BEN
MACPHERSON

Singing Utopia

VOICE
IN
MUSICAL
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For Lauren

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devil are my songs?": Negotiating Text, Voice and Performance Analysis in Rex Harrison's Henry Higgins', *Studies in Musical Theatre* 3, no. 2 (2008), and chapter 5 draws on a review of Merrie Snell's *Lipsynching* featured in the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies* 5, no. 2 (2020), along with a section based on the article 'Baudrillard on Broadway: Bio-musicals, the Hyperreal and the Cultural Politics of *simuloquism*', also published in *Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies* 5, no. 1 (2020).

Introduction

Songs for New Worlds

Erik is restless. Alone in his Coney Island hideaway, he waits. He cannot allow himself to settle or sleep, wracked with anticipation that at any moment his one true love might return, after losing her ten years earlier to a man who was everything he despised. His life is one ruled by the absence of a voice. Until Christine Daaé walks back through the door and sings once more, Erik (The Phantom) will wallow incomplete, unfinished, and unfulfilled. Without the voice of his muse, the masked protagonist of *Love Never Dies* (2010)—Andrew Lloyd Webber's sequel to *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986)—would, presumably, have little reason to go on living.

As an agent of primal longing, voice is not just the preserve of the deformed and reclusive on the musical stage. It becomes the most immediate form of communication for Clara and Fabrizio, who otherwise struggle to connect romantically and erotically across a language barrier in *The Light in the Piazza* (2005). Elsewhere, voice can place characters in mortal danger, as Ariel found out, signing her voice away in a Faustian pact with Ursula for the promise of her prince (*The Little Mermaid*, 1989), or as Floyd discovered when the echoes from his call led him one cave too far (*Floyd Collins*, 1996). Voices can be unspeakably fragile, singing of familial connections between fathers and sons too intimate for speech (*Closer than Ever*, 1989); they can joyously celebrate newfound romance, causing a simple-minded shop assistant to declare his amazement that she *does* love him, after all (*She Loves Me*, 1963); they can be outsized, giving voice to the soul of Doris Winter far beyond the constraints of her church choir (*Mama, I Want to Sing*, 1983). Voices can assert and subvert identities, or become politicized, such as when black, Hispanic, and Asian performers sing the lives of white men and women (*Hamilton*, 2015), or when voices are dragged, toying with ideas of gender and sexuality (*Betty*, 1915; *Matilda*, 2011).[1]

Romantic, erotic, dangerous, immediate, intimate, physical, familial, joyous, outsized, assertive, subversive, politicized; voice in musical theatre

Singing Utopia. Ben Macpherson, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2024.
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can be all of these things and much more as it shifts and writhes through a complex set of sonic expressions. However, despite its shared status in the trinity of musical theatre disciplines (singing, acting, and dancing), and its primacy as an agent of meaning, emotion, and aesthetic value, most considerations of the singing voice in musical theatre have tended to focus on aspects of pedagogy and practice, examining the *how* and taking the *why*, *when*, and even at times the *what*, for granted.[2] There are exceptions, but these could almost be counted on the fingers of one hand. For example, a special issue of the journal *Studies in Musical Theatre* was published in 2012. Guest edited by Millie Taylor, it offered a rich and varied set of lenses through which voice and vocal excess were conceptualized on the musical stage. Jake Johnson's monograph *Mormons, Musical Theater, and Belonging in America* (2019) considers voice and religious identity in the American musical, while several doctoral theses have examined key aspects of musical theatre voice.[3] Scholars including Stacy Wolf, Mitchell Morris, and Raymond Knapp have further considered vocal registers and characterization, while these discussions have tended to be implicit in their reading of something else or occupy only a chapter in more broadly themed publications.[4] Elsewhere, Taylor and Johnson have considered how musical theatre voice 'encodes' meaning through the various facets of which it is composed, while Dominic Symonds has explored how musical theatre voices can be fetishized on recordings.[5] Alongside the occasional article, however, these are but three further chapters in a large and international body of musical theatre scholarship that has been cautious to explore voice beyond discrete ideas in larger collections, musicological taxonomies of voice type and character, or general discussion. This book aims to fill that void, to render present that absence, and to ask *why*, *when*, and *what* in a meaningful and provocative way. (After all, Christine *did* eventually return to Erik.)

Asking questions forms the foundation of this book. This introduction will ask several, to make sense of the ones that follow in the subsequent chapters. As we will see, the answers to each question are not definite; they exist in spaces or states between, the reasons for which will become clear throughout. First, acknowledging the lack of sustained scholarship on voice in musical theatre, it seems appropriate to ask *why*. Why has there yet been no previous attempt to write a critical or conceptual study of voice in musical theatre?

'Betwixt and between': The State and Status of Musical Theatre

One answer might relate to the difficult status of musical theatre in popular culture, something Stacy Wolf sees as a 'paradox'. As a global phenomenon, musical theatre is 'dominant' in the cultural landscape yet 'contested' as to its legitimacy.[6] It is a cultural magpie—a chameleon—borrowing freely from a range of high, low, and contemporary forms, styles, and genres in pursuit of its commercial aims. Variously, such borrowing involves theatre genres and forms including opera, operetta, music hall, vaudeville, burlesque, minstrelsy, and melodrama, along with musical styles including jazz, blues, folk, rock, pop, gospel and liturgical music, and hip hop. Neither fully at one with the opera house nor completely at home in the music hall, it is the 'Fabulous Invalid' of popular musical entertainment. Occupying a space between the 'Great Divide' of 'high culture' and 'low culture', musical theatre might therefore be understood as 'middlebrow'.[7] This positioning relates to the fact that while musical theatre is a commercial form, its stories address many serious social issues from domestic abuse (*Carousel*, 1945) to mental health (*Next to Normal*, 2008). For David Savran, understanding musical theatre in this way offers an opportunity both to 'study the circulation of the artwork-as-commodity' and the 'sophisticated' musical and theatrical devices present in the form.[8] As chapter 2 considers in detail, this combination characterizes the ways in which we might listen to musical theatre vocality. Here, however, a more direct literary rendering of the 'middlebrow' helps articulate the complex status of musical theatre.

In a posthumous essay entitled 'Middlebrow' (1942), Virginia Woolf defined middlebrow culture as existing 'betwixt and between' in a cultural area that was 'in pursuit of no single object, neither of Art itself nor life itself'; a space where efficacy and entertainment are 'mixed indistinguishably, and rather nastily, with money, fame, power, or prestige'.[9] Early in the essay, Woolf claims that highbrow art is concerned with beauty, value, form, and integrity, while lowbrow work may not be intellectual but is modest in its aims and knows its audience, for which it is worthy of equal regard. When thinking about musical theatre, the notion of a form which exists 'betwixt and between' offers a succinct and acute description. Musical theatre is not opera, but at times it displays operatic aspirations.[10] It is not a form composed solely of American popular idioms but, along with a range of European influences, it is nevertheless characterized by influences from jazz, blues, and gospel

styles, derived from African and African American musical forms, whether openly or indirectly. It is a form that once fed the popular music charts but is now inspired by (and borrows from) them, as seen in the proliferation of jukebox musicals, particularly from the late twentieth century to the present. In other words, the status of musical theatre as 'betwixt and between' highbrow and lowbrow culture has also been the paradoxical source of its (contested) success.

Stacy Wolf goes further, suggesting that this in-between character can be identified in the structures and aesthetic influences of musical theatre alongside its cultural status. Engineering the coherence of disparate textual elements (book, music, lyrics, and choreography) and requiring real-time negotiation of the divergent and conflicting demands of music, movement, and speech in performance, musical theatre often borrows from, transgresses, repurposes, or reimagines boundaries between a range of art forms and disciplines. Such conflation, circulation, and borrowing across various structures and aesthetic practices was also noted by the director Peter Brook when reflecting on the popular impulse of what he termed 'Rough Theatre'. Brook observed that: 'Brecht was rooted in the cabaret: Joan Littlewood longs for a funfair [and it is] to Broadway that American poets, choreographers and composers turn. A choreographer like Jerome Robbins is an interesting example, moving from the pure and abstract theatres of Balanchine and Martha Graham towards the roughness of the popular show'. Such a blurring of boundaries evidences the pitfalls of analysing generic conventions through a discrete or bifurcated approach.[11] As a consequence, musical theatre occupies a paradoxical space 'betwixt and between' various analytical paradigms, something which both sustains and reflects its complex cultural status. It is neither wholly the preserve of musicology, nor a discipline entirely suited to dance studies, and only temporarily resident in the realm of traditional theatre and performance studies (which, at times, have more closely aligned with literature).

Since the late 1990s, however, studies in musical theatre have flourished, examining the complex place of the form in popular culture, and critiquing its status and function as art. These studies have explored its use of intertextuality, analysed its disciplinary complexities, engaged with its cultural history and international circulation, and interrogated its capacity for performing issues including politics, identity, and nationhood, while recently re-evaluating the systemic whiteness of the form—particularly in North America. Returning to the question above, why has this not yet included an

extensive study that seeks to articulate the cultural significance of musical theatre voice? One reason may be that in its liberal borrowing from musical idioms, styles, forms and cultures, any discussion of voice in the musical, by necessity, becomes a discussion of—and between—multiple *vocal* idioms, styles, forms, and cultures. It is therefore fraught with difficulty and complexity, given the breadth of vocal properties inherent within, and contingent upon, musical theatre performance. The traversing of disciplinary boundaries in the form itself also extends any consideration beyond discussions of popular music (song) or straight theatre (speech) and into the realm of multi-modal analysis. Such difficulties have long posed a challenge to the scholarly study of voice at large.

'The most beautiful sound . . .': The Voice Problem

Reflecting on what he calls the '*problem*' of voice, Konstantinos Thomaidis has observed that, until recently, there has been a 'paucity of critical writing' on voice in theatre and performance studies.[12] Beyond speech and actor training, such work remains somewhat disparate, and on this basis, Thomaidis notes the historical tendency for 'voice studies' to come from the realm of philosophy.[13] Taken together, some foundational texts in this area help to establish why voice is a '*problem*' and at the same time demonstrate why it is a rich and fruitful area of study. Drawing upon the contentious status of voice-as-sound, philosopher Adriana Cavarero's *For More than One Voice* (2005) challenges the *logocentrism* in Western critical traditions, arguing that to privilege written and semantic discourses 'devocalizes' what is said, constructing a patriarchal history of understanding and marginalizing *who* it is that speaks. In many ways, her desire to reconfigure the relationship between patriarchy, politics, and sound—a 'politics of the voice', as she proposes—is sympathetic to (while at times a critique of) theorist Jacques Derrida's work in *Of Grammatology* (1967) and *Voice and Phenomenon* (1967). Derrida took issue with the privileging of voice and speech as the bearer of meaning. Contending that an overemphasis on *phōnḗ* (what is heard) demotes writing (*logos*) to a secondary position, Derrida suggests that the sonorous and the semantic should be understood in interplay.[14]

Such a complex and equitable relationship between *phōnḗ* and *logos* is not to be found in the structural theories of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, however, arguing as he did that sound was simply the carrier of semantic

signs and symbols. It was, for him, an agent without agency—something with which Roland Barthes seemed to struggle. In 'The Death of the Author' (1967), Barthes betrays logocentrism when he suggests that readers re-author texts at the expense of authorial intention. To this extent, Barthes's thinking echoes that of Derrida, sharing a concern for how readers engage with words. In another essay, 'The Grain of the Voice' (1972), Barthes also argues for the uniqueness of individual voices, noting that any song performed always betrays the material presence of the vocalist as it reveals 'the body speaking its mother tongue'. Cavarero is sympathetic to this position, focussing as it does on the individual singer, yet critiques Barthes for reducing voice to a mere mediating function between body and language. Echoing this hierarchy or intersectionality between voice, language, and the body, philosopher and psychoanalyst Mladen Dolar's *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006) develops Jacques Lacan's notion that alongside its sonorous properties and capacity to convey meaning, voice embodies thought and desire, while Steven Connor's work has suggested that when a voice leaves a body it becomes a 'vocalic body' of its own. Elsewhere, Michel Chion has considered the body/voice split from the perspective of what can be seen and what can be heard in cinema, developing the idea of *acousmêtre* (a voice without origin) that has been employed by scholars such as Jennifer Fleeger and Brian Kane in their considerations of voice, sound, and technology.[15]

Examining the gendered and racialized politics of voice, its presence and/or absence, the psychology and biology of the voice in production, the relationship between *logos* and *phōnḗ*, the nature of vocal sound when mediated by technology, and its configuration via cultural spaces of listening therefore offers rich and complex possibilities in theatre and performance studies, something Thomaidis has called for more purposefully in his recent work. Taken together, the works mentioned might also form the basis of thinking that constitutes the growing field of voice studies—a trans-, cross-, and interdisciplinary area that has been developing as a specific concern since the mid-2010s in Western scholarship and beyond.

Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of voice have been codified as a field of inquiry through the establishment of the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies* (2014–) and the Routledge Voice Studies monograph series, which launched in 2015 with the edited collection *Voice Studies: Critical Approaches to Process, Performance and Experience*. In the introduction to that edited volume, a critical perspective on voice is offered, understanding its sonic space as an 'in-between': 'the junction point for multiple encodings

of experience to be negotiated and understood'.[16] Such experience may relate to the foregoing concerns of gender, technology, language, or presence, or they might include aspects of eroticism, intimacy, family dynamics, unabashed joy, or political subversion, mentioned at the outset. As an in-between space, musical theatre voice is also complicated by *what* and *who* is singing, and indeed, the very act of making a sound. Seeking to codify voice in popular music, Simon Frith tells us that a voice can be all-at-once a musical instrument, a body, a person, and a character.[17] In other words, any voice that sings can be heard as a sound, a vocal presence, as the person singing, and the persona determined by the lyric. Each of these layers encodes the voice, as it occupies an in-between space in which embodied presence, technological mediation, outsize expression, emotional solitude, vectors of gender or race, character or performer, sound, and word freely negotiate, play, coexist, or vie for dominance.

As chapter 1 explores in detail, these concerns—and the philosophical tenets that underpin them—are already to be found in the large body of writing on voice in opera. For example, Mary Ann Smart, Catherine Clément, and Carolyn Abbate have explored complex notions of the female voice in opera and its relationship to presence, patriarchy, and politics, while Wayne Koestenbaum has considered operatic vocality with regard to queerness and sexuality. In each case, the materiality of the voice as a sonic object or point of focus serves as a departure or complication, something also seen in works by Michel Poizat and Gary Tomlinson, as they listen to vocal presence and absence in opera, considering notions of transcendence and metaphysical sonority.[18] Such ideas have, at times, found their way into musical theatre scholarship, the uses of which are considered in the following chapter. However, as mentioned above, beyond pedagogy or practice, a sustained exploration of the cultural, philosophical, or conceptual properties of musical theatre vocality analogous to the work of Tomlinson, Poizat, Abbate, and other opera scholars mentioned above has yet to be forthcoming. There are several reasons for this.

First, opera studies focus on an older and more assuredly 'highbrow' cultural form with closer ideological links to the philosophical concerns seen in the writing of Cavarero or Dolar, for example. Second, musical theatre occupies an in-between space in popular culture and is paradoxical in its structural conceits, expressive qualities, and formal conventions. Third, the recent concept of studying voice as an interdisciplinary in-between brings with it a peculiar challenge. It asks us to move beyond ideas or analyses

of register, range, character, or the conventions of style or stereotypes. It requires that we allow all of those things free rein in a sonic space that is plural and fluid. Instead of listening *to*, it needs us to listen *in*, *through*, *across,* and *between* 'multiple encodings', a position developed later in this introduction, and which exceeds current analytical parameters in musical theatre scholarship.[19] In this context, the study of voice in musical theatre becomes the study of a vocal in-between in a form that already exists 'betwixt and between'. The challenge of how to approach this is therefore significant and fraught with possible complications, blind alleys, contradictions, and unknowns. To begin mapping a path, we need to return to first principles and ask another question: why *do* musicals sing?

'The song that goes like this': Why Musicals Sing

Received wisdom says that characters, and any choruses to which they may belong or might attach themselves, must have a *reason* to sing. This reason cannot be simply that 'musical theatre has music and songs' (even if that statement says more about the cultural value of the form than its cynical naiveté might suggest). Musical theatre lore tells us that the primary reason song (and dance) occurs in a musical is because a character's emotional state has *outgrown* the expressive potential of speech. This focus on emotional expressivity is seen in Scott McMillin's 2006 book, *The Musical as Drama*. He argued that the ideal of integration so beloved of Rodgers and Hammerstein was an impossibility. Suggesting that the unavoidable tension in the gear changes between book, music, lyrics, and dance in performance provides musical theatre with its distinct thrill, McMillin proposed that musical theatre operates through two 'orders of time'. First, 'book time' concerns the narrative, exposition, and dramatic action, while in 'lyric time' songs stop the action to *enlarge* on thoughts and feelings, as characters uncover what Carey Wall calls their 'full self' in performance.[20]

Whether focussing on conventional book musicals, so-called concept musicals that toy with linearity and the nature of storytelling, through-sung works such as the megamusicals of the 1980s and 1990s, or more challenging pieces that play with accepted conventions of melody, shape, and form (such as *London Road*, 2011; or, *A Strange Loop*, 2022), the gospel of heightened emotion or realism is still perpetuated as the rationale for musical theatre's reliance on singing (and dancing). As recently as 2019, a panel of musical

theatre and popular music scholars continued to agree that 'the voice is where musical theater places its truest meaning'.[21] While this is a central tenet of the form, and while emotions—such as those offered at the outset—are many and varied, might there be more to it?

In his seminal essay 'Entertainment and Utopia' (1977), Richard Dyer suggests that through sustained melodic expressivity, singing enables performers (and the characters they create) to communicate with emotional 'intensity' and 'transparency'. For Dyer, this allows musical films to offer an image of utopia—defined as 'something better' than lived reality and, here, transposed to live musical theatre performance.[22] Through the outsized emotional 'energy' inherent in song and dance, in its many variations, musical theatre configures human relationships and stories not as they are, but as they *could be*, with a directness that suggests resolutions can be easy and complexities reduced to their simplest, essential, or discrete components.[23] For example, while Erik is wracked with self-doubt, anxiety, loss, confusion, and unresolved bitterness, the opening moments of *Love Never Dies* hear the Phantom reach fever pitch in a soaring tenor torch song, ''Till I Hear You Sing'. Complex though his emotions may be, they are distilled into a moment of full expression as his dream of Christine's return is given voice. Dyer says that the utopia evoked from this transparency of emotion, facilitated by the intensity and energy of performance, is something for audiences 'to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide'.[24]

Therefore, beyond giving a character an emotional outlet they would be denied in reality, singing in musical theatre serves an ideological function. McMillin once wrote that as a performer moves from speech to song (or dance) in live performance, they enter a 'space of vulnerability' in which the voice could crack, or strain, or break, and in which minds can blank and lyrics or choreography could be forgotten. The act of witnessing someone overcome this vulnerability, facing down the 'danger of failure' through the intensity and emotional expressivity of song and dance, is, in itself, an image of something beyond the mundane—something outside the lived reality of audiences.[25] On this basis, as Dyer further reasons, utopia is experienced 'at the level of sensibility' or feeling—not in *where*, *how*, or *why* songs occur—but in the experience of their *performance*. Utopia is therefore an affective rather than structural ideal.[26] This position is echoed by Jill Dolan, who considers the liveness of performance essential to the experience of utopia. Since live performance is transient, any intensity experienced in musical theatre song is also transient. This means that any glimpse of utopia

can never be fixed. Dolan suggests it is 'not a world in being' but merely an 'index of the possible'—a *feeling* of 'something better'. In this context, song and dance function as 'never finished gestures toward a potentially better future', categorized as what Dolan might term 'utopian performatives'.[27] Some moments proffer what theorist Ernst Bloch understood to be an 'abstract utopia' of compensation; a state that is wishful rather than wilful; expressing a desire for change rather than an anticipation of material difference.[28] At the 'level of sensibility', the abstract 'utopian performatives' of the musical stage are not *song* and *dance* as structural, textual, or narrative entities. Rather, they are *singing* and *dancing*—non-representational gestures of 'something better' that are never fully actualized, even if their sonic intensity suggests emotions can be overt, direct, tangible, and uncomplicated.[29] Borrowing a term from sound studies scholar Salomé Voegelin, we might say that the utopian performative of the sung voice in musical theatre offers audiences a 'sonic *possible* world' through voice, a vocal utopia.[30]

The term 'vocal utopia' might sound tempting as a way to talk about the quality of voice in musical theatre through the lens of Dyer's essay. Yet, if voice—and the sonic space it creates—is in itself a messy in-between full of 'multiple encodings', then might this destabilize Dyer's claim to the transparency and intensity of *singing* in musical theatre?[31] Does it challenge the emotional directness that is key to Dyer's idea of 'something better'? Developing this question further, if vocal sonority is always plural and fluid, then a 'vocal utopia' must also be plural and fluid. Is this what Dyer meant? To answer these questions, a closer look at the nature of utopia will demonstrate that, in many ways, it is similarly complex, fluid, and plural—a fact that both enhances and complicates the ways in which we might listen to voice in musical theatre.

'Singing the world into tune': Vocal Utopia(s)

In Western thought, the idea of utopia can first be found in Plato's *Republic*—a manifesto for a political and social ideal. Among Plato's policies, there would be a rigid set of social hierarchies, fairly distributed wealth and resources, the promotion of law and order (but few laws and no lawyers), and the removal of theatrical performance to ensure citizens were protected from succumbing to craven (or rebellious) desires. A similar form of social utopia was also found in England in 1516, with the publication of Thomas More's *Utopia*.[32] While More's text has variously been seen as a representation of an

ideal society and a secular satire, at its heart is a dilemma over the meaning of 'utopia'. Derived from the original Greek, 'utopia' might mean either 'no place' (*ou topos*) or 'good place' (*eu topos*), which are homophonic in the original language. Paradoxically, it might mean both of these at the same time: a good place which does not exist. As theorist Edward Rothstein puts it, this 'good place' is an 'ideal toward which the mundane world must reach'.[33] Through the intensity of its performance structures and aesthetic, musical theatre does indeed elevate the mundane to the utopian, as audiences listen to and thrill at bank clerks, barbers, bakers, cavers, coves, children, politicians, princesses and preachers, or witches, wives, and widows achieve the intensity of voice that might reach towards 'something better' in their emotional fulfilment or social relationships. In such moments, Dolan suggests that 'audiences feel themselves allied with each other [as] social discourse articulates the possible, rather than insurmountable obstacles of human potential'.[34] However, as the best place never to have existed, utopia also has several additional characteristics not considered in Dyer's essay which may challenge a singular view of utopia and its possibilities.

As a human concept borne of 'the conviction that humanity is perfectible', utopia is a future realm of 'impossible perfection'.[35] In other words, the nature of utopia is rooted in paradox and contradiction. In his essay 'Utopia and Its Discontents' (2003), Rothstein observes that 'one man's utopia is another man's dystopia'. Turning to literature to demonstrate his point, Rothstein considers the fact that both Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *1984* depict societies 'specifically designed by their rulers to be *utopias*'. He notes that neither 'show societies designed to create unhappiness', and yet—because of the oppressive, authoritarian, and inhumane effects on the central characters—Huxley's and Orwell's novels are paradigmatic works of *dystopian* fiction.[36] In a broader social example, the mythological ideal of the American Dream—celebrating economic success and individual achievement—may be vaunted as a capitalist utopia, yet as geo-political and global economic shifts have taken place across the last fifty years, the American Dream is viewed increasingly as a 'nightmare' world of 'joyless materialism and brutal exploitation'.[37] In short, as Rothstein concludes, the greatest contradiction in utopia is that 'all of these paradises are really varieties of hell'.[38]

This foundational contradiction may be because while 'something better' is an idealized future state, it is built upon versions of present (or past) social structures.[39] As utopian scholar Lyman Tower Sargent suggests,

these may include ideals which are 'socialist, capitalist, monarchical, democratic, anarchist, ecological, feminist, patriarchal, egalitarian, hierarchical, racist, left-wing, right-wing, reformist'. For Sargent, these ideals also embrace everything from 'Naturism/Nude Christians [and] free love' to the whole spectrum of nuclear, extended, and blended families.[40] Yet such contradictions may be negotiable, surmountable, or even desirable, as a way of achieving utopia. Demonstrating Sargent's argument, political sociologist Luke Martell considers the complexities of economic capital in an illustrative utopia founded on 'collective ownership of the economy and of work'. Acknowledging that some in that society may not conform entirely to such an ideal, that particular utopia may 'accept pluralism and diversity, including a minority role for private enterprise. To not do so would require authoritarian imposition on those who wish to do something different'.[41] For Martell, '[t]his does not mean utopia is a variety of utopias but a utopia to which alternatives are permitted'.[42] Far from being a homogeneous state of 'escape' and wish-fulfilment, and notwithstanding the internal contradictions at play, utopia may therefore be characterized by plurality and accommodation.[43] This sense of accommodation is also understood as indicative of utopia's malleability and openness to change to reflect shifting cultural or social ideals. For example, republics overthrow monarchies, Judeo-Christian governance cedes place to secular politics over time, and civil rights or social justice is championed, reckoned with, or achieved. As Martell notes, '[w]hat is utopian now or at the time it is achieved may not continue to be ideal because of developments, intended or unforeseen, such as in technology or human nature . . . and so will need change'.[44]

To speak of a vocal utopia in musical theatre, then, is to invoke a contradictory, plural, and changeable ideal of a flawed but good place that does not exist. In many ways, this echoes the idea of voice as a plural in-between seeking to negotiate multiple ideas and experiences which, over time, may change in their nature or value. While the vocal utopia of musical theatre might not explicitly engage or encode some of the political ideals Sargent outlines (even if many narratives of musical theatre do), the plurality of styles and aesthetics inherent in musical theatre vocality gives evidence of complexity, changeability, and lack of homogeneity, considered in chapter 2. Of course, if voice is all-at-once an index of intense expressivity and yet so multi-faceted that it performs a range of cultures, styles, emotions, ideals,

intentions, and situations, questions arise in light of the complex nature of utopia identified above.

Do all voices in musical theatre sing utopia? Do different voices give space for 'alternatives' in a sonic demonstration of utopian plurality? If the ideal of 'something better' changes over time (and is always flawed), does the sonic quality of voice change with it, betraying imperfections as it does so? Can the singing voice in musical theatre ever really capture a sense of emotional intensity or transparency if utopia is always a negotiation founded upon a contradiction? What happens when musical theatre rejects such imperatives from Dyer, when characters appear to resist the urge to sing, or when the entire musical is characterized by a style or idiom such as hip hop which places voice on a continuum somewhere closer to speech than song (*In the Heights*, 2008; *Hamilton*, 2015)? Can these voices also be understood as utopian? If any definition of utopia also implies its opposite, are there communities for whom certain voices may be heard or experienced as dystopian; communities excluded or silenced from the dream of 'something better' such as those from whom certain musical or vocal styles have been appropriated at the service of white privilege and culture? Elsewhere, how are we to understand voices that sound like other voices, in tribute or imitation? Do they perhaps epitomize a utopia defined as 'nowhere'?[45]

Such questions give pause for thought and demonstrate the complexity of examining voice as a utopian property or ideal in musical theatre. This book, then, will seek to examine the ways in which the plural, contradictory in-between of voice—in a form that is paradoxical, and occupies a 'betwixt and between' space amidst various spheres of popular culture—reflects, critiques, negotiates, denies, or reaches towards 'something better'; the paradoxical, changeable, plural, imperfectly perfect utopian. How might such an undertaking be approached?[46]

'Someone's gonna listen . . .': Approaches to the In-between

Conceiving of voice as an in-between means it is no longer possible only to listen *to* a fixed idea of vocal utterance. Rather, we need to find other ways of listening to help identify the 'multiple encodings' and negotiations taking place. As a first step, we might borrow an approach from Thomaidis and engage in an act of 'listening across' the sonic (and plural) qualities of vocality

as they play out within, between, and across time, space, culture, and race.[47] Thomaidis observes that '[n]ot only is voice multiple [in its sonic, semantic, and cultural properties], it is also heard plurally' by those who listen. Such listening may be complicated, however, because 'listening is also a culturally and historically situated practice' offering the listener agency in constructing the affective characteristics of the voices that are heard from a given position.[48] Exploring vocal utopia therefore entails a reflective understanding of *how* we listen to what is sung and asks us to situate our own listening practices in relation to the world.

A further way to listen is once more found in the work of Salomé Voegelin, who has argued that as material, sound (and, by extension, vocal sonority) exists in an experiential space 'anterior' to the tyranny of speech and the predominance of visual culture (a duo which have jointly 'muted' sound in Western culture and philosophical thought since Plato). Freed from seeing the world through the 'signs and symbols' with which 'language and culture assert their superiority' and determine boundaries of analysis, this consideration of vocal utopia in musical theatre therefore rejects what Voegelin has termed the 'chronological and patrimonial ancestrality' of traditional Western analysis.[49] Instead, it focuses on the sound and uses the complex interplay and multi-faceted intersectionality of sonic properties, form, style, and texture as a way of listening to popular culture across, between, and within eras, races, genders, politics, and thought.[50]

Beyond such an approach to listening, the cultural and historical situatedness of the listener has informed recent thinking about the relationship between voice and race. Building on established paradigms from voice studies outlined above, Nina Sun Eidsheim frames notions of 'hearing race' as 'the acousmatic question'. She suggests that the very enquiry 'who is speaking?' invites the listener into an acousmatic search for identity and meaning beyond the body of the voicer. Building from the position that 'voice is not innate; it is cultural', Eidsheim interrogates at times problematic or stereotypical assumptions made about the relationship between voice and racial identity.[51] As a complementary study which precedes Eidsheim's work, Jennifer Lynn Stoever develops the concept of 'the sonic color line' using W. E. B. Du Bois's original term 'the color line' to listen for the ways (white American) culture 'racially codes sonic phenomena such as vocal timbre, accents, and musical tones'.[52] Both Stoever and Eidsheim are acknowledged in the work of music scholar Matthew D. Morrison, whose concept of 'Blacksound' offers tools for listening to and 'uncovering the political