# CHORAL SINGING AS BODILY REGIME

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*Abstract — Résumé*

An exploration of the practice of choral singing draws on the Foucauldian critical tradition to analyse how singing in a choir structures the ways in which people inhabit, use and experience their bodies. Texts from the choral conducting literature are read as instruction manuals for the production and regulation of choral singers, and the technologies of disciplinary power that constitute and maintain the boundaries of this identity are examined. This reading shows how musical practices can be simultaneously independent from and constructed within the power structures of day-to-day social relations: while the mechanisms that regulate choral behavior index overtly political axes of identity such as class, education level and regionality, they do so with an agenda that is more focused on the transformation than on the exclusion of the individual. The study contributes to the ongoing theoretical discussions of music and social identity within musicology, but it also raises practical questions concerning the social and personal values associated with choral music-making.

**Key Words: choral; singing; conducting; discipline; identity; surveillance**

Singing in a choir is a regime of the body. That is, it is a practice that structures the ways in which people inhabit, use and experience their bodies in clearly defined ways and according to ideological imperatives. At the same time, these imperatives seek to disguise themselves by grounding their dictates in discourses of the natural and of the universal. In this paper, I shall read a range of texts from the choral conducting literature as instruction manuals for the production and regulation of choral singers, and examine the technologies of disciplinary power that

constitute and maintain the boundaries of this identity. This reading will show how musical practices can be simultaneously independent from and constructed within the power structures of day-to-day social relations: while the mechanisms that regulate choral behaviour index overtly political axes of identity such as class, education level and regionality, they do so with an agenda that is more focused on the transformation than on the exclusion of the individual. The study is intended to contribute to the ongoing theoretical discussions of music and social identity within musicology, but it also raises practical questions concerning the social and personal values associated with choral music-making.

The voice has been recognised since Barthes's essay 'The Grain of the Voice' as a site where social processes and individual identity meet most intimately.[1] It is singular and unique, to the extent that it acts as a standard metonym for originality and agency of thought throughout the arts and humanities. At the same time it is generic, formed by forces beyond the control of the individual, whether those of nature (lungs, larynx, resonant cavities) or of nurture (language acquisition, gender roles, conventions of expression). The ideological, aesthetic, and — increasingly — technological contexts in which vocality is constructed have consequently been investigated in a plethora of idioms from *bel canto* to extended vocal techniques, from crooning to cock rock.[2] The majority of this work, however, has focused on the singer as soloist; ensemble vocality has received far less attention.

There are several reasons why it is valuable to redress this soloistic bias. First, the study of choral music presents interesting theoretical questions about the relationship between individual and corporate identities, between the personal and the supra-personal. Related to this, it moves the focus away from the exceptional voice towards the 'typical': while it is undoubtedly important to understand the passion that a diva, a torch singer or a rock star arouses in her or his devotees, it is also important to understand how the 'ordinary' singer might experience his or her own voice. Choral singing (however broadly or narrowly one defines this) involves many more people in the act of musical performance than solo genres, and as such arguably represents a more fertile ground for the production of socio-musical meanings.

The widespread nature of the activity also gives it a significance in its own right: there are many people for whom the matters discussed here are an integral part of their week to week lived experience. In particular, many choral organisations are deeply concerned with questions of social inclusivity, whether from an

[1] Roland BARTHES, The Grain of the Voice, in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977).

[2] See for example Leslie DUNN and Nancy JONES (eds), *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), John POTTER, *Vocal Authority: Singing Style and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Universtiy Press, 1998), and Mary Ann SMART (ed.), *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

educational perspective, through the agenda of funding bodies, or simply from the pragmatics of recruiting and retaining choir members in an era of falling participation in organised leisure.[3] A critical analysis of the practice's cultural politics can help to clarify the variable levels of success such programmes have encountered, and can thus inform the onward development of praxis.

The primary source material for this study comprises texts for the instruction of choral conductors published in Britain and the United States between 1914 and 2003. Some (primarily American) are intended for use in structured courses in choral conducting and/or by those intending to pursue choral conducting as a career; others (both British and American) are aimed at the aspiring amateur. Virtually all, though, are written by practitioners and draw strongly upon their authors' personal experience as choral conductors.

These texts represent a range of utterances that both draw upon and constitute a complex and constantly renegotiated discourse that shapes cultural practice. They are the discursive flotsam left behind by a century of music-making in two countries, and they give us vivid pictures of their authors' practical experiences, and the frameworks of value in which these occurred. At the same time, the texts are claiming the power to shape their readers' activities and their beliefs about their activities in ways that will directly impact upon the lived experience of the singers those readers direct. It is notable that the intertextual relationships within this literature are strongly mediated by praxis; authors are in general far more likely to refer to another conductor's or choir's good practice to support their recommendations than they are to another writer's book.[4] Practitioners are the primary storage device for this discourse, and the literature is commensurately personal and practical.

My analysis of this discourse has sought both common themes running through the literature, and areas of contradiction or dispute. The former provides us with evidence of the shared currency in the behavioural expectations of choral singers, and thus of the construction of an idealised, supra-national identity articulated through a body of repertoire and its associated practices. The latter reminds us of

[3] The concern for social inclusivity manifests in the range of projects and organisational initiatives aimed at enhancing the participation of specific social groups; see for example the range of Repertoire and Standards Committees supported by the American Choral Directors Association (details available online at http://acdaonline.org/R&S/ [accessed 20 May 2004, 09:35 GMT]). Robert PUTNAM documents changing patterns in participative leisure in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

[4] Hence, in 1975 Darrow notes that a 1959 article classifies articulation styles into legato, marcato and staccato; this classification also appears in 1970 and 1996 in books by Garretson and Jordan respectively, and is developed in 2002 by Neuen. In all cases except Darrow, there is no reference to any literary provenance of this classification. See Gerald F. DARROW, *Four Decades of Choral Training*, (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1975), 152; Robert L. GARRETSON, *Conducting Choral Music*, 3rd edn. (Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1970), 24; James JORDAN, *Evoking Sound: Fundamentals of Choral Conducting and Rehearsing* (Chicago: GIA, 1996), 119; and Donald NEUEN, *Choral Concepts: A Text for Conductors* (Belmont, CA: Schirmer/Thomson Learning, 2002), 224.

the contingency of that identity, and reveals the mechanisms of its construction. Imperatives stated as absolutes in one text will be contradicted by other imperatives just as strong in another; views change over time and in different locations. As two pictures of the same object can give the sense of depth to their viewer, so the differences in opinion between writers who think they are discussing the same subject set each other's ideas into relief.

The study is in the Foucauldian tradition, and, as such, is not claiming a greater or more privileged explanatory power than the knowledge systems it investigates, but it does seek to make explicit the operations of power that these knowledge systems suppress. I have retained the sometimes overtly polemical language of this critical tradition, therefore, partly as a means to acknowledge an intellectual debt. However, the ideologically-charged vocabulary also serves a strategic purpose in the development of my argument: it endeavours to *make strange* practices which may be deeply familiar to readers of this journal. Like Bruno Nettl's conceit of the 'ethnomusicologist from Mars', it provides a means for those of us involved in Western choral traditions to stand outside of our week-to-week experience and see it afresh. So, to discuss a choral director's means of maintaining rehearsal discipline in terms of 'technologies of power' is not to suggest that he or she should not use them; such an interpretative strategy might, though, bring an extra level of reflective self-awareness to the ways in which they are deployed.

The discussion starts by outlining the processes of discourse formation that define choral singing as a cultural practice, and examines how culture-specific and style-specific practices are naturalised and universalised. An exploration of the boundaries that delimit the category of choral singing follows, and traces the way the identity of the choral singer interacts with other categories of social identity. This leads in turn to an examination of how those boundaries are policed.

### *Formation of a Discourse*

The choral conducting literature presents the practice of choral music as a coherent and self-evident category. It may embrace different types of groups, performing somewhat different repertoire in different social spaces, but it posits a basic core of common traits that give the activity its identity. This core is constituted through shared discursive structures and secured as axiomatic by grounding in the discourses of the universal and of the natural.

The taxonomy of choral craft centres on a handful of key categories: vocal production (posture, breathing, placement); diction (vowel shape, enunciation of consonants, accent); choral ensemble (blend, intonation, precision); interpretation (style, dynamics, articulation); and performance (visual presentation; stage decorum). Additionally, the director is expected to impart these elements to his or her choir through the crafts of conducting (stance, beat patterns, expressive gesture)

and rehearsal (planning, choir training, leadership). Not all writers deal with all of these areas, and their relative emphasis varies between texts, but the spread of these discursive themes is remarkably consistent.[5]

The result is a system of knowledge that is simultaneously all-encompassing and very flexible. The broad terms of debate are so well-established as to be inescapable, yet they provide plenty of room within themselves for contention to develop. At one level, the myriad differences in opinion between writers allow contingency to show through between absolute statements: one cannot simultaneously sing with a high larynx to produce the brilliance of sound required by Cleall and obey Nicholson's dictate that the larynx must remain low at all times.[6] At another, though, they safeguard the categories of thought: while different authorities may disagree on whether choirs should sing the post-vocalic r, or on the type and degree of vibrato suitable for choral blend, the debates themselves confirm diction, vocal production and ensemble as primary categories by which to organise one's understanding, and hence one's practice of choral singing.

This unity of discourse also gives room for the growing historical relativism manifest in more recent texts, both with regard to an awareness of changing choral styles and competing traditions over the past century, and to questions of historical performance practice. Whereas earlier writers such as Coward and Davison assert the superiority of the methods they propound over practices of their immediate predecessors, more recent writers are more willing to acknowledge changes in taste and practice over time as representing different, but nonetheless valid, artistic choices, and encourage the aspiring conductor to develop his/her own concept of the 'ideal' choral sound.[7] The terms in which the reader is invited to hear these shifts in fashion and to imagine his/her own ideal, however, are those of the discipline's basic taxonomy. Hence, John Hylton's comparison between the four American 'schools' of St Olaf's Choir, Westminster College Choir, Fred Waring's Glee Club and the Robert Shaw Chorale is couched in terms of their approach to vocal tone.[8] These are not four different practices, it would appear, but four variations on a single theme. The knowledge-base by which choral singing is constituted is not, then, monolithic, but by accommodating diversity becomes arguably more powerful than if it were.

[5] Useful overviews of the American literature can be found in DARROW, *Four Decades* and Steven Robert HART, Evolution of thought and recurrent ideas in choral conducting books and secondary music education texts published from 1939 to 1995, (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Colorado, 1996).

[6] Charles CLEALL, *Voice Production in Choral Technique* (Sevenoaks: Novello, 1970), 35; Sydney, S. NICHOLSON, *Practical Methods in Choir Training*, RSCM Handbook No. 2 (London: Royal School of Church Music, n.d.), 6-7.

[7] Henry COWARD, *Choral Technique and Interpretation* (London: Novello, 1914); Archibald T. DAVISON, *Choral Conducting*, (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1954).

[8] John HYLTON, *Comprehensive Choral Music Education* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 28-9.

In order to maintain their hegemony over the field they construct, definitive discourses will often seek to render the arbitrary operation of linguistic practices invisible by casting the practices they prescribe as natural, universal and thence only to be expected. Such appeals to the inevitable, however, cannot avoid displaying the means of their own construction, and tracing these sites of rupture and contradiction can provide telling insights into the means by which the discourses are maintained. Points of interest in the choral conducting literature include a synecdochic elision between a universalised practice of singing together and a delimited range of specified practices, and the double value of the 'natural' human voice as both unspoilt and unformed.

The discourse of the universal is articulated through notions of shared humanity and authentic expression. »When people wish to express their innermost thoughts and dreams, they sing,« asserts Nick Strimple, »and when they sing together, it is called choral music.«[9] Such a vision supposes a pre-existent interiority common to all humanity, ready to be externalised through the act of singing. This in turn allows choral music to be defined as any such act occurring in a social setting, conflating the cross-cultural phenomena of human sociality and vocal communication with the specific set of practices defined in this literature. However, there are plenty of ensemble vocal practices that are not usually considered to be 'choral music', particularly those which use a single voice per part.[10] Moreover, some of these, most notably pop and rock styles, are specifically excluded as acceptable by many writers on choral music: Neuen's distinction between styles of pop vocal production and 'legitimate choral singing' reminds us that the act of definition is legislative as well as descriptive.[11]

This rhetorical slippage between part and whole has a more subtle manifestation in texts which address themselves to the conductors of 'all' types of choir, and then proceed to list which types are encompassed in their notion of 'all'.[12] These lists are necessarily selective, however much they attempt to include; they provide, moreover, a useful picture of the range of experiences a particular writer brings to bear on the subject. But the attempt to delineate a global category through enumeration of its constituent parts leads to a definition that is inevitably limited, yet claiming to be inclusive. The result of this is that any activity that could be embraced by the universal definition of 'people singing together', but is not part of the specific sets of practices used as exemplars, becomes conceptually invisible.

[9] Nick STRIMPLE, *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 2002), 298.

[10] For instance, John POTTER (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Singing* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000) treats choral genres separately from ensembles using one voice per part.

[11] NEUEN, *Choral Concepts,* 45.

[12] For example, David HILL, Hilary PARFITT & Elizabeth ASH (1995), *Giving Voice: A Handbook for Choir Directors and Trainers* (Stowmarket: Kevin Mayhew, 1995), 7; Gordon REYNOLDS, *The Choirmaster in Action* (London: Novello, 1972), 6.

To the extent that a marginal practice is acknowledged at all, it is subject to the rules of the dominant discourse by virtue of its inclusion within the universal category; its exclusion from the range of specific categories, however, prevents it from making any significant contribution to that discourse.

James Jordan presents this synecdochic elision between universal and particular in his discussion of repertoire and musical meaning:

> A conductor's responsibility is to search for a universal meaning in each piece that he conducts, a meaning that contains a truth or truths that are applicable to life and living. Whether it be a simple church anthem or a major choral work, it is our responsibility to give meaning to the text so that the meaning derived from the relationship of the text and the music connects in a direct way with the lives of the persons singing the work and those who will hear the work performed.[13]

This rests on a similar vision to that of Strimple in its evocation of a universal set of meanings arising from shared humanity, yet locates these meanings in a conspicuously circumscribed repertoire. Moreover, the direct connection between music and lived experience that he posits is itself contingent. The conductor is required first to 'search' for meaning (though universal, it is not self-evident); he is then required to 'give meaning' to the text (though universal, it is insufficiently meaningful in itself); meaning is then to be 'derived' from the relationship between text and music. It is only at this point that the connection becomes 'direct'.

The discourse of the natural is closely allied to that of the universal: a shared humanity rests on the concept of a natural human body. Colin Durrant makes this connection explicit in his chapter entitled 'Why do people sing?' He presents examples of singing in groups from a nomadic tribe in Ethiopia, a rugby stadium in Wales and a school playground in Sweden, then starts his explanation of this common practice of social song from the perspective of the 'neuropsychobiological', a term he glosses as »cover[ing] everything to do with the human condition«.[14]

The discourse of the natural is both more widely developed and more overtly contested than that of the universal, with the tension between universal and particular surfacing in the way that the natural body is simultaneously valued as the self-evident rationale for the practice of choral singing and regarded as the unformed, fault-ridden matter from which choral singers are to be moulded. The shared heritage of biological being is widely represented in anatomical diagrams of the various mechanisms of voice: stance, breath, tone production, resonators. At the same time, the body is regarded as an instrument to be deployed in prescribed ways by the singer's act of will. This contradiction runs throughout the literature as an ever-present conundrum: »It [the voice] is the most natural musi-

[13] JORDAN, *Evoking Sound*, 175.
[14] Colin DURRANT, *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2003), 40.

cal instrument and one which we all possess. Its use has been evolving for millennia. So why do we have to learn to use it? Why can we not simply sing?«[15]

The singing body is conceived as both born and made:

> Good voices are rare, and if you are lucky enough to have one in your choir you will find that its benign influence will help to convert any soprano who shrieks, or alto who booms, or tenor who bleats, or bass who bellows.[16]

This account assumes that the voice has certain given attributes, both in positing a pre-existing 'good' voice, and in its delineation of the stereotypical faults to be expected in each voice part. At the same time, the deficiencies of those unfortunates who do not possess 'naturally' good voices are susceptible to improvement by a process of osmosis: natural virtue gradually overcomes natural inadequacy without direct intervention.

The simultaneity of nature's and nurture's formation of the voice, and the value to be placed thereon, is articulated through two distinct, but interrelated dichotomies: the voice as trained or untrained, and the voice as authentic or manufactured. Hence, Davison prefers a chorus of untrained voices, on the grounds that, »trained singers find it both difficult and wearisome to adjust their particular 'method' to the needs of tonal homogeneity«.[17] Coward, meanwhile, classifies untrained voices into the categories of, »weak and quavery, worn and tinny, harsh and shrill, strident, metallic, shouty, throaty, cavernous, hooty, scoopy, and nondescript«, and further asserts that, »a person's natural voice is not unalterable, like the colour of his eyes, but is subject to control by the will of the singer«.[18] In the absence of formal instruction, it seems, the voice's state of nature might either enjoy the virtues of Rousseau's noble savage or endure a nasty and brutish Hobbesian existence.

For other writers, the voice's naturalness or otherwise rests less on whether or not it is trained, but upon whether it is genuine to the self of the singer. Hence Neuen states that 'To sing, and to conduct singers, is to work with the instrument of nature. There should be nothing unnatural or gimmicky — no 'tricks of the trade«', and that, »Singers should sing like natural human beings, not like a conductor's conception of how they might be transformed, manipulated, or manufactured into something else!«.[19] The authenticity of the singer's emotional expression is often discussed in terms of vibrato, with a common distinction between a 'natural' vibrato which is to be encouraged, and an excessive, undesirable, vibrato,

[15] HILL, PARFITT & ASH, *Giving Voice*, 12.
[16] Imogen HOLST, *Conducting a Choir:A Guide for Amateurs* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 52.
[17] DAVISON, *Choral Conducting*, 28-9.
[18] COWARD, *Choral Technique*, 19, 23.
[19] NEUEN, *Choral Concepts*, 27.

dubbed a 'wobble' or 'tremolo'. Hence, Hill, Parfitt and Ash see vibrato as a 'cultivated' attribute of the voice, but nonetheless inextricably linked to expression:

> The vibrato is what lends colour to the voice, and is often cultivated to achieve particular effects in certain types of singing. …. Singing without vibrato can only be achieved by decreasing activity in the muscles involved in the working of the larynx and reducing the energy of the breath. It is clear that such singing also demands a diminished emotional response in the singer, since, willy-nilly, our emotions are expressed through our voices.[20]

Knight, meanwhile, interprets the excessive form as the result of an attempt to fabricate a derivative rather than sincere form of expression:

> The singer who is addicted to these forms of wobbly singing may have started doing it in imitation of someone else, under the mistaken impression that it indicates emotional commitment to the song. If so, he probably can no longer hear himself doing it, which is perhaps fortunate for him but certainly the reverse for everyone else.[21]

Vibrato stands as a metonym for the distinctiveness of an individual's voice, and it is in service of the question of how best to mediate between the uniqueness of individual voices and the corporate sound of choral blend that the discourse of the natural is commonly deployed. Hence, Davison regards the construct of vocal 'method' as an impediment to a unit sound, and Lewis considers a choir of trained voices to sound as »a mass of clashing vocal colours — a heterogeneous huddle of warring resonances, each striving to be heard above the rest.«[22] In both of these instances the problem is not merely that the process of training has made voices sound too unlike one another, but that it has fostered an overly individualistic attitude that values this uniqueness above the corporate endeavour of the whole. The natural voice may be faulty, but it is at least not obstructive: it has the potential to be shaped.

Counter-poised to this is the notion that the manufacturing process that removes the voice from its natural state goes on not in singing lessons, but in the very process of melding voices together in a choir:

> Our singers are individuals. They deserve to be respected and treated as individuals. They should not be manipulated into some kind of mass unit that has no individual identity. They are all human beings. They will sound similarly beautiful, and

[20] HILL, PARFITT & ASH, *Giving Voice*, 25.

[21] Victor KNIGHT, *Directing Amateur Singers*, (West Kirby, UK: JUBAL Music Publications, 2000), 73.

[22] Joseph LEWIS, *Conducting without Fears: A Helpful Handbook for the Beginner, Part II: Choral and Orchestral Conducting* (London: Ascherberg, Hopwood and Crew, 1945), 10.

> suprisingly uniform, if they sing naturally, freely, energetically, and with sensitivity. They need not be forced to sound like someone else, or manipulated into a »special sound« for which the conductor wishes to be known.[23]

The discourse of the natural voice as authentic expression is thus deployed in direct opposition to that of the natural voice as untrained, although in search of an answer to the same practical and philosophical questions.

The interrelated discourses of the universal and the natural, then, serve to secure the coherence and self-evidence of the category of choral singing, although by somewhat different means, and to somewhat different effect. The discourse of the universal operates by a rhetorical sleight of hand that simultaneously posits a broad, encompassing definition and a delimiting set of conditions upon it: choral music is simultaneously any corporate act of vocalisation and a specified list of repertoires and practices. This elision of whole and part serves to disguise the contingency of the category, and render invisible those practices that fall outside the smaller but inside the larger definition. The very slippage between inclusive and restricted definitions, however, permits us to see not only the processes of construction themselves, but also the nature, location and ideological investments of the boundaries that are thereby constructed. I will examine these boundaries in more detail in the next section. The discourse of the natural serves more as a means to regulate the behaviours that define these boundaries, and operates by bringing into play contradictory meanings of the natural as authentic and as inchoate: the singer's voice is simultaneously an inherent attribute endowed by our evolutionary inheritance and defective raw material in need of training. These incongruities are used to finesse the problematic relationship of individual to group; I will return to this issue in my discussion of disciplinary technologies below.

### *Defining the Boundaries*

The category of choral singing is constituted through the stipulation of prescribed and proscribed practices; certain forms of behaviour are mandatory, others forbidden. In examining the boundaries that are drawn between the correct and the incorrect in my chosen literature, I am less interested in identifying the content of the category — the sources themselves do this in great detail after all — than in investigating the terms in which these boundaries are articulated. These terms group into four main themes.

[23] NEUEN, *Choral Concepts*, 12.

The first, that of bodily control, is the most obvious place to observe the production of choral singers. We have already seen this in the discussion of the 'natural' faults of the inexperienced singer: the lists of undesirable attributes define what lies outside the boundaries of acceptable choral behaviour. To counter this, the texts outline a whole host of practices specifically to be desired, relating to stance, breathing and vocal production (the latter including the position of larynx, soft palate, and tongue, and the placement of resonance). That is, the texts provide specific instructions for how singers are to use their bodies; indeed, the singer's body is often referred to as an instrument, an implement to be wielded in service of the conductor's musical ends.

The second theme used to define boundaries is that of social identities such as class, educational level, and regionality. This theme emerges most frequently through the discussion of diction, although other aspects of choral practice such as voice placement are also implicated on occasion. Hylton's assertion that, »No matter which language is sung, the aim is to pronounce words in a universally accepted manner, devoid of regional and colloquial mannerisms,« is typical in positing a manner of diction that transcends the particular identities of specific localities, and in doing so contributes to the notion of a universalised choral practice discussed above.[24] The social judgments implied by his casting of regional accents as 'mannered' is underlined by their association with the 'colloquial'. Garretson likewise advocates avoiding 'vocal mannerisms characteristic of particular regional areas', and fleshes out the social implications of this by recommending »a standardised 'general American' approach to pronunciation, as utilised by most radio and television announcers.«[25] By mandating the use of 'the King's English', as a means of dealing with those »districts in which even educated people have certain peculiarities of pronunciation,« Coward makes more explicit still the associations of class indexed by accent.[26] It is worth noting in this context, that the idealised 'default' or 'universal' pronunciation promoted by writers is invariably mediated by place: British writers such as Coward, Cleall and Knight warn singers against sounding too American, while American authors such as Willetts make the converse caution.[27]

While Cleall's discussion of diction makes some reference to regionality (»A dialect such as Scottish, which inverts and exchanges vowels, alters the flow and movement of sounds in an unjustifiable way«),[28] it rests to a greater extent on the axes of class and education:

[24] HYLTON, *Comprehensive Choral Music Education*, 21.
[25] GARRETSON, *Conducting Choral Music*, 56.
[26] COWARD, *Choral Technique*, 86-7.
[27] COWARD, *Choral Technique*, 44; CLEALL, *Voice Production*, 37; KNIGHT, *Directing Amateur Singers*, 79; Sandra WILLETTS, *Beyond the Downbeat: Choral Rehearsal Skills and Techniques* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 24.
[28] CLEALL, *Voice Production*, 33.

> It may be said, »But language is a living thing. Correct pronunciation is established by usage; not by the dictionary.«
>
> Attractive as the argument may seem, it is not used by those who have an ear for language; because usage constantly falls into error by imitating ignorance, supposing ignorance to be fashionable.
>
> Without the guidance of The Oxford English Dictionary, we shall ape the yob or the nob every time we open our mouths: with it, we may learn to pronounce English beautifully, in a way which is neither posh nor common.[29]

Hence the aesthetic quality of beauty is directly linked to a specifically middle-class sensibility that is considered well-educated and therefore able to transcend mere fashion. The location of authority over language in The Oxford English Dictionary suggests not only a respect for the written word, but also, by invoking Britain's oldest university, references a particular accent, and, indeed, a particular collegiate choral tradition.

The third theme by which the boundaries of acceptable choral practice are defined is by reference to other genres. That is, notwithstanding the universalised definition of choral singing as the natural expression of shared humanity, styles of singing associated with some other repertories are explicitly excluded, especially those associated with pop and rock. So, Willetts attributes tuning problems to »faulty vocal production« arising from »male changing voices and with females who have sung only pop or country music in a chesty register«, while Hylton asserts that, »The current pop vocal sound of many female singers is not a desirable model for choral singing, since it is breathy, lacking in focus, and dependent on electronic amplification for projection.«[30]

Related to the marking of boundaries by genre is the overwhelming assumption of literacy: choral music is almost exclusively conceived in terms of the notated works that constitute the classical canon. Hence, the ability to sight-read is demanded by those writers discussing audition criteria, and promoted by those writing for conductors working in an educational context. Demorest places music literacy so firmly in the heart of choral music that he entitles his book dedicated to developing this skill *Building Choral Excellence*.[31] That 'choral' here refers to the specific rather than the universalised practice emerges in his discussion of vocal traditions that rely on orality rather than literacy:

[29] *Ibid.*, 94.

[30] WILLETTS, *Beyond the Downbeat*, 31; HYLTON, *Comprehensive Choral Music Education*, 73. Objections to pop styles are not limited to female singers: Hylton continues »Many male pop singers also produce a sound that is an inappropriate model for most choral situations, athough a positive point is their use of falsetto«.

[31] Steven M. DEMOREST, *Building Choral Excellence: Teaching Sight-Singing in the Choral Rehearsal* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001).

> The influx of world music into choral repertoire over the last ten yeas has been a welcome and very positive addition to choral music education. … However, many of the singing cultures represented do not rely on standard notation for either the transmission or performance of their music. In fact, notated editions of some cultures' music can conceal more than they reveal about authentic performance practice. Consequently, there is often a greater reliance on rote procedures for learning this music, and the skill of reading traditional notation is less important.[32]

Hence, repertories that arise from oral traditions are seen as inherently outside the category of choral music, since their recent inclusion is seen as an 'influx' that is effected by their transformation into notated scores. The contrast here between 'rote procedures' and 'traditional notation' is telling: oral transmission is cast as a set of concrete operations devoid of understanding, while literacy takes on the associations of a valued continuity of practice carried by the term 'tradition'. 'World music' is also (as ever) a problematic term; its discussion here solely in terms of non-notated idioms invites a connection with the term 'ethnic music', which appears as either implicit or explicit euphemism for music from African American traditions. For example, Adler states that:

> There are many instances when we wish to perform authentic ethnic music, or 'composed' music with an ethnic flavor. 'Hold On' by James Furman gives us an opportunity to look at a work that attempts to notate the Gospel singing style. James Furman is one of our foremost authorities on black Gospel music, and in this, as in some of his other works, he has given us as close an approximation as possible of all the rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic nuances of the style.[33]

The repeated use of 'we' and 'us' in this passage, and the way this is counterpointed against the mysteries of a black idiom requiring the intercession of an 'authority' to make it performable, signal that the choir of Adler's imagination is predominantly white. Notation marks the boundaries of choral music not only by repertory, that is, but also by race.

The final category used to mark the boundaries of choral practice is that of the moral attributes of a singer's character. We have already seen how the trained voice and/or the voice with excessive vibrato can be regarded as evincing an overly soloistic attitude and a concomitant refusal to commit to the corporate endeavour. Such voices, suggests Garretson, must be 'subdued'.[34] The other common moral failing commonly identified is laziness, with associations not only of idleness but also depravity. Garretson and Cleall both decry 'slovenly' articulation, and the

[32] *Ibid.*, 17.

[33] Samuel ADLER, *Choral Conducting: An Anthology* (Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1971), 540.

[34] GARRETSON, *Conducting Choral Music,* 136.

latter considers »the conventionally fat and feverish tone« employed by choirs as »not only thriftless of energy, but musically ineffective.«[35] Holst distinguishes between faults due to inexperience and those of 'self-indulgence' and 'sentimentality'.[36]

What is notable about the deployment of these themes is that the boundaries they define are strongly overdetermined. That is, any one form of behaviour to be included or excluded is defined in terms of more than one of these discourses. We have already seen how music literacy (or the lack of it) accrues associations with different styles or idioms, and thereby can index race or ethnicity. Likewise, 'scooping' up to a note might be labelled as simply a fault due to lack of training, as the result of an indolent and complacent character, or as an attribute of other, inappropriate, styles of singing such as crooning.[37] Knight conflates the discourses of genre, bodily dysfunction and regionality in his assertion that:

> Singers whose singing or listening experience has been limited to pop music present serious problems when they join choirs. Some of them may have excellent voices if they sing properly, but seem to be under the impression that, in order to sing at all, they should sound as though they suffered with their adenoids and came from Tennessee.[38]

As a result, it is not possible to separate out those behaviours that are conceived in terms of cultural political axes of identity (race, class, education level, regionality), from those that are 'purely' technical or musical. The bodily, the moral, the social and the generic are inextricably intertwined in defining what constitutes choral singing, and ostensibly pragmatic statements of good practice, when placed in their broader intertextual web of reference, are rarely neutral with reference to the operations of power in wider culture.

### *Policing the Boundaries*

The boundaries that define choral practice are constituted through discourse; their enforcement, however, relies on a range of disciplinary mechanisms operated by both conductors and by the singers themselves. These entail both the literal exclusion of individuals who display inappropriate forms of behaviour and the stipulation of practices intended to transform participants' behaviours.

[35] *Ibid*., 56; CLEALL, *Voice Production*, 55, 35.

[36] HOLST, *Conducting a Choir*, 47. John Potter discusses the choral society movement in Victorian Britain as a means to enforce the moral values of the dominant classes; see *Vocal Authority*, 81-2.

[37] Paul ROE, *Choral Music Education*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall), 120; HOLST, *Conducting a Choir*, 47; KNIGHT, *Directing Amateur Singers*, 106.

[38] KNIGHT, *Directing Amateur Singers*, 6.

The processes of literal exclusion are enacted through the audition process, which is designed for the selection of singers displaying the desired attributes. While older texts such as Coward explicitly include class and educational level as factors to consider, most articulate their desiderata in primarily musical terms.[39] However, given the overdetermination of the appropriate behaviours and attributes discussed above, audition requirements cannot be regarded as 'purely' musical, but will inevitably maintain a relationship with more overtly social or political axes of identity. Music literacy again provides a telling example: regarded as a fundamental criterion for selection by authors such as Neuen, it is central only to those choral traditions that sing primarily from notated music.[40] This is not to deny the importance of sight-reading skill for the performance of notated repertoire, but to highlight the way that the synecdochic elision of the cross-cultural phenomenon of ensemble singing with the more limited set of practices usually encompassed by the literature on choral singing can tend to suppress the extra-musical exclusions concomitant with an ostensibly musical selection criterion.

Such maintenance of boundaries by literal exclusion, however, is less important in this literature than that by the modification of participants' conduct. Many writers assume that the director will have to craft a choir out of whoever presents themselves as volunteers, and even those writers who do discuss audition procedures and requirements spend far less time discussing selection than detailing the means by which to promote desired behaviours and to prevent those deemed unsuitable. Moreover, the notion that the choral singer is made rather than born betrays an egalitarian ideal that to an extent counter-balances the ideological investments of the behavioural ideals themselves. Hence, Reynolds advises aspirant choral conductors:

> It is necessary to learn how to include in one conversation people of widely differing mental attainments. A choir may include labourers, doctors, teachers, office workers, all manner of people — and the choirmaster is usually the best person to ensure that they all feel wanted.[41]

So, while the boundaries that delimit the identity of the choral singer may be located with reference to wider social categories, it is by the execution of correct practices rather than by the possession of congenital attributes that the individual can have access to that identity. Whatever one's previous musical experience and

[39] Coward states: 'As to the social qualifications, I am convinced that, other things being equal, the better a singer has been educated the more refined are the results obtainable. But while admitting, with pleasure, that some of the most energetic and enthusiastic singers I have ever met are high in the social scale, it would be fatal to a high standard of performance to elect members upon social position alone, because so many would join and then refuse to work. … The best plan, therefore, is to insist on vocal and reading ability as being the basis of admission to a choir.' COWARD, *Choral Technique*, 258-9.

[40] NEUEN, *Choral Concepts*, 70.

[41] REYNOLD, *Choirmaster in Action*, 49.

regional or class accent, one merely needs to learn the accepted styles of vocal production and diction to become a choir member. In this sense, the practice has some claim to its supposed universality: choral singing may be a narrower and more culturally contingent activity than its literature would like to imagine, but it is one that has well-developed techniques for transforming disparate individuals to suit its needs. These techniques fall into the Foucauldian categories of technologies of the self and technologies of power, and are represented in the choral conducting literature by the range of training methods and disciplinary frameworks by which a choir director can generate choral singers.

Foucault defined technologies of the self as methods by which individuals »effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.«[42] There are several ways in which instructions for training choirs match this definition. Firstly, there is way that the technologies are operated both by the self being transformed and by others: the choral trainer provides instruction and demonstration, but it is the individual who enacts the practices thus prescribed. The co-operative nature of this endeavour shows through the literature in the ambiguity as to whether such sections are addressed to the choir trainer or the singers in his or her care. Hence, Cleall delivers his comments directly to the singer (»Stand, or sit, like a soldier at attention, but without his rigidity: head up, chin in, shoulders loosely back and down, chest up, abdomen in«), while Willetts talks about the singers' experience to their leader (»They must memorise what it feels like to sing in the dome or mask, and humming is nature's way of achieving that automatically.«).[43] Roe attempts to encompass both by presenting notional monologues that the director might present to the chorus: »One of the very first things a director must tell a new choir is, 'Hold up your music.'«.[44]

The next point to note is that the instructions relate both to individuals' bodily experiences and to their sense of interiority. The 'self' here is an integrated psychophysical unit, and so the techniques for transforming it involve both instructions for actions and for ways to imagine and experience those actions. Cleall's instruction above, then, invites the singer to identify with a particular role or persona as a means to learn how to hold the body, while Willetts links the act of humming with both bodily sensation and memory. Singers' affective states are also invoked as a means to achieve appropriate bodily disposition: two of the techniques that Roe provides to establish »a firm, open throat and relaxed neck mus-

[42] Michel FOUCAULT, Technologies of the Self, in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman et al, (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 17.

[43] CLEALL, *Vocal Production*, 11; WILLETTS, *Beyond the Downbeat*, 12.

[44] ROE, *Choral Music Education*, 73.

cles« are to »feel suddenly amazed« and to »feel ecstasy«.[45] The frequent use of medical metaphors likewise signals that the process of change operates more deeply on the singer's experience of him or herself than simply following instructions: hence Lewis writes of individual instruction being required to 'cure' the 'defects' of problem voices, and Garretson suggests that, »it might be well for the choir director or voice teacher to think of various vocal exercises as a physician might think of a prescription or a form of therapy«.[46]

The idealised state that these technologies of the self are designed to attain is that of choral unity. This is conceived as both an audible quality (Coward calls for »a rich compound tone, made up of voices of various timbres, which has the disagreeable excesses of individuality so modified that the characteristic qualities of one set of voices form the complement of another set or other sets, the combination making an agreeable whole«) and as a form of social bonding (Garretson asserts the virtue of »A choral group with high morale, in which each individual possesses a feeling of 'belonging' and exhibits a singleness of effort toward the groups' objectives«).[47] This unity of sound and purpose entails a degree of subordination of the individual to the group — quite how much is, as we have seen, subject to debate — and the processes by which this subservience is effected reveal the operations of the technologies of power.

The technologies of power provide the surveillance mechanisms by which the choral director enforces required behaviour. Most if not all choral conducting texts devote far less space to the discussion of the conducting techniques of beat pattern and gesture than to furnishing a repertoire of techniques for the regulation of appropriate choral conduct in rehearsal. Indeed, the entire rehearsal process is framed as one of monitoring what singers are doing, identifying what is faulty or lacking and then altering it: »Even if the change is not for the better and has to be modified later,« asserts Kaplan, »the essence of a good instruction is that it is understood by the chorus and requires that they *change something* in their performance.«[48] The diagnostic phase of this process, the detail of perception brought to the director's aural surveillance of choral behaviour, is key to the success of the enforcement mechanisms: »How well do you hear?« Howard Swan asks directors, »How well do you listen? How much do you hear at rehearsal?«[49]

Just as the technologies of the self encompassed both physical demeanour and self-identity, the director's superintendence of his or her singers extends beyond their specifically musical behaviours to control their affective, psychological and moral states as well. This is evinced in concerns with the maintenance of

[45] *Ibid.*, 77.
[46] LEWIS, *Conducting without Fears, part II*, 24; GARRETSON, *Conducting Choral Music*, 41.
[47] COWARD, *Choral Technique*, 25; GARRETSON, *Conducting Choral Music*, 135.
[48] Abraham KAPLAN, *Choral Conducting* (New York: Norton, 1985), 188.
[49] Howard SWAN, *Conscience of a Profession* (Chapel Hill, NC: Hinshaw Music, 1987), 42.

orderly habits in the rehearsal and performance environment: laxness in putting away the choir's robes, it is suggested, fosters a general moral decline that will infect not just choral technique but the entire spirit of the choir.[50] It also relates to the understanding of the voice as both site and expression of individual self-identity: »I begin with the conviction,« states Swan, »that we must know our singers as persons before we can help to build their voices«.[51] This statement mediates between the multiple meanings of 'natural' discussed earlier: the natural, authentic self must be respected if the natural, unformed body is to be successfully transformed into a choral singer.

A key element of this process of enforcing choral discipline through the surveillance of the whole person is the development and maintenance of eye contact. At one level, close visual attention to the chorus complements the aural monitoring of their vocal behaviour, providing information about how singers are managing their vocal equipment. At another, however, it serves to intrude into the singer's sense of interiority. Hence, Bertalot states that »creative and interactive eye contact« between conductor and choir means that, »when your eyes meet, each of you knows what the other is thinking«.[52] There is a potential for equality, for a sharing of power, in the mutuality of this definition; elsewhere, though, he reasserts the role of eye contact as a means for control, instructing the director, »Always make sure, when you give an order, that you are standing up straight, like an officer in front of his troops, and looking everyone in the eye.«[53]

These operations of power have been noted in the few previous studies that consider choral musicianship as a cultural practice. Paul Attinello claims that the chorus is an inherently authoritarian structure, while John Potter describes the practice whereby singers in British cathedral choirs are expected to raise their hands to indicate when they have made a mistake as a 'ritual humiliation'.[54] I would argue, however, that 'hegemonic' is possibly a more precise description than 'authoritarian': the requirement that singers discipline themselves provides a classic instance of hegemonic power in the Gramscian sense. The purpose of the technologies of power, that is, is to prompt the singers into operating the technologies of the self: »Singers,« asserts Bertalot, »need to correct their own faults.«[55] Durrant makes a more developed statement of the same principle:

[50] John BERTALOT, *How to be a Successful Choir Director* (Stowmarket: Kevin Mayhew, 2002), 19; NEUEN, *Choral Concepts*, 15.

[51] SWAN, *Conscience*, 96.

[52] BERTALOT, *Successful Choir Director*, 119.

[53] *Ibid.*, 18.

[54] Paul ATTINELLO, Authority and Freedom: Toward a Sociology of the Gay Choruses, in *Queering the Pitch: The New Lesbian and Gay Musicology*, ed. by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas, (New York: Routledge), 321; POTTER, *Vocal Authority*, 84.

[55] BERTALOT, *Successful Choir Director*, 46.

> By far the most valuable feedback for choral singers is that perceived by the singers themselves. As singers learn how to detect their own feedback, intrinsic reward is increased with that self-mastery, conductor feedback becomes less necessary (rehearsal time is saved), and emotional attachment to singing is intensified.[56]

Not only are singers implicated in the policing of choral boundaries, but the power accorded to the conductor over them is far from absolute. There is a strong emphasis within the literature on avoiding the abuse of power: those that enforce it are expected to discipline themselves as much as their choristers. Kaplan's chapter on 'Discipline' refers to the director's control over his or her technique, both gestural and instructional, while Jordan presents a trouble-shooting guide that attributes musical and technical problems in the choir's performance to specific inadequacies in the conductor's own technique.[57] Many texts also require conductors to shape their choirs' behaviours from a position of responsiveness to and empathy with them; Reynolds, for instance, asserts that the choir »will only function properly, and with that degree of unanimity which a first-class team must have, if there is complete understanding between the choir-master and each individual singer.«[58] Choral conducting itself can thus be seen as a distinct but related bodily regime in its own right. Directors, like singers, are being required to act hegemonically, enforcing rules to which they themselves are also subject.

*Conclusion*

To discuss choral singing as a regime of the body, then, is to state that the choral singer is brought into being by the disciplinary structures that define and regulate the practice. The proto-choral subject is transformed into a chorister through the acquisition of prescribed behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs and by the avoidance of those deemed improper. This transformation is made possible by the development of a standardised knowledge base: the common discourse permits the practice to maintain itself as a coherent and self-evident category, while its grounding in the discourses of the natural and the universal masks the contingency of its constitution. I should like to close by highlighting two primary issues that have implications both for the theorizing of other musical activities' role in identity-formation, and for the practice of choral music in the early twenty-first century. These are the relationship between choral singing and other, more overtly political, categories of identity, and the increased rationalisation of disciplinary power over time.

[56] DURRANT, *Choral Conducting*, 33.
[57] KAPLAN, *Choral Conducting*, 90-94; JORDAN, *Evoking Sound*, 288-97.
[58] REYNOLDS, *Choirmaster in Action*, 6.

The boundaries that define what is and what is not acceptable choral behaviour are drawn, as we have seen, with reference to other social categories. The requirements for certain forms of diction, styles of vocal production or musicianship skills rather than others are couched in terms that privilege the white, educated middle classes. These social qualifications may not always be indexed directly but the overdetermination of the definitions of the choral singer means that what for one writer is a matter of physical technique becomes for another a matter of moral fitness. As may be expected, recent writers are much less likely to comment on class and race (although references to regionality and musical style may still recall these associations, as in the examples quoted from Knight and Demorest), but the continued coexistence on the library shelves of older texts that do assert these values with newer ones that do not, but that require the same forms of behaviour, and the increasing tendency for newer texts to cite older literature, serve to maintain these meanings within the discipline's knowledge base.

On the other hand, the emphasis within this literature on the transformation rather than the exclusion of the individual promises a flexibility of identity quite at odds with the essentialist notions of these forms of social identity more commonly in circulation. It is the behaviour, not the individual that displays it, that is to be excluded. Moreover, the capacity for individuals to change their behaviour is a central predicate of the development of choral tone: to the extent that the requirement to blend involves the renunciation of individuality, it also holds the potential for liberation from the restrictive stereotypes of cultural politics. Indeed, the very unity of discourse that constructs the category of choral singing itself generates a unity of praxis that to a considerable extent does transcend the local. The breadth and consistency of practice in choral music, that is, is not evidence of a universal human nature, but the result of the practice's formalised knowledge base. The choral singer emerges as a supra-national identity that is performatively constituted along lines of coherence established through a unified discourse.

This in turn leads to my final point: that of the increasing rationalisation of power over time. In this study, I have taken a primarily synchronic perspective, since the texts I examine, although written over the course of nearly a century, form an extant body of knowledge available today. However, it is worth observing two features of this literature that show significant change in recent years. The first is their increased sense of historical context: recent writers are far more likely to use the knowledge frameworks they present as a means to organise and account for previous practice. Second, there is a shift towards a more scholarly style of presentation, both in the style and tone of language used, and in the inclusion of bibliographies and references to situate this new work in relation to previous texts and performance contexts. Personal practical experience still strongly informs these later texts, but is no longer the sole basis for a writer's authority. The result of this is much greater sense of a systematic, coherent and integrated discourse, bringing a commensurately greater efficiency and effectiveness to the disciplinary power it affords.

This standardisation of discourse over time in turn parallels the growth of institutional structures that support and promote the practice. Educational and networking organisations such as the American Choral Directors Association (founded 1959), the International Federation for Choral Music (founded 1982) and the Association of British Choral Directors (founded 1986) not only rely upon the discursive formation of choral singing as an ontologically secure category for their existence, but also serve as mechanisms to extend the consistency and scope of that discourse's reach. In this sense, choral singing provides a classic example of Foucault's notion of 'governmentality': the centralisation of power through the construction of systematic and/or scientific knowledge. It also reminds us that, notwithstanding the reliance on historical repertoire, the increased concern with historically-sensitive approaches to performance style, and, in some cases, the historical continuity of the choirs themselves, what the literature would like to cast as 'traditional' choral singing is thereby becoming a distinctly modern institution.

*Sažetak*

ZBORSKO PJEVANJE KAO TJELESNI REŽIM

Istraživanje prakse zborskog pjevanja nadovezuje se na foucaultovsku kritičku tradiciju analize kako pjevanje u zboru strukturira načine na koje ljudi borave u svojim tijelima, upotrebljavaju ih i doživljavaju. Tekstovi iz literature o zborskom dirigiranju čitaju se kao priručnici za produkciju i upravljanje zborskim pjevačima, a ispituju se tehnologije moći discipliniranja koje tvore i održavaju granice tog identiteta. Ovo čitanje pokazuje kako glazbene prakse mogu biti simultano neovisne i konstruirane unutar strukturâ moći svakodnevnih društvenih odnosa: dok mehanizmi koji uređuju zborsko ponašanje jasno upućuju na političke osi identiteta kao što su klasa, obrazovna razina i regionalna pripadnost, oni to čine djelokrugom koji je usredotočeniji na transformaciju nego na isključivanje pojedinca. Studija pridonosi teorijskim diskusijama o glazbi i društvenom identitetu stalno nazočnim u muzikologiji, ali i postavlja praktična pitanja koja se tiču društvenih i osobnih vrijednosti povezanih sa zborskim muziciranjem.

Rasprava započinje ocrtavanjem procesâ tvorbe diskursa koji definira zborsko pjevanje kao kulturnu praksu i ispituje kako se univerzaliziraju i postaju prirodnima prakse specifične za kulturu i stil. Slijedi ispitivanje granica koje omeđuju kategoriju zborskog pjevanja a koje utvrđuju način na koji međusobno djeluju identitet zborskog pjevača i druge kategorije društvenog identiteta. To zauzvrat vodi k ispitivanju toga kako se te granice održavaju. Studija slijedi foucaultovsku tradiciju i kao takva ne polaže pravo na više ili manje privilegirajuću objasnidbenu moć nego što ga očituje sâm sustav znanja koji ispituje, ali nastoji učiniti očitima operacije moći koje ti sustavi znanja potiskuju.