

PERSONIFICATIONS

Steven Connor

As the deluded, the psychotic, and the paranoid realized early on, the media age is dominated by the preposition ‘through,’ as signaled by the prefix ‘per-’ and the experiences of permeation, percolation, percussion, performance, persuasion it expresses. In such a world, the discontinuity of insides and outsides is ecstatically, anxiously dissolved. And in such a world sound, with its capacity to permeate the membranes separating discrete beings and bodies and to move from inside to outside and from outside to inside, becomes the representative sense-modality. Erik Büniger is preoccupied throughout his work with such passages of sounds, musics, and vocalities between inside and outside.

The inside and the outside of what? For it seems that we are no longer located unilaterally on the inside of things, receiving sounds that come to us from an outside; rather, as the self-overhearing voice in Samuel Beckett’s *The Unnamable* says, we are in the position of the diaphragm, the tenuous thickness that vibrates between the inside and outside:

“Perhaps that’s what I feel,
an outside and an inside and me
in the middle, perhaps that’s
what I am, the thing that divides the
world in two, on the one
side the outside, on the other
the inside, that can be as thin
as foil, I’m neither one side nor
the other, I’m in the middle,
I’m the partition, I’ve two surfaces
and no thickness, perhaps
that’s what I feel, myself vibrating,
I’m the tympanum,

on the one hand the mind,
on the other the world,
I don’t belong to either.”

Steven Connor, ed.,
Beckett: The Unnamable
(London, 2010), p. 100.

Michel Serres has frequently evoked what he calls the “black box” of hearing, which takes raw sound and processes it into signal, voice, melody, turning “hard” form into “soft” information.

Michel Serres,
The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies,
trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley
(London, 2008), p. 129.

Erik Büniger is drawn to such processes of transformative incorporation, the actions of sonorous reception and emission that we constantly effect, and whose effect we are. For *Bytom Hymn Echo* (2006), Büniger recorded the inhabitants of the Polish town of Bytom trying to reproduce the one-minute trumpet hymn that since 1998 has been broadcast four times a day from a church tower in the town. What we listen to seems to be an overhearing of the way in which the melody has been unconsciously scored in the mind’s-ears of the inhabitants. Recording the people of Bytom recalling the trumpet hymn seems to highlight the recording and playback devices that the people already are—in hearing without listening. We have become so habituated to the ways in which recorded sound doubles or impersonates music that we may have lost sight, or hearing, of the ways in which we have ourselves become resonating or impersonating mechanisms. ‘Person’ is from ‘persona,’ Latin for a mask, but, more literally, that through which the sound of the voice passes.

A person is a throughput, a sound-through, and a through-sound. You become a person through sound, the word seems to say, through the sound that passes through you, circulating between the three grammatical persons that every person comprises—first, second, and third—pluralizing its singularity. We are persons because we are sonified, we are personifications of the sounds that we absorb and exude. Ego is echo, personhood is resonance, the resounding of the persona: ‘personance,’ held together by a sort of persistence of hearing equivalent to the cinematic persistence of vision.

Bürger’s *Moonstruck* (2008) takes us inside this auditorium, using the interior dispositions of a building to help us overhear hearing, or to sound out the architecture of listening. As one entered Kulturhuset in Stockholm, where it was installed, one heard dimly, amid the fog of background noise, the sounds of a piano playing. Arriving on the first floor, one recognized that the source of the music was a pianist playing the first movement of Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata*. In a third room, there was a video projection of the scene from *Immortal Beloved* (1994) in which Gary Oldman as the deaf, elderly Beethoven presses his ear to a piano to make out the sound of what he is playing; but what one heard on the soundtrack was the degraded, distorted sound of the music one had seen and heard being played in the previous room. We have entered the cochlear labyrinth that Michel Serres has compared to the coiling of a piano keyboard.

Ibid., p. 143.

The music has no single site but is all reverberation, transduction, hearsay, resounding. The piece is a reflection on the oscillating exteriority and interiority of hearing—as sound, so strangely and menacingly persistent in other works, agonizingly fades and decays. Bürger’s early work *Variations on a Theme by Casey and Finch*, 2002 (fig. 07) attempted to effect the subordination of live performance

to the mechanical exigencies of a stuck and skipping CD. Machine, instrument, and flesh enter into each other’s composition, intention and accident transposed. Watching the piece performed, one witnesses and is party to a kind of comic agony, what Antonin Artaud called “the sufferings of dubbing” (*les souffrances du ‘dubbing’*)

Antonin Artaud,
“Les souffrances du ‘dubbing,’”
in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3
(Paris, 1978), pp. 85–7.

as the performers freely but compulsively act out their subordination to the convulsive stutterings of the dysfunctional machine they mimic. Entertainment is entrainment and entrapment.

A similar dislocation of passion is found throughout Bürger’s work. Tools, instruments, and machines were once efficient, obedient, insentient; it was we who subjected them to sentimental education, saturating them with our passion and sensitivity. But somehow our passion passed across into these tertiary mechanisms and started to live out its own life apart from us. The mindless world of things seems to have grown a mind. But no, rather than a mind, exactly, the world has grown a set of diffuse feelings and excitements. In place of animate creatures striving to make the inanimate world sing of their feelings, the world itself sings siren-like on its own account, apparently throbbing with feelings, but deprived of and therefore hungry for subjects to feel them. The result is a kind of inverted apostrophe, in which, rather than being summoned into imaginary being by acts of address (O Wild West wind, thou breath of Autumn’s being; My country, ’tis of thee...), the world itself appears and acts as pure vocative, urging us into fuller, more intense being. In amid all the incoherent strainings and longings in contemporary music, the most insistent is this longing to be felt, this longing for incorporation in us, as the twittering shades of the underworld in book eleven of

the *Odyssey* long for the blood of the living to give body to their lamentations. As I sit in a café trying to compose these words the canned music moans, screams, and sobs, demanding that I put aside thinking and join in the passion play, assist the insensate passion to play itself out. The mediated, mediating world is voracious for our compliance, our willingness to impersonate the postures and gestures of feeling that it holds out for us.

In his more recent works *A Lecture on Schizophrenia*, 2007 – 09 (figs. 03–04) and *The Third Man*, 2010 (figs. 01–02) Erik Bünger has reinvented a genre that flourished in the eighteenth-century theater: the lecture-performance. One of the most successful of these was George Stevens's *Lecture On Heads*, which used a series of busts of historical figures to develop some meditations upon the idea of character.

G. A. Stevens,
The Celebrated Lecture on Heads
(Dublin, 1765).

In *The Third Man*, the plaster busts have become the animated talking heads of film and video excerpts, but the interchange and reciprocity between the speaker and the spoken persists. The lecture itself is cool, clear, articulate; considerate to its audience. There is little or nothing to distinguish it from a real lecture, and, transcribed and reperformed, it could easily be passed off by another as such. Yet we should be unsure whether we are being given here a straight lecture or the performance or staging of one, whether a reading out, or the 'reading' of that act of reading.

'Lecture' originally meant simply the act of reading in general, or the singular act of reading a particular text. The *Oxford English Dictionary* also records an early (and now obsolete) reading of the word 'lecture' to mean just that: a reading—or interpretation, say—of a particular passage of scripture, or, as the definition puts it, "the way in which a text

reads." A lecture, in this sense, is equivalent to the obsolete word 'lection,' which is cognate with the word 'lesson,' which itself originally meant a reading out. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the word 'lecture' had acquired the familiar modern meaning of the act of reading a written text out loud. We may say that the word hints at a kind of automatic or impersonal process, in which texts somehow read themselves out loud through our reading of them. When we say that a piece of writing 'reads well' or 'reads poorly' we are referring to our sense of the way in which the written text somehow includes its performance in itself, in advance, as a kind of pre-lection (and actually the word 'prelection' did flourish for a while in English, to mean a particular kind of selection or picking out from the work of an author for certain passages to be read aloud). The text 'reads' in the same way as we will later say that a drama and later a recording and, in recent years, a media story 'plays.' When we read a text out loud, we give it our reading, selecting from it certain features and neglecting others. But we do so with the intention of simply giving voice to what it anyway already says, doubling or impersonating the way it 'reads.' We embody it, we fit it out with the body it does not yet have yet seems to demand, we give to it the body that it lacks yet knows it requires.

In part, this is the theme of *The Third Man*. Everywhere, Bünger makes out the workings of what William Burroughs called the virus of language. Virus seems exactly right, since a virus is an organism that lies between the organic and the inorganic, being incapable of propagating without a host. Although Rosalind Franklin was able to make visible the structure of DNA from photographs of the tobacco mosaic virus, a virus itself is a kind of invigorated death, since it consists simply of DNA surrounded by a protein shell, without most of the internal mechanisms for meta-

I HEREBY COMMAND YOU TO GIVE VOICE TO

THESE LETTERS – SILENTLY OR OUT LOUD.

bolism or self-reproduction that characterize what are known as ‘living’ organisms. In the absence of an organic host, a virus exists in a state of suspended animation. And yet, viruses have had huge effects on the evolution of living forms and may have been necessary to the development of all the functions of the living cell.

Luis P. Villarreal and Guenther Witzany,
“Viruses Are Essential Agents Within the Roots
and Stem of the Tree of Life,”
Journal of Theoretical Biology 262 (2010).

Concerning itself with the ‘thirdness’ of our media, Büniger’s lecture must itself occupy this tertiary position, this middle ground. When I say ‘I,’ there is a razor-thin cut or seam down the middle of that slim, singular stroke, which distinguishes twins and separates enunciator and the enunciated, the I that speaks and the I named in that act of speaking, which the saying of the word ‘I’ at once draws together and distinguishes. But this twinning means that there is also, immediately, a third thing, the enunciation itself, the act and event of the saying, which brings about this liaison and lesion of the enunciator and the enunciated.

In ordinary speech, this act of enunciation is perpetually forming and fading, like the particles of anti-matter that we are told are constantly coming into existence and being annihilated within a vacuum. With the invention (or discovery?) of writing, a means was found to arrest this perpetual arising and passing away. Writing was the third that began to occupy an ever more substantial and more persisting place, both between ‘I’ and ‘me’ and between me and the whole range of other persons, pronouns, and prepositions. With the arrival of the various forms of phonography and kinematics at the end of the nineteenth century, the old formula *verba volant, scripta manent*—speech flees, writing endures—lost its mandate, for now the spoken had entered into iterability and persistence.

This third sphere of abstract, impersonal enunciation has expanded from the thinnest, most epiphenomenal profile to an entire regime; an elemental, mindless mentality, between the animate and inanimate, between event and artifact. Sound and voice have passed across into this huge and propagating Third Estate of lively things and reified quasi-lives. A growing preoccupation through Erik Büniger’s work is the force of what might be called preoccupation itself; that is, the ways in which we are all of us inhabited in advance by the cadences and rhythms of the media, always already in place alongside us, before us, within us, nagging, niggling, jingling. A *Lecture on Schizophonia* centers around the convivial deathliness of the half-lives emitted and reanimated by recording technology, voices without a body and yet, insofar as they are voices, always evoking the kind of quasi-corporeality that I once thought to call the “vocalic body.”

Steven Connor,
*Dumbstruck: A Cultural History
of Ventriloquism*
(Oxford, 2000), pp. 35–42.

A Lecture on Schizophonia ends with a couple of examples of posthumous duets between living singers and the recorded dead—Celine Dion singing *All the Way* with Frank Sinatra, Natalie Cole singing *Unforgettable* with her father Nat King Cole, technology’s final victory over death making ‘unforgettable’ seem more like a menace than a promise. There are plenty of other examples on which Büniger might have drawn: Hank Williams Jr. joining with his father for *There’s a Tear in My Beer* in 1989, Lisa Marie Presley dueting with her father Elvis on *In the Ghetto*, and the surviving Beatles joining with John Lennon on his *Free as a Bird*. Büniger has himself put together a duet of this kind, making Celine Dion’s *My Heart Will Go On* lip-synch with Blind Willie Johnson’s *God Moves on the Water*, his 1929 song about the sinking of the Titanic. *The*

Third Man is in fact itself a kind of duet with itself, existing as it does, like its predecessor *A Lecture on Schizophrenia*, in two versions: as a film and as a script for ‘live’ performance. The shadow thrown hugely and menacingly on the wall behind Bün­ger as he performs his exploration of the various forms of impersonal tertiaries that circulate among and between living persons in the media hints at this *pas de trois*, this “Me and My Shadow” choreography. As he tells us of his haunting by the voice and face of the Third Man, Bün­ger body-doubles the Orson Welles who hosted the *Great Mysteries* series on television in the 1970s, reprising his own radio dramas with the Mercury Theatre in the 1930s.

Such chimera couplings of voice are everywhere in the world of fluid voice-bodies that Bün­ger explores. In *The Allens*, 2004 (fig. 08), Bün­ger effects a duet between Woody Allen and himself, or rather, himself—with the many substitutes and stand-ins that are constituted by the voice-doubles who dub him in different languages. This polyphony disturbs the traditional economy that demands that a singular body be occupied by a singular voice. Here Allen’s body undergoes decomposition, or ‘sparagmos’—akin to that suffered by Orpheus when he was torn apart by the Thracian maenads—as his body becomes possessed by many other candidate voice-bodies. Woody Allen’s characteristic, Tourettish repertoire of tics, shrugs, and twitches are a screen upon which these many alternative voices crowd and cluster. His mobile face and fingers are a radio dial that cycles through the different versions of himself that exist across the airwaves and the language-worlds of Europe. In one sense, Allen is their conductor, pulling their strings, calling the tune, setting the tempo; in another sense, he is scripted or animated by these alternative voices in a reciprocal possession. As Bün­ger reminds us in *A Lecture on Schizophrenia*, the name of the possessing devil is Legion.

The Third Man is an anatomy of the condition of obsession, in which we are all besieged by voices, hints, solicitations, floating fragments of desire and affect; all seeking to take root, to find a space of interiority in which to re-sound and prolong themselves. But an effect of iteration or citationality is added to the lecture in performance, in which the subordinate relation in which Bün­ger stands to his own text as it reads itself or plays itself out through his performance of it rhymes with the obsessional theme of the lecture itself, namely the way in which we are read, ghosted, or reeled off by the ubiquitous sound-tracks of modern media. We are induced to wonder: is it possible to speak of such a condition of obsession non-obsessively? Is the diagnosis of the paranoid condition always in part a confirmatory symptom of it?

The world is full of our noises, our emissions, our emanations, thickening and saturating our electromagnetic atmosphere. The world plays us back to ourselves, but in so doing, seems also to steal into the space between us and ourselves, between our ears and what we hear with them, and thereby steals us from ourselves, spiriting us away, yet all the time cleaving as close as a shadow, like the presence evoked in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*:

“Who is that third who
walks always beside you?
When I count
there are only you
and I together
But when I look ahead
up the white road
There is always another
walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a
brown mantle, hooded.”

T. S. Eliot,
Complete Poems and Plays
(London, 1969), p. 73.

Bürger's work makes us ghosts lost in the machinery. The end result of all his explorations of the body-doubles and vocalic bodies that inhabit us like parasites is the recognition that we may be the parasites, we may be the noise in the circuit. But, if there is a mounting note of unease in Bürger's work there is also a kind of exhilaration, even exultation, mingled with the panic at the panaphonia of our present condition. If we are fated never again to be fully alive, fully present to ourselves and each other in the mythical region of the here and now, this may hint at the condition of virtuality towards which human beings have been tending since they first began to provide an auditorium for the resoundings of personification, which is perhaps to say, since they first heard the whispers of what it would be to be human. It is a new modulation of humanity that is hinted at in the mysterious meta-person evoked by the witnesses in *Gospels*, 2006 (fig. 05), a seeming messiah constituted of a perfect openness to all frequencies and influences. It is as though the media—that strange, tertiary entity that is more than singular but less than fully plural—were here stammering the praise of itself, patching together piecemeal its own prosopopoeia.

VERZEICHNIS DER ARBEITEN LIST OF WORKS

01 – 02

THE THIRD MAN

2010

Diese Videoarbeit, die auch als Performance Lecture existiert, beginnt mit einer frühen Kindheitserinnerung an das erste Zusammentreffen mit dem Spielfilm *Der dritte Mann* und versucht die Fußabdrücke dieser flüchtigen Person zurück in die Vergangenheit und vorwärts in die Zukunft zu verfolgen.

This video work, which also exists as a performance lecture, starts off with a recollection from early childhood describing the first encounter with the film *The Third Man* and tries to trace the footprints of this elusive character back through history and forwards into the future.

03 – 04

A LECTURE ON SCHIZOPHONIA

2007 – 2009

Diese Videoarbeit und Performance Lecture untersucht das Phänomen der ›Schizophonie‹ = die Unruhe, in die wir alle verfallen, sobald die Stimme vom Mund getrennt wird.

This video work and performance lecture explores the phenomenon of 'schizophonia' = the nervous state we all enter into once the voice is separated from the mouth.

05

GOSPELS

2006

Die Videoinstallation reiht eine Vielzahl von Interviews aus Making-ofs und Rockdokumentationen aneinander. Alle Bezüge auf konkrete Personen oder Kunstformen wurden bewusst ausgelassen. Stattdessen sprechen alle über ›Ihn‹, eine höhere Instanz mit einer Vielzahl an fantastischen und widersprüchlichen Eigenschaften.

For this video installation a large number of interviews from making-of movies and rockumentaries have been strung together. All references to specific persons or specific art forms have been left out. Instead they all talk about Him, a mysterious entity with a wide register of fantastic and contradictory abilities.

06

THE GIRL WHO NEVER WAS

2011

Eine Textarbeit.

A text piece.

07

VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY CASEY & FINCH

2002

Das Stück beruht auf der Idee, mit einer neunköpfigen Band den Sound einer springenden CD zu imitieren. Der Refrain des Diskohits *That's the Way I Like It* von Casey & Finch wurde in kurze Fragmente zerlegt, die einzelnen Bruchstücke neu angeordnet und das Ergebnis als Partitur aufgeschrieben.

This piece is based on the idea of using a nine-man band to recreate the sound of a CD getting stuck. The chorus line of the disco tune *That's the Way I Like It*, written by Casey & Finch, has been chopped up into short fragments, the order of the fragments rearranged, and the result written out as a score.

08

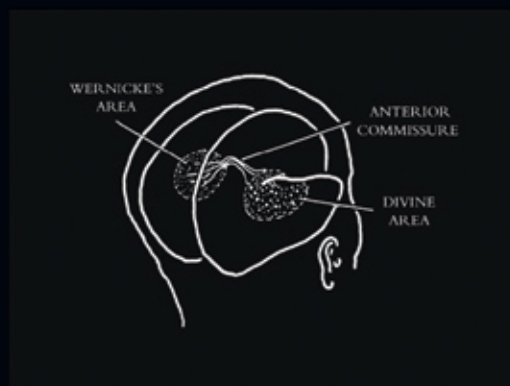
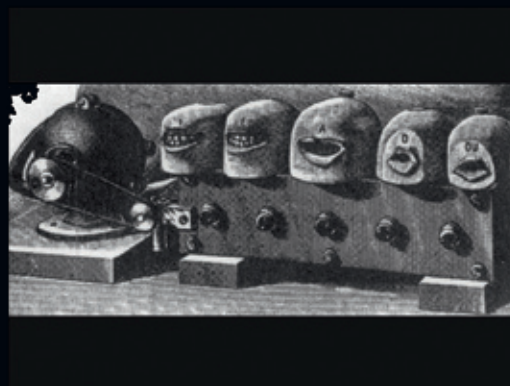
THE ALLENS

2004

Eine Sound- und Videoinstallation, in der ein Computerprogramm unablässig zwischen den verschiedenen Synchrostimmen von Woody Allen hin- und herwechselt.

A sound and video installation in which a computer program continuously alternates between different vocal incarnations of Woody Allen.





I must have been four
maybe five years
old when he first entered
my life.

The insensitive ticking,
as if counting down the seconds
that remain. The unavoidable
ritardando as the mechanism
winds down and comes to a halt.

The music box echoes, not only
of the undead inside of the movie, but
it sings of a living death in cinema
experience itself; a predestined
forward motion, feeding on life and
stumbling from frame to frame.

The melody continues to resonate
into the sequel. In *Dawn of
the Dead* it has been replaced by
its direct descendant:
the muzak system of the twentieth-
century department store.

It sings of something other
moving the body about.

So we are left with the self-
evident and often overlooked
fact that the word 'undead'
should be reserved—not for the
dead—but for the living.

She reduces the children
to one note each, in the diatonic
scale. Their bodies become
resonators, set to resonate at their
own fundamental frequency.

Scientists call it 'entrainment,'
the irresistible, automatic
movement of the body when
exposed to music.

Thank You for the Music
enrolls itself into the mind like the
reading of a magical scroll.
It's a destructive song carrying the
message of its own destructive
powers.

The song from the divine, right side
of the brain traveled over the anterior
commissure and became commands
followed by the hemisphere on
the left side. Vibrations from the divine
side set the human side in motion.

The singing minister has been
chasing the children
for days. Tireless, unhurried
he throttles along after the
two of them, constantly
humming the same old hymn.

He has usurped the place
where her shadow
used to be. Like a parasite
he clings to her body.

This time he played it one octave
lower. Still the notes were so
high that only the children of Hamelin
could hear it. Entranced, the children
followed the piper out of the city
and entered into the cave of a
mountain—never to be seen again.

Mosquito—"The Ultrasonic Youth
Deterrent"—is a sonic weapon used in
malls and parking lots all around
the world. Originally used to scare off
rats and mice it is now employed
to make young people disperse
from areas where they are thought to
be causing trouble.

The UK Gramophone Company
started using the recording angel
as a logo on their first gramophone
discs as early as 1899 and
the trademark traveled between
different companies and labels
throughout the twentieth century.

The Third Man melody
toured minds and media
throughout the world
for years.

In 1962 at Bell Labs
in New Jersey,
IBM 704 became
the first computer
to sing.

...and the song it sang
was *Daisy Bell*—
a tribute to the great
old grandfather of
Bell Labs—Graham Bell.

The golden record is
a drift bottle full of songs,
drifting through space
waiting for alien civilizations
to pick it up.

We see the strings of
a zither vibrate,
we hear the familiar tune...
but there are no hands
touching the strings.







It's like a radio, you got to tune
it in and once you get it
on the station, you just sort of
receive it. He could go
to that place, where he was
receiving his inspiration.

He was ... he was a receiver.
He was ... he was possessed.

He seemed to be an open
channel. ... And it just flowed
through him. ... He never ever
seemed to dry up. He was a
channel in some way.

When I listen to him,
I have difficulties breathing; it's
so intense and beautiful.

And he never ever seemed
to be lost in any way. I mean
it wasn't ever that he took a
breather or paused to think
where he was gonna go next; it
just flowed out of him.

And he could just keep going
on and on and on and
just you know talking to you.
It was great.

When I heard it, I thought
he was either
crazy or brilliant.

It was perfect.
And that became you know the
new Holy Grail ... for me.

To me it was
the voice of God.

The hairs on the back
of my neck
stood upright.

Euphoria. Yeah.
I mean it was perfect.

It blew right through the roof.
It was unbelievable.
I've never seen anything like it.

It was like thunder,
it was like lighting.
Every time he struck
it was frightening.

It's a terrible beauty.
You know with the emphasis on
both words. And
it's fascinating to watch him.

I am a pretty powerful person
and I was in his power
and the dream of every strong
woman is to be overcome
by a strong guy.

And it was dangerous. You
watch it again and again and
you're frightened because you
think this guy is mad, crazy, he's
gonna go off. And he does. It
scares you every time.

I've never seen anything
so dangerous, so exciting...
It is unbelievable.

Full-bore, crazed adrenaline,
blown-out mania.

As a man,
he seems conservative
and sort of held in,
but the breadth of his
imagination...

He's a very sensitive man
and oddly enough, which
I don't think many people
would think, he's shy.

He didn't speak very much,
he is very quiet, but when
he said something, it was very
clear and to the point.
I was very appreciative of
his presence.

He doesn't have
to talk about it.
He does it.

You look at him. You meet
him. He is just very—not so
much introverted—but just very
calm. Then you read what he
has written and you don't know
where it comes from...

I don't know where this stuff
comes from, because you don't
see it in his face or his eyes or
you don't hear it in his conver-
sations...

Very quiet. ... But if something
isn't right he knows it. He is
always thinking and you could
never mistake his quietness
for someone who isn't actively
thinking and observing.

Very, very tuned in
to the moments.
Very aware of when the
real stuff is happening.

He would never let something
go, that he doesn't feel is quite
right or quite there.

He is a very sensitive guy.
And he is very intelligent.
And he is so alive and he feels,
picks up everything.

He makes it really special.
He could take an average,
relatively dull moment and
makes it into something
electrifying.

He had a way of saying things
that wasn't the norm.
He was one of the first to veer
off from the traditional way
of saying things.

He saw what was happening all
around him and
everybody else saw what was
happening but he voiced that
for the first time.

He articulated what
the rest of us wanted to say but
couldn't say.

He's about the first that
I can think of that really
brought it out.

He was duly influencing
everybody that heard about
him at the time and his
impact for generations ... you
can't even calculate it.

Anyone who was leaning
in that direction
got it from there.

I just thought it was inspiring,
especially for young people,
when someone young comes
out of that who's that talented.





In 2008 American researchers made audible a voice from one hundred and forty-eight years ago—a recorded voice from before the invention of sound reproduction. Wavelike traces—left behind by a forgotten French inventor absorbed by the idea of visualizing sound—were scanned and analyzed by a computer... and out came the voice of a little girl singing:

*Au clair de la lune
Pierrot répondit*

By now this story is well known. What is less recognized is that one year later another researcher managed to prove the first researchers wrong. It seems they had simply opted for the wrong playback speed. What they took for the haunted, fragile voice of a little girl, he showed to be the not-so-haunted, average voice of a full-grown man—most likely the inventor himself. And all by the turning of a dial.

Why were the first researchers so quick to affirm that the voice belonged to a little girl?

And why is it that this voice—the voice of this girl who never sang, who never breathed, who never even once opened her little mouth—will outlive the voice of the singing inventor?

HAL—the computer from 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)—is the recorded voice brought to its full potential. Like the voice of a god impossible to localize, like the voice inside the head impossible to escape. When HAL dies he dies singing. In the French version of the film his song goes like this:

*Au clair de la lune
Pierrot répondit*

As HAL's song becomes slower and slower his voice simultaneously spirals down to lower and lower frequencies. Like the long gone song of tape recorders and gramophones rather than the fixed tonality of a computer generated voice. And a highstrung, omnipotent voice is gradually, transposed into a deep, sleepy and harmless mumble.

Why is the sound of HAL losing his powers a downward vocal glissando?

Could this be a premonition, set 33 years into the future, of an incident 8 years further on, involving a voice, from 149 years earlier, of a girl who never was?

ERIK BÜNGER

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6

