

*le grain*: If RB thought of *Blow-Up* when writing “Le grain de la voix?” (doubtful) Ablinger explains.

*la voix*: Whitney: “commonly referred to as ‘The Voice.’”

Houston’s career, occurring all but in tandem with the emergence of the Compact Disc and digital music production, traces not only the anthropological moment of a shift in paradigms of “pheno-song” (from *bel canto* to “soul,” for example), but a codification of “geno-song” itself into “pheno-text.” After Houston (the moment, the phenomenon), grain is grain overlay: “[a] process add[ing] noise characteristics [...] to the more sterile looking digital medium.” No longer the presence of “the body in the singing voice,” but a question of (higher or lower) definition, resolution. A better illustration of the “precession of simulacra” than Houston’s absolutely periodic vibrato in recordings from the 80s & 90s would be hard to find. And if indeed Houston’s later recordings did more readily participate in that which Barthes may have identified as “geno-song,” this appearance is only the by-product of a particular abjection. “Being Bobby Brown” is no wonder in the face of the brutal appropriation of a strand of African-American music just a few generations removed from the memory of slavery: its affective vocabulary transmogrified into the melismatic fodder of teen idols and reality television contestants. The authenticity, the “realness,” the material characteristics (down to the pornographic minutiae of breath and whetting of lips) of a particular “geno-song” become the quantifiable norms of an industry. The *punctum*’s market share. The Voice (“hers” or the television program of the same name) overtakes the voice.

But then, for Ablinger, grain always meant something else: the entanglement of “pheno-” and “geno-”-songs – the traumatic moment of the voice’s constituent dissolution in its psycho-physiological processing – the grid of the grain. For Ablinger, the grain is the reality of human subjectivity – its intrinsic limitation, its incapacity to take in *Alles*. His is the real of the “*tuché*” (the real as the missed encounter with the real) – never the quasi-mystical encounter of Barthes’ *grain*. In his instrumental resyntheses of spectral analyses, Ablinger sonifies this gap, leaving our synapses quivering between “music” (analyses displaced from their referents) and identification. Any and all recorded traits of source materials – from the voice itself to background noise of a recording medium – are projected onto an X-Y axis of frequency and amplitude – a rasterized field of constantly shifting intensities throughout the audio spectrum. Here, Panzera, Fischer-Dieskau, Mahalia Jackson, and Whitney Houston are quantitatively equivalent – all equally representable. And it’s here that Whitney Houston and Peter Ablinger touch – in the “horror” of the de-mythologized equivalence of materiality.

And yet, in something like Ablinger’s de-ideologized repetition of Houston, there is more for him to tell us. Anecdotally, Ablinger has referred to *Voices and Piano* as his “Winterreise.” He writes, “I like to think about *Voices and Piano* as my song-cycle, though nobody is singing in it [...] [a]nd the piano is not really accompanying the voices.” In his own terms, the stated lack of singer and accompanist clarifies the analytical relation at the base of his work (“Music analyzes reality”). But what if we were also to imagine the cycle as the displacement of the singer, of the voice? As such, we would become the singer. In our fluttering syntheses of disparate tones and partials into meaning, into a voice, it would be we who sing – in listening. Beyond the cognitive recognition of analysis, Ablinger’s “vocal” music “ghost writes” (Amacher) a particular neural positioning that allows access to (again, Amacher) “the experience of our own processing.” Ablinger the songwriter tells us that it was us singing all along. The so-called “anthropological transformation” accompanying Houston is nothing new, just newly illegible.

How then might we memorialize Whitney Houston? Perhaps more fitting than a new addition to *Voices and Piano* (which would be a particularly non-productive redundancy) would be a *quadraturen-ed Imitation of Life?* – that is, a bridge to an earlier moment in the succession of historical simulacra: a legible retaliation against the reality of reality.

