§ The Subject of Production

> As for being shocked to hear someone say 'we' when speaking all alone after the death of the other, there is no reason for it…. 'We' is always said by a sole person.
>
> -Derrida, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* (43)

> Biggie Duets… Let's go.
>
> -P-Diddy, "Whatchu Want"

In his 1966 essay "The Prospects of Recording," Glenn Gould criticizes the "antirecord lobbyists" for celebrating "the existence of a mystical communication between concert performer and public audience (the composer being seldom mentioned)" (119). Gould is suspicious of the "eye versus ear" bias of this belief in the "mystical communication" that occurs in the live concert environment, his parenthetical remark highlighting the fact that in order to construct this presence in the concert performance, the composer who is absented in and by the work, often seems left out. The antirecord lobbyists oppose the presence afforded by the concert environment to the alienation and deadness of the musical recording. Inherent in this opposition is the impulse to consider technologically reproduced objects to be incapable of sustaining a presence found in the original.

Walter Benjamin gave the term "aura" to that which withers in the reproduced object with respect to its original. Though his article "Art in the Age of Mechanical

Reproduction" is somewhat wistful about this new age without aura, Benjamin is actually hopeful about the possibilities mechanical reproduction will afford the coming generations. Gould's view is more than hopeful. Against the complaints about the lifelessness and distance of the reproduced object, Gould argues that recording techniques allow for a "tactile proximity…immediacy…an acoustic with a direct and impartial presence" (116). In short, Gould calls for the use of electronic means to construct, if not a more "real" presence certainly a more sonic one. In so doing, he inverts the relation of recording and live performance to presence, a prescient inversion given the shift already underway at the time (and solidly part of our musical experience today) whereby the live performance became a spectacle venerating or (re)presenting the recording.

The Wu-Tang Clan, one of the most influential hip-hop groups—after many years in which they had recorded group albums, solo albums and appeared in films and television shows—began touring again this year. With eight members on stage, thousands of screaming fans and booming instrumentals, it was very difficult to understand the words. In the instrumentals too, some of the melody lines were obscured by the clang of the cymbals and the screams of the fans whose lips often mirrored the words of their favorite rappers on stage, the spectacle of the show illustrating this inversion of the live performance and the recording. The only way to hear this "live" performance was through recourse to the recordings that everyone there knew so well. One mediated between the raw splatterings of sound, reconstituting them as themes and lyrics by "hearing" the recording in one's head as one watched. This is not entirely new to recording—concerts have always been heard through scores the audience knows well, some buried flute line made audible in the performance only through memory of it. But this development with recording makes the situation even more complicated. With the development of splicing techniques around the middle of the last century, it became possible to make a song by splicing together different takes which may have been recorded in different countries, different studios, and over the course of years. The result is a fragmented object whose status is highly complex and can make for the greatest performance that never took place. This fragmented object is that through which the contemporary pop music concert is experienced. The present is (re)presented to the audience through the recording.[1]

Gould's identification of the famous forger Hans van Meegeren as his "hero," makes it clear that he is not sympathetic to the idea of "aura" (120). Meegeren was a forger of Vermeers in the 1930s. Because he sold these works to private collectors in the Third Reich, he was charged after the war with collaboration. He caused a great stir when he explained that he had forged the paintings. The critics and art historians who had verified and enjoyed the authenticity of his Vermeers were particularly upset. One sad fact of his story is that he had in fact used the money he received from these collectors to arrange for the safe transportation of Jews out of Germany but nevertheless died in prison after being charged and found guilty.

The van Meegeren case demonstrates that the "aura" we find in original works need not inhere in the work itself. The experience of this aura or authenticity, as implied by Leonard Meyer's discussion of forgery in *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, is not ontological but is produced from the assumption that a work is in fact authentic (65). To rephrase the problem in psychoanalytic terms, there is no aura, only transference.

---

[1] This "hyperreal" age makes the relevance of Benjamin's concept of aura highly questionable.

Lacan defines transference as the supposition of knowledge and locates it at the heart of as diverse concepts as love and authority (*Book XX*, 65-67). The notion of authority—prostrating oneself to an author, believing that the author's view is more valid than one's own—is a function of this supposition of knowledge. For this reason, Lacan insists that before any reading (which can be generalized to media besides written word), one must "desuppose" that the author has knowledge. This desupposition of knowledge is consonant with the death of the author from Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida to Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, who criticize the author as a guarantor of the meaning of a text. In other words, these models assert that authority or authenticity is a mirage, an effect of a particular type of approach rather than something that inheres in an object (text, musical recording, work of art).

Gould finds the "aesthetic moralism" of the following situation ludicrous:

> Elisabeth Schwarzkopf appends a missing high C to a tape of *Tristan* otherwise featuring Kirsten Flagstad, and indignant purists, for whom music is the last blood sport, howl her down, furious at being deprived a kill. (119)

This passage presents aesthetic moralism (a subset of the more general "humanitarian idealism" he is criticizing) as paradoxically close to violent, purely animal interest. It has no musical relevance but offers only an opportunity for indulgent personal attack. In Gould's age of improved production technology and technique, it might be impossible to hear such an edit. It is not the musical effect of this high C but of specifically Elisabeth Schwarzkopf's high C that suffers from the transference that is disrupted by these recording techniques. Gould's implication is that it is not musical experience but a metaphysics of identity or presence that is threatened by the advent of recording techniques. The cult of the performer only gets in the way of the music itself. Gould exalts recording for the role it will play in reducing the possibility of using “biographical data or chronological assumption” as the foundation for artistic judgment.

Of the three major benefits of the recording process (new possibilities for presence and participation being the other two), Gould calls this destabilizing effect on identity “the most hopeful thing about this process” (125). Splicing together different pieces of tape (or, now, different wave forms) allows for the combination of performances from different performers, times, and geographical places into a hopefully seamless whole. And while the performer begins to dissolve with the importance of these splices, the tape editor himself emerges as a significant creative agent in the process. This holds true for the present time, in which a producer is often at least as important for the sound of a track as the artist whose album the track is released on, and whose image will sell it (although some producers have their own compelling and well-marketed images). Gould writes that as “the performer’s once-sacrosanct privileges” (121) begin to blend with those of the tape editor and the composer (and, increasingly since Gould’s time, the producer) we can look forward to—he is thoroughly sincere here—the van Meegeren syndrome as an accepted aesthetic of our time.

One opening Gould sees is that, through all this confusion of identity emerges the possibility of a recording whose aim is the most perfect presentation of a composer and his work. Because the performer seems to disappear behind the pure sound the recording offers the listener, it is the work and the composer that are showcased. The course of pop music makes this claim (at least regarding the composer) difficult to sustain—though everyone has heard his songs, who has heard of Max Martin, über-successful songwriter for Kelly Clarkson, 'N Sync and Backstreet Boys, among others. But is this even true in Gould's case? Anyone who has heard Gould's recording of the D Major fugue from the second book of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* can quibble with the extent to which the performer's role is really effaced in the recording process. Despite his talk of recording as the effacement of the performer's image, Gould is often very present on his tracks, but interestingly one of the most memorable aspects of his performances (and one that significantly is not excised from the recordings) is Gould's tendency to hum along with the pieces he plays. This feature of his performances is particularly striking given his view of recording as the creation of a perfect performance that would be otherwise impossible and of the erasure of the performer. What comes through on his recordings so strongly despite the pristine attitude towards the production is not necessarily his image or person but the beyond of musical technique that Roland Barthes theorized as "grain."

About the time Gould wrote his essay on recording, Barthes wrote "The Grain of the Voice" criticizing recording and production techniques as aiming to erase the body from the music. Gould's approach had been to consider the question of identity in relation to recording but does not remark on the question of the bodily. In his essay, Barthes defines "grain" as the presence of the bodily in the voice (182). One should not be distracted by his use of the voice as a test case; his theory should be understood as a general engagement with the question of the role of the body in reproduced media (his argument could certainly be extended to the touch-ups and make-up of photography or cinema as well).

It is intriguing that Gould's article does not comment on the bodily, especially since his hum is such a distinct feature of his recording. There is some apparent tension between Barthes and Gould, the one arguing for the effacement of the performer the other arguing for the importance of the presence of the bodily in the reproduced medium, yet the two thinkers are not exactly opponents. Barthes would no doubt agree with Gould's critique of biographical data as a standard for artistic judgment. Gould, despite his own hum, might be more resistant to Barthes' call to record the bodily, although perhaps this is alluded to in Gould's attitude towards the "tactile proximity" that recording can offer as well as in the conscious decision that Gould and his "tape editors" must have come to in choosing to leave Gould's humming audible on some recordings. An interesting question, the answer to which would indicate the compatibility of their views, is whether it is possible to satisfy both of their suggestions simultaneously: to efface both the performer as a persona while simultaneously recording the body. But Gould's persona is conjured up when we hear his hum. Because so much of recording technique has been about smoothing over the bodily—muting out breathing noises, removing the smacking of lips, the sound of saliva, the screech of fingers moving across guitar strings, whatever lies outside of the ideals of vocal or instrumental technique—whenever anyone does record the grain, its distinctiveness often contributes to the cult of the performer and makes them easily identifiable in the music as such. The grating of Björk or

Diamanda Galas's vocal chords, Keith Jarret or Gould's humming, John Cage's lisp. Can the grain ever escape treatment as a feature of character or persona? Is there such a thing as generic, impersonal, purely physical grain? The three registers of Gould's dismissal of antirecord lobbyists' "humanitarian idealism"—participation, identity and presence—were also chief concerns of both Derrida and Lacan. The theoretical ground of Gould's work on production provides a framework with which to address issues of identity and authorship in music production, looking at Phil Spector/The Crystal's "He Hit Me" and the recent release from Bad Boy Records *Duets: The Final Chapter*.

Music recording and production have allowed for unprecedented complication of authorship and responsibility as well as the presence of the performer. To begin with, "responsibilities" of composer, performer and tape editor, Gould notes, begin to merge, but it is not that the roles of composer and performer had remained meticulously discrete up to this point. Composers like Franz Liszt and Niccolò Paganini made their careers by performing their own works. Improvisatory practices similarly problematize the composer/performer distinction, which are explored in relation to the subject of participation in light of the participational approaches employed by, among others, Yoko Ono and Cage. The medium of recorded audio presents a disembodied sonic experience to its listener. The listener hears sounds that she recognizes as words, voices and instruments. All the creative figures that participated in the making of the song are collapsed into a flat sonic surface that is (re)presented under the image of the pop star. The songwriter is often not the same person singing the song. The producer, like Gould's tape-editor, leaves at least as much creative imprint, especially in the contemporary age of larger-than-life producers like Dr. Dre, the Neptunes, or Scott Storch, as songwriter or performer. In many cases, the producer chooses the songs a performer will sing—maybe even writing them—and it is up to the singer/pop star only to articulate the words and music the producer gives to him.

This displacement of voice is musically as old as song. From the mushroom gathering songs of the Ba-benzele Pygmies to folk songs in the British Isles, the voice of what in Lacanian terms is the Symbolic other (cultural habits, linguistic norms, etc.) speaks through the subject who in doing so assumes his role in the collective. The subject is called to speak for that into which she is thrown. Igor Stravinsky, perhaps sensitized to this problem of speaking with the voice of the other by his complicated relation to his Russian national origin (both musically and culturally), treats the displaced voice as a focal concern in his staged work *Les Noces*. This work, which Stravinsky started writing during his exile in Switzerland in around 1915, will provide a parallel to the relationship between producer and performer that is later explored in relation to Phil Spector and The Crystals.

In *Les Noces* (as in the original Russian peasant wedding ceremonies it is based on), the bride's *plach*, literally "weeping," plays an important role. In the *plach*, Stravinsky scholar Taruskin writes, the bride pleads that her father not send her away, yet he adds that "[m]ost modern scholars (as well as Stravinsky) agree that, as it functions in the wedding ritual, the *plach* is not the spontaneous expression of feeling, but the fulfillment of a prescribed liturgical requirement, performed to a prescribed liturgical text, and sung in a prescribed liturgical manner to a prescribed liturgical formula" (1326). The key notion here, if repetition did not drive the point home, is prescription. The words here are sung, in the way they are sung, not as an act of expression but as the fulfillment of obligation. They are sung because it is what one does. I propose that we look at the *plach* as a metaphor for the general conditions of speech—namely that when one speaks (especially in the case of produced music), he speaks with the voice of the other.[2]

Martin Heidegger was deeply concerned with the individual subject's relationship to *das Man*—which in German means the "they" or the impersonal third-person "one." What *das Man* does is *what one does*: the subject follows the cultural conventions that are given to him, uses the language that is given to him, uses forks as forks, husbands as husbands, etc. Situated in this context, playing the role assigned to him by these cultural conventions, deprives the subject of his own authentic being:

> But this distantiality which belongs to Being-with, is such that Dasein, as everyday Being-with-one-another, stands in *subjection* to Others. It itself *is* not; its Being has been taken away by the Others. (*Being*, 164)

Heidegger's use of the term "distantiality" echoes a point Blanchot makes about the paradox central to the subject of distance. The presence of the Other transforms the subject, distancing him from his particular desires and authentic existence by calling on him to be different from what he is.[3] The "Others" Heidegger talks about, he is careful to note, are not definite Others but *das Man*, the neuter that represents culture as impersonal and collective. As anyone knows, living within any culture compels one to do what one (das Man) does, to follow the culture's prescriptions. In a rite—a traditional wedding serves as a good example—of following what one does: ceremonies excessively long and rich, rife with symbolic objects and often with no purpose really but to lend cultural authorization or weight to an event.

---

[2] It is worth noting that the material for this work is taken from Pyotr Vasilyevich Kireyevsky, who had collected thousands of Russian folk songs (Taruskin, 1333). Some of these folk texts though which Pushkin contributed to the Kireyevsky's collection were in fact made up by the former, though he would not say which ones were of his own creation. Stravinsky, Taruskin tells us, was not only aware that some of the songs—though he didn't know which—were of dubious authenticity, but found the trick Pushkin had played impressive (1335). Thus, the material in Stravinsky's work is of complex origin, sometimes several times removed from the original source, sometimes referring to no original folk source at all.

The *plach* gives us a musical metaphor for this relation of the subject to its culture and the culture's expectations. The message of the *plach* holds a symbolic and cultural value; any correspondence it has to her own feelings is purely coincidental and, from the point of view of the ceremony, totally irrelevant. The *plach* thus illustrates the structuralist model of subjectivity—the subject is doomed to speak with the voice of the other, a voice that constitutes him as he performs it. In articulating its words, desires, and expectations, the subject assumes them as his own. One can think of the Victorian parlor songs in which men penned women's voices which women then performed, no doubt a factor of women's socialization at the time. This displacement of voice is also a general issue of music recording and production with the increase in the producer's importance in the middle of the last century. Take Spector's work, which is considered in greater detail later in this section, with The

---

[3] Kojève makes this into a problematic of interpersonal relations with his formulation, which Lacan takes up, that desire is the desire of the other (7). Human desire—best thought of here not as an intentional act of wanting but as an existential drive—is the desire to be recognized by the other. This personal model, more so than Heidegger's relation between subject and impersonal Other, is useful to keep in mind when thinking about the distancing and displacement of speech involved in the relation between producer and recording artist. Heidegger's model is useful as an illustration of this general problematic of "distantiality," illustrated in *Les Noces* as cultural.

Crystals. None of them wanted to sing "He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)," protesting its message, which they found perverse. Spector merely insisted that they sing it and they did. The Crystals then are singing a voice that is not only not their own but with which they actively disagreed. The structuralist model in which the subject is wholly constituted by the Symbolic (his environment, culture, language and experience) leads one to ask: is there any hope for breaking out of this system? Is there any way the subject can free herself from the homogeneity of *das Man* to become a subject who speaks with her own unique voice?

This notion of freedom from *das Man* also applies generally to artistic production and composition: the composer or artist must think very carefully about whether he is doing simply "what one does" or whether he is doing something unique and original. That we are structured so deeply by the culture and language around us poses the question of whether or not such uniqueness or authenticity is possible. In his seminar of 1959-60, Lacan asked the question of how one can own one's particularity and rupture the hegemony of the Symbolic in terms of an ethics of desire, "Have you acted in conformity with your desire?" (*Book VII*, 311). Lacan's question is more difficult than it at first seems because it raises another question: how does the subject know what desire is actually his and what is the desire of the other living through him?

Both Lacan and Heidegger agree that it is only through a confrontation with death that one can begin to break with *das Man* (for Lacan, the Symbolic) and take the first step towards an authentic and individual way of being. Whether such authenticity or individuality is possible is debatable and whether confronting death is the key to approaching them is too. That said, the confrontation with death, for Lacan and Heidegger, does not mean a near-death experience but a true acceptance of the inevitability that one will at some point cease to exist and that there is ultimately no way of expecting this end; it could happen in thirty seconds, five months or eighty years. In the post-theological age in which Lacan works (and in which at least some of us live), once one accepts that he will cease to exist, there is nothing stopping him from acting in accordance with the desire that is in him. Why do "what one does" if something else is desired? The subject does "what one does" because she desires recognition from "them," from *das Man*, this recognition being an affirmation of her existence. But since death is inevitable and when she dies their recognition will become as useless as it will be meaningless, that recognition becomes less valuable than acting in accordance with her own desire, if she can find it.[4] When the subject understands that this death could come at any time, he is compelled not to hesitate any longer but to start actualizing his desire, which is no simple task since one's desire is not just fixed and present to be actualized but encountered in glimpses through a process of continual discovery.

Stravinsky (on this point as well as others sharing an affinity with Spector) seems a good example of this subject who acts in accordance with the desire in him. *The Rite of Spring*, *Renard*, *Les Noces*, *Pulcinella*, and his later twelve-tone works, each draw on a tradition and at the same time subvert it, be it Russian folk, Classical period or contemporary art music. Stravinsky had to struggle to locate his voice and it seems fitting that *Les Noces* show him sensitive to the concerns of whether one speaks with one's own voice. In the first staging of *Les Noces*, the vocalist performs the *plach* offstage conveying the sense that the voice of the *plach* does not belong to a specific subject. It is generic and cultural, a disembodied other voice. The unusual design and choreography of *Les Noces* accentuates this lack of individuality with the chorus of women dressed identically, faces that are indistinguishable, singing in unison—a perfect picture of *das Man*.

---

[4] Lacan proffers speech (and the slippage between intended and unintended meanings) as the site for this discovery, "It is there that what we call desire crawls, slips, escapes, like the ferret" (*Book XI*, 214).

Phil Spector's work with The Crystals, almost a half-century later than Stravinsky's opera, affords us the opportunity to explore similar issues of authorship and identity in recorded pop music. The Crystals had many hits, among them "Da Doo Ron Ron" and, what Spector considered his best song, "He Kissed Me." Spector met the quintet of girls, which had been formed by big-band musician Benny Wells a year earlier, and recorded many songs released under The Crystals (Bogdanov et. al, 171). Of interest for issues of identity and recording, Spector presented Darlene Love (née Wright) and her group The Blossoms as The Crystals for "their" hit "He's A Rebel," which was the first hit single for Spector's Philles record label (Williams, 67-8). None of The Crystals sang on that song or on "He's Sure The Boy I Love," a kind of unintentional parody of the fungibility of the performer who disappears not only behind the recording (as Gould may have properly assessed) but behind her own name (a plight Thomas as a subject of distance well understood). The reason for The Crystals' absence on "He's A Rebel" was apparently due to the three-thousand mile distance between them and Spector at the time and Spector was racing his old record label to get the single out first. Such a telerecording would be no struggle with today's high-bandwidth and technology that enables entire orchestras to be recorded at much greater distances.

The members of the group did sing on the 1962 song "He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)," although none of them wanted to, finding the song grotesque. Spector wrote many of his songs but did not write this one, which was penned by musical and romantic partners Carole King and Gerry Goffin. There are different answers to the question of whose voice was present on this song. Barbara Alston, one of the group's members, sang the lead vocals, but the words and music she delivered had been written and given to her.

The story of this song is complicated further by the fact that its lyrics came from a story Goffin's and King's babysitter Eva Boyd had told them (Williams, 59). Boyd, who later became the "Little Eva" famous for Goffin's and King's chart-topping hit "The Loco-motion," described how her boyfriend had hit her to punish her for her infidelity—noting that it did not upset her but that it made her understand that he loved her. As Goffin's and King's lyrics immortalize her it, "He hit me,/And it felt like a kiss./He hit me, and I knew I loved him./And then he took me in his arms,/With all the tenderness there is./And when he kissed me,/He made me his." No one can say how close these lyrics were to Boyd's story.

The song was not well received and complaints quickly silenced it. Spector's biographer Williams imagines the average listener's response, "He hit me? And it felt like a kiss? What're these people trying to *say*, for god's sake?" (59). Williams' listener (probably an accurate reaction) attributes responsibility for the story and its authorship to "these people" and listens baffled as to what their intention was. It is unclear if Williams is aware of how prescient these issues are to the problems it raises for authorship of and responsibility for the recording. The song's origination with Boyd, its foundation in her personal experience and its engagement with a real problem are effaced through the multiple displacements at work from Boyd to the listener and by the format and expectations of popular music.

Alston's place in this song from The Crystals provides us with an example of the subject as a channel for the voice of the other, a subject that does not speak with her own voice. Boyd's place points to another related problem of displaced speech (and another general effect of recording and production) that can be illustrated with some of the most recent music from The Notorious B.I.G. In this case, I will be looking not at the ways in which the subject's voice is dictated by the other—as was illustrated in the *plach* or The Crystals' reluctant performance of Boyd's story—but at the ways in which the displacement of voice resonates with the death of the author.

My interest in the *Duets: The Final Chapter* is to some extent inspired by Derrida's claim—quoted at the beginning of this section—that "we" is only ever being said by a sole person. Of the four albums that bear The Notorious B.I.G.'s name under "Artist," *Ready to Die* was the only one released during his lifetime. His second album *Life After Death* was released weeks after he had been shot and killed in March of 1997. After these two albums came *Born Again* and in December 2005 *Duets: The Final Chapter*, both of which feature recycled rhymes or unearthed demo tracks from Biggie over newly produced beats. *Duets* features Biggie rapping with a number of other recording artists, some rappers, some not, some alive, some dead. There are other examples of undead duets outside of hip-hop too: the recorded Natalie

Cole and Nat King Cole duet “Unforgettable” or the duet between Celine Dion and Frank Sinatra that was performed live (!) at the Grammy Awards, Dion singing while a video of Sinatra played behind her (Driscoll). Derrida remarks that the absurdity of saying “we” after another’s death is no greater than the absurdity of any statement of “we.” “We” is spoken in the place of another who, dead or alive, is absented in being spoken for. The absurdity is only more apparent when the death of the one spoken for draws attention to the fact that now *he cannot but be spoken for*.

At issue in the use of “we” as in the Biggie *Duets* is the author’s relation to his text and its destination. On the *Duets*, we find Biggie with some artists he worked with during his life (Jay-Z, Mary J. Blige, R. Kelly), some artists he never even knew (Obie Trice, Eminem), and some artists one cannot imagine him working with, pop-metal group Korn standing out the most of the collaborators. One “collaboration” on the album is the doubly-posthumous “Get Your Grind On” which features Biggie and Big Punisher, the song beginning with a voice lamenting that a Biggie/Big Pun collaboration would have been incredible followed by Big Pun saying, “It was just destined to happen. Remember, we’ll have our day. I know, I know I’ll see him at the pearly gates.” Biggie starts rapping and Big Pun joins in later, but there is, unsurprisingly, little life in the track. Their voices sound a bit ghostly and distant, a bit off, although their raps are perfectly aligned with the beat. At least we have the assurance that Big Pun had wished he could have collaborated with Biggie, yet even if this duet fulfills both of their wishes, it is still only accomplished through a producer taking their voices and putting them together. To echo the quotation from Derrida that begins this section, I would like to remark that perhaps their deaths only make apparent the absurdity of the situation. Isn't this displacement of voice the general condition of recording? There is a doubly-posthumous duet with Bob Marley on the album which leaves one wondering if Marley or Biggie would have wanted it that way. Anyone who has faced the loss of another knows that it feels almost instinctual to ask whether the dead "would have wanted it that way," even though such a question commits the same error of speaking for the other. In the case of the duet with Big Pun, it seems that they indeed would have wanted it that way. Does that diminish the gravity of their having been spoken for by P-Diddy and the other producers involved with the track? At any rate, the production highlights that one cannot control or anticipate the way his work will be interpreted or used after his death. For this reason, both Lacan and Derrida were concerned with how they would be read after their death. Biggie's concern with death could be considered obsessional.

In "Warning," one of the hits from the morbidly-titled *Ready to Die*, Biggie raps about a friend warning him that he has been marked for death by some of his old associates. Biggie, having been warned, gets the associates first in a skit at the end of the track. The final track of the album is a suicide note that begins with Biggie calling producer, rapper and friend then-Puff Daddy/now-P-Diddy and ends with Biggie shooting himself. His next album and first posthumous release, *Life After Death*, begins with Biggie in the hospital, the beat of his heart and the beeps of his EKG machine clearly audible. Death is central to this album as well with songs like "You're Nobody Till Somebody Kills You." Biggie certainly had some success during his lifetime, but it was nothing compared with the success and critical acclaim he would achieve posthumously, perhaps due in part to the quasi-prophetic quality his rapping—laced with plots of his murder, the impossibility of real fame during his lifetime—took after his death.

Lacan and Derrida were both preoccupied with death as well—it is one of the things ex-drug dealing hip-hop artists and esoteric French theorists have in common (other shared interests including flows and the real). While neither Lacan nor Derrida had any hits out on them except the one we all share, they were both acutely aware of the problems their texts may face after their deaths.[5] One of the few times the two spoke with each other, the subject of death came up, both expressing some anxiety at how they would be read after they had died. As Derrida put it in his essay "For the Love of Lacan," "What will he [Lacan] not have said!" (*Resistances*, 39). In championing the future anterior as the modality of the postmodern, philosophers such as Lyotard take the stance that the present cannot be understood in itself because its effects cannot yet be seen and one cannot predict the proliferation of interpretations of it "to come." In "For the Love of Lacan" this modality is invoked in order to discuss interpretation in *l'avenir* (to come), a French word that has a different usage than "future," the strong formulation of this position being that the present is literally constituted retroactively. The "to come" in contrast with "future" emphasizes the fact that one cannot foresee what is in store. Lacan's texts have been published, he is dead, but new readings and scholarship continue relentlessly, leading one to great uncertainty, Derrida muses, about what he *will have said*.

---

[5] The most extreme example of such textual violence is Derrida's New York Times obituary. Though Levinas was no less abstruse, his 1995 obituary received the title "Emmanuel Levinas, 90, French Ethical Philosopher." The obituary "Jacques Derrida, Abstruse Theorist, Dies in Paris at 74" took no time in taking advantage of the fact that Derrida could no longer respond to his critics. The article seems to hold Derrida responsible for everything from political indifference to the "zigzaggy, sometimes disquieting spaces" of deconstructionist architecture. The Economist's obituary was no better, explaining the tension at Cambridge over his honorary degree as because, "There were [in his work] no arguments, nor really any views either," adding in a fine example of speaking for the other, "He would have been the first to admit this." ("Jacques Derrida"). The *Times* obituary had defined deconstruction as a method for "robbing texts—whether literature, history or philosophy—of truthfulness, absolute meaning and permanence" (Kandell). The wrongdoings of these obituaries are ironically difficult to pin down. One feels compelled to say, with some self-aware irony, that the statements are often not wholly false, yet they completely misrepresent the abstruse theorist's intentions.

This fate of Lacan's is not reserved just for the writers of the world, as suggested by Biggie's posthumous successful career. Scientists, musicians, politicians—no one can be sure how their work will be interpreted or used in the future (*l'avenir*). It is hard enough to stand behind one's work or ensure its "proper" use while still alive. Despite their advocacy of the (metaphysical) death of the author and the author's inability to limit his work's interpretations and uses, Lacan and Derrida talk about the uncertainty that faces their texts following the (physical) death of the author. No matter how rigorous their theory was, they still, understandably, wanted to think they really had some control over their texts. Lots of recording artists or composers do not hold the copyrights to their music and, between movie soundtracks and commercial uses, the music of artists dead or alive ends up in places it was surely not intended: Nick Drake's "Pink Moon" on a Volkswagen commercial, Beethoven in *A Clockwork Orange*, a looped phrase of Tchaikovsky in a hip-hop track produced by RZA. Sampling, borrowing the voice of the other for one's own use, is the modus operandi of hip-hop.

Sampling, the modus operandi of hip-hop, may be the converse—or perhaps more appropriately, *detournement*—of the problem of speaking with the other's voice. Whereas the Symbolic other calls upon the subject to speak its voice as his own, quotation is a self-conscious effort to mark the fact that one’s words or music has an origin that is not one’s own. Quotation or sampling thus has the potential to subvert the process whereby the subject is submerged by the Symbolic other because it constitutes a personal voice that does the quoting by marking a distance between the subject’s voice and the other’s voice. Thus it may be that the death of the author is an opening for the subject to speak with a unique voice precisely by using texts instead of delivering them—a subtle but important difference—and in so doing constituting his own voice by a process that could be compared to the Hegelian subject who appears and asserts himself through his negation of the world around him.