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LIP-SYNCHING AND ITS POTENTIAL AS A THEATRICAL
CONVENTION TO PROGRESS STORYTELLING IN A LIVE
PERFORMANCE CONTEXT

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September 2014

“SAY, ARE YOU PUTTING WORDS INTO MY MOUTH?”

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MARK LACEY



Fig. 1: A Double Lip-Synch: Lina Lamont, played by Jean Hagan, lip-synchs to Kathy Selden, played by Debbie Reynolds in a still from the M.G.M. film musical *Singin' in the Rain* (Film, 1952). In actuality Reynolds was herself synching to the voice of ghost artist Betty Noyes (*The Secret Voices of Hollywood*, 2013). Still accessed at [Imgarcade.com](http://imgarcade.com) (2014)

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INTRODUCTION

In 1972 my mother took me to see the Walt Disney live action/animated fantasy film 'Bedknobs and Broomsticks' (1971, Film) at the local cinema. I was 4 years old and nagged my mother to buy me a 45-rpm single of one of the songs that featured in the film, which I played on an inexhaustible loop. From the vocal quality of the recorded vocals, as much as from the lyrics, some part of me picked up clues to not only the story and dynamics of the song, but also to the characters' actions and intentions; so when it came to physically recreating the scene in my bedroom, as is necessary when you are 4, I found my physical expression being led by an embodied empathy that was being animated by these aural clues. Video recording was not widely available at this time and yet using just sound recording I was able to recreate choreography, emotions, intentions, facial expressions and physicality. The most curious aspect for me, however, is that although my whole, embodied self seemed to be animated by stepping into this fantasy, I never voiced a single sound. Instead I mouthed the words as if knowing that to hear, or even feel my own voice would break the spell. Tripping over, pausing for breath or mum calling for tea did not have the same destructive effect. These interruptions my imagination could surmount. But hearing, or feeling, my own vocal mechanism killed the fantasy stone dead.

Singing held no inhibition for me as a child so the fact that I mimed had nothing to with vocal self-consciousness. It seems there was some instinct in play that was aware that inhibiting my own voice and replacing it with another, like a mask, freed some expressionistic aspect of myself. I have often reflected on what it is about the mediated sound that had such power to excite fantasy, and about the personal voice that had such power to kill it?

As my vinyl collection expanded so too did my physical repertoire. Not just in terms of choreography, but in terms of the differing levels of expression, pace and tension that was suggested by the singers. As a result, when I eventually became a professional actor, I found it

easy to demonstrate different emotional states, and finding a suitable song to mime to when building a character became my secret trick. Lip-synching became part of my developmental repertoire, and yet I have never encountered it in any training or rehearsal technique programme. It may be that my response is a unique one, or it may have some broader value - either way this raises a further question about whether there is any potential for using lip-synching to not only enhance the live theatre experience from an audience's perspective, but also from the phenomenological perspective of the performer. These experiences and reflections are what gave rise to the core question for this thesis, which is:

What potential does lip-synching have as a theatrical convention that enhances storytelling in a live performance context?

Related questions that emerge from this core question and which must be reflected on in terms of their technical contribution are:

- A. What is successful lip-synching?**
- B. How does a performer develop successful lip-synching skills?**
- C. Does lip-synching have any potential within actor training/performance development?**

The practical/visual nature of the subject automatically suggests practice as research as being the most appropriate methodology to apply. The practice has been divided into two separate research days - one examining technique (relating to questions A, B and C above) and referred to throughout the thesis as Practice 1, and the other the to effect of lip-synch in a live theatre context (relating to the core question) referred to as Practice 2 - and these are both informed by critical analysis of theories drawn from literary resources and existing visual media. This thesis has been structured to reflect the incremental development of ideas and research that has contributed to answering the core question, with each wave being presented in four chapters roughly following the themes of *Existing Context*, *Resistances*, *Technique* and *Storytelling* as follows:

Four Waves of Incremental Research

1. Existing Context

Chapter 1 analyses the use of lip-synching within existing applications. It outlines research drawn from secondary literary and visual media resources that identifies, extracts and analyses existing themes, opinions, and ideas on the subject. These are discussed within a theoretical framework and form the foundation for the practices.

2. Resistances

Chapter 2 examines potential resistances to lip-synching, which are identified through analysis of theoretical and practical literary resources. This establishes the ideologies that challenge and are challenged by lip-synching and, through critical analysis, further clarifies the philosophical contexts within which it can be applied and which can be taken through to the practices.

3. Technique

Chapter 3 investigates lip-synching as a skill - its challenges to the performer; its effects on the performer; its potential in performer development; the effect of external media; and its possibilities within storytelling. Analysis of potentially transferable skills drawn from existing theatre training are put forward to support practical research (Practice 1) that was conducted in Studio 2 of The University of Kent School of Arts on the 16th February 2014 using professional actors. Phenomenological analysis was embedded into the day by introducing questionnaires for the actors to complete in order to compare and contrast audience and performer experience to discover whether the actors could confidently and accurately recreate the work and, if so, how?

4. Storytelling

Chapter 4 details Practice 2, which was built upon all prior research and more directly explores the core question. This took place in the same venue as Practice 1 on 20th May 2014 using the same actors as the first research practice, as well as two others. From analysis of critical testimony in the form of written questionnaires and recorded interviews provided by an audience of four specialists conclusions are drawn as well as opportunities for continued research.

The anonymity of all participants means no completed questionnaires have been included within this thesis however they are available to the examiner via myself on request if considered necessary.

A Note on Citations

Visual and audio clips of both practice days, as well as some supporting clips, can all be found by clicking on the following link: www.youtube.com/playlist . All citations in **BLUE within the text of this thesis refer to these clips and are presented as the clip number from the playlist followed by the timing in hours, minutes and seconds where relevant. For example: (Clip 5, 00:34:12).**

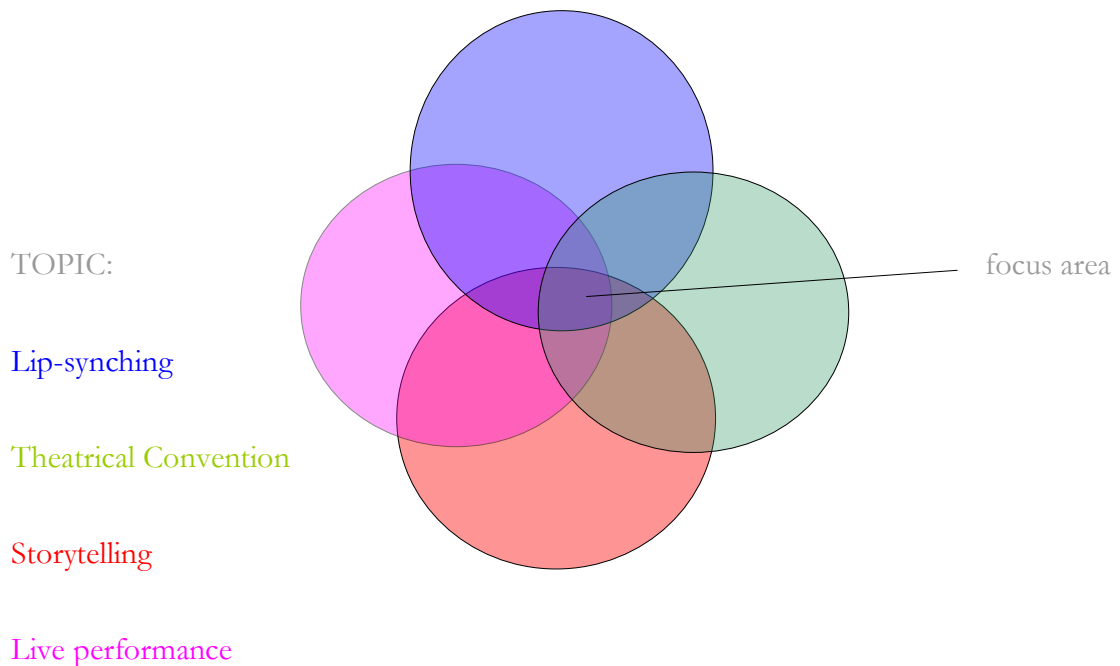
Clarification of Terminology and Research Boundaries

In order to clarify the core research question and its boundaries it is necessary to define some of its broader terms and clarify how they are being used within this thesis. These are:

- 1) Lip synching
- 2) Theatrical Convention
- 3) Storytelling
- 4) Live performance

I am aware of the amount of existing theory covering these topics, so in order to refine what is being specifically referred to when using these terms I have identified a focus area as defined by the research question. This can be best seen in the diagram overleaf:

Fig. 2: Diagram showing Interrelatedness of Topics Included Within the Research Question and Resulting Identification of Focus Area



The main area of study, then, is where these topics interrelate and as such it is possible to eliminate definitions that describe any aspect outside the focus area that does not directly relate to the content or intention of the core question. Useful definitions can then be refined and these are shown in Fig. 3 on the next page.

Column A in Fig. 3 can be read, then, as a succinct description of the research question which is less open to semantic misinterpretation. This does not mean those aspects in column B are never mentioned or brought into the analysis, only that for the purpose of this thesis they are not being directly referred to when the terms are used.

Having explained the inspiration and structure of this thesis, and clarified the detail and intention of the research question I next move into the four waves of analysis, the first of which is to identify areas where lip-synching has already been used and see what themes arise that may be useful to include in the research practice.

Fig. 3: Definitions of Key Terms

Term	A	B
Lip-synching	Definition of term as used in this thesis	Broader subject areas not included within the definition as used in this thesis.
Theatrical Convention	The skill of synchronising ones vocal mechanism to an external aural source, yet inhibiting sound to create the illusion of delivering the external sound oneself	<p>a) The act of miming to ones own, or somebody else's, voice in a popular music or musical theatre context, in order to amplify sound or deceive an audience.</p> <p>b) Ventriloquism or any device where the speaker manipulates the lip movements of the syncher.</p>
Storytelling	A non-naturalistic conceit that is integrated into the live theatre experience to enhance the progress of the piece, and which is accepted by the audience.	<p>a) The complexities of narrative theory and application.</p> <p>b) The action of narrating a story</p> <p>c) The global theme of lip-synching as metaphor.</p>
Live Theatre	The exposition of narrative material that advances the plot, exposes the character, or enhances the theme in a way that is efficiently integrated into the audience's experience of a particular piece of work.	A theatre experience that is perceived with temporal and spatial synchronicity by an audience.
		Live theatre as defined as the non-inclusion of technological inter-media devices.

CHAPTER 1

Lip-Synching: Existing Context and Application

In this chapter I analyse existing applications in the broader field of lip-synching in order to discover and further define its potential as an accepted convention in theatrical storytelling as well as demonstrate how I extracted many of the themes that form the foundation for the research practices.

The dearth of existing sources that offer evidenced material explicitly referring to lip-synching, whether as theory or practice, has provided a number of research challenges, meaning that information has had to be extracted from related sources. In addition, where it is mentioned there is little agreement as to what lip-synching actually is, either as a concept or a skill. The phrase ‘lip-synching’ is often generalized within literature and is used interchangeably with similar vocal synchronisation methods such as dubbing, ghosting, miming, mirroring, mimicking and venting. Even the Oxford English Dictionary offers an erroneous definition when it states ‘(Of an actor or singer) move the lips silently in synchronization with a pre-recorded soundtrack’ (Oxford University Press, 2013) since it is perfectly possible to lip-synch to non pre-recorded material and, as will be explained later, does not just involve the lips.

Existing literary information presented under the heading of ‘lip-synching’ almost exclusively focuses on the skill of synching to one’s own voice in the context of the popular music industry (Inglis, 2006)- a practice more commonly called miming - or how to synchronize a voice to a digitally animated character (Juul, 2005) - which is actually called dubbing and is the reverse of lip-synching in that one provides a voice rather than silently mouths to one. Neither definition comes into the scope of the research focus area outlined in Fig. 3.

The only direct reference provided by a theatre practitioner appears in Keith Johnstone's book *Impro for Storytellers* (Johnstone, 1999: 174), but the improvisation game he labels 'lip-synching' is actually vocal mirroring and no accurate synchronization technique is required at all.

Therefore it has been necessary to glean relevant data from related primary and secondary sources that might be transferable to the practice. Below I describe and analyse a selection of applications that have already been used in a performance context in order to identify areas where it has already been proven effective as a storytelling tool.

Temporal/Spatial Manipulation and the Supernatural

Lip-synching first came into its own after the advent of technological sound transportation and the ability to record sound. Prior to this disembodied voices would be produced off stage, such as the ghost of Hamlet's father in Act 1, scene 5 of *Hamlet* (Shakespeare, 1982); or mimicked by the actor on stage, such as Puck tricking the two male lovers in Act 3, Scene 2 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare, 1988). Significantly in both these scenarios non-worldly characters speak the words and the device is used to create a supernatural effect. This idea of the disembodied voice as being supernatural is the first theme to emerge.

In 1876 the first telephone call was made from Brown's Hotel in London and with it the experience of being able 'to transport someone's voice without the accompaniment of the body' (Boettinger, 1977 cited in Karpf, 2006: 235). Hot on its heels was Edison's phonograph in 1876, which had an even deeper impact on the concept of the voice as something that could be extracted from the speaker and so perceived as separate from it. As Edison dramatically stated:

Whoever has spoken...into the mouthpiece of the phonograph, and whose words are recorded by it has the assurance that his speech may be reproduced audibly in his own tones long after he himself has turned to dust.

(Edison, 1877 cited in Karpf, 2006: 237).

What Edison recognised was that by its very nature recorded audio material contains within it a *spatial* and *temporal* aspect that can be manipulated. This potential for manipulation means notions of the human voice as being something that could be defined as intrinsically embodied and transient becomes challenged, and at the time this seems to have led to a kind of anthropological identity crisis. In her book *The Human Voice: The Story Of A Remarkable Talent* (2006) Anne Karpf describes the hysterical horrors this new reframing of the voice via telephone and phonograph created. Many compared it to the extraction of the soul and opportunists used this to their advantage, giving rise to a wave of occultist charlatans who used the new technology to create the illusion of channelling alleged dead voices of clients' loved ones. Not only could these séances be viewed as the first use of lip-synching in a theatrical context but they also demonstrate how at its most primitive the temporally/spatially manipulated voice can create disturbances within the perceiver, which are easiest rationalised as emanating from a *supernatural* source. It also gives rise to the idea of the lip-syncher being perceived as a kind of medium who behaves as a *channel* for the recorded voice.

Put this into a storytelling context and the most immediate significance is that temporal /spatial manipulation of sound through media can introduce, at its most primitive, either a supernatural effect to a narrative, or create a disturbance that has supernatural overtones. There are also questions raised about the role of the actor, as to whether they have to become an empty *channel* for the recorded material for the effect to be persuasive, or whether there are other technical interactions between the performer and the media that may be equally, if not more, effective in creating the lip-synch illusion. This will be studied in Chapter 3.

Metaphor, Congruence/Incongruence and Illusion

There are relatively few recorded examples of lip-synching used in a live theatrical context. Those that there are emerge over a period of about nine years during the first part of new millennium and then quickly vanish again, and unfortunately the transient nature of live theatre makes the accessing of these primary resources difficult. However in her Blog for the

Guardian *Lip-synching: The New Kitchen Sink*, theatre commentator Lyn Gardner has itemised and described many recent theatrical applications, some examples of which are (descriptive summaries condensed from Gardner): Theatre de Complicite's *Mnemonic* (1999, Theatre) in which an actor fools the audience into believing he is speaking a monologue live when in fact he has segued into lip-synch; *Big 3rd Episode: Happy/End* (2008, Theatre) in which the entire cast lip-synchs to dialogue that has been manipulated to speed up, slow down and rewind; and, most notably, Robert Le Page's *Lipsynch* (2008, Theatre) which deals with the lives of eight protagonists each having a narrative that highlights their relationship to the voice and includes lip-synching to radio programmes (Gardner, 2008). One can see from these descriptions that the technique appears to have mostly been applied as a random novelty effect, or to highlight socio-psychological themes of the voice itself – not necessarily as an integrated, story-telling convention to support the narrative. For example Gardner herself summarizes lip-synching as going:

Straight to the heart of post futurist anxieties about authenticity, an increasingly media-centric world, fractured societies and dislocation. It is the perfect metaphor for our times.

(Gardner, 2008)

Viewed in this context lip-synching is seen as a symbol in its own right, to be interpreted as a metaphor for endemic anxiety caused by personal and societal disconnection. This is a view that is of conceptual interest, but is not connected to the direct phenomenological experience created between an audience and performer during a live performance. If this metaphor is taken to its conclusion then there is a danger of ending up with work that is drenched in conceptualization whilst starved of spontaneous narrative. Gardner shares this concern:

It only takes one bright spark to realise that by claiming they are investigating the postmodern fragmentation within *King Lear*, they can just play the recording of Kenneth Brannagh's Renaissance Company production with any old bodies moving around the stage under suitably avant-garde lighting, perhaps layered with a nice new soundscape by, well, probably

Gareth Fry, and the need for actors actually learning lines and, uh, acting goes right out of the window.

(Gardner, 2008)

Though not without theoretical interest the value of such an exercise would rely on the observer's capacity to intellectually recognize the metaphorical intention in order to appreciate the piece. To find existing examples of lip-synching that directly enhances narrative exposition, it is therefore necessary to look beyond existing plays.

Cinema and television have been using lip-synching for nearly seventy five years and the practice of using a recording of another's voice to enhance one's image came into its own when sound first appeared in cinema in 1927. The documentary *The Secret Voices of Hollywood* (Documentary, 2013) outlines how the invention of playback technology allowed actors to lip-synch to their own voices on a film set in order to ensure continuity. It was a short leap to the realisation that other voices could be submitted if a particular performer did not have the required voice necessary to uphold their star image. This practice was not uncommon in the studio system. A secret stable of performers was created just for this purpose, and were called 'ghost artists' (a term that interestingly carries with it subliminal references to the *supernatural*).

The lengths to which the studio went to hide the ghost artists were extreme and in the documentary Marni Nixon, who ghosted for many stars, describes how she was told she would never work again if she revealed her identity (00:18:15). What the studios had unwittingly discovered was the inherent capacity people have to identify a human archetype with the kind of voice that emanates from them, and the enormous power of lip-synching to create *Illusion*, not only in terms of technique, but also in manipulating how a whole *Identity* might be perceived. This phenomenon has been backed up by more recent research on voice recognition that suggests:

A strong link between auditory and visual modalities...this link originates in the mechanics of speech production, which, in shaping the vocal tract, determine the movement of the face as well as the sound of the voice.

(Karnachi, Hill, Lander & Vatikotis-Bateson, 2003: 1709).

In terms of lip-synching Karnachi *et al*'s observation puts forward two ideas: that the technical *illusion* is not actually achieved by lip manipulation alone but by the engagement of the entire vocal mechanism (with only the sound inhibited) and that we are hard wired to seek *congruence* between the sound and the source.

Throughout cinema history one can find creative applications of lip-synching in all genre of movies. As early as 1933 Laurel and Hardy were using it to play their respective sisters in the short comedy film *Twice Two* (1933, Film); horror directors have frequently drawn upon the supernatural aspect of the disembodied voice to create disturbing juxtapositions between voice and face to suggest possession or channelling such as in *The Exorcist* (1973, Film); and in the surreal art house film *Mulholland Drive* (2001, Film) director David Lynch introduces an entire fictional location in which everything is synched in order to disturb both the protagonist's and the audience's concept of reality. However, unlike the ghost artistry seen earlier, these applications are transparent and rather than trying to fool the audience into believing a synched voice belongs to the actor on screen, all the above examples contain within them some aspect of *incongruence* between the audio and visual modalities. The potential for this juxtaposition to disturb an audience's sense of reality, or to scare them (as in the latter two examples above) is self evident and harks back to the supernatural séances of the 19th century. Agnes Heller writes in *Immortal Comedy: The Comic Phenomenon In Art, Literature and Life*:

Almost all analysts of the comic drama believe that incongruence is one of the main sources of the comic effect...the comic drama draws from several sources of incongruence. The most general type of incongruence belonging to the fundamental structure of comedies can be

described as the confounding of identity.... a character begins the play in a role which is not hers, but someone else's.

(Heller, 2005: 56)

Therefore by juxtaposing or creating some form of sensory conflict between the aural and visual modalities lip-synching has the potential to disturb an audience's perception of reality for thrilling, surreal and even comic effect and this offers huge possibilities when developing a narrative.

This use of congruence and incongruence initially seems contradictory, since we have seen that it can be used to create both *hidden* and *transparent* illusions. So what is a transparent illusion?

Closer analysis reveals that there are, in fact, two kinds of congruence/incongruence in play in any given lip-synch moment. These are as follows:

1. The (in) congruence that exists between the aural material and the vocal mechanism of the syncher. (i.e. technique - connected to illusion)
2. The (in) congruence that exists between the perceived character of the recorded speaker and the perceived character of the syncher. (i.e. context - connected to exposition)

In practise these can be applied in one of five combinations, some of which will create effective illusion and others not. These are:

- a) That the visual and aural modalities emerge from the same source and we believe it to be so. (Vocal congruity¹ + visual congruity² = congruent illusion)

¹ Vocal (in) congruity = (dis) parity of the audio to the visual

² Visual (in) congruity = (dis) parity of the visual to the audio

- b) That the visual and aural modalities do not emerge from the same source and it is not believed to be so. (Vocal congruity + Visual incongruity = incongruent non-illusion)
- c) That we are aware that the visual and aural modalities emerge from different sources but we accept them to be from the same source (Vocal incongruity + visual congruity = incongruent illusion)
- d) That the visual and aural modalities emerge from different sources and we believe them to be from the same source (vocal incongruity + visual congruity = congruent illusion)
- e) That the visual and aural modalities emerge from different sources and we do not believe them to be from a single source (vocal incongruity + visual incongruity = incongruent non-illusion.)

From this we find (further evidenced in Chapter 3) that there are actually two types of illusion: *congruent illusion* in which the audience accepts that the speaker and the syncher are the same person; and *incongruent illusion* where the audience is aware that the speaker and the syncher are not the same person but accepts them as being so. We can also see that the visual modality is stronger than the audio modality in creating illusion. If the physicality of the performer is out of synch with the audio material, then even if the recorded material is that of the actors themselves, illusion will not take place. However, if the syncher's physical mechanism is accurately synchronized with the sound material the audience will create congruence no matter how incongruent the recorded material seems to be.³

In fact in the case of iconic voices it seems the wider the juxtaposition between the aural and visual modalities the more effective the illusion. This is seen most clearly in the world of the

³ There are times when this is not the case, such as when the lip-syncher is actively trying to imitate the entire personality of a familiar or iconic voice, such as in *'Life with Judy Garland'* (2001, TV Movie) in which case the voice and image of the original speaker are so inter-linked in the audience's psyche that it is impossible to separate them.

drag artist, in which there is a long tradition of men dressed as women lip-synching to their favourite female divas. Roger Baker, in his book *Drag, A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts*, states that borrowing a voice of the opposite sex inverts 'the effeminate stigma attached to being gay and wearing it as a badge' (Baker, 1994: 238), however this does not account for the choice of material as it is never a random female voice but generally an iconic one. Baker himself admits that many drag artists are 'hopelessly untalented' (Baker, 1994:238) and it seems that their need to perform could arise from the same instinct that led me to create the performance in my bedroom; by adopting a vocal *mask* (a theme discussed in Chapter 3) the 'untalented' performer can access self-expression that would be inhibited if relying on their limited vocal mechanism. In the case of the drag artist the audio material, which is usually camp in its content, can be considered part of the entire costume that allows the performer to release aspects of their personality and therefore transform their identity for the duration of the performance - not only to the audience but, perhaps more importantly, to themselves. This highlights the powerful potential that lip-synching has in providing the elusive alchemy of character transformation for which so many performers and practitioners search.

This is not to say that lip-synching is all about hiding lack of skill. Mention must be made of Lipsinka, the alter ego of drag artist John Epperson, who 'splices together sound bytes and songs from camp old movies into one continuous manic soliloquy' (Baker, 1994: 252).

Although this is novel presentation rather than storytelling the astonishing accuracy with which she synchs ([Clip 16, 00:03:02 – 00:06:31](#)) highlights the high level of skill required to create illusion and demonstrates the sophisticated level to which, providing this skill is accurate, our brain makes congruence of incongruity.

Lip-synching, therefore is seen to have the potential to manipulate an audience's perception of personality by inspiring their inherent capacity to create congruence out of both technical and contextual incongruence. It is often most effective when there is a wide juxtaposition between the performer and the personality of the recorded artist and can be used for both

dramatic and comic effect. It can transform how a character or the identity of an actor is perceived and has the potential to aid expression in performer development.

Fantasy, Subtext and the Inner Voice

Possibly the most widely recognised use of lip-synching on screen is in Dennis Potter's television triptych *Pennies from Heaven* (1978, Television), *The Singing Detective* (1986, Television) and *Lipstick on your Collar* (1993, Television). Each deals with a protagonist who uses popular songs from the thirties, forties and fifties respectively to escape from personal emotional or physical pain. In this instance the characters lip synch not in order to disturb or fool an audience but as a device to expose the psychological state of the character:

It [the song] was in the head of the characters, and although it might have been Al Bowly's or Sam Browne's voice, it was actually the character's thoughts and it wasn't an interlude...it was part of the drama.

(Potter, 1994: 85)

This introduces two new themes. Firstly, that lip-synching can create dramatic *fantasy* and secondly that the recorded material can be perceived as being a projection of the *inner voice* of a character. Gregg Recanzone describes in *Interactions of Auditory and Visual Stimuli in Space and Time* (2009) how auditory and visual stimuli are correlated in the human mind to create congruence between the two in order to retain a sense of a cohesive reality - what is termed 'the ventriloquism effect'. This not only helps create the lip-synch illusion, as already seen above, but creates within the observer a need to make sense of the *context* in which the synching is occurring - that is to say making sense of the space and situation that the character is in, based on information received through the eyes and ears. In *The Singing Detective*, for example, the narrative is orchestrated in such a way that the protagonist's fantasies, although they appear to spring out of unlikely scenarios, occur when his pain has become so excruciating that the appeal to the audience's empathy becomes strained (Sandis, 2011: 185). Therefore rather than risking melodrama his experience is presented as a fantastical hallucination in which those around him sing to bright, familiar songs that

juxtapose his appalling, inexpressible state. The audience's in-built ability to create congruence, and therefore to make sense of these transitions enhances empathy because we are able to see and directly experience the character's state of mind as if it was laid out on an autopsy table. Here we have a superb example of how lip-synching can be used within a naturalistic context to contribute to storyline and theme that would be perhaps less effective without it, and further evidences how congruence theory can be applied to establish not only *illusion*, but a *narrative context* in which the illusion can be placed.

The juxtaposition of aural/visual modalities has also been explored in the contemporary art world. In her video installation *10-16* (1997, Installation) artist Gillian Wearing shows adults lip-synching to pre-recorded interviews with children. In her summary of the piece on the Tate website (Tate, 2000), Elizabeth Manchester describes how:

Wearing's works explore the slippage between private identification and public expression, between those aspects of themselves which people try to hide, and those which they are willing or able to reveal. Various forms of masking are fundamental in allowing self-revelation (Manchester, 2000)

What Manchester is describing here is what, in theatrical terms, is called *subtext*, i.e. the inner motivation of a character that exists beneath the words, or given text, that they present to the other characters. Manchester continues:

For Wearing, using children's voices masked by adults heightens the emotional impact. 'We know children have interesting things to say and use language in a rich way, but when you channel this through an older body, then all of a sudden there's a pathos and you're transforming how people look at that' (Wearing quoted in *Gillian Wearing*, p.18)...Placing a child's voice in an adult's body accentuates the viewer's sense of the vulnerability of children to the adult world which they grow up to inhabit and reproduce, and provides a very literal representation of the psychoanalytic notion of the fragile and damaged 'child within'.

(Manchester, 2000: 1)

This supports Potter's view that lip-synching can be used to reveal the condition of a character's inner life where traditional naturalistic techniques are too subtle or ineffective. It is interesting to note that Manchester uses the words 'channeling' and 'mask' to describe this phenomenon.

These have profound possibilities within storytelling, not only to expose the inner life or psychological fantasies of a character, but in breaking down barriers between traditional theatrical genres. Fig.4 shows how the potential applications already identified in this thesis imply there are overlaps between naturalistic, expressionistic and political genre. This counteracts the idea that it is just a stylistic gimmick or intellectual metaphor, and takes it towards being understood as a practical convention that can support and develop the circumstances of a character or mis-en-scene within many different genres to communicate multi layered themes.

Stylization, Identity and Socio-politics

The potential application of lip-synching in a stylized theatre context has perhaps a more obvious and direct use as a device since the introduction of external audio media to detach an audience from its empathetic response to the visual narrative. Commonly called 'alienation' it is a technique already utilized in Brechtian theatre. The idea is that by doing so the audience ceases to become emotionally embroiled in the scene and is encouraged to step back and interpret it in terms of the socio-political dilemmas that it raises (Willett, 1977). Therefore there is potential for using lip-synching to raise *political* ideas and juxtapose modalities dealing with cultural issues such as race, age and gender that may reveal philosophical questions about *identity* and inherent prejudices within it.

Within contemporary theatre there has emerged a wave of stylized drama called *verbatim* theatre, which uses original testimony to construct plays that usually focus on contemporary events or conditions. This too seeks to break down the barriers between naturalism and expressionism. These testimonies can be presented in a variety of ways including pure recreation of the original testament by the actor as in *Twilight Los Angeles: 1992* (1994,

Theatre). Using live feed of the testament via headphones to the actor who then interprets and repeats it to the audience as in *Are We Nearly There Yet?* (2012, Theatre), or manipulating the verbal material to create a narrative as in *London Road* (2011, Theatre). Verbatim theatre practitioner Roslyn Oades describes how she:

Operates from the principle there is as much information embedded in the way someone speaks, as what they are saying... even if the performer is of a conflicting gender, age or racial background to the original speaker.

(Oades, 2013)

Given that the focus is on the original speaker it is surprising, then, that lip-synching has not yet been incorporated into this movement since it directly reproduces the 'way someone speaks', rather than attempts to have it replicated, however painstakingly, by an actor who cannot help but add interpretation or nuances of their own. Once again we find that film and television are ahead of the game here and a number of docu-dramas have recently appeared which have actors synching to original testimonies of the subjects they are representing such as in *The Unseen Fred West Confessions* (2014, Documentary). Possibly the best example of these, and arguably of the use of lip-synching to date, is in Clio Barnard's film *The Arbor* (2010, Film) which is almost entirely lip-synched and uses original testament to portray the life of Bradford Playwright Andrea Dunbar. Responses to this film reflect many of the themes already identified, such as in film critic Peter Bradshaw's review for *The Guardian*:

The effect is eerie and compelling: it merges the texture of fact and fiction. Her technique produces a hyper real intensification of the pain in Dunbar's work and in her life.

(Bradshaw, 2010)

And Jeanette Catcoulis in *The New York Times*:

The technique constantly reminds us that we are watching staged reality, and though the actors flawlessly reproduce every breath and syllable, every halting hum and haw, the

disconnect between words and performer brutally exposes the machinery of representation
(Catsoulis, 2011)

One of the criticisms of both the above films, however, could be that there is little, if any, juxtaposition between the recorded material and the actors chosen to synch to them. In the case of *The Unseen Fred West Confessions* the producers chose a look-alike of the serial killer, and in *The Arbor* nearly all the actors are of the same age and type as the real life characters they are portraying. The result is that unless one has prior knowledge that the recordings are of the original people being portrayed - or indeed who they are – it provides very little added effect to the narrative itself. The story and ideas being presented could have been just as effectively presented in a purely verbatim style with the actors speaking the dialogue themselves. It is true one is aware of a qualitative incongruity between the audio and visual material at the beginning of each film, but one soon becomes acclimatized to this. As such both pieces come across as conceptually novel and thematically intriguing but are not necessarily dramatically enhanced by the incorporation of lip-synching.

In conclusion, then, the themes that can be extracted from the existing field of lip-synching, and have potential to be applied and analysed in the research practice, can be visually presented as in Fig 4.

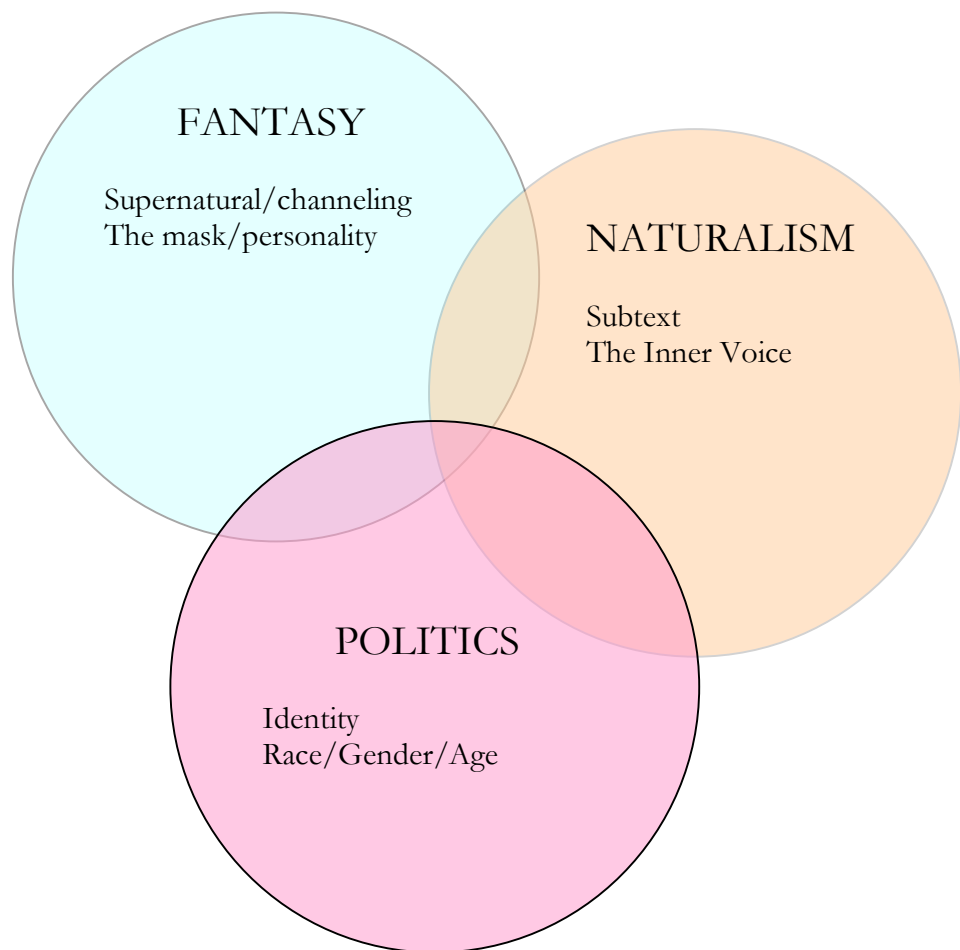
Thus, we can see how our perception of lip-synching has evolved from being one that was seen as emanating from something supernatural to something incredibly complex, meshing naturalistic and expressionistic devices that can combine fantasy and reality to simultaneously express political ideas and human narrative, as well as questions about identity and reality - providing the correct combination of technical and contextual combination of congruence/incongruence is intact in order to create the illusion.

Having established what lip-synching is, and what it can be, the next wave is to critically analyse the ideologies that potentially negate the idea of using lip-synching in order to further define its place in live theatre. If, indeed, it has one.

Fig.4: Potentially Transferable Components of Applied Lip-synching in a Live Theatre

Context.

TEMPORAL/SPACIAL MANIPULATION OF THE VOICE



CONGRUENT / INCONGRUENT ILLUSION

CHAPTER 2

Resistances

The chapter begins with a deconstruction of the aspects that make up lip-synching and goes on to offer an analysis of contemporary and historical attitudes and resistances to these in order that any potential practical application can be refined. By analysing resistances not only can the ideologies that challenge - and are challenged by - lip synching be identified, but it can ensure its live application is an empirically considered one rather than one that is shoe-horned into a piece for the sake of novelty. It would be easy to gratuitously apply lip-synch to a piece of live theatre and later justify it as anarchic or post-modern. An on-line review states this to be the case with *Big 3rd Episode/Happy End*, mentioned in Chapter 1:

The real problem here is...an approach to structuring that most closely resembles tearing pieces from magazines, books and scripts, throwing them up in the air and calling where they land a dramaturgical solution

(Postcards from the Gods, 2008)

It seems that if lip-synching is to be integrated into live theatrical storytelling usefully it is important to analyse the resistances that form part of the existing ideological dialogue in order to avoid the trap of whimsically applying it and intellectually justifying it later.

Lip Synching: A Deconstruction

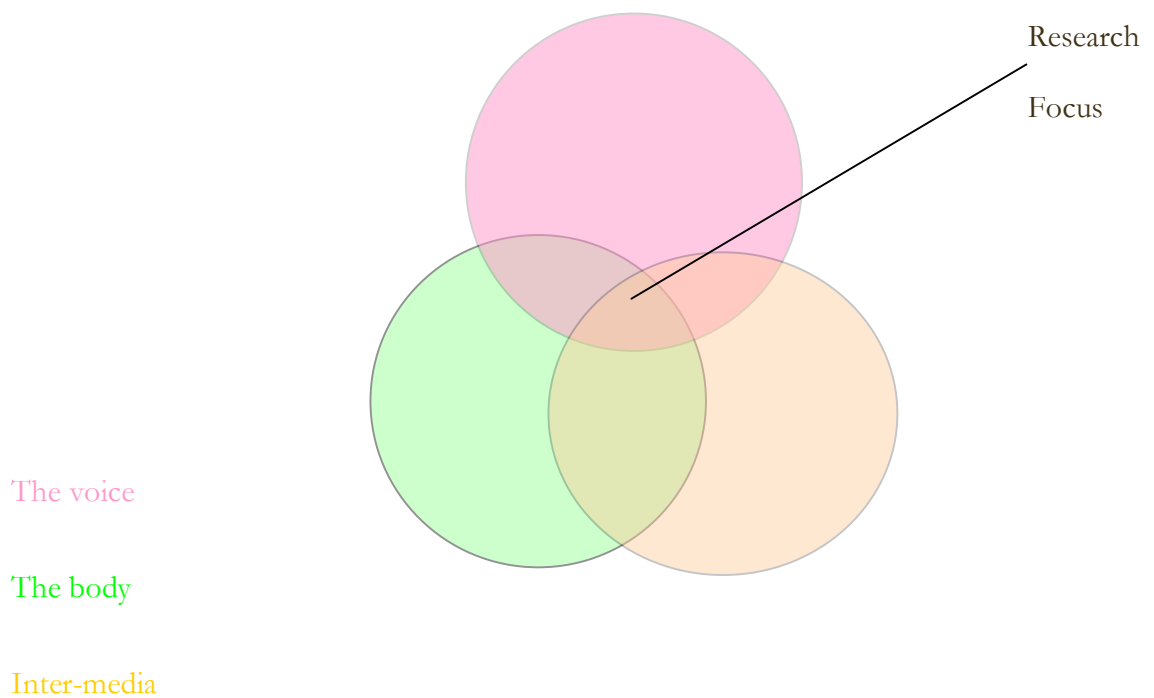
By deconstructing lip-synching as a method it can be seen that it comprises of three elements:

1. A voice. (The aural modality)
2. A body. (The visual modality)

3. Mediality. (The introduction of pre-recorded or simultaneously presented material into the live theatre event via technological media) ⁴

In terms of theatrical application I am aware that each of these is a vast area in its own right, with huge amounts of literary and practical theory available for each and therefore I have once again constructed a diagram to identify the focus area in order to contain the research.

Fig. 5. Elements of Lip-synching.



The research focus area can therefore be defined as that where vocal, physical and mediated aspects co-exist, and the analysis can be directed towards discovering how these can be combined to create effective technique and performance.

⁴ Although lip-synching can occur in a non intermediated context (if an actor is synching to another actor's voice that is being delivered live), for the sake of this research I have focussed more on the assumption that the voice is being produced by external media as this is more usually the case.

When I announced to a voice-teacher colleague of mine that I was going to be conducting research on lip-synching in a live theatre context her immediate, and somewhat indignant, response was that referring to someone ‘miming’ as being ‘live’ was heretical, and that the two concepts were incompatible.

There are three possible reasons that an argument could be put forward as to why lip-synching has no place in live theatre.

1. Because the definition of a live voice is one that is irrevocably connected to a live speaker who is in front of an audience.
2. Because the introduction of pre-recorded media into a theatre context automatically negates any claim it has to being live.
3. Because the live voice is capable of spontaneous and adaptive responses while the recorded voice is not. So if the actor is unable to newly mint expression based on the immediate given circumstances then the event ceases to be live.

Each of these will be analysed in turn.

Profaning the Living Voice: Voice and the Self

Reflecting on the general tone of most books dealing with voice - whether in a theatrical context or not - one gets a sense that there is a pre-supposition that the voice and the self are somehow synonymous with each other, or at least inextricably co-dependent. Therefore any interruption to the flow of voice from the actor’s self to an audience would result in a non-live experience. As such it is often presented by specialists as our purest means of self-expression. Patsy Rodenburg, head of voice at Guildhall Theatre school and one time head of voice for the National Theatre of Great Britain explicitly expresses this in *The Right to Speak* when she refers to ‘Vocal Imperialism’ (Rodenburg, 1992: 5) and states ‘We have to learn to release sound naturally in order to release ourselves’ (Rodenburg, 1992: 26). Some

practitioners extend this into esoteric areas: Kristin Linklater in 'Freeing The natural Voice' describes how 'the natural voice is most perceptibly blocked and distorted by physical tension, but it also suffers from... aural blocks, spiritual blocks' (Linklater, 1976: 2); and Steven Conner in his complex deconstruction of Ventriloquism 'Dumbstruck' takes it into the ontological arena, grandly stating: 'Listen, says a voice, some being is giving voice' (Connor, 2000: 4).

Anybody like myself who has undergone intense actor training will have had the experience of trying to connect to their 'centre', their 'core', or their 'self' during voice classes in order to create pure speech. These were often delivered as if they were tangible things that existed within the body. Of course the frustration was inevitable as these are, in fact, myths. In no anatomy book will you find such a thing as a discrete 'centre' or a 'core' anywhere in the human body, either as part of the vocal mechanism or otherwise. Furthermore it is never clearly stated in any of these books what is actually meant by 'self'. Without digressing into wider philosophical and psycho-anatomical theories, contemporary thinking is mostly of the opinion that there is no such thing as a self except as a neurological construct derived from the organisation of sensory interpretation in the motor cortex (Damasio, 2000). What is actually being referred to is, perhaps, the phenomenological experience – or what Eugene Gendlin describes as 'the felt sense' - of self (Gendlin, 2003:10). However this cannot be the self being referred to since it describes something changeable and moveable, and if it is changeable then it is elusive and cannot be considered to be expressible in pure terms.

This vaguery over terminology in turn can create anxiety rather than freedom in the performer over whether or not they have found their 'true' voice: a phenomenon neatly summed up by Philip Auslander in his essay *The Inauthentic Voice: Vocal Production In Glam Rock*:

When you try to get back to your natural voice, you may discover that you have no idea where to look for it. Is it big or small, classy or common, stagy or intimate? You will be

plunged into an elementary philosophical experience: feeling absolutely certain of something but unable to tell what it is or how to lay your hands on it.

(Auslander, 2004)

Even theorists avoid empirical speculation about the relationship between the voice and the 'self', but still endow it with esoteric mysticism and super-hero power. For example, voice specialist Karpf writes 'the alchemy wrought by the human auditory system still remains relatively mysterious' (Karpf, 2006: 30) and goes on to invest the voice with extra sensory powers: 'Through it (the voice) our size, height, weight, physique, sex and occupation, often even sexual orientation, can be detected' (Karpf, 2006: 10). Were the latter true then presumably someone could stand behind a curtain and be accurately drawn from vocal clues alone. Not only does this seem unlikely but our own personal experience of being surprised by someone's appearance with whom we have only had aural communication points, in fact, to the reverse being true.

Even some renowned rationalist philosophers neatly duck the issue, regarding the voice as being outside their empirical jurisdiction, projecting upon it virtuous notions:

Humans, according to the philosopher Kant, are the only species to emit sound at birth- (and) that the newborn baby's cries have been invested with such purity, innocence and almost mystical power.

(Moses, 1954: 16)

When the fact is, as Moses goes on to explain in the *The Voice Of Neurosis*:

The reality is more prosaic. The first audible cry clears the respiratory track of mucus...also an instinctive reaction to a shocking change of temperature, light and air.

(Moses, 1954: 95)

It seems many voice practitioners, theorists and philosophers alike have used, and still use, esoteric, poetic and grandiose rhetoric based on traditional ideals to define the voice as

something that exists to communicate a true self; like a ghost within the machine. Thus they align themselves with an intangible, almost divine, status in the world of theatre expression and this also, of course, raises their status as practitioners. This may also account for the resistance to the notion of its technological reproduction in a 'live' context since, if this is your model of the voice, replacing it with something mediated would reduce the performer to little more than an occultist charlatan, channelling the dead (like those mentioned in Chapter 1). The actor becomes a zombie. It shows how potent the tradition to regard the voice as something that expresses 'me' is, and therefore how impotent lip-synching might make us feel.

In contrast to this acclaimed Semiotician and literary theorist Roland Barthes sees the voice as something in fact incapable of pure expression:

Not that speech in itself is fresh, natural, spontaneous, truthful, expressive of a kind of pure interiority, quite the contrary, our speech...is immediately theatrical, it borrows its turns... from a whole collection of cultural and oratorical codes.

(Barthes, 1985: 3)

and continues:

what is lost in transcription is quite simply the body...which, in dialogue, flings towards another body

(Barthes, 1985: 4)

What he is describing here is a voice that is not some pure, ectoplasmic entity that is released from the self into the ether as a divine truth, but is a learned physical function capable of being manipulated with the intention of touching and influencing another person in order to survive. In the same way that for a mute person the hands might be considered the most direct form of communication, enabling them to both speak abstractly and touch directly without any inherent connection to a 'core self' living within the vocal apparatus. So the voice has its many and unique functions that are possibly restricted if only regarded as authentic

when connected to a 'centre'. In her practical voice book, *Freeing The Natural Voice*, Kristin Linklater gives an accurate description of the neuro-physical process of talking:

1. There is an impulse in the motor cortex of the brain.
2. The impulse stimulates breath to enter and leave the body.
3. The breath makes contact with the vocal folds creating oscillations.
4. The oscillations create vibrations in the breath stream.
5. The vibrations are amplified resonators.
6. The resultant sound is articulated by the lips and tongue to form words.

(Linklater, 1976: 6)

As can be seen this is actually no different from any other human function and exactly the same process would be needed if one were standing, scratching or kissing - the only difference being the stimulant, the part of the motor cortex fired, and the muscles engaged. Therefore, if we reframe the voice and see it as an embodied function that responds to external stimuli in a way that is no different from any other physical function, then the potential for exploring the relationship between the voice and the body, both in technical and performance terms, becomes more empirical and less ideological. Notions of exorcising the ghost in the machine need not enter into the argument at all and the idea of vocal imperialism might come into question. Declan Donnellan, in *The Actor and The Target*, goes even further and states that 'words actually deny expression' and puts forward the idea that a pure voice connected to the truth of the actor's self is not only a myth but is also not very dramatically interesting. (Donnellan, 2002: 184)

It is interesting to note, though, that even for those practitioners who do accept a more embodied model of the voice there is still a tendency to give it a functionally higher status. Cicely Berry, long-time voice coach for the Royal Shakespeare Company, introduces her seminal book *Voice and the Actor* by declaring 'it is through your speaking voice that you

convey your precise thoughts and feelings' (Berry, 2001: 7) implying that gesture, facial expression and a combination of these, do not possess the same functional abilities. Similarly John Laver in his massively dense deconstruction of phonetics states (emphasis mine):

a small part of non-vocal-communication is thought to be of universal human significance...this too is a skill whose performance has to be learned, albeit a somewhat less complex skill than that involved in spoken language.

(Laver, 1994: 16)

This conviction that the non-vocal mechanism is less complex than the vocal is in direct conflict with psychology professor Albert Mehrabian's research. This states that 55% of our intention is perceived through physical gesture, as opposed to 45% through vocal (Mehrabian, 1971), showing that physicality, including facial expression, and our subconscious interpretation of it, is a more complex system than vocal communication. Therefore Berry's claim that precision of communication lies primarily within the voice is doubtful. Not only, then, is the voice not connected to a self in any real terms, but physiologically it is not even the most complex communication system we possess.

None of this is to diminish the voice's power in any way. Like all physical functions it still has its remarkable and unique role to play, and is a wonder of neurological wiring and human evolution. As Steven Connor rightly observes in *Dumbstruck* 'I produce my voice in a way that I do not produce ...other attributes' (Connor, 2000: 3). But psycho-somatically this is true of all functioning – I also produce my kick in a way that I do not produce any other attributes – and so all functions can be deemed equally important.

Rather than ideological discussion it is possibly more pertinent to remember that most audiences will have a phenomenological response to lip-synching based on the identification they make with their own voice and voices in general - regardless or not of whether these identifications are justified in scientific terms. In fact without this we would not be able to manipulate the spatial/temporal aspect and therefore would not be able to create any

dramatic conflict that would necessarily engage them. It is more important, then, to understand and appreciate not what the voice is, but what an audience believes it to be.

To conclude then, it is possible that part of the resistance to lip-synching is based on an iconoclastic threat to traditional notions of the 'live voice' and 'self' that do not exist in any real way. Lip-synching challenges these lofty notions and by doing so questions are raised about the voice itself and its effect on a live theatre narrative, so contributing to the debate on the subject rather than being excluded on the grounds of theatrical heresy.

Dead and Alive? Voice and Intermediality

Given the above observations it is curious that when an actor wears a mask on stage nobody complains that they are being deprived of seeing the 'live' face. Particularly as, as has already been seen, facial expression is at least as revealing as vocal. And yet perhaps because there is a longer tradition of mask within theatre it is accepted as a device and not questioned.

Prior to cinema there was no concept of 'live' theatre as there was no alternative. So when the Lumiere brothers first showed their film *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1896, Film), which depicted a train entering a station, the audience was so unused to the experience of recorded visual media that they unanimously ducked believing the train was going to run them over. Today this response would seem absurd, and in fact mediated images are probably more familiar than live ones, but it shows how developments in technology take time to be integrated into the audience's psyche – and once this has occurred then it's application could be considered a 'convention'. The resistance to lip-synching, therefore, could simply come down to little more than the fact that it is unfamiliar. Philip Auslander takes this view in his seminal book on intermediality: *Liveness: Performance In a Mediatized Culture*. He bursts the bubble of liveness as a theatrical holy cow by condemning:

Traditional, unreflective assumptions that fail to get much further in their attempts to explicate the value of 'liveness' than invoking clichés and mystifications like 'the magic of live theatre', the 'energy' that supposedly exists between performers and spectators in a live event,

and the ‘community’ that live performance is often said to create among performers and spectators.

(Auslander, 2008: 2)

As has already been seen many of the observations made by Auslander within the wider debate surrounding the subjects of “liveness” and “intermediality” in contemporary theatre are pertinent to this dissertation. He questions the traditional view, defined by exponents of live theatre such as Steve Wurtzler and Peggy Phelan, who put forward the argument that ‘the notion of the live is premised on the absence of recording and the defining fact of the recorded is the absence of the live’ (Wurtzler, 2008: 89) and ‘only life is present...to the degree performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its ontology’ (Phelan, 1993: 146). Auslander counters such statements with ‘as soon as electronic amplification is used, one might say that an event is mediated’ (Auslander, 1999: 25) and ‘...if the mediated image can be recreated in a live setting it must have been ‘real’ to begin with’ (Auslander, 2008: 43)

This last quote supports the ‘temporal/spatial manipulation’ that has already been seen to be one of the primary aspect of lip-synching in Chapter 1. His point is that, in terms of aural communication, the voice has been mediatized for some time and is already a convention. The use of technological amplification in live theatre is not uncommon practice, particularly in larger venues and certainly in musical theatre, and therefore how often can an audience truly say they are hearing the ‘pure’ and ‘live’ voice. In fact in modern society we are arguably more familiar with electrically produced voices than ever before, since much of our communication occurs through mobile phones, Skype, television and other means of digital communication, and much of our day is spent listening to recorded voices on mobile music players. John Durham Peters, professor of communication studies at the University of Iowa states in his essay *The Voice and Modern Media*:

We drop CDs into our players, chat on our cell phones, and turn on the radio without much thinking about it...but it is profoundly weird at some level to live in a world full of so many

voices without bodies - a condition that was historically subscribed only to Gods, devils, angels, and ghosts.

(Peters, 2004: 91)

As well as echoing the Supernatural theme mentioned in Chapter 1, this comment also highlights a paradox. That as the voice is becoming more scientifically defined as an embodied function we are becoming more accepting of the voice as a disembodied entity than ever before. It could be argued, therefore, that the intermediated theatre experience is one that reflects more of modern experiential life than that which consists solely of direct human interaction. The profound weirdness that Peters believes is evoked by mediatized material is likely to become less apparent as, like the cinema-going generations that followed the original witnesses of the train coming into La Ciatot station, generations of children entering a mediatized world where the disembodied voice is 'normal' will be able to differentiate it from the 'live' without inducing mass psychosis.

Like attitudes to the vocal aspect, the resistance to the inter-medial aspect of Lip-synching, therefore, comes from traditional, purist notions that the performer is the source of all that represents 'live'. However theatre in its broadest sense relies on an audience to define it as such, since theatre without observers (even participatory ones) though conceptually conceivable is absurd in practice, and since the time of Aeschylus theatre has been built upon a game of make believe within which the audience plays its active part. In the same way that we allow ourselves to be scared even though we know Anthony Perkins is only pretending to be Norman Bates, so we can play along with a voice coming from a mediatized source whilst knowing it is in reality coming from the sound box (as will be shown in Practice 2). The idea that an audience cannot differentiate a live source from a mediated one, at least not without sullyng their direct experience, is perhaps a patronizing one.

In conclusion any resistance to integrating recorded lip-synch material into live theatre is perhaps down to lack of familiarity with it as a method for story telling, even though global

familiarity with the meditated, disembodied voice in everyday life makes an acceptance more, rather than less, likely and may, in fact, be considered a more living reflection of modern reality.

Deja Entendu: Spontaneity and Liveness

The two resistances to lip-synching outlined above stem mostly from ideological arguments over what 'live', 'self', and 'voice' actually mean. And we have seen that, somewhat ironically, the frictions that ensue over these debates are precisely what may provide it with some of its dramatic value and charge in practice.

The final resistance, however, describes a more empirical difference between live and recorded material, and this is that recorded material is consistent and relentless while live material has the capacity to change at any time in response to its environment. It is true that recorded material can be programmed to replay randomly, or even in response to stimuli, but in the case of lip-synching this is not an option since the illusion depends upon the performers knowing precisely what is coming next.

Peters expresses a commonly held view of the virtues of the spontaneous over the non-spontaneous when he says:

To be at a live performance of music or theatre means the possibility of imperfection, of mistakes, of bits of mortality, of hearing the voice strain or crack.

(Peters, 2004: 99)

Part of this argument seems to be stating that it is the potential for variety between one performance and another – the things that happen in the moment - that define it as live. On one level this is true. One of the things that helps us define recorded material from non recorded is that recorded material seems to hold no surprises as it has captured, and can reliably repeat, a specific temporal/spatial moment. Indeed this is mostly *why* we record things. However Peter's argument presupposes that the recording of any material renders it automatically perfect, and that any 'mistakes', 'strains' or 'cracks' become miraculously ironed

out. Of course technology has the capacity to do this, but it also has the capacity to capture profound living moments. As Auslander stated earlier all mediated images were once live themselves. Many people, when I mentioned the subject of this thesis to them, immediately referred to the television series *Creature Comforts* (2003-2007) in which animator Nick Parks creates clay animals that lip-synch to recorded interviews with members of the public. One of the joys of this series is the freshness and spontaneity of the interviews themselves, a spontaneity that is incredibly hard to replicate in a live context in front of observers. In fact practitioner and play-write David Mamet in his book *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor* puts forward the idea that much of modern actor training, in an effort to control the text while under scrutiny from a live audience, teaches actors to do little more than put on 'Funny Voices' (Mamet, 1998: 60), and as such is complaining that much of what we call 'live' theatre ends up being fake, unspontaneous and, ironically, dead.

The argument is not so much, therefore, to do with the apparent spontaneity of the material – since recorded material can sound more spontaneous than live –but over whether live theatre should be defined as such in terms of the *actual* audio temporal/spatial proximity between performer and audience, or the audience's *perception* of audio temporal/spatial proximity. It is not whether it is the first time the material has been played before that is important, but whether it is the first time the audience has heard it, since they will invest it with contextual newness even if the recorded material is familiar. In addition acoustics and their proximity to the media may change, as might their mood, attitudes or internal state. An actor also repeats the same line night after night. Whether or not this is recorded is irrelevant. It is how the audience hears it that is important.

The issue of non-spontaneity seems to become more relevant when seen from the perspective of the performer. For them, to have their capacity for vocal immediacy replaced may be felt as an impingement on their artistic self-expression. Therefore it is important to examine the phenomenological experience of performers when lip-synching and this will be done in the next chapter.

In conclusion, then, the primary resistance to lip-synching comes from the idea that by replacing the voice in a theatre context the performance ceases to be live. However, whether it is considered live or not, is actually defined more by the audience's perception and interpretation of the event than by extremist philosophical debate over relevant terms and ideologies. By binding the recorded material to a live event it becomes live to an audience. The inclusion of lip-synching therefore has the potential to stir up further debate and add dramatic content by filling in the gaps that are being created by re-analysis of these ideologies.

In the third wave of the research, described in the next chapter, we move from the theoretical to the practical and begin to identify and reconstruct some of the ideas and themes opened up and examined in the last two chapters, applying them empirically to see if the practice reflects the conjecture.

CHAPTER 3

Lip-Synching Technique: Research Practice Day 1

In this chapter I will be looking at the technique of lip-synching by addressing the research questions mentioned in Chapter 1:

- A. What is successful lip-synching?**
- B. How does a performer develop successful lip-synching skills?**
- C. Does lip-synching have any potential within actor training/performance development?**

It begins with an identification of existing actor development approaches that have the potential to be transferred as training methods and goes into a description of the first research day built upon these findings.

As has already been seen the exactitude of skill required to ensure the illusion of lip-synching is upheld means that before any exploration of story progression can take place the technique itself needs to be studied and learned. Undertaking this research in Practice day 1 ensures any debate arising from the Practice day 2 can be identified as resulting from contextual rather than skill based issues which, although relevant and not excluded from the feedback, are not core to the research question and should not distract from it. Also, as mentioned before, the absence of any existing material dealing explicitly with lip-synching technique in a non popular-music context makes this research necessary.

The comparison between lip-synching and mask-work has emerged a number of times in this thesis. In both techniques the performer responds to a constructed, external tool replacing a physical, expressive aspect of themselves - in the former the voice and in the latter the face. Therefore looking at the processes and key ideas behind visual mask-work, and seeing if there

are any ways these may be transferred to lip-synching, can provide a 'way in' to structuring the practice.

The key idea behind the use of the facial mask in theatre is that by inhibiting an expressive part of the actor with which they identify (their face), and replacing it with an external substitute, then subconscious aspects of the personality become liberated. For theatre director Peter Hall it is 'emotional truth' that is released (Although no description is given of what is actually meant by this, nor how it is recognised). (Hall, 2000 cited in Wilsher, 2007: 15), whereas for 19th Century theatre practitioner Jacques Copeau's we see that it is more precisely a greater capacity for physical expression that is sought:

The mask protects the soul for grimaces. Thence, by a series of very explainable consequences, the wearer of the mask acutely feels his possibilities of corporeal expression.

(Copeau quoted in Rudlin and Paul, 1990: 50).

Either way the mask is seen to release expressive, performance potential from the actor.

Significantly for practitioner Antonin Artaud the facial mask is used specifically to inhibit the voice. In his seminal book *The Theatre And Its Double* he states: "The sense of a new physical language, based upon signs and no longer upon words, is liberated" (Artaud. 1977: 70), implying that it is the voice, not just the face, with which the actor identifies and which has the power to repress spontaneous physical modes of expression. That humans profoundly identify with their voice- almost to the point that it is synonymous with what is most true and deep about them- is something we have already seen in previous chapters. Theoretically, then, if one inhibits the voice, and replaces it with another, it too might have the potential to release subconscious elements that lie dormant within the performer and unlock new possibilities of expression.

The question that needs to be asked if one is to transfer mask-work to lip-synching is at which point in the process of talking does one create inhibition in order for a successful

illusion to be created? If we look again at Linklater's description of the neuro-physical process of speaking in Chapter 2 it can be seen that the voice can be inhibited at a number of points:

- a) At the point of articulation.
- b) At the vocal folds.
- c) At the point of breath.
- d) At the point of intention.

Obviously a) and c) are not viable options since to inhibit either would mean to rob the audience of visual clues that are necessary to create the illusion. It is difficult to imagine lip-synching in an illusory context without the movement of the lips, as well as without the visual physical rise and fall created by inhalation and exhalation. This is not to say inhibition at this level may not have potential ramifications worth observing when considering subsidiary question C (Does lip-synching have any potential within actor training/performance development?). For example in her book *Mindful Spontaneity* movement therapist Ruthy Alon, who is a disciple of psychosomatic functional development practitioner Moshe Feldenkrais, describes a technique he would use in his teaching whereby the conscious inhibition of a functioning set of muscles encourages a chronically contracted set to return to their optimum tonus and availability (Alon, 1990: 269). In theory, then, if a voice student is struggling to access any part of their mechanism then rather than encouraging them to strengthen the non-available aspects, if they were taught to inhibit the functioning ones then this may allow the vocal muscles to re-organise and give the student renewed functionality. Lip-synching may be the perfect tool for this.

In terms of illusion, however, the question arises as to whether lip-synching is most effective simply as an inhibition and masking of sound (b), or as an inhibition and masking of the entire psychological inner voice (d).

One of the perceived differences between the vocal and facial mask is highlighted by Margaret Coldiron in her work on Japanese Noh theatre *Trance and Transformation*:

The masked performer does not interpret a character through the face and body...rather the masked actor is given the task of bringing to life an exterior object, the mask, which obliterates the objects own face and determines the physical characterisation.

(Coldiron, 2004: 62)

This raises the question as to whether the performer perceives their voice as being something external (b) or internal (d)? As such should the actors endeavour to perceive the audio material as something that masks their physical voice - that is something external like a face mask – or as something which replaces their internal voice?

Cicely Berry explains ‘you do not hear your own voice as other people hear it, partly because you hear it via the bone conductions and vibrations in your own head’ (Berry, 2001: 8).

However true this may be this tends not to be the voice with which we identify. It is our internal, mental voice - the inner monologue that precedes talking - rather than the sound that comes out of our mouths with which we are more familiar. It could, therefore, be that it is inhibition and replacement at this internal level that that frees physical expression. This would explain why, when in my bedroom aged four, actually singing along with my record would have broken the spell since making vocal sound would have had the effect of overriding the ‘mask voice’ created by the record that was replacing my own internal voice. I would have become aware that I no longer sounded like the recording artist, and therefore I could no longer believe I *was* the recording artist. It would have been like a visual mask slipping from the face.

This internal transformation is in many ways an area of overlap with naturalistic approaches to performance development, which also seek to transform the actor by directly altering their internal psyche, or their perception of it. This can be seen in the approach of established Ghost singer Marni Nixon, who we met in Chapter 1, when describing in the documentary

The Secret Voices Of Hollywood how she spent six weeks with Deborah Kerr preparing for *The King and I* (1956, Film):

I would stand next to her, side by side like a ghost image, watch her and watch her conformation of her mouth, how her lips moved, and I would imagine what she was trying to do acting wise.

(Documentary, 2013. 00:17:05)

What is occurring here is a combination of physical mask work and naturalistic techniques (essentially Stanislavski's 'what if' exercise in which the actor asks 'how would I be *if* I were a pirate/plumber/psychopath etc (Stanislavski, 1980: 46). The dexterity and sophistication with which both the dubber (Nixon) and the lip-syncher (Kerr) move vocally back and forth is evident when watching the film⁵ and further demonstrates that effective lip-synching is not merely a question of oral mirroring, but is a technique that is informed by close observation of, and subtle response to, the entire mechanism of the speaker. Understanding this sophisticated interplay between the visual and aural modalities, as well as the external and internal, is core to discovering the potential of lip-synching in both illusory and storytelling contexts. Therefore it seems that, as well as pure mask approaches, there is potential in examining the effect various naturalistic training approaches has on both the illusion and the performance.

An interesting technical aspect that is drawn from mask-work and is worth exploring in terms of lip-synching is that, as Jacques Lecoq observes in *The Moving Body*, to be effective the mask:

Should not adhere closely to the face. A certain distance should be preserved between the face and the mask, for it is precisely this distance which makes it possible for the actor to play.
(Lecoq, 2000: 38)

This idea of a space between the actual and the replacement echoes the congruent/incongruent aspect of lip-synching in Chapter 1 where it was seen that in order to

⁵ In [Clip 17](#) the voice actually swaps between Kerr and Nixon three times between [00:00:01](#) and [00:00:35](#)

create drama it is useful for there to be a juxtaposition between the recorded material and the syncher, either acoustically or in terms of personality. Practitioner and philosopher Richard Schechner, in *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, defines the power of this dynamic gap as the space that the process of dramatic transformation is played out between the actor and the character:

Olivier is Hamlet, but also he is not Hamlet: his performance is between a denial of being another (= I am me) and a denial of being himself (= I am Hamlet)...in this sense performing is a paradigm of liminality.

(Schechner, 1985)

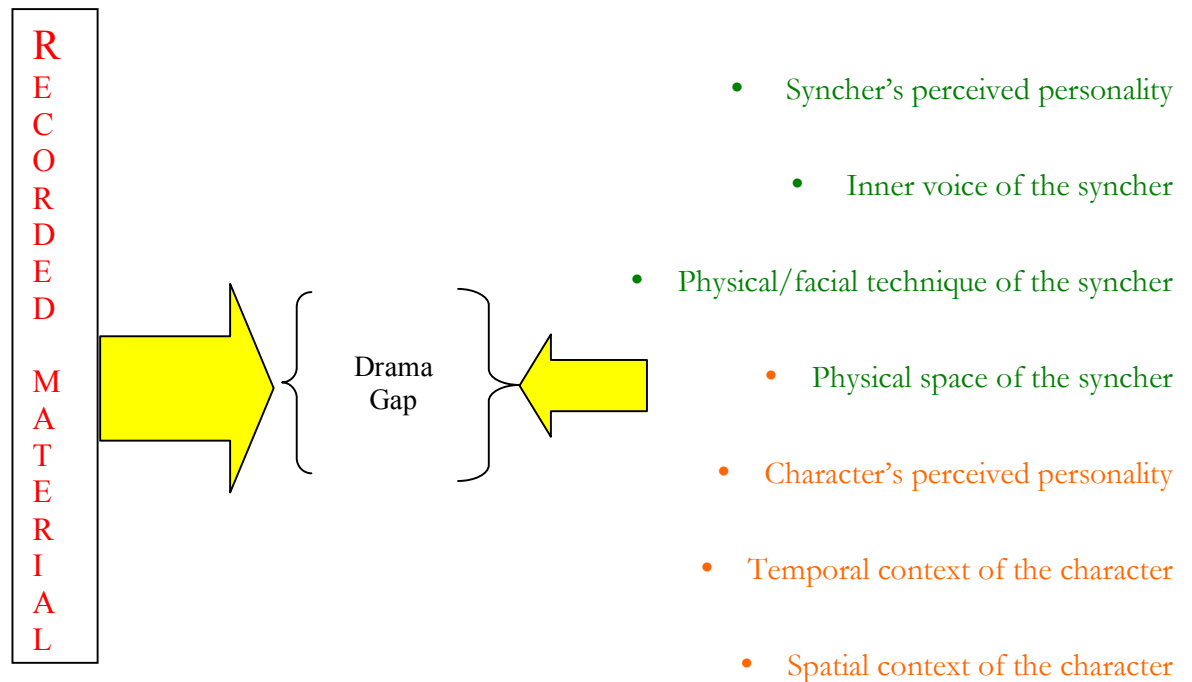
As such it is this gap, which is created by some kind of physical space or thematic incongruence, in which creativity and drama takes place. This is also one of the recurring ideas expressed by 'Cheek By Jowl' artistic director Declan Donnellan in his book *The Actor and the Target* where he describes the 'enabling distance' between the 'I' and the 'Me' of the character (Donnellan, 2002: 115). He goes on by stating that 'life loathes a void' (Donnellan, 2002: 176)- which might be a metaphysical description of congruence theory - and that drama occurs in the space that is created between who a character is and who they prefer to be (2002, Chapter 7), as well as what they say and what they mean (2002, Chapter 15); both concepts of which have connotations with mask-work, incongruence, fantasy and the idea of *subtext* that further blurs the existing boundaries between traditional expressionistic and naturalistic approaches.

If we take this idea of the spaces that can exist between the recorded medium (mask) and the lip-syncher through to the research then by analyzing them we find they can be broadly itemized as follows:

Fig 5: Potential Incongruity between Audio Material and Performance

Technique

Context



The areas in green are those to be analysed in the first practice day, and those in orange are more contextual and are taken through to the second.

So in building a practical research day that examines lip-synch technique and potential for training in order to answer subsidiary questions A, B and C, a combination of expressionistic and naturalistic approaches are used to discover the optimum balance between inhibition and liberation of physicality and emotion in the performers. The technical nature of it means that a systematic approach can be employed.

What follows is a summary of the exercises and the results. A complete and detailed analysis can be found in APPENDIX 1. Quotes from the actors are taken from the feedback forms and these are available from the author on request. Clips can be found by clicking on www.youtube.com/playlist.

Two professional actors of roughly the same age, one female and one male, were selected to take part on the basis of their broad theatrical training, as well as experience within academic research situations. Neither were singers but both were asked to prepare a song that they could lip-synch to. The male (I) also prepared a formal piece - Alec Guinness reading T.S.Eliot's *The Wasteland* (Daily Motion, 2010) - while the female (B) was asked to choose a colloquial interview from one of *The Listening Projects* commissioned by the BBC (BBC, 2013).

To avoid, as much as possible, any cross-contamination of results the research areas were separated into five areas of study: Training, Performance, Illusion, Media and Response. The methodologies applied consisted of a mixture of specifically designed data collection for the externally perceived aspects, as well as questionnaires/interview of the performers to gauge phenomenological feedback. These were then compared in order to analyse the interplay between subsidiary questions A and B. The phenomenological areas particularly focused on were:

- a. Noting Any changes in musculature or availability of the vocal apparatus post lip synching.
- b. Any changes in the muscularity or availability of physical apparatus globally post lip synching.
- c. Any phenomenological changes within the performer's experience of themselves while performing.
- d. Any shifts in the performer's understanding of the character they are portraying.
- e. Any shifts in the performer's capacity to express the character they are portraying.

Training

In order to discover if there was any effect on the vocal mechanism as a result of lip-synching the participants were asked to sing a previously prepared song unaccompanied - T: Master of The House from *Les Miserables* (Alun Armstrong, 2004) and B: The Sado-Masochism Tango by Tom Lehrer (Tom Lehrer 2010). They were actively discouraged from doing any kind of

vocal warm up that might have affected the results. They then lip-synched to a recording of the same song after which they returned to an unaccompanied delivery noting any phenomenological or observable shifts in the muscularity or sound of the voice.

In comparing the actual vocal quality before and after lip-synching ([Clip 1](#)), as well as feedback from the questionnaires, it was found there was very little observable or perceived change in the actual reorganization of the vocal mechanism, or in vocal availability. There were, however, changes in the both actors' responses to the material that opened out their performances. Being non-singers they asked if they could keep their eyes closed while performing. Without prompting T opened his eyes after lip-synching ([Clip 1, 00:00:26](#)) and both mentioned that they were less self-conscious; B remarking that she was less worried about 'how to sit'; and T commenting that he enjoyed the freedom of 'Letting the recorded voice give permission to extend the staging and act it out physically'. This physical availability is notable in both post lip-synch performances, where it can be seen that there is more movement in the head and nuances in the expressive facial muscles (compare [Clip 1, 00:00:15](#) with [00:00:30](#)). The focus, as T observed, became more on telling the story of the song rather than the song itself and this shift in attention, although not changing their ability to sing in a technical sense, seems to have relaxed them into the song and the performance situation enough to find a more globally embodied, as well as connected, expressive confidence. B, who synched to a song recorded before a live audience, commented that she 'enjoyed taking ownership of Tom Lehrer's voice' and that she was 'owning somebody else's success' and this helped her feel the character clearer. Interestingly she also said that her 'relationship with the fake audience made me feel better about the real audience' which brings up the idea that lip-synching need not necessarily be just about responding to the recorded voice, but to the entire spatial/temporal context in which the material was recorded. This would redefine lip-synching as a method for inter- mediating sound into performance, not solely voice.

It seems, therefore, that in a training context there is some evidence for lip-synching to be used as a fast-track method of helping performers engage with, and find confidence in,

material or aspects of performance that they are struggling to access, which in turn leads to more physical freedom. There is little evidence, however, that it creates any significant change in the neuro-muscularity of the vocal mechanism. This is not to say that it does not still remain a possibility, but it has become apparent that this is potentially the subject for a whole thesis in its own right and, not being central to my research question, will not be further pursued in this thesis.

Performance

The believability of lip-synching seems to rely on an elusive ‘aha’ moment in which the performer connects with the material emotionally and psychologically and the audience relaxes into the story rather than becomes transfixed by the technique. In order to discover useful methods of making this connection without overriding the illusion the actors were asked to synch to their spoken material using nine incremental performance development methods. These are itemized below: b) to d) are methods where physical actions are technically performed and this informs the actor of the character’s state (what is referred to in acting terminology as an ‘outside-in’ approach), and e) to h) are those where connection is made with the internal life of the character and this informs the physical expression of the character (‘inside-out’).

- a) ([Clip 2, 00:00:01](#); [Clip 3, 00:00:01](#)) Sits and speaks as they have practiced
- b) ([Clip 2, 00:00:18](#); [Clip 3, 00:00:37](#)) Analyses and copies only the breath pattern, then synchs.
- c) ([Clip 2, 00:00:32](#); [Clip 3, 00:00:37](#)) Slowly mouths the phonetics of the sentence, focusing on the aesthetics and physical sense rather than the meaning, then synchs.
- d) ([Clip 2, 00:00:48](#); [Clip 3, 00:00:56](#)) Hums the intonations of the material (possibly while conducting the sounds, then synchs.)
- e) ([Clip 2, 00:01:04](#); [Clip 3, 00:00:16](#)) Connects with the feeling of the speech using

emotional memory exercise of choice, then synchs.

f) (Clip 2, 00:01:20; Clip 3, 00:01:34) Actually speaks the piece naturalistically - trying to recreate the material exactly, then synchs.

g) (Clip 2, 00:01:35; Clip 3, 00:01:52) Performs the piece to the material as a caricature.

h) (Clip 2, 00:01:51; Clip 3, 00:02:12) Actually speaks the piece expressively in a caricatured, over the top manner, then synchs.

i) (Clip 3, 00:02:30) Restricts all movement. (T only)

After each increment the actors were asked to note down whether they felt the exercise improved or deteriorated their performance and their skill. These were then measured against observable differences.

Looking at the results it becomes quickly apparent that there is very little agreement between the actors as to which exercise has the greatest improvement. In fact they are almost diametrically opposed. The only increment that both agree helps is c): mouthing the phonetics. However this is not necessarily apparent in the performance from an audience perspective where T, in particular, appears to over-mouth (Clip 3, 00:00:42). Therefore it appears that it is difficult for performers to gauge their own effectiveness when giving a lip-synch performance. This implies that reliance has to be made on an external eye to ensure the performance/illusion is working and that a degree of technical discipline, rather than simply instinctively feeling the material, is required when rehearsing.

In terms of believability aspects are found in each of the increments that could add effective nuances to the delivery. In comparing a) and b) in both clips there are moments where the actors, by connecting with the breathing patterns of the speaker, are seen to physically inhale (Clip 2, 00:00:28; Clip 3 00:00:07) and as an audience we subconsciously pick up on this (and its absence). The same is true comparing b) and c) where articulation is introduced. For example B is seen (albeit very briefly) to use her tongue when pronouncing 'th' after the

exercise where she did not before ([Clip 2, 00:00:42](#)), and this seems to improve the overall effectiveness. The subtlety of this shows how powerfully our visual perception plays a part in our acceptance of the authenticity of somebody talking. As Anthropologist at the University of Aberdeen Professor Tim Ingold asserts:

It is the very incorporation of vision into the process of auditory perception that transforms passive hearing into active hearing.

(Ingold, 2000: 277)

From an audience perspective improvement between c) and d), in which the actors hummed the intonations, is less effective as it appears to encourage them to nod along with the beats ([Clip 2, 00:00:53](#); [Clip 3, 00:00:58](#)) which over accentuates the material in an inauthentic way.

One of the greatest surprises given the technical nature of lip-synching and that its efficacy is best measured by external means is that the clearest 'aha' moments appears to come when the actors have applied the 'inside-out' exercises. The subtlety of the nuances make it difficult to pin down exactly what causes this effect, but it appears that more of the actor is involved in physical expression and there is a greater balance of effort in the relationship between this physicality and the material. In B we can see that there is less extraneous head movement and less demonstrated plasticity in the eyes and mouth (compare [Clip 2, 00:00:12](#) with [00:01:33](#)). The attention then becomes less on the mouth and words alone, and more on the entire face of the person, particularly engagement with the eyes. It appears that there is a greater connection with the personality of the recorded person and their voice, although we know from the feedback from the actors that this was not necessarily the case.

Bringing forward the findings in the training exercise above it appears, then, that effective lip-synching is not merely a case of miming words, but of connecting with a combination of the contextual, physical and psychological content suggested by the material as a whole. In

answer to the earlier question about where the vocal production is actually held back, then, it seems that lip-synching is most effective when it is inhibited at the vocal folds rather than the point of intention. Focusing on these areas rather than on the point of articulation makes for a more believable illusion. More accurate labeling therefore might be ‘voice-synching’, ‘sound synching’ or even ‘person-synching’. This latter definition challenges the idea of lip-synching as being synonymous with *channeling* since the actor is not a neutral vessel through which the material is expressed, but is holistically animated by the entirety of its content. A more accurate supernatural comparison would be *possession*, so rather than thinking of lip-synching in terms of a *mask*, it has more in common with *puppetry*. The actors are controlled and restrained by the material rather than using it to express their own subconscious behaviour. But this is not the same kind of puppet-actor described by Edward Gordon Craig as the ‘Uber-marionnete’ (Walton, 1991: 82), which uses an ‘outside-in’ approach to create actors that behave like animated furniture to express visual poetry, but one which necessarily connects to the psychology and nuances of the material to reveal the personality and context of the recorded speaker. This points to the material being used as a *given circumstance* - a term used by naturalistic practitioners such as Sanford Meisner (1987) to describe all the factual aspects inherent in a piece which it is imperative for the actor to respond to. This is evident in both naturalistic and stylized material.

By comparing the two actor’s responses to caricaturing their pieces we see that for B over-expressiveness destroys the illusion (Clip 2, 00:01:35) while T’s performance retains an aspect of efficacy (Clip 3, 00:01:52) and this is probably down to the nature of the material. The stylized content and delivery of T’s poem can be supported by a more physical and larger interpretation than B’s colloquial speaker.

So we see that believability comes from an inhibition of both the vocal folds and the inner voice of the actor. There are technical and psychological aspects at play and the intention is not to expressively release the actor, in a performance situation, but flatten the actor to the

recorded material in order that they may be articulated by it. To achieve this the actor studies the personality of the speaker through close attention and mimicry of their aural nuances, picking up emotional, intentional and contextual clues as to their state at the time of recording.

Illusion

To work out parameters in which voice synching works best as an illusion from an audience perspective the actors performed their pieces using incrementally larger lip movement from 1 to 7, with 1 being minimal movement, 4 being most natural (neutral) and 7 being most grotesque. The believability of these was then plotted on a chart along with how effective the actors felt they were being, and these were compared.

The results for both were consistent, some increments were minimal and beyond 4 the illusion became steadily worse so only T's clips at levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 are provided.

As would be expected it is hard to accept the illusion when the lip movements are minimal ([Clip 4, 00:00:01](#)), but interestingly the illusion is also lost when the actor is performing at a natural level ([Clip 4, 00:01:00](#)) because the audience is able to detect that the mouth movements do not match the material and actually appear over the top. Illusion appears to work when the lips are working below neutral ([Clip 4: 00:00:39](#)) and this may be because the audience has a greater chance of being able to project the audio material onto the visual to create congruence, as was seen in Chapter 1.

Harry McGurk and John MacDonald in their paper *Hearing Lips and Seeing Voices* (McGurk & Macdonald, 1976) demonstrate the power of our ability to reduce clashes between aural and visual modalities. Known as the McGurk effect it was discovered we will manipulate certain sounds to match our visual input ([Clip 15, 00:00:04](#)). It is likely that a similar phenomenon is taking place and so in order to maintain believability it helps for the visual input (mouth-movement) to be slightly ambiguous in order for the audience to project their own congruity functioning onto it.

Media

The dramatic effect different kinds of external sound systems and changes in volume had on the illusion - as well as on storytelling potential - proved, in many ways, to be the most surprising part of the day.⁶

By using the studio sound system and gradually incrementing the volume, with 1 being the softest and 7 the loudest, we found that the most effective volume levels were 3 and 5 – with 3 being the most natural and 5 being useful if one wants to give the impression of formal speaking or being miked up. Of course it is likely this would depend on the space and the distance of the syncher from the audience, but it is interesting to note the importance of the external media on the illusion, and that, similar to the lip movement in the exercises above, efficacy is found just below that which would expect to be accurate to the space. One might expect that briefly turning their back on the audience without adjusting the volume might destroy the illusion but this does not seem to be the case ([Clip 5, 00:00:48](#)). Once the congruence is in place it seems to stick.

Although taking the sound above 5 is ineffective for B, T's stylized material takes on a whole new focus when the volume is cranked up to 7 ([Clip 5, 00:00:58](#)). Although the audio is clearly artificially recreated the illusion remains intact, but it is as if the material is coming from a separate, possibly supernatural, place and the performer is being possessed by it. One is also drawn more to the words than the personality of the speaker. This volume has potential use, therefore, if an audience needs to be kept aware of the temporal/spatial gap between the identity of the performer and that of the speaker in order that a more stylized,

⁶ Note: the clips for this exercise ([Clip 5, 00:00:01 – 00:00:42](#)) showing levels 1, 3, 5 and 7 do not accurately demonstrate the efficacy of each increment as the actual volume is affected by the camera audio).

alienating effect can be created that highlights the themes being communicated rather than the inner life of the speaker.

Furthermore using mobile sound producing equipment, such as mobile phones or mobile amplifiers, alters the illusion. The mechanical sound produced by mobile phones is so distinct and recognizable that if we cannot see the phone, or it is not made obvious that this is the source of sound, we are looking for it as an audience and this is distracting (Clip 6, 00:00:01). It is therefore more effective if the phone is visible (Clip 6, 00:00:12).

Playing with how the placement of the mobile media within the space effects the illusion the following was found:

Mobile Phone:

- a) (Clip 6, 00:00:12): Phone held close to face: effective illusion. Raises the question in the observer as to whether the actor is synching to own voice or to someone else's, and if the mediated voice is live or not. This has potential in adding levels to storytelling.
- b) (Clip 6, 00:00:22): Phone in sight but on chair at distance: Effective illusion. Less ambiguous than a) as the placing of the media appears deliberate. Also movement of the syncher around the space does not effect the illusion. Once the illusion is accepted it maintains itself without the need for any acoustic adjustment.
- c) (Clip 6, 00:00:40): Held by another actor at a distance: Effective illusion. This has the best balance of theatricality and naturalism. We accept the theatrical conceit very quickly.
- d) (Clip 6, 00:00:50): Holding phone and addressing other actor: Effective illusion. This is very sinister. It raises the sense of detachment of the syncher to the material and highlights themes of insincerity and manipulation.
- e) (Clip 6, 00:00:59): Other actor holding the phone and turning back on syncher: Non-effective illusion. It strains the observer's potential to create congruity too much. There is a split of attention between the syncher and the action of the non-speaker which makes it unclear what we are meant to be observing.

e) (Clip 6, 00:01:07) Back to audience with media invisible for prolonged period: Effective illusion but uninteresting as there is no contextual incongruity. The Syncher may just as well be speaking the words as this would tell the same story.

Mobile Amplifier:

Easily the most natural if one wants to reduce the incongruity between syncher and material, giving a more immediate ‘documentary’ feel. The sound is most authentic as it can be held close to the actual source of the sound produced by the actor. However, holding the device impacts on physicality so one would need to attach to belt or lanyard for maximum effect.

Holding amplifier at different places on body where most vocal resonances are naturally produced: The head (Clip 6, 00:01:20), the chest (Clip 6, 00:01:33) and the belly (Clip 6, 00:01:50). It was found that having it close to the chest seems to recreate best the original source of the voice. Perhaps this is due to anatomical reasons – since the lungs and ribs are where the mechanical sound process originates from – or because the intention to speak is often an emotional one and this is the traditional area associated with the heart and feeling. Either way, it places the sound production in the centre of the torso and this makes the direction from which it seems to emerge less ambiguous.

Participant Responses

The actors were asked to complete a questionnaire to establish their experience of the day in which, most surprisingly, it was found that the constant repetition of the material did not become boring (as they expected it would). In fact they reported that the more they repeated the exercise the more they elicited from the material. Lip-synching, therefore, is not a skill that can be developed in a hurry.

Conclusions

Conclusions, then, that can be drawn from this practice day, and which address questions A, B and C are as follows:

A. What is successful lip-synching?

Illusion most effective:

1. When lip movement is slightly below neutral, unless deliberately stylizing.
2. Using emotional memory and other inside-out methods to connect the vocal mechanism with the material on a deeper psychological level creating subtler expressive nuances.
3. Thinking in terms of VOICE SYNCHING rather than LIP SYNCHING - employing the whole vocal apparatus and inhibiting the voice at the level of the vocal folds, not just at the place of articulation.
4. Thinking in terms of possession and puppetry rather than channeling and mask-work.
5. If using external audio system then just below or just above neutral volume depending on context.
6. If using mobile phone then keeping it visible.
7. Without visual split of focus between syncher and the intention of other characters
8. Using mobile amp near chest

B. How does a performer develop successful lip synch skills?

Actors are not the best judge of whether they are being effective with their technique and require an external eye to inform them when illusion is taking place. This does not assume that, with more practice, and with an understanding of the above approaches, internal instincts cannot be refined.

C Does lip-synching have any potential within actor training/performance development?

Vocal musculature Negligible.

Voice	Negligible, some sense of freedom was expressed though not apparent externally.
Physicality	Negligible. Habits not addressed.
Character	Potential for getting into understanding of character or finding alternative expression.
Expression	Potential as fast track approach to freeing expression and self-consciousness.

Having completed this research it possible to apply this into the final wave and address the core question.

CHAPTER 4

Lip –Synching and Storytelling in a Live Theatre Research Practice Day 2:

Bringing forward all the theoretical and practical themes and conclusions found in the first three waves I created a series of short scenarios that examine how these results might be perceived by an audience in a live theatre context. This chapter outlines and analyses these and presents the results in order to address the core question:

What potential does lip-synching have as a theatrical convention that enhances storytelling in a live performance context?

To review, when using the term *storytelling* in this dissertation I am referring to the exposition of character or plot in terms of narrative, narrative theme or mis-en-scene, as well as to any dramatic content that drives the narrative forward. To summarize, then, the focus of the analysis is on whether, and how, lip-synching might be added to a live theatre piece in a way that reveals something previously unknown about the character, scene or theme; and/or that creates a space for dramatic tension between two or more conflicting aspects of it.

Practice 2 took place on 20th May 2014 in Studio 2 of The University of Kent School of Arts using four invited actors who had prepared their material using the findings outlined in the conclusion of the previous chapter.

Rather than present a show with a single narrative I created a number of short scenarios, each set up so that a study could be made of one of the themes identified in Chapter 1. I chose this more systematic approach in order to make any differentiations clearer in terms of their impact on storytelling.

It was presented in front of four industry professionals with different areas of expertise who were presented with a questionnaire (APPENDIX 2) on which to note impressions during

the performance; after which a discussion was held during which they were asked to present their notes, thereby avoiding being influenced by their colleague's interpretations. A full recording of this discussion, as well as all visual clips mentioned in this chapter, can be found by clicking on www.youtube.com/playlist.

The observers will be referred to throughout this chapter as:

D: Specialist in Voice, Music and Theatre.

S: Specialist in Theatre and Comedy.

R: Specialist in Multi Media Performance.

A: Specialist in Technical Theatre and Multi Media Performance.

A breakdown of the scenarios is as follows:

CLIP NUMBER ON PLAYLIST	AUDIO MATERIAL AND SOURCE	PRIMARY THEMES	SCENARIO STORYLINE
7	Thomas Edison's recording of <i>Mary had a Little Lamb</i> on Phonograph (Thomas Edison, 1926 accessed at internet Archive, 1996)	The Supernatural.	A medium appears to channel Thomas Edison, showing no expression and suggesting the scene by placing hands on table.
8	Live recording of excerpt from Martin Luther King's <i>I Have A Dream</i> speech. (Martin Luther King, 1963 accessed at Internet archive, 1996)	Identity	A young, caucasian female delivers a famous speech as if to an audience from behind a chair
9	<i>Ya Got Trouble</i> - song from Broadway musical <i>The Music Man</i> (Robert Preston, 1957)	Song as Subtext: Contextual Incongruity	A convicted murderer is given a lethal injection and dies in real time
10	A mother and daughter discussing why the mother left her husband. <i>The Listening Project</i> (BBC, 2013)	Speech as Subtext: Identity	Two men bond over a cup of tea taking on the reverse identities (age, gender, nationality and race) of the speakers.
11	<i>You Gotta Get a Gimmick</i> - song from Broadway Musical <i>Gypsy</i> (Heather Lee, Kate Buddeke, Julie Halston, 2004)	Song as Fantasy	Three psychologists discuss the treatment of a patient, each putting forward their own ideas to compete with the other two.
12	Excerpts from various sources edited to create a sound montage (spliced from various sources)	Inner Voice	A schizophrenic patient alone in a mental health unit.
13	Interview with Judy Garland (Allaboutjudy, 2010)	Speech as Fantasy	A schizophrenic patient being interviewed by a psychologist.

All the scenarios contain within them an aspect of temporal/spatial manipulation. The first two are more expressionistic and stark in their staging, while the rest are embedded in a naturalistic scenario. The final three follow a short, sequential storyline of a schizophrenic patient receiving treatment.

These scenarios are each designed to raise particular enquiry into the theme mentioned on the list above, which are drawn from the themes identified in Chapter 1. I have endeavoured to keep each one discrete while embedding it into a narrative context. In addition some use expressionistic techniques and others naturalistic in order to see if this has any effect on how the material is received. Some of the recordings are inspired by material that has been mentioned in the research. At no point were the observers informed of the themes, allowing comparisons to be made between the intended story and the story as perceived. To separate Practice 2 from Practice 1 they were also asked to focus more on the exposition than the technique, unless some aspect of the latter was felt relevant to their interpretation of the piece.

In Practice 2 less focus is placed on the phenomenal experience of the performers, which was the focus of Chapter 3. It has already been seen that their experience is not always reflective of the efficacy of the performance, and so asking them to comment on any personal performative experience (unless asked to by the observers themselves) may have had the effect of distracting the observers from the main focus of the day, which is concerned with the story as it is perceived rather than how it is performed.

Analysis revealed the following:

Projection, Prejudice, Politics and Poly-Scenic Levels

The most immediate thing to become apparent from the feedback is that systematic presentation of the results in terms of theme would be near to impossible. As was seen in Fig: 2, and throughout this dissertation, lip-synching blurs the edges of topics and genre which makes deconstruction based on differentiation in this way unhelpful, in spite of my efforts to

construct the scenarios to do so. Although the questionnaires contain very specific prompts such as ‘can you describe the scene you have just seen?’ and ‘can you describe the character?’ During discussion it becomes clear that lip-synching brings so much layered ambiguity to each scene that not once could any of the observers precisely describe or agree with any certainty upon what they had just seen. Rather than creating confusion, however, this mostly seemed to have the effect of adding intrigue and depth to the observer’s experiences.

A, in his response to [Scenario \(Clip\) 8](#), introduces the term *Poly-Scenic* ([Clip 14, 00:05:22](#)). This is when a number of different scenes potentially exist within the one performance simultaneously; and different viewpoints, both metaphorical and literal, shift throughout the piece. *D* expresses this when, in referring to the same sequence, he says that he sees both Martin Luther King and the actress simultaneously ([Clip 14, 00:06:38](#)) and *A* adds to this when observing that the recorded material does not just transport the voice, but the whole atmosphere of the space in which it is recorded ([Clip 14, 00:04:02](#)). This is temporal/spatial manipulation in practice. Therefore there are two (at least) possible viewpoints of the setting – that which the audience is seeing and that which the audience is hearing- and the shift between these possibilities creates an indefinable dramatic dynamic rather than a single, definable static. This not only creates *layering* within the dramatic content scene ([Clip 14, 00:06:25](#)) but also breaks down theatre practice boundaries creating multiple genre possibilities. Although the staging of [Scenario \(Clip\) 8](#) is simple, for example, it asks the audience to make a number of independent decisions about what is actually occurring: is this a woman pretending to be Martin Luther King? Is this a woman imagining she is Martin Luther King in her head? Is this actually Martin Luther King? Are we in Washington? Are we in her bedroom? Is she in front of a crowd and, if so, are we the crowd? There are more possibilities, but the point is made and as such defining the genre as Naturalistic, Epic or Expressionistic is not finite but a moveable feast since the answer seems to be that it is potentially all of these and none. As was seen in Chapter 3, and seems to be borne out here, it is the audience who ultimately decides what it is they are reading. Therefore systematically

dismembering the anatomy of storytelling and objectively observing each part is not an effective way to analyse its effect since its dramatic power lies in its poly-scenic construct and the subjective interpretation of each audience member.

Referring also to [Scenario \(Clip\) 8](#), *D* describes how, even though the actor is a white female, the image he projects onto her- picked up from the aural media - is that of a black, moustachioed man ([Clip 14, 00:06:22](#)) and, in an effort to create congruity of the incongruity before him, his perception moved rapidly between these viewpoints. From a practitioner's point of view this is exciting stuff, because it means there is a dynamic being created in the audience that is engaging, and this reflects Fig. 5 where we see that it is the space between these incongruities in which the conflict, and therefore the drama, resides. In order to glean clues that allow him to make sense of what he is watching the observers have to actively participate in what is in front of them. It is not served up on a plate nor is it presented piecemeal and therefore it becomes living and complex.

That this process does not frustrate the observer, as might be expected, is born out by the fact that [Scenario \(Clip\) 9](#) – which is the scene that had most congruity between the personality of the actor synching and the voice ([Clip 14, 00:17:36](#)) – is felt by *S* and *R* to be *more* confusing than the others ([Clip 14, 00:17:15, 00:18:56](#)). It is the lack of ambiguity that has the effect of giving them more time to focus on more theatrical aspects such as technique ([Clip14, 00:17:24](#)) and although still effective ([Clip 14, 00:19:02](#)) runs the danger of being a demonstration of execution rather than immersive storytelling, becoming less about exposition and more about synching gymnastics.

It seems then that lip-synching has the effect of engaging the audience by appealing to their inherent ability to create congruity, through a process of projection and cognition, which consequently encourages them to address multiple questions raised in their own mind. As such many stories can be told at once leading to the idea of a layered, rather than linear, narrative.

The enormous power that this projection based on aural prompting has, the scientific evidence for which has been shown throughout this dissertation, is demonstrated by *A* when he tells the actor of [Scenario \(Clip\) 7](#) that he felt he physically metamorphosed into somebody much older, stating that even his mouth aged ([Clip 14, 00:02:08](#)). It seems lip-synching, then, has the potential to not only add complexity to a character by creating multi-layering, but also can change our perception of the actor's physicality to fit in with the identity of the speaker. An idea which has potential in character presentation – as if, like the drag artists mentioned in Chapter 1, the donning of a voice is synonymous with the putting on of a theatrical costume. In [Scenario \(Clip\) 9](#) *D* even visually projected a costume as well as physicality onto the actor ([Clip 14, 00:20:10](#)).

Modern technology and careful application, then, can not only help present character, but takes movie ghost artistry as a way of manipulating identity - such as we saw between Marnie Nixon and Deborah Kerr in *The King and I* – into the live theatre context and to a whole new, multi-layered level of powerful illusion.

Returning to the idea of presenting theatre narrative without finite answers, this is not a new concept - political practitioners have been using it for some time to encourage discourse. The difference here, though, that there are so many potential permutations between the aural and visual modalities that, rather than highlighting a single, specific issue, it has the dramatic potential to raise many ideas simultaneously. In [Scenario \(Clip\) 8](#), when explaining his projection of Martin Luther King onto the actress, *D* talks about 'voice having a colour' ([Clip 14, 00:8:16](#)). This idea of voice making personality transparent reflects many of the quotes made by the voice practitioners in Chapter 2. However in [Scenario \(Clip\) 10](#) *D* is shocked when the two speakers who have Scottish dialects revealed that they were, in fact, Asian, meaning he had to address and shift all the prejudicial assumptions that he had previously projected about voice, race and identity ([Clip 14, 00:29:25](#)). At the same time the exposition of the gender, age, relationship, race and nationality of the speakers – all of which were subverted by the actors - was drip fed in such a way ([Clip 10, 00:01:23](#)) that it not only

challenged prejudices but simultaneously provided exposition to the characters identity and/or subtext. In addition by having men synching it raised political issues for R about gender and violence ([Clip 10, 00:27:56](#)), while for D it was more poignant, human issues about childhood that were evident ([Clip 14, 00:28:19](#)). Once again we see a variety of multi-layered responses to the same event, each with its own relevance to the observer.

It appears, therefore, that lip-synching has the potential to add value to scenarios less by clarifying them, but more by creating a kind of ‘cubist’ effect that - like life and the world around us - is ambiguous and multi-faceted in both reality and in our perception of character, situation, and message. It is contra-modal and therefore more complex than a streamlined, uni-modal presentation would be. Lip synching is not only poly-scenic but could also be called poly-thematic, poly-persona or poly-genre, in that through its many incongruity possibilities remarkably complex dynamics can be created between the modalities, actors and audience, and these can exist simultaneously within the same scene creating something which is not singularly finite but multi layered.

In terms of storytelling, then, it is less about trying to develop linear narrative via systematic exposition, and is more about creating a series of multi faceted moments that can both enhance and challenge the projections and prejudices of the audience, and reflecting the true complexities and ambiguities of life and the human condition.

Character, Words, Subtext and the Inner Voice

As has just been seen lip-synching can be used to effect how we perceive the identity of a character, and also how it can be used to raise socio-political dialogue in an Epic style staging, but in setting up the practice I theorised that the most obvious way to incorporate it when wanting to reveal the inner life of a character, particularly in a naturalistic context, would be to use the material as a kind of aural subtext. That by juxtaposing the character’s public actions with the recording we might get an insight into the psychology of the character - almost like an aural aside (as can be seen in [Scenario \(Clip\) 9](#) where a condemned man synchs

to a song that is clearly not being heard by the other characters, whilst being administered with a lethal injection). It turns out to be not quite as cut and dried as that.

In the Martin Luther King scenario, as has been seen, there are many interpretations of who the actress might be and what she might be doing because this is left deliberately vague in the staging. In [Scenarios \(Clips\) 9 and 10](#), however, where the actors physically work against the material and stick to a separate narrative action, there are some, but fewer, questions presented regarding their intended identity and situation. They are performed naturalistically with a unity of time and place so it is clear this is a man being executed ([Clip 9](#)), and it is clear these are two men having a cup of tea ([Clip 10](#)). This is supported by the presence of props and other actors, which is significant because it provides visual cues that more clearly establish a recognisable context and ground it in a specific place.

Therefore the question is asked: what does lip-synching add to these naturalistic scenes? In terms of character and exposition it seems that by juxtaposing the physical action against the soundtrack more focus is put on the *character* rather than the *words* - an observation that was made by *A* ([Clip 14, 00:22:51](#)) and picked up on a number of times throughout the interview. In [Scenario \(Clip\) 8](#) - that uses verbal material and no physical disconnect - there is a greater sense of the actor being totally manipulated (in a puppetry sense) by the material and, although there are complex poly-scenic properties in play, the focus seems to be on the speech and verbal expression rather than the action, and as such the words become paramount. For example *S* found that the phrase 'all men are one' said by a female with a male voice made him aware of a glaring absence in the rhetoric of this speech that he had not noticed before ([Clip 14, 00:09:00](#)) and this created in him a sense of a troubling act of appropriation ([Clip 14, 00:09:27](#)). In [Scenario \(Clip\) 10](#) which also uses verbal material but with a physical disconnect the words are of some importance to the story, as they create their own narrative, but the focus is more on questions about the characters. By juxtaposing the male physical characterisation with female voices - so the two actors continue behaving like men even though the recording suggests they are female - it makes for a more endearing insight

into the private world of their personality and the men come across as tragi-comic. This is deemed by the observers to be more dramatically interesting (Clip 14, 00:028:17) than if it had been performed verbatim with the two actors using their own voices (Clip 14, 00:28:29). In this instance, in terms of character exposition, the subversion of the visual against the aural seems to provide an insight into the men's softer, feminine sides, and is of dramatic interest even though the situation is quite mundane. Interestingly we do not seem to consider that it might be the other way round - that is might be about two women showing their masculine sides - showing once again that it is the visual that dominates the narrative, and creating the physical/aural disconnect lessens the interpretive permutations.

In Scenario (Clip) 9 (musical material/ physical disconnect) as \mathcal{A} observes, the words are virtually irrelevant (Clip 14, 00:23:13) and the song is 'just underpinning your performance' (Clip 14, 00:24:14). It is the physical trajectory of the scene that we follow as narrative.

However to say that the song is just underpinning, and that because the words are not directly congruent to the scene, adding nothing to character exposition, is perhaps to miss some of the nuances that it reveals. Because there is no response from the other characters to the lip-synching of the protagonist the initial conclusion is made that this is something going on within the character's head – like Dennis Potter's *Singing Detective* in Chapter 1. In this sense, as was outlined in the last chapter, the soundtrack becomes something that replaces his inner voice - either as a distraction, a thought process, a psychotic response or a combination - something we as audience become privy to and can be called 'subtext'. As the character's emotions and situation become more desperate so they become more juxtaposed to the mood of the song and so the space between the 'text' (or in this case action narrative) and the subtext becomes wider and more dramatic (Clip 14, 00:21:13). The tempo gives the sense of urgency of what it is like to have limited time (Clip 14, 00:19:39), as well as provides thematic echoes of criminals trying to talk their way out of a situation (the song is sung by a hustler working a crowd). So it is not just - or even - the specific verbal narrative of the material that is important, but the mood and the intention. It need not be the literal verbal details of the

inner monologue that create exposition and subtext (as in [Scenario \(Clip\) 10](#)), but a general atmosphere that acts as a poetic metaphor for the entire inner state being experienced by the character in that moment. In many ways this provides a more direct communication between subtext and audience than traditional, naturalistic approaches that rely on an audience's capacity to empathise based on subtle human expression to be effective. It is almost hallucinatory, and rather than presenting an internal linear monologue can demonstrate the entire state of a character's mind.

At the end of the scene, where the character dies and stops synching, the soundtrack carries on ([Clip 10, 00:02:29](#)). This moment of the voice living on proves to be very powerful for the observers ([Clip 14, 00:21:21](#)) not only, I suspect, because the moment of death is always chilling, but because it reveals that the soundtrack *cannot* have been the character's inner monologue as was originally thought. Since the narrative does not make sense for it to have come from a supernatural source it means that only the observers themselves can only have supplied it. This means it is not the inner voice of the actor - who is just synching as a puppet - that the audio material is supplanting, but that of the observer, and this is possibly why this moment is so alarming, since there is a subconscious realisation that this must be the case and it might, in fact, be us who are trying to mollify the violence of the scene rather than the character

This phenomenon is also evidenced in [Scenario \(Clip\) 12](#) where the actor synchs to a montage of rapidly edited sounds with the intention of presenting a character with schizophrenia. However what emerges, and is expressed by *R*, is that the material is less an exposition of her inner linear monologue and more an immersive experience of what it would be like to be her ([Clip 14, 00:41:20](#)). Once again it is not just the aural narrative that creates the subtext, but the quality of the material itself - both tonally and in terms of the grain of the recording - that gives a direct sense of a character's phenomenological state. This has enormous potential in storytelling, since an elusive element of theatre development has been the question of how to make an audience experience directly a character's inner state (in

narrative terms called *diagesis*, as opposed to *mimesis*, which is the act of demonstrating).

Traditional and contemporary drama has mostly been *mimetic* in its approach since in theatre there is almost always a disconnect between the performance and the direct experience of the audience. Despite many efforts to break down this barrier, it is usually the audience which ends up having to make the internal adjustments necessary to make sense of the piece.

Naturalism, for example, relies on empathetic capacity, expressionism on a capacity to let go of the literal, and Epic theatre on non-emotional engagement. However by plugging the subtext of a character directly into the ear of an audience- whether literal or poetic- they are able to directly share the inner life of the character without any need for personal adjustment. It is not, as at first thought, the inner voice of the actor that dons an aural mask and creates the magic; it is the inner voice of the audience.

In terms of character exposition, then, we can see that a change in relationship between the physical and aural dynamics, and whether these are chosen to be performed congruently or incongruently to each other, can change the observer's understanding of the material and the level to which it is the words or the character that are of primary focus. Lip-synching can not only directly develop character exposition by adding literal subtext, but by creating a soundscape in which the character exists, creating not only a context but an atmosphere that can reflect the inner state of the character in poetic terms. It is the observer who ultimately supplants the sound to the scene, not only as a projection of the verbal content as we saw above (which places focus on the words themselves), but as an immersive contributor whose inner voice is temporarily possessed by the soundtrack, and is consequently effected in such a way that they get an embodied sense of what it might be like to be that character in that moment.

Supernatural, Fantasy and Diegetics

For Scenario (Clip) 7, where the actor *channels* Thomas Edison, I deliberately created a *supernatural* effect by having the actor synch with minimum movement to a grainy recording. The observers pick up on the uncanny element very quickly and *S* refers to the character as

‘possessed’ (Clip 14, 00:01:38). Beyond this it did not raise much excitement in terms of exposition and it seems that, probably because of its heritage, the explicitly supernatural is by now a familiar, almost mundane, application.

All the scenarios could be interpreted as fantasies on some level. However in Scenarios (Clips) 11 and 13 this fantasy element is more overt. In Clip 11 three psychologists show professional etiquette while internally announcing their psychological method to be superior – demonstrated by juxtaposing hyper-naturalism with out-and-out theatricality performed to the sound track of three strippers declaring it is not quality but gimmickry that counts. Interestingly this ironic parallel between the material content and the scene is only picked up by *J* (Clip14, 00:54:36) and for the rest it is a classic example of a device to demonstrate the inner ‘drag’ diva in all of us (Clip 14, 00:34:29). As such it is mostly seen as a classic example of a ‘dream sequence’ to show the desired intentions and personality of a character, and the fact that the synching was done to a musical soundtrack seems to have aided in this interpretation, since it is a familiar convention in musicals and movies (Clip 14, 00:033:50). There is a danger, then, when employing fantasy sequences, of any subtle story content being lost within the spectacle.

Scenario (Clip) 13 uses fantasy more in the way described by Potter in Chapter 1 – that is to express the inexpressible when heightened conflict or pain threatens to tip the narrative into melodrama. The schizophrenic patient seen in Scenario (Clip) 12 is interviewed by one of the psychiatrists and the scene merges in and out of a lip-synched recreation of a television interview with Judy Garland. Interestingly the nature of her condition is only expressed by *J*, and he assumes it not to be schizophrenia, but mutism with the lip-synching ‘scaffolding her’ (Clip14, 00:39:05). Once again we see that as opposed to some of the more complex interpretations of subtext seen in previous scenes, merging into fantasy is more readily accepted as a convention that reveals something about repressed material in a broad sense. It is less multi levelled and plays out less as representative of the character’s (or audience’s) inner monologue, and more as an overall sense of the state of someone’s whole private world.

One difference between the way the effect of fantasy is achieved, [Scenario \(Clip\) 11](#) and [13](#), is that the performances move to and fro between acting styles, and so between mimesis and diegesis, differently. The transference between naturalism and lip-synching is sudden in [Scenario \(Clip\) 13 \(00:00:36\)](#) and gradual in [Scenario \(Clip\) 11\(00:00:01\)](#) and this creates different responses to the narrative of the scene as it effects where the sound is perceived to be coming from, and how it is integrated into the scene ([Clip 14, 00:48:10 & 00:44:50](#)). Some of the observers pick up on this and remark on the possibilities of lip-synching as a diegetic tool that, like a film soundtrack, can either embed sound into the live action or have it coming as if from an external source ([Clip 14, 00:46:10](#)). In fact, as *J* states 'it cuts across the diegetic, non-diegetic divide' ([Clip 14, 00:51:34](#)) in that lip-synching, as has already seen in [Scenario \(Clip\) 9](#), can be ambiguous, and as in [Scenario \(Clip\) 13](#) can jump between many suggestions of the source of sound within the same scene - both literally and in the audience perception of the fantasy/subtext storyline. The fact is we do not know with any certainty where the sound is coming from, we only know it is there because we can hear it and it is being responded to on stage. Not only does this have value as a storytelling tool in terms of scene transition, but also in controlling how the integration of sound can be manipulated to change the relationship between the audience and the action, even in the middle of a scene. Much to the annoyance, I am sure, of the voice purists seen in [Chapter 2](#) lip-synching can be viewed as live and not-live simultaneously, and this creates a unique dramatic space in which to storytell.

Sound, Media and Convention

It has already been shown that lip-synching has the power to advance and deepen a narrative, and that it can easily be integrated into a theatrical story as a fantasy, supernatural, political and subtextual tool. However to become a storytelling convention it has to be accepted as something other than a distracting novelty or demonstration of skill. It needs to be something the audience receives without question.

In [Practice 1](#) it was found that different audio media created different effects on lip-synching, and in order to see if this was something the observers would be able to identify I used the

same external, non-mobile sound system and volume for all the pieces, thus using it as a control.

Initially, in scene 1, all observers remarked that the lip-synching, although effective, jarred in some way. *D* puts this down to the fact that he had not got used to the sound coming from two directions (Clip 14, 00:00:26) while *S* believes it is because he had not been given time to get used to the conceit (Clip 14, 00:01:19). The former might show that a mobile amplifier would have better served the scene, which is certainly what Practice 1 results would suggest. However the latter points to the idea that time might be needed to acclimatize to the concept – as already seen in the example of *L'arrivee d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*.

All the observers, however, at some point remark that there was a moment where they suddenly realise that they had ceased to be aware of the sound source and accepted it as part of the scene. This was particularly in evidence with *A* who specialises in media and was initially preoccupied with the technological effects but later expresses surprise that he had forgotten them altogether.

The times that the effects became intrusive again were in Scenario (Clip) 9, where the skill of lip-synching to the patter song appeared more acrobatic, and the observers were more in awe of the technique than the content, and Scenario (Clip) 12 where it was felt the sound would have been better placed if seeming to come from the same direction as the speaker – which confirms the discoveries made in Practice 1 that in more intimate and personal soliloquies a split in sound direction or volume can distract from the illusion or content.

A surprising discovery to the media is that all responded to the idea that the mute character in scene 7 probably experienced the imagined interview 'on a loop' (Clip 14, 00:42:00). This was suggested by the historic nature of the recording that is inherent in its sound quality and ties in with the notion discussed on chapter 2 of recordings having within them some sense of inevitability and history. This is summarized by *R* when she refers to the 'transparency and opacity of the medium' (Clip 14, 00:52:03) stating that sometimes the presence of scratches

are important (Clip 14, 00:52:26); as well as *D* who states that ‘lip-synching is not just about lip-synching to a recorded voice, but to a recorded sound’ (Clip 14, 00:52:46).

Therefore although, as was suggested in chapter 2, recorded material contains within it a uniqueness that cannot help but add its own *liveness* to a theatre situation, it also possesses a particular grain that is recognised as recorded and this quality, in itself, provides a particular resonance that can be utilized as a theatrical convention to advance spatial/temporal atmospheres and character development in a way no other current conventions can. Almost as an answer to the whole theses question *D* states, and the other observers confirm, that ‘this could very easily be a ninety minute performance...I thought there was real potential for this not to be, you know, a funny exercise but something that could be the theatrical language found to tell a particular story in a really interesting way’ (Clip 14, 00:55:10)

CONCLUSION

When originally posing the thesis question I had not appreciated the rich seam of possibilities that lip-synching would reveal.

Through research from primary and secondary sources, leading up to the final practice it is discovered that many of the applications and themes already used in film media to advance plot and character are transferable to a live theatre context without profaning any existing concepts of the performance being regarded as *live*.

Lip-synching is more than a simple case of moving the mouth in time to recorded material but is an embodied skill that, far from flattening the performer to the media, enriches the relationships between the performer, the speaker, the space, the history and both recorded and live contexts.

From a performer's perspective it requires discipline and is difficult to learn autonomously. It has associations with the skill of puppetry and requires emotional connection. That this may also mean it has value as an acting or vocal training tool has been seen to be possible and it would be interesting to further this research.

As in all illusions the technique is either right (i.e. the illusion is effective) or it is wrong and in Practice 1 it was discovered that certain applications, such as playing just below the natural physical size, adjusting the media placement /volume and thinking in terms of voice-synching (utilizing all of the vocal apparatus) went some way achieve this. These are by no means finite but they open the door for continued research opportunities to refine these discoveries.

In terms of story-telling lip-synching has the potential to provide multi dimensional exposition that is non linear and not always explicit in its intention. This is due to the fact that, provided the illusion (whether congruent or incongruent) is intact, it is the audience as much as the performers who are being inhabited by the voice; and the drama takes place as a result of the frictions between the visual performance and each individual's associations and projections taken from the audio media. One of the challenges for future research might be to find out whether, and if so how, a director might manage these interpretations in order to refine precisely which theme or storyline they wish to highlight.

Exploring different combinations of physical narrative, aural media and staging the method has been seen to highlight verbal content, advance character, create atmosphere and introduce political debate. Its power lies in the fact that it can do all of these simultaneously if required, crossing the boundaries of traditional, polemical genre and staging.

The power of storytelling seen in Practice 2, and the responses to it, demonstrates that further exploration of these combinations, and the complex relationships that have already been revealed between subtext and fantasy; words and character; audience and performer; mask and puppet – as well as many others - would make for worthwhile continued research built upon the findings presented here.

Applied well lip-synching has been seen to be quickly accepted by an audience and as such can be assimilated as a convention, not only in terms of exposition but as a diegetic tool and method of transmitting a character's experiences directly to that of the audience. As such it contains potentially massive, untapped power as a storytelling tool, particularly if viewed in the context of our current era of ubiquitous audio technology.

Although I am sure the debate will continue as to its right to be applied to a live theatre context, from an audience's perspective lip-synching has as much potential to be assimilated as a convention as any existing staging technique, and the practices detailed in this thesis have shown how it could potentially unlock a whole world of new storytelling possibilities in a live theatre context.

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APPENDIX 1

Practice Day 1 Notes: Structure, Analysis, Results and Conclusions

The plan for the day is as follows:

10.30 - 10.45 Short physical and vocal warm to ensure any changes are not simply due to 'warming up' of the apparatus. Close attention paid to direct experience of self using mindfulness/Feldenkrais approaches

TRAINING

10.45 -11.15

Each person performs their song to widely amplified source:

- 1) Singing using own voice (important this is 'cold' as none of the participants are trained singers)
- 2) Lip -synching
- 3) Singing using own voice

11.15-11.45

Direct experience check in and recorded reflection

Q1. In observing the other's performances did you note any changes, and if so what?

a) Physically?

b) Vocally?

c) In Characterisation

Q2. Do you observe any differences in your own musculature? (E.g. Tension, placement, availability, relationship to that place etc)?

a) Vocal apparatus ?

b) Physical apparatus?

Q3. Do you observe any difference in your global experience of yourself (personality, mood, breathing pattern, thoughts etc)?

Q4. How did lip-synching help or hinder your own sense of your performance of the song?

Q5. How did performing the lip-synching subsequently change your experience of the non lip-synched performance?

a) character/story/staging

b) personal sense of performance effectiveness during and post performance (Eg: shifts in self-consciousness, capacity to respond to material, sense of achievement/failure etc)?

11:45-12.00

Break

12.00 - 1.00

PERFORMANCE

Researching the connection between lip synching and performance, objectively and subjectively.

Taking the spoken audio material each actor:

a) Sits and speaks at as they have practiced.

- b) Analyses and copies only the breath pattern
- c) Slowly mouths the phonetics of the sentence, focusing on the aesthetics and physical sense rather than the meaning.
- d) Hums the intonations of the material (possibly while 'conducting' the sounds.)
- e) Abstractly physicalises the intonation of the material, and then returns to the hum.
- f) Connects with the feeling of the speech using emotional memory exercise from own personal experience (Stanislavski? Adler? Strasberg? Whichever is felt applicable).
- g) Imagines the given circumstances, who they may be talking to and what they hope to change in them.
- h) Actually speaks the piece naturalistically - trying to recreate the material exactly.
- i) Performs the piece to the material as a caricature
- g) Actually speaks the piece expressively in a caricatured, over the top manner.

Each of the stages will be video recorded, and after each one the performers will enact their lip-synched material and gauge any perceived difference in:

- 1) Illusion accuracy
- 2) Phenomenological performance experience.

Noting their results on a questionnaire sheet. The results of the subjective and objective recorded material will be compared at a later date to compare between them.

1.00- 2.00

Lunch

2.00 - 3.00

ILLUSION

Researching effectiveness of lip-synching technique as illusion to spoken audio material using a scale system of 1 to 7:

1= No muscular movement

2

3

4= Natural muscular movement

5

6

7= Most extreme muscular movement

Each number is a measured grade larger than the previous as sensed by the actors and repeated 3 times, to ensure consistency. They record on a visual sliding scale the sense that they have of being connected to the material, and their imagined efficacy of it.

Once again these are video recorded but played back to the actors to discuss, with myself:

a) which seems the most effective (recorded).

b) any responses to the others

3.15 -4.00

MEDIA

Experimenting with difference between artificial sound producing systems in their effect on lip-synching:

1. Global sound system: Actors perform spoken material which is introduced through the space's sound system at 7 incrementing volumes from quiet to loud. These will be ideo

recorded though this will be for evidence only for not for feedback as the sound will be distorted through the recorder. Through experimentation decisions can be made over:

- a) Which volume level creates the best illusion (this can be fine tuned?)
- b) Which volume level creates the least effective illusion?
- c) The dramatic effect of other volume levels.

2. Mobile phones

3. Personal mobile sound system. Again they perform both pieces. Technical issues that may be expected may be:

- a) Disturbance of the device during movement
- b) Cueing of the material.

A further stage may be added which is that of a music player live on stage.

4.00-4.30

RESPONSE

Recorded interview with the actors led by following questions:

1. What do they feel about the recorded material having worked with it all day?
2. Which part(s) of the day did they feel had made the profoundest improvements on their performance - both in terms of their lip-synch skill and character expression?
3. Was there any part they felt was reductive (or neutral) either to their skill or to their relationship with the character or their sense of the efficacy of their performance?
Independently of lip-synching as a skilled device, and based on their theatre training

experiences to date, do they think anything they did today might support performer development- either within training or rehearsal?

4. Was the work pleasant or a chore?
5. What was the biggest surprise - about the work and about their response to it?

Lip synch research day: 1

RESULTS

T DIRECT QUOTES

B DIRECT QUOTES

TRAINING

Taking into account that neither of the participants were singers nor dancers, and that this was deliberately set up as the inaugural exercise to see how long it would take for the usual self consciousness (and terror) to sing to dissipate, it is notable that the degree of comfort that was assumed after the relatively short experience of lip - synching was quicker than many other traditional ‘warm up’ exercises. Both participants talk about feeling freer after synching.

	Mark (observer)	T	B
1. Observed changes in non-LS performance after LS experience.	<p>Less fixed concentration/ more physical freedom.</p> <p>Less inclined to ‘mug’ or over-mouth after LS.</p> <p>Greater psychological connection to the song.</p>	<p>(Observing B) concentration more visible before than after.</p> <p>Seemed to enjoy the humour of the character’s situation more.</p>	<p>(Observing T) Kept eyes open and was less fixed.</p> <p>Greater sense of voice being centred.</p>

2. Muscular changes	<p>Unaware of any massive difference in voice. Only that which came through increased confidence.</p> <p>Less overworked use of mouth, eyes and face in general.</p> <p>More work going on in whole body – subtler facial expression.</p>	Over mouthing before – ‘showing synchronisation’	<p>Less self conscious and therefore freer.</p> <p>Less worried about ‘how to sit’</p>
3. Global experience.	<p>B gained a lot more confidence – was more expressive and available to the expression of the song.</p> <p>Both seemed less concerned about ‘showing ‘ the audience the skill.</p> <p>They seemed to be more interested in allowing the character, rather than impersonating them. They gave</p>	More comfortable, due to getting used to the situation.	<p>Sense of ‘what’ I was performing.</p> <p>Better relationship with audience.</p> <p>‘RELATIONSHIP WITH FAKE AUDIENCE MADE ME FEEL BETTER ABOUT REAL AUDIENCE. I WAS OWNING SOMEBODY ELSE’S SUCCESS’</p>

	the character in themselves more respect and trust.		
4. How did LS help or hinder your sense of performance of song.	Both were more connected and 'believable' as the character. Less strained.	'IT FELT LIKE AN INTERPRETATION OF AN INTERPRETATION, NOT AN INTERPRETATION OF THE SONG. I WAS CAUGHT BETWEEN COMPARING THE TWO AND LETTING MY OWN OINTERPRETATION TAKE OVER'	Less inhibited.
5. What did lip-synching change in experience?		<p>Enjoyed the freedom of 'LETTING THE RECORDED VOICE GIVE PERMISSION TO EXTEND THE STAGING AND ACT IT OUT PHYSICALLY'.</p> <p>Focus became more about the 'STORY TELLING'</p> <p>No sense of warm up in facial muscles.</p>	<p>Felt character clearer</p> <p>ENJOYED TAKING OWNERSHIP OF TOM LEHRER'S VOICE.</p>

PERFORMANCE

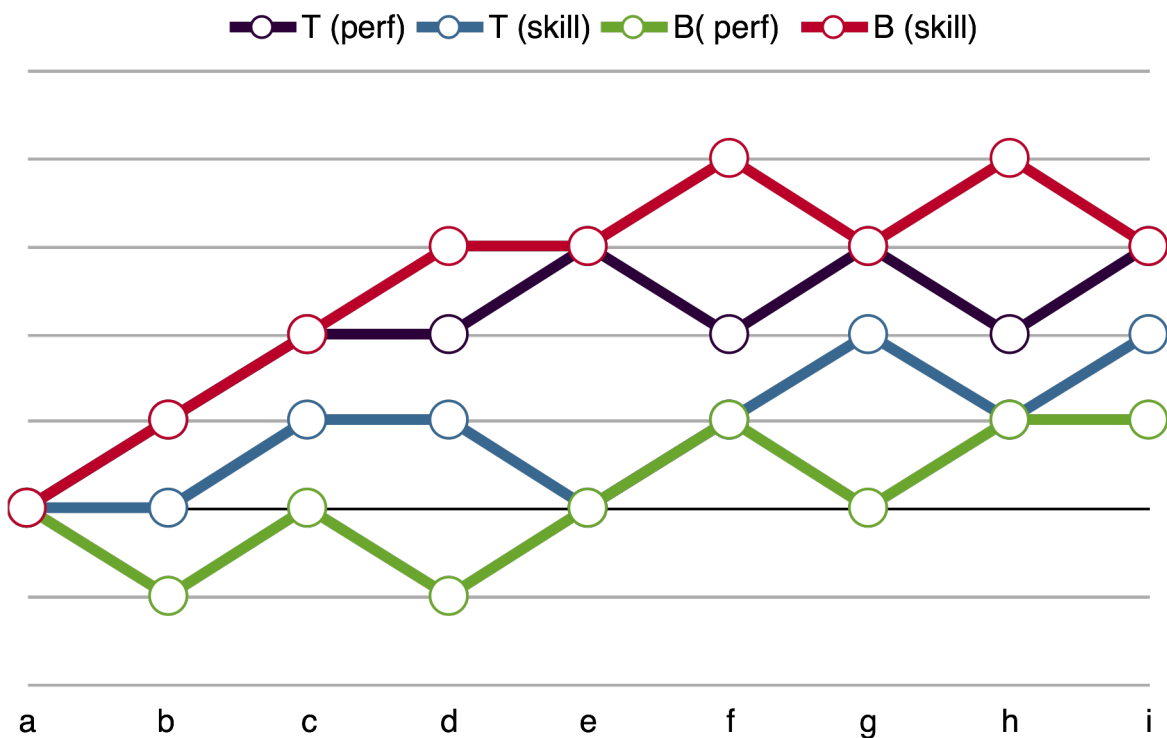
The differences between the eventual recorded material and the original questions laid out in the questionnaire are highlighted below.

Taking the spoken audio material each actor:

- a) Sits and speaks at as they have practiced.
- b) Analyses and copies only the breath pattern
- c) Slowly mouths the phonetics of the sentence, focusing on the aesthetics and physical sense rather than the meaning.
- d) Hums the intonations of the material (possibly while conducting' the sounds.
- e) Connects with the feeling of the speech using emotional memory exercise from own personal experience (naturalism -Stanislavski? Adler? Strasburg? Whichever is felt applicable)?
Speaks the speech
- f) Actually speaks the piece naturalistically - trying to recreate the material exactly
- g) Performs the piece to the material as a caricature
- h) Actually speaks the piece expressively in a caricatured, over the top manner.
- I) Restricts all movement (I' only)

Before noting down on graph whether such a practice has improved/marred their experience and perception of their LS as performance and as skill.

T and B had reverse perceptions of themselves. While B had more confidence in experience for T the reverse was true.

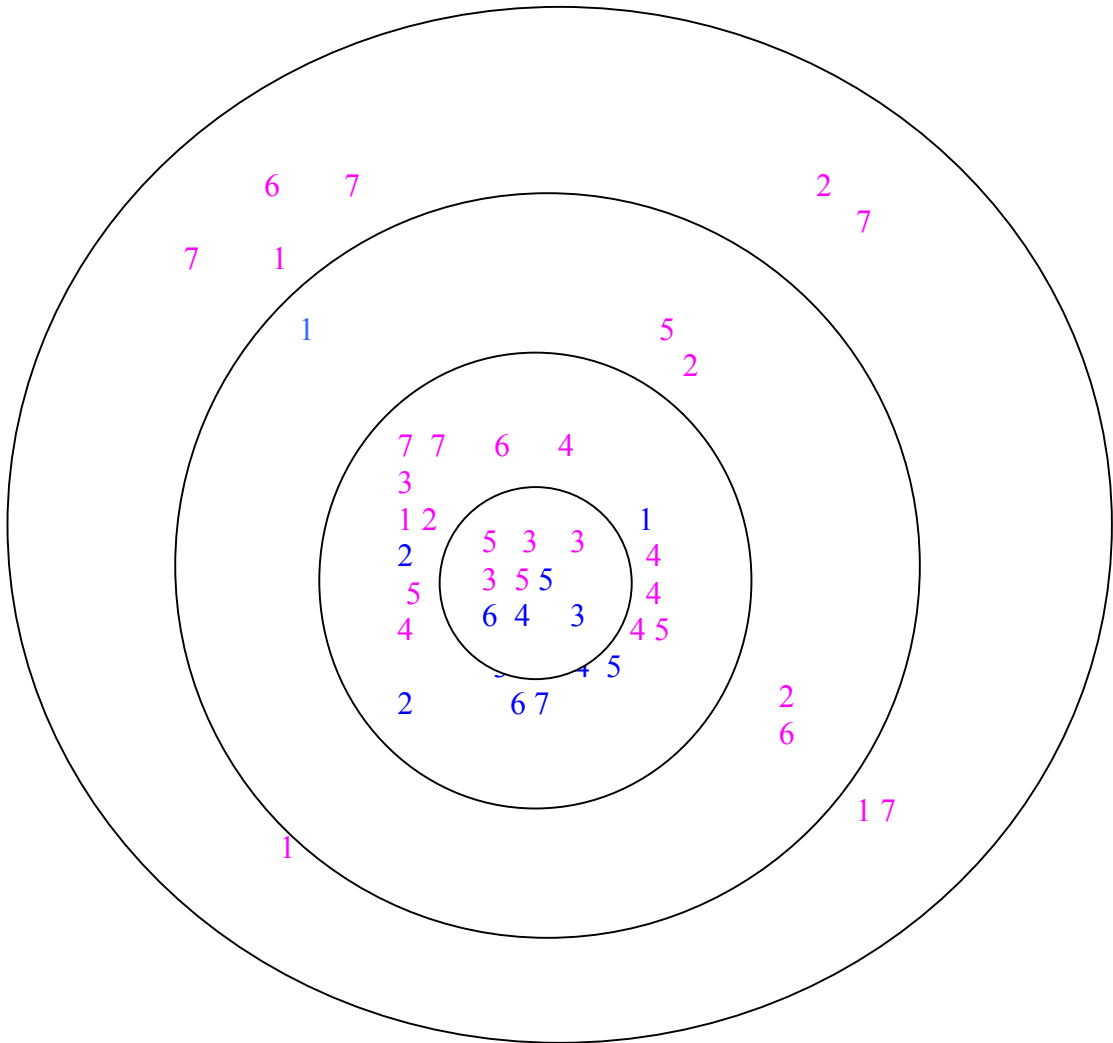


The only place where all perceived an improvement in every aspect is c- mouthing the phonetics. Interestingly this improvement was less evident in the actual performance.

The only places that T and B agreed on an improvement in accuracy was c and e - emotional memory. Interesting as one might expect this to improve experience more than accuracy. Ties in with the above, that by connecting emotionally somehow the LS slots in.

The improvements were mostly consistent from an observer's POV. b, f, g, and h (breath, recreating piece, caricature, over the top) were improvements in both, while there was some improvement on e. c and d showed a lessening of effectiveness, though apart from B's accuracy rating, all saw these as an improvement. There is a DISCREPANCY, between the performers experience of themselves and their perception of their efficacy, and the actuality as seen by an audience.

ILLUSION



On scale of 1 to 7 from smallest to largest lip movements the general consensus was that; 1 – Ineffective

2 – More effective but still ineffective

3- B also felt herself being most accurate. T saw and felt improvement from 2. All agreed as observer this was the most effective.

4. Although 'reality' the movement was interestingly too big. More effective than 2, less effective than 3 as agreed by B. T and me felt slightly more effective than 3 but much more for his own sense of himself

5. T felt these were most successful for him and in observing B I felt in T it was an improvement on 4 but still not as effective as 3. B thought he had not improved on 4. B felt it was good for her, I did not.

6. T thinks effective but not shared by B and myself. For me it was his worst. For B his second worst.

7. Agreed this was unsuccessful for both

Observations:

Once again experience of actors is not a good measure.

Illusion most effective when lips move below the size of normal speaking.

The bigger the voice the more the rest of the face became involved. It seems to stay under 2 the eyes had to die. I suspect 3 allows us to project while 5 is delivering something to us.

MEDIA -VOLUME

Varying volumes from EXTERNAL SOUND SYSTEM:

Softest (1)	2	3	4	5	6	Loudest (7)
Least effective - looks as if the sound system has gone wrong.		<p>'She compensated for the slight lack of volume by making more physical, which made it more authentic'</p> <p>Agreed most effective. Although may depend on the acoustic of the space- that we have an awareness</p>	<p>Although most 'neutral' less effective than just below and above in terms of usefulness.</p>	<p>'It was if she was miked up. - Which had a potential usefulness.'</p>		<p>Does not work as illusion, but creates sense of voice coming from other place. More brechtian. It is not hiding the voice behind illusion- it is deliberate. It has power as the idea of someone 'playing' someone or</p>

	of how the space should sound.			being 'played' by the voice' Again the idea of 'possession' .IT PLACES A GREATER EMPHASIS ON THE WORDS, IF THE PERFORMER IS STILL, THAN IF REALLY SPEAKING.
	<u>MOST NATURAL/ILLUSION</u>		<u>EFFECTIVE IF FORMALITY REQUIRED</u>	<u>MOST POWERFUL THEATRICALITY</u>
"Most difficult as felt most disconnected from voice"				'Felt the easiest, as if I was inside the energy of her voice.'

Phenomenological
Observer

MEDIA- MOBILE PHONE.

The mobile phone sounds automatically electric/mechanical therefore hiding it does not work. It is most effective when seen explicitly by the audience to be the source of the sound; otherwise it looks like a sound effect gone wrong.

Having the source visible also adds to the sense of focussing on the voice as a method of expression. It is daring. We are unsure where the sound is coming from. We normally assume a voice is coming from the mouth, but this unsettles us. It is like ventriloquism. We enjoy the illusion but it is the same time unsettling as it is like an 'aural illusion- we cannot take in both concepts (mouth produced/electric produced). At the same time so we have to fix on one- and we are more used to sound coming from the mouth.

- a) Phone held close to face- effective illusion. Raises the question in the observer as to whether the actor is synching to own voice or to someone else's, and if the mediated voice is live or not. This has potential in adding levels to storytelling.
- b) Phone in sight but on chair at distance - effective illusion. Less ambiguous than a) as the placing of the media appears deliberate. Also movement of the syncher around the space does not effect the illusion. Once the illusion is accepted it maintains itself without the need for any acoustic adjustment.
- c) Held by another actor at a distance – effective illusion. This has the best balance of theatricality and naturalism. We accept the theatrical conceit very quickly.
- d) Holding phone and addressing other actor - effective illusion. This is very sinister. It raises the sense of detachment of the syncher to the material and highlights themes of insincerity and manipulation.
- e) Other actor holding the phone and turning back on syncher- non-effective illusion. It strains the observer's potential to create congruity too much.
- e) Back to audience for prolonged period. – non-effective illusion.

MEDIA- MOBILE AMP

Easily the most natural if one wants to reduce the incongruity between syncher and material, giving a more immediate 'documentary' feel. The sound is most authentic as it can be held close to the actual source of the actual sound produced by the voice. However holding impacts on physicality so would need to attach to belt or tabard for maximum effect.

Holding amplifier at different places on body where most vocal resonance is produced (head chest and belly) it was found that having it close to the chest seems to recreate best the original source of the voice, perhaps because closest to the lungs where the muscularity of voice production originates, and was the most effective.

5. RESPONSE (OF PARTICIPANTS)

B

T

1. What do you currently feel about the recorded material having worked with it all day?

The wasteland feels finite, whereas the other, colloquial one still feels warm and still

Neutral. Not a bored as I might have anticipated.

2. Which part(s) of the day did you feel had made the profoundest improvements on your performance - both in terms of your lip-synch skill and character expression?

The effect on my physical movements and the understanding of the power of exaggerating verbal sounds.

The exercises where we were plotting accuracy

3. Was there any part you felt was especially reductive (or neutral) either to their skill or to their relationship with the character or their sense of the efficacy of their performance?

Too loud and too quiet volumes created a gap between performance and perception.

I feel like singing ourselves highlights the negative (i.e. 'fake) aspect of lip-synching, rather than what is does involve. Makes it harder to regard a live performance as a real 'live' performance.

4. Independently of lip-synching as a skilled device, and based on your theatre training experiences to date, do you think anything you did today might support performer development- either within training or rehearsal.

Vocal/physical levels could be changed extending size of character, scene or even style

Good tools for characterization and speech rhythm. Also more tangential things-like puppetry and attention might be explored.

5 Did it remind you of any other techniques you have learned?

Subtext exercises where someone mimes the subtext and another actor presents the fact.

Puppetry

6. Was the work pleasant or a chore?

Very pleasant and interesting

Pleasant

7. What was the biggest surprise - about the work and about your response to it?

That when actor and track merge it can be astounding . I spent the morning marveling at the spectacle.

Repeating the same 15 seconds of text did not become boring.

Conclusions and potential for continuation into story and exposition:

Illusion most effective:

9. When lip movement is slightly below neutral, unless deliberately stylizing.
10. Using emotional memory (in-out) with the material to connect the 'sound ' deeper and connect the eyes.)
11. Thinking in terms of VOICE SYNCHING rather than LIP SYNCHING
12. Thinking in terms of possession and puppetry rather than channeling and mask-work.
13. If using external audio system then just below or just above neutral volume depending on context.
14. With guidance from external observer. Performer experience is unreliable.
15. With mobile phone visible
16. Using mobile amp near chest

Potential for lip-synching in training

Vocal musculature	Negligible.
Voice	Negligible, some sense of freedom was expressed though not apparent externally
Physicality	Negligible. Habits not addressed
Character	Potential for getting into understanding of alien character or finding alternative expression
Expression	Potential as fast track approach to freeing expression and self-

consciousness

APPENDIX 2

Practice 2: Observers' Questionnaire

Lip synching and Its Potential as a Storytelling Device In a Theatrical Context

Mark Lacey – MA. Research in Practice

Name:

Area of expertise:

Date:

Many thanks for agreeing to take part in this research. Please be assured your names will not be used in the final dissertation or any other aspect of this practice.

You will be shown a series of short lip-synched scenarios. After each one you will be given time to write down notes on what you saw reflecting particularly on the following questions:

- a) Could you describe the scene you have just seen?
- b) Could you describe the character you have just seen and/or what is going on for them?
- c) Within your area of expertise can you note down anything of interest that comes to mind?

These will be discussed after therefore they may be noted as memory joggers rather than essays.

Note: You are not being asked to comment on whether the technique of lip synching works as an illusion. The performers have had less time to rehearse than they would

in a real set-up. Please try to ignore any 'errors' and focus on the potential of the story being told.