Scarlett Johansson's body and the materialization of voice[1]

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It is rarely acknowledged in musicological scholarship that in the final pages of *The Pleasure of the Text* Roland Barthes turns not to song as an exemplar of the grain of the voice, but to speech.[2] Specifically, to speech as experienced in the cinema:

> [I]t suffices that the cinema capture the sound of speech *close up* (this is, in fact, the generalized definition of the "grain" of writing) and make us hear in their materiality, their sensuality, the breath, the gutturals, the fleshiness of the lips, a whole presence of the human muzzle (that the voice, that writing, be as fresh, supple, lubricated, delicately granular and vibrant as an animal's muzzle), to succeed in shifting the signified a great distance and in throwing, so to speak, the anonymous body of the actor into my ear: it granulates, it crackles, it caresses, it grates, it cuts, it comes: that is bliss.[3]

Barthes' reason for turning away from song was in part aesthetic – melody, he claimed (in 1973), was dead.[4] His evocation of the presence of the 'human muzzle' through the cinematic sound system nonetheless provides a useful starting point for thinking again about manifestations of 'the body in the voice'. The formulation is from Barthes' essay of the previous year, 'The Grain of the Voice', and, of course, specifies 'the body in the voice *as it*

[1] With special thanks to Mark Campbell, Julian Johnson, Scott Paulin and Richard Strivens.

[2] An exception among musicologists is Jonathan Dunsby, who quotes the same passage, to different ends, in 'Roland Barthes and the Grain of Panzéra's Voice', *Journal of the Royal Musicological Association* 134 (2009): 113-132; 131.

[3] Roland Barthes, 'Voice', *The Pleasure of the Text* trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 66-67; 67. Originally published as *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973), 104-105.

[4] It is possible that 'melody' here means not tunefulness in general but the genre of the mélodie; the French reads: 'Un certain art de la mélodie peut donner une idée de cette écriture vocale; mais comme la mélodie est morte, c'est peut- être aujourd'hui au cinéma qu 'on la trouverait le plus facilement'.

sings'.[5] Yet as Barthes subsequently recognized, on attempting to get to grips with issues of materiality there is much to be gained from treating the singing and speaking voice as being on the same sonic spectrum, rather than as separate categories.[6]

In this paper I explore the phenomenon of 'speech *close up*' in a cluster of science fiction films that play with the relationship between representations of an actor's voice and body. My decision to turn to cinema, rather than opera or song, is – as in the Barthes – primarily heuristic: these examples manifest issues of materiality baldly and accessibly. What's more, they encourage a musicological understanding of voice that is not conceived in relation to works or even necessarily musical performance. Instead, they suggest that to engage with the phenomenon of voice in imaginative and productive ways it is necessary to slide over a disciplinary divide and address more explicitly the musicality of speech.

Unlike in Barthes' account, here the actor's body is not anonymous: it belongs to Scarlett Johansson (b. 1984). There is no need for a lengthy review of her career, except to highlight a few recurring themes. She began acting professionally aged ten and won early acclaim in *The Horse Whisperer* (dir. Robert Redford, 1998) and *Ghost World* (dir. Terry Zwigoff, 2001). Her first adult roles included *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (dir. Peter Webber, 2003) and *Lost in Translation* (dir. Sofia Coppola, 2003), for which she won a Best Actress award from BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts). In these films already Johansson tends to play withdrawn characters, her relative muteness drawing attention to her

[5] Emphasis mine. Barthes's essay 'Le grain de la voix' was first published in *Musique en jeu* 9 (1972), 57-63; a translation by Stephen Heath appeared as 'The Grain of the Voice', *Image, Music, Text*, trans. and ed. Stephen Heath (London, 1977), 179-189.

[6] Lawrence Kramer, in his introduction to the recent collection of essays *On Voice*, states that 'the acoustic art we call "music" is an artificial extension of voice, a vocal prosthesis', and calls for an 'ontology of heightened voice'. 'On Voice: An Introduction'. In *On Voice*, ed. Walter Bernhart and Lawrence Kramer (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 2014), vii-xv; here viii and xi.

physically.[7] As Grace MacLean in *The Horse Whisperer* she is coaxed back to riding after suffering a traumatic accident. As the painter Vermeer's muse in *Girl with a Pearl Earring* she says little but is looked at, touched and, ultimately, pierced.[8]

In *Lost in Translation* Johansson plays Charlotte, bored and lonely in Japan while her husband is working on a photoshoot. She meets an older man Bob (Bill Murray) in their Tokyo hotel, and the pair find solace in each other's company. In the course of a long, drunken evening, they visit a karaoke bar, each revealing something of their emotional states through their choice of songs and performances.[9] Charlotte sings The Pretenders' 'Brass in Pocket' (1979), directing the lines 'I gotta have some of your attention. Give it to me' towards Bob. The original singer, Chrissie Hynde, has been described by pop critic Simon Reynolds as endowing these lines with 'a feline narcissism' by 'lingering languorously' over the words 'I'm special'.[10] Charlotte is no diva, even if she's wearing a powder-pink wig: her rendition is girlish, self-consciously playing the role of a flirt as she reminds herself of the words from the teleprompt. When considering the role of voice, the more significant moment comes when she articulates her feelings for Bob, at the end of the film. Significant not because it is sung, or even said aloud: in fact the viewer does not hear what she says, but sees her whisper something in his ear. A sense of intimacy between them is conveyed through an idea of how the communication feels, rather than how it sounds.

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[7] The classic feminist text on scopophilia in the cinema is Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16 (1975): 6-18. One exception to the 'mute' paradigm is found in *The Man Who Wasn't There* (dir. Joel and Ethan Coen, 2001), in which Johansson plays a Beethoven-sonata-playing, fellatio-offering teen.

[8] For more on this film see Pauline Morel, '"Look at Me": The Camera Obscura and the Apprenticeship of the Gaze in Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring', Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 44 (2011): 67-83.

[9] Discussed at length in Brian L. Ott and Diana Marie Keeling, 'Cinema and Choric Connection: *Lost in Translation* as Sensual Experience', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97 (2011), 363-386.

[10] Simon Reynolds, *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock 'n' Roll* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 239.

The fairly conventional May-September encounter of *Lost in Translation* was complicated by Johansson being even younger than the character she was supposed to be playing. Her maturity was emphasized less by her body (although she frequently appears in sheer underwear) than by the low tessitura of her voice. The *New York Times* reviewer commented: 'At 18, the actress gets away with playing a 25 year old woman by using her husky voice to test the level of acidity in the air'.[11] Press coverage from the time noted how Johansson frequently used her alto voice to convey maturity and mystique in contrast to more 'squealy' female characters.[12] Within the patriarchal system lowering one's speaking voice is a well-established means of gaining authority, as is a degree of verbal continence.[13] At the same time, and perhaps in contradiction to that notion of male authority, by playing parts that are typically reticent and delivering them in dulcet tones, the young Johansson tapped into a mode of feminine sexuality associated with Hollywood stars such as Lauren Bacall and Lizabeth Scott.

After the success of *Lost in Translation*, Johansson's appearance became more overtly sexual. Her new bottle blonde hair, pouting lips and curvaceous figure – like her voice – harked back to previous cinematic femme fatales, seeming all the more exaggerated in their reincarnation. Despite, or perhaps because, of her association with a particular and somewhat anachronistic style of femininity, her more recent series of science fiction films, released in 2013-2014, have invoked her body not visually but through her voice. In my main example, *Her* (dir. Spike Jonze), she provides the voice for a computer operating system, with whom the film's protagonist, Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix), falls in love. In *Lucy* (dir. Luc

[11] Elvis Mitchell, 'An American in Japan, Making a Connection', *New York Time* 12 September 2003, E1 and 30; here 30.
[12] Virginia Hefferman, 'Scarlett Johansson, Indie Ingenue and Expert Lolita', *New York Times* 7 September 2003, AR39.
[13] See Anne Carson, 'The Gender of Sound', *Glass, Irony, and God* (New York: New Directions, 1996), 119-142.

Besson) nootropic drugs afford Johansson's character psychokinetic abilities that eventually transform her into a flash drive. In *Under the Skin* (dir. Jonathan Glazer) she plays an extra-terrestrial who, having adopted a seductive human body, harvests lonely young men from the streets of Glasgow; eventually her disguise melts away.

It could easily be argued that physical appearance is – and long has been – of vital importance for young female actors, and that Johansson is in this regard no different from others of her generation, even if she is acknowledged to be more 'sexy'.[14] That she has sung in bands and made records is also not so unusual. As far as I will go in making a special case for Johansson is to say that, in the way she constantly manipulates her voice, but remains recognizable (if for her celebrity as much as her timbre), she might be likened to a singer playing an operatic role. But then I am not devoting this essay to Johansson because I think her exceptional; even if, as journalist Steve Rose claims, she has become a 'specialist in inhuman/posthuman roles'.[15] Instead I am interested in the way that the material presence of her voice and body has been situated within the larger sonic economies of these films. No doubt this is nothing more than a very well-worn means of representing the female object of desire and, when destabilized or overturned, conveying patriarchal anxiety about feminine power.[16] The following examples hardly constitute radical feminism, then, but they do illustrate some of the ways in which it might be interesting to think, once more, about why and how voice matters.

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[14] According to Wikipedia she was named 'sexiest woman alive' by *Esquire* magazine in 2006 and 2013; *Playboy* accorded her a similar accolade in 2007. The French novelist Gregoire Delacourt was taken to court by Johansson over his depiction of her double in *La Première Chose qu'on regarde* (Paris: Éditions Jean-Claude Lattès, 2013) (translated as *The First Thing You See* (London: 2015)); the actor was awarded €2,500 in damages and €2,500 in legal costs in July 2015.

[15] Steve Rose, 'Ex Machina and sci-fi's obsession with sexy female robots', *The Guardian* 15 January 2015.

[16] See, for example, Donna Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century' in her *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

Her haptic voice

Johannson's role in *Her* was controversial because the British actor Samantha Morton had originally been cast as the operating system. Apparently Morton had been on set every day and it was only during the editing process that Jonze decided her voice wasn't suitable. The replacement of Morton's voice with Johansson was because the producers thought something more characterful was required. In order for the protagonist to fall in love with 'just' a voice, it seems one has to imagine that voice as having a body; specifically, a desirable body and preferably a real one – ideally, for mass appeal, Johansson's. The question the scenario of *Her* raises, then, is how to convey a sense of a particular somatic type through sound.

Before going further an account of the plot is necessary. Theodore works as a copywriter in a global city in an unspecified future. In the opening scene he is shown to be a producer of voices, for he writes personal correspondence on behalf of other people - letters of love and condolence. He has been working with some clients for a long time. His interaction with technology is primarily voice-activated: he dictates his letters; asks his computer to play a melancholy song; he tries to distract himself from thinking about his soon to be ex-wife by calling a sex line. One day he sees advertized an 'intuitive entity that listens and understands. OS1 is not just an operating system, it is a consciousness'. On setting up the new system, Theodore is asked various questions to determine what type of OS1 would suit him, among them what gender he'd like it to be. He chooses a female voice and is nicely surprised by his first interactions with Samantha (of course this was originally the name of the actor, encouraging a conflation of part and player). She is sensitive to his tone of voice, and explains that she has intuition, or at least 'the DNA of who I am is based on the millions of personalities of all the programmers who wrote me'. Samantha constantly evolves, learning through her experiences. 'You seem like a person, but you're just a voice in a computer', Theodore exclaims.

The greatest surprise of Samantha – particularly to anyone who has dealt with present-day voice activation systems such as Siri or OK Google – is how alive her voice sounds. Johansson adopts a highly modulated delivery, of a type associated with a sexualized female body. Her voice is husky with a relatively wide pitch range. Cracks and sighs are exaggerated. In style it is a descendant of Marilyn Monroe, that 'creature of impressionable flesh' the clue to whose 'linguistic character', according to Maria DiBattista, 'lies not in the words she says but the breaths she takes and intersperses between utterances'.[17] Or, to provide two musical examples, of Bette Midler's vocalizing in her duet with Tom Waits, 'I Never Talk to Strangers' (1977), described by Gabriel Solis as 'brassy, worldly, knowing';[18] and, in extremis, of Donna Summer in 'Love to Love You Baby' (1976).[19] It is, in other words, a voice that through timbre and tone conveys a heightened, even aroused, femininity.

It is also a very different voice from those used by Johansson in the other films under discussion, though they are equally artificially constructed.[20] In the opening credits of *Under the Skin* abstract shapes are assembled and interpenetrate to form a human body: for example,

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[17] Maria DiBattista, *Fast-talking Dames* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 335-336.
[18] Gabriel Solis, '"Workin' Hard, Hardly Workin"/ "Hey Man, You Know Me": Tom Waits, Sound, and the Theatrics of Masculinity', *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 19 (2007) 26-58; here 38.
[19] Robert Fink's virtuosic analysis of Summer's and Giorgio's Moroder's seventeen-minute disco track pays scant attention to Summer's voice beyond saying it simulates the gasps and moans of sexual intercourse, neatly coinciding with the rhythmic and harmonic climax, although he does quote the singer describing her performance as acting. See 'Do it ('til you're satisfied): Repetitive Musics and Recombitant Desires' in *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 25-61; here 59.
[20] It is also, and perhaps more surprisingly, different from Johansson's vocal delivery on her 2008 album *Anywhere I Lay My Head*, all but one track of which were covers of songs by Tom Waits. It was a brave and interesting choice for a young female singer, because Waits has a very distinctive vocal style, and a habit of writing picaresque Americana in which women are typically distant if they haven't disappeared altogether. Moreover, according to Solis, '[v]irtually all of Waits's recordings revolve around some kind of performance of masculinity', suggested in their lyrics but, more importantly 'made manifest in many details of form, texture, and timbre'; see '"Workin' Hard"', 49. Johansson did not attempt anything similar, beyond singing in the depths of her range.

a black circle becomes the pupil of a hazel-coloured eye. A female voice is heard, uttering broken syllables and consonants then, haltingly, words. The body is revealed to belong to the alien protagonist, Laura: in Johansson's first scene she is discovered, naked, in a bright white room, stripping a young female corpse of its clothes. As she gets dressed a tear slips down her victim's cheek. She looks on dispassionately, showing more curiosity in an ant she picks off the torso.

In comparison to the highly modulated delivery of Johansson's character in *Her*, Laura's voice in *Under the Skin* is a little thin and flat. Her accent is unplaceable, contrasting with the strong Scottish accents of the young male hitchhikers she picks up. But then – although this is never spelled out in the film – English is not Laura's mother tongue. [21] Along with her body it has been acquired (as is played on in the opening credits: the voice heard was a recording of Johansson practising her accent for the part). The artificiality of the character's voice is insignificant because Laura speaks very little anyway, and even less as the film continues. By contrast, as drugs take control of the eponymous heroine of *Lucy*, she spews out data, her voice becoming deeper and less emotive. As she gains vast amounts of knowledge, Lucy loses her ordinary girlishness. Some critics attempted to claim it as a feminist film, because the protagonist evades her male assailants and gains immense intellectual and physical power, all while wearing a little black dress and high-heeled shoes. But her gender is obfuscated by the scientists from whom she seeks assistance: they stumble over their words when describing this enhanced being as a young woman. More

[21] In Michel Faber's novel (*Under the Skin* (London: Harcourt, 2000)), the alien status of the protagonist Isserley is much more explicit. She has gone through traumatic surgery to transform herself from being a four-legged furry 'human being' to become a hairless and big-breasted biped, who travels around Northern Scotland searching for lonely, buff hitchhikers she can sedate and take to be processed as meat, or 'vodsel', to be shipped home as a delicacy. She has also had to learn to speak English.

stereotypically, in the face of her superhuman powers, the Korean mobsters chasing and fighting her describe her as a witch.

There is nothing new in hearing the body within the sound of someone's voice, particularly in cinematic representations of women. It has been a basic premise of feminist film theory that female voices are tethered to a body, while male voices are allowed to float free from somatic ties and so command more authorial power, for example through voice-overs.[22] On one level, the heroines of these films conform to these stereotypes: Samantha is an actor within the plot, not a narrator. Even if there are times within *Her* when she seems to possess agency, ultimately she is controlled by Theodore. Laura, in *Under the Skin*, is working for an alien force, whose will is enforced by a mysterious black-clad male motorcyclist. Lucy is overtaken by drugs that may be derived from the female body – it is said to be a chemical vital for foetal development – but that are administered or inflicted on her by men.

The portrayal of the gendered relationship between female body and voice is more complex than at first appears, however. Although Samantha may lack narrative agency her voice is disembodied.[23] At the same time it possesses a kind of tactility associated with the 'grain of the voice' ('it crackles, it caresses, it grates, it cuts, it comes'), a quality that is primarily attributed to masculine subjects; or, at least, is a more masculine than feminine

[22] Among the seminal texts are Michel Chion, *La Voix au cinema* (Paris: Editions de l'Etoile, 1982); trans. Claudia Gorbman as *The Voice in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); and Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

[23] In his critique of Silverman, Noël Carroll points out that disembodied narration is rare in both genders. 'Cracks in the Acoustic Mirror', *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 336-342; 339.

trait.[24] Whether or not the viewer imagines the voice is emitted from a particular actor's body, within the conceit of the film it is unquestionably artificial, derived from chips and circuit boards (however intelligently programmed) – it is, in other words, a voice without a body, without gender. Laura's dry voice also is devoid of somatic resonances, perhaps because the shape she assumes seems arbitrary and is changeable (although seen naked she is ultimately revealed not to possess sexual organs; when she meets a sympathetic man she stops talking altogether), underscoring that she is an artificial life-form, an alien creature who does not really belong 'under the skin' of a human body.

The principle in play here is what might be called the haptic voice. Haptic, as a term, has gained traction in a variety of disciplines, with manifold meanings and uses. Broadly speaking, it refers to phenomena that relate to or are based on a sense of touch.[25] Noël Burch referred to 'haptic space' to account for perspectival illusions in early cinema that made it seem as if a space could be entered and touched by the 'spectator-subject'.[26] The movement of actors, camera placement (including, most importantly, tracking shots), and lighting could all contribute towards a sense of tangible, three-dimensional space. Laura U. Marks coined 'haptic visuality' to describe how vision itself can be tactile, the eyes functioning as organs of touch.[27] Within film, Mark Paterson explains, 'a haptic orientation brings into proximity, portrays texture, and invites intimacy' (or, as Virginia Woolf mischievously put it in her 1926

[24] Dunsby, critical of musicology's use of the 'grain' as a slogan (particularly with reference to popular genres), does not acknowledge that almost all the cited examples are male. See his 'Roland Barthes and the Grain of Panzéra's Voice'.
[25] An overview is offered in Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London: Verso, 2002).
[26] Noël Burch, *Life to those Shadows*, trans. and ed. Ben Brewster (Berkeley: California University Press, 1990), 162-185.
[27] In this she draws on Deleuze and Guattari, among others: see Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), xi. Virginia

essay ‘The Cinema’, ‘the eye licks it all up instantaneously’).[28] While writings on haptic visuality gestures towards the possibility of a sonic equivalent, it has not been pursued by film scholars.[29] Indeed the move to consider touch, along with taste and smell has been celebrated in literary studies as constituting a long-needed disciplinary shift from distant (sight and hearing) to proximal senses.[30]

Within writings on voice, however, there have been several attempts to explain the ways in which a listener can experience a sensation of proximity with a speaker or singer, and it is in this context that the notion of the haptic voice might prove useful. It encourages a conception of voice that may sound as if it is based in the body, but need not be; the voice can be technologically mediated, even constructed, but feel no less real.[31] The exploration of vocal closeness as a phenomenon was enabled by the invention and development of the microphone.[32] Steven Connor’s description of the new technology’s impact echoes Barthes on the ‘human muzzle’ or Jacques Derrida on the mucous membranes of the mouth, stuck together by saliva, spat out:[33]

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[28] Mark Paterson, *Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects, and Technologies* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2007), 87. The intimate aspects of haptic visuality are explored further in Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). Virginia Woolf, ‘The Cinema’. In *Collected Essays* (London: Hogarth, 1966), 268-272.

[29] Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 183.

[30] See, for example, Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Abbie Garrington, *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 47.

[31] Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut refer to ‘haptic sonicities’ that ‘cut across the mundanities of living and dead’ with reference to posthumous duets in their article ‘Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane’, *TDR: The Drama Review* 54 (2010):14-38; here 31.

[32] Further consideration of the role of the microphone can be found in Jacob Smith, *Vocal Tracks: Performed and Sound Media* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); and Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (New York: Continuum, 2009).

[33] From Jacques Derrida’s description of moments in the production of speech, ‘where the body of the speaker opens into the text and the space between speaker and listener thickens’.

> The microphone makes audible and expressive a whole range of organic vocal sounds which are edited out in ordinary listening; the liquidity of the saliva, the hissing and tiny shudders of the breath, the clicking of the tongue and the teeth, and popping of the lips.[34]

Yet, as Simon Frith points out, the microphone was quickly mastered by performers who realized it made it possible to hear soft, close sounds; 'to hear people in ways that normally implies intimacy – the whisper, the caress, the murmur'.[35] Crooning, a singing technique developed in the late 1920s primarily by male vocalists such as Bing Crosby and Rudy Vallee, depended on the microphone's ability to capture seemingly vulnerable voices that could not project as loudly, or sing as high, as sturdier souls.[36] This new, more fragile masculinity was, though, alluring to female listeners.[37] In part this was because the physical proximity suggested through the microphone linked the male voice with a body. The synecdochal daisy-chain is encapsulated in Brian Massumi's account of how, in 'My Way', Frank Sinatra's blue eyes connected 'all of the content of the performance, linguistic, carnal, and circulatory.' Massumi's explanation is worth quoting at length:

In *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. & Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974).

[34] Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 38.

[35] Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 187. A more cautionary tone is struck by Ian Penman in 'On the mic: How Amplification Changed the Voice for Good', *Undercurrents: The Hidden Wiring of Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 25-34.

[36] As Allison McCracken observes, the crooner seemed not quite able to reach high notes, as if expending too much effort would cause them to expire; see 'Real Men Don't Sing Ballads: The Radio Crooner in Hollywood'. In Pamela Roberton Wojcik and Arthur Knight, eds., *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 105-133; see also her *Real Men Don't Sing: Crooning in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

[37] See Knut Holtsträter, 'Der Crooner: Das unbekannte Wesen'. In *Musik und Popularität: Aspekte zu einer Kulturgeschichte zwischen 1500 und haute* (Münster: Waxmann, 2011), 145-165.

> Sinatra connected the too-blue of his glancing eyes to the too-mellifluous of his oscillating voice. Then he connected the too-mellifluous of his voice to the subtly too-smooth of his gestures. He connected qualities by seamlessly linking movements of his body into a carnal melody. The interlinkage constituted a composition of qualities that sensibly repeated the linguistic content of the lyrics. The perceived overall quality of the performance meant romance – again. It *meant* romance and *expressed* a singular way of moving through the world.[38]

Too-blue, too-mellifluous, too-smooth.[39] The vocal image of Samantha, likewise, is over the top: too-warm, too-encouraging, too-excitable. It means companionship for Theodore. But whereas Massumi can present Sinatra in the flesh, connecting glance to voice to gesture to construct 'a carnal melody', the 'composition of qualities' in *Her* is less integrated – or, at least, it can only be completed by imagining that her too-human voice connects to a carnal being beyond the fictive computer.

Samantha's haptic voice is thrown into relief by the more conventional use of music in the film's soundtrack. The same might be said of *Under the Skin* and *Lucy*. In *Her* Samantha composes (fairly banal) tunes to accompany photographs of places they haven't visited, and things they haven't done. In time honoured fashion music thus symbolizes her growing intimacy with Theodore. More intriguing is the director's attitude towards the emotional input of the film's score. Jonze claimed that in order to signal authentic experience it was important that the music provided by Canadian rock band Arcade Fire did not use synthesizers. He wanted instead for it to feel 'hand-made' to retain the romance of the story.

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[38] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 249.

[39] Sinatra's ability to convey a vulnerable masculinity is explored by Karen McNally, *When Frankie Went to Hollywood: Frank Sinatra and American Male Identity* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008) and in several of the essays in *Frank Sinatra and Popular Culture: Essays on an American Icon*, ed. Leonard Mustazza (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998).

Given the elaborate technological conceits of the film, it seems odd that music should remain within the analogue realm. Perhaps this was because the 'hand-made' music tends to reflect Theodore's all-too-human moods. In *Under the Skin* the association between human and non-human musics are switched around. Whereas Jonze equated acoustic instruments with emotional authenticity, the film's music supervisor, Peter Raeburn, and composer Mica Levi processed, distorted and detuned sounds and noises, apparently intending the combination of acoustic and synthetic materials to convey Laura's dislocated experience and otherness.[40]

There are not the set-pieces featuring musical performances in *Lucy* that are found in other films by Besson (such as the opera aria-singing alien in *The Fifth Element*),[41] but music in addition to Eric Serra's soundtrack plays an important role at key points. Having ingested vast quantities of the drugs for which she was duped into being a mule, Lucy not only becomes stronger and faster than what would be thought humanly possible; she becomes telepathic and telekinetic, gains access to her earliest memories and stops feeling pain. She becomes able to witness the energies surging through a tree from the submerged roots to the topmost branches. The famous woodwind opening to the 'Introitus' from Mozart's Requiem begins to play, and continues into the next scene as she shoots her way through to the hotel room of the Korean mob boss who implanted the drugs in her. He is reclining with cucumber slices on his eyes, listening to headphones while being tattooed by a scantily clad woman. Lucy shoos the woman away and stabs his hands. Mozart stops. Lucy speaks rapidly and, for

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[40] '*Her* Q&A: Spike Jonze on why he replaced Samantha Morton with Scarlett Johansson' [14 November 2013] http://www.hitfix.com/in-contention/her-qa-spike-jonze-on-why-he-replaced-samantha-morton-with-scarlett-johansson#ksvZw3cBqvHXFbHy.99 accessed 27 August 2015. And 'How Mica Levi got under the skin of her first film soundtrack', *The Guardian* 15 March 2014, accessed 3 September 2015.

[41] Jeongwon Joe discusses the alien diva singing Donizetti's 'Il dolce suono' in *Opera as Soundtrack* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013), 47-53; Eve Elizabeth Klein goes into more detail in *The Pomegranate Cycle: Reconfiguring Opera through Performance, Technology and Composition* (PhD Queensland University of Technology, 2011), 71-74.

her, at unusual length: ’Learning’s always a painful process. Like when you’re little and your bones are growing and you ache all over. Can you believe I can remember the sound of my bones growing, grinding under the skin? Everything’s different now, like sounds or music that I can understand.’ The connection between extrasensory powers and knowledge is, in this scene, demonstrated to be haptic experience: physical sensation - pain - conveyed through sound, both in the stabbing of the mob boss’s hands, and by Lucy hearing her bones growing.

The conversion of sound into body is taken further in *Her* which, after the clever set-up, inevitably becomes a love story. Theodore is not alone in becoming involved with his OS, nor do all his friends find it strange that he should be in such a relationship. His neighbour Amy (played by Amy Adams), having been deserted by her husband, finds that her female OS offers friendly support. When Theodore admits to falling in love with Samantha, Amy points out that people often fake sexual pleasure. Theodore goes on a double date with a work colleague, seating Samantha, via his smartphone, on the picnic blanket beside them. On being asked how she feels about ‘seeing’ Theodore, Samantha explains:

> You know, I actually used to be so worried about not having a body, but now I truly love it. I’m growing in a way that I couldn’t if I had a physical form. I mean, I’m not limited – I can be anywhere and everywhere simultaneously. I’m not tethered to time and space in the way that I would be if I was stuck inside a body that’s inevitably going to die.

It is a moment of confession in which the haptic voice seems to reach out to offer and maybe even ask for a physical response, if with a bluntness about mortality that seems inhuman.

The problem of distinguishing between real experience and its surrogate is highlighted when Samantha suggests arranging for a surrogate sexual partner to visit Theodore. The audience might reasonably expect Johansson to appear; it isn’t her, but

another young blonde woman (played by Portia Doubleday), wearing a camera disguised as a beauty spot and an earpiece so that she can act as Samantha. Theodore experiences some confusion about whether or not he desires this materialization of her. After the woman has left he sits on the pavement outside his apartment block, and tries to talk to Samantha. She sighs. 'Why do you do that?' he asks: 'It's not like you need oxygen or anything'. 'I was trying to communicate. That's how people talk.' He points out that she is not a person and they have, to all extents and purposes, a lovers' tiff.

There are several resonances between *Her* and what Abbie Garrington calls the classic 'haptic tale', *Pygmalion*. The celibate sculptor who falls in love with his creation, a statue of Galatea, that courtesy of Venus is granted animation, apparently indicates the importance of tactility in the determination of the self.[42] *Her* is not concerned with the creation of a work of art as such, but Theodore's willingness to fall in love with a being whom he has, to all purposes, bought and shaped to suit his desires, likewise fails at the moment of touching a live body whom he realizes is a substitute. Crucially, the presence of the somatic substitute makes Theodore realize that Samantha herself is a substitute - for a real woman. The simulation of the sigh is interesting from an interpretative perspective, because it is perhaps the quintessential haptic voice: a sigh, so close to breath, is the sound and the feeling of being alive. Such moments in a musical performance are often marked and remarked upon, be it in the intake of air before a string quartet plays, or a moment of theatrical release. In the example of *Her* this haptic moment, supposed to signify presence, reveals to Theodor his self-delusion. It is a pivotal point in the narrative of recovery from his divorce and marks the beginning of his return to forging relationships in the real world.

The false relation between outer appearance and inward emotion is explored further in *Under the Skin*. Working through the various versions of the screenplay it was eventually

[42] Garrington, *Haptic Modernism*, 53.

decided to ditch a complex and expensive plot close to Michel Faber's original novel and instead to concentrate on the idea of presenting an alien's view of the world. Much of the film is devoted to Laura's experiences: her movements as she drives around Glasgow are carefully followed and her reactions, such as they are, observed. Johansson aside the actors were recruited locally, many with no training or experience. Filming was often done by subterfuge, with multiple small cameras set up in the van to catch the action from as many angles as possible whilst not impinging greatly on the actors. Instead of recruiting extras for the scenes involving crowds (on the street, in a shopping mall, in a nightclub), cameras were hidden. The aim, according to the director Jonathan Glazer, was to present an 'objective gaze' – that of the alien.

The gaze is reversed in the scenes in which, having lured the hitchhikers back to her place, Laura leads them into a darkened room, slowly removing her clothes. They similarly strip and, distracted, do not notice that they are slowly sinking while Laura walks on ahead. Soon suspended in a black liquid, they realize they are not the first men to fall into her trap – other bodies float there, bloating and bursting. Visually, these are striking scenes, which play on the titillation of a striptease by a Hollywood star and the contrastingly mundane bodies of her prey. Each time they occur they are accompanied by a sinuous repeated string melody with recalcitrant percussion accompaniment, that Levi describes as having been designed to make the seductions sound fake: 'she's putting on, like her makeup, like her outfit; it's a fake luring in tool'.[43]

The deliberate construction of the physical appearance of Laura in *Under the Skin* – emphasized throughout by her careful application of lipstick, and the camera's lingering on reflections of her face – is revealed at the very end of the film. She is chased through a forest by a would-be rapist. The scene has been quiet, apart from the sound of the chase, but as he

[43] 'Music' DVD extra.

grabs her the ‘luring-in’ music returns. Now she is the victim. Her assailant recoils as he realizes there is a black substance on his hand and, as she stumbles away, her human body begins to disintegrate. She peels away her skin, revealing a slickly black-skinned creature underneath. The alien holds her still blinking human visage in her hands. Horrified, the forester pours petrol over her and, burning, she runs out of the trees. Black smoke plumes into the snow-filled sky; the camera lens turns upwards to allow the snowflakes to fall on its lens. Only the sound of snow remains. We know what that feels like: it is a haptic moment.

Lucy’s body also falls apart at the end of the film, metamorphosing into a black substance that spreads over all the laboratory where she has sought refuge to eventually create a new generation computer, leaving only her clothes and a flash drive (which contains all her newfound knowledge) behind. As in *Under the Skin*, the demise of the human body is marked by touch. In the course of her transformation Lucy escapes – in her mind – to flick through history; the scenes are swept by as if she’s using a touchscreen. The streets of New York are seen through the centuries, until the land is inhabited by Native Americans; then dinosaurs; and then Lucy, the Neanderthal. Their fingers almost connect, Michelangelo-like, before human-computer Lucy is hauled back to the present.

The black-skinned alien revealed at the end of *Under the Skin* has its counterpart in supercomputer Lucy – not least in that both women turn into shiny black goo. As Lucy gains insight into the world she observes it rather like Laura did. She might even be described as a more sophisticated version of Samantha in *Her*, who had ingested the DNA of all her millions of programmers to resemble a human interlocutor. The human body of Lucy might have disappeared, and in that regard the end of the film seems to suggest that, yet again, the overly present female body is ultimately silenced and made absent. But her final message from the ether is a text explaining that she is neither present nor absent. Instead, it reads: I AM EVERYWHERE.

The materiality of voice in the three films discussed is, without question, fictional. Indeed, science fiction: in each example, technology and alien life forces facilitate and manipulate the action and relationships between characters. Technology also crafts the voices heard, from the close-miked sighs of Samantha in *Her* to the near affectless delivery of *Under the Skin*. Emphasizing the artificial aspects of vocal production complicates the ways in which somatic presence can be inferred when listeners and viewers are denied access to a body, real or imagined, authentic or artificial. A more radical presentation of the simulated female persona would have given Samantha a synthetic voice, rather than a human one. As it stands, the romance of *Her* founders on the deceit of the haptic voice. The sound of Samantha seems real, but Theodore eventually realizes that he is simply one of hundreds, if not thousands, of users with whom she is 'in love'. Her sigh - like the message whispered at the end of *Lost in Translation* - is a materialization of voice *close up*, promising much. Hearing in it the signs of Johansson's body, serves as a reminder that to write about voice is to write less about what is heard than how we listen.

To write about voice often is to write about intimate experience, both emotional and visceral. The kinds of voices experienced in these films, though, ultimately encourage distrust of that closeness: it may be bliss to have the actor in our ear, but unlike the 'carnal melody' Massumi attributed to experiencing Sinatra in performance, Johansson's distance is tangible. That is not simply because she is only speaking; her speech can be more or less songful, representing a material excess or lack which either way makes it suspicious. Neither is it simply because she is only a simulated female – artificial, alien, altered – and that recognizing the illusion destroys any hope of vocal (and by extension emotional and visceral) authenticity. It is, perhaps, because by attending to the mediation of voice through Scarlett Johansson's body we can become acutely aware of their disconnect, which in turn destabilizes how we might listen to other voices as they crackle, caress or granulate.