Zavros, D

Encounters with 'the same' (but different): London Road and the politics of territories and repetitions in verbatim musical theatre

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This article is structured around a series of developing repetitions: repetition in the form of the musically-inspired 'refrain' (discussed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their 2007 *A Thousand Plateaus*)[1] constitutes the main theoretical impetus of the analysis, the methodological framework and the presentational scaffolding of the research. Traversing a variety of different platforms or 'territories', the research journey adapts sections of an 'original' chapter published in Rodosthenous' *Twenty-first Century Musicals: from Stage to Screen* (2017), which was developed and recontextualized into a keynote for SSS XIV (June, 2019) after I introduced the Deleuzian framework as a response to the conference call ((Re-)Inventions: Adaptations and New directions in Musicals on and between Stage and Screen). The paper is now further re-configured and redeveloped into the journal article published here.

London Road began as an experiment. As part of a program for the development of new work at the National Theatre Studio in 2007, composers and writers were brought together to workshop ideas and exchange practices; among them were Alecky Blythe and Adam Cork. Based on Blythe's purist approach to verbatim theatre practice, all the text was directly transcribed from a lengthy series of interviews she conducted in Ipswich between December 2006 and July 2008, after the community of Suffolk became the epicentre of the events surrounding the brutal serial killings of five female sex workers. The performance follows the impact of the events on the community, as well as the media frenzy that ensued. Both the spoken text and song lyrics were derived from the interviews as recorded (including all the 'ums and errs') with the metre, pitch and rhythm of the music following the patterns of the original recorded speech as closely as possible (Blythe and Cork 2011). This practice can arguably be viewed alongside a long tradition of exploration into the relationship between music and language that has been at the centre of some more experimental music theatre work (e.g. Berberian, Berio, Stockhausen, Ligeti, Wishart, Janáček, Maxwell Davies, Gaburo, Reich and Adams). The re-framing and adapting of an 'original' text into the domain of the musical, however, offers new possibilities of practically and critically examining this relationship, particularly within the context of musical theatre.

First performed in the Cottesloe auditorium on 14 April 2011, the stage performance transferred to the Olivier on 28 July 2012 and was adapted into its cinematic version and released in 2015.[2] All stage and film versions were directed by Rufus Norris.[3] With generally rave reviews both after the Cottesloe run and the Olivier transfer, *London Road* won the Critics' Circle Theatre Award for Best Musical in 2011. Michael Billington, in *The Guardian*, reported that 'this miraculously innovative show finds a new way of representing reality [and] opens up rich possibilities for musical theatre'. He noticed that 'while the show celebrates the [community's] healing process, it also raises disturbing questions about the dark underside of bourgeois togetherness' (2012: n.pag.). Andrzej Lukowski in *Time Out* similarly not only praised the performance as 'something very new for the musical form' but also described it as 'a powerful, beautiful and unsettling articulation of the ambivalence that underpins all communities' (2011: n.pag.). Others were less impressed with the 'inarticulate' language and the unconventional structure of the plot: Brian Logan, in his 2011 review of the Cottesloe

[1] Deleuze and Guattari use birdsong as a point of departure to formulate a discussion of how music is used to delineate territories in nature and accordingly develop their theory of the 'refrain'. A refrain is not simply a repetition, but a reconfiguration and recoding of elements which, in repetition beyond their initial milieu, acquire expressive functions within the newly founded territory (Bogue, 2003). While the refrain is essentially territorial, Deleuze and Guattari insist that what all great composers manage to achieve is the deterritorialization of the refrain through a productive unsettling of the given musical conventions of their day, or what they call an inventing of a 'diagonal between the harmonic vertical and the melodic horizon' (2007:327).

[2] A number of actors from the two stage productions appear in the film (including Kate Fleetwood, Rosalie Craig, James Doherty and Michael Schaeffer) alongside new cast members Olivia Colman, Tom Hardy and Anita Dobson among others.

[3] The analysis here will focus on the stage versions of the musical. For a further discussion of the film version, please see Zavros (2018).

performance, complained that ‘the conventionally dramatic parts of this story are happening offstage’ (2011: n.pag.). Some reviewers were sceptical about a musicalized adaptation of the events and a treatment of this serious subject matter in a potentially trivializing manner.

The innovative nature of the show is inextricably linked to the fact that *London Road* started as an alliance between what seemed to be unlikely partners: between the hyper-naturalistic form of ‘verbatim’ theatre (in Blythe’s style) and the heightened language of musical theatre aesthetics (noted by Young 2012). As David Roesner writes, in the case of *London Road*, ‘two genres with their respective “rules”, expectations, and methods of creation meet [...] and create a “third stream” which challenges and enriches both’ (2017: 660). This is indeed an instance where musical theatre ‘interrogates’ and ‘subverts its own status’ both by disrupting and innovating (2017: 652). Or, to use Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of a ‘minor’ practice, it is involved in an act of affirmation and dissent through a deterritorialization, which is always in close relationship to the categories it proposes to deterritorialize (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 2007). The rigorous play with the (territorial) conventions of the two ‘major languages’ and the resulting ‘deregulation of codes’ that characterizes the ‘minor’ is also connected to a re-investigation of ‘patterns of inclusion and exclusion’ (Nibbelink 2019: 17–18).[4] This re-investigation happens here, crucially at both the levels of form *and* content: the aesthetic and political are inextricably interlaced as part of this hybrid/minor articulation, this freeing ‘line of flight’.

In this article, I explicate how *London Road*, as an example of a minor practice in musical theatre, engages with a tracing and play with territories, as well as several acts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Starting with a discussion of the post-integrated musical and its connection to community politics, I argue that the use of repetition in *London Road* lies beyond the aesthetics of disjunction, as well as any claim to authentic representation. The reterritorialization of repetition will be discussed as the transformative process that invents a diagonal new space of engagement – one that involves the audience in an encounter that allows them to experience (both viscerally and cognitively) the (per)forming of community as a real political and ethical dilemma. The article is subsequently structured through a series of ‘repetitions’ (a re-iterative return to the opening song) that seek to examine how *London Road* opens up this new ethicopolitical space of experience by productively destabilizing a series of traditional categories in verbatim and musical theatre discourse: music and text, number and book, speech and song, voice and orchestra, diegesis and mimesis, audience and performers, reality and representation.

THE POLITICS OF REPETITION AND DIFFERENCE IN THE POST- INTEGRATED MUSICAL: THE TERRITORIES OF DISJUNCTION AND INTEGRATION

> JULIE. Seein’ everybody have a great time,
> That’s what it’s all about.
> Getting together as a community.

In *The Musical as Drama* (2006), Scott McMillin suggests a conceptualization of the aesthetics of musical theatre based on the notion of disjunction, rather than the more traditional idea of integration. The primary instigator of this disjunction is the existence of two distinct orders of time embedded in the ontology of the form: book time and lyric time. Book time is concerned with the linearity of the story to be told; lyric time with a different mode of expression that

[4] I am borrowing here from Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink’s Deleuze- inspired notion of ‘nomadic theatre’, which also ‘deals with territories and with processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, [...] crosses disciplinary boundaries [...] affiliates with experimentation, testing, and play’ (Nibbelink 2019: 17–18).

suspends linear time in favour of elaboration and extension through repetition and difference. Lyrical moments, songs and production numbers break away from the cause-and-effect logic of the dramatic plot (and the normative structures and ideologies) encapsulated in the book, and it is this disjunction between the two different orders of time that gives the genre its distinct aesthetic as well as its political potential. To quote McMillin, '[t]he resistance that occurs between book and number wants to rule out simple answers to questions of identity' and invite the subversive and the multiple (2006: 191). Similarly, in *Only Entertainment*, Richard Dyer capitalizes on the disjunction between narrative and number in arguing that the genre has a tendency to resolve 'contradictions at all levels in such a way as to "manage" them, to make them seem to disappear' (2002: 27). The contradiction becomes analogous to 'one between the heavily representational and verisimilitudinous (pointing to the way the world is, drawing on the audience's concrete experience of the world) and the heavily non-representational and "unreal" (pointing to how things could be better)' (2002: 27). Dyer finds the potential for contesting normative structures (which pertain to musical theatre's status as a product of capitalist economics and politics) in the musical's 'extra-ordinary mix of [...] two modes' – to almost mirror McMillin's later argument – 'the historicity of narrative and the lyricism of numbers' (2002: 35). Building on McMillin, Dyer and scholars including Raymond Knapp, D. A. Miller and Stacy Wolf, Sarah Taylor Ellis also 'locates 'the "queerness" of the American musical in the ruptures of the musical numbers – and particularly in their temporal deviation from a linear narrative' in her compelling thesis 'Doing the Time Warp: Queer temporalities and musical theatre' (2013: 18).

In practice (at least since the 1960s), as well as in theoretical discourse that surfaced in the last few decades, audiences have embraced the post-integrated musical era, which has allowed for an expansive and critical re-evaluation of the political power of musical theatre as a form of entertainment encased within the aesthetics of rupture and difference. The hybrid quality of this verbatim musical, however, holds the potential to destabilize some of the politics found in the aesthetics of disjunction. *London Road* is a post-integrated musical, which goes against the grain in the ways it valorizes, deterritorializes and reterritorializes techniques we would normally ascribe to integration, now with new functions. It is, in fact, in this 'meticulous relation with the "strata"'[5] of integration (the unfixing and recoding of the integrative qualities) that I understand the term 'post-integrated' to work in this instance.

This reterritorialization does not happen in a way that centralizes or prioritizes the linear temporality of the book and the normative politics embedded in that linearity, nor does it subordinate the performance to a singular, phallogocentric poetic aim that Ellis, among others, notices (as, e.g. in the integrative efforts of golden age musicals). Instead, the reterritorialization of integrative qualities happens by deterritorializing the two distinct orders of time (book and lyric) and by making repetition (usually ascribed to the temporality of the musical numbers) pervasive throughout the piece. It is this pervasive (and unprecedented treatment of) repetition that allows for an alternative type of active engagement with exactly those dominant, normative ideologies usually ascribed to the linearity of the book.

This flooding of the musical's structure with the multi-temporal aesthetics of repetition and re-iteration thematizes the notion in *London Road* to the extent that the politics of the performance of community are more akin to a play between repetition and difference than to the events the performance is depicting, or any essentialist representation of reality under the banner of authenticity. The hybrid form that the verbatim musical engenders takes repetition – this idea, notion and device that is ontologically implicit in both the verbatim and musical genres – and reterritorializes it in a unique way that effectuates a new type of political

[5] I am paraphrasing here from Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that '[i]t is through the meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape' (2007: 178).

engagement. The politics of repetition are what is at stake here. The dramaturgical axis of the performance is built around the coming together of the community: who repeats what, how and to what effect is 'what it's all about'.

PER-FORMING COMMUNITY AND 'BELONGING': TERRITORIES AND PERIPHERIES

Documentary (and verbatim) theatre is often discussed in terms of its connection to community, its focus on the voices of otherwise underrepresented or marginalized subjects and its investigation into notions of belonging.[6] Coming together in building communities (and often literal territories) can also be found at the core of a huge number of diverse performances throughout the history of musical theatre – either explicitly, as part of the plot, or more implicitly, as part of underlying themes or subjects.[7]

Notions and processes of belonging suffuse the discourse around the politics of musical theatre. Ellis discusses musical theatre 'as an identificatory site for marginalized subjects' (2013: 17). She locates a space of belonging in the queering of temporality embedded in McMillin's lyric order, a no-where alternative to the normative structures of the book; an anticipatory illumination (borrowing Bloch's *Verschein* or home) embedded in that excess of the musical temporality and its relationship to circularity and difference. The communitas engendered in the 'cohesive fleeting feeling of belonging to the group' that 'bathes the audience' (as Jill Dolan puts it in *Utopia in Performance*) is found in the experience of the lyric order of the numbers and the 'utopian performatives' that reside in it (2008: 11). This extraordinary power of the musical to create incredibly strong moments of coming together in belonging persists outside the theatrical event, as both McMillin and Ellis state: 'At the end of a musical, the curtain may close and the fullness of the utopian moment may fade – but a melody can haunt, reprising the promise of communitas and performatively reaching for difference and transformation beyond the proscenium arch' (Ellis 2013: 13). Musical theatre has a complex, multilevel relationship with notions of community and transformational experiences of belonging that revolve around or become imbricated into the aesthetics of disjunction. This characteristic is arguably one of the most magnetic powers of the genre. In the case of *London Road*, however, the 'minor' articulation does not seem to comfortably satisfy the model.

London Road focuses on the coming together of a community 'to heal itself' (Blythe and Cork 2012: vii). Cork describes *London Road* as choric theatre, where 'the choral presentation of this story in particular seems to underline the ritual aspect of human communal experience' (2012: x). The subject of coming together in a community is not just implicitly inferred through the dramatic plot. It also lies at the centre of the way the performance was conceived and structured. *London Road* presents the formation of community as the residents come together to overcome the trauma of the murders, not as a uniformly constituted ensemble, but as a community that partakes in the 'multiplicity' of dissent. What we are presented with as the performance unfolds on stage are different reactions to the events surrounding the murders, and not the events of the murders themselves and the people directly implicated in them. The dramatic arc and resulting theatrical presentation focus on how the residents ritualistically perform their community as it is in the process of becoming.[8] Largely due to the peripheral focus of the dramaturgy, this coming together overrides the linearity usually inscribed in more

[6] See, among others, Brown (2005), Paget (1987), Peters (2019), Pfefferman (2011), Radosavljević (2013), Steward and Hammond (2008), etc.

[7] Just a few indicative and very widely discussed examples here might include *Oklahoma*!, *West Side Story*, *Music Man*, *Hair*, *Rent*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, as well as more recent documentary musicals like *Silver Stars*, *Come from Away*, etc.

[8] I am focusing on the residents' community here, but this is true of all the different communities involved in the performance: residents, reporters and sex workers. All are performed through repetition, stylization and citation. Due to the multi-rolling in the stage versions (as opposed to the film), the same actors are constantly seen on a palimpsestic stage to interchangeably perform different communities, thus exposing the act of performing community as a stylistic repetition, a performative aspect of our culturally shaped realities.

conventional books. The usual book as 'plot' embedded in conflict at the level of the protagonists is no longer a central through-line to be ruptured; it is instead deterritorialized and reterritorialized into the book as 'process', which renders the idea of disjunction between the two orders of time almost obsolete.

In its reterritorialization of repetition, as I will discuss in the following sections, the performance invents a special relationship between music and text that de/reterritorializes genre conventions and dislocates expectations, thereby extending an invitation to experience anew and re-consider the dynamics of community formation.

REPETITION 1: RETERRITORIALIZING THE 'REAL' (UTTERANCE) INTO THE MUSICAL: A REFLEXIVE RENDERING AUDIBLE

As we enter the theatre to take our seats, a small orchestra is tuning up while actors on stage make coffee, chat and prepare the space. The atmosphere is friendly and relaxed. We are welcomed and invited to participate in this event of gathering and sharing, thereby almost immediately opening up the potential or implicitly suggesting the expectation of the traditional feeling of communitas. The experience is intimate and palpable, especially in the Cottesloe staging; at the same time, the theatrical/presentational frame is made explicitly evident. The two coexist: some of us shake hands with actor Nick Holder, who welcomes us into the theatre as, simultaneously, his character, Ron, welcomes us into the starkly minimalistic representation of the 'church hall just off London Road'.

We hear the original audio recording of Ron's actual speech over the PA, which slowly fades as a simple piano melody takes over and Holder repeats the same words, thereby transitioning them into the first live utterances following the preshow: are these repeated words sung, or spoken with musical accompaniment?

> Song – 'Neighbourhood Watch AGM'.[9]
> RON. Good evening. (Beat.) Welcome. (Beat.)

There is something familiar about this invitation to 'attend', which is also rather extraordinary: the characters address the audience in a bewildering type of a hybrid *Sprechgesang*. Discussing its hybrid nature, Millie Taylor suggests that this approach to setting the words is 'different from the musical writing in either musical theatre or contemporary opera' (Taylor 2012, n.pag.); Roesner further argues that the hybrid use of voice denies 'an easy pigeonholing of its genre or idiom' (2017: 662).

> While a substantial part of the book is set to music, the 'numbers' – identified as 'songs' with titles in the libretto – are hardly songlike in their structure: instead of offering hummable tunes, hook-lines, refrains, verses, or bridges, the music meanders with only a minimum of memorable motifs or phrases, which are repeated and offer some structural coherence.
>
> (2017: 661–62)

One of the ways the musical defies genre conventions, according to Roesner, is 'by denying us most familiar musical structures and forms and thus the element of recognisability and orientation' (2017: 661). It is almost as if we witness a new 'sign' in the process of becoming in this first deterritorialization of the documented utterance and its reterritorialization into the

[9] The original cast recording versions of the songs are no longer available on YouTube, but the album exists for purchase on the internet. I am including here a YouTube link to the song (no longer the 'opening') from the motion picture soundtrack, which is slightly different but should still hopefully provide a useful point of reference. https://www.youtube. com/watch?v= VOhvkNXDy5M. Accessed 29 November 2021.

musical. In his illuminating reading of Deleuze and Guattari, Bogue explains that implicit in every new territory is 'a certain degree of decoding, or "unfixing" of qualities and rhythms, and a subsequent recoding of those qualities and rhythms in terms of a specific domain' (Bogue 2003: 20). This recoding of the initial qualities is what causes the disorientation when we first come in contact with the new sign-in-process. It is not one that we can immediately recognize, categorize and ascribe meaning to, but one we have to work for to figure out.[10]

As disorientating as this musical *Sprechgesang* sounds, Dereck Paget, in his 1987 article on verbatim theatre, almost prophetically anticipates a connection between the verbatim and the musical by discussing a peculiar characteristic of everyday speech: 'there is something almost musical in these idiosyncratic rhythms', Paget states, and whereas 'ordinary' (dramatic) speech requires the actor to learn, interpret and 'play' (the words), here it is a case, indeed of 'the actor as instrument' (1987: 331). Salt, Robinson and Thacker discuss in an interview with Paget the idiomatic everyday speech and the 'repetitiveness, the stumbling, the oddity' and the 'extraordinary juxtapositions, loops and circumlocutions' as a trademark of 'real talk' in verbatim theatre (1987: 330); repetition is part of the surface level of an already rather musical 'real' language.

In discussing his process of setting the source material to music, Cork explains that it progressed from a 'slightly freer hand' to a more 'faithful' approach to (Blythe's) verbatim ideals, which entailed forensic detail in the transcription of the original speech material. The resulting melodic lines are composed together into musical structures, which 'are often built out of key elements of the transcribed voice, translated into harmonic progressions, or rhythms in the accompaniment' (Blythe and Cork 2012: ix). So, this musical re-framing of the prosaic and quotidian form of the linguistic document (its reterritorialization) happens on a 'continuum' of levels or degrees of heightening. On the one hand, we have the essentially unaltered, absolute, forensic transcription of the initial qualities (an austere replication of rhythm, pause and prosody, among other paralinguistic attributes) into the musical domain. On the other hand, we have heightened moments of harmonization, polyphony and counterpoint in some of the choral numbers. In between these extremes, the composition retains several degrees of poetic relationships to the documented utterance.

The consequence of this process is twofold. The placing of utterances on a continuum between spoken and sung engages and deterritorializes both extremes; the in-betweenness puts the reterritorialized utterance outside the binary of two easily distinguishable time orders. Consequently, the reterritorialization of the utterance lies in an almost quasi-lyric time order, which immediately destabilizes the usual disjunction between lyric and book. Moreover, the setting of the words signals a special type of poetic transformation because the musical composition is not simply imposed as a new aesthetic transfiguration and external critical frame. The (re)composition is based on a poetic accentuation or hyperbolizing of some of the musical attributes that already exist in idiomatic language; this opens up the potential for a reflexivity that is exclusively characteristic to this new hybrid musical language.

The result is quite different from the mimetic or representational mode that belongs to the new wave of verbatim (or docudrama) theatre Marvin Carlson describes after the '1990's, especially in the US and England' (2018: 30). A number of practitioners, Carlson states, have returned to an earlier quest to authentically represent reality, rather than the more reflexive approach that characterized post-70's documentary-based work that emphasized the

[10] When the expectations are disrupted and we are thrown into a space of non-recognition, we need to reconfigure, re-carve our own process of perception. As Laura Cull explains, Deleuze argues that objects of recognition '"do not disturb thought" insofar as they provide thought with "an image of itself"; they reaffirm for thought, in other words, what it already thinks it knows. [...] We only "truly think" when we have difficulty in recognizing something' (Cull 2009: 250). Theatre can be experienced as 'an encounter', rather than as an act of recognition, Cull argues, in the same way that the sign comes into being when thought is thrown into crisis.

constructedness and ambiguity of the material itself, and thus problematized the idea of any singular, truthful representation.[11] Placing *London Road* within that more reflexive current, Lib Taylor also suggests that while Blythe has constantly striven for the transmission of truth and authenticity, 'the use of song [...] becomes the mechanism for a reflexivity that Blythe had not envisioned' (2013: 373).

Cork suggests that 'making spontaneously spoken words formal, through musical accompaniment and repetition, has the potential to explode the thought of the moment into slow motion, and can allow us more deeply to contemplate what's been expressed' (Blythe and Cork 2012: x). This process seems initially to be close to what Carolyn Abbate suggests about strophic songs where 'the dialectical tension between narrative metamorphosis and structural repetition' helps 'focus the reader-listener to fix on the meaning of the words and not their sound: to listen to the story' (1996: 71). Cork adds, however, that 'hearing the natural speech patterns sung in this way can have the effect of distancing the audience from the "character" and even "the story", but in a positive way that alters the quality of listening' (2012: x). Deleuze and Guattari suggest that in every becoming implicit in the musical refrain, 'inaudible forces are rendered audible' in ways that can be 'reflected in the relationships between matter and form' (Deleuze and Guattari in Bogue 2003: 52). The altered quality of listening that distances us from preoccupations with characters and story is exactly what I am suggesting is happening when the inaudible is made audible in this reterritorialization. The (musical) sound of the words (in repetition) becomes a focal point in our engagement, experience and 'figuring out' in the disorientating encounter with the material, in this particular case more than the story or its suspension. The hybrid refrain we encounter in *London Road* generates a special type of relationship between matter and form that renders audible and perceptible what lies beneath the surface of the utterance.

REPETITION 2: PERFORMATIVE TERRITORIES AND A NEW KIND OF 'A MUSICAL DIAGONAL': DETERRITORIALIZED 'CONTAINERS' AND NON-VERSES

> Song – 'Neighbourhood Watch AGM'.
> RON. Good evening. (Beat.) Welcome. (Beat.)

While the opening song is inviting and the atmosphere is generally very friendly, the community is presented to be dynamically forming to make 'sure that the problem with the girls has disappeared' and keep the police to their commitment 'to clear the streets' (Blythe and Cork 2012: 5). The 'London Road in Bloom' contest, advertised at the opening as one of the forthcoming communal events, is connected to that 'clearing' and regenerating of the street. The developing marking of the territory thus becomes almost synonymous with the constitution of the community.

> RON. The more publicity we get – around here – the less likely it is – I think – fer de (Beat.) ne'er-do-wells to start creepin' back. (Beat). Get the – uh (Pause.) I mustn't keep sayin' this I keep tellin' (Beat.) every meetin' we hold 'we gotta get this street tarted up'. (Laughs heartily.) An' they always say 'it's not the right choice a words'. Yeah.

Using the Austinian performative as a point of departure, in *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari propose that language 'is not the communication of information' but 'the transmission of order-words' (2007: 87). They argue that there is no individual enunciation separate to social character: 'Order-words do not concern commands only, but every act that is linked to statements by a "social obligation"' (2007: 87). Judith Butler concurs that 'the Austinian subject speaks *conventionally*, that is, it speaks in a voice that is never fully singular

[11] This earlier, more reflexive trend, according to Carlson, can be found in the work of companies like the Wooster Group (e.g., in *L.S.D.*) and Moisés Kaufman's *Gross Indecency*.

(1997: 25, original emphasis). Building on Turner, Butler expands on the connection between ritual and the citational nature of performative utterances by suggesting that 'social action requires a performance which is repeated. This repetition is at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation' (1988: 526).

Throughout the performance, the different communities perform a concretization of territorial functions in legitimizing their point of view by using a repertoire of stylized, citational performatives in a variety of ways.[12] The placement of the reterritorialized speech document within a musical continuum animates our perception towards the artifice and constructedness of the citational utterance (even when it is not sung); this is a result of the altered quality of listening caused by the refrain, which renders audible due to this special relationship between matter and form. We become attuned to repetition as being embedded in the normative politics of territorializing as the documented utterance is exposed to already be an 'un-original'; a stylized repetition performing othering and excluding exactly as the residents ritualistically come together in acts of belonging.

Our perception of the territorial construction of the community in the opening is further aided by the nuanced interweaving of orchestra and voice(s) in Cork's exceptional compositional technique, which further elucidates the connection between matter and form. Cork explains that he composed what he calls musical 'containers' to help carve out a musical sense from the often anarchic, un-versified, overhanging melodic lines that result from the more forensic transcriptions of the original utterances (2012: ix). The musical container for the opening song starts with an introductory solo piano melody that has extensive angular metre changes. The instrumental melody is composed of several repetitions and subsequent expansions or variations between consecutive note cells that almost emulate the type of repetition we find in the stumblings and circumlocutions of 'real talk'. This first part of the container itself is put in a process of 'continuous variation' (Deleuze and Guattari 2007: 108) in each subsequent repetition because of the un-versified utterances those repetitions will have to 'hold'. I would like to propose a designation of these sections in the song as the non-verses, to differentiate from the choruses and to account for the fact that the container may repeat to a certain extent, like a verse in more traditional song structures, but the melodies change based on the prosody, length and rhythm of the utterances, thereby changing the container along the way. Music becomes 'rhythmic' (not 'metric', as Deleuze and Guattari suggest) and finds a new form of the diagonal between 'the harmonic vertical and melodic horizon' through this deterritorialization of the tonal container that happens because of the musical properties of the overlayered, un-versified linguistic utterance(s). The end result sounds exactly like the meandering melodies Roesner discussed, rather than the more conventional verses in song. Then again, this meandering not only is very cleverly organized but also effectuates a further deterritorialization between voice and instruments.

Ron's voice is introduced towards the end of the first iteration of the piano melody (or the first section of the container) and extends over the second iteration (which also introduces a lower countermelody). 'Good evening. (Beat.) Welcome. (Beat.)'. The voice enters in a rather pointillistic manner in a way that it appears to be machined by and through the instruments that do more than simply accompany it. The vocal utterance achieves the consideration of its status as this hybrid reterritorialization or *Sprechgesang* through the orchestral machining (in the gradually expanding weave of the instrumental texture), the new environment that has already always changed its function in repetition. The voice becomes just one of the lines in this evolving assemblage, which destabilizes the distinctions between voice and orchestra, actor and instrument. The chorus members repeat Ron's carefully intoned 'this really is our

[12] One form is the extreme stylization we have in the reporters' industry jargon; another form is found in clichés, apophthegms and trite truisms or in other instances even bigoted xenophobic and sexist utterances.

first AGM' monophonically and constitute themselves performatively as a community while simultaneously authorizing Ron's speech by implication, in a similar manner that his voice is authorized by the instrumental ensemble that machines it. Ron continues with his inaugurating speech only after he is authorized by the communal legitimizing repetition of the chorus.

PERFORMING REPETITIONS IN SONG: REFRAIN AND THE DIEGETIC/ MIMETIC IN-BETWEEN

Discussing the concept of the refrain in musical theatre songs, McMillin suggests that 'the repetition of words several times brings the lyric around to itself as another point of reference. It refers to itself as well as to the other things' (2006: 109). The pleasure in listening to the repetition is due to the fact that the refrain 'seeks to become its own signifier through repetition, and this approach [...] lifts the song to another layer of reference above the normal agony of being "about" love, or "about" the blues. The other layer makes the song about itself' (2006: 109–10). This is important as far as the refrain has a special potential tendency towards non-representational and affective modes of experience (connected to both Deleuzean theory and Dyer's musical sensibility) and the transgressive potential of communitas found in songs as proposed by Dolan and Ellis. 'The repeated line threatens to abandon semiosis by standing for itself', says McMillin, 'and by actually standing for itself-in- repetition it gives a lift to [a] poem' in a similar manner that 'song and dance thrive on this lift' (2006: 111).

'Good evening [...] welcome' is perhaps a little peculiar, yet still a type of refrain that repeats between the non-verses of the opening song. This repetition of the refrain in the opening would normally be experienced as a focus on the words (as Abbate proposes); as a suspension of the narrative and representational order; or even incorporated in the dramatic world, if Ron, the character, decided on the highly unconventional practice of welcoming us again and again in the middle of his inaugurating speech. There is something unique about this refrain, however: it is strangely reproduced vocally in exactly the same way every time it is repeated in the song. Or, rather, there is a very distinct effort to do that in order to follow Blythe's purist approach to verbatim material. This performative control of the repetition, which also falls in line with Paget's observation that the actor is not 'playing' the words but acting 'as instrument', signals a departure from more conventional modes of acting through song. This idiosyncratic approach in the performance and (re)presentation of the utterance lies ambiguously between diegetic and mimetic modes of theatricality in a way that helps further attract attention to the repetition in quotation marks.

The repetition here is not simply a matter of suspended animation. Due to the dramaturgy, the songs essentially escape the need for reconciling tensions between suspension and narrative action. At the same time, this refrain does not cause a lift in a way that unproblematically allows for the potential to become self-signifying. Instead, the repetition, which happens between each iteration of the refrain in the song on stage, cannot be divorced from the repetition we know to be part of the ritual aspect of the performative citationality of convention that made those utterances possible in the first place. As a result, the repetition of this unconventional chorus does not just become self-referential and self-signifying; it also becomes critically thematized: an essential part of the performances that we see on stage and those that have been performed and cited multiple times before the one instance that was documented and reterritorialized. While some of the song refrains are impregnated with the potential for the kind of anti-historical time Deleuze refers to and McMillin implies in his discussion of popular song refrains, the repetitions of the refrain result in an uncanny connection to what Butler suggests is a 'condensed historicity' of the performative:

> to the extent that the moment is ritualized, it is never merely a single moment. The 'moment' in ritual is a condensed historicity: it exceeds itself in past and future directions, an effect of prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of utterance.

(1997: 3)

In a strange manner, not only does the musical reterritorialization of the utterance in repetition not absolve the utterance from its cultural baggage, but, in fact, it signals repetition as the process that produces it. The musical treatment of the utterance exposes the socioculturally performative nature of repetition qua (musical) repetition. In addition, repetition is performatively highlighted through this hybrid mode of diegetic/mimetic presentation as a normative and territorializing device in the constitution of community. This happens only because the stylistic hybridity we are presented with denies us the usual ability to categorize repetition exclusively, or even primarily, as part of the non-representational or non-verisimilitudinous circular quality of the lyric time order.

The fact that the musical setting exposes the performativity of the utterance as one that constructs, constitutes and enacts due to the condensed historicity inherent in the ritual repetition and citationality of the speech act is essential to the politics of this particular verbatim musical. It is a particular power that the form has, which I would suggest is different not only to other forms of reflexive documentary practices but also to the ways we traditionally discuss the politics of temporality and disjunction in musical theatre discourse. This reconceptualization of the use of repetition in the reterritorialization of integrative techniques allows for a politics of the genre outside the more traditional transgressive potential that a separate musical time order offers in disrupting the linear narrative and the dominant ideologies embedded in it. The reimagined relationship between music and text focuses not so much on the escapist, utopian politics as on a different politics of perception.

REPETITION 3: THE AUDIENCE AND/AS COMMUNITY IN BE-LONGING – DETERRITORIALIZATION OF STAGE AND AUDITORIUM

Our sense of investment and the urge to accept the invitation to join the community that was offered from the opening is in oscillation throughout the performance: it is constantly somewhere between the longing to fulfil the promise for a utopian lift into the alternative coming together of a communitas on the one hand, and on the other the problematic community politics we find ourselves becoming aware of through the different mode of listening and attending. The constant negotiation of the dynamics of participation in the event is quite complex and only exacerbated by the different levels or types of engagement and immersion. We become aware, for example, of the unattainability of the limit of an absolute or exact performance of the immensely complicated vocal score. By constantly witnessing the possibility of the accident, or failure, we begin to strongly invest in our participation in the event. We are rooting for the performers to get it right; in an extension of that, we join into the experience of this community in a strongly visceral way. And it is a rather visceral shock, which results from our buying and investing into the frame of the community in the here and now of the theatrical event, simultaneously with being aware of the usual contract, which expects us to 'willingly suspend our disbelief', when indeed in disbelief we hear Kate Fleetwood/ Julie[13] utter:

> JULIE. What's happened's happened but I' m not sad. (*Beat.*) Ya know (*Beat*.) I'd still shake his hand. I'd love to just shake his hand an' say 'Thank you very much for getting rid of them.

This persistent, escalating, irresolute negotiation in re-carving the locus of our participation is also the quintessential political layer in our experience of the performance.

[13] Played by Olivia Colman in the film adaptation.

‘LONDON ROAD IN BLOOM’ REPRISED:[14] NO HAPPY ENDINGS...

The performance will end with a reprise of the ‘London Road in Bloom’ song, which was first introduced right after the opening. It would seem almost counterproductive to my argument to refer, here, to what is arguably the most hummable, memorable tune of the musical, which feels as if it gravitates towards the lift of lyric escapism. It is very tempting to participate in the utopian sensibility inscribed in the nostalgia of the quasi-waltz-like music, as well as the endless list of flowers that is coupled with the actual smell of the flowers on stage. Yet the urge to join in is again problematized on several levels: the song structure produces a feeling of vacillation as the constantly changing metre alternates between 3/4 and 2/4, modifying the initial container along the way and coupling with the uncertainty of the residents’ charmingly sketchy gardening and floricultural knowledge. More importantly, this reterritorialization of the list-song – what is essentially a musical theatre song staple – alludes to one other list we were presented with in the performance in ‘The five counts of murder’: Tania Nichol, Gemma Adams, Anneli Alderton, Paula Clennell, Annette Nichols. This reprise draws any expectations away from the cathartic quality of a happy ending. The final, celebratory moment is tainted by the awareness that as the community comes together in ‘tarting the street up’, the flower-filled baskets only disguise real problems. The tension in the politics of our participation is intensified; however much we have the urge to enter the utopian, affective lyricism of the song and the usual sense of communitas it produces, we nevertheless cannot disregard the guilt that would accompany allowing ourselves that entering. This is especially the case when this reprise is preceded by an actual recording of an interview with a group of surviving sex workers: those who have no place in the ‘regenerated flower-filled Eden’ crowned in this final song.

[CAESURA]

The reprise is preceded by a crucial moment in the performance, which widens the pendulum of our participatory engagement and illuminates and shifts our political involvement away from a simplistic designation of, and critical distancing from, a villain and the unproblematized exaltation of a hero. Three performers, representing sex workers who survived the events described, creep onto the stage from darkness and stare at the audience for a chilling 80 seconds of unorganized, unstylized, non-categorized time that opposes itself to lyric time, book time and even theatrical time. The threatening, unnerving silence that ensues destabilizes a number of frames and floods the theatre as we experience the force of the characters’ ‘intrusion’ in the space as they stand among the dimly lit sofas, representing the living rooms of the community. We come face-to-face with their returning gaze, as well as with the process of perception itself as, again, we are thrown into a crisis of non-recognition.

This climactic encounter is a lot different to the kind of purging that results in an empathetic connection to a protagonist and event; here, we become aware that the ‘unreflected certainty and security by which [we] experience being spectators as an unproblematic social behaviour’ (Lehmann 2006: 104) – found in more illusionist, self-contained, empathetic and arguably more purely escapist and utopian musico-theatrical experiences – is not applicable. The already porous territories of stage and auditorium become further destabilized, and this deterritorialization or resulting instability, to follow Nibbelink, forms ‘a multiperspectival cubism, in which the spectator is both participant and reflexive observer at the same time’ (2019: 12). In the embodied experience of this encounter, we become aware of our implication in the political and ethical dilemma and glimpse the ways we are involved in the politics of communities, territories, otherings and exclusions.

[14] The YouTube link is again from the motion picture soundtrack, which, while different, can provide a useful point of reference I hope. https://www. youtube.com/watch?v =4qa0F_737GU&list=RD nS5pct90Jv0&index=4. Accessed 29 November 2021.

This moment frames the rest of the performance and our experience of it. It is this 'encounter' constituted in the interweaving of the affective experience, the critical awareness and the perception of the politics of our participation that makes us co-responsible, not only in the production of meaning, but also ethically implicated in that 'unsettling ambivalence that underpins *all* communities' (Lukowski 2011: n.pag., emphasis added).

A SUMMARY OF REPETITIONS: MOVING FORWARD

By unpacking the uses of repetition and the politics behind it, I have tried to demonstrate how *London Road*, as a special type of post-integrated verbatim musical, approaches the subject of community and the audience's experience of it in unique ways by deterritorializing the two genres it borrows from on a variety of levels.

The songs here supersede the traditional function of representing a clearly delineated 'emotional, physical and formal – as well as temporal – excess', which occurs as a temporary disruption of the narrative (Laing 2000: 10). By destabilizing the categories and orders of time (book and lyric), *London Road* also recalibrates our expectations around community and belonging in musical theatre, which usually very much revolve around the aesthetics of disjunction. The hybrid new sign of the peculiar refrain that results from the special type of reterritorialization of the utterance does not offer us recognizability and ease in navigating the experience, nor our participation in it. The figuring-out that results from the crisis of non-recognition is quite essential and generative as we encounter and engage with the politics of the performance.

In the course of the show, we gradually become attuned to an altered quality of listening, and a special mode of perception that is crucial because it allows us to discern how the musical treatment exposes the performativity of the utterance as one that constructs, constitutes, enacts and concretizes territories because of the condensed historicity inherent in the ritual repetition of the speech act. The resulting embodied perception is essential to the politics of this particular verbatim musical, and an exceptional potential that the form has, since it is different from any other form that falls within the current of reflexive verbatim or documentary practice. But at the same time, since the performance is based on a deterritorialization of both of the genres, it is also quite different from the ways we traditionally discuss politics in musical theatre.

The usual coming together in song, in an excess of temporality that helps transgress social structures and politics of normativity embedded in the historicity of the book that we relate to 'our concrete experiences of the world', according to Dyer, is not offered as an unproblematized space of alternative or escapist belonging. Here, our engagement with the politics of community is neither through an empathetic experience of a closed-off fictional cosmos nor through the utopian sensibility inscribed in lyric time and the self-signifying order of the numbers, which offer opportunities for identificatory experiences of communitas both inside the theatre and out. Neither book nor lyric time is fully entered in this quasi-lyric hybrid. They are both promised but never delivered, and the performance places us somewhere in an in-between space beyond the aesthetics of recognition generative of the Deleuzian 'fundamental encounter' (2001: 139); a space where we need to re-carve our own process of perception.

The extraordinary relationship between text and music, which produces the hybridity in *London Road*, demonstrates the power unique to the possibilities of the verbatim musical to evade a simplistic ascribing to essentialist notions of faithfulness and authenticity. Instead, this verbatim musical has the ability to destabilize the binary between reality and representation, 'demonstrating that the real and the represented are not a set binary but are

the products of human consciousness and ways of seeing and encoding' (Carlson 2018: 18); or, in fact, ways of hearing more-so in this instance.

This destabilization comes through the disruption of conventions and the deregulation of codes Deleuze and Guattari bestow to a 'minor' practice. It is this experimentation and play not just with content but with form that, in this special case, also 'ultimately highlights the innovative and critical potential that the musical has and which, due to commercial constraints and genre conventions, remains too often unexplored' (Roesner 2017: 663). Perhaps *London Road*, as a unique 'line of flight' of the verbatim musical, is only a point of departure in experimenting with form and content in order to produce different types of 'minor' practices in destabilizing territories and boundaries, and thereby reinventing the musical in the twenty-first century.

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