WHO

WHAT

WHEN
WHO
Female, 60's?
Former Opera singer from
Weimar
(East-Germany)

WHAT
"Nadie Hesser"
(Mac the Knife)
by B. Brecht

WHEN
As part of 'Swing Song for portrait'
Atelierhaus Weimar 2003

Die Singende Stadt
SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT
#24
WHO

Male, 40s
Artist
Cork, Ireland

WHAT

"Lift MacCahir O'G your face
Boodring o'er the old disgrace
That Black FitzWilliam stormed your place
Drove you to the Fern."
(Follow me up to Carlow)

(1:49min)

WHEN

Recorded at Artist's exhibition opening
2005

SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT

Herder's Legacy

#152
WHO

Teenager from Cork, Ireland

WHAT

“Pizza Hut, Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken and a pizza, McDonalds McDonalds...” (0:21 min)

WHEN

2005

Recorded at Capitol Cinema

Group of friends (5 girls) all laughing & being embarrassed

SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT

Herder’s Legacy

# 155

www.song-archive.org
WHO
Female, 20's
confident, talented
music student from Northern Iran

WHAT
Sings a song by Gogoosh
but asks to have the recording erased afterwards.
During private (family) party in Poloor Village
2006

WHEN

SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT
#298
WHO
Female, 30's
Living in
Tehran, Iran
Black tank top,
no hijab

WHAT
Sings song by
Googoosh*
for nearly 1 hour
(extract 2:11 min)

WHEN
2005
During private dinner party
in Tehran

* Famous Persian singer & actress
banned from public singing after 1979

SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT
# 299

Herder's Legacy
WHEN

Female, 60's?
French lady from Strasbourg
knows the complete Song by heart

L'amour
L'amour
L'amour
L'amour
(La Habanera)

WHAT

Afternoon leisure time
Meeting of female elderly in home
Strasbourg France

WHO

Herder's Legacy
SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT

# 302
WHO

Male, 50's
Mustache &
Greyish hair
With red hairband

WHAT

"I'm single &
I'm available -
is that so
unbelievable"
(Improvisation)
0:26 min

WHEN

During free
Lunch provided
by Catholics
Charity in
Nashville
2006

Music City
SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT

$404
**WHO**
Female
Teen
Sunglasses
chubby
African
American

**WHAT**
"When I woke up this morning,"
Religious
lynn
(1:47 min)

**WHEN**
Waiting for a bus at Downtown Nashville bus station
2006

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Music City
SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT
## 407

www.song-archive.org
WHO

young girl, 7?

from

Nashville, Tennessee

WHAT

"In 1989, there's a very small window in a very small little door."

Improvisation (Entirely made up) (1:51 min)

WHEN

During children's craft class at Cheekwood Museum

2006

Herdee's Legacy

SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT

# 500
WHO
Male, 30's
Hurricane Katrina victim relocated
to Nashville
Wears black beanie
with fake diamonds
spelling 'Jesus'

WHAT
"You are the
loving I need."
Beginning the song
with a quote
from the Bible.
Rap & singing
(3:01 min)

WHEN
2006
Recorded at Catholic Charities
in Nashville, Tennessee

# Herder's Legacy
SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT
# 501
WHO
Female, 20's
student at
University of
Tennessee
shy & very polite

WHAT
'Somewhere
over the Rainbow'
(0:54 min)

WHEN
Recorded in Uni
Library at
Murfreesboro
Campus
2006
WHO
Female, 70's
Retired
In grey jumper
with matching cardigan

WHAT
"When I grow too old to dream
I'll have you to remember"
(0:50 min)

WHEN
2007
During afternoon tea with other elderly ladies at the Senior Centre in Newtown, Wales

Song for Newtown
SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT
£ 550
WHO
Female, 20's
(part-time)
butcher
Living in Newtown,
Wales

WHAT
"Somewhere
over the
rainbow"
(1:33 min)

WHEN
Recorded
during residency
at Oriel
Davis
2007

Song for Newtown
SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT
# 554
WHO
Female, 20's
Art student
at Coleg Pwysy,
Wales

WHAT
'It's all about you'
Singing & dancing
with "Fred", the
life drawing skeleton
(0:36 min)

WHEN
Classroom
at Newtown
College
2007

Song for Newtown
SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT
# 555

www.song-archive.org
WHO
Teenager male
In grey hoody hiding his face

WHAT
“24 years just waiting for a deal”
(0:16 min)

WHEN
2007
In a youth club.

Song for Newtown
SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT
$556
WHO

Welsh School boy
7 (?)
Singing most passionately

WHAT

"Fe'm dyswyd fodd
pawb yu gyfartal
Beth bynhag fo'i
Cefyndir â'i lliw."

(CJ was told that everyone is equal...)

WHEN

Red Nose Day
2007

Song for Newtown
SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT
# 558
WHO

Male, 40's
Shop employee
Blue shirt
Dancing whilst singing passionately

WHAT

"Down the road, there is a blooming riot"
(Cockney song)
(1:03 min)

WHEN

On a journey through England
In Ditcot Mobility Center
2007

Listen to England

SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT

# 706
WHO
Male 50s
A butcher from 'The Markets' in Sunderland

WHAT
"Do you think I'm sexy?"
Come on baby let me know.
(0:26 min)

2007
He sings when 'pressurised'
by his fellow work mate/boss?

WHEN

Listen to England
SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT
#722
WHO
Female, 20's
Criminology student
Wearing a black dress and overknee boots

WHAT
"That's alright, Mama, that alright for you"
(0:52 min)

WHEN
2010
Late on a night out
University of Essex
WHO
Male, 20's
Mathematics
Student,
Wearing a
Student Union
hoody with his
name: "Peter...!"

WHAT
"Easy Lover"
Singing & dancing
Flicking his fingers
to the beat

WHEN
During Drama Society
meeting in a classroom
2010

Uni Essex
SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT
# 844
WHO
Female, 20
Student
(Media, culture and society)

WHAT
"Damn girl, damn who's a sexy bitch
a sexy bitch, damn who's a sexy bitch?"
(0:55 min)

WHEN
During
Dance Society training session
2010

Uni Essex
SONG ARCHIVE PROJECT
# 847
SELECTED SONGS
Song Archive Project

YOU ARE WHAT YOU IS
Alinka Greasley

BRAINWORMS, STICKY MUSIC
AND CATCHY TUNES
Oliver Sacks

EMBARRASSMENT IS THE MOST
HUMAN OF ALL EMOTIONS
Jens Asendorpf

A CAPPELLA
Sean Ashton

(E)QUALITY
Liam Devlin

CONVERSATION (TO JOIN)
Iain Biggs and Yvonne Buchheim

SAP
Yvonne Buchheim
When people agree to perform in front of Yvonne Buchheim’s camera in the Song Archive Project (SAP), they typically sing a song they hear/listen to frequently and like. But what influences whether we like or dislike a song? And how do people choose which song they are going to sing? We can gain insight into these questions by exploring the SAP performances in the context of recent research on musical preferences.

What Would You Sing?

Of the 900 performances Yvonne has captured on camera so far, there were very few examples of people choosing to sing the same song (the most frequent being *Somewhere over the Rainbow* which was chosen by six individuals). This is perhaps unsurprising given that research shows that people are listening to an increasing variety of music and have unique patterns of musical preferences. One study in particular has shown that people prefer up to 40 different styles of music and a wide range of artists within these. So how then do people decide what to sing?

Music listening in everyday life is typically goal-oriented: we choose to hear certain types of music whilst travelling, or to help us get ‘revved up’ in the gym, or to relax after a long day’s work. The context of being approached in the street and asked to sing is atypical, and thus people’s choices are based less on concurrent activities and more on aspects of self-identity.

Our musical preferences serve as a marker of identity which can play a key role in communicating information.
such was the case when teenage girls sang in front of their friendship groups. Some verbalised the process of choice; for example, one man commented that he wanted to sing something unusual, something that not everybody would sing, highlighting his desire to be seen as ‘different’ rather than ‘mainstream’.

Then there is the song choice itself. At the broadest level, nearly all sang in their native language (e.g. Welsh, French, German), underlining their national identity. Yet the performances indicated much more than the nationality of the individual. One Iranian woman (song no. 299) communicated her political ideals by singing songs by Googoosh, who is a well-known and controversial Persian female singer who was banned from performing after the 1979 Islamic revolution. One American man (song no. 501) asserted his religious beliefs by quoting from the Bible and then singing and rapping Christian lyrics. An English girl (song no. 847) conveyed a diva persona by singing *Sexy Chick* by David Guetta, altering the words (from ‘sexy chick’ to ‘sexy bitch’) and dancing provocatively. What was particularly interesting about these examples is the congruence between the clothing they were wearing and the song(s) they decided to sing. The Iranian lady performed in a private house in Tehran, and had chosen not to wear a hijab, even though it was a mixed gathering, which is considered controversial, much like Googoosh. The religious man was wearing a beanie hat with JESUS written on it. The young lady was wearing a high fashion top positioned off her shoulder halfway down her arm, arguably a ‘sexy’ style.

There is much evidence within the SAP of identity processes at work, even within the brief encounter in which people are asked to perform, choose a song, and then sing it. Firstly, there is the way in which people orient themselves to the task. A large percentage (93%) of people approached by Buchheim refuse to sing on the grounds that they are not able to sing or cannot remember the lyrics of any song. Of these, a small number of individuals report that they hardly ever listen to music. In contrast, others accept willingly, and in some cases want to sing more than one song (one woman sang for nearly an hour). So, first then, there is musical identity – would you be willing to sing a song impromptu if Buchheim approached you in the street? There are considerable differences between people in this respect. Secondly, having agreed to sing, there is the process of choosing the song. People seemed to be aware that their song choice would (at least to some degree) give an impression of who they were personally, and searched through their memories to locate a song that they felt able to perform or that was sufficiently ‘them’. On some occasions, it appeared to be shaped more by the presence/absence of others in the situation; to others about who we are (or are not). Recent research has shown that the music we like can provide information about our personalities with a greater degree of accuracy than has been found in studies using photos or video clips to convey information to observers; and that we have clear and consistent stereotypes about fans of various styles which may influence whether we admit our likes and dislikes in public.\(^3\)

Another key similarity in these examples is the importance of the lyrics to the individuals. In general, when explaining musical likes and dislikes, people talk about the role of preferred musical characteristics (e.g. vocal style, instrumentation) and the most frequently discussed by far is the lyrical content. Lyrics are liked if they are thought-provoking, and convey a political, ethical or moral message or story, and disliked if they are meaningless, unimaginative, repetitive, annoying, aggressive, violent, offensive or blasphemous. People also tend to prefer lyrics that they can relate to and apply, if not wholly, then in part, to their own lives and situations, and lyrics are particularly salient for those with strong religious or political beliefs. This is evidenced in the SAP, as those with religious identities often chose to sing a hymn or some type of religious song, as highlighted by the man in the beanie hat, and other examples such as a rendition from one young woman of When I Woke Up This Morning (song no. 407) which encourages you to consider the things you have in life (e.g. the ability to hear, see, speak, walk).

In addition to specific features of the music, people's musical choices are shaped by their responses to music. These include physiological (e.g. chills, shivers); physical (e.g. tapping hands, singing, dancing); evaluative (e.g. knowledge of music theory, or facts about the music); and affective (e.g. emotional response, catharsis) responses. Whilst one cannot infer a great deal about the range of responses an individual has to music in the SAP, as this requires in-depth interviewing, it was possible to see some physical responses (other than the act of singing itself) to preferred music in the performances. One man, a retail assistant, sang Down the Road There's a Blooming Riot (song no. 706) by Chas and Dave and marched on the spot in time with his singing. An undergraduate student sang She's an Easy Lover (song no. 844) by Phil Collins and was jigging throughout his performance, clicking his fingers to keep in time. One lady danced with a human skeleton that was in the classroom for teaching purposes whilst singing All About You (song no. 555) by McFly!

Whilst, most of the time, people were singing a song they preferred and identified with, lending strength to research which shows that music is a means through which to communicate individual identities, this was not always the case. In some instances, the context dictated the song choice. When participants agreed to sing and were with a group of friends, their reaction was often somewhat different to that which it might have been had they been alone. For example, one young girl agreed to participate, and, once up in front of the camera, started singing McDonalds, McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken and a Pizza Hut (song no. 155) with the actions. During her performance, she kept breaking into laughter and was continually looking at her friends (who were standing nearby) for approval. The song appeared to become more of a performance dedicated to her group than what the young woman prefers musically. There were other occasions where someone had agreed to sing, but then had the song choice dictated to them, as was the case with one English man, a butcher, who sang a few lines of Rod Stewart's Do You Think I'm Sexy (song no. 722) because his fellow work colleague had told him to do so.
people are likely to be related to a wide variety of factors including general levels of engagement with music in everyday life, amount of musical training, exposure to music and the presence/absence of others. With these points in mind, what would you sing, and why?

You could argue that these examples are not therefore reflective of the person’s identity; but, on the other hand, you could argue that they are, and it relates to musical identity. Some people feel embarrassed about singing and hence decline Buchheim’s request. Others agree but are then held back by their perceptions of what other people might think of their choice. These latter performances suggest that the person does not have a particularly strong musical identity, and may be interpreted in relation to research on levels of engagement with music in everyday life, which has shown that people who are less engaged with music are more likely to be embarrassed about the music they like.7

HAVE YOU CHOSEN A SONG YET?

So how would you respond if Buchheim approached you in the street? The SAP performances show that being asked to sing on the spot is a surprising and awkward situation to find oneself in (hence the high proportion of people who decline) but one which can provide insight into people’s musical preferences and personal identities. People generally choose songs that they like and identify with, and this is illustrated in the musical characteristics of their chosen song (e.g. lyrics) and their responses to it in the context of the performance (e.g. dancing). For some, choosing a song and performing it requires little thought, whereas others seem more consciously aware of wanting to present themselves in a certain way, and struggle with the song choice and performance. These differences between

Sometimes normal musical imagery crosses a line and becomes, so to speak, pathological, as when a certain fragment of music repeats itself incessantly, sometimes maddeningly, for days on end. These repetitions—often a short, well-defined phrase or theme of three or four bars—are apt to go on for hours or days, circling in the mind, before fading away. This endless repetition and the fact that the music in question may be irrelevant or trivial, not to one’s taste, or even hateful, suggest a coercive process, that the music has entered and subverted a part of the brain, forcing it to fire repetitively and autonomously (as may happen with a tic or a seizure). Many people are set off by the theme music of a film or television show or an advertisement. This is not coincidental, for such music is designed, in the terms of the music industry, to “hook” the listener, to be “catchy” or “sticky,” to bore its way, like an earwig, into the ear or mind; hence the term “earworms”—though one might be inclined to call them “brainworms” instead. (One newsmagazine, in 1987, defined them, half facetiously, as “cognitively infectious musical agents.”) A friend of mine, Nick Younes, described to me how he had been fixated on the song “Love and Marriage,” a tune written by James Van Heusen.¹ A single hearing of this song—a Frank Sinatra rendition used as the theme song of the television show *Married ... with Children*—was enough to hook Nick. He “got trapped inside the tempo of the song,” and it ran in his mind almost constantly for ten days. With incessant repetition, it soon lost its charm, its lilt, its musicality, and its meaning. It interfered with his schoolwork, his thinking, his peace of mind, his sleep. He tried to stop it in a number of ways, all to no avail: “I jumped up and

1) An earlier generation will remember the tune of “Love and Marriage” as the Campbell’s soup advertisement “Soup and Sandwich.” Van Heusen was a master of the catchy tune and wrote dozens of (literally) unforgettable songs—including “High Hopes,” “Only the Lonely,” and “Come Fly with Me”—for Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, and others. Many of these have been adapted for television or advertising theme songs.
The concept is far from new. Nicolas Slonimsky, a composer and musicologist, was deliberately inventing musical forms or phrases that could hook the mind and force it to mimicry and repetition, as early as the 1920s. Though the term “earworm” was first used in the 1980s (as a literal translation of the German Ohrwurm), the concept is far from new. Nicolas Slonimsky, a composer and musicologist, was deliberately inventing musical forms or phrases that could hook the mind and force it to mimicry and repetition, as early as the 1920s. 

And in 1876, Mark Twain wrote a short story (“A Literary Nightmare,” subsequently retitled “Punch, Brothers, Punch!”) in which the narrator is rendered helpless after encountering some “jingling rhymes”: They took instant and entire possession of me. All through breakfast they went waltzing through my brain. They played themselves down a scale and sprang back and forth with a sort of whirling action all through the evening, went to bed, rolled, tossed, and jingled all night long.

Two days later, the narrator meets an old friend, a pastor, and inadvertently “infects” him with the jingle; the pastor, in turn, inadvertently infects his entire congregation. What is happening, psychologically and neurologically, when a tune or a jingle takes possession of one like this? What are the characteristics that make a tune or a song “dangerous” or “infectious” in this way? Is it some oddity of sound, of timbre or rhythm or melody? Is it repetition? Or is it arousal of special emotional resonances or associations? My own earliest brainworms can be reactivated by the 2) Since the original publication of Musicophilia, many people have written to me about ways of dealing with a brainworm—such as consciously singing or playing it to the end of the song, so that it is no longer a fragment circling round and round, incapable of resolution; or displacing it by singing or listening to another tune (though this may only become another brainworm in turn). Musical imagery, especially if it is repetitive and intrusive, may have a motor component, a subvocal “humming” or singing of which the person may be unaware, but which still may exact a toll. “At the end of a bad music-loop day,” wrote one correspondent, “my throat is as uncomfortable as it might have been had I sung all day.” David Wise, another correspondent, found that using progressive relaxation techniques to relax the muscular correlates to the hearing apparatus . . . associated with auditory thinking” was efficacious in stopping annoying brainworms. While some of these methods seem to work for some people, most others have found, like Nick Younes, no cure.

3) Jeremy Scratcherd, a scholarly musician who has studied the folk genres of Northumberland and Scotland, informs me that Examination of early folk music manuscripts reveals many examples of various tunes to which have been attributed the title “The piper’s maggot.” These were perceived to be tunes which got into the musician’s head to irritate and gnaw at the sufferer—like a maggot in a decaying apple.

Yet it seems to make little difference whether catchy songs have lyrics or not—the wordless themes of Mission: Impossible or Beethoven’s Fifth can be just as irresistible as an advertising jingle in which the words are almost inseparable from the music (as in Alka-Seltzer’s “Plop, plop, fizz, fizz” or Kit Kat’s act of thinking about them, even though they go back more than sixty years. Many of them seemed to have a very distinctive musical shape, a tonal or melodic oddness that may have played a part in imprinting them on my mind. And they had meaning and emotion, too, for they were usually Jewish songs and litanies associated with a sense of heritage and history, a feeling of family warmth and togetherness. One favorite song, sung after the meal on Seder nights, was “Had Gadya” (Aramaic for “one little goat”). This was an accumulating and repetitive song, and one that must have been sung (in its Hebrew version) many times in our Orthodox household. The additions, which became longer and longer with each verse, were sung with a mournful emphasis ending with a plaintive fourth. This little phrase of six notes in a minor key would be sung (I counted!) forty-six times in the course of the song, and this repetition hammered it into my head. It would haunt me and pop into my mind dozens of times a day throughout the eight days of Passover, then slowly diminish until the next year. Did the qualities of repetition and simplicity or that odd, incongruous fourth perhaps act as neural facilitators, setting up a circuit (for it felt like this) that reexcited itself automatically? Or did the grim humor of the song or its solemn, liturgical context play a significant part, too?
“Gimme a break, gimme a break . . .”). For those with certain neurological conditions, brainworms or allied phenomena—the echoic or automatic or compulsive repetition of tones or words—may take on additional force. Rose R., one of the post-encephalitic parkinsonian patients I described in Awakenings, told me how during her frozen states she had often been “confined,” as she put it, in “a musical paddock”—seven pairs of notes (the fourteen notes of “Povero Rigoletto”) which would repeat themselves irresistibly in her mind. She also spoke of these forming “a musical quadrangle” whose four sides she would have to perambulate, mentally, endlessly. This might go on for hours on end, and did so at intervals throughout the entire fortythree years of her illness, prior to her being “awakened” by L-dopa. Milder forms of this may occur in ordinary Parkinson’s disease. One correspondent described how, as she became parkinsonian, she became subject to “repetitive, irritating little melodies or rhythms” in her head, to which she “compulsively” moved her fingers and toes. (Fortunately, this woman, a gifted musician with relatively mild parkinsonism, could usually “turn these melodies into Bach and Mozart” and play them mentally to completion, transforming them from brainworms to the sort of healthy musical imagery she had enjoyed prior to the parkinsonism.) The phenomenon of brainworms seems similar, too, to the way in which people with autism or Tourette’s syndrome or obsessive-compulsive disorder may become hooked by a sound or a word or a noise and repeat it, or echo it, aloud or to themselves, for weeks at a time. This was very striking with Carl Bennett, the surgeon with Tourette’s syndrome whom I described in

An Anthropologist on Mars. “One cannot always find sense in these words,” he said. “Often it is just the sound that attracts me. Any odd sound, any odd name, may start repeating itself, get me going. I get hung up with a word for two or three months. Then, one morning, it’s gone, and there’s another one in its place.” But while the involuntary repetition of movements, sounds, or words tends to occur in people with Tourette’s or OCD or damage to the frontal lobes of the brain, the automatic or compulsive internal repetition of musical phrases is almost universal—the clearest sign of the overwhelming, and at times helpless, sensitivity of our brains to music. There may be a continuum here between the pathological and the normal, for while brainworms may appear suddenly, fullblown, taking instant and entire possession of one, they may also develop by a sort of contraction, from previously normal musical imagery. I have lately been enjoying mental replays of Beethoven’s Third and Fourth Piano Concertos, as recorded by Leon Fleisher in the 1960s. These “replays” tend to last ten or fifteen minutes and to consist of entire movements. They come, unbidden but always welcome, two or three times a day. But on one very tense and insomniac night, they changed character, so that I heard only a single rapid run on the piano (near the beginning of the Third Piano Concerto), lasting ten or fifteen seconds and repeated hundreds of times. It was as if the music was now trapped in a sort of loop, a tight neural circuit from which it could not escape. Towards morning, mercifully, the looping ceased, and I was able to enjoy entire movements once again.4

4) The duration of such loops is generally about fifteen to twenty seconds, and this is similar to the duration of the visual loops or cycles which occur in a rare condition called palinopsia, where a short scene—a person walking across a room, for example, seen a few seconds before—may be repeated before the inner eye again and again. That a similar periodicity of cycling occurs in both visual and auditory realms suggests that some physiological constant, perhaps related to working memory, may underlie both.
Brainworms are usually stereotyped and invariant in character. They tend to have a certain life expectancy, going full blast for hours or days and then dying away, apart from occasional afterspurs. But even when they have apparently faded, they tend to lie in wait; a heightened sensitivity remains, so that a noise, an association, a reference to them is apt to set them off again, sometimes years later. And they are nearly always fragmentary. These are all qualities that epileptologists might find familiar, for they are strongly reminiscent of the behavior of a small, sudden-onset seizure focus, erupting and convulsing, then subsiding, but always ready to reignite. Certain drugs seem to exacerbate earworms. One composer and music teacher wrote to me that when she was put on lamotrigine for a mild bipolar disorder, she developed a severe, at times intolerable increase in earworms. After she discovered an article (by David Kemp et al.) about the increase of intrusive, repetitive musical phrases (as well as verbal phrases or numerical repetitions) associated with lamotrigine, she stopped the medication (under her physician’s supervision). Her earworms subsided somewhat but have remained at a much higher level than before. She does not know whether they will ever return to their original, moderate level: “I worry,” she wrote, “that somehow these pathways in my brain have become so potentiated that I will be having these earworms for the rest of my life.” Some of my correspondents compare brainworms to visual afterimages, and as someone who is prone to both, I feel their similarity, too. (We are using “afterimage” in a special sense here, to denote a much more prolonged effect than the fleeting afterimages we all have for a few seconds following, for instance, exposure to a bright light.) After reading EEGs intently for several hours, I may have to stop because I start to see EEG squiggles all over the walls and ceiling. After driving all day, I may see fields and hedgerows and trees moving past me in a steady stream, keeping me awake at night. After a day on a boat, I feel the rocking for hours after I am back on dry land. And astronauts, returning from a week spent in the near-zero-gravity conditions of space, need several days to regain their “earth legs” once again. All of these are simple sensory effects, persistent activations in low-level sensory systems, due to sensory overstimulation. Brainworms, by contrast, are perceptual constructions, created at a much higher level in the brain. And yet both reflect the fact that certain stimuli, from EEG lines to music to obsessive thoughts, can set off persistent activities in the brain. There are attributes of musical imagery and musical memory that have no equivalents in the visual sphere, and this may cast light on the fundamentally different way in which the brain treats music and vision.5 This peculiarity of music may arise in part because we have to construct a visual world for ourselves, and a selective and personal character therefore infuses our visual memories from the start—whereas we are given pieces of music already constructed. A visual or social scene can be constructed or reconstructed in a hundred different ways, but the recall of a musical piece has to be close to the original. We do, of course, listen selectively, with differing interpretations and emotions, but the basic musical characteristics of a piece—its tempo, its rhythm, its melodic contours, even its timbre and pitch—tend to be preserved with remarkable accuracy. It is this
orders of magnitude in the last couple of decades, so that we are now enveloped by a ceaseless musical bombardment whether we want it or not. Half of us are plugged into iPods, immersed in daylong concerts of our own choosing, virtually oblivious to the environment—and for those who are not plugged in, there is nonstop music, unavoidable and often of deafening intensity, in restaurants, bars, shops, and gyms. This barrage of music puts a certain strain on our exquisitely sensitive auditory systems, which cannot be overloaded without dire consequences. One such consequence is the everincreasing prevalence of serious hearing loss, even among young people, and particularly among musicians. Another is the omnipresence of annoyingly catchy tunes, the brainworms that arrive unbidden and leave only in their own time—catchy tunes that may, in fact, be nothing more than advertisements for toothpaste but are, neurologically, completely irresistible.

6) It may be that brainworms, even if maladaptive in our own music-saturated modern culture, stem from an adaptation that was crucial in earlier hunter-gatherer days: replaying the sounds of animals moving or other significant sounds again and again, until their recognition was assured—as one correspondent, Alan Geist, has suggested to me: I discovered, by accident, that after five or six continuous days in the woods without hearing any music of any kind, I spontaneously start replaying the sounds that I hear around me, mainly birds. The local wildlife becomes "the song stuck in my head." . . . [Perhaps in more primitive times] a traveling human could more readily recognize familiar areas by adding his memory of sounds to the visual clues that told him where he was. . . . And by rehearsing those sounds, he was more likely to commit them to long-term memory.

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When Mark Twain was writing in the 1870s, there was plenty of music to be had, but it was not ubiquitous. One had to seek out other people to hear (and participate in) singing—at church, family gatherings, parties. To hear instrumental music, unless one had a piano or other instrument at home, one would have to go to church or to a concert. With recording and broadcasting and films, all this changed radically. Suddenly music was everywhere for the asking, and this has increased by
Charles Darwin did not only publish, in 1859, his theory of evolution but also, in 1872, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, which was the first comparative study of emotional expression. It is probable that Mark Twain had read this book when, in 1879, he made his often quoted remark, ‘Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to.’ This quote nicely captures the core feature of embarrassment. It is an emotional reaction shown in public situations when people recognise that they have not lived up to the standards of behaviour that they hold for themselves. Singing a song in public is such a potentially embarrassment-arousing situation, and therefore Yvonne Buchheim’s Song Archive Project is fascinating, not only from an artist’s perspective but also from the perspective of scientists interested in Darwin’s quest for the expression of emotions since this project documents a great variety of expressions of emotion in a relatively standardised situation. In this project, Art and Science meet. Below, I will deal with a few frequently asked questions about embarrassment from my perspective as a scientist who is familiar with the psychological literature on embarrassment and has done a few empirical studies on embarrassment himself.

**WHY DO WE ACT WITH EMBARRASSMENT, AND DOGS DO NOT?**

Holding standards for one’s own behaviour and living up to them is uniquely human and has probably evolved in tandem with the evolution of the human cognitive capacity to intentionally deceive, lie and cheat – a well-developed capacity that dogs lack, as do apes,
our genetically nearest neighbors. In a social world inhabited by potential deceivers, liars and cheats, internalised social norms, rules and expectations, as well as their control by self-conscious emotions such as embarrassment, shame and guilt, assure more reliability in social interaction. These uniquely human capabilities seem to have been so advantageous that they are nowadays shared by nearly all humans. People who are never embarrassed are probably only a small number of psychopaths.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Because embarrassment is not a reaction to an ‘objective’ situation as perceived by others but rather a reaction to the subjective discrepancy between one’s behaviour and one’s standards for behaviour, embarrassment can be predicted only to a limited extent within a situation. Most heterosexuals would be embarrassed if they were sunbathing naked in a private setting but were suddenly confronted by strangers of a similar age of the opposite sex, although some would not. Most people are not embarrassed when being praised for an accomplishment but a few others would perceive it as over-praise that they are not worthy of, and thus are embarrassed. Ultimately, it depends on the individual’s standards for behaviour whether they become embarrassed or not. Therefore, many really good singers in Yvonne Buchheim’s project became embarrassed during, and particularly right after, the end of the song (song no. 842; 0:48 min: female singer in front of red wall displays signs of embarrassment [a nervous hand] even though she is a very good singer).

However, many others were not embarrassed although they completely forgot the text (song no. 706; 0:54 min: male singer in blue shirt is not embarrassed even though he is a poor singer).

SOCIAL FUNCTION OF EMBARRASSMENT

Whereas shame and guilt are evoked by stronger moral violations and do also occur in privacy, embarrassment is shown only in public or when remembering past public situations that were embarrassing to oneself. In contrast to shame and guilt, embarrassment can also take place when social rules are unintentionally broken without moral implications, such as spilling a glass of wine over the trousers of a neighbour at a formal dinner. In this and other cases, embarrassment has a social repair function: my embarrassment shows you that the act was unintentional, and I am really sorry for that. Thus, embarrassment is a social signal which communicates that one’s standards of behaviour are higher than one’s current behaviour seems to indicate.

AUTOMATICITY OF EMBARRASSMENT

Although embarrassment can be followed by verbal excuses (‘I am so sorry about that’), the embarrassed reaction itself occurs fast and automatically and only under partial voluntary control. This applies particularly to blushing that cannot be directly controlled at all; in this case, as in other cases of strong emotional reactions, control attempts often even increase the reaction. Were embarrassment to be voluntarily controllable, it would not be a reliable signal of one’s
standards, could be used for deception, and thus could not serve its counter-deceptive function – the very reason why it developed during human evolution in the first place. Nevertheless, some people try voluntarily to fake embarrassment in order to deceive others but often overact in doing so, and can be detected by a slightly delayed, less smooth, exaggerated response.

**VICIOUS FORMS OF EMBARRASSMENT**

Most embarrassed reactions are brief, particularly if the violation of one's standards can be quickly repaired. There are, however, at least three situations when embarrassment lasts longer and becomes more marked, such as by intensive blushing – vicious embarrassment. First, one's standards can be unrealistically high. If one cares about singing a song really well, and suddenly forgets how it continues, embarrassment will be stronger than if one forgets how the song continues but does not care so much about its performance. Second, people who perceive their embarrassment as a sign of weakness, because it violates a private standard of not being embarrassed, may become trapped in a vicious cycle of being embarrassed about their own embarrassment. This can be particularly vicious in the case of blushing because this response is not directly controllable. Unfortunately, even colour videos do not reliably show blushing, but I am pretty sure that many of the embarrassed singers in Yvonne Buchheim's project blushed. And, third, embarrassment will increase if others make fun of the embarrassment, making one even more aware of one's violated standards.

**VICARIOUS EMBARRASSMENT**

Fortunately, making fun of an embarrassed person is the exception rather than the rule, and, if it does occur, it is often meant to help the person out of the situation, not realizing that this is often counter-productive. More common reactions are to simply ignore the embarrassed reaction ('OK, you didn’t mean this to happen, so let’s go on’), or to be embarrassed oneself. This latter social contagion of embarrassment is called vicarious embarrassment. It is more likely that the more the others identify with the embarrassed person (for example, if the audience imagines what it must be like to be the singer on stage and emotionally identifies with her mishap of hitting a wrong note). It can even occur if the target person is not embarrassed but most of the audience because most people would be embarrassed in that situation. For example, if a singer forgets part of the text, briefly stops, and then continues, this might arouse vicarious embarrassment in the audience even if the singer himself does not show any signs of embarrassment. These discrepancies between the behaviour of the singer and the audience suggest that much of vicarious embarrassment is driven by situational cues rather than the behavioural cues of the target person (song no. 407; 0:24 min: female bystander shows signs of embarrassment. However, the singer next to her does not.).

**FEAR–EMBARRASSMENT–RELIEF**

Often embarrassment does not occur in isolation. Instead, it can be part of a sequence of emotional states
that people pass through when they confront a situation that they believe might lead to a discrepancy between their behaviour and their standards for behaviour. Singing a song in front of an audience or a camera is such a situation for most people because they think that they might be doomed to failure. If they anticipate such a failure, this expectation arouses fear of failure and can be recognised by visible anxiety symptoms such as fearful eyes, a stiff body position, nervous hand or foot movements, or a jittery voice, or by attempts to cope with fear, such as exaggerated laughing.

During the song, fear decreases due to the attention to the act of singing. If everything runs smoothly, people will not show signs of fear any more nor embarrassment. Embarrassment may occur expectedly for observers after failures in the performance, or unexpectedly because nothing was wrong from the observer’s perspective. In this latter case, only the singers know why, and, if embarrassment was strong, most often they can tell you afterwards why they were embarrassed at a particular moment (showing them a clip starting a few seconds before the embarrassed reaction greatly assists them in this task). In contrast, many will not be embarrassed, either because they had no reason to be or because they focused their attention so much on singing correctly that they did not become aware of discrepancies with their standards of behaviour. In these people, embarrassment often occurs with a delay, when attention becomes less focused and singers suddenly become aware of discrepancies in their recent behaviour. This delayed embarrassment typically occurs alongside a reaction of relief – ‘now it’s over’ – which can lead to peculiar blends of different emotional expressions. The amount of relief – whether accompanied by embarrassment or not – is proportional to the tension during the song (song no. 556; 0:16 min: male singer in a grey hoodie is hiding and laughing behind a gesture of embarrassment).

CONCLUSION

Yvonne Buchheim’s Song Archive Project is a wonderful demonstration of the fear–embarrassment–relief sequence. Watching only clips taken before the song informs us about the fear of singing. Watching the songs themselves informs us about focus of attention and embarrassment (and about vicarious embarrassment if others are on tape too). Watching the clips after the songs informs us about delayed embarrassment and relief. Indeed, the Song Archive is well suited as a large database for researchers interested in the expression of emotions in humans. One hundred and forty years after Darwin’s groundbreaking book, much has still to be learned about expressions of emotion, particularly about two largely unresolved issues. First, different people express the same emotion in different characteristic ways (psychologists call them ‘individual response styles’), and we are still far from a comprehensive catalogue of different expressions of the same emotion. The large database of the Song Archive Project is an invaluable source for creating such a comprehensive catalogue, at least for western cultures. Second, different cultures may use culture-specific expressions of emotion, including different characteristic rules of suppressing, enhancing, or modifying an assumably
universal catalogue of human expressions of emotion (psychologists call them ‘display rules’). Some singers in the Song Archive Project seem to have a non-western background, and, although their behaviour looks quite familiar to us at first glance, a more detailed look reveals ‘strange behaviour’ that may not be so strange in their culture of origin. Extending the Song Archive Project to non-western countries would not only be a fascinating art project in the years to come but would also be much welcomed by scientists interested in Darwin’s quest for the most human of all emotions.
The Avon Lady never did come calling, but I’ve had all the rest, everyone you can think of, queries and questions of all sorts, how I intend to vote, whether I could spare five minutes, whether I could spare ten, whether I want dishcloths and dusters, whether I saw anything suspicious last night, whether that’s my car out there, blocking everyone in… I’ve taken delivery of parcels for neighbours, refilled the buckets of window cleaners, answered the door naked on Sundays when I know it’s them.

I’ve had cold-callers of every stripe. But I’ve never been asked to sing. He said he was a census-taker. This in itself was surprising; I assumed the census-taker had gone the same way as the milk man and bus conductor, that it was no longer necessary to go around counting people.

“Yes sir,” he said, when I told him this.
“A lot of people think that… Mr Richardson.”
“You know my name?”
He glanced at his clipboard. “Mr Arthur Richardson?”
“Yes.”
He moved up to the top step. “Then I must ask you to sing.” He looked again at his clipboard. “Says here you’re a musical man. By profession.” I asked him why.
“I already told you, sir,” he said. “I’m a census-taker.”

“And you already have my name.”

“Name’s not enough. We need your voice. In order to count, you must sing.”

The cold-caller’s window of opportunity is slim, and ever narrowing. His first task is to apologise for the interruption; his second, to demonstrate that the interruption is warranted. To maintain our attention, he must then say something interesting — something that requires a response. The census-taker had ignored the preliminaries, proceeding directly to this last stage. He was perfectly sincere, ingenuous even, as though to refuse his request would be stranger than the request itself.

“They’ve all done it, sir,” he said, gesturing to the rest of the street.

“Ah?” He seemed to be claiming the same success rate as a meter-reader.

“Yes, sir.” It was beginning to rain, and he inched under the lintel to shelter from the first heavy drops. “At least, them that was in.”

It was a mixture of curiosity and vanity that made me do it. As we went through the hallway, the census-taker stopped at the entrance to the living room, peering in at the furniture, which was covered in sheets.

“I’m redecorating.”

“Yes, I can see that, sir. It’s perfect.”

“I’m sorry?”

“The room, sir.” It was the only one I hadn’t finished. “Can we do it here, sir? Do you mind?”

He explained that for so many years the census had been an impersonal record, a generic list of names and occupations with no connection to the real world. “You see, we like to catch folk on the hoof, to record them… how can I put it, in the midst of their affairs.” He seemed pleased with this, as though he was not used to finding the right words. And yet he must have said it thousands of times before.

The piano was the only thing that wasn’t covered. I sat down and I gave him a blast of Chopin’s <i>Prelude No. 16</i>. I hadn’t played it for years, and it came out with cathartic ferocity. When I looked up, the census-taker was holding on to the mantelpiece.

“As you can see,” I said, seguing into a jazz version of “Who Will Buy”, “you’ve come to the right place.”

“I should say, sir. That much is certainly apparent.”

“Lunchtimes I do Kettners. Thursday evenings I can be found at the Phoenix Bar on Charing Cross Road. I also provide accompaniment for <i>Wasted Days</i>, a monthly revue in Fitzrovia. It pays for my drinks and minicabs — and keeps Mr Riley in the manner to which he is accustomed.”

The census-taker’s face was a bulletin of intrigue. “Is there another person in the household, sir? P’rhaps this Mr Riley, p’rhaps he’d like to—”
"Mr Riley!" I clapped my hands and Mr Riley came bounding over the floorboards, his claws struggling for purchase as he turned sharply into the living room.

“Oh, I see. I thought…”

“No. It’s just me and Mr Riley.”

“I’ve one myself, sir,” said the census-taker, as Mr Riley rolled over to receive the stranger’s affection. “Lovely dog is your Jack Russell. Lovely dog. A bit cantankerous, p’rhaps, ’specially in his dotage—”

“Yes. As I was saying, Mr…”

He looked at his palms, wiped the cleanest one on his trousers and offered it to me. “Hargreaves, sir.”

“As I was saying, Mr Hargreaves, you’ve come to the right place…” I gave him a burst of honky-tonk, then got to my feet and did my impression of Little Richard. I admit, it was excessive. I get carried away.

“Very good, sir,” said the census-taker. “Very good… But I’m afraid it won’t work.”

“T’m sorry?”

“It won’t do, sir.”

“What do you mean, ‘won’t do’?”

“I’m afraid” – he removed his hat and clutched it to his chest, as though about to inform me of the death of a loved one — “I’m afraid I must ask you to sing…unaccompanied — sir.”

I thudded the keys in an instinctive gesture of disapproval.

“A capella?”

“Yes, sir. The first thing that comes into your head.” The census-taker began unzipping his rucksack. “Well, not necessarily the first thing. Anything. Anything you can remember.”

“What’s that?”

“This? It’s a camera, sir.”

“You record them?”

“The songs? Of course I record them, sir. I’m a census-taker…”

“I meant visually. Won’t a microphone do?”

He said he needed proof that the songs had been performed in situ, by the people listed as residing at the address.

He set up the tripod while I made tea — I needed time to think about what I was going to sing. Given my vocation, this should have been straightforward, but there were so many to choose from. An amateur, a novice, anyone who never sang, would be restricted to the few he remembered; my problem was that I remembered too many. Moreover, I struggle to stick to a single tune. Between you and me, that is my failing as a composer — and my success as a restaurant pianist. I am always thinking about how to get to the next song, gauging the mood of my audience and adapting my repertoire accordingly, going smoothly from one to the other.

When I returned to the living room, Mr Hargreaves had moved some of the furniture to clear a space. The camera was pointing away from
must harbour no artistic delusions: his job is simply to keep on playing. There were those, of course, who kept on playing in exceptional circumstances. There were those — we are told — who’d kept on playing as the Titanic went down. I’d kept on playing as the dustcart trundled by outside, I’d kept on playing as a tray of drinks went tumbling, I’d kept on playing as they queried the bill...

I went over to the window. It was raining heavily now, and the census-taker stared back at me through spattered panes, patient hands on patient knees. He didn’t seem bothered by the delay — which was preferable, I suppose, to a soaking.

He’d removed his mackintosh and tucked his tie into his shirt, like a schoolteacher about to conduct a physics experiment.

"Mr Hargreaves?"

"Yes, sir?"

"I want to know what they did."

"You’ve lost me there, sir."

"The others." I spun round, resuming my place at the piano. "Before I do mine. I want to know what they did."

"Oh. All of them, sir?"

"My neighbours." I called them my neighbours, but I was already beginning to think of them as my contemporaries. "I’ll be frank with you, Mr Hargreaves: I want to see the competition."

"Ah."

"Let’s start with next door."

"The lady at No. 41... Mrs Dobson? Go on,
what do you think she sang, sir? Have a stab.”
“Was it this?” I raised the lid and played the opening arpeggio of a well known disco hit. Mr Hargreaves recognised it immediately:
“Sir, I would love to be able to tell you that Mrs Dobson did Gloria Gaynor, and that she did it on the landing with her hair in a towel, but I’m afraid it was Donna Summer.”
“What…?”
“No, sir. Not ‘Love to Love You Baby’.”
He showed me the list of names on his clipboard. Halfway down the page was the following entry:

Mrs Celia Dobson, née Celia Fotheringale, housewife, No. 41 Seeley Rd., *sang* ‘The State of Independence’ (*originally performed by Miss Donna Summer, 1982*), utility room, 11.38 am, Thursday 21st April, 2010. Other residents: none.

“Moustache. Eye-patch.”
“Ah, yes. The military gentleman at No. 26. ‘Teddy Bear’s Picnic’. In the potting shed.”
I pictured him mugging to camera in his gardening gloves, doing all the hand movements. It was probably the only song he’d committed to memory, apart from “Land of Hope and Glory”.
“And Brilling?”
“I don’t follow, sir.”
“His manservant, Brilling. Same regiment. Served under him in Burma. What did he do?”
Mr Hargreaves looked disconcertingly at his clipboard. “Strange. No such person. I shall have to return to No. 26. Thanks for the tip-off, sir.”
“I’m joking, Mr Hargreaves. There is no Brilling.”
“Oh.” He seemed genuinely offended, as though I’d aspersed his vocation irrevocably.
“I’m sorry, that was mean of me. I invented him to test you, Mr Hargreaves. Now I know you’re a genuine census-taker.”
“I see your point sir,” he said, brightening. “An impostor might have lied — he might said that he’d met this Mr Brilling. Nevertheless, my credentials…”
I waved away the laminated ID card. “It’s OK, Mr Hargreaves, that won’t be necessary.”
I was surprised to see, on reading the rest of the list, that apart from Mr Rogers at No. 32, my neighbours had eschewed the usual karaoke standards. Not only was there no Gloria, there
was no Tina Turner, no Cher, no Madonna, no Whitney, no Aretha. Likewise, the men had avoided Tom Jones, Bruce Springsteen, Stevie Wonder. No one had done “My Way”. No one had done “Let’s Stick Together”. This was to be expected: there was a high proportion of non-British residents on my street, and their contributions — national anthems, folk songs, pop hits that had never travelled beyond the borders of their homeland — were unfamiliar to the Western ear. But their British counterparts seemed to have acted in kind, mining the western pop canon for its stranger minerals.

“What’s this?” At No. 37, a man named Douglas Pardew had sung “I Dream of Wives” by Gary Numan.

“Ah.” Mr Hargreaves leaned over and amended the entry with his biro. “A clerical blunder, sir. It’s wires. Should be ‘I Dream of Wires’. A retired electrician: see?”

I asked him whether the vocational connection was deliberate. “A good question, sir,” he said. But he trailed off, as though regretting the disclosure.

When I pressed him he merely intimated that this and other matters were a source of great speculation — private speculation — among his colleagues. His reticence told me that the time spent collecting this data, the weeks and months and years spent pounding the pavements, was vastly outweighed by the time spent analysing it.

But analyse it to what end? If some choices seemed to echo the vocation of the singer, others attested to unfulfilled ambitions, desiccated dreams. Take Mr Rogers, for example. Had it been his intention to demonstrate the difference between the boy he once was and the man he’d become, or had he reached instinctively for “Teenage Kicks”, paying no mind to the years that had elapsed since the song’s original release?

Seeing the songs laid out as a list, one could not help but draw such inferences: something about their juxtaposition, together with the statistical data — the age and occupation of the performer, the domestic setting of the performance — gave them an anthropological slant. How many had taken this into account when choosing their song? It was impossible to tell — it was impossible to tell the difference between those for whom the selection was culturally significant and those who’d taken Mr Hargreaves at his word and sung the first thing that had come into their heads. In both cases, something was revealed; but perhaps more was revealed by those who’d followed instinct. Who among us would choose to condense his existence into “You Need Hands” by Max Bygraves or “She Blinded Me With Science” by Thomas Dolby?

Then there were the cover versions. They were all cover versions, I suppose, but Mr Hargreaves had made a number of annotations to indicate which version of a song he thought the performer had in mind. Thus, there were three renditions of “When I Grow Too Old to Dream”,

84

85
but only Mr Attwood’s had been attributed to Vera Lynn. Mrs Wilson’s had been attributed to Gracie Fields, while another was attributed to Linda Ronstadt.

“This is not what I expected, Mr Hargreaves: minor hits, novelty records, obscure album tracks…”

“I agree, sir. Some of it self-composed, I shouldn’t wonder. I was in the high street this morning, and let me tell you it’s a different story down there.”

“You go into shops?”

“I move freely between residential and business premises, sir,” he said proudly.

“And?”

“The chap at the butchers, what’s his name…”

“Thorley’s. What did he do?”

“I Can’t Go For That.”

“Mr Thorley did Hall and Oates?”

“To be precise, Mr Thorley did *Hall*, sir.”

“And Oates? What of him?”

“Roped his boy into it, didn’t he?”

“His apprentice? They duetted?”

“With respect, sir,” said Mr Hargreaves, “‘I Can’t Go for That’ is not a duet in the proper sense. The lyrical burden is shouldered mostly by Mr Darryl Hall. His partner, Mr John Oates, supplies a number of vocal flourishes, but his chief contribution is with the song’s arrangement.”

This I had to see. But Mr Hargreaves was guarded: it was one thing to tell me what they’d done, quite another to show me. I reminded him that Mr Thorley’s performance was already a matter of public knowledge. I also intimated that my own involvement in the census was at stake. Eventually he relented.

“I suppose there’s no harm. Like you say, Mr Thorley’s secret’s already out.”

As he rewound the camcorder, everyone else’s secrets came out, backwards, at high speed, in tiny piping falsettos, as various high street vendors held forth against the backdrop of their merchandise.

“Here we are then.”

Yes: there they were, the butchers, their aprons smeared and clotted with bestial fluids, the dark impasto of recent dismemberment. There was meat involved, even here: Mr Thorley had appropriated a string of sausages for a microphone, and his apprentice had thrown the slack over his shoulder like the strap of a bass guitar. Clearly, they’d sung it together many times when scrubbing the blocks. They had good voices, knew all the words, and only faltered where the saxophone is supposed to come in, eyeing each other uncertainly and laughing, before resuming their places behind the counter to off-camera applause.

I insisted on seeing the rest — and Mr Hargreaves was happy to oblige. Sadly, none of the other performances matched Mr Thorley’s. Everyone had made the same mistake, beginning an octave too high and settling for a spoken word
version of the song on realising the limitations of their voice.

“Well,” I said diplomatically when we’d finished viewing them, “you’ve certainly covered all the bases.”

“I’m sorry, sir?”

“The various genres, Mr Hargreaves — they’re all represented.”

“All?” Suddenly his demeanour changed, the stiff humility buckling into something vaguely illicit.

“All? Oh no, sir,” he said, whipping out another memory card. “Not quite all.”

Rap, he explained, had been excluded from the census since 1989. In its early years, the genre — with its irreverent wordplay, its social conscience, its casual appropriation of James Brown’s back catalogue — had been embraced. However, as the East Coast sound gave way to the darker West Coast sound, as the brash gaieties of the Bronx yielded to the violent misogyny of South Central Los Angeles, head office had been decisive.

In Mr Hargreaves’ opinion it was a scandal. The new directives had been ruthless: when confronted with a rapper, the census-taker was to behave as normal. Let him go through his routine, head office had counselled, then delete the footage before moving on to the next address. It was, as he said, shameful. But Mr Hargreaves had not deleted. Far from it, Mr Hargreaves had gone out at weekends, doorsteping thousands of emcees and storing their performances in his own personal archive. This, he said, inserting the memory card and beckoning me nearer, was a compilation of the finest — his Salon des Refusés, he called it.


There were rappers of all ages, and every generation had its distinctive style. The old guys were surprisingly energetic, their versions of Gil Scott Heron and Linton Kwesi Johnson delivered with impeccable timing. The middle-aged rappers were more laconic, their renditions of Erik B and Grandmaster Flash almost avuncular in comparison with the youngsters, who’d developed more aggressive styles, dealing out their rhymes like tetchy croupiers. What most intrigued me was the way they used their bodies, the gestures they made with their hands and arms, the semiotic mysteries imparted by their fingers, each of which seemed to point in a different direction. The body performed a vital supplementary role, perhaps subconsciously compensating for the fact that the performer was not, in the final analysis, singing, but — well, talking in a highly specific way. The words would not come unbidden: the body was a silent instrument; it helped to accomplish what the voice could not manage alone. And it was this that made me see
how I might do it, how I might sing
_a cappella_.

By now the census-taker was looking at his watch.

“We’ve reached my hour of reckoning, haven’t we, Mr Hargreaves?”

He nodded professionally, white-collar rectitude returning as he ejected the memory card and replaced it with another.

“I’m afraid I must press you, sir.”

“Right, then,” I said, closing the piano lid.

“You’re ready, sir? That’s wonderful news. What’re you going to do for us?”

“Now it’s your turn to guess, Mr Hargreaves.”

“I don’t know, sir. Something well known?”

“Guess.”

“I really don’t know, sir. ‘My Way’?” I frowned.

“‘Groove is in the Heart’?”

I rolled my eyes.

“‘Sexual Healing’?”

“Please.”

“What then, sir? ‘Puppet on a String’? ‘99 Red—?’

“—‘Rocket Man’. I am going to do ‘Rocket Man’, Mr Hargreaves, and I am going to do it at the piano.”

“But—”

“Don’t panic, Mr Hargreaves.” I took
The manner in which Yvonne Buchheim has collected the material that forms the Song Archive Project (SAP), and its subsequent treatment for exhibition, performance and, of course, the publication of this book, can be situated within the shifting relationship between the assumed positions of the artist and the audience, the speaker (or indeed singer) and the spectator. The challenge to the distinct positions of the artist/actor/speaker who embodies knowledge and action and therefore power, as opposed to the passive, receptive, powerless audience, has been an important foundation to radical art practices from the early twentieth century. From the Dadaist use of ephemeral mass media in their montages and Duchamp’s ready-mades, to Beuys’ declaration that ‘we are all artists’, there has been a concerted effort to create a more expansive understanding of artistic endeavour, to imbue art with a political and social agency, and to destroy the false boundaries between art and the everyday.

Within the world of theatre and performance, Bertolt Brecht challenged the traditional function of plays that sought an audience’s emotional identification with its characters that usually lead to a climatic catharsis, believing they bred passivity. His theory of ‘Epic Theatre’ highlighted the constructed nature of theatrical production. Through Verfremdungseffekt or ‘estrangement effect’, Brecht hoped to provoke his audiences to adopt a critical perspective not only to the play itself, but also to the constructed nature of social relations in the world outside the theatre.

(E)QUALITY
Liam Devlin

‘Let’s talk of a system that transforms all the social organisms into a work of art, in which the entire process of work is included... something in which the principle of production and consumption takes on a form of quality. It's a Gigantic project.’
Joseph Beuys
The writer and artist Guy Debord's practice has become synonymous with the desire to awaken the assumed passivity of society's spectators. In his publication *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Debord describes the spectacle as a world almost exclusively mediated through images in the service of advanced capitalism. Debord charts the demise of what he calls an authentic social life into its vacuous representation. As the spectacle becomes all encompassing, our existence is increasingly diminished as it moves from being defined as being, into having, and from having into merely appearing. The spectacular society represents the moment when social life is completely colonised by the logic of the commodity – in other words, a consumer culture, organised and maintained through mass media.

For Debord therefore, a passive identification with the spectacle supplants genuine activity and hinders critical thought, preventing the individual from understanding the society of the spectacle as only another historical moment that can be transformed through revolution. In effect, the society of the spectacle has supplanted Marx's notion of religion as the opiate of the masses from which the spectator must be awoken, through radical action or through what Debord termed 'situations' that are constructed to radically reorder 'life, politics and art'.

The practice of approaching complete strangers with the request of a song for the camera has many parallels with the work of Debord and in particular that of Situationist International, a group that he helped found in 1957. Through these encounters, Buchheim offers the participants an opportunity to experience what is called in German *Fremdbild*, literally, 'strange image'. Buchheim's activities in the collecting of the song archive offers an opportunity for participants to step outside their normal existence, to see themselves as others may see them – an opportunity for critical self-reflection.

However, there is an important, fundamental difference at play in the creation and various manifestations of the Song Archive Project. For Debord, as for Brecht, the need to 'shock' the spectator, or audience, out of their passive acceptance of the spectacle, did not actually challenge the relationship between speaker and spectator, precisely because the latter's passivity was always assumed. The images that Buchheim creates do not continue to attempt to instruct the proletariat in how to live an 'authentic social life', but seek instead to act as a vehicle for genuine human interaction, across all the individuals involved, from the singers, to the gallery visitors, to you reading this book.

This important distinction between instruction and genuine interaction can be found in the writings of the French philosopher, Jacques Rancière, and, in particular, his book, *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009). The critique of the spectacle for Rancière has its origins in Plato's denouncement of the nemesis of theatre as a place where the spectator was 'invited to see people suffering, as a spectacle of pathos... through the optical machinery that prepares the gaze for illusion and...
and reality, then we are already accepting a structure that maintains the two positions that can be described as those who possess capacity and those who do not.\(^3\)

Instead, Rancière calls for an intellectual emancipation that is based on the a priori logic of an equality of intelligence; in effect, the schoolmaster must accept his own ignorance. The foundational premise of this emancipation is that intelligence is not a position to be held. Rather, within this alternative logic, the task of the schoolmaster is to charge his/her students to venture out ‘into the forest of things and signs, to say what they have seen and what they think they have seen, to verify it and to have it verified’, an activity that Rancière refers to as ‘the poetic labour of translation’.\(^4\)

The original impetus for the Song Archive Project was an acknowledgement of Buchheim’s own awkwardness in public performance, her own ignorance if you like. There is an understanding that, in pointing her camera, she is not really recording whether the individual can sing or, indeed, knows any songs. Instead, she is altering the environment of each individual for the period of time she is recording them. Through this encounter, the opportunity to experience *Fremdbild*, Buchheim is offering individuals the chance (indeed not all accepted the opportunity) to place themselves in a different space, sometimes challenging, usually awkward, but ultimately rewarding. Within this philosophical framework of an equality of intelligence, the camera does not become a subjugating frame but a shared platform or a stage on which to participate.

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When we look at the individuals within this eclectic collection, we can empathise with their anxiety, embarrassment and vulnerability. This is vital, because it is surely our imperfections that make us not only human but also unique. It is a strange paradox that the attention to the unique presence of each singer helps to create a sense of a shared experience that can form the basis of a possible community. Crucially, however, this is not an easy community, an apparent community or a community that claims a natural cohesion, but an overtly invented community.

This can be seen in the nominal framework chosen for the organisation of the material contained within this archive, as the SAP uses three identifying labels that can be applied to each recording, namely, ‘who, what, and when’. Using open-ended questions to organise the archive, the SAP challenges the epistemology of definitive categories as manifestations of power. The archive is made with the understanding that the attempt to rigidly define is an act of domination or oppression. This allows Buchheim to select a multitude of possible combinations from the archive – for exhibition, publication and performance, based on combinations of nationality, gender, age etc. The many possible communities that can be articulated from this archive therefore are always open to contest and re-articulation.

Importantly, the philosophical basis of an equality of intelligence is maintained throughout the various manifestations of Buchheim’s treatment of the archive, including this book. The essays that normally appear in artist’s publications are usually written from a position of authority, to create a conceptual framework to help the reader understand the work. The various essays that are included in this publication however are treated as discreet attempts to engage in the poetic labour of translation that the Song Archive Project invites. The relationship between the texts and the SAP can be seen to form two points of a triangular relationship that can only be activated by you the reader, thus continuing the encounter and the opportunity, based on an assumed equality of intelligence, to explore what is visible or invisible, sayable or unsayable, audible or inaudible: a continuation of the debate and the poetic labour of translation that does not seek to define what ‘is’ but points towards what is possible.
CONVERSATION (TO JOIN)
Iain Biggs and Yvonne Buchheim

I want to suggest that this book might be understood as an invitation to join a conversation that I think is vital to your approach as an artist; one that makes your work unusually inclusive and outward looking. I use *conversation* because I think it’s a more accurate term than the word ‘discourse’ for the kinds of exchange between artists I find most valuable. Good conversations are free form, open-ended, multi-layered – as much about listening as speaking. They accommodate factual argument, gossip, intellectual speculation, analysis, beliefs and accounts of experience. I think your work is similarly open in the various exchanges that are vital to its existence, not least because what you do is dependent on conversation and a willingness to listen. I suppose this emphasis on conversation is reinforced by the fact that the ideas behind the Song Archive Project originated with a conversation.

Yes, a heated discussion that resulted from a request to sing a song in an Irish pub. I could only remember German Socialist marching tunes from my childhood in East Germany but I didn’t think they were appropriate for a sing-song; so, in the end, I chose a Russian folk song instead. Afterwards, I was questioned about my identity because of my choice of song and that got me thinking about the relationship between our identity and the songs we choose to sing.

In one sense, *of course*, the starting-point was that you were asked to make a work in response to Johann Gottfried Herder’s *Volkslied*?
The SAP title became playful and poignant in the process of making this book because of an attempt to reduce and distil to its very essence the Song Archive Project. Over the years, the song collection has grown somewhat monstrous and anarchic. Although I access the songs on a regular basis to edit works for exhibitions, I had never attempted to open this messy collection for research purposes. The process of turning it into an accessible archive was assisted by discussions with archivist Ellie Finch and by the design from Alex Rich: the Who What When Folders introduced a loose but coherent order. With this system, I documented a total of 905 songs and made 96 available to the contributors who subsequently chose the 21 songs that feature at the beginning of the book and can be viewed online (song-archive.org).

When did the song collection turn into an archive and what is the relationship between this extensive song collection and your art works?

The inception of the archive happened almost by accident. As the collection grew, with songs from different countries, I realised the physical and conceptual potential of the archive. Each period of song recording is also a process of research into a specific place and community where interventions and public events are used to trigger exchange and dialogue – conversations, if you like. The individual songs from the Song Archive Project provide a source for site-specific video installations, exhibitions and public events that allow me to look at a specific subject matter such as...
cultural and, at times, political themes. The potential of the SAP lies in the structure it provides to develop very different art works that are based on exchange and collaboration. My ambition is not to record as many songs as possible, but rather present those songs as catalysts that activate people. That’s where the archive becomes a living force rather than a closed or sealed archive.

IAIN BIGGS Can you describe how you go about approaching people to sing and what situations and places you have encountered through the project so far?

YVONNE BUCHHEIM I approach people in all kinds of public places with the request for a song. Most people decline but, over the sudden interruption of people’s everyday situation is crucial, producing not only startled reactions but also prompting unexpected communication. Around one in fifteen people agree to sing on the spot with no time for preparation or rehearsal. I never suggest a particular song and, surprisingly, very few people choose the same song, so the collection includes all kinds of musical genres: pop, rock, indie, rap, punk, death metal, as well as lullabies, children's songs, advertisement jingles and surprising made-up tunes. I have recorded songs in different places: Weimar (2003), Cork (2005), Strasbourg (2006), Newtown and the Banw valley in Wales (2007), Nashville (2006) and Tehran (2005). I have also recorded in several locations in England over the years. This includes a journey from Southampton to Sunderland (2007) and the University of Essex in Colchester (2010). With each location comes a set of differences that has more to do with the particularities of specific places rather than nation.

IAIN BIGGS The SAP recordings seem to capture a shift of focus from what people sing to how they sing it. So what goes through our heads when we are asked to sing out of the blue in front of a camera?

YVONNE BUCHHEIM Initially, I began with a focus on identity in a work entitled Herder’s Legacy, which consists of songs recorded in front of a white neutral background to eliminate any reference to place, for example, in songs nos. 24, 152 and 302. Paradoxically, this reduction and focus on the singer led to the shift from what to how people sing, and the presence of the camera impacts on the performance in several ways. The camera gaze appears to offer an insight into how humans behave, how we deal with personal challenge, expectation and disappointment in oneself. For example, during a 2006 exhibition at the Cheekwood Museum of Art in Nashville the audience itself was invited to perform on a temporary stage while well-known song quotes were projected onto a screen. This installation was intended to tempt the viewer into a performance, which was recorded and screened via a live link into a different part of the museum. A potential performer must imagine herself performing the song before doing it. So she creates an image, a Fremdbild (a sense of how one is seen by others) before deciding to take on this personal challenge. The gap between the standards for behaviour we expect of ourselves and our actual behaviour is why, for many people, the simple request
For me, there’s a central question about interaction and participation throughout your work, about the shift in the role of the audience. Do you think that all SAP exhibitions and public events have some element of rousing a ‘passive’ audience into active participation?

Many of my concerns link back to the Situationist International group with their interventions into mass media and advertising. I am interested in blurring the distinction between the passerby and the observer in a public space by turning the shopkeeper into a singer and encouraging the theatre audience member to become a stage performer. By shifting habits and presuppositions, we can experience another self, or at least imagine other possible selves. When witnessing someone performing a song, we identify with the singer’s feelings of joy, excitement, difficulty or failure. We relate to their emotional expression in a very visceral, immediate way. Becoming active in this way stimulates people and normal conventions can be revealed or broken (song no. 404).

Looking through the archive, I was particularly struck by the characteristics that two performances of the same song – for instance, Somewhere over the Rainbow from Wales (song no. 554) and Nashville (song no. 503) – have and don’t have in common. The two women who sing may be about the same age, but what they project as individual members of two very different ‘regional’ cultures – if that’s the right term – seems to me very different. This seems to have to do with what I’d call cultural confidence, to name just one characteristic. Is this the type of aspect of the performances you want the viewer to reflect on?

I am intrigued by how confidence and embarrassment are completely subjective emotional states of mind, which have, in fact, nothing to do with the actual (in)ability to sing. Often people start off very unsure of themselves and slightly irritated by the unusual request to sing unprepared in front of a camera. Then they gain confidence throughout the song, only to feel embarrassed by forgotten song lyrics a few seconds later.

With Stagefright, your recent series of public events that combine performance and lectures, you’re encouraging responses from people in different ways. Although the emphasis seems to be similar to earlier SAP works, Stagefright seems to be raising questions about issues around embarrassment and our capacity for deception in our social interactions.

Stagefright developed out of a whole series of previous public events, all attempting to turn the audience into performers. It’s been a real challenge and, at times, it seemed disastrous, for example, when attempting to transfer the concept of an Irish pub night into a German tavern. Improvised sing-songs are rather rare in my hometown of Weimar. Although the event was advertised in the local media and lots of people came to
the event, they were too inhibited to sing in public – for hours it looked like a complete failure!

Amateur musicians played melodies inspired from specially prepared beer mats but only when someone started singing controversial East-German songs, the whole pub began to liven up and entered into a heated mix of singing and discussing songs.

In contrast, Stagefright is a much more constructed concept. Through ‘tips on how to overcome stage fright’, the audience learns odd facts about singing and human behaviour before being tempted on stage for a spontaneous solo performance. It combines elements of performance, video screening, a lecture and audience participation through fictional practical exercises. This is not as serious as it sounds: at one point, the whole theatre audience grunts, howls and neighs in an attempt to create an animal orchestra.

IAIN BIGGS How have the contributors to this book benefited your art practice and what inspires the material for the lecture component of Stagefright?

YVONNE BUCHHEIM A lot of the knowledge and theories in the Stagefright lectures stems from the collaborations in this book. In order to find contributors to the book, I looked at research on the periphery of my own interests and offered the SAP as a starting point for dialogue. I was curious as to where art meets behavioural psychology, neurology, philosophy, fiction, and art criticism. I was intrigued by how each contributor viewed the same songs but extracted different information from them and created a context through their own research field. In Stagefright, I pass on some of these insights and I add questions about how we live our lives and deal with normative conventions. The request to sing a song publicly turns into a catalyst to engage people and reflect on their own views.

IAIN BIGGS How would you characterise the role of the camera in your work, both in relation to yourself as the artist/facilitator and for your participants? I ask because you have infrequently stepped out from behind the camera and appeared in front of it. What changes when you yourself become a performer and in this way part of the archive?

YVONNE BUCHHEIM As a non-singer, I leave my safety zone by stepping out in front of the camera, and put myself in a vulnerable position where anything can happen. I attempt to sing and I am faced with issues of failure and loss of control. I understand that singing in public is a personal challenge and am confronted with my own insecurities. I am intrigued by the shift that one undergoes in knowing the camera is switched on. The 3-channel video piece Before and After Presence uses footage of this transition. It also shows how lyrics provide the basic standard by which most people judge their performance and, when one forgets, suddenly the structure of the song falls apart. People deal with this situation very differently.
Another attempt to identify the role of the camera happened during my residency at the University of Essex. This remarkable counter-modernist, purpose-built campus outside Colchester houses one of the few functioning paternoster lifts in its library building. I was intrigued by how the open cubicles can become like a stage set that one cannot escape from if a camera is placed in a very visible position directly in front. By introducing very small shifts from the everyday, for example, standing slightly awkwardly or bringing an unusual object into the lift, a spontaneous play unfolds: amateur actors, following a loose script, merge with other unknowing lift companions. Sometimes bystanders will become amused observers. Some have even felt compelled to document the scenario on their mobile phone.

**IAIN BIGGS** Could you explain what the political dimensions of the SAP are?

**YVONNE BUCHHEIM** In most places, political issues surfaced in some form or other: in Strasbourg, Cork and Weimar, history became apparent through the chosen songs and, in Wales, the use of language often seemed a political decision informed by a strong sense of identity.

In a very different way, in Iran, the simple request to record songs became inadvertently contentious due to the restricting law on female public singing. The fact that I was recording the song on camera and therefore could show it to a mixed audience turned the performance into a prohibited act and only a few women were prepared to take the risk and defy the ban (songs nos. 298 and 299). It made me very aware of my own country’s history and my position as a woman in a foreign country, and I consequently decided to perform a German folk song *Meine Gedanken sind frei* (*My Thoughts Are Free*) in public places in Tehran. This particular old German song, with its roots in the 13th century, was banned both during the German Revolution in 1848/49 and the Third Reich.

**IAIN BIGGS** SAP is moving into a new phase with this book, finding another way to be an open research field rather than a closed archive. How does this change the way you intend to work in future and how do you envisage the archive’s users engaging with it?

**YVONNE BUCHHEIM** Well, I guess, making the book has presented me with an analogy to the sap taken by a forester: I intend to scrape back the bark, drill a small hole, wait a while, collect the sap and turn it into a whole range of surprising objects that people can enjoy and interact with. In other words, I intend to keep my work open for exchange and collaboration, and envisage that this book and the interconnected Stagefright performances will bring the SAP to a wider audience and act as a catalyst for new ideas and projects.
I can’t get no satisfaction
What song do you dislike and why?

Question No. 13, Free Cake for a Song Story, 2007
Dyna ti yn eistedd y deryn du, Brenin y goedwig fawr wyt ti

Song No. 559, Song for Newtown, 2007
Hallo Major
Tom können sie hören

Song No. 22, Earworms, 2009
Nothing is as bad as your fear of it
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Photography

Yvonne Buchheim p.2–22, 113, 123; Ronnie Close p.115, 117; Matt White p.119; Ruth Jones p.119 colour; Matthew Bowman p.121; ML p.125