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Materializing Identity in the Recording Studio

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Planes of mediation: The individual, society and the institution

The process of identity formation in the recording studio entails both conscious and unconscious negotiations of broader aesthetic, social and industry values. Identity is neither fixed nor inevitable. Anthropologist and sociologist of music Georgina Born outlines four planes of social mediation to articulate ‘how music materializes identities’ (2011: 376). The first plane recognizes that musical practices produce social relations – between musicians, producers, technicians, etc. The recording studio creates its own ecology, which is sonified and can then be analysed. The second plane recognizes music’s ability to create imagined and virtual communities. Music plays a significant role in the expression of identity of the music practitioners as well as the identity formation of listeners. The third plane recognizes that music emerges from wider social identity formations, such as class, age, race, ethnicity and so on. These broader social relations of the individuals in the recording studio will variously shape the specifics of the identities materialized in music. Finally, the fourth plane recognizes the institutional mediation of music as it is produced, reproduced and transformed. The recording studio is a central institutional space that itself mediates industry standards through individuals (e.g. producers) and technologies.

Staging the voice in popular music

Due to popular music’s emphasis on the voice – in performance staging, mixing, the importance of lyrics, emphasis on star persona, etc. – vocal performance and staging are prioritized in the recording studio. Identity is constructed and then mediated rather than revealed from some inherent form. Serge Lacasse describes vocal staging as a ‘deliberate practice whose aim is to enhance a vocal sound, alter its timbre or present it in a given

spatial and/or temporal configuration with the help of [a] mechanical or electrical process' (2000: 4). Vocal staging and its outcomes directly impact the listener, resulting in certain connotations regarding presence, intimacy and emotion. It starts with the voice and what the microphone picks up, but production choices such as double tracking and filtering create the potential for playfulness, aloofness and so on (Lacasse 2010). For example, in Tori Amos's '97 Bonnie And Clyde', studio production emphasizes paralinguistic sounds (e.g. breathing, swallowing). When combined with specific vocal delivery choices (e.g. whispering vs. murmuring), Amos constructs a materiality to her voice that serves her feminist critique of Eminem's original song.

Both Nicola Dibben (2009b) and Lacasse (2000) point to the contrast between a voice staged as 'dry' versus with reverberation as strategies for constructing relationality, specifically between the voice and the listener. According to Dibben, a listener who is closer to a sound source will hear a larger proportion of direct sound than reverberant sound: close microphone placement ensures a high level of direct sound. This close microphone placement results in a 'flat' voice, which is 'close-up sound, sound spoken by someone close to me, but it is also sound spoken *toward* me rather than away from me. Sound with low reverb is sound that I am meant to hear, sound that is pronounced *for me*' (Altman 1992: 61, italics in original). Recordings also indicate proximity through amplitude in a parallel way to sound sources in real life. Dibben explains: 'sounds which are louder in the mix in a recording tend to be heard as being nearer the listener than sounds which are quieter' (2009b: 320). This relationality enables the emotional connection listeners feel to vocalists.

Constructing emotion, feminism and nationalism with Björk

Dibben argues that Björk's music, specifically on *Vespertine* and *Homogenic*, represents and possibly incites emotional experiences; also 'it contributes uniquely to the idea of what emotion is and of how it is perceived' (2006: 197). Because Björk's involvement in all matters of studio processes (e.g. beat-making, writing lyrics, processing sounds, collaborating with producers) is emphasized, her work is read as autobiographical. Thus, studio production creates a space for connection: for example, in 'Unison', spatialization, vocal staging and lyrics work in tandem to immerse the listener 'in an increasingly full sonic space' (177) simultaneously to situating the listener in close proximity to Björk due to close-micing (and intimate lyrics). On *Vespertine*, 'Even when the virtual space evoked is seemingly extended through a deepening of the aural perspective, a combination of vocals and delicate percussive sound is often placed at the very front of the mix [...], thereby reinforcing the (virtual) proximity of the listener to the source materials involved' (180).

Björk's music and the discourse surrounding it demonstrate the capacity for the identity of a single artist – constructed principally in the studio – to stand in for national identity. Indeed, Björk uses her musical sound to argue that Icelandic national identity unites nature and technology. Dibben argues that 'technologised nature' or 'naturalised technology' is

conveyed through the following musical strategies: ‘the “resistance” created between her voice and the metric grid of beats of the sonic background of her music; the integration of acoustic and synthesized sources; the mimesis of natural sounds as the timbre of beats; miniaturisation of beats; and exploitation of the failures and idiosyncrasies of music technology’ (2009a: 142).

Shana Goldin-Perschbacher (2014) broadens Björk’s performance of Icelandic national identity to examine the role of ‘difference feminism’ on *Medúlla* and *Volta*. The recording process is central to the finished album and its message: ‘[Björk] laid down her own tracks and then brought in guest vocalists, recording their contributions and picking and choosing what she wanted to include with what she had already created’ (Goldin-Perschbacher 2014: 63). This production process exemplifies ‘emergence’, or ‘the gradual materialization, introduction or becoming of a fuller texture or more complete musical idea’ (Malawey 2011: 143), by which musical emergence parallels motherhood as emergence. By pointing to ‘peace politics through maternal sensuality’ (Goldin-Perschbacher 2014: 64), Björk constructs a particular feminist (i.e. maternal) identity for herself in order to foster a kind of global unity for the listeners – to transcend nation-state boundaries and the strong influence of nationalism on identity. This shift to a ‘one tribe’ message was a response to 9/11: to articulate the dangers of getting distracted by ‘religion and patriotism’ (Björk quoted in Goldin-Perschbacher 2014: 61) and to advocate for embracing humanity through the shared expression of her ‘close, natural, and fallible’ voice (69). Björk’s diverse vocal timbres articulate various identity positions, in this case both mother and sexual being, thus rejecting the position of ‘mother’ as asexual (though embodied). Björk rejects certain stereotypes of femininity and motherhood in Western culture, but not all. Björk’s song ‘Hope’ in particular emphasizes the multiplicity of female perspectives, which is difference feminism.

Scholarship on Björk continues to be a dominant trend in popular music scholarship, and her musical processes offer insight into diverse ways in which the recording studio can create identity. Her work in the recording studio pushes the boundaries of normative constructions of gender, sexuality and nationality. Other artists create non-normative gender and sexual identities in the recording studio.

Identity processes and generic conventions: Gender, queerness and the cyborg

Meshell Ndegeocello is a Black queer musician whose constantly-changing musical practice eschews labels, including those most typically placed on her: black feminist, black nationalist/Africanist. Ndegeocello constructs multiple personae to critique identity politics’ ‘inherent reinvestment in intertwining heteropatriarchal, racist and classist formations’ (Goldin-Perschbacher 2013: 473). Goldin-Perschbacher’s application of affect

studies emphasizes Ndegeocello's identity(ies) as process over essence and argues against deterministic readings of artists' identity politics into musical meaning. In this case, Ndegeocello performs a queer masculinity (in sound recording and live performance) to salvage both masculinity (which generally rejects 'feminine' qualities such as vulnerability) and femininity (which generally rejects 'masculine qualities'). Ndegeocello demonstrates how social and institutional notions of gender, race and sexuality intersect with genre.

The perceived normativity of Americana positions the genre well for transgender and queer artists to share perspectives with audiences not typically exposed to transgender and queer artists (Goldin-Perschbacher 2015). As a storytelling genre, Americana allows transgender and queer artists to express their identity politics and critique the heteropatriarchal white supremacy from multiple angles. Rae Spoon and Namoli Bennett, for example, illustrate that 'Sung music is a performative articulation of the "self-in-progress," a musicking in which the interplay of individual and collective identities compels us to make fresh sense of ourselves and the world' (Goldin-Perschbacher 2015: 796). TransAmericana singing is open and diverse, which allows for trans and gender non-conforming musicians to express their identities vocally.

Jeff Buckley's strategy was to keep the pronouns when singing songs written initially for female performers; also, he did not 'clean' up his recordings to remove the body (Goldin-Perschbacher 2003). His recordings create what Goldin-Perschbacher calls an 'unbearable intimacy': 'Unbearable intimacy seems to arise not only because Jeff is so intimate that he displays his vulnerability, but also because this intimacy encourages an empathic response in listeners, one which encourages listeners to search their own souls, sometimes to feel painfully vulnerable themselves' (309). His vocal performance and staging in the recording studio construct a compelling identity that creates a strong sense of connection with listeners (i.e. second plane of mediation).

Artists such as Buckley expose the internal technologies of the voice in the body. When this presence is combined with other production and post-production choices within genre expectations, popular music can challenge gendered logic and reveal the cyborg.

The association of The Carpenters with 'easy listening' reflects the intersection of Born's third and fourth planes of mediation in which societal norms regarding gender and industry institutional standards position the group as outmoded. Freya Jarman-Ivens claims that the double bias against both female musicians and easy listening, non-countercultural genres is a potential opening for articulating the queer because the 'derision [of The Carpenters] is based on such gendered logic' (2011: 67).

The studio becomes a site for the emergence of the cyborg. In this case, the cyborg materializes through the subservience of Karen Carpenter's internal technologies of the voice to the external technologies controlled by Richard Carpenter. Jarman-Ivens applies Roland Barthes's grain of the voice and the pheno-song/geno-song binary to distinguish between the effects of the ubiquitous overdubbing and the rare audibility of Karen's internal technologies (i.e. the voice in the body). For example, Ray Coleman explained that Richard left in Karen's deep breaths on 'Goodbye To Love'. While this sound is audibly striking, Jarman-Ivens argues we know this sound is there only through Richard's permission – that any such sound is 'always subject to Richard's technological manipulation' (2011:

87). Thus, the grain is not actually breaking through independently but is ‘an artificial construct’ (87). The result of this situation – that Karen’s voice as created through internal technologies is always subservient to the will of external technologies – materializes the cyborg.

Developments in production and post-production technologies mean the cyborg identity is more readily and easily emergent in the recording studio. The specific construction of identity, though, relies on Born’s first plane: the social relations in the studio. Producers are central figures in the popular music industry, and the nature of their relationship to artists and role within projects vary (Burgess 2002; Howlett 2012). For The Carpenters, the recording studio was characterized by Richard’s control over Karen’s voice, a process that mirrors broader societal gender hierarchies. This emphasis on her ‘natural’ voice contrasts with her initial role as drummer in the Richard Carpenter Trio. Richard himself praised her instrumental virtuosity and described how she could ‘speedily maneuver the sticks’ (Richard Carpenter quoted in Schmidt 2012: 7). Soon, she combined singing with drumming, but by the early 1970s, Karen was presented as lead singer and only occasional drummer. The recording studio in particular, under Richard’s direction, capitalized on her unique voice.

Many artists choose to self-produce, a choice that is increasingly viable with the affordability of commercial-level equipment. Paula Wolfe (2012) explains that, for many women artist-producers, this ‘creative retreat’ has been essential for them developing ‘confidence in [their] technical abilities’ within the male-dominated commercial studio. Thus, unlike Karen Carpenter, British electronica artist Imogen Heap’s cyborg is one that defies gendered logic in the studio as she positions herself as empowered and embodied (i.e. feminine).

Imogen Heap has demonstrated her technological prowess in the recording studio with her solo albums *I Megaphone* (1998), *Speak for Yourself* (2005), *Ellipse* (2009) and *Sparks* (2014). Developments in recording technology that increase portability and decrease cost allow artists such as Heap to sidestep institutional and commercial structures to create a sonic identity of their own design (Woloshyn 2009). In Heap’s case, this means that a female musician takes on the role not only of vocalist/performer but also producer. The cyborg image becomes useful not only in describing the sonic merging of her acoustic voice with technological manipulation in the sonic outcome of Heap’s work, but also in articulating a body-machine unity in the musical processes located in the recording studio (and then often re-enacted on a live stage). The successful track ‘Hide And Seek’ exemplifies the cyborg identity, as the vocal input from her physical voice is required for the vocoder and harmonizer processing. By taking on a cyborg identity, Heap rejects the association of technology with the masculine. She takes ownership over the often-genderless cyborg (or post-gender) by embracing the feminine in her media and performance image. Since ‘Hide And Seek’, Heap has made significant progress in translating the cyborg identity of the recording studio to the live stage through MI.MU gloves she created with a team of electronic, software, design and textile experts. Now in both spaces, Heap’s gestures and vocal utterances are seamlessly captured, transformed and reimagined through real-time digital processing.

The recording studio has become a playground for exploring and challenging normative constructs of gender and sexuality. Artists from George Michael and Boy George to Lady Gaga and Azealia Banks emphasize queerness in diverse ways. When Stan Hawkins asks ‘what makes pop music queer?’ (2016), he looks at heavily produced and playful music – music that some might consider antithetical to resistance. Hawkins argues that pleasure is central to the disruptive possibilities because the collaborations inherent in any large-scale pop artist’s output offer queerness as a vision for a utopian future (from José Esteban Muñoz). This pleasure is sonically expressed through the musical stylings of camp, pop art, irony, parody, disco, kitsch, glamour and flair – stylings which are constructed in the recording studio and reinforced through videos and live performances. For example, the Scissor Sisters celebrate excess and affectation in ‘Skin Tight’ by pairing a simple harmonic sequence and the four-on-the-floor requisite disco beat with high production values in filtering, placement in the mix and equalization (EQ) (Hawkins 2016: 107). Because of the voice’s central position in popular music, vocal delivery is a ‘prime signifier of identity’ (2). The voice articulates the personality of the performer; gendered identification is inevitable, but the voice *performs* rather than marks a stable identity. For example, Hawkins’s analysis of Le1f’s ‘vocal costuming’ traces five ‘costume changes’ linked to the singing style. These production choices showcase his voice as an *haute couture*. Hawkins explains: ‘It seems that Le1f knows full well that to be black and queer stands for the formidable Other and that musical styles can be exploited to represent primitiveness and mysteriousness’ (216).

Hierarchies of race and ethnicity in the recording studio

While the wider social identity formations based on class, age, race, ethnicity and so on mediate all identities constructed through popular music, specific genres and musicians emphasize this mediation more strikingly. The recording studio becomes its own ecology consisting of the various artists, technicians and producers involved in a given project (Born’s first plane). These social relations mediate how the recorded music materializes identity. Certain contexts highlight wider social identity formations (third plane), in particular when societal hierarchies are replicated in the recording studio. For example, Paul Simon’s *Graceland* signalled the kinds of musical and social significations possible in a collaborative album, particularly one associated with the political context of apartheid South Africa (Meintjes 1990). Collaboration – musical and social – is entwined in the processes and sounds of the album and will be interpreted depending on one’s political stance on South Africa and one’s belief about music’s autonomy.

Black Zulu musicians struggle for power in the recording studio – to have agency over the kind of Zulu music that will be shared on the global market (Meintjes 2003). Power dynamics in the studio (both in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa) ensure that white sound engineers are the gatekeepers for what Zulu music will hit the international market. In her book *Sound of Africa!* (2003), Louise Meintjes discusses one engineer who

speaks in essentializing terms, which, Meintjes argues, ‘perpetuates inequality in everyday social interaction in and out of the studio and exposes the social, especially racialized, mechanisms through which studio practice is rarefied’ (103). While this particular engineer does not support apartheid ideology, he still weaponizes it against the musicians to explain ‘the divisions of labor and authority in the studio’ (103). The divisions come down to not only race but also class and ethnicity, as working-class musicians have ‘the least-empowered position’ (104). Black musicians are denied similar access to studio space and new technology as white musicians as a means of innovation. As a result, these artists continue to be confined to stereotypically ‘authentic’ Zulu music; they are denied agency as modern subjects.

In powwow recording culture, the recording studio – especially one owned by non-Natives (such as Arbor Records) – is a place where assumptions about race and culture come to the fore. Christopher Scales, thus, refers to powwow music labels as ‘intercultural contact zones’, ‘where competing commonsense notions about music, musical performance, musical ownership and authorship, and “normal” rules of social conduct and social relations continually rub up against one another’ (2012: 21): compromise and concession are required and negotiated by both sides. The common assumption is that powwow music expresses Native identity. However, Scales argues:

This expression or meaning or *articulation* is never guaranteed and must be actively produced by all involved in the social production and consumption of powwow music. Particular *elements* of Native identity must be articulated to particular elements of powwow musical or choreographic or social style. Certain ideas about the nature, definition and content of Native tradition must be articulated to particular social and musical values. (9)

Reverb, EQ and compression are employed as specific strategies for achieving a sense of ‘liveness’, which is deemed crucial for producers and consumers seeking ‘cultural authenticity’. At the same time, musicians can be eager to use more obvious forms of electronic mediation in the studio as innovation and thereby construct modern Indigenous identities.

The recording studio is, thus, not an open space that is neutral. The position of the recording studio within the recording culture of a specific genre is central to how we understand identity formation in that space. The Indigenous hip-hop scene similarly seeks to construct a modern Indigenous identity through a contemporary musical expression and approach to production/post-production that still engages an Indigenous worldview and history.

Charity Marsh explains that hip-hop culture becomes ‘a way to express and make sense of present-day lived experiences, including the ongoing legacies of [...] colonization’ (2012: 347–348). The work of Indigenous hip-hop artists in the recording studio allows them and the youth who consume their music to ‘convey the contradictions, struggles, resistances, and celebrations of their current lived experiences while simultaneously attempting to acknowledge and respect the (hi)stories of their ancestors’ (348). Saskatchewan-based female Cree hip-hop emcee Eekwol (Lindsay Knight) exemplifies the strong relationship between an artist’s work in the recording studio and the broader community (i.e. Born’s

second plane). Marsh emphasizes Eekwol's role as a storyteller in 'Apprento' from the album *Apprentice to the Mystery*. By calling on the importance of storytelling in Indigenous culture and including many recognizable Indigenous sounds, such as round dance singer Marc Longjohn, flute and rattle, Eekwol 'challenges the listener to really hear her stories and to embody the affects of the storytelling act and the storyteller's meaning. Eekwol puts herself, and her contradictions, out there, simultaneously becoming vulnerable and powerful as she dares the listener to reflect and to move' (366).

Eekwol mobilizes the globalization of hip-hop in service of her local context. When Eekwol records an album, she has found a safe place to speak out, which is particularly important for a female emcee in a male-dominated scene. The increased accessibility to DIY technology in the recording industry (fourth plane) allows Eekwol and her brother Mills to produce their own work. This Indigenous-centred ecology of Eekwol's work in the recording studio avoids interference from non-Indigenous producers who have their own agenda regarding hip-hop and Indigenous identity.

Cross-/trans-cultural creativity in the recording studio

The recording studio can be a site of creativity for Indigenous musicians, particularly to reflect the heterogeneity of Indigenous music. The stylistic distinctions of various repertoires are often captured and deliberately constructed through processes in the recording studio. Beverley Diamond explains: 'Decisions about style and arrangement often involve teams of collaborators. [...] style can reflect cross-cultural alliances, the exigencies of textual expression, or personal aesthetic preferences' (2008: 152). The recording studio becomes a site of identity formation through its social processes (first plane), the production/post-production choices that signal specific relationships to tradition and contemporary musical practices (third plane), and the engagement with the recording industry more broadly (e.g. major vs. indie labels; fourth plane).

The social relations in the studio enact the values of Indigenous culture and point to potential tensions in collaboration. As Native American artists have enjoyed a surge in productivity, concerns about commodifying Native culture – given the long history of ethnographic 'preservation' – create an opportunity for Native American artists to assert agency over the definition of the commodified product (Diamond 2005). Diamond explains that, in order to increase their agency within the recording studio ecology, the majority of artists work outside of the major labels; they require the following when choosing where and with whom to work: (1) trust within collaboration, (2) more input in processes, and (3) freedom to include diverse material on a single album rather than to target a specific genre.

Diversity on an album means that traditional songs may be juxtaposed with pop styles, such as on *Hearts of the Nation* by Aboriginal Women's Voices (1997). Some artists aim for a fusion. In either case, the recording studio may be variously used: in some cases, they isolate different parts and piece together the parts layer by layer; in other cases, the

social interaction of musicians in creating the sounds of traditional music is central to the mode of recording. Strategies in-between or in combination are also possible. For example, when the Wallace family recorded their album *Tzo'kam* (2000), they employed different recording techniques in four different studios; cuts from each studio were included on the final album.

Diamond's work with Native artists stresses one common priority, especially for women artists: '[they] regarded the choice of collaborators to be part of the production process, a part that is as significant as the more tangible techniques of production' (2005: 125). What is the 'right' collaboration team differs according to industry expectations and genre conventions and may be specific to the artist. What Diamond found with these Native artists was that they wanted the recording studio to be a space for asserting an Indigenous worldview and individual and community identity with Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborators. Production and post-production choices in the recording studio have consequences on the presentation and perception of regional, national and individual identity for these Native artists.

Indigenous artists around the world also see the recording studio as a site for experimentation when creating a sonic Indigenous identity. For example, Sámi artists often experiment in the recording studio.¹ Some use popular genres in combination with traditional genres such as *joik* to express a modern Sámi identity. Sámi musicians have found ways to translate traditional values and musical practices in *joik* in the studio, especially with the ability to layer sounds and use archival recordings. These approaches are 'part of a larger project of making Sámi culture tangible and visible – and audible' (Diamond 2007: 44). Often the vocal production techniques aim to distinguish between *joik* and song, and to capture the individuality of each singer. Artists try to present a voice with 'soul', and the production/post-production techniques that achieve that can vary greatly. Diamond does highlight a gender divide not in *joik* but in music categorized as 'song' in which producers often aim for a feminized sound, despite the discomfort of the singers themselves, which reflects a gendered hierarchy of wider social relations.

Like folk and traditional musicians from various musical practices, many Sámi artists consider the studio to be completely different from live performance, even 'dead' or 'awful' (26). Diamond notes the tension between 'indigenous concepts and norms [... and] the industry norms of studio production' (26), a tension that arises specifically within rock and pop industry conventions (Hilder 2017). For example, when recording *joik*, artists are faced with important decisions: some choose to 'adjust' *joik* to 4/4 time, while others seek arrangements that avoid metrical clarity or achieve cross rhythms. Many Sámi artists value creating a sense of 'liveness' in the recorded product. One strategy is to mix in a field recording with a studio recording.

The institutional mediation of music has a strong influence on the construction of Sámi identity. Sámi recording culture intersects with the broader institutions of government-sponsored cultural processes as many projects are funded with state subsidies and funding for cultural projects tends to focus on 'audibly *joik*-based' music (Diamond 2007: 25). Sámi-owned record labels and Sámi radio stations are both crucial institutions for the circulation of these records. Richard Jones-Bamman underlines the importance of these

recordings: ‘recordings of Saami music have played a significant role in how the Saami conceive of themselves collectively, and how they would prefer to be perceived by others’ (2001: 191). As a result, Jones-Bamman can point to the contrast between Sven-Gösta Jonsson singing ‘I am Lapp’ in ‘Vid Foten Av Fjället’ (1959) and Jonas Johansson singing ‘I am Saami’ in ‘Goh Almethj Lea’ (1991) to illustrate the transformations in Sámi popular music. The choices made in the recording studio both reflect and inspire conversations about ethnic identity in the broader Sámi community.

Popular music evidences the global circulation of artists and recordings. As a result, many artists employ strategies in the recording studio to position an artistic identity that is both global and local: ‘glocal’. For example, Roderic Knight (1989) describes the ‘Mande sound’ as a combination of popular sounds, such as Latin rhythms and popular instruments (e.g. electric guitar) as well as traditional instruments and songs, specifically from the jali tradition. The contemporary recording industry for popular musicians in West Africa reflects the transnational/transcultural exchange of various popular musics. This exchange of popular music codes can be brought directly into the political sphere, such as with Zambia’s Zed Beats, which blends Zambian rhythms and languages with global pop and dance trends (e.g. reggae and hip-hop). Matthew Tembo argues that the tune ‘Dununa Rivesi’, which was created for the Patriotic Front party during the 2016 Zambian national election, ‘changed the ways people hear politics’ (2018).

Popular music across Africa explores this transnational/transcultural exchange in various ways, depending on the marketing scale. For example, local consumers from a shared culture will understand (and even seek out) popular music that maintains nuances of local traditional musics. What is ‘traditional’, though, will be read through a complex of factors, including class and generational divide, and will be interpreted variously as complicit or resistant, particularly within the history of colonialism in Africa. The international world music market requires artists to find a broadly appealing balance between familiarity (e.g. pop song form, metric regularity) and ‘exoticism’ (e.g. traditional instrumental and vocal timbres); even in this marketing context, though, a perception of ‘progression’ or ‘resistance’ may be part of consumer appeal.

Sophie Stévançe describes Inuk vocalist Tanya Tagaq as a transcultural/transnational artist who ‘rewrites the symbolic dimension of *katajjaq* [traditional Inuit vocal games, or throat singing] according to her wishes and values, which are rooted in two cultures’ (2017: 50), the two cultures being Inuit and Western. Stévançe declares: ‘In terms of the *subject* rather than the *object*, Tagaq works against the grain of these conventions by consciously exercising control over them for her own purposes’ (54). Tagaq creates an ecology in the studio that is conducive to her transcultural expression – her ‘right to modernity’ (48), which is constructed through specific choices that relate to *katajjaq* and contemporary electro-pop studio techniques (or ‘phonographic staging’). For example, overdubbing allows Tagaq to interact with herself as a *katajjaq* partner on ‘Qimiruluapik’. The mix allows the listener to ‘distinguish each of the parts’ while still ‘contributing to the merging of the vocal timbre’. Her diverse vocal sounds are each treated like individual instruments in the mix. For example, amplifying the low frequencies in her voice (similar to the EQ of a kick drum) lends a ‘contemporary’ feel to the track.

On 'Caribou', the production techniques on the voice, in particular, create a pop/rock song, even as Tagaq continues to call upon her *katajjaq* influences. The chorus is particularly effective as it layers four different vocal techniques: the layering of tracks means that Tagaq sonifies her transnationalism in a single sonic moment (Stévanice and Lacasse 2019). Tagaq creates an individual transnational artistic identity based on diverse cultural references, or what Stévanice and Lacasse call 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism' (from Regev 2013). Production and post-production techniques are crucial for establishing Tagaq's identity that emerges from integrating musical and cultural codes. They construct an identity that bypasses the restrictive binary of traditional/modern so often imposed on Indigenous artists by producers, consumers and industry labels.

Tagaq's two latest albums (*Animism* and *Retribution*), in conjunction with her social media community (i.e. second plane), assert an identity as a modern Inuk woman and reject violations against Inuit sovereignty (Woloshyn 2017). For example, 'Aorta' on *Retribution* references *katajjaq* in some of the vocal sounds and Western pop music in the steady drum beat and song structure, but with a vocal virtuosity and alarming sound world reflecting the album's theme. The extra-vocal sounds inherent to *katajjaq* (e.g. breaths and grunts) give Tagaq the freedom to include a vast array of vocal sounds, many of which portray a sensuality and sexuality that are central to her identity as an Inuk woman. The recording studio is a space in which Tagaq gathers individuals whose collaborations allow her to express her artistic agency, and thus her agency as an Inuk woman.

Rejecting neutrality, embracing potentiality

This chapter has focused on aspects of *collective* identity that are materialized in the recording studio. Collective identities are the broader contexts from which one's particular self emerges and is expressed. Numerous examples discussed here also point to the potential to capture and construct individuality as sonically expressed through vocal styles (and how those styles are staged), unique use of extra-vocal sounds for phrasing, distinctive instrumental timbres and so on.

Some aspects that are central to an artist's identity (both unique and in relation to a collective) will not translate audibly. For example, Tagaq's performance approach, both live and in studio, is characterized by her corporeality, with a wide range of physical gestures, many of which have corresponding sets of vocalizations. Her movements inevitably affect her vocalizations, and maybe some of her movement could be captured and preserved on an audio recording. However, the exact relationship between movement and sound will be relatively inaudible to a listener. What we hear is what happens when Tagaq finds the right ecology (first plane) for her uninhibited musical expression in the studio.

Sonic traces of identity will also be interpreted variably by listeners, often resulting in imagined communities (second plane); production choices related to arrangement, tracking, mixing and mastering will influence the formation of listener subcultures in which artists are hailed as heroes or villains, such as within the low-fi as authentic and hi-fi as corporate sell-out debates of certain music communities.

Those of us who were not part of the record-making process often will not – cannot – know what exactly happened to create the sonic outcome we hear. For example, the final version of Kate Bush's 'Lake Tahoe' is missing a piano note; that take 'just had a feel about it', and because Bush was confident in her own musical direction, the 'mistake' made it through (Wolfe 2012). There is a sonic trace of this 'right' performance, but without the story, what do we hear in that piano part? Perhaps we will never hear it as 'missing' anything, because we are unaware of what was intended.

The recording studio is a space of negotiation. Because the individuals in the studio mirror broader social identity formations, inequality, oppression and racism can exist in the recording studio. Institutional demands regarding genre and marketability as well as access to technology may also limit what identities are created in the studio. Artists do not share the same levels of agency in determining what elements of collective and individual identities will be embraced and in what ways. Artist-producers such as Björk and Heap have more authority over such matters. Emerging artists can be particularly vulnerable to the hierarchies within the popular music industry.

In her recent authorized biography, Buffy Sainte-Marie discusses her early years with Vanguard Records: 'I wish that I had been able to choose the takes because Vanguard had a certain perception of me, I think, and really wanted to rub it in. [...] In my first couple of records, whoever was choosing takes wanted me to sound like I was old and dying. I think they imagined that maybe I was a junkie or they probably thought that I was going to be a young casualty' (Warner 2018: 64). Nonetheless, Sainte-Marie's career, and countless others, also reminds us that the recording studio offers artists potential to express diverse and sometimes subversive identities. Contrast Sainte-Marie's early years with Vanguard with her 2015 album *Power in the Blood*, in which the album's production is a full partner to her artistic vision, creating what Warner calls 'a new era in protest music and resistance' (2018: 244).

The recording studio is not a neutral space. It is a space of potential and process. These diverse examples demonstrate the exciting opportunities for artists to use studio techniques to construct identities that engage with and challenge the broader society.

Note

1. Both Sámi and Saami are common spellings. The traditional music genre *joik* is also often spelled *yoik*. For purposes of consistency, this chapter will use Sámi and *joik* unless a direct quotation or reference uses a different spelling.

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