera, based on a play by David Belasco, tells the story of a young Japanese geisha, Cio-Cio-San, also known as Butterfly. She marries a foreign sailor, Pinkerton, who has no intention of keeping his vows when he returns home to America. Butterfly waits faithfully for him, and when Pinkerton comes back to Japan with his American wife, wanting to claim the son Butterfly has had and raised in the three years of his absence, Butterfly commits suicide, seeing it as the only way for her to die with honour and

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<sup>483</sup> Abbate, p. 228.

<sup>484</sup> Kassabian, pp. 49–50.

leave her son to a more secure future. The choice of the opera is apt on a narrative level, as both stories are about shame surrounding illegitimate children and abandoning mothers avoiding that shame. Cressy has remained absent from her child's life, and attempts suicide while the house burns, and Butterfly prefers suicide to a shameful life, having been rejected by Pinkerton. Similarly, Cressy sings to make money, as Butterfly is forced to do as a geisha before her marriage, and something that she refuses to do again.

What happens in *Radiance* is allusion with a twist: the story of the opera explained by Nona during her performance creates an association between the singing of 'Un bel di' and suicide/sacrifice, although the aria is Butterfly singing about her optimism that Pinkerton will return.<sup>485</sup> As one of the better-known sections of the opera, it allows perceivers to explicitly make a connection even if they do not have detailed musical understanding of the opera, as this aria stands in for the whole of the opera, a musical metonym. For more knowledgeable perceivers, the selected musical allusions offer another level of meaning that resonates with Cressy's character and the world of the diegesis. In Kassabian's terms, parts of the opera make up a compiled score that would negotiate a wide range of perceiver knowledges.

Cressy is first represented in the film with her face the iconic image of a CD cover but is immediately associated with singing. Nona puts on the CD *Madame Butterfly* and 'Che tua madre dovrà' begins to play. Cressy's arrival in a taxi is intercut with Nona putting on the CD, listening and beginning to sing along. The music creates an acoustic space that eventually brings mother and daughter together, both literally and figuratively, although Nona is not aware at this stage of the truth of their relationship.

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<sup>485</sup> See Appendix K and L for the translated libretto to 'Un bel di,' and Nona's (sung and spoken) version.

The sequence is a good example of the complexities of describing and classifying the status of film music in analysing its importance. Chion calls broadcast music an example of ‘on-the-air’ sound, sound that is transmitted electronically and which exhibits the ability to cross boundaries of cinematic space.<sup>486</sup> The music track here can also be understood in Hagen’s terms as both visual and implied source music, or source music and source scoring.<sup>487</sup> It is visual source music, as Nona is clearly seen putting on the CD, followed by a cut to Cressy’s arrival in a taxi. As Cressy gets out of the cab, she looks towards the house, as if she can hear the CD playing, where the source is implied as coming from the house. However, it could also be described as source music (coming from the CD within the diegesis) becoming source scoring (between diegetic and nondiegetic music) because it is tied to the narrative in heralding the arrival of Cressy, then returning to source music once more. The sound levels do not vary as the visuals move from the lounge room to the back of the house. The singing is sourced from within the narrative but used dramatically, positioning Cressy as different to her ‘sisters’.

Cressy’s singing voice announces and masks her own unexpected arrival. It can also be understood as enveloping her child, Nona. The sequence begins with a shot of Nona putting on the CD, followed by a two-shot with Mae. As Nona praises Cressy’s voice, she leans back her head and closes her eyes, surrendering to the sound, while Mae rolls her eyes sarcastically. The next nine shots bringing Nona and Cressy together leave Mae out of the frame until she moves to turn off the ‘maternal voice’ on the CD player. In the aria ‘Che tua,’ Butterfly rejects having to become a geisha (singer and dancer) again, a paid occupation she equates with dishonour.<sup>488</sup> Much of Butterfly’s libretto is in the third person, as if to describe a divided sense of self that bears comparison with Cressy, who has lived the dishonesty of her relationship to Nona and whose emotionality has previously been expressed through the technologically mediated performances of her CD and televised singing performance. The

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<sup>486</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 76.

<sup>487</sup> Kassabian, pp. 43–44.

<sup>488</sup> See Appendix M for the translated libretto of ‘Che tua madre dovrà.’

desperation of Butterfly as the abandoning mother is not exhibited by Cressy until the final moments of the film. As Butterfly, Cressy vocally exhibits her emotions that remain contained for much of the film. It is not until she and Mae burn the house down and Mae pulls her out of the flames that she has an emotional release that allows her to speak the truth to Nona.

Nona's diegetic singing is in response to Cressy's status as a singer and is a form of worship as well as an attempt to impress, but in ways that underline their relationship connections. The second use of the mother's mediated voice is Nona's artistic interpretation of the *Madama Butterfly* story to Cressy and Mae to the aria 'Un bel di.' Nona's own performance of 'Un bel di' parodies an operatic style, as she wears her red kimono with flowers in her hair, using large gestures, and a wide-open mouth. She sings along to Cressy's voice on CD, but uses her own words to relay the narrative to explain Cressy's televised performance to Mae. She puts her own self into the performance, but by partly ventriloquising her sister/mother's performance, she is also unknowingly aligning herself with Cressy, the diegetic events alluding to the relationship that Cressy has still not admitted to Nona. Acting as an 'acoustic mirror' Nona reflects back Cressy's performance. This song of return resonates with Cressy's return to see Nona. 'Un bel di' is also used as the house burns and Nona runs away from Cressy, with Mae following behind, the singing moving from source scoring (of different arias from the opera) to dramatic scoring. Once again this directly relates to Cressy and her hope of being reunited with her daughter now she has confessed to Nona.<sup>489</sup>

The melodramatic concerns of the film come to a climax with the eventual burning down of the house, fulfilling Mae's fantasy of revenge on Harry Wells, her mother's one true love who 'did the dirty' on her. Cressy, fully supporting Mae's idea, and with both of them having good reasons for wanting to be rid of the house, splashes petrol inside and seems to be in a kind of

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<sup>489</sup> The only sequence where the opera is heard and not directly associated with Cressy is a fragment of 'Ecco. Son giunte al sommo del pendio,' when Mae appears in her mother's unused wedding dress. In this section of the opera Butterfly's girlfriends sing as Butterfly attends her wedding to Pinkerton.

daze as she doesn't care that petrol splashes on herself and Nona. Exclaiming 'This is so operatic,' she bends down to turn on the CD player (out of the frame) and the music begins. Here, Cressy is doubly responsible for the musical selection, having 'sung' it, and chosen it to play as the house burns, an indication of a self that relates to the performing persona of Butterfly.

The section of music that is heard begins with Butterfly, about to enact her suicide, whispering 'Con onor muore chi non può serbar vita con onore' / 'To die with honour when one can no longer live with honour.'<sup>491</sup> The aria continues as Butterfly bids her son farewell and kills herself. While the aria plays, as if to continue to an operatic ending, Cressy walks back into the burning house in a daze, and has to be rescued by Mae. This occurs before the revelation of the circumstances of Nona's conception. The end of the opera corresponds to the drama of ending their emotional involvement with the house and Cressy (and Mae's) exorcising of ghosts, now able to tell Nona the truth. This filling in of the maternal silence or lacuna around a daughter happens also in *High Tide*.

## ACOUSTIC MATERNAL ABANDON

Felicity Collins argues that in the Gillian Armstrong films *High Tide*, *Mrs Soffel* (1984) and *The Last Days of Chez Nous* (1993) there is a 'space of maternal abandon' around daughters, a space where the mother belongs.<sup>492</sup> For Collins, in *High Tide* this space is transformed through Armstrong's representation of spatial relations between characters.<sup>493</sup> The space of maternal abandon also has an acoustic dimension. In *Mrs Soffel*, Collins suggests, there is a specific aural space left empty, where the mother counting at her piano-playing daughter's side is now absent.<sup>494</sup> This notion can be extended to *High Tide*, and to other films, where the

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<sup>491</sup> See Appendix N for the translated libretto of 'Con onor muore.' The start of the aria is heard only faintly and builds as Mae and Cressy splash petrol, and argue with Nona who doesn't want them to burn the house.

<sup>492</sup> Collins, *The Films of Gillian Armstrong*, p. 41, p. 46.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

return of the mother doesn't wholly satisfy the daughter's need to hear of her mother's love. Mothers in *High Tide*, *Only the Brave* and *Radiance* have maintained silences around their daughters' heritage and around their own relationships. The acoustic maternal abandonment of Alex, Ally and of the three women in *Radiance* creates the desire for that acoustic space to be filled with the words that these characters want to hear. For Ally, it is to hear her mother say that she loves her, a wish that is not fulfilled. The singing voice of Alex's mother in *Only the Brave* gives her a memory to cling to, but Alex wants to ask her the questions her father can't answer about her mother's absence. For Mae it is the unsatisfied desire to hear her mother Mary talk about her heritage, and to tell her that she loved her.

In *High Tide*, before Lilli arrives in Eden, Bet provides a 'sonorous envelope' of a surrogate mother's voice. Bet describes herself as doing 'a bit of amateur singing – nothing much,' when flirting with travelling performer Country Joe. She performs in the local club's talent quests regularly, and is seen ably performing for the patrons. At the start of the film she and Ally sing together in harmony, but as the narrative progresses Bet's soothing voice becomes fractured as she struggles to keep Ally from Lilli and grandmother and grand-daughter shout at each other more and more. Once defeated, Bet again becomes a soothing voice for Ally, reassuring her that they will keep in touch now Ally is about to leave.

The importance of sound is foregrounded from the opening moments of the film, the soothing sound of ocean waves preceding Lester and his group performing 'Johnny B. Goode.' At the level of song there is a distinct musical contrast between Bet's smooth club number and Lilli's participation in the retro Elvis act singing Chuck Berry rock classics and later, her own choice of song, Bob Dylan's 'Dark Eyes.' There is an aural overlap between Lilli and Bet before they meet, as they both perform at the Fisherman's Club. Bet's singing can be heard backstage as Lester enters his backing group's dressing room. Lester wants 'harmony' on



tour, but he and Lilli clash. As Lilli has just finished aggravating Lester, Bet passes the group's dressing room door, and at the sound of her voice Lilli gives a frown of partial recognition. Later, Bet's voice, calling Ally's name, precedes her meeting with Lilli in the laundry. There is no such recognition between Lilli and Ally until she sees Bet.

When Ally knows that Lilli is her mother, she seeks aural reassurance to explain her abandonment and their now resumed relationship. Lilli can't satisfactorily answer the questions that Ally asks her: 'Are you my mother?' 'Do you love me?' Collins suggests that rather than a return to a pre-Oedipal relationship, at its conclusion the film describes a 'post-Oedipal, intersubjective relation between mother and daughter ... of mutual recognition between two subjects' that produces a 'reciprocal space.'<sup>494</sup> This visual reciprocal space resonates with the aural space that is filled by Lilli's question 'Do you want to come with me?' and Ally's question as answer 'Can I?' The aural space of maternal abandonment is then filled, not with the words that Ally wants to hear ('I love you'), but an approximation that satisfies Ally enough to leave Bet.

In *Only the Brave*, Alex's mother's absence is partially filled by the singing mother's voice, remembered/dreamed and replicated by Vicki. However, when Alex and her mother actually meet, neither of them can speak – Alex can't ask her questions out loud, and the mother can't answer her unspoken demand. Paradoxically, the return of her mother makes her mother's abandonment complete. In the final sequences of the film, as Vicki commits suicide and Alex finds herself in hospital, silence surrounds Alex. Vicki is silent as she strikes a match and sets herself alight. None of Alex's hospital visitors make any sound.

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<sup>494</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

By the end of the film, singing's previously transgressive possibilities are nullified, as the maternal voice is completely silenced, completing Alex's acoustic abandonment. Vicki's suicide and the mother's silent return mean Alex no longer has any connection to home and to her mother's song. Alex's 'real' mother does not speak, offering no motives or reasons to explain her absence. Writing about film representations of Greek femininity, Freda Freiberg and Joy Damousi suggest that generally, Greek mothers have a 'very pale presence' in comparison with other 'ethnic' mothers, although Alex's mother overturns Greek stereotypes of meek motherly subservience, having absented herself from family and home.<sup>495</sup> Alex's mother's presence is pervasive, and visually and aurally striking. With her red dress and long wavy black hair, and the effects of her song on others, she has a strong presence without the perceiver knowing much about her. Her image and voice are both mediated through representations: with posters, photos, dreams and memories, and through Vicki's singing. However, when she turns up at Alex's hospital bedside, her power within the film is diminished through her silence, her voice and body still not properly synchronised.

The mother's arrival offers no sense of closure, and there is a sense in the hospital room that too much has happened for there to be any reconciliation. In an extended seven shot/reverse shot sequence, the mother looks at daughter and looks down then looks up again, while Alex's gaze remains on her. The series of looks suggests that the mother has nothing or perhaps too much to say about what has happened in their relationship but, like Lilli's initial position in *High Tide*, she is unable to fill the aural space of abandonment with any words at all. This is paralleled by an apparent physical reluctance or avoidance of taking up space next to her child – when she enters the hospital room, she remains at the foot of Alex's bed, unwilling or unable to come closer.

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<sup>495</sup> Freda Freiberg and Joy Damousi, 'Engendering the Greek: the shifting representations of Greek identity in Australian cinema 1970–2000,' in *Womenvision*, ed. Lisa French, Melbourne, Damned Publishing, 2003, p. 219, p. 222.

Mae in *Radiance* suffers a similar aural abandonment with her mother Mary's death, as her mother has never told her about her parentage, or told her that she was loved. But prior to Mary's death, it has been a profusion of vocal communication that has been problematic. Her mother's illness and subsequent continual verbal abuse has made their relationship more difficult, and brought Mae to the point of attempting to strangle her mother. As in *Only the Brave*, the mother's voice has become distorted so that it offers no comfort.

## AN EXTRADIEGETIC SONOROUS ENVELOPE

I now want to stretch the notion of the sonorous envelope a little further, and consider the way that another song is used within *Radiance*, potentially providing soothing comfort to perceivers rather than to characters within the diegesis. In the film, 'My Island Home' engenders both affiliating and assimilating identifications through its use in the film narrative. Nora Island, seen in the distance from Mary's house as a real place, also exists as a metonymic image of Mary's lost heritage and ancestry, and what her daughters have lost by her silence. This loss is recalled but soothed through the use of the song 'My Island Home,' whose lyrics speak of an imagined return to an island home 'waiting for me.'<sup>496</sup>

The song is first heard when Nona sings its opening lines when she tries to convince Cressy that she could also be a singer. The cue is then heard later on the soundtrack as dramatic scoring in a piano variation of the song while Nona scatters her (grand) mother's ashes on the island. This is immediately followed, as a separate cue, by the first and second verse and chorus of the Tiddas version of the song, as Nona returns to the mainland and sees Mae's purple car, apparently empty. The music is mixed down as Nona talks with Mae and Cressy, although it is still noticeable. A slide guitar, used earlier on the soundtrack when images of the island have been seen, is mixed with the harmonising voices of Tiddas, vocalising the

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<sup>496</sup> See Appendix O for the lyrics to 'My Island Home.'

melody but not the words as character dialogue continues. The singing of the third verse commences again as Mae's car roars along the road and the credits roll. In this way the importance of the lyrics are prioritised, making way for but not occluded by the dialogue, and the slide guitar reinforces the connection of the song to Nora Island and to Nona. On an extradiegetic level, the song can be understood as working as a site for the negotiation of individual and collective Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australian subjectivities.

The history of the song is pertinent, as although it is strongly identified as an 'Aboriginal' song, its genesis is more about collaboration between white and black Australians. The song is widely recognised, particularly since Christine Anu's performance of the song at the Closing Ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympics.<sup>497</sup> It was written by Neil Murray, an Australian of Scottish descent who was a member of the (otherwise) Aboriginal group, the Warumpi Band, for their lead singer George Rrurrambu about his island home, Elcho Island.<sup>498</sup> 'My Island Home' was recorded by the Warumpi Band in 1987, and by Anu, a singer of Torres Strait Island descent, in 1995. Tiddas, another Australian group comprising two Aboriginal and one white Australian member, recorded a version that is used in the film. The pop song resonates with a number of different 'islands' and 'homes' that furnish a comforting ending, despite the results of events in the narrative. Although their grand/mother's ashes are returned home, the three women are left dispossessed of any home, driving away from their mother's land. Considering the importance of land to Aboriginal identity, this would seem on a narrative level to constitute a loss, and yet the ending of the film, as the women leave together to the sound of the song, is uplifting.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> Thank you to Dr Felicity Plunkett for reminding me of this performance.

<sup>498</sup> Neil Murray. 'My Island Home' available from <[http://www.neilmurray.com.au/next\\_songlist.html](http://www.neilmurray.com.au/next_songlist.html)>, accessed 3/3/05.

<sup>499</sup> The 'Aboriginality' of the play and film has been downplayed despite indigenous elements that are interconnected with the very fabric of the film. For example, the *Radiance* press kit quotes producer Andy Myer: 'The story is one that could happen in any family anywhere in the world. The themes and issues are universal.' Beyond Films. 'Radiance Press Kit,' available from <[www.beyond.com.au/pdfs/radiance.pdf](http://www.beyond.com.au/pdfs/radiance.pdf)>, accessed 1/06/03.

Ceridwen Spark sees the women's departure at the end of the film as less of a dispossession and more of a continuing significance of what Spark calls 'emplacement': the women leaving together signal 'their changed subjectivities' while the island 'symbolises the ongoing significance of the women's Aboriginal heritage to the construction of their identities,' although they are leaving it behind.<sup>500</sup> Spark suggests that 'My Island Home' as the final song operates to confirm the significance of the island in relation to Indigenous connections to place.<sup>501</sup> I would argue that the popular song, at least since its circulation at the Sydney Olympics, also makes connections with a non-Aboriginal Australian audience who desire their own island home of Australia. In this way, the soundtrack also reinforces what Spark argues elsewhere: that the film fails to 'unmask whiteness' as a negative force on Aboriginal lives.<sup>502</sup>

## INTERIORS: PRIVATE SINGING SPACES

The interior spaces of cars and bedrooms afford singing subjects a protective and perhaps womb-like space where they can express themselves. Bedrooms are intimate places where revelations and personal conversations take place, and where such an exposing activity as singing can be safely performed. In film, the bedroom is often where a singing space of the female homosocial is created. Catherine Simpson, developing Meaghan Morris's ideas about the place of the car in Australian film drama of the 1970s and 1980s, discusses contemporary representations of the interior of the car as a 'volatile' place, paradoxically claustrophobic and yet 'a utopian sphere in which to reconstitute familial relations.'<sup>503</sup> As a space of familial domesticity, the internal space of the car directly relates to the bedroom in terms of a place of

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<sup>500</sup> Ceridwen Spark. 'Rethinking emplacement, displacement and indigeneity: *Radiance*, *Auntie Rita* and *Don't Take Your Love to Town*.' *Journal of Australian Studies* 75, Country, 2002, p. 97.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>502</sup> Ceridwen Spark. 'Gender and Radiance,' *Hecate* 27, no. 2, 2001, p. 47.

<sup>503</sup> Catherine Simpson, 'Volatile vehicles: when women take the wheel,' in *Womenvision: Women and the Moving Image in Australia*, ed. Lisa French, Melbourne, Damned Publishing, 2003, p. 198.

intimacy and a safe space for expression and experimentation through singing.<sup>504</sup> As I have discussed, in *Only the Brave* Alex's mother's song is introduced to the film through Vicki's rendition of it in Alex's bedroom, and in *Little Voice* the bedroom is also an important location of LV's private transgressive singing. As I argue below, in *Radiance*, Mary's bedroom is where Cressy and Nona talk about her and, I propose, where Cressy and Mae experience the 'acousmother,' an aural rather than visual representation of the absent mother. In *High Tide*, singers Bet and Lilli reveal their subjectivities through private singing more so than their public performances. Intimate interior spaces serve as a recurring motif where unspoken relations are expressed.

Although in *High Tide* there is narrative emphasis on the public singing performances of both Lilli and Bet, indicated by the amount of screen time they are afforded, their private singing performances are also significant. The first takes place in the intimacy of Bet's caravan, while she gets ready for her talent quest gig. Ally suggests an alternative to Bet's choice of song, 'It Had to be You' and together they perform a clapping song: 'I L-O-V-E love you, I K-I-S-S kiss you ...' Their joint performance suggests the initial harmony of their relationship with Bet as the successful surrogate mother.

The second private singing performance is when Ally first meets Lilli in the caravan park amenities block, before they are aware of their relationship. During the course of the film Lilli's singing maternal voice is not recognised as providing any acoustic space of maternal pleasure and comfort. Her boss, Lester, directs her public performances. It is not until Lilli's employment as a singer is finished that she meets her daughter, without them recognising each other. Consoling herself after she loses her job, she gets drunk and winds up on the toilet block floor, singing to herself. She needs Ally's assistance to get up. Lilli's choice of song,

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<sup>504</sup> Characters singing in cars often provide humorous moments, as unguarded expression. For example, Lester (Kevin Spacey) in *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999) and Geoffrey Rush in *Intolerable Cruelty* (Joel Coen, 2004).

‘Dark Eyes,’ which she regards as a ‘great song,’ is an expression of an unhappy self, accentuated by her pulls on her bottle of whisky after she sings. Lilli sings the last three lines of the song, where the singer/storyteller sings of ‘A million faces at my feet/ but all I see are dark eyes.’<sup>505</sup>

Lilli’s singing expresses a moment of unguarded vulnerability that Ally gets to see before Lilli is aware of their relationship. After this sequence, Lilli works hard to retain an emotional secrecy and continually retreats from Ally – disappearing into a restaurant toilet when overcome with emotion, and refusing to give Ally answers on the beach and in the car. As Collins notes, it is these spaces, the public toilets and the shower block, that are the most significant locations within the film.<sup>506</sup> The shower block is a liminal space that is both public and private. It is later rendered an intimate space of change through Lilli’s surreptitious looks at Ally shaving her legs, an indication of Ally’s development.

The musical contrast of Lilli’s own choice of song with the rock-and-roll numbers and her blonde onstage persona, both presumably chosen by Lester, reinforces her character as someone who is a troubled spirit. Like the use of *Madama Butterfly* in *Radiance*, the choice of song operates on different levels of understanding, depending on the perceivers’ knowledge. Lilli performs ‘Dark Eyes’ in a similar way to Dylan’s nasal and sometimes almost slurred delivery, alerting those who aren’t as familiar with his work that it is (most likely) a Dylan song. ‘A Dylan song’ carries with it certain connotations of counterculture. Lilli’s singing voice, heard in the club singing rock-and-roll, or a moody folk tune while drunk in the caravan park toilets, is not recognised by Ally, just as Lilli does not recognise the baby whom she abandoned.

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<sup>505</sup> See Appendix P for lyrics to ‘Dark Eyes.’ An earlier verse of the song talks of a ‘mother’s child’ who has ‘gone astray,’ a connection that may resonate with Dylan fans who know the rest of the words to the song Lilli sings.

<sup>506</sup> Collins. *The Films of Gillian Armstrong*, p. 51.

Ally has no inkling of her connection to Lilli. After Ally tells Bet that ‘that lady’ has left the caravan park, as they are driving in their ice-cream van, Bet gleefully sings along to the van’s tune, ‘Greensleeves.’ Both Collins and Stephen Crofts note Bet’s jubilant singing of the lyrics<sup>507</sup>: ‘to cast me off discourteously / for I have loved you o so long / delighting in your company.’ Bet assumes her threats to Lilli have worked: the last two lines of the fragment Bet sings confirm her ‘familial relations’ with Ally, voiced within the intimate space of the van interior, believing she has escaped any attempt by Lilli to claim Ally back from her. However, the earlier part of the song prefigures the film’s end. As Collins suggests, this ‘lament of the discarded woman’ is also Bet’s song because she is eventually cast-off by Ally.<sup>508</sup>

As I’ve suggested earlier, singers tend to dominate the acoustic space around them. To a lesser degree, this idea of power and control extends to music ‘choices’ that characters make in selecting their own diegetic soundtrack. In *Radiance*, Mae’s hesitant singing of ‘Amazing Grace’ at her mother’s funeral contrasts with Cressy’s singing talent and Nona’s performance abilities. However, it is in the space of the car, her fabulous purple Ford V8 that Mae expresses another self through her selection of music, Nokturnl’s ‘Unveiled,’ a fast rock/metal track that contrasts with her previously controlled character, but that matches her driving style in intensity. Simpson notes how Mae’s car defines her, and that Cressy and Nona’s means of transport, a taxi ride and a lift from a truckie respectively, also identifies their contrasting characterisation.<sup>509</sup> The contrasts between them are also exemplified by their music choices, of Cressy’s opera versus Nona’s Country & Western/pop versus Mae’s rock/metal.

For Chion, ‘anempathetic’ music ‘seems to exhibit conspicuous indifference to what is going on in the film’s plot, creating a strong sense of the tragic.’<sup>510</sup> Mae’s music is first heard as the

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<sup>507</sup> Crofts, 18, and Collins, *The Films of Gillian Armstrong*, p. 51.

<sup>508</sup> Collins, *The Films of Gillian Armstrong*, pp. 49–50.

<sup>509</sup> Simpson, p. 206.

<sup>510</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 221.



three women leave their mother's funeral, starting up loudly as Mae starts the car. They have to shout at each other to be heard over it. At first it would seem that the music is anempathetic, with the expectation of sadness after a funeral. But as the 'driving home' sequence progresses, Mae's anger at both her mother and at Harry Wells becomes more apparent, and the music then is empathetic with her character. Mae's anger is released and revealed once she gets behind the wheel – and her music selection within that space helps to describe it. Later in the narrative, a distraught Mae explains the difficulties with her ill mother and her mother's continual verbal abuse of her. In the space of her car Mae commands the acoustic dimension and through her music (it can easily be imagined) drowns out her mother's voice.

To end this chapter, I want to consider the aural representation of Mary's nonsynchronised voice in *Radiance*, again taking up Michel Chion's ideas about the *acousmètre*. I suggest that the film allows for an understanding of the absent mother's voice. The *acousmètre*, Chion asserts, often has powers of 'seeing all,' 'omniscience,' 'omnipotence' and 'ubiquity,' yet there are other kinds of *acousmètres* that are not as powerful which he identifies as 'paradoxical *acousmètres*.'<sup>511</sup> Extending Chion's definition, I argue unsourced singing heard in *Radiance* used as dramatic scoring has acousmatic properties, creating a fragmented *acousmètre*. Three striking sequences are pertinent to this interpretation, all of which take place in the mother Mary's bedroom in front of the wardrobe mirror.

The space of the bedroom is where Nona talks most fondly to her real mother Cressy about her assumed mother Mary. As she gets ready for the funeral, Nona is seen putting on a blue dress and admiring herself in the mirror. On the soundtrack Nona's giggle can be heard. When Cressy and Mae also step in front of their mother's mirror (separately), the soundtrack is different, featuring a voice singing a song a cappella. The melodic shape of the song

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<sup>511</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

suggests a lullaby or hymn.<sup>512</sup> Although this is nondiegetic singing, in this case I would argue that such a category is inadequate for these sequences, and that the singing voice operates as the equivalent of a voice-off for the character of the mother.

After arguing with Nona, Mae is seen looking at herself, dressed in a bra and petticoat, caressing her décolletage and face, and the singing is heard for the first time. Nona's stories suggest that it was in the bedroom that Mary was happiest, unlike the chair where she gazed out to Nora Island and where she died. The bedroom functions as a womb-like place of safety, where the comfort of the sonorous envelope of the mother's singing might have been experienced in the past. Before attempting to walk to the island Cressy changes into the blue dress that Nona had earlier tried on; when she looks at herself in the mirror, the same singing is heard. These three sequences in front of the mother's mirror suggest clues to Cressy's secret about Nona's conception: Mary 'sings' only for Mae and Cressy, her daughters, while Nona and Cressy, mother and daughter, are seen at different times wearing the same dress in the wardrobe mirror.

Using Chion's term, I consider this voice an *acousmètre*, one that seems to hover on the edge of being seen, although within the logic of the realist film the dead mother cannot be expected to appear. The repetition of the same singing voice and accompanying visuals, firstly with Mae and then Cressy looking at themselves in the mirror in their mother's bedroom, strongly suggests an acoustic presence for the dead and maligned mother. Chion uses the term 'subjective-internal' to describe sounds that are perceived as memories.<sup>513</sup> While it could be that the sound is an aural memory, repeated in exactly the same way for both daughters, there are indications that this singing could be considered in another category – that the 'acousmother' is somehow aurally present in her room. The first time the singing voice is

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<sup>512</sup> The film's credits are ambiguous as to the singer and song heard.

<sup>513</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 76.

heard as Mae looks at herself, the sound cuts off dramatically, matching the cut to Cressy and Nona outside in the rain. When Cressy faces the mirror, she looks up, startled, as the singing is heard again, as if she too can hear it. As shared memory or as ‘acousmother,’ the singing voice suggests an alternative identity to Cressy and Mae’s representations of their mother. Although the singing is not a showing of acousmatic power, the singing does allow a slight recuperation of Mary’s subjectivity – not as a sexually active being, or abandoning mother, but as a caring one, as Nona remembers her.

The soundtrack in these sequences provides a realisation of the mother, an absent character who is very much involved in the diegesis. The image of the mother is evoked through a photograph taken of her as a young girl, which sits on her dressing table. The photograph suggests someone very different to the memories that each of the daughters (Mae and Cressy) considers as true, while Nona thinks Mary is a ‘spunk.’ In the same way the soundtrack supports a different identity, a mother that cared for her children. While it is not known what the mother’s voice sounds like, it evokes the mother through timbre and tone, the words indecipherable to most Western audiences (because it is in an Aboriginal language) but soothing and comforting. Although the words are untranslated and their semantic meaning available only to a small percentage of the audience, its calming sound offers a tenderness. In this way the disembodied voice can be understood as the mother’s voice, challenging her daughters’ memories of her as entirely selfish.

Whether ‘sonorous envelope’ or ‘umbilical web,’ the singing mothers’ voices in *High Tide*, *Radiance* and *Only the Brave* are of great significance both within the diegesis and on an extradiegetic level. The mother’s voice, even when the mother is absent, can shape behaviour and desire. Her lack of acoustic connection can leave a space of abandonment as painful as her lack of physical presence for abandoned daughters, but sometimes her mediated voice can

provide a connection point and a space of self-expression that is otherwise denied in the narrative. In this way songs can work as a site for the negotiation of female subjectivity where the conflict between motherhood and creative career are played out. I examine a different aspect of the negotiation of female subjectivity in the final chapter, using scenes from *Mulholland Drive* and *Muriel's Wedding*. In particular I explore perceptions of two lip-syncing sequences as examples of the overt questioning of the 'perfect' unity of women's bodies and voices demanded by patriarchal societies and by classical cinematic texts. With the participating characters there is a conscious play with the presumed unity of identity. This play can prove to be dangerous for the singers involved, as it is in *Mulholland Drive*, or liberating, as it is in *Muriel's Wedding*.

## 5. Synchronicity

Throughout the thesis I have been concerned with issues surrounding women as singing subjects, set within a larger theme of the problematic relationship that feminist theories suggest women have with language. Using Kaja Silverman's work on cinematic 'containment' of female characters as a starting point, I have explored questions surrounding the demand for synchronicity of women's voices and bodies and the gendered implications of such a demand for singing in film. I have suggested that issues surrounding synchronicity are complex, and 'containment' of women characters cannot always be assumed, particularly in singing sequences. In this chapter, I explore a form of 'singing' where the split between body and voice is overt, and where the exposure of the artifice of synchronicity can have both negative and positive implications for representations of women. Sequences in both *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001) and *Muriel's Wedding* (PJ Hogan, 1994) use lip-syncing in ways that can be understood to be commenting on women's representation, and as a potential site of feminist resistance to hegemonic patriarchal expectations.

Lip-syncing to a song is a conscious and deliberate singing transformation, where the 'singer' is most usually ventriloquising the voice of another. In film and music video production, lip-sync is a standard practice where body and voice are split and joined together in the editing stage to produce a 'realistic' synchronised performance. When the act of lip-sync is performed, like an associated singing form, karaoke,<sup>515</sup> it can be humorous, a parody of a 'star' performer. If the act of lip-sync is not foregrounded, its revelation is profoundly disturbing for perceivers, because it disrupts the expectation of coherence of the self, dividing the body and voice. Just as singing can be a transformative experience, representations of

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<sup>515</sup>An associated form of lip-sync is karaoke, when a singer actually sings the words of an (often) famous song, with the words displayed on a video screen for the performer while the music plays. Lip-sync is sometimes described as karaoke mime.

performed lip-sync can raise questions about a character's subjectivity. Making the split between body and voice obvious can empower or transform, disturb or entertain.

The pivotal lip-sync performance in *Mulholland Drive* is one of disturbing disruption. The female homosocial created between a singer (Rebekah del Rio) and audience members Betty (Naomi Watts) and Rita (Laura Elena Harring), and the connection that it engenders, is shattered through the violent splitting of the woman singer's voice and body. The split suggests that perfect synchronicity of female body and voice is an illusion. Conversely, in *Muriel's Wedding* lip-sync is performed as a joyous expression for the film's protagonist Muriel (Toni Collette), and acts as a site for a convincing demonstration of the power of a collective female homosocial, through her relationship with Rhonda (Rachel Griffiths). Muriel's lip-syncing and singing with Rhonda provides an unfettered expression of jubilant female collectivity, working in synchronicity. Using pertinent aspects of music video analysis, I consider how their performance of 'Waterloo' functions to evoke female friendship, then go on to explore the function of other singing sequences and songs within *Muriel's Wedding*.

Amy Lawrence suggests that sound technology itself makes it difficult for women to speak, and that dubbing scenes in films such as *Inside Daisy Clover* (Robert Mulligan, 1965) and *Postcards from the Edge* (Mike Nichols, 1990) reveal the technical means by which the industry perfects the impossible female image, a demand for which 'supplants, undermines or domesticates the female performer.'<sup>516</sup> *Mulholland Drive* and *Muriel's Wedding* offer contrasting examples of film representations of lip-sync performance. The exposure of the artifice of synchronicity, through being ruptured or knowingly embraced, can be read as transgressive or empowering moments for women characters in these films.

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<sup>516</sup> Lawrence, 'Losing her voice: silencing two daughters of Hollywood,' p. 219.

## VOICES AND MOVING LIPS

For contemporary Western audiences the expectation of synchronised lip-sync for film dialogue is very high, to the extent of being described by Elizabeth Weis as a ‘fetish’ for certain audiences.<sup>517</sup> Marguerite Duras has suggested that for contemporary cinema, voices must be ‘nailed down’ to bodies, a practice that she has flouted in her film work.<sup>518</sup> Accurate synchronisation meets a Western audience’s expectation of accomplished and polished film-making.<sup>519</sup> Disruptions to this expectation can take the audience from the space of the film, and nonsynchronisation’s disruptive effect can be used subversively when it works against expectations.<sup>520</sup>

The possibilities of technological manipulation mean that it is not always clear if the actor’s speaking voice is also the singing voice that is heard. However, the power of singing does not rely on the actuality of the voice coming from the presented body, just that perceivers accept the ‘audio-visual contract.’<sup>521</sup> Chion describes accurate dubbing as functioning ‘not so much to guarantee truth, but rather to authorize belief.’<sup>522</sup> For example, while Jane Horrock’s singing in *Little Voice* is impressive, the extratextual knowledge of Horrock’s talents is not necessary to accept her singing/acting performance. Because of the effect of synchresis, there is an expectation that the voice and body, present at the same time, are connected to each other, and that the visible body is responsible for the voice. When that is disrupted, belief is destabilised, as it is in *Mulholland Drive*.

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<sup>517</sup> Weis, ‘Sync Tanks: The Art and Technique of Postproduction Sound,’ (accessed).

<sup>518</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, p. 130.

<sup>519</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, pp. 63–65. Chion notes that Italian post-synching is looser than the French, and so is criticised by French audiences, yet creates a more ‘poetic’ effect.

<sup>520</sup> Nonsynchronised performances or inaccurate lip-sync has also be used for comedic effect. Such comedy often has racist or derogatory implications when a Western soundtrack ‘talks over’ the original film soundtrack. See Philip Brophy, ‘Funny Accents: The Sound of Racism,’ in *Cinesonic: Experiencing the Soundtrack*, ed. Philip Brophy, North Ryde, AFTRS, 2001, pp. 227–237.

<sup>521</sup> Chion’s term for the acceptance of the perceiver that particular sounds and images belong together. Chion, *Audio-Vision*, p. 222.

<sup>522</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, p. 127.

## *Mulholland Drive* AND THE LOSS OF THE BODY

The expectations of lip-sync and synchronisation are not met in a most dramatic instance in *Mulholland Drive*. Disembodying the female voice has drastic consequences that allow a questioning of female subjectivity. *Mulholland Drive* is a richly complex film with a narrative that defies easy explanation or interpretation.<sup>523</sup> An aspiring actress named Betty Elms (Naomi Watts) arrives in Los Angeles to stay at her aunt's apartment, having won a contest she hopes will help her start a film career. Meanwhile, a woman (Laura Elena Harring) involved in a car accident the night before, following her attempted murder, searches for a safe place to hide, and creeps into Betty's aunt's apartment just as the aunt leaves. The mysterious woman is in the apartment having a shower when Betty arrives. Unable to remember her name when Betty discovers her there, the woman takes the name Rita from a poster of *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946) that hangs in the bathroom.

Much of the narrative revolves around Betty and Rita attempting to discover Rita's identity. The only clues they have are the contents of Rita's purse, which contains a large amount of money and an unusual key, and Rita's recollection that the name 'Diane Selwyn' could be important. There are also other characters that are involved in their story to a greater or lesser degree: a man in a diner, dealing with disturbing nightmares; an inept hit man; a film director, Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux), being threatened into choosing a particular actress for a part in his new film. A dramatic turning point in the film occurs when Rita begins talking in her sleep, speaking Spanish phrases and repeating the word 'silencio.' She wakes, and follows a strong urge to go 'somewhere' with Betty, a seedy night theatre named Club Silencio, the name of which is eventually revealed to have particular significance.

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<sup>523</sup> The film began as a TV series pilot that was eventually rejected by the US ABC television network and finished a couple of years later as a film with money from French production company Canal Plus. *Mulholland Drive*'s complicated production history is often used to account for the number of narrative threads that are not satisfactorily resolved in the film, although such an approach to narrative is typical of Lynch's films. See for example Kim Newman, 'Mulholland Dr.', *Sight & Sound* 12, no. 1, 2002, pp. 50–51.



Betty and Rita arrive at Club Silencio, in the middle of a sinister magician's act. Silencio's magician repeats the Spanish words that have been spoken by Rita in her sleep. His performance reveals the 'smoke and mirrors' of his use of sound: he tells the audience 'there is no band,' while the sound of a band can be heard playing. A trumpet player appears onstage, as if playing the solo that can be heard, but then he removes the instrument from his lips as the trumpet playing continues. The magician warns the club audience (and the film's audience) in several languages during his performance: 'This is all a tape recording,' 'It is all recorded,' 'It is an illusion.' His performance causes Betty to shake violently in her seat. It is only retrospectively that the significance of the magician's act at Club Silencio gives a clue to the technology that is operating backstage and that this technology might be used in other ways.

Following the magician's performance (once he theatrically disappears in a puff of smoke), a female singer is introduced as 'la Llorona de Los Angeles, Rebekah del Rio.' The character and the singer share the same name, initially suggesting to those who are familiar with the performer a 'guarantee' of a 'real' singing performance. Del Rio emerges from between red velvet curtains and sways out to the microphone. Framed in a long shot, del Rio is dressed in a tight fitting, low cut velvet dress and high heels. In these opening shots, the bright spotlight and the use of a long shot mean her face cannot be seen clearly. When her face is seen in close-up after she has begun to sing, her heavy make-up, along with her 'big' hair, is reminiscent of Dorothy in *Blue Velvet* (1986). However, the presence of a painted-on tear below del Rio's right eye is a significant and more theatrical difference compared to Dorothy's appearance. In a review of the film Kim Newman notes that *la Llorona* is a character from Hispanic-American mythology, 'the ghost of a mother who has lost or killed

her children, who wails in advance of tragedy.<sup>524</sup> Even without knowing such connections, the tear and make-up accentuate the underlying pathos of del Rio's vocal performance.

Her singing performance begins as a moving and particularly embodied rendering of the Roy Orbison song, 'Crying,' sung a cappella in Spanish. Here also, as the magician has told the audience, there is no band. The cinematic detail of fit between body and voice is flawless, with close-ups affording the perceiver a view of the singer's tongue and throat movements. The angle of the shot used by Lynch allows the audience to see quite intimately into del Rio's mouth as she sings. Part of the pleasure of lip-sync is to do with the visible, with the performer achieving synchronisation and the audience observing that the mouth is correctly synchronised. In both psychoanalytic theory and French feminist theory, women and mouths are closely associated. As I've discussed, the similarities between the mouth, female sex organs and the vocal folds make an explicitly physical connection between them that has been considered in the work of a number of theorists and writers. The intimacy generated through the visual and aural attention devoted to the singer's mouth intensifies the impact both narratively and symbolically when the female body ceases its performance while the female voice continues.

Del Rio's use of Spanish is somewhat expected, prefigured by Rita's spoken Spanish outburst in her sleep which results in their going to the Club, the name of the venue and the magician's multi-lingual performance. But there is still a slight sense of dislocation hearing such a well-known song sung in a language other than its original English. The popularity of the song means that the lyrics are likely to be known by many in a Western audience, particularly Roy Orbison fans, and/or David Lynch fans.<sup>525</sup> The lyrics describe the anguish and trauma of love

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<sup>524</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>525</sup> As discussed earlier, Lynch uses another of Roy Orbison's songs, 'In Dreams,' to powerful effect in *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986).

that is unreturned.<sup>526</sup> The effect on a non-Spanish speaking audience is to concentrate attention on the ‘grain of the voice’<sup>527</sup> of del Rio, while simultaneously evoking a sensation of understanding an unknown language. Wole Soyinka understands what Barthes calls the ‘grain of the voice’ as interchangeable with ‘soul’; such a description is appropriate for del Rio’s moving performance.<sup>528</sup> The pain expressed by the lyrics can be heard through the nuances of Del Rio’s vocals, while the extensive use of close-ups allow an intimate connection with the emotion her singing face expresses.

Perceivers see a hyper-synchronised performance. It is not only that the lips are in perfect tandem with the musical sounds that emerge, but also the sounds and bodily movements of breathing all work together to produce what is initially a completely convincing singing performance. Additionally, what makes the performance seem so ‘real’ are the attendant sounds accompanying a closely miked performance. The sound of the microphone, heard being bumped before del Rio begins singing, and the rhythmic rush of an inward breath as the singer inhales to sing out, operate as examples of Chion’s ‘materializing sound indices,’ and add to the veracity.

The scene prioritises close-ups both of del Rio and of Betty and Rita sitting transfixed in the audience. Other audience members are present but are rarely sighted during the song. Both Betty and Rita are physically moved by the performance. When del Rio abruptly freezes and then collapses to the floor, before the song has ended, both cannot take their eyes from the stage. Del Rio is unceremoniously dragged behind the red velvet curtain, while her haunting voice continues to sing. The performer’s body, not her voice, is rendered ‘silent’ in Club Silencio. On first viewing, the scene is particularly shocking, and after repeated experiences I

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<sup>526</sup> See Appendix Q for the lyrics to ‘Crying.’

<sup>527</sup> I have discussed Barthes’ term earlier, in chapter 2. Barthes, p. 182, p. 185.

<sup>528</sup> Wole Soyinka, ‘The critic and society: Barthes, leftocracy and other mythologies,’ in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., New York, Methuen, 1984, p. 56. fn 20.

continue to find it disturbing. The collapse of the singer raises questions about how the performance can be understood, and perhaps casts doubt on all singing scenes. Should the first half of the performance be called singing, when the collapse of the body means that it could have been lip-sync?<sup>529</sup> Can these distinctions be so clearly made in relation to cinematic productions?

The lip-sync performance in *Club Silencio* is in part so powerful because the disembodiment of the singing voice is visualised as it happens. Witnessing this disembodiment with the singer's collapse results in the need for a dramatic and immediate reappraisal of the performance and provokes questions about whether the body and voice are supposed to be together. It also visualises a splitting of subjectivity, suggesting cracks in, using Lawrence's phrase, the 'impossible female image' of the perfect (attractive) female body and voice. Clearly the gendered expectations of body and voice are not disrupted. But the visible splitting of body and voice is a shock, working against film production expectations and the (psychoanalytically explained) demand for synchronisation.

As I have discussed earlier, according to Silverman's work in *The Acoustic Mirror*, issues of synchronisation are crucial to the representations of women in film. Silverman argues that women remain confined to the 'safe place' of the story, and that '[s]ynchronisation provides the means of that confinement.'<sup>530</sup> She argues that this is exacerbated with a song and dance number. Alternatively, nonsynchronisation of female voice and body, evident in experimental feminist cinema, offers a powerful way for women to speak. I have argued in earlier chapters that in terms of Silverman's theorising, some contemporary representations of singing performances can be understood as challenging her proposed gendered power divide of vocal representation, because synchronised performances of female characters such as Amy and LV

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<sup>529</sup> The body is still required for lip-sync to be performed, but the performance is only understood as lip-sync retrospectively.

<sup>530</sup> Silverman, 'Dis-embodiment of the female voice,' p. 310.

can also show acoustic authority, at least temporarily, and provide singing spaces that are potentially empowering or transgressive. However, the dislocation that Silverman suggests can evoke a forceful questioning of female subjectivity is evident in the lip-syncing/singing scene in *Mulholland Drive*.

Chion, like Silverman, ascribes importance to the cinematic voice that is bodiless, which he names the *acousmêtre*. As I discuss in the previous chapter, Chion argues that the return of synchronicity with the matching of the voice to a body means a loss of power: ‘An inherent quality of the *acousmêtre* is that it can be instantly dispossessed of its mysterious powers (seeing all, omniscience, omnipotence, ubiquity) when it is *de-acousmatized*, when the film reveals the face that is the source of the voice.’<sup>531</sup> When the reverse process takes place, when the body is taken from the voice, as in *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001), questions of power are problematised. There is no agent, and yet the voice continues with authority. Silverman argues that certain feminist filmmakers manipulate women’s voices to ‘interrogate female subjectivity in ways that would have been impossible without permitting it a certain distance from the image track,’ by ‘voice-off and voice-over, jettisoning synchronization, symmetry, and simultaneity in favour of dissonance and dislocation.’<sup>532</sup> The singing sequence from *Mulholland Drive* shows that such an interrogation may also take place in films that are not feminist or experimental,<sup>533</sup> where a body that might be ‘matched’ to a voice has been removed. Because the scene centres around a minor character of whom the audience has no knowledge, beyond her physical and vocal presence onstage and her effect on the central characters, the ambiguity created enables multiple readings of what her disrupted performance means.

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<sup>531</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 130.

<sup>532</sup> Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 165.

<sup>533</sup> Lynch’s film-making practice is in some regards *avante-gard*, but in both *Mulholland Drive* and *Blue Velvet*, narrative cause and effect relations are still important. His work is significantly different from the experimental films that Silverman discusses in *The Acoustic Mirror*.

In film-making practice, post-synchronisation or dubbing (used for spoken texts) and playback (used for sung texts) are both technological necessities for the reproduction of lip-sync.<sup>534</sup> Silverman considers that dubbing, like synchronisation, ‘performs a supervisory role with respect to sexual difference.’<sup>535</sup> There is a demand for ‘proper’ gender matching of women’s bodies with women’s voices, and men’s bodies with men’s voices. With dubbing, actors’ voices are recorded to match the moving lips already edited on screen, while playback involves lips moving to match recorded voices.<sup>536</sup> With playback, music or songs are played for the performers to move to while shooting musical numbers or music video. Michel Chion suggests that playback is a ‘*centripetal*’ process, one where the body ‘incorporates the voice, in aspiring to achieve an impossible unity.’<sup>537</sup> The notion of an impossible unity is one that resonates with the ‘impossible female image’ and dominant cinematic practices to create representations of women in cinema, where patriarchal pressures demand women look and sound in ways that do not challenge hegemonic femininity. The Club Silencio singing/lip-syncing sequence represents a rupturing of this impossible unity, a resistance to dominant demands placed on women’s representation.

When the singer in Club Silencio collapses, she reveals the space between the body and voice that generally has to be disavowed in dominant cinema. Consideration of the technological aspects of reproduction of the voice makes plain that, whether as a deliberate entertainment performance or (invisibly) employed as the standard industry film practice for dialogue, lip-sync evidences the contemporary technological requirements of fracture and reconstruction to reproduce sound and image. Jody Berland points out that ‘[w]ith the

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<sup>534</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, pp. 154–155. For contemporary Hollywood film production, dialogue is often rerecorded after the edited film has been put together to get a ‘cleaner’ sound, and so actors voices are dubbed, repeating words exactly so that the sound corresponds with what is seen on screen. Also known as ADR (automatic dialogue replacement or recording) or ‘looping,’ the process is used extensively, although location sound is generally preferred. See also Thom, p. 20.

<sup>535</sup> Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 47.

<sup>536</sup> Knowledge about lip-sync makes necessary the end credits in *Little Voice* as proof that the sound heard is not just technological ‘magic,’ but that the voice and body of LV/Jane Horrocks ‘really’ exist as they are represented in the film, able to imitate a panoply of voices.

<sup>537</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, p. 154.

invention of sound recording, the singer is split from the song, and from the listener, whose relation to the singer is mediated by the song.<sup>538</sup> Restoring or replacing that lost unity is what cinema offers.<sup>539</sup> With lip-sync singing there is paradoxically a synchronised or unified performance, and yet a kind of ‘double address’ of body and singer.

While the physical body is lost, both the affect and effect of the song remain powerful as the singing voice continues on without being ‘nailed’ to a body, and without the certainty that the body previously ‘belonging’ to the voice was the ‘right’ one. This uncertain ‘retrospective’ matching of body to voice does not result in a disempowering of the female voice heard, although the body is rendered powerless. Rita and Betty continue to stare even though the spectacle of the apparently lifeless body has been removed and del Rio’s voice has an acoustic authority now as a free-floating sound. While the split of the body/voice and the loss/removal of the body call into question a unified female subjectivity, these act as a precursor to what follows in the narrative of the film. The scene agrees with Silverman’s assessment of the dislocated female voice that can interrogate identity, but also questions the state of synchronicity as a ‘safe’ place for women characters, as perfect synchronicity is destined to fail.

Del Rio’s performance as La Llorona de Los Angeles can be understood as a warning to the two women in advance of what will be Betty’s tragedy. After the song, Betty discovers a strange box in her handbag. On their return home with the mysterious box, Betty disappears as Rita looks for her key, which matches the lock on the box. On her turn of the key, the film’s narrative world changes dramatically, where the women’s identities within the film are swapped: Rita becomes star actress Camilla, and Betty is now Diane Selwyn, her desperate

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<sup>538</sup> Jody Berland, ‘Sound, Image and Social Space: Music Video and Media Reconstruction.’ in *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*. eds. Simon Frith, Andrew Goodwin and Lawrence Grossberg. London and New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 28.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*

girlfriend, who will soon be ‘Crying’ over the loss of her lover Camilla to director Adam Keshner. In the film narrative it is only the women characters who are ‘rearranged’ in the alternative universe of the diegesis, and whose subjectivities are interchangeable. The ‘safety’ of synchronisation is also questioned by the film narrative through these switches of subjectivity. Just as there is a split between body and voice, there is a split between women characters and identities.

The sequence suggests that it is the hyper-synchronised performance that appears to be the cause of the rupture between the singer’s body and voice. The consequences are devastating for del Rio, and for Rita and Camilla. The sequence deconstructs the ideal of an acceptable femininity. The attractive body and voice are fractured in a most violent way, exposing the impossibility of unity, and suggesting how (patriarchal) demands are indeed never met in film, although that may be how it appears and what hegemonic film practices require. In this way the sequence can be understood as a deliberate (albeit destructive) disruption or subversion of what is expected of women by dominant discourses. The auditory power that del Rio has as ‘pure’ voice is not the same as the disembodied voice of male authority that Silverman suggests has a position of authority and ‘potency,’ yet it continues to ‘speak’ to Betty and Rita, and to me as a perceiver. The possibility of the rupturing of a unified subjectivity evoked by the scene is foregrounded by earlier incidents in the film, concerning Rita’s lack of known identity. Rita’s taking of her name from the *Gilda* poster not only reflexively quotes the earlier film, but for knowledgeable perceivers retrospectively links to the body and voice split in *Mulholland Drive*. Del Rio is convincingly ‘dubbed’ by herself. In *Gilda*, Rita Hayworth was dubbed by an uncredited Anita Ellis.<sup>540</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> Warner, p. 95.



The scene in Club Silencio can also be understood as a metaphor for the visual and aural illusion created by cinema. The sequence is a critique of Hollywood artifice, the very antithesis to the singing sequence in *Singin' In The Rain* (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1951), when a 'real' singer is revealed 'behind' a lip-syncing actor. Silent screen star Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen), onscreen romantic partner to Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly), has a voice deemed unsuitable for the new 'talkie' technology, and to save her and Don's latest film, they use the voice of Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds), Don's new 'real life' love. The climax of the film transpires when Lina continues to refuse to give Kathy credit for saving the film. At the premiere, the film is rapturously received, and the crowd demands a song 'live.' The singing Kathy is hidden behind the stage curtain while Lina lip-syncs. Don and his friend Cosmo Brown (Donald O'Connor) lift the curtain to humiliate Lina and reveal who is 'really' singing.<sup>541</sup>

Industry revelation of technological artifice is employed earlier in *Mulholland Drive* as director Adam Kesher auditions the girl Camilla Rhodes (in the first half of the film played by Melissa George) who his mysterious and violent backers insist that he hires. Camilla's lip-syncing to Linda Scott's 'I've Told Every Little Star,' is identified by Adam's yelling of 'playback' as she begins her audition. There is no attempt to convince that this is anything other than a lip-synced performance, and the use of medium shots and medium long shots of the actor don't allow a close examination of synchronicity, as is possible with the later scene in Club Silencio. (This first Camilla again appears as another character later in the film, as another of the alternative Camilla Rhodes's lovers.<sup>542</sup>) As Newman describes, lip-syncing

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<sup>541</sup> Lina is further humiliated when Cosmo takes over the singing and Lina continues to lip-sync. Voice manipulation also occurs (famously) in the film at the level of production, with the singing voice of Betty Royce used for Kathy's number 'Would You' that Kathy 'dubs' for Lina Lamont. Kathy's dubbing of Lina's speaking voice is actually performed by the actor who plays Lina, Jean Hagen. Warner. pp. 93–96.

<sup>542</sup> The first Camilla's audition is for Adam's film within the film, *The Sylvia North Story*, which Betty (Naomi Watts), in the latter part of the film as Diane Selwyn, talks of as she explains her relationship to Camilla Rhodes (previously Rita, actor Laura Elena Harring).

and 'life-sync[ing]' are paralleled in *Mulholland Drive*.<sup>543</sup> Life-syncing and lip-syncing take on aspects of the interchangeability of voices, bodies and subjectivity, but only in relation to women. Within the logic of the film narrative, women can be switched around and the story continues. Womanhood is reduced to a single note: any desirable woman may stand in for another, diminishing the differences and separate subjectivities of individual women.

In *Club Silencio*, a public space is made private through sound and image editing. While there are other members in the audience, seen briefly as Rita and Betty enter the theatre, the sequence is edited to visually favour Betty, Rita and the singer's performance onstage. The juxtaposed close-ups of the three actors creates a sense of a private performance, one that visibly affects both Rita and Betty. They begin to cry at the start of the second verse of the song, while the singer is still present. The editing suggests a formation of a female homosocial between Rita, Betty and the singer. The connection between them becomes one of horror as Betty and Rita witness the rupturing of the singer's identity, in a violent display exposing the illusion of a coherent subjectivity. Del Rio transgresses expectations of a unified performance but it is a distressing event to witness because of the violence of the pulling apart of body and voice. In *Club Silencio*, Betty and Rita's bonding over the song and the collapse of the singer is a mutual recognition of what disruption to unity may mean. It is a prefiguring of the 'life-syncing' Betty and Rita are about to perform in the film narrative as the alternative narrative world of the film takes over. For Betty, about to 'become' Diane Selwyn, this 'swapping' ultimately leads to her death.

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<sup>543</sup> Newman, p. 51.

## SINGING TOGETHER

Singing can create a bonding experience, and in both *Mulholland Drive* and *Muriel's Wedding* lip-sync performances act as pivotal scenes in marking female relationships. Like singing, lip-syncing together can create an important aural dimension that assists in evoking the female homosocial, a sonic space created when women sing with or to each other. Vocal synchronisation with each other allows for an emotional resonance between characters. A private connection can be experienced or enjoyed through a public performance, and this happens for both Rita and Betty, and Muriel and Rhonda. Generally, singing spaces of the female homosocial are created and valorised in *Muriel's Wedding* through the use of the music of ABBA, the 1970s Swedish supergroup.

In *Muriel's Wedding*, unemployed and socially awkward protagonist Muriel Heslop (Toni Collette) is a dedicated ABBA fan. Writer and director PJ Hogan wrote ABBA's music into the screenplay as an integral part of Muriel's character, marking her as 'uncool' within the film narrative,<sup>544</sup> but appealing to a contemporary audience with an appreciation for her 1970s style.<sup>545</sup> As a musical selection, ABBA's songs are particularly appropriate for an Australian film as the group's popularity in Australia during the 1970s was immense. 'ABBA-mania' occurred after the group's Eurovision song contest win in 1974 with 'Waterloo,' and was tied very much to their media presence created through their music 'promo' film clips.<sup>546</sup> ABBA's reluctance to tour encouraged them to make film clips, a promotional medium that had been used since the mid-sixties by popular groups like The Beatles. ABBA utilised TV director Lasse Hallström (later to become a film director), ensuring a consistent aesthetic and editing style. ABBA followed an objective of making clips that were different to the one-shot band

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<sup>544</sup> Reid, pp. 64–65. Reid also recounts the amusing anecdote of how producers Jocelyn Moorhouse and Lynda House and director PJ Hogan eventually wrote letters to ABBA (who have personal veto over the use of their music) after being denied permission a number of times, begging them for the use of their songs for the film.

<sup>545</sup> Catherine Lumby, 'Music and camp: popular music performance in *Priscilla* and *Muriel's Wedding*,' in *Screen Scores: Studies in Contemporary Australian Film Music*, ed. Rebecca Coyle, North Ryde: AFTRS, 1998, p. 80.

<sup>546</sup> Carl Magnus Palm, *Bright Lights, Dark Shadows*, London, Omnibus Press, 2001, p. 245, p. 272.

performances that were prevalent at the time. In contrast, ABBA wanted their faces to be clearly visible, putting the group ahead of what would become the dominant stylistic choices when music video became the normal music promotional practice in the 1980s.<sup>547</sup>

Molly Meldrum, the presenter of influential Australian music show *Countdown*, claims that it was his show that most significantly created the group's popularity by playing their film clips, four of which were released at the same time.<sup>548</sup> ABBA historian Carl Magnus Palm suggests that *Countdown*'s initial use of ABBA's clips was due in part to the TV show's need for colour product, as colour television had only recently arrived in Australia!<sup>549</sup> 'Mamma Mia' was only released as a single in Australia to cater to the unprecedented demand *Countdown* created through playing the film clip of the song, which remained number 1 in the Countdown Top 10 for ten weeks.<sup>550</sup> The link between music and music video resonates with the way ABBA has been signified in filmic representations.

Healthy sales of the soundtrack of *Muriel's Wedding* indicate the successful revival of ABBA's music through the success of the film.<sup>551</sup> Catharine Lumby notes in her essay about the significance of parody and performance in *the Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Stephan Elliott, 1994) and *Muriel's Wedding*, that there is a 'broad spectrum of ABBA consumers – from the sincere and sentimental to the hip, camp and cynical.'<sup>552</sup> She argues that a 'knowing' contemporary consumer of the music might 'remake the music' through consciously or unconsciously understanding the music and its appreciation as a 'camp' sensibility, or appreciate it in the naïve and sentimental manner that Muriel does in the

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<sup>547</sup> Ibid., pp. 243–244.

<sup>548</sup> *ABBA Reborn*, (video recording), Prime, 2004.

<sup>549</sup> Palm, p. 270.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>551</sup> Mark Dezzani, 'Global Soundtrack Pulse,' *Billboard* 108, no. 17, 1996, 49–50. In 1996, *Billboard* reported the sales of the *Muriel's Wedding* soundtrack at around 35,000 units, in a market where a few thousand sales was considered a good result for a film soundtrack.

<sup>552</sup> Lumby, p. 79.

film.<sup>553</sup> Contemporary use of ABBA music allows for a variety of responses, depending on the perceiver's musical knowledge and personal history connected to the song, and these differing positions (of sincere to cynical) might not be exclusive. The music also connects to the appeal of Muriel's story of transformation.

Muriel's awkward social status emerges in the early moments of the film: picked up by the police at her friend Tania's wedding, she's taken home to face the criticism of her father Bill (Bill Hunter), who is a councillor for their coastal hometown, Porpoise Spit. She's abandoned by her friends Tania (Sophie Lee), Nicole (Pippa Grandison), Janine (Belinda Jarrett) and Cheryl (Rosalind Hammond) after the wedding because she embarrasses them, not least because she 'listens to seventies music.' A blank cheque from her mother Betty (Jeanie Drynan) to start a career as a 'beauty consultant,' and a new friendship with Rhonda (Rachel Griffiths) enable her escape from Porpoise Spit. Stealing money from her parents' cheque account, she first travels to Hibiscus Island, where she meets Rhonda and they win a talent quest, getting the better of Tania and her gang who are also on holiday. Arriving home and learning her theft has been discovered, Muriel escapes again, this time to Sydney. She lives with Rhonda, gets a job and reinvents herself as Mariel.

When Rhonda becomes seriously ill, Mariel finds comfort in returning to her dream of being a bride, and through her fabricated tales of family tragedy she manipulates store assistants to photograph her in the bridal gowns she tries on. Mariel's father, now facing bribery charges in Sydney, demands that she return home with him at the end of his trial, to begin paying back the money she stole. Rather than face her old life, she finds a husband, a South African swim champion wanting Australian citizenship. With her marriage she achieves social success: but Rhonda, now wheelchair bound and unhappily forced to live with her mother at

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<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

home in Porpoise Spit, is disgusted with her. When Mariel's mother commits suicide, and she returns home for the funeral, she realises that she has to stop lying. She ends her sham marriage and, again calling herself Muriel, collects Rhonda, and together they escape from Porpoise Spit once more.

ABBA's music is woven throughout the film, and used as source music, including diegetic singing, source scoring and dramatic scoring. For Muriel, ABBA songs are the sound of her desire for transformation. ABBA songs function within the film as a marker of Muriel's desire to be somebody; her notion of what this means changes over the course of the narrative. 'Dancing Queen,'<sup>554</sup> the first ABBA song heard, is specifically tied to her desire for change. For Muriel, the attainment of desirability like that expressed in 'Dancing Queen' is, as she tells her mother, to 'get married and be a success.' Initially for Muriel she thinks it is the former that will result in the latter. The song, alluding to the power of desirability, is the soundtrack she chooses for herself.

Humiliated in the opening scenes of the film as she is arrested at Tania's wedding, she hides in her bedroom, ostensibly looking for a receipt for her stolen dress, while her father charms the police. She puts on her *Arrival* cassette tape, and begins to sing along despondently to 'Dancing Queen.' The camera pans her bedroom walls as the song of dance floor transformation plays 'you can dance / you can jive / having the time of your life / see that girl ...' Posters of ABBA and magazine cuttings of brides plastered over her walls are the visual evidence of her desire to be something or someone else. The song moves from source music from Muriel's pink tape recorder, to source scoring as it transcends the bedroom walls and acts as a music bridge for the next series of shots. Muriel sees the police leave and a new sequence begins in a Chinese restaurant, where Muriel is again humiliated by her

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<sup>554</sup> See Appendix R for the lyrics to 'Dancing Queen.'

father. These opening sequences of *Muriel's Wedding* signal the importance of the ABBA soundtrack as both diegetic and nondiegetic scoring.

While Catherine Lumby argues that Muriel's first instance of singing ABBA is a sign of her passivity,<sup>555</sup> I understand it as a vocalisation of her desire to remake herself and become desirable like the 'Dancing Queen' of the song. Later in the film, lip-syncing with Rhonda to win the talent quest, she is able to work towards a goal of acceptable subjectivity in her own eyes through a public appropriation of ABBA's acoustic authority. I agree, as Lumby suggests, that with the performance of 'Waterloo' Muriel is actively 'remaking' herself.<sup>556</sup> In contrast, Muriel's mother Betty remains passive, constantly repeating the words of her husband Bill. 'Your father says I'm to write you a blank cheque,' she tells Muriel, not knowing that she will be blamed for her obedience when Muriel steals thousands of dollars from the family's account. Betty is unable to communicate her own desires and fears about Bill's relationship with his special 'friend' Deidre (Gennie Nevinson) or her own needs.

Further use of 'Dancing Queen,' both as diegetic and nondiegetic music, underscores Muriel's desire. Later in the film, as Muriel looks and tries on a wedding dress after learning of Rhonda's cancer, a wordless choral version of 'Dancing Queen' is used as dramatic scoring. The overlap between marriage, success, ABBA and Rhonda in her life is made explicit. Muriel, now calling herself Mariel because she feels she has transformed and is a 'new person,' earnestly explains herself to a wheelchair-bound Rhonda: 'Since I've met you and moved to Sydney I haven't listened to one ABBA song. That's because now my life's as good as an ABBA song, it's as good as "Dancing Queen".' Rhonda doesn't believe her, but makes her agree that they won't return to Porpoise Spit. While Mariel agrees, she initially breaks her promise when she abandons Rhonda to become a bride in a marriage of convenience. Coming

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<sup>555</sup> Lumby, p. 79.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

home to a sleeping and soon to be abandoned Rhonda, after taking up the offer to be a paid bride, she again retreats to her own bedroom to play and sing sadly to 'Dancing Queen.' At first Muriel is unable to look herself in the eye as she sits in front of her mirror, guilty about what will happen to her friend.

Muriel's walk to the altar takes place to a different ABBA hit, 'I Do I Do I Do I Do I Do,' a choice that has the wedding guests looking bemused. The bridesmaids Tania, Cheryl and Janine jerkily step down the aisle to the ABBA song, music they have previously criticised. They have difficulty keeping in time to the music and with each other. Their collective 'performance' provides a contrast to Muriel and Rhonda's demonstrated ability at the talent quest and after to perform in synchronicity. In the scene, Rhonda looks on from her wheelchair with a knowing smile at the sound of her friend's musical choice.

Finally, during Muriel's rescue of Rhonda from her mother and a life in Porpoise Spit, 'Dancing Queen,' used as dramatic scoring, auralises Muriel's achievement of her desire to be 'a success,' not through heterosexual marriage but through friendship. The beginning of the song is closely tied to the visual images of the sequence, with an almost mickey-mousing effect as the opening piano glissando of the song corresponds to Rhonda's free wheeling down her ramp and away from the stifling interior of her mother's house. Earlier, a distraught Muriel tells Rhonda that as the old 'fat, stupid, useless' Muriel Hesslop, 'no one would look at me.' Muriel and Rhonda's exchange of looks in the taxi, after yelling 'bye' to everything in their home town, shows that Muriel now feels she is 'someone' and suggests their friendship is now more important to Muriel than her desire to marry. Understood as an aural underscoring of Muriel's achievement of happiness, the triumphant final nondiegetic scoring



of 'Dancing Queen' as the taxi drives them away from the dreaded Porpoise Spit prioritises their non-competitive and supportive friendship over romantic heterosexual love.<sup>557</sup>

The pivotal ABBA sequence in the film, where Muriel and Rhonda's friendship is forged, portrays their winning lip-sync performance. After Tania's wedding, Cheryl, Janine and Nicole travel to Hibiscus Island, taking Tania who is upset at her new husband Chook's confessed unfaithfulness with Rose Biggs. Like Muriel, Tania has high expectations about her marital state: 'I'm a bride,' she wails, 'I'm supposed to be euphoric!' Before they leave they reject Muriel, suggesting that she needs to find friends on her own 'level.' With her mother's blank cheque Muriel travels to the Island too, much to the outrage of her ex-friends. On Hibiscus Island Muriel meets her former schoolmate Rhonda, who has also suffered from Tania and her groups' snobbery in the past. Muriel and Rhonda enter the Island's 'Star Search' competition and win with a fabulous lip-sync performance of 'Waterloo.'

Preceding the 'Waterloo' sequence is a fragment of another talent quest performance, by Tania and her group. Differing song choices mark the different experiences of the female homosocial that are present in *Muriel's Wedding*. When the women reject Muriel, they tell her 'This is the nineties ... we listen to the Baby Animals, Nirvana.' On the Island, Tania and her friends mime to Blondie's 'Tide is High.' Dressed in costume bikinis that feature plastic fruit, coconut shells and grass, the four dance and lip-sync along to the sound of Debbie Harry's multi-layered and harmonising voice, singing of being 'your number one' and suggesting the character/storyteller of the song never 'gives up.' Although the women dance together, they look out to acknowledge the appreciative gazes of the group of four men sitting at a table watching them. Their lip-syncing is exaggerated, and the featuring of a single

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<sup>557</sup>Some theorists have argued, however, that the film is a queer love story. For example see Jill A Mackey, 'Subtext and countertext in *Muriel's Wedding*,' *NWSA Journal* 13, no. 1, 2001, pp. 86-104 and Andy Medhurst, 'But I'm beautiful,' *Sight & Sound* 7, 2002, pp. 32-34. Wherever their relationship lies on a continuum between heterosexual and homosexual, it is the perspective of friendship that is reinforced by the final moments of the film.

vocalist (Debbie Harry) and lyrics describing an individualistic desire to win a man, underscores the sexual competitiveness of Tania's group. When Rhonda tells Tania the truth about Nicole's sexual dalliance with Chook, the individualistic competitiveness of the gang, reinforced by their talent quest song, is exposed to all four of them.

### *Muriel's Wedding* AND MUSIC VIDEO

In contrast, on a number of different levels the performance of 'Waterloo' creates and results in the triumph of a supportive female friendship. Lips are synchronised with 'star' voices, and dancing bodies with each other, as Muriel and Rhonda perform their newly found friendship on the 'Star Search' stage. As a parodic and celebratory performance of star performers Agnetha (Agnetha Faltskog) and Frida (Anni-Frid Lyngstad) from ABBA, analysis of the sequence benefits from knowledge of both music video and previous histories of other performances.

There are elements of a drag performance in Muriel and Rhonda's performance of 'Waterloo,' where the split between performing bodies and voices is intentional. Mary Ann Doane describes the body in cinema as a '*fantasmatic* body,' the technologically available body created by the cinema and which in dominant cinema practices signals requirements of 'unity' and 'presence-to-itself.'<sup>558</sup> When the voice is that of a star, like the well-known voices of Agnetha and Frida of ABBA, a reconstruction of the space between body and voice becomes more complex, particularly when the body may be of another, as in drag lip-sync performances. Better recording techniques, where the recording system is not heard, reduce the 'distance perceived between the object and its representation.'<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>558</sup> Doane, 'The voice in the cinema: the articulation of body and space,' p. 567.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid., p. 568.

Although recording is an electronic manipulation of a voice, the recording of a ‘star’ voice retains ‘qualities of uniqueness and authenticity’ and so the ‘voice is not detachable from the body, which is quite specific – that of the star.’<sup>560</sup> The star body is displaced but paradoxically remains in the star voice. Thus in the presentation of lip-sync there are multiple bodies and subjectivities that are constructed and reconstructed through a song performance. In Muriel and Rhonda’s performance of the ABBA song, there are also references to other texts; the memories of ‘original’ ABBA film clips, and to other drag performances of ABBA songs, as also seen in another Australian film, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.<sup>561</sup>

Perceivers familiar with the music video form must bring some of their awareness when watching singing performances within films, despite the two being very different forms.<sup>562</sup> It is useful to consider music video when contemplating contemporary singing sequences, to ascertain how those sequences might work with expectations shaped more by music video and an MTV aesthetic than classic musical genre films. In terms of performance, the requirement of synchronicity holds true for music video performances, even though this is possibly where perceivers are more likely to be aware that lip-syncing is one of the performance requirements to produce a video. Music video is performed as lip-sync, as the recorded song is used as playback while musicians mime. Film and music video are different genres, but the overlap and influence of the two forms on each other, made even more complex with digital techniques, is mutual and multiple.<sup>563</sup>

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<sup>560</sup> Ibid. Doane is writing of the tape-recorded voice of Ella Fitzgerald. Her article doesn’t consider the contemporary performance practice of lip-sync as stage entertainment, but her comments regarding the ‘star’ voice resonate with such a practice.

<sup>561</sup> Palm notes that it was in gay communities that the ABBA revival began in the late 1980s. Palm, p. 501.

<sup>562</sup> For a comprehensive look at understanding music video as a distinctive form see Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1992.

<sup>563</sup> Jody Berland notes that Elvis’s appearances on the *Ed Sullivan Show* (1956–7) post-dated *Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, 1955), the first filmic use of rock and roll. See Berland, pp. 33–34.

A recent example of the overlap between the two forms is *One Night the Moon* (Rachel Perkins, 2001), a film about a lost child described as a ‘musical drama.’<sup>564</sup> The director intentionally used music clip conventions.<sup>565</sup> She starts the film with a singing sequence performed by a well-known Australian musician, Paul Kelly, playing the role of the father in the film, as a way of encouraging contemporary audiences to accept a film that uses singing rather than dialogue.<sup>566</sup> Camera shots that prioritise the face of the singer/actor, and editing choices that follow the musical structure of the song, with almost every line of the first and last verses of the song equating to the duration of a shot, are other techniques that she uses that align the opening singing sequence with a music video style, although the cuts are much less frequent than would usually be typical of a music video clip.

Interestingly, there is an animosity displayed in some articles on MTV and music videos that argue ‘cultural studies’ techniques are inadequate in saying anything useful about music television, because of a reliance on image and lyric analysis. Andrew Goodwin argues that music video’s flouting of realist modes is not ‘subversive’ as E Ann Kaplan and other writers have claimed, but one of pop’s conventions: there is an entirely ‘different structural logic at work’ in pop songs and music television.<sup>567</sup> He critiques ‘cultural studies theorists’ who ‘set up a model of the classic realist text and its supposed effects on the audience’ then ‘match narratives to the idea and infer effects on the basis of adherence to or subversion of the ideal.’<sup>568</sup>

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<sup>564</sup> The phrase was used in publicity and on the cover of the video release of the film.

<sup>565</sup> Kathryn Millard, ‘*One Night the Moon*: Interview with Rachel Perkins,’ available from <[http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/19/this\\_land.html](http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/19/this_land.html)>, accessed 2/04/02.

<sup>566</sup> Catherine Keenan, ‘Man in the moon,’ *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 2–8 2001, Metro, p. 7. Paul Kelly, along with Kev Carmody and Mairead Hannan, collaborated on the film’s music score.

<sup>567</sup> Goodwin, ‘The structure of music video: rethinking narrative analysis,’ pp. 73–77.

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

I agree that ‘songs are not movies,’<sup>569</sup> and there are often significant differences in editing techniques for music video, such as a closer relationship with the rhythm, music structure or lyrics of a song.<sup>570</sup> However, diegetic singing in contemporary film displays some common elements with the visualisation of pop songs. Goodwin notes that narrative forms in music video may extend beyond a realism/non-realism narrative dichotomy, and can simultaneously be both non-realist and conventional.<sup>571</sup> His suggestion evokes a space in narratives that is of the diegesis and yet distinct from it, as I have argued that singing sequences can create. It is not just singing in and of itself that can be transformative, but how it works syncretically with images.

Visual techniques used for both film and music video include the use of direct address. Singing to camera, and ‘double address’ – singing a first-person narrative where the singer is narratively positioned as both the ‘character in the song and the storyteller’ – is usual in pop music and television,<sup>572</sup> and is also utilised in cinema. In his music video analysis, Goodwin identifies three main codes of pop music – music, lyrics and iconography – and discusses how these codes, which often do not present a unified address, work together and in tension with each other in visual representations of pop songs.<sup>573</sup> Goodwin’s pop codes offer an alternative way into singing scenes, rather than Jacques Schultz’ categories, particularly singing scenes like the lip-syncing of ‘Waterloo’ that are represented as a pop performance. The performance of ‘Waterloo’ in *Muriel’s Wedding* ably uses Goodwin’s three codes.

Whether as a sincere or cynical perceiver, a visual appreciation of the lip-syncing scene is cultivated through clever and parodic adoption of ABBA iconography, including costuming, choreography, and camera and editing techniques. Introduced by the talent quest MC as

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<sup>569</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>570</sup> Carol Vernallis, ‘The kindest cut: functions and meanings of music video editing,’ *Screen* 42, no. 1, 2001 pp. 44–47.

<sup>571</sup> Goodwin, ‘The structure of music video: rethinking narrative analysis,’ p. 82.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

‘Fabber ABBA,’ Rhonda and Muriel are ‘fabulous,’ seen onstage dressed entirely in white: Muriel wears a clingy white jumpsuit, pant legs at knickerbocker length, while Rhonda wears a short skirt, trimmed cape, and long boots. Their costumes faithfully mimic the ABBA women’s iconic original costumes that were used during their 1974 European tour and the film clip for ‘Mamma Mia.’<sup>574</sup> Rhonda and Muriel’s use of the ‘Mamma Mia’ costumes to perform ‘Waterloo’ combines two of the most popular singles in Australian pop history.

Examining the ‘Waterloo’ performance shot by shot, the echoing of camera and editing techniques of the film clips of the time add to the sense of convincing ‘authenticity’ in relation to the original artists. This extends to iconography within the clip, through clothing and hair: Rhonda and Muriel use wigs that correspond visually to the appearance of the two female singers of ABBA. Muriel wears a long blond wig imitating Agnetha’s hair, while Rhonda ‘is’ Frida with a curly brunette wig. As with many other music video clips, the ‘Waterloo’ performance is punctuated with a narrative fragment, in this case concerning the unhappy relations between Muriel’s ex-friends because of Rhonda’s disclosure. Tania, her ‘gang’ and their new male friends are seated in the front row of the talent quest audience. Nicole is sporting a black eye, and Tania’s body language and angry looks at Nicole reveal her response to Rhonda’s earlier revelation that, like Rose Biggs, Nicole has also been unfaithful with Chook.

Particularly during the second verse, the tropes of the music video, and specifically ABBA videos, are used. A visual ‘trademark’ of ABBA’s clips was a face direct to camera/face profile two-shot, with focus pulled between the two performers in shot. As Rhonda lip-syncs the line ‘and how could I ever refuse,’ Muriel’s face is in profile while camera focus remains on Rhonda, then Muriel turns her head and camera focus changes to her as she ‘sings’ the

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<sup>574</sup> Palm, p. 252.

next line, with Rhonda still in shot. Director Lasse Hallström first used the technique in the original ‘Mamma Mia’ film clip, well before an MTV ‘style’ or aesthetic.<sup>575</sup> The visual edits that follow of heads turning match the descending chord changes.<sup>576</sup> The element of parody is underlined when the direct-to-camera two-shot, also a feature of Hallström’s ABBA videos, is repeated, but with Muriel having to lift Rhonda’s ‘big’ hair out of the way so that her face can be seen too.

The bonding between the two women onstage also occurs through and is expressed by their use of the ABBA-esque moves of standing close, dancing in synchronicity and looking at each other in intimate proximity. The choreographed moves that were a prevalent part of the ABBA women’s performances resonate with what Lisa Lewis identifies as a ‘girl practice’ of learning and synchronising body movement together as a way of negotiating the ‘social restriction’ placed on female bodies.<sup>577</sup> Muriel and Rhonda’s echoing of the two different but similar ABBA women’s synchronised moves functions both to bring them closer and to suggest an appealing strength in their collectivity. In this way there is a creation of an intimacy that exists within the larger context of the public performance.

The members of ABBA were mythologised as the perfect working team of two wholesome twosomes.<sup>578</sup> Palm quotes an unidentified Australian reporter summing up the cross-generational appeal of ABBA: ‘adults can feel reassured because their young are watching two nice clean-cut heterosexual couples.’<sup>579</sup> For many of their biggest hits, such as ‘Mamma Mia’ and ‘Waterloo,’ Agnetha and Frida shared lead vocals, and songs often featured them singing in unison. Their combined voices created a ‘third voice’ that is

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<sup>575</sup> Robert Scott, *ABBA Thank You for the Music: The Stories Behind Every Song*, London, Carlton Books Ltd. 2002, p. 60. As Lisa A Lewis notes, MTV was launched in America in 1981, and almost immediately music video had an impact on music sales. Lisa A Lewis, ‘Being discovered: the emergence of female address on MTV.’ in *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*, eds. Simon Frith, Andrew Goodwin and Lawrence Grossberg, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 130.

<sup>576</sup> There are similarities with the final performance of Mitzy (Hugo Weaving) and Felicia (Guy Pearce) in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, where they lip-sync to ‘Mamma Mia’ and the same visual hooks are also employed.

<sup>577</sup> Lewis, p. 140.

<sup>578</sup> Palm, p. 249. Frida and Benny were engaged, not married, for most of their time in ABBA.

<sup>579</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

considered one of ABBA's 'most important trademarks.'<sup>580</sup> Their complementary voices, costumes and dance routines contrasted with their different archetypal media personas: Agnetha as youthful, virginal Swedish 'ice maiden,' the most popular member of ABBA; Frida as more mature, sophisticated and mysterious.<sup>581</sup> From her first appearances in the trademark white jumpsuit, Agnetha was designated the 'sexiest bottom in pop.'<sup>582</sup> In Rhonda and Muriel's performance, the 'double address' of the use of first person narrative extends to the women lip-syncers standing in for the women musicians of ABBA without their male partners, suggesting an address that enables a valorisation of friendship over a somewhat misogynist representation of destructive, competitive relationships of heterosexual women.<sup>583</sup>

Discussing the relations between songs and videos, Goodwin outlines three specific elements: 'illustration, amplification, and disjuncture.'<sup>584</sup> With illustration, the video 'tells the story of the song lyric'; amplification means the visuals 'introduce new meanings that do not conflict with the lyrics, but that add layers of meaning'; while disjuncture can be a visual narrative that contradicts the lyrics, or where there is no apparent relation with the lyrics.<sup>585</sup> The multiple layers of meaning generated between the conjunction of images and music with the 'Waterloo' singing sequence suggest Goodwin's categories of amplification and disjuncture. The song's lyrics reference both adversarial relations ('Waterloo, I was defeated, you won the war') and romantic association ('Waterloo, promise to love you for ever more'), both of which are played out in visual terms between the two pairs of female participants (Muriel and Rhonda, and Tania and Nicole), and on multiple levels.<sup>586</sup> Another of Hallström's 'promo' techniques was to juxtapose different pairings of the four ABBA singers,<sup>587</sup> and a parodic

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<sup>580</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>583</sup> Mackey goes so far as to suggest: 'Knowledge of the intimate relationships of ABBA helps to eroticize the half of ABBA made up of Muriel and Rhonda.' Mackey, p. 98.

<sup>584</sup> Goodwin, 'The structure of music video: rethinking narrative analysis,' p. 86.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid., pp. 86–88.

<sup>586</sup> See Appendix S for the lyrics to 'Waterloo.'

<sup>587</sup> Palm, p. 266.



version of the cinematographic technique of contrasting pairs also happens in *Muriel's Wedding*. For Muriel and Rhonda, their association is cemented as they sing, face to face, 'Waterloo, knowing my fate is to be with you,' while Tania and Nicole fight. Muriel and Rhonda bond during the performance, while the friendship of Tania and Nicole deteriorates. The school history of the 'cool' group of Tania and her gang ostracising Rhonda and Muriel is inverted as Rhonda and Muriel win the approval of the crowd together while Tania and Nicole make fools of themselves.

Goodwin identifies the ways in which the video visuals employ hooks, in the same way that the music might, suggesting structural links with the pop song.<sup>588</sup> Close-ups of stars' faces are now the norm, as a typical element of 'discourses of stardom,' and frequently images of women 'employ the classic techniques of objectification, fragmentation, and (occasionally) violation ... [that] are placed throughout the clips in order to encourage viewers to keep watching.'<sup>589</sup> However, the presence of women musicians in a clip can disrupt the latter kind of hook when direct modes of address are used.<sup>590</sup> A hook might be the connection through repetition of a visual motif with a musical motif, or through other associations with lyrics, voice, rhythm or other aspects of music.<sup>591</sup> In Muriel and Rhonda's performance of 'Waterloo,' on the level of visual editing, there are numerous examples of Goodwin's 'hooks' in the sequence. The first verse is composed of wider shots, allowing perceivers to take in the costuming and choreography of the two women onstage, as well as to observe the presence of Tania and her gang. At one point a shot from the back of the stage has Muriel and Rhonda in profile, smiling at each other as they sing, while behind them, seen between their two faces, Tania and Nicole both sit with their arms crossed, their anger palpable.

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<sup>588</sup> Goodwin, 'The structure of music video: rethinking narrative analysis,' p. 90.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., pp. 91–92.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid., p. 92. Lisa A Lewis also suggests how women musicians' music clips provide a position of female address. Lewis, pp. 136–143.

<sup>591</sup> Goodwin, 'The structure of music video: rethinking narrative analysis,' p. 94.

As the song moves into the final chorus, Nicole provokes Tania, raising her eyebrow at Tania's angry glare. Their ensuing fight provides a spectacle for the scopophilic gaze. The editing of the sequence parallels the two couples, of Tania and Nicole fighting, and Muriel and Rhonda triumphantly singing and dancing, shot for shot. The high angle camera shots capture the fighters and the legs of those standing around, while the majority of the crowd enjoys the performance of the lip-syncers. Screams interject into the sound of the performance, firstly as part of the fight, and then acting as a sound bridge to Rhonda and Muriel's screams of delight as they are announced as winning the contest.

In Carolyn Abbate's terms, lip-sync is an 'acoustic delusion.'<sup>592</sup> Her phrase contains implications of deception and falsehood, a form of trickery, which presupposes the concept of a 'genuine' performance. However, if the voices of the 'stars' are identifiable, as they are with Muriel and Rhonda's performance, then the 'delusion' is undermined, regardless of the performing gendered body. In the lip-syncing scene in *Muriel's Wedding*, there is a taking on of female 'star' bodies, primarily through the knowing and parodic appropriation of 'star' voices, by other female bodies. Muriel and Rhonda's celebratory performance of 'perfect' 1970s pop star womanhood, so obviously manufactured, is a flouting of dominant societal demands for perfect femininity. The 'daggy-but-cool' appropriation of ABBA and their music encourages perceivers to identify with Muriel, who is initially represented in the film through her appearance and others' criticisms of her as not living up to societal standards of being a desirable woman. Muriel, as a voluptuous and excessive body, is 'out of sync' with her representation of Agnetha's body. Part of the initial humour of the film is Muriel's conventionally unattractive excessiveness, in terms of her body shape, and her personal style. Yet partly through the use of ABBA music and her synchronicity with Rhonda, for film perceivers her unattractiveness is diminished by the completion of the film.

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<sup>592</sup> Abbate, p. 229.

Tania and her friends, although fulfilling the conventional demands of femininity, are ridiculed in the narrative, climaxing with Tania's response to Rhonda's parting insult. When Rhonda calls Tania, Cheryl and Janine a 'bunch of cocksuckers' (something that Tania has just admitted to doing, to effect her revenge on Rose Biggs), Tania follows Rhonda out of the house, screwing up her face and bellowing 'Who are you to call me that? I'm married. I'm beautiful!' Perceivers laugh along with Muriel and Rhonda who are no longer concerned with others' opinions of how they should behave, and what hegemonic society might deem as beautiful.

The lip-syncing sequence of 'Waterloo' is a demonstration of the liberation and empowerment possible for singing subjects, acting as a renegotiation of the relations between them and their ex-friends. Muriel's performance with Rhonda enables her to take her secret desires (her love of ABBA and her wish to be 'not nothing') out of the bedroom and share them, even to use them against her 'enemies,' Tania and her gang. The singing sequence suggests a critique of competitive female friendship, and of 'beautiful' womanhood that is enacted through the performance from both 'couples.' The 'perfect' appearances and behaviours in terms of the demands of a patriarchal or heterosexual economy, which Tania and her gang accept, are ridiculed through Nicole and Tania's brawling while 'femininely' dressed. 'Acceptable' desirability is also destabilised through Muriel and Rhonda's performance in their 1970s ABBA dress-ups, parodying, through their 'playing' of the women from ABBA, the artifice of femininity on display.

Muriel's visibility onstage contrasts with her sense of invisibility in Porpoise Spit, one that she tearfully explains to Rhonda later in the film. Her performance with Rhonda does not seek approval from others (men), but is for their mutual enjoyment, as they look at each other as much as at the talent quest audience. Rhonda's acceptance of Muriel's music, which has

previously and so cruelly been rejected by her ex-friends, signals the importance of their relationship. After their win, they lie out under the stars, still in their gloriously kitschy ABBA outfits. They sing a couple of lines from 'Waterloo.' Muriel begins to sing the chorus from 'Fernando' and Rhonda joins in ('There was something in the air that night/ the stars were bright Fernando').<sup>593</sup> Each sings a line separately and then they sing together ('If I had to do the same again/ I would my friend'), once again in synchronicity. Their private offstage performance constitutes a continuance of the bonding that has already taken place in public on the 'Star Search' stage and foregrounds the development of a closer relationship, creating a supportive and synchronised female homosocial that Muriel has not experienced with Tania and her mates.

Muriel's connection with Rhonda liberates her singing self, enabling her to perform onstage where they become the winners of the talent quest. Collectively they create and claim a physical and aural space on the stage for themselves. Muriel begins to appreciate herself not for what she could be for somebody else via marriage, but through her friendship with Rhonda. Rhonda and Muriel appropriate the space afforded the women of Tania's group, who identify themselves as wearing the 'right' clothes to appropriately conform, unlike Muriel who is an embarrassment to them. The cohesiveness of Tania's group is undermined while Muriel and Rhonda celebrate their synchronicity. In 'playing at' female perfection, they undermine it.

The use of lip-sync and recorded voices can be understood as the representation of multiple subjectivities. As Steve Wurtzler suggests in relation to 'live' popular music events and nondiegetic music in film, cinematic representations of lip-sync theatricality articulate the:

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<sup>593</sup> See Appendix T for the lyrics to 'Fernando.'

fragmented, decentred subject privileged in discourses of postmodernism even as the collapsing of oppositions such as live/recorded or original/copy testifies to the “eclipse of the real” and other postmodern tropes.<sup>594</sup>

In cinema the voice is mediated through technology, and is potentially a deconstruction and reanimation of both the lack of and the claim to a unified subject. For female characters, both singing and especially lip-syncing representations make possible recognition of how and where subjectivity can be renegotiated. While synchronisation of ‘acceptable’/‘desirable’ women’s voices and bodies in film representations elides the differences between women, the parodic lip-syncing of a ‘star’ voice with a self-conscious performance of the unattainable ‘star’ body resists the limitations of hegemonic demands for femininity. Lip-syncing, singing with another’s voice, offers potentially subversive moments in a film narrative because it ironically underlines the desire for synchronicity and yet undercuts it, providing a destabilising influence in terms of the patriarchal idealised woman. Particularly in *Muriel’s Wedding*, the parodic lip-syncing of voices, and performing bodies ‘out of sync’ with societal demands regarding (‘star’) femininity, accentuate and celebrate the differences between women.

As sound films gained popularity, and integrated with the record industry, the dubbing of an uncredited professional singing voice with the body of a popular actress was standard practice.<sup>595</sup> While in contemporary film correct attribution is usually described in the credits, this is often overlooked by perceivers because of the power of synchresis. When lip-sync is acknowledged or foregrounded, perceivers cannot always trust their eyes and ears. The heterogeneity of cinema’s sound and vision is exposed, allowing a transgressive space on a meta-textual level, where the film’s meanings can be rethought.

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<sup>594</sup> Steve Wurtzler, ‘“She sang live, but the microphone was turned off”: the live, the recorded and the *subject* of representation,’ in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman, New York, Routledge, 1992, pp. 93–94. Wurtzler’s italics.

<sup>595</sup> Berland, p. 28.

The lip-sync sequences in *Muriel's Wedding* and *Mulholland Drive* are pivotal points in their respective cinematic texts. The act of lip-sync brings together a body and a recorded voice to simulate unity, but simultaneously recognises a split between the two. In this 'space between' that such an act generates, questions arise about acoustic authority and how split body/voice performances can be interpreted. In the examples of female lip-syncing that I use here, lip-sync performance also concerns the opening up of a powerful singing space of the female homosocial. In *Mulholland Drive*, the exposure of the split between body and voice is a disruption of the 'perfect' performing woman: perfect in terms of the demands made of women by a patriarchal economy that expects only a limited range of what is deemed acceptable and desirable. The horror of the singing/lip-syncing sequence brings Betty and Rita closer together, just before they themselves are separated from each other, and from their identities. In *Muriel's Wedding*, the performers are knowledgeable about the split between their bodies and the 'star' voices that they take on – their knowing appropriation is a joyous expression of the strength of women working or syncing together, purposefully rejecting the examples of 'perfect' women like Tania and her friends who, within the narrative logic of the film, are ultimately shown to have destructive relationships. Muriel and Rhonda's synchronisation in performance and beyond celebrates an alternative to the negative stereotyping of heterosexual competition between female friends.

## CODA

From my initial encounter with the singing in *Songcatcher*, I began to reflect on other sequences of women singing and how to me those sequences often seemed to be transformative moments within film narratives. I wanted to investigate the effects and affect that women's singing produced. My initial objective was to explain my own strong emotional responses to the multiple and diverse singing sequences that have most often involved women's voices, and to examine how singing women's voices connect with other conceptions of women's representation and use of language. In doing so my ambition was to express in words what I now realise must always remain to a certain extent intangible, how the singing voice resonates in the body and mind of the film perceiver.

The links and connections assumed between women and music, as well as feminist theorising within a variety of frameworks (psychoanalytic theories, film theories) about the problematic relationship that women have with language, reinforced the notion of singing in film as likely to be an important means of expression and communication, and its representations of practice and performance worthy of investigation. Kaja Silverman's influential work in the *Acoustic Mirror*, which proposes that women's voices are always 'contained' or restricted within the classic narrative, was an initial starting point, although my response to certain singing scenes suggested to me that some women's voices could be understood in other ways. Kaja Silverman's work has remained pivotal: yet there are situations where female voices are not wholly contained. The liberating and transformative potential of singing and lip-syncing in the eleven Western contemporary films I have analysed suggests to me that for women and girls singing can be a site where filmic representations can subvert or escape cinematic enclosure, even if only for a specific time. There are also instances, such as in *Radiance*, where Silverman's notion of nonsynchronised voices as powerful does describe

representations of singing women, although those voices are not only found in feminist or experimental cinema as Silverman's theorising requires. A split between body and voice can foreground the ways in which women's bodies and voices are subjected to demands for patriarchal perfection within films that adhere to dominant narrative expectations.

While the disembodied singing voice can be powerful for women, as in the performance in *Mulholland Drive*, synchronised singing voices, like that of Amy and LV, can also have acoustic authority. With this authority they are listened to and have a powerful effect on those around them. Women singing together, in harmony and in unison, provide the strongest examples of the transformative power available through singing. I have suggested that representations of women singing can be associated with *écriture féminine*, because both are embodied practices that allow women to communicate and express themselves in ways that are not available through the usual use of phallogocentric language. Exploring how gender is performed in and through the acts and gestures of singing, and the behaviour that surrounds singing, I have considered aspects of both cinematic performance and performativity in relation to singing. I have examined the functions of women's singing in a diverse range of films, particularly where the aural dimension of women together, of the female homosocial, has had significant resonances within the film. Through textual analysis that shows an awareness of the aural dimensions of singing scenes, I have attempted to explore the ways in which singing is significant for women characters, not only thematically, as part of the narrative, but as a practice that operates on a meta-textual level for women's communication and expression.

Most critical analysis on musical sound in film has concentrated on nondiegetic film music, or on the soundtracks of classical Hollywood film musicals. The examples of singing subjects that I have responded to through the onscreen practices and performances of their music



suggest a range of ways that singing subjects and their songs can function within a film. Although my attention in the films has always begun with the diegetic music of singing subjects, at times I have ventured into the nondiegetic soundtrack, led there by the voices from within the diegesis. Closer analysis reveals the interrelatedness of the nondiegetic soundtrack with the diegetic. The connections between source music, source scoring and dramatic scoring can suggest an extended influence of the singing subject. Films like *Radiance*, where the nondiegetic soundtrack seems to reach into the diegesis with a voice of what I propose is the absent mother singing, reveal the complexities of the soundtrack and provide further opportunities for singing subjects to emerge.

Through my examination of singing scenes in the films chosen for this thesis, I have identified a diversity of singing situations: the solitary performance, where women sing for themselves, as in *A Ma Soeur!*; the intimate, where women sing to and for each other, as in *Only the Brave*, and sometimes for men, like Dorothy does in *Blue Velvet*; and the collective, where women sing with each other, like they do in *Paradise Road* and *Muriel's Wedding*. Although I have outlined singing basically as a private or public action, I have aimed to explore the complexities of each individual singing sequence, rather than adhere to a specifying grid of singing situations, to offer other ways of thinking and writing about singing scenes. In films that are not classic musicals, singing publicly for women often appears to be more allowable than singing privately. Private and intimate performances can offer transgressive moments of expression, such as the singing sequences of LV in *Little Voice* and Vicki's singing in *Only the Brave*, that allow for a rich and complex representation of subjectivity. Yet public performances, like Muriel and Rhonda's lip-synching in *Muriel's Wedding*, can also suggest that women singing together can be strong, and have access to acoustic authority.

Through consideration of singing spaces that I've identified as particularly significant for women singing in these film representations, I have explored the question of whether such space affords transgressive, subversive or empowering positions for women. I have expanded the limits of what Brett Farmer calls the 'migratory potential of diva vocality.' In my thesis, the singing sequences that I have examined and discussed have led me to agree that women's voices have migratory potential. However, it is not only the diva-like voice of LV in *Little Voice*, or the strong individual voice of singing subjects like Cressy in *Radiance*, that have this ability to resist containment. Anaïs in *A Ma Soeur!*, whose untrained singing voice nevertheless powerfully and disturbingly expresses her state of mind in the film, is also a singing subject, using singing to reveal herself as a character, when no one except her sister will listen to her.

As I've discussed, diegetic singing can transcend the space of the narrative in two ways. The singing can literally move from source music, where the sound is motivated and appears to be coming from within the space of the diegesis, to source scoring, where the singing is in between the diegetic and nondiegetic/dramatic score. Singing can also create aural moments or spaces where the singing voice is transcendent, lifting the voice out of the space of the narrative. The migratory potential of the voice produces a space, similar in some ways to the supradiegetic of film musicals but also distinct from it, and this singing space often creates or strengthens a female homosocial in a powerful way. The aural dimensions of these singing spaces can operate as sites for the negotiation of characters' subjectivities.

My research into singing women in contemporary cinema proposes that representations of women, in becoming or acting as singing subjects, can provide new ways of thinking about women expressing themselves. Singing subjects can communicate with an approach that extends and expands their use of phallogentric language, to produce situations of

empowerment. While the power of singing may be ultimately destructive for those who take up its practice and performance, singing subjects can wield authority when expression is curtailed in other ways. Sometimes, as with Vicki in *Only the Brave*, the moments of access to vocal authority are fleeting. Singing privately and intimately for Alex and for herself is a way of disrupting the patriarchal order that dominates her life, and her transgression of that order is seemingly punished through her experience of incest and death. The voice of Rebekah del Rio in *Mulholland Drive* retains acoustic authority, despite being split from the singing body. For Dorothy in *Blue Velvet* singing seems to be a dangerous occupation, seemingly drawing the violent Frank to her. Yet her singing voice haunts the final moments of the narrative, and her ending of the song 'Blue Velvet' can be understood as a reclamation of her subjectivity. As with the femmes fatales of film noir who do not survive the narrative, the impact of these characters' singing continues to reverberate after the film has ended.

A number of my examples have featured girls and young women as singers, but often their singing takes on adult-like attributes through lyrics and through the connections and effects of the songs that they sing. In the films that I've analysed it is the younger female voices that most often sing in solitary and intimate situations. Anaïs sings alone on the beach and in the pool in *A Ma Soeur!* LV sings alone in her bedroom in *Little Voice*, although others overhear her offstage performance. Through their singing these two female characters transgress their expected positions of child and childishness respectively. Their offstage singing enables them to express themselves in ways that are not as possible for them with language within the logic of their film narratives. Anaïs sings a version of her adult views on love and sex in a way that she is only able to discuss, unsatisfactorily, with her sister. In singing, LV is able to communicate her isolation and loneliness to her late father, whose presence gives her comfort.

Child singer Amy communicates more directly with others through her singing. At first her singing takes place only in intimate spaces, but during the course of the narrative her singing extends to public performances for her to connect with others. Her singing is empowering in that regardless of age or social status, people must sing to be able to communicate with her. For Amy, as for LV, singing holds connections to her late father. Eventually Amy returns to speech through a cathartic event that involves her father's music, so she no longer 'needs' to sing, so for Amy, her empowerment through singing is transitory. However, while this transition is in process her position as a singing subject provides her with more attention, through acoustic authority, than her age and position would otherwise allow.

The most durable and positive consequences for women singing are exemplified by the singing spaces experienced in *Paradise Road* and *Muriel's Wedding*. In different ways both of these films reveal singing spaces of the female homosocial where singing together is a show of strength and empowerment. In *Paradise Road*, the women sing in harmony, enabling a disparate collection of women to fruitfully work together. Through singing together in the wordless vocal orchestra, the women find a way to rebel against the indignities of their internment and to motivate themselves to survive. Their performances produce an example of singing spaces of the female homosocial that results in a coming together of a diversity of women in a positive and productive way. Differences between singing subjects are accommodated, exemplified by their multi-layered harmonies.

In *Muriel's Wedding*, differences are elided and empowerment engendered through two women 'singing' together. Muriel and Rhonda lip-sync in unison, 'singing' and dancing in a performance that brings them close to each other and so gives each other strength. Not only are their mouths in synchronicity with the female voices of ABBA, but also during the performance of 'Waterloo' their bodies work together in time with the music and with each

other. Their togetherness is reinforced by their singing of 'Waterloo' and 'Fernando' in their own voices, with Muriel now able to sing beyond the confines of her bedroom. By the end of the narrative, they are working together in unison again, empowering them both to leave Porpoise Spit with a sense of triumph. Their friendship stands strong in contrast to the destructive friendships of Tania, Cheryl, Janine and Nicole, whose competition for men creates a female homosocial that is characterised by antagonism and discord. In *Muriel's Wedding*, the celebratory performance of 'Waterloo' functions to contrast two differing situations of the female homosocial, but elevates one where the demand for perfection (to not be 'fat,' to be attractive to men, to not be in a wheelchair) is knowingly disrupted by Muriel and Rhonda's success. In my thesis I have shown a range of functions and effects for the disruptive and empowering potentialities of singing, most significantly in relation to women, where it would seem to offer a potentially risky way to communicate that when successful is an uplifting expression and strengthening of the female homosocial.

Much more work is needed to explore other aspects of diegetic singing voices. Each of the films that I have discussed has other musical elements that could be more closely examined, to consider how different elements work to support or exist in tension with the diegetic singing that takes place. A future direction for closer consideration, something which I have only touched in my thesis as my approach has remained concentrated on female singers, is an appraisal of the relationships to singing that men have, and how their use of diegetic singing functions in realist film narratives. In *Paradise Road* and *Songcatcher*, for example, that relationship with singing for many of the male characters seems to be a signifier of vulnerability. Yet the performances of characters Snake and Earl Giddens have a threatening or destructive element to them, and for both characters singing is a one-off act within the narrative. The transgressive sexualities of the characters of Frank and Ben in *Blue Velvet* are expressed through a disturbing and violent use of song. To explore in more detail the singing

sequences and spaces created through singing for men in films that are not classic musicals could be instructive.

Within the thesis I have attempted to contextualise and emphasise the significance of women singing in film. Through specific singing examples I have begun to identify the differing spaces of this diegetic singing, not only as physical locations with aural dimensions, affected by conditions of address, but also by considering the conceptual spaces of the linkages between singing and women's relationship to language, and the ways their relationships with each other are also sometimes created through and mediated by singing. The importance of the aural dimensions of the female homosocial and the ways women use singing are significant areas for film analysis and further understanding of the cinematic representations of women and their voices. In the darkness of the film theatre, the singing female voice resonates with the desire for a way to communicate that is not fettered by the demands and limitations of phallogocentric discourse, and where its intense reverberations continue to be felt, extending beyond the initial film experience.

## APPENDICES<sup>596</sup>

### APPENDIX A – LYRICS TO ‘THE MAN THAT GOT AWAY’<sup>597</sup>

The night is bitter, the stars have lost their glitter  
the winds grow colder, suddenly you’re older  
and all because of the man that got away

No more his eager call  
the writing’s on the wall  
the dreams you’ve dreamed have all gone astray

The man that won you has run off and undone you  
the great beginning has seen a final inning  
don’t know what happened, it’s all a crazy game  
no more that old time thrill  
for you’ve been through the mill  
and never a new love will be the same.

Good riddance goodbye  
every trick of his, you’re on to  
but fools will be fools and where’s he gone to?  
The road gets rougher, it’s lonelier and tougher  
with hope you burn up, tomorrow he might turn up  
there’s just no let up, the livelong night and day.

Ever since the world began,  
there’s nothing sadder than  
a one man woman looking for  
the man that got away.

Written by Ira Gershwin/Harold Arlen

Performed by Jane Horrocks

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<sup>596</sup> The lyrics to songs that I discuss in the thesis are largely my transcriptions drawn from the films themselves, as in most cases a definitive source of the lyrics is unavailable. For some songs where I have discussed only part of the performance in the thesis, or where only a segment of the song is heard on the particular film, I have not recorded the complete lyric.

<sup>597</sup> Mark Herman, *Little Voice*. Great Britain, Methuen Film, 1999, pp. 24–27.

## APPENDIX B – LYRICS TO ‘SINGLE GIRL’

When I was single went dressed mighty fine  
now that I’m married go ragged all the time

I wish I was a single girl again  
o Lord  
don’t I wish I was a single girl again

When I was single my shoes did squeak  
now that I am married my shoes they do leak

I wish I was a single girl again  
o Lord  
don’t I wish I was a single girl again

Three little babes a cryin’ for bread  
with none to give ’em I’d rather be dead

I wish I was a single girl again  
o Lord  
don’t I wish I was a single girl again

When he comes in it’s a curse and a row  
knockin’ down the children and pullin’ out my hair

I wish I was a single girl again  
o Lord  
don’t I wish I was a single girl again

Dishes to wash... [The performance ends here in *Songcatcher*]

Traditional  
Performed by Pat Carroll and Janet McTeer



## APPENDIX C – LYRICS TO ‘YOU & ME’

Flowers for your hair  
rainbows for your eyes to see  
music in the air you breathe  
and the games we like to play  
whatever makes us happy  
we’ll do it every day  
and if there’s storm clouds everywhere  
and if the sun won’t shine well  
then who really cares

if I’m with you if I’m with you  
you know that there’s nothing else  
that I would rather do  
than be with you

Places we could go  
and if that just gets boring  
you know we could always stay at home  
there is years for us to grow  
you know that there’s nothing else  
for you and I to be except free

Without you  
without you

Written by Nick Barker  
Performed by Nick Barker and Alana de Roma  
Mushroom Music

## APPENDIX D – LYRICS TO ‘MOI JE M’ENNUIE’

I get so bored  
from 6 to 10  
from 10 to 6  
from 6 to 6  
all my life  
both day and night  
I get so bored

if only  
I could find  
alive or dead  
a man, a body  
an animal  
I don't mind  
just to dream

for I get so bored  
from 6 to 10  
from 10 to 6  
from 6 to 6  
all my life  
both day and night  
I get so bored

if only  
I could find  
man or woman  
a body a soul  
a werewolf  
I couldn't care less  
just to dream ...

[The same song continues later in the film, identifying Anaïs as the singer of the song that accompanies the opening titles.]

after my life  
after my survival  
after my death  
I'll still be bored  
more than ever

if only I could find  
a spectre or a ghost  
woman or man  
an animal  
I don't mind  
just to dream ...

Written by Catherine Breillat  
Performed by Anaïs Reboux

APPENDIX E – LYRICS TO 'THE PRETTY THINGS ARE GOING TO HELL'

[Excerpt as heard in *A Ma Soeur!*]

You're still breathing but you don't know why  
life's a [bit?] and sometimes you die  
you're still breathing but you just can't tell  
Don't hold your breath  
But the pretty things are going to hell

I am a drug I am a dragon  
I am your best jazz you've ever seen  
I am the dragon I am the sky  
I am the blood at the corner of your eye  
I found the secrets I found gold  
I found you out before you grow old  
I found you out before you grow old ...

written by David Bowie/ Reeves Gabrels<sup>598</sup>

performed by David Bowie

© Nipple Music/Exploded View Music/David Bowie/Virgin Records America Inc.

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<sup>598</sup> Credited (incorrectly) as Gabriel Reeves on the DVD credits to *A Ma Soeur!*

## APPENDIX F – LYRICS TO ‘J’AI MIS MON COEUR A POURRIR’

I’ve set my heart to rot away  
on the window sill  
I trust in a future day  
the crows may come, I hope they will  
with their beaks so fleet  
they will peck away  
at this lump of raw meat  
over which you thought you held sway

I’ve set my heart to rot  
on the window sill  
for the joyless joy of the day  
my worries fall still  
if you see the flock  
of crows fighting o’ver it  
throw them not a rock  
for I am not worth a bit

I’ve set my heart to rot  
on the window sill  
I trust in a future day  
when the crows come, if they will  
with their beaks so fleet  
they will peck away  
at this lump of raw meat  
o’er which you thought you held sway

Written by Catherine Breillat  
Performed by Anaïs Reboux

APPENDIX G – LYRICS TO 'BLUE VELVET'

[Dorothy's (Isabella Rossellini's) first performance]

She wore blue velvet  
bluer than velvet was the night  
softer than satin  
was the light from the stars  
she wore blue velvet  
bluer than velvet were her eyes ...

[second performance]

But when she left  
gone was the glow  
of blue velvet  
but in my heart there'll always be  
precious and warm a memory  
through the years  
And I still can see  
blue velvet through my tears

Written by Bernie Wayne/Lee Morris  
Performed by Isabella Rossellini

## APPENDIX H – LYRICS FOR ‘IN DREAMS’

A candy-colored clown they call the sandman  
tiptoes to my room every night  
just to sprinkle stardust and to whisper:  
“Go to sleep, everything is alright”

I close my eyes  
then I drift away  
into the magic night  
I softly sway  
oh smile and pray  
like dreamers do  
then I fall asleep  
to dream my dreams of you

In dreams I walk with you  
in dreams I talk to you  
in dreams you’re mine  
all of the time  
we’re together  
in dreams  
in dreams

But just before the dawn  
I awake and find you gone  
I can’t help it, I can’t help it  
if I cry  
I remember  
that you said goodbye  
to end all these things  
and I’ll be happy in my dreams  
only in dreams  
in beautiful dreams

Written and performed by Roy Orbison

## APPENDIX I – LYRICS TO 'LOVE LETTERS'

Love letters straight from your heart  
keep us so near while apart  
I'm not alone in the night  
when I can have all the love you write

I memorize every line  
and I kiss the name that you sign  
and, darling, then I read again right from the start  
love letters straight from your heart

I memorize every line [in *Blue Velvet*, the song cue ends here abruptly as Jeffrey shuts Dorothy's apartment door]  
and I kiss the name that you sign  
and, darlin', then I read again right from the start  
love letters straight from your heart

Written by Victor Young and Edward Heyman  
Performed by Ketty Lester  
© 1945 Famous Music Corporation

## APPENDIX J – LYRICS TO ‘SEASONS OF CHANGE’

[Vicki’s (Dora Kaskaris’s) first performance]

See the stars falling on the ground  
days of old  
pots of gold  
red ship sailing among the clouds  
still its cold  
seasons go so quickly...

[record and Vicki’s second performance]

people dancing in the street  
in the town a small boy cries  
eyes of laughter bird of stone  
lines the shores  
cuts away

the seasons go so quickly  
you don’t know where you are

the seasons go so quickly  
you don’t know where you are

Composed by John Robinson

Written by Neil Jones

Performed by Vicki (Dora Kaskaris)

Performed by Sally Anne Upton, Clive Bourne, Andy Provis, Philip Brophy and recorded by Rachel Sherrif, Neil Kerlogue, Philip Brophy

©Essex Music of Australia Pty Ltd



## APPENDIX K – TRANSLATION OF LIBRETTO FOR ‘UN BEL DI, VEDREMO’

One fine, clear day, we shall see  
a thin trail of smoke arising,  
on the distant horizon, far out to sea.  
And then the ship appears.  
Then the white ship  
enters into the harbour,  
and thunders out its greeting.

You see? He has come!  
I’ll not go down to meet him. Not I.  
I shall stay on the hillside and wait,  
and wait for a long time,  
and I’ll not grow weary  
of the long wait.

Emerging from the city crowds,  
a man is coming, a tiny speck  
starts to climb the hill.  
Who is he? Who?  
And when he arrives.  
What will he say? What will he say?  
He will call “Butterfly” from the distance.  
I, without answering,  
will remain hidden.  
A little to tease him  
and a little so as not to die,  
at our first meeting;  
and then rather worried  
he will call, he will call:  
“My little one, my tiny wife,  
Perfumed-Verbena”  
The names he gave me when he came last.  
*(to Suzuki)*  
All this will happen,  
I promise you.  
Keep your fears to yourself,  
I, with faithful trust will wait for him.

Music by Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924)

Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica.

Translation by A Shepherd © <http://www.bohemianopera.com> (used with permission)

Performed by Miriam Gouci/Yordy Romiro/Georg Tichy/Slovak Philharmonic  
Chorus/Czecho-Slovak RSO (Cue Management Pty Ltd)

## APPENDIX L – NONA’S DIALOGUE FOR ‘UN BEL DI, VEDREMO’

[Nona sings along to the CD]

Oh, my life is shit  
my boyfriend left me  
for another woman  
he’s a big arsehold  
and she’s a slut

She then speaks, waiting for the soprano’s climactic note at the end of the aria:

‘And then what happens, Mae, is the American soldier comes back home with this white woman. And they want to take the baby. And Butterfly, she’s really pissed off. And she thinks – Hey, I’ll kill myself. So she does that hari-kare stuff with the knife. She grabs it – there’s a moment of pause – she contemplates. Hurry up! Hang on ... Wait a minute ... Alright. And then ...’ Nona then sings along to the final dramatic note.

Performed by Nona (Deborah Mailman)

## APPENDIX M – TRANSLATION OF LIBRETTO FOR 'CHE TUA MADRE DOVRA'

That your mother will  
take you in her arms,  
and through the wind and rain,  
wander the city to earn  
enough to feed and clothe you  
And to the people who  
are full of pity she will  
stretch out her trembling  
hand and cry: Hear me, hear  
my sad song.  
Give charity to an  
unfortunate mother  
have pity on her I beg you  
The geisha will sing once more!  
But her merry and happy song  
will finish with a sob!

Music by Giacomo Puccini (1858 – 1924)

Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica.

Translation by A Shepherd © <http://www.bohemianopera.com> (used with permission)

Performed by Miriam Gouci/Yordy Romiro/Georg Tichy/Slovak Philharmonic  
Chorus/Czecho-Slovak RSO (Cue Management Pty Ltd)

## APPENDIX N – TRANSLATION OF LIBRETTO TO ‘CON ONOR MUORE’

### **Butterfly**

*(softly reading the words that are inscribed on her dagger)*

“To die with honour when one can  
no longer live with honour.”

*(pointing the dagger at her throat from the side)*

*(the door on the left suddenly opens to reveal the arm of Suzuki [Butterfly’s servant] pushing the child towards his mother: he enters running, his little hands extended: Butterfly lets the dagger fall, she hastens towards her child giving him hugs and kisses that nearly smother him)*

You? you? you? you? you? you? you?

*(anxiously but*

*with great feeling)*

My little God! Love, my love,  
my Lily flower of rosebud.

*(taking her son’s head in her hands  
and drawing him close to her)*

Although you must never know it,  
it is for you alone, for your innocent eyes that,  
*(in a whisper)*

Butterfly dies

because then you may

travel beyond oceans

and when you have grown up,

you will never feel remorse knowing

that your mother abandoned you.

*(with exaltation)*

Oh, you who came down to me from

Heaven’s highest throne,

look for the last time upon your Mother’s face,

look closely at her face, closely,

so that some trace will remain, look carefully!

Farewell my beloved! goodbye little love!

*(in a faint voice)*

Go and play, play!

Music by Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924)

Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica.

Translation by A Shepherd © <http://www.bohemianopera.com> (used with permission)

Performed by Miriam Gouci/Yordy Romiro/Georg Tichy/Slovak Philharmonic Chorus/Czecho-Slovak RSO (Cue Management Pty Ltd)

## APPENDIX O – LYRICS TO ‘MY ISLAND HOME’<sup>599</sup>

Six years I’ve lived in the city  
and every night I dream of the sea  
They say home is where you find it  
will this place ever satisfy me

For I come from the saltwater people  
we always lived by the sea  
Now I’m down here living in the city  
with my man and a family

My island home my island home my island home is waiting for me.

[dialogue]

In the evening the dry wind blows  
from the hills, and across the plains  
I close my eyes and I’m standing  
in a boat on the sea again  
I’m holding that long turtle spear and I feel I’m close now  
To where it must be, my island home is waiting for me

My island home my island home my island home is waiting for me

My island home, my island home, my island home, my island home, my island home  
My island home.

Written by Neil Murray  
© Rondor Music Australia Pty Ltd  
Performed by Tiddas

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<sup>599</sup> The original lyrics, slightly different to the version Tiddas recorded for the film, are listed on Neil Murray’s website Murray, (accessed).

## APPENDIX P – LYRICS TO 'DARK EYES'<sup>600</sup>

Oh the gentlemen are talking and the midnight moon is on the riverside  
they're drinking up and walking and it is time for me to slide  
I live in another world where life and death are memorized  
where the earth is strung with lovers' pearls and all I see are dark eyes

A cock is crowing far away and another soldier's deep in prayer  
some mother's child has gone astray, and she can't find him anywhere  
but I can hear another drum beating for the dead that rise  
whom nature's beast fears as they come and all I see are dark eyes

They tell me to be discreet for all intended purposes  
they tell me revenge is sweet and from where they stand, I'm sure it is  
but I feel nothing for their game where beauty goes unrecognised  
all I feel is heat and flame and all I see are dark eyes

Oh the French girl, she's in paradise and a drunken man is at the wheel  
[Lilli's (Judy Davis's) singing begins here]  
hunger pays a heavy price to the falling gods of speed and steel  
oh, time is short and the days are sweet and passion rules the arrow that flies  
a million faces at my feet but all I see are dark eyes

Written by Bob Dylan  
©1985 Special Rider Music  
Performed by Judy Davis

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<sup>600</sup> Bob Dylan, 'Dark Eyes,' available from <<http://bobdylan.com/songs/darkeyes.html>>, accessed 22/12/04.

## APPENDIX Q –LYRICS TO ‘CRYING’

I was alright for a while  
I could smile for a while  
but when I saw you last night  
you held my hand so tight  
when you stopped to say hello  
although you wished me well  
you couldn't tell  
that I'd been  
crying, over you  
crying over you  
and you said so long  
left me standing all alone  
alone and crying

I thought that I was over you  
but it's true, it's so true  
I love you even more  
than I did before  
so darling, what can I do  
for you don't love me  
and I'll always be

Crying over you, crying over you

yes now you're gone  
and from this moment on  
I'll be crying, crying crying  
over you

Written by Roy Orbison and Joe Melson  
Performed by Rebekah del Rio (Spanish version)

## APPENDIX R – LYRICS TO ‘DANCING QUEEN’<sup>601</sup>

You can dance, you can jive  
having the time of your life  
see that girl, watch that scene  
dig in the dancing queen

Friday night and the lights are low  
looking out for the place to go  
where they play the right music  
getting in the swing  
you come to look for a king

Anybody could be that guy  
night is young and the music’s high  
with a bit of rock music  
everything is fine  
you’re in the mood for a dance  
and when you get the chance

You are the Dancing Queen  
young and sweet only seventeen  
Dancing Queen,  
feel the beat from the tambourine, oh yeah  
you can dance, you can jive  
having the time of your life  
see that girl, watch that scene  
dig in the Dancing Queen

You’re a teaser, you turn ‘em on,  
leave ‘em burning and then you’re gone  
looking out for another  
anyone will do  
you’re in the mood for a dance  
and when you get the chance

You are the Dancing Queen  
young and sweet only seventeen  
Dancing Queen,  
feel the beat from the tambourine, oh yeah  
you can dance, you can jive  
having the time of your life  
see that girl, watch that scene  
dig in the Dancing Queen

Written by Benny Andersson, Stig Anderson & Björn Ulvaeus  
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AB, Stockholm, Sweden. All rights reserved.  
Performed by ABBA (Benny Andersson, Björn Ulvaeus, Agnetha Faltskog, Anni-Frid Lyngstad)  
Performed by Muriel (Toni Collette)

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<sup>601</sup> *ABBA – the Site*, ‘Dancing Queen,’ available from <<http://www.abbasite.com/music/songs.php>>. accessed 26/3/05.



## APPENDIX S – LYRICS TO 'WATERLOO'<sup>602</sup>

My, my, at Waterloo Napoleon did surrender  
oh yeah, and I have met my destiny  
in quite a similar way  
the history book on the shelf  
is always repeating itself

Waterloo – I was defeated, you won the war  
Waterloo – promise to love you for ever more  
Waterloo – couldn't escape if I wanted to  
Waterloo – knowing my fate is to be with you  
Wa, wa, wa, wa, Waterloo – finally facing my Waterloo

My, my, I tried to hold you back but you were stronger  
oh yeah, and now it seems my only chance  
is giving up the fight  
and how could I ever refuse  
I feel like I win when I lose

Waterloo – I was defeated, you won the war  
Waterloo – promise to love you for ever more  
Waterloo – couldn't escape if I wanted to  
Waterloo – knowing my fate is to be with you  
Wa, wa, wa, wa, Waterloo – finally facing my Waterloo

So how could I ever refuse  
I feel like I win when I lose –

Waterloo – couldn't escape if I wanted to  
Waterloo – knowing my fate is to be with you  
Wa, wa, wa, wa, Waterloo – finally facing my Waterloo

Written by Benny Andersson, Stig Anderson & Björn Ulvaeus  
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Performed by ABBA

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<sup>602</sup> *ABBA – the Site*, 'Waterloo,' available from <<http://www.abbsite.com/music/songs.php>>, accessed 26/3/05.

## APPENDIX T – LYRICS TO ‘FERNANDO’<sup>603</sup>

Can you hear the drums Fernando?

I remember long ago  
another starry night like this  
in the firelight Fernando  
you were humming to yourself  
and softly strumming your guitar  
I could hear the distant drums  
and sounds of bugle calls  
were coming from afar

They were closer now Fernando  
every hour, every minute  
seemed to last eternally  
I was so afraid Fernando  
we were young and full of life  
and none of us prepared to die  
and I’m not ashamed to say  
the roar of guns and canons  
almost made me cry

There was something in the air that night  
the stars were bright, Fernando  
they were shining there for you and me  
for liberty, Fernando  
though we never thought that we could lose  
there’s no regret  
If I had to do the same again  
I would my friend Fernando

Now we’re old and grey Fernando  
since many years  
I haven’t seen a rifle in your hand  
can you hear the drums Fernando?  
Do you still recall the fateful night we crossed the Rio Grande?  
I can see it in your eyes  
how proud you were to fight  
for freedom in this land

There was something in the air that night  
the stars were bright, Fernando  
they were shining there for you and me  
for liberty, Fernando  
though we never thought that we could lose  
there’s no regret  
If I had to do the same again  
I would my friend Fernando

Written by Benny Andersson, Stig Anderson & Björn Ulvaeus  
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AB, Stockholm, Sweden. All rights reserved  
Performed by ABBA  
Performed by Muriel (Toni Collette) and Rhonda (Rachel Griffiths)

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<sup>603</sup> ABBA – the Site, ‘Fernando,’ available from <<http://www.abbasite.com/music/songs.php>>, accessed 26/3/05.

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