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Choralities

STEVEN CONNOR

Abstract

The voice has often been identified with the assertion of idiosyncrasy or exception (The Chanting Crowd: 'We are all individuals!' An Individual: 'I'm not.' Monty Python, *The Life of Brian*). This article explores why humans (though not uniquely them) feel urged to merge and magnify the individual voice through assimilating it to the voices of others. What are the powers, menaces, and satisfactions of these singular–plural megavoices, in choirs, collective chants, and other forms of what may be called *chorality*, that have become more familiar than ever in the mass spectacles ('audicles'?) of sport, entertainment, and politics? I suggest that the chorus represents the challenge of the inchoate, in that it is the making manifest of what menaces music, the matter that must be made into form, a reservoir of unschooled energy that must be converted to information. I suggest that there may be an implicit relation between the individual voice and the collective voice it may seem to convoke, such that every individual vocality has a connection to a phantasmal chorality. Finally, I consider the political force of chorality, and the fantasy focused on and through the collective voice, and what this means in a world that seems to have moved from the dominion of the mass to that of the multitude.

This article attempts to understand the strange and powerful plural–singular that is the choral voice. Though there is a rich literature within music history concerning the aesthetics and pedagogy of choral singing, there has been little study of collective voicing, as such and in its own terms yet across the broad range of its manifestations, and little account taken of the way in which choral music functions in this broader ecology of joint vocalizations. *Chorality* is the name I propose for such collective voice acts. Examples include prayer, children's games, formalized learning processes, and statements of fealty ('I pledge allegiance to the flag'), along with the chants of protest, demand or celebration found in political and sporting circumstances. Such acts may be divided into voluntary and involuntary forms. It may appear that the collective utterances of crowds and choirs are both in their way intended and agential. Yet it may as persuasively appear that the murmurs of pubs, crowds, and cocktail parties are a kind of semi-willed choric quasi-choation. There is scarcely any critical literature on chorality, as I have defined it, in this most general of ways. Even Fred Cummins, who has done more than most to investigate the phenomenon, focuses most of his attention on what he calls 'joint speech', and thereby sets aside many of the forms of chorality, either above the threshold of joint speech, in the direction of music, or below it, in the direction of hubbub, murmur, and buzz.

Email: skc45@cam.ac.uk

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The sublimated forms of the choric voice lift humans up into an angelic condition, but its less organized forms bring us close to the condition of the animal. The idea of the choric has often been focused on aggregated animal sounds, especially of insects and birds, where the sound may be much more apparent than the creatures making it. William James saw, or heard, what he saw as a law of fusion, in which '*any number of impressions, from any number of sensory sources, falling simultaneously on a mind* WHICH HAS NOT YET EXPERIENCED THEM SEPARATELY, *will fuse into a single undivided object for that mind*. The law is that all things fuse that *can* fuse, and nothing separates except what must.'[1] This means that the plurality of impressions experienced in the 'great blooming, buzzing confusion' of the infant assailed by different sense impressions will be experienced as a kind of unitary confusion, a primal dawning of chorus.[2] Animal choruses may instance the application of that law of fusion. Many animals have a strong impulsion to join their voices in what is known as 'chorusing', examples being the howling of wolves, the hooting of primates, the grunting of frogs, the swarming of bees, the singing of birds and cicadas, and even the sounds of certain larvae.[3] Bernie Krause has seen the origin of human music in the sounds of animal choruses.[4] Collective words for birds sometimes focus on their sound, especially in some of the words introduced by Dame Juliana Berners in the listing of 'the companyes of beestes and fowle' to be found in her *Boke of Saint Albans*, such as a 'gagyll of gees', an 'exaltyng of larkes' ('exaltation' means elevation, but we may hear in it the note of exulting), a 'clatherynge of choughes', a 'dule of turtylles' (turtledoves) and a 'murmuracyon of stares', the last most famously and successfully revived by W. H. Auden in his plea to love to 'make [man's] thought / Alive like patterns a murmuration of starlings / Rising in joy over wolds unwittingly weave'.[5] Berners also proposed a 'dissymulacyon of byrdes', perhaps hinting at their visual elusiveness, as well as a 'boste of souldyours', a 'laughter of ostlers', a 'melody of harpers' and an 'eloquence of lawyers'.[6]

It seems likely that chorality can often suggest that nourishing experience of the 'sonorous envelope' of which Didier Anzieu has written, which, for Anzieu, is modelled on the maternal voice, but, because of the uterine space in which that voice is first heard, is present in those spaces of 'rumblings, echoes and resonances' where sound provides a kind of matrix in which the subject may paradoxically be both suspended and supported, dissolved and defended.[7]

1 William James, *Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols (New York: Holt, 1890), 1:488.

2 James, *Principles of Psychology*, 1:488.

3 Pawel Fedurek, Anne Schel, and Katie Slocombe, 'The Acoustic Structure of Chimpanzee Pant-hooting Facilitates Chorusing', *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology* 67 (2013); Douglas Jones, Russell Jones, and Rama Ratnam, 'Calling Dynamics and Call Synchronization in a Local Group of Unison Bout Callers', *Journal of Comparative Physiology* A200.1 (2014); Petr Kocarek, 'Sound Production and Chorusing Behaviour in Larvae of Icosium tomentosum', *Central European Journal of Biology* 4 (2009).

4 Bernie Krause, *The Great Animal Orchestra: Finding the Origins of Music in the World's Wild Places* (London: Profile, 2012).

5 Dame Juliana Berners, *The boke of hawkynge huntynge and fysshynge with all the propertyes and medecynes that are necessarye to be kepte.* [*The Boke of Saint Albans*] (London: John Waley, 1547), sig. H4^{v}; W. H. Auden, *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings: 1927–1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), 118.

6 Berners, *Boke of hawkynge*, sig. H4^{v}, sig. I1^{r}.

7 Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, trans. Chris Turner (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 171.

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The poetry of Wordsworth and Keats are both strongly attuned to these choric sound-spaces, and Angela Leighton has evoked the cavernous 'hum' which also throbs through Tennyson's poetry, in the 'sounds, noises, rhythms, the murmurs and boomings which become Tennyson's special subject matter and music'.[8] In 'The Crowd of Birds and Children', W. S. Graham evokes a kind of aerial ocean of sound compounded of a child's memory of climbing the birdsong-crowded branches of trees, the poem's own internal assonances giving it the choric density it evokes:

> Beginning to be very still
> I know the country puffed green through the glens.
> I see the tree's folly appleing into angels
> Dress up the sun as my brother
> And climb slow branches and religious miracles.
> On the deck of the doved woods
> Upward unhappy and holy breaks voice of the crowd
> That has in my body built shape and its enemy.
> Through each harmonic orchard onewhere bloody
> With all that my choice chooses in Genesis
> The overhead rooks laugh up in a dark borough
> With fury making fear to the daybreaking mavis . . .
>
> And a sunk sea noise in the roosting forest house.
> Every flying thing the sky gives to a child
> To feed his wild crowd and to share his deed[9]

After six years thinking about ventriloquism and voices without assignable sources, I had to decide that there is no disembodied voice. That is, there can be no voice that does not imply and require the possibility of somebody, and more particularly some body, to utter it. There can be unassigned voices, but no unascribed ones. There are many different kinds of voice-body and more voice-bodies than one in any voice, or in any body.[10] In the choralized voice, this many-in-one becomes a kind of one-from-many. Choric voices may be regarded as a form of ventriloquism. It is not that the source of the sound is unknown or even exactly hidden, for it is often perfectly plain who is doing the singing or chanting in an instance of chorality. Rather, it is that the choric voice gives rise to the fantasy of a collective voice-body that is not to be identified with any of the individuals who compose it. So, in being neither concealed nor yet ever fully in view, present without being situated, the choric voice may be regarded as a particular instance of what Michel Chion has called the *acousmêtre* in cinema, a voice which is on the scene but unable to be seen – the voice of the Invisible Man, for

8 Angela Leighton, 'Tennyson's Hum', *Tennyson Research Bulletin* 9 (2010), 325.

9 W. S. Graham, *New Collected Poems*, ed. Matthew Francis (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), 48, 49.

10 Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 35–43.

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example.[11] This may account for the strange impression that one has when seeing somebody singing or chanting as part of a crowd that they are miming to the sound to which they are in fact contributing. Indeed, this may be part of the power of the choric, that it is at once so powerfully unifying and yet invisible. It seems to be intrinsic to every choir that it be the kind of 'choir invisible' evoked by George Eliot, which allows one to 'Be the sweet presence of a good diffused, / And in diffusion ever more intense.'[12] It is the sonorous actualizing of the otherwise abstract or merely attributive idea of a collectivity.

One and many

Choric utterance is almost always concerned with the establishment of solidarity. This may be what joins prayer and protest, which otherwise may seem, as Fred Cummins has observed, 'odd bedfellows'.[13] If humble imploring seems to be at the opposite extreme from hortative demand, the two have in common the need for a bracing intensification of common purpose, one which can both enlarge the uttering collectivity and solidify it, sealing in and rounding up all the variations of belief and feeling which might allow the diffusion of common purpose. We may suspect nevertheless that chorality is more closely allied to anger than to petition, precisely because anger is the *ne plus ultra* means of bringing our action and our belief into consonance, and forcing ourselves to be of one mind. If anger is a concentration of purpose in the interest of a discharge of energy, in fight or flight, we might think of an angry crowd as a special example of what Peter Sloterdijk has called an anger bank, or 'elevation (*Aufhebung*) of local anger resources and dispersed projects of hatred into an overarching instance', the task of which 'as for every authentic bank, consists in serving as a collection point and recycling agency for investments'.[14] A chanting crowd has the capacity not just to act as a 'storehouse of rage', but as a thymotic accumulator, in that the crowd's discharge of energy in utterance seems to be a way of recharging rather than depleting the anger.[15] Chorality provides the channel along which this feedback of anger can be conveyed.

Not only is chorality most commonly expressed in collective song, but also the choric is always subject to song's sirenic solicitation. For where I chant, whether it is in dittying the six times table or muttering the Apostles' Creed, my voice seems to be tugged, as the word 'chant' suggests, towards sung melody. Fred Cummins has hypothesized a continuum that runs from silent speech to monologue, then conversation, then, occupying the median position between speech and song, chant.[16] The governing principle of this speech-music continuum

11 Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 129–30.

12 George Eliot, *Collected Poems*, ed. Lucien Jenkins (London: Skoob Books, 1989), 50.

13 Fred Cummins, 'The Remarkable Unremarkableness of Joint Speech', *Proceedings of the 10th International Seminar on Speech Production* (Cologne, 2014), 73.

14 Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*, trans. Mario Wenning (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 62.

15 Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, 62.

16 Fred Cummins, 'Joint Speech: The Missing Link Between Speech and Music?' *Percepta: Revista de Cognição Musical* 1 (2013), 21.

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is that at each stage there is an increase in redundancy, as unpredictability gives way to greater regularity. The movement from voice to song increases redundancy by smoothing out all the variations in pitch, attack, and pace of individual speech. The crowd drawn into the condition of chorus submits to an equivalent increase in redundancy, literally the 'flowing back' of contingency on itself to allow intelligible messages to emerge from indeterminate noise. However, the kind of musicalized collective vocality we call 'chant' is pulled not just towards the increased redundancy of pitch and rhythm characteristic of song, but also back towards the more frayed and irregular prosody of speech. Collective vocality actually strives to preserve this equilibrium. This is perhaps because it needs to keep on dipping back into the reservoir of unbound noise of which it is formed in order to keep itself tensely energized. Voice is the opposite of noise, for voice always emerges from and stands out against noise, while noise always assaults voice. But choric vocality yields a voice that is compounded of, rather than subtracted from, noise: it is a background that starts forth, yet never fully separates from itself. Writers of hymns have sometimes harnessed and turned to account the profane noisiness of the hymn, doubled by the bronchial boom of the organ with all the stops, as we say, pulled out. One of Charles Wesley's hymns forces its singers to imitate the bacchanal their hymn nevertheless is meant to redeem:

> But ah! what means this frantic noise!
> Do these, good God, to Thee rejoice,
> Whose echoing shouts we hear!
> A beastly bacchanalian crowd!
> Whose oaths profane, and curses loud,
> Torment the sober ear?
>
> With foul and riotous excess,
> With surfeiting and drunkenness,
> They *magnify* Thy name;
> With vauntings proud, and impious jest,
> (The horrors of *Belshazzar's* feast,)
> They glory in their shame.
>
> The rich to Thy dread courts repair,
> And offering up their formal prayer
> As incense to the skies,
> With sports they close the hallow'd day,
> Their promised vows to Satan pay,
> An hellish sacrifice![17]

17 John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, 11 vols, ed. G. Osborn (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference, 1868–72), VI, 164–5.

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I don't do very much in the way of collective praying, but I do sometimes find myself, at weddings, funerals, or formal dinner tables where grace is said, called upon to give some kind of polite and audible assent to the act of prayer that is being performed, by saying 'Amen'. I can't really be said to say this word, which is anyway something other or less than a word, being rather the sound of the so-be-it assent to vocality than any outright kind of saying, the voice opened in *a* being instantly crimped between the two nasals, *m* and *n*. And even those nasals are more implied than uttered in the sound I tend to make, which is a gravelly kind of growl, more a throat-raking 'errm' than anything else. In producing this sound, I make the adjustment that must always be made in a choral sound between my volume and the likely volume of the utterance, to which I wish to contribute without standing audibly clear from it. In fact, the indistinct rattle I emit is also an imitation of the blurring that all vocal sound undergoes when it is blent in joint voice. I merge my voice to the rumble of affirming by imitating it in my own. This kind of anticipatory assimilation is also to be heard in the boxing announcer who allows his vowels to be stretched and bent like those of the watching spectators, or the child playing alone who imitates the fuzzy, frayed sound of the crowd's acclamation, in the case of my children in a strange kind of screaming whisper employed to suggest multiplicity. It is there too in the lone football supporter's efforts to get the booming sea-surge of the terrace into his voice, by hollowing the vowels and damping the consonants.

There are many other ways in which the individual voice might seek to incorporate this kind of noisy amplitude. One of these is the practice of *xöömii*, or 'overtone singing', also known as 'biphonic singing' or 'throat singing', in regions of Central Asia and also among the Khosa people of Southern Africa. In this kind of singing or chanting, a low drone is typically produced at the same time as harmonics of that fundamental tone are amplified, giving the impression that two or more tones are being sung at once. One account of the meaning of overtone singing in Mongolia relates it to the reverberant qualities of the landscape, in which mountains and lakes are said to speak to each other.[18] The magical powers attributed to this kind of singing seem to have a great deal to do with the fact that in it the voice is both taken up by and takes into itself the variousness of the outside world, in much the same way as ventriloquial utterance in various times and places have been seen as an opening of the voice to external influences, demonic and otherwise. Karlheinz Stockhausen incorporated overtone singing into his *Stimmung* (1968), and explains that the title is meant to encompass a kind of pluralizing of the voice. *Stimmung* means tuning, but could be translated with other words:

> Stimmung incorporates the meanings of the tuning of a piano, the tuning of the voice, the tuning of a group of people, the tuning of the soul. This is all in the German word. Also, when you say: We're in a good Stimmung, you mean a good psychological tuning, being well tuned together.[19]

18 Carole Pegg, 'Mongolian Conceptualizations of Overtone Singing (*xöömii*)', *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 1 (1992), 38.

19 Quoted in Jonathan Cott, *Stockhausen: Conversations with the Composer* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), 162.

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Voice is in fact unexpectedly full of these crowdings, or swellings towards multeity, approximating the grandeur of the 'voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder' heard in Revelation (Revelation 14:2). As I have suggested, song may itself be seen as pushing the individual voice in the direction of the collective; and in fact any distension or lengthening out of the voice may simultaneously tend to the univocity of the choric: 'Wooww!'; 'JEEsus Christ'; 'Oh NOOoooh!'; 'Oh my GOOOd!' Swearing is perhaps the most potent example of this becoming-general of the voice, since swear words and swearing expressions combine unbound vehemence and binding formula in a way that recapitulates the two principal features of crowd utterance.

Choreography

Plato defines the art of *choreia* as the combination of singing plus dancing.[20] One of the confirmations of the choric voice-body is the choreography that always seems to be pressing through or in on the choral. The subtle and dynamic entanglements of eyes, lips, fingers and brows involved in actions of collective utterance imply, either that voice is only ever one component of collective speech situations, or that what we think of as 'voice' might be best thought of as a convocation of different physical actions in interlocking modalities. Many acts of joint utterance seem to prescribe or provoke movement. The football team I find myself having to support, Arsenal, has a particularly vicious chant, 'Stand Up, if you hate Tottenham', which requires not just a surging stress to be applied to the word 'up', but also requires you, assisted by the little lift of the major sixth separating the first two words and the two-beat metrical intermission after the word 'up', to prove your devotion to the comminatory cause by actually rising to your feet and occupying as much vertical space as is possible with the noble ascension of your hatred. Many choric locutions display a similarly imperative or enjoining force. Hymns in particular are given to the utterance of what their utterance is meant to be enacting: 'Onward Christian Soldiers'; 'I Vow to Thee My Country'; 'Ave Maria'; 'Shout the Glad Tidings, Exultingly Sing'. Prayer is frequently accompanied by bodily gestures, and so is chanting – as, for example, in the finger-stabbing towards opposing fans with the chant 'Who ARE yer?', or, following the scoring of a goal and silencing of the opposing supporters, with the singing, to the tune of 'Bread of Heaven', of the triumphantly self-attesting 'You're not singing any more'. Even where there are no specifically prescribed movements, the patterning of choric utterance seems to aim at entraining the uttering body into a kind of synchronicity, its binding of time exerting a regulating effect on shared physical space, through clapping, foot-tapping, swaying, and so on. Solo singers need not move, or may display highly individuated movements; but backing singers nearly always move, as we say, in concert. Just as choric utterance is a giving of a body to the event of speech, so it aims to draw its constituent speakers into identity with this voice-body; in giving a body to utterance, it draws utterance into the body.

20 Plato, *Plato, With An English Translation. Vol IX: Laws*, trans. R. G. Bury, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press and London: William Heinemann, 1961), 654B; I, 92–3.

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A great deal of attention is paid in choral handbooks and conducting manuals to the bodies of choir members, with all kinds of advice being offered as to the ways in which the right kind of posture can be achieved. In the absence of a single corporeal source, the work of producing the choral 'voice-body' is intricate and exacting, and involves a kind of choreography amid the chorality, for both conductor and performers:

> I often ask my singers to concentrate on their ankles – yes, ankles – and create for themselves a freedom of motion and flexibility from the ankles by moving their ankle joints. The knees then automatically become unlocked and the whole lower torso to the hips will generate a tension-free condition that in turn will bring about tension-free singing.[21]

Chorality does not require language, and where it does not, it may seem to be more than usually choreographic, or impregnated with space and gesture. Sports crowds in particular rely as much upon cheers, hoots, whistles, and hisses as upon verbal formulae, and it can seem as though the point of the chant is actually to thicken vocal sign into a bodily or gestural thing. Often, words are deliberately distorted into choric gesture, where choric implies the compounding of sound and space – for example, in the cry of 'Ooooooo-sPINA!' recently developed among Arsenal supporters to accompany goal kicks taken by the goalkeeper David Ospina. In this, the slow, climbing glissando of the elongated first syllable builds to the climactic discharge of the 'spina', in a sort of phonomemic magic aimed at imparting more punch to the ball's parabola.

Chorality is derived from Greek choros (χορός), dance, rather than chora (χώρα) space, or region, but there is nevertheless a kind of chorology (the study of spatial distribution and limit) in every chorality. Michel Serres has proposed that the principal purpose of many exercises of the collective voice is to occupy space:

> To take a place or to give up a place, that is the whole question. There are those who take places, there are those who give them up. Those who take places take places always and everywhere, and those who give up places always do so. There are places taken, there are no unoccupied places. Space consists of, and is saturated with places taken, and in them swarm restless, almost motionless, the takers. The restlessness comes from the struggle for place. All space is noisy, clamorous, it is a cloud, a chaos, under the martial and stable law of noise and combat. It may at a moment be order under the law of the strongest. But one must make more noise than the others in order for one's shout of *no more noise* to be heard and for the others to obey.[22]

Serres has written equivalently of the way in which soiling an environment, whether in scent-marking, graffiti, or auditory pollution, may be regarded as a way of appropriating

21 Colin Durrant, *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 130.

22 Michel Serres, *Genesis*, trans. Geneviève James and James Nelson (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 74.

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it; power involves the power to make a noise, while making a noise is the assertion and performance of power.[23] Volume is voluminous, as everybody knows who has been in a pub populated by loud and space-consuming football supporters, or on the top deck of a bus on the Caledonian Road crammed with shrieking schoolgirls. To chant is to spread the individual voice out into a kind of imaginary amplitude which corresponds to the spreading of sound to occupy space. Many forms of ecclesiastical chanting take place in locations which seem designed to smear or spread out the sound, making its location indefinite and compounding sound with its matrix. Here the architecture gives the vocality back to itself, in the process imparting to that vocality a kind of architectural thickness. Elias Canetti writes of the crowd that '[a]s soon as it exists at all, it wants to consist of *more* people: the urge to grow is the first and supreme attribute of the crowd. It wants to seize everyone within reach; anything shaped like a human being can join it.'[24] We may attribute a similarly agglomerative impulse to the crowd sound, which seeks to assimilate not only the voices of those who compose it, but also the space it occupies. Football supporters develop an ear for spaces near stadia that are particularly hospitable to their chants: Arsenal supporters know, for example, that the bridge which connects the Emirates stadium to Gillespie Road provides an ideal space for amplifying and condensing their chanting. As the supporters descend the steps, the overlapping cries of 'Red ARMy' bounce around erratically as in some Fingal's Cave. Echoing within walls or vaults or cloisters, chorality seeks both to command and to occupy space, both to be and to absorb it. Chorality is space filled with sound, and also sound maximally impregnated with the sense of space. It is sound expanding to include what contains it.

Architectural forms are most commonly employed to provide reverberation, of course, and echo has a particularly important role in the sonic solidification of space that serves to enact forms of social solidarity. Echo serves to fill in the slack intervals between articulations (pauses for breath, for example), making of the sound a kind of saturated condensate, with as few enfeebling fissures or remissions as possible. The use of antiphonal structures, which is so common in liturgical, sporting, and political chanting, serves a similar purpose of filling in any gaps in the utterance, symbolically folding it over on itself. In call and response, the crowd becomes its own audience and interlocutor, thereby cancelling the possibility of any external dialogic point of view. We should see the characteristic deepening and solemn hollowing of the voice brought about by reverberation and related techniques such as double-tracking as another instance of the choralizing of the individual voice alluded to earlier.

Volume

Chorality is most characteristically evident in song, and yet, perhaps for that very reason, it occupies a position of minority in music. There are many reasons for this. One may have to do with a feature that Percy M. Young regrets in his history of choral music, in stating that the 'specialized all-purpose tone' often employed by choral singers 'is known to have

23 Michel Serres, *Le Mal propre: Polluer pour s'approprier?* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2008), 48.

24 Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 16.

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two dynamic levels – loud and very loud'.[25] The perils of loudness are apparent in the jeer of Henry Carey about Handel's oratorios: 'Sing, sing and rorio / An oratorio.'[26] The power and popular value of chorality lies in what might be called its pure magnitude, the power it has of suggesting unalloyed power. Music must deploy rather than be or transmit power; it must modulate force. Since the power of music is assumed to be a power of orchestrated relations, rather than of simple enlargement, grandeur can never simply be aggrandisement. Music's allergy to pure loudness is captured in the joke told about the conductor, who is squirmingly urging his orchestra to play 'with more *intensity*, with more *assertiveness*, give the music more *depth* and *density*', when he is interrupted by the French horn player sweetly enquiring 'You mean you'd like us to play louder?' Pure loudness might be associated with the appetite for ever-larger choral numbers during the nineteenth century: 'once an organizer had gathered together 200 for a performance', writes Celia Applegate, 'then 300, then 500, little seemed to resist the notion of a chorus of 10,000 and an orchestra of 1,000, such as gathered in Boston for the National Peace Jubilee and Musical Festival of 1869'.[27] It is striking how often matters of sheer magnitude assert themselves in discussions of choral music, such as in Ronald Corp's *Choral Singer's Companion*: 'once a choir exceeds thirty singers (and approaches fifty, let us say) you will need to think carefully about repertory, because you will be too big for some works, and some works will be too big for you'.[28] The marked growth in the size of choirs which began in the nineteenth century has been blamed for 'the heavy slow solemn thick-porridge kind of singing into which nearly all amateur choirs tend to lapse'.[29] Archibald Davison confirms this allergy to unmodulated volume:

> It goes without saying that a wide dynamic range is essential; but for once that a conductor feels obliged to ask for more volume, he will on twenty occasions ask for less. A fine pianissimo which is maintained at pitch requires mainly a controlled tone and full breathing and that pianissimo is much easier to produce than a fine fortissimo. Just how loud a chorus may sing without offense is a question each conductor must decide for himself. I would earnestly suggest, however, that no chorus ever be allowed to sing as loud as it can unless it is submerged beneath a sea of orchestral tone. There is, after all, a point at which choral singing ceases to be music and becomes plain natural undisciplined sound.[30]

The chorus represents the challenge of the inchoate. In a sense, it is the making manifest of what menaces music, the matter that must be made into form, a reservoir of unschooled energy that must be made into information. The choral voice has two opposing dimensions:

25 Percy M. Young, *The Choral Tradition: An Historical and Analytical Survey From the Sixteenth Century to the Present Day* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1962), 12.

26 Quoted in Young, *The Choral Tradition*, 94.

27 Celia Applegate, 'Building Community Through Choral Singing', in *Nineteenth-Century Choral Music*, ed. Donna M. Di Grazia (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 5.

28 Ronald Corp, *The Choral Singer's Companion* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1987), 21.

29 Keith Mitchell, *The Beautiful Roar: Forays into Amateur Choral Singing* (Sevenoaks: Amherst Publishing, 2005), 70.

30 Archibald T. Davison, *Choral Conducting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 68–70.

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that of power and that of sensitivity. The more power I muster in my voice, the less sensitivity and precision I can register in it. The extension of the voice into space depends on a kind of spreading out that is accomplished through pitch. But it also requires a narrowing and disciplining of the voice in time to prevent the fraying at the edges that will reveal the plural nature of the voice. The choral voice must simultaneously be broadened to a roar and thinned to the merest hiss or tiniest dental tick.

The conductor must struggle against two opposite dangers – the flabby and the choppy, a soup of homogeneity and a fissiparous spasticity: 'The conductor who in this matter allows vocal nature to take its course is rewarded by a bewildering array of resonances, including the "dental," "slit-mouth," and "trumpet," which need not further be characterized.'[31] Henry Coward complains that '[i]n most choral societies, even in those where the voices are tested, there are a great majority of untrained voices, which may be roughly classified as follows: – weak and quavery, worn and tinny, harsh and shrill, strident, metallic, shouty, throaty, cavernous, hooty, scoopy and nondescript'.[32] Archibald Davison confesses to astonishment at the kinds of sounds that his singers produced in a state of nature: 'Some amateurs, indeed, appear to refute the laws of nature and the textbooks of the physiologists. The source of their voices and the means they employ in an effort to propel vocal sound from the remote recesses of the body are alike a mystery.'[33] Davison is concerned about the capacity of the choir to slip back into a condition of slack inertness, unless its energies can be kept at a pitch of focus and balanced intensity:

> You can waste time, too, and injure morale by constant praise; frequent commendation dulls the edge of discriminating and especially deserved congratulation; but, when the occasion arises, a single glance of gratitude and admiration will convey far more than verbal encomiums. The foregoing admonition – and I fear this paragraph is heavy with negative advice – will seem merely rhetorical to those conductors who, cursed with a sluggish or inattentive chorus, would seize hysterically upon any plausible excuse for lauding their singers. But these conductors should remember per contra that consistent scolding will yield a state of dull discouragement more damaging than that lethargy of self-satisfaction which is induced by over-praise.[34]

Others have concentrated on transforming the raw, native noisiness of the chorus into expressive, but tempered 'tone'. Often this centred on techniques of verbal articulation, especially of consonants, which need to be suppressed in order to foreground the more musical work of the vowel. Because the choric voice is open and expansive, it tends to overflow the containment and punctuation provided by the consonants. One of the biggest challenges for any choir leader is to give the choir the definition that the consonants supply, allowing the choral voice to combine supraindividual force with individual form. The most

31 Davison, *Choral Conducting*, 56–7.

32 Henry Coward, *Choral Technique and Interpretation* (London: Novello and Co., 1914), 19.

33 Davison, *Choral Conducting*, 56–7.

34 Davison, *Choral Conducting*, 40–1.

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complex and demanding forms of choral music – the Kyrie of Mozart's *Requiem*, for example – will often seek the simultaneous intensification of these two dimensions, of the massive and the minutely articulated.

Many of those who write about choral direction are hostile to the internal noise represented by the consonant. Peter Tkach wrote in 1948 that '[e]very consonant interrupts the breath current in some form. Since beauty of tone depends upon the vowel sounds this interruption should be very brief.'[35] Few were more devoted to this principle than Noble Cain, who stabbingly asserts that 'each word in every language has a tone and a noise. Each syllable of each word has a tone and a noise! The tone is the vowel; the noise is the consonant!'[36] Cain says that, since consonants 'of themselves . . . have no pitch', the practice of sustaining them is a 'perversion' born of radio singing.[37] The consonantal problem is perhaps a temporal rather than a spatial one. It is much easier for the ear to blend the variant pitches of a group of singers, or harder for it to avoid averaging them out, than to get wayward consonants to cinch together at one precise moment (woe to the composer who requires a choir to close oxymoronically on the word 'silent'). Consonants are a constant reminder of the multiplicity of the chorus, since 'what is understandable when spoken by one individual is quite meaningless when sung by a hundred'.[38] Davison, however, argues that the role of the consonant in giving clarity of structure is much greater than is usually recognized. If the chorus is sometimes a kind of undisciplined mass of energy, it can also be thought of as threatening always to slide into boneless torpor without the bracing effects of the consonant:

> Without consonants . . . the whole fabric of the music becomes flabby and meaningless . . . Although singers may pronounce the *r* with care, unless that letter is rolled it invariably gives the effect of *w*, especially if the chorus is sizeable. This accounts for the constant choral phenomenon which results in the sound of a word flatly denying its meaning. Such a word is 'strong,' which suggests only weakness when it is heard as 'stwong'.[39]

The avoidance of slurring is of prime importance. Davison proposes the introduction of a sharp aspirate *h* for the purpose of dividing words audibly which might otherwise be elided:

> The letter h is most valuable, however, when it is introduced between two adjacent vowels; and the common neglect of this device leads, first, to rhythmlessness and, second, to unintelligibility and an occasional effect or word-scrambling suggestive of James Joyce's later prose style. 'Dowopen' (doopen), 'myyeye' (my eye), and 'whhowis' (who is) both look and sound confusing.[40]

35 Peter Tkach, *Vocal Technic* (Park Ridge, IL: Neil A. Kjos Music Co., 1948), 27.
36 Noble Cain, *Choral Music and Its Practice* (New York: M. Witmark and Sons, 1932), 42.
37 Cain, *Choral Music and Its Practice*, 42.
38 Davison, *Choral Conducting*, 52.
39 Davison, *Choral Conducting*, 49.
40 Davison, *Choral Conducting*, 52.

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There have been those who have felt that the raw energy of the chorus is an important principle that it is important not to refine into effeteness:

> It is better to get raucous tone and then refine it, than to tolerate a nondescript merely nice tone. Fight against thin, pinched tones. Counteract them by having the men grunt 'huh' as if someone were striking them in the solar plexis. When you get a masculine grunt that has full resonance, go after singing that has the same character. Make your men work hard, let them understand that they are to sound like men, not like women dressed in trousers.[41]

The mediator, both between chorus and audience and between actuality and musical ideal, is the choral conductor, and much of the critical literature on chorality is concerned with the fragile, fraught dignity of this particular office. Archibald Davison begins his 1940 text on the art of choral conducting with a frank acknowledgement of the lowly status of the choral conductor:

> The choral conductor 'type' is a familiar feature of amateur musical effort. He conquers by personality rather than musicianship. His acquaintance with the literature of music is far too small, and his resourcefulness in making available a wide variety of works lacks the support of scholarship. His sense of discrimination between good and bad music is generally intuitive because it has not been trained, and he crowns all by disregarding the canons of conducting as musicians know them, substituting therefore a system of his own made up of interpretative gestures which are meaningful only to his own group.[42]

Davison is caught between wanting to increase the expertise and sophistication of choral conductors, while not wanting to refine away the 'identity of spirit' between conductor and chorus:

> To say that conductor and chorus must be in sympathy is not enough. They must be *one*. The conductor should enter into every problem not only as conductor, but as chorister also; sometimes, quite instinctively, he even breathes with his singers, a symbol of his unity with them and of his vigilance in their behalf. Once that unity is established, the chorus, on its part, may be counted on to return a prompt and cooperative response to the conductor's efforts.[43]

Because of its special role in mediating between the unformed amateur and the fully formed performance, there is no form of music-making in which the rehearsal is more important than choral singing: rehearsing, Celia Applegate observes, 'is work done together; rehearsing is the struggle to reach a common goal together; rehearsing is the synchronization of individual bodies: ears, minds, eyes, lungs, arms holding music, legs standing and sitting'.[44]

41 Ruth Krehbiel Jacobs, *The Practical Choirmaster* (Los Angeles: Choir Publications, n.d.), 58.

42 Davison, *Choral Conducting*, 3.

43 Davison, *Choral Conducting*, 8.

44 Applegate, 'Building Community Through Choral Singing', 13.

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Collective voice

For much of the twentieth century, choral music stood apart from the currents of innovation and experimentation in technique, leading to Nick Strimple's judgement that '[t]hroughout the century, choral music tended to be more conservative than its instrumental counterparts'.[45] Keith Mitchell goes further, writing that, by the 1960s, 'amateur choralism came to be regarded by the establishment as a hopelessly conservative influence'.[46] Choral music tended to absorb popular elements, such as folk song and jazz, rather than responding to the technical developments of twelve-tone modernism. Strikingly, when choral elements were absorbed into serious and ambitious music, this often involved a suppression of the enunciation word, as voices were treated as pure instruments, rather than the vehicles of articulation, as in Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony*, or, later in the century, the choral and vocal works of Karlheinz Stockhausen.

The marginality of choral music in the twentieth century is one sign and effect of the increasing tension and complexity in the relationship between the modernist artist and his audience. The critical literature relating to choral music from the early twentieth century onwards is very limited and sometimes, as in the case of Nick Strimple's *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century*, apologetic rather than celebratory. By contrast, the pedagogic literature relating to choirs and choral music-making is very substantial, with dozens of guides being produced for the benefit of choirs and choir leaders anxious to improve their quality. One might almost see choral singing as equivalent to the vernacular art of photography; like photography, it may benefit from and be transformed by a great deal of technical training and competence, but it is not dependent on it. In both chorality and photography, art and everyday accomplishment are in tension.

Much of the meaning and function of musical chorality derives from the fact that its practitioners are much more likely to be amateurs than professional musicians. Already, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Arthur Mees reported that 'chorus singing is the sphere of public musical activity which now belongs legitimately to amateurs, and choral music the class of music for the performance of which the public is almost entirely dependent on amateurs'.[47] Forty years later, Archibald Davison observed that

> Thirty years ago, if one were contemplating a performance of Bach's *Magnificat* or Hindemith's *Das Unaufhörliche* (had it then been in existence), he would have recruited his chorus from the ranks of experienced singers, with emphasis on trained voices and able sight-readers: in other words on veteran choristers most of whom would have been between thirty and sixty years of age. The reverse is now generally the case, for we have learned that a group of young, enthusiastic singers in their late teens and early twenties can perform the most difficult music more impressively than their elders.[48]

45 Nick Strimple, *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 2002), 15.

46 Mitchell, *Beautiful Roar*, 110.

47 Arthur Mees, *Choirs and Choral Music* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), vii.

48 Davison, *Choral Conducting*, 27.

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The growing involvement of amateur singers meant that the choir came to be seen as Percy M. Young notes, 'some sort of communal symbol'.[49] The chorus is not just collective voice, it is apt to be heard as the voice of the collective. In the USA, the growth of colleges had an important impact on choral music, along with the growth of popular entertainment and, later on, of mass broadcasting and entertainment.[50] Writing at the end of the First World War about its impact on choral singing, Herbert Antcliffe reported that, although many festivals and concerts had been cancelled, and choirs depleted by the departure of male singers to serve in the armed forces, there had been some benefits – beyond 'the banishment (or should we say the deportation?) of many inferior German works' – in the encouragement of choral music-making by the social changes wrought by the war:

> The gathering together of thousands of men in intimate, if primitive and uncomfortable circumstances, the frequent need of occupation of a restful character alike to bodies, minds and nerves, and of forgetfulness of the sordid horrors which war brings in its train, have made all classes of Englishmen discover themselves musically. Already the so-called lower middle classes, the clerks and smaller professional men and the workingmen with comfortable incomes, formed the backbone of the music, and particularly of the choral music of England. But though England has for so long been a great choral country, those who have taken part in the art have formed a comparatively small proportion of the whole population ... [T]hose who voluntarily or by compulsion joined the army have now learnt some of its joys and their own capabilities with regard to it ... [I]t seems probable that ... a by no means negligible proportion of the population of the country will find a new pleasure in partsongs, cantatas and oratorios.[51]

At the beginning of the nineteenth century in Italy, the opera chorus was regarded as 'the working class of the opera world ... thought of as rough, insubordinate, apt to drink, smoke, and gamble in the collective dressing room'.[52] The huge expansion of choral singing which took place from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards – by 1901, there were five thousand choral societies in existence[53] – has meant that it has often been associated with the rise of democratic movements, for example by Percy Young, who observes that '[c]horal music no longer was confined to the chancel, and great new halls were erected to accommodate the huge choirs that symbolized, in one way, the Revolutionary aspirations towards at least equality and fraternity. The symbol of the symbol surely was the "Choral Symphony".'[54] Celia Applegate agrees, writing that '[i]n looking at the ever more multitudinous mixed-voice choruses that began to proliferate from the last decades of the eighteenth century on, one is

49 Young, *Choral Tradition*, 55.

50 Gerald F. Darrow, *Four Decades of Choral Training* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1975), 2.

51 Herbert Antcliffe, 'The Effect of the War on English Choral Music', *Musical Quarterly* 6 (1920), 346, 348.

52 John Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 204.

53 Mitchell, *Beautiful Roar*, 31.

54 Young, *Choral Tradition*, 191.

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tempted to link the mobilization of the choral crowd to the mobilization of crowds of a less musical sort in the era of the French Revolution'.[55] In Germany in particular, choral music embodied the crystallization of nationhood, as described by Ryan Minor:

> From the beer-hall to the bourgeois choral society, the private salon to the public festival, and the church to the concert hall, choral singing marked the contours of the burgeoning nation as perhaps nothing else could by grafting a rhetoric of communal participation onto the emerging notion that there was a unique bond between Germans and their music.[56]

Celia Applegate also sees collective singing as a practical and symbolic way of affirming the German nation: 'Germany and other modernizing nations became real to people because many thousands travelled around these nations, first by coach or horseback or on foot, later most often by train, meeting their fellow countrymen and singing together.'[57] Simon Goldhill has pointed similarly to the ways in which reflections on the role of the chorus in Greek tragedy by German Idealist philosophers embody shifting political dynamisms: 'there is a changing sense of what community, the crowd, the collective, the voice of the people, can mean'.[58]

Marxist accounts of the social function of music have also gravitated towards choral music, finding in it, as Rosemary Manning does, not just the evidence of a strong and unbroken popular tradition – 'we remain pre-eminently a country of choirs'[59] – but also the possibility of an alternative to the sterile modernism typified by *Finnegans Wake* (though it is arguably among the most choric of modernist works) which is 'at once the crowning point and the tombstone of modern literature'.[60] Choral music provides the possibility of the convergence between artistic technique and the 'more vital contact with society' that Manning feels is absent from serious contemporary music.[61] Her book ends with praise of Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*, on the grounds that it is 'so complete an expression of the age in which it was created'.[62] And yet, the work can only show a kind of generalized individuality: 'Man's dilemma in this age of darkness is expressed by the soloists, the soprano and the tenor, who represent the ordinary man and woman, bewildered in a world at war.'[63] Manning cannot

55 Applegate, 'Building Community Through Choral Singing', 5.

56 Ryan Minor, *Choral Fantasies: Music, Festivity, and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–2.

57 Applegate, 'Building Community Through Choral Singing', 9–10.

58 Simon Goldhill, 'The Greek Chorus: Our German Eyes', in *Choruses, Ancient and Modern*, ed. Joshua Billings, Felix Budelmann, and Fiona Macintosh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 36.

59 Rosemary Manning, *From Holst to Britten: A Study of Modern Choral Music* (London: Workers' Music Association, 1949), 1.

60 Manning, *From Holst to Britten*, 3.

61 Manning, *From Holst to Britten*, 58.

62 Manning, *From Holst to Britten*, 69.

63 Manning, *From Holst to Britten*, 71.

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bring herself to believe that the full expression of collectivity has yet found choric form: 'The affirmation of faith, the oratorio that may be the modern *Messiah* is yet to be written.'[64]

The association between chorus and political collectivity has not always been centripetal, and from the twentieth century onwards chorality has often had a strongly local or even oppositional character, which it has taken work of a sociological or ethnomusicological kind, as opposed to work focused on music history and structure, to highlight. Karen Ahlquist's edited volume *Chorus and Community* (2006) focuses on the many different kinds of expression and solidarity enacted through community singing, including choirs for newly freed slaves, local communities, ethnic groups, and labour unions.[65] For this reason, a focus on chorality is often a way for music historians to reach beyond what Ryan Minor calls 'the myopic generic frontiers that have frequently limited musicology's engagement with music's public spheres'.[66]

Every exercise of the voice is a work of fantasy, even and especially where it is simple and straightforward reality. Even where I simply employ my voice, to ask for a ticket or tell somebody the time, I am confirming the capacity of my voice to make the world in sound. The voice is the physical confirmation of my fantasy – that is no less a fantasy for being the plain truth – that I can bring about effects in the world simply by using my voice. The choral voice is an amplification of this fantasy into the fantasy of amplification itself. 'The voice is the body's greatest power of emanation', Guy Rosolato writes.[67] But chorality is that emanation raised to the second power; if my voice is that which goes beyond me, then the choral voice is the voice that goes beyond itself. It is the voice as pure amplitude, having the power both to cluster together with other voices and to swell excitably like a kind of inflammation. It is not just the body's power of emanation, it is emanation's power to grow into a kind of hyper-body. As Ryan Minor argues, imagining that a choir can directly embody *das Volk*, giving itself to voice and giving voice to itself, is a work of what, borrowing the popular name given to Beethoven's Fantasy in C minor for Piano, Chorus, and Orchestra, he calls 'choral fantasy'. But the fantasy is performative, employing the magical thinking that is never far away in any exercise of the voice, and must always be to the fore in the 'count-as-one' in Alain Badiou's phrase, of the collective voice: 'Germany', writes Ryan Minor, 'is sung into existence.'[68]

It is a pity that we have so few sound-based words for this kind of collective fantasy or willed hallucination, for this deficit may tempt us to think that auditory phenomena are more resistant to illusion. But, though we may feel that the choral voice is particularly prone to dissipation and ragged collapse, we are all of us eager to average out all the imperfections and anomalies into a single voice, emanating from what we imagine as a single throat. In a sense, the work of the choral conductor, chivvying the intransigent imperfections of the choir into

64 Manning, *From Holst to Britten*, 75.

65 Karen Ahlquist, ed., *Chorus and Community* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

66 Minor, *Choral Fantasies*, 1.

67 Guy Rosolato, 'La Voix: Entre corps et language', *Revue française de psychoanalyse* 38 (1974), 76 (my translation).

68 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 89–92; Minor, *Choral Fantasies*, 9.

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univocality, acts in concert with this strong predisposition to round chorality into collective voice. Understanding the phantasmagorical elements of the collective voice should not lead us to assume that collective voices are different in this respect from individual voices, for these too are never audible in any in-themselves way. We are all of us, all the time, hearing voices and engaged in acts of ventriloquism or voice-throwing, in which we throw into the world that voice we seem to hear coming at us from it. A voice is always as much an attribution as a recognition. Of all the things that we ever hear, the voice is perhaps most of all that which we can never simply hear, since it is so bound up with what we want, or need, or mean to hear. If chorality is always tugged at by song, it may be an indication, not just of a lyric impulse that emerges under conditions of collectivity, but also that music is somehow the proof of voice, voice lifted up into distinctness of being.

Fred Cummins focuses his work on what he calls the 'deep puzzle' of how it is that human beings speaking in groups are able to synchronize their speech so precisely.[69] He argues that joint speech 'may be a rich and productive domain for scientists to investigate who wish to go beyond or around the limitations of Cartesian and purely individualistic approaches to mind'.[70] He therefore maintains that it requires an understanding of 'collective intentionality' rather than the Cartesian subject that is linked to the investigation of inner speech.[71] But this collective intentionality must be regarded as a projected rather than a substantial presence. We are not justified in seeing chorality as any kind of 'expression' of collective intentionality', because that intentionality is a kind of projection or fantasy. The collectivity cannot be thought of as held in readiness, waiting for the opportunity to put its feelings into utterance, since it must actually be regarded as produced by the utterance itself. It is a quasi-subject, or subject-in-the-making, a mixture of what I have called distributive and attributive collectivity, rather than anything that could meaningfully be regarded as any kind of collective subject capable of *having* collective feelings or singing them out.[72] I think there are compelling reasons to doubt the existence of such collective subjects which might be able to feel, deliberate, and communicate on their own account. Despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that the voice is so closely associated with the individual subject, the choral voice is one of the most potent carriers of the fantasy of the collective subject; it is the embodied fantasy of a fantasy of embodiment. There is in fact no vox populi that is capable of sounding upon the ear, or is anything more than this sounding and the work of prosopopoeia it requires and provokes, however irresistibly it may seem to claim the condition of voice and clamour for hearing in the urgent yet hallucinatory voice-body of chorality. Chorality is the means whereby we allow ourselves the collective hallucination of collectivity. We understand much of the pressure and pleasure of the voice in understanding its choral forms; but the point of trying to understand the power we allow ourselves to exercise over ourselves in the fantasies of chorality is also to be able to refuse and as necessary rescind its demands.

69 Cummins, 'Joint Speech', 29.

70 Cummins, 'Joint Speech', 24.

71 Cummins, 'The Remarkable Unremarkableness of Joint Speech', 73.

72 Steven Connor, 'Collective Emotions: Reasons to Feel Doubtful', lecture given at Queen Mary, University of London, 9 October 2013, http://stevenconnor.com/collective.html

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Perhaps chorality is intrinsically part of mass experience because it is a means of bringing the experience of the mass to audibility. This audibility is not merely the symmetrical complement to visibility. A sea of faces is unable to suggest the dynamism, the self-expanding power of self-assertion that the crowd-made-audible can. However, despite the growth in mass entertainments, in sporting events and music festivals, it may be that the homogeneous understanding of the mass has for some time been giving way to the imagination of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have called the Multitude.[73] Is there a chorality that corresponds to this multitude? Certainly there are those who seem pessimistic about the prospects for choral societies in a world that we might think of as more connected but less collective: Keith Mitchell laments 'the high proportion, in so many [choral societies) ... of balding pates, greying hair and matronly figures. How far into the 21st century, we wonder, can this ancient doddering lot possibly last?'[74]

If there is something archaic about chorality, it may be because it seems to be the enactment of an idea of the crowd that no longer carries the force that it used to. If the idea of the crowd persists, it is less as a force than as a resource. The crowd is more informational than kinetic, which is why the word 'crowd' seems in usage as well as in sound to rhyme so closely nowadays with 'cloud'. When Jeremy Corbyn marked his first Prime Minister's Question Time as Leader of the Opposition in the British House of Commons by putting to David Cameron 'crowd-sourced' questions that he had been sent in response to an invitation email sent out to 40,000 people, the rhetorical gesture was intended to suggest that the silent and ignored had somehow found their way en masse into the space of parliament, usually so noisily self-absorbed and at such a distance, so it is universally believed, or at least said, from the disconnected and politically disaffected population. But the way in which the questions were put was necessarily reminiscent of a séance or record-request show ('Marie, who works for a local authority, would like to know what the government is doing about house-building'). A murmuring chamber music of sweet reason seemed for a moment to have replaced a braying, bullying opera of solidary passions – neither of them, of course, being any more or less 'theatrical' than the other. The effect was not just to tone down the (admittedly tedious) vehemence of Question Time, it was to provide another example, so apparent in many other ways, of the contemporary decathecting or even abandonment of spatial being-there. The crowd, once the crystallization of collective *Dasein*, does not aggregate, or, when it does, it is on and for media, or it is assembled on the fly, as the web programmers say.

The human masses of the early twenty-first century are distributed rather than concentrated. It is not that twenty-first-century humans no longer experience or seek the experiences that Durkheim called 'collective effervescence'.[75] It is rather that when such concentrations in space and time do occur, they are increasingly prescribed and penetrated by fantasy-representations, embodiments of desire that are at the same time

73 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin, 2004).

74 Mitchell, *Beautiful Roar*, 110.

75 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 171.

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desired embodiments. We tend to think of fantasy as a private and ungovernable sort of thing, but the fantasy of collectivity in our era is governed by the fact that fantasy is itself more and more a collectively produced endeavour. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the growing reflexivity of crowds. Crowds increasingly act in the knowledge of the kinds of things that crowds are supposed and supposed not to do, or know. Who knew that crowds could learn to be ironic? Hence the phenomenon of the 'flash mob' or coordinated riot. Where crowds have traditionally been characterized by their stubborn density, these 'guerrilla crowds' are characterized by ephemerality and volatility. Hence the paradoxical effectiveness of 'kettling' by police forces controlling demonstrations: try to disperse a crowd in conventional ways and it will cling stubbornly together; concentrate the crowd in such a way that its members are prevented from leaving it, and you create a diasporic craving. One may perhaps sometimes hear the characteristic sound of the crowd-in-dispersal in some contemporary forms of chorality, like the oxymoronic refrain 'Dispersed are we; who have come together' that quavers out in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*.[76] The choralities of Ligeti, Stockhausen, Adams, and Reich have sometimes seemed to be the attempt to sound out a specifically scattered kind of semi-solidity, or merely molecular aggregation, the paradoxical sound of what clings together, not quite this side of audibility, never quite amounting to the viscosity of voice, in its own divarication.

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76 Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (London: Granada, 1980), 142.

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