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"Breaking the Fourth Wall" - The Effect of Acknowledging the Studio on Staging and Perception. Justin Morey
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The studio can be used to locate a recording in settings other than the actual recording space, either realistic or imagined. What is the effect on this staging of the inclusion of acknowledgements of the production process, such as verbal interaction between the musicians, or from one side of the glass to the other (such as David Bowie's treated conversation with producer Ken Scott at the beginning of Andy Warhol), that can be found in finished recordings?

It will be argued that this practice is analogous to the cinematic device of "breaking the fourth wall", where protagonists step out of the scene they are enacting, either by addressing the audience, or by acknowledging the presence of the production team, simultaneously making the viewer complicit in the events, and highlighting the artificiality of the medium delivering them. Given that much popular music, particularly rock music, is often appreciated with the assumption that the protagonists are addressing the listener directly, how does the inclusion of these interactions on the final master affect audience perceptions?

Using a range of examples from artists including Arctic Monkeys, David Bowie, The Libertines and Led Zeppelin, it will be proposed that these interactions serve to "break the fourth wall" by revealing the mediation involved in a recording to the audience. However, while these moments can draw the audience in and give them a sense of complicity in the production, as is often the intention in the cinematic device, the intention diverges from the use in cinema in that it reinforces rather than subverts the authenticity of the recording by locating it in a believable space, i.e the studio, and promotes a sense in the audience that the events around these interactions are more immediate or live as a result. As such, it will be suggested that the inclusion of such interactions in the final master can be viewed as an attempt by the producer(s) to inscribe a recording with authenticity.

Introduction The proscenium arch has, since the 18th century, been the frame for the onstage action and the dividing line between the players and the audience in a theatrical setting. The audience is encouraged to willingly suspend its disbelief and accept the "reality" of what is being presented. 20th century Dramatists such as Brecht chose to challenge this convention, or break the fourth wall by having the actors step out of character to address the audience directly, and through other devices, to encourage the audience to engage actively with the play rather than observe passively:

"If the artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him...the audience can no longer have the illusion of being an unseen spectator at an event that is really taking place."
(Brecht, quoted in Willett, 1964, p91)

In film and television, the screen has taken the place of the proscenium arch. Reflexivity has become common practice in post-modern cinema, a key element of which, according to Stam (2000, p151) is "the foregrounding of the materials and processes of art...their own production...their authorship...their textual proceedings...their intertextual influences". The on-screen acknowledgement of the production team and or their technology has almost become a convention in documentary, docu-drama and first person narrative visual media, while directors such as Godard, Brooks and Allen, have used these techniques to break the fourth wall. The following, from "Robin Hood Men in Tights" serves as an example of this technique:

Scene: Archery contest in front of the King and Sheriff of Rottingham

Robin: I lost. I lost? Wait a minute, I'm not supposed to lose! [produces script and checks it] Wait! I get another shot!...
Marian: Does Robin get another shot?
King and Rottingham [checking scripts, then resignedly in unison] Yes, he does, he does.

The convention of a dividing line between performers and audience is also in place when we listen to a record. In graphical depictions of elements in a mix, the stereo speakers delineate the proscenium arch, with analysis terms such as "staging" and "soundstage" reinforcing this idea. Gibson's (2005) visual representations of mixes in terms of gain, stereo placement and frequency employ a rectangular three dimensional space with the speakers placed as if far left and right at the top of a proscenium arch. The record inhabits what Gibson calls "the space between the speakers", and we, the audience, are detached from it in a similar way to viewing a film, TV show or theatrical performance. Moylan (2006, pp 176-179) makes this delineation even clearer in his discussion of a "perceived performance area", consisting of a "sound stage" divided from the auditorium (in a literal sense) by the stereo speakers.

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fig 1. The sound stage within the perceived performance copy of the second environment. From Moylan (2006, p178).
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This idea of separate performance and listening areas is emphasised by the listener engaging with a recording as a "performance" because "the recording represents the illusion of a live performance" (ibid. p177) regardless of whether or not the sounds coming from the speakers could be reproduced in a live setting. Frith notes:

"I listen to records in the full knowledge that what I hear is something that never existed, that never could exist, as a "performance", something happening in a single time and space; nevertheless, it is now happening, in a single time and space: it is thus a performance and I hear it as one, imagine the performers performing even when this just means a deejay mixing a track, an engineer pulling knobs". (2002, p207)

While Frith also argues " that "listening" itself is a performance", it is nevertheless an act that is removed from the "action" of the recording, whether the listener is analysing the music intently or listening casually. Different popular music styles will also imply different kinds of musical spaces, and different relationships between the performance area and listening space, that transcend the medium of transmission; Frith notes that a club track played over breakfast radio will have a different meaning to a rock ballad on the same play list, because it "still refers to an ideal listening situation, still constructs one sort of musical space even as it is being heard in another one altogether" (ibid. p250). My argument in this paper is that the inclusion of reflexive elements in a recording helps to involve the listener directly by breaking down the barrier between the implied performance area and the implied auditorium, whether these musical spaces are arenas, concert halls, or somewhere altogether more intimate. The listener is put "in the know", and as such is dragged from the auditorium into the performance space, or sometimes even the control room. An example is to contrast Quincy Jones' production of "Workin' Day and Night" with Michael Jackson's home demo of the song, included on the CD reissue of *Off The Wall*, where siblings Randy and Janet are contributing to the percussion track. At the start of the recording we can hear Randy shouting at Michael to turn down his headphone mix, Janet shouting Randy down in defence of Michael, and Michael remaining calm, and counting in the performers. Frith (ibid. p207) argues that "public performance...describes something marked off from the everyday, something in which when the everyday does appear it is as a joke, an intruder". Jones' productions on "Off The Wall" and subsequent Michael Jackson albums are masterful "public performances",

whereas the "everyday" exchanges at the start of Michael Jackson's home demo (as well as, it would not be unfair to say, the amateurish production values by comparison) dissolve the divide between performance area and auditorium. Prior Research The concepts of the fourth wall and reflexivity are common areas of discussion in film theory, with authors such as Stam (2000) offering outlines of their origins and application. Kaplan (2000, p34) has noted that the application of reflexivity is also commonplace device in pop music videos. The focus is generally on the intentions behind the application of the technique, rather than the study of an audience's reception to it; however, Auter and Davis' (1991) study focused on audience reaction to a range of comedy shows from different decades, where the fourth wall breaking technique had been employed. Groups were presented with one minute clips from comedy shows including "Burns and Allen", "The Dobie Gillis Show", "The Monkees", "Moonlighting", and "It's Gary Shandling's Show", with each group viewing one clip that contained a fourth wall break. Viewers found the fourth wall clips to be both more entertaining and more sophisticated than the other clips.

"Participation is a primary determiner of interest-involvement, and the shows studied invite their viewers to participate in the content by speaking directly to them-with surprising results. That interactive relationship redefines the normally passive relationship with a given show and makes the viewers a part of the action."

Paul's (2004) study of the 3-D film version of Kiss Me Kate, discusses how an "interplay" (p.238) with the audience is created by a number of different applications of this technique:

- i. There is a very literal breaking of the fourth wall when the characters from the film appear to cross into the auditorium through the application of 3-D technology to create an emergence effect.
- ii. When the characters break into song and/or dance, "there is an element in the performance that takes the performer somewhat outside the diegesis since the musical performance is always implicitly directed to the audience" (ibid. p237).
- iii. In the song "Brush Up Your Shakespeare", the performers address their song to the character of the theatre director played by Howard Keel, but on his departure, acknowledge the camera before breaking into a refrain.

Paul (pp.236-7) also refers to the work of the theatre historian and Shakespearian scholar Robert Weimann, who divides the theatrical space into two distinct areas: the platea or downstage area, and the locus or upstage area. These distinct areas derive from the early forms of theatre, and can be seen in Shakespearian drama, where the locus or upstage is reserved for the more significant characters, and is where the illusion of the drama is preserved, whereas the downstage area was "continuous with the audience" (ibid. p236), and would be inhabited by low-born or comic characters (although the major characters might inhabit this area when delivering a prologue or epilogue). Weimann's contention is that Western theatre, through the employment of a proscenium arch, has largely dispensed with the platea, and expanded the locus, with Paul's conclusion being that these areas remain intact in conceptual form in musical theatre, in both stage and cinematic versions, because of the different "dramatic modes" (ibid. p237) present in the form.

Where does this leave the pop/rock record? If we agree with Paul that a musical performance "is always implicitly directed at the audience", then it can be argued that the performers inhabit the platea, and have to an extent broken through the fourth wall by acknowledging the presence of the audience. I would argue that this could be the case in a live recording, but would suggest that in returning to Moylan's idea of the studio recording representing the "illusion of a live recording", the "action" is generally taking place upstage, with the application of reverb and delay effects providing the "scenery" for an imagined or imaginary location. When these fourth wall moments appear in records, it changes our perception of what follows in the same way that our expectations and reaction would be changed if we hear the director off camera yelling "action" at the start of a film scene. I would suggest that the listener becomes part of the scene, which while breaking the illusion of an imagined or imaginary space, authenticates the recording studio as a live and dynamic performance area.

If the idea of the pop record as "performance" is well established, is there also an argument for the pop record as narrative? A common thread between the film and theatre application of fourth wall techniques is that the established narrative is interrupted, even collapsed, by the introduction of a reflexive device. Frith (2002, p209) notes:

"Pop listeners are always aware of the tension between an implied story (content: the singer in the song) and the real one (form: the singer on the stage)."

If we accept this idea, then reflexive moments can be seen to disrupt the notion of "the singer on the stage", and replace it with the singer in the studio. In the following proposed typology, one thing all the examples have in common is to locate the performer(s) in the studio, and I would suggest that rather than disrupting the narrative of "the singer in the song", it adds an additional layer of narrative.

A Typology of Reflexive Devices What follows is in no way an exhaustive list of examples of reflexivity in popular music, but is intended as an outline of the different ways in which this practice occurs, with some suggestions as to the effect of and possible intentions behind their inclusion:

- i. The count-in. This is perhaps the most common verbal interjection found on records, and tends to be either distant and "off-mic" such as John Bonham's count-in for Led Zeppelin's "The Ocean", or directly into the mic such as on The Ramones' "Today Your Love, Tomorrow the World". While there can be no certainty as to the exact intention of the inclusion of a count-in without further ethnographic research, or indeed whether there is a consistency of intention among

producers and artists, I would argue that it serves to suggest to the listener that what follows is essentially a live recording, but in the studio.

ii. Are we rolling?/are you ready? This is like the count-in in its effect, in that it suggests that what follows is a "live" take, but it also acknowledges that there is a production team involved in the recording process, as well as revealing a degree of uncertainty in communication in the studio. Examples include "Heart Of The Wound" by Nights Like These, and "Hey God" by Bon Jovi, "A Certain Romance" by Arctic Monkeys, and "Valerie" by Mark Ronson, feat. Amy Winehouse. In the former two examples, the performers' voices have a reverberant quality that suggests either a combination of close and distance miking in a very "live" live room, or the addition of artificial reverb. Either way, the band is located in the studio live room. This inclusion of this interaction before the performance begins also highlights that it is just that, as we hear the musicians "out of character", and then very much "in character" as the song begins. An example of this happening off-mic occurs on Arctic Monkeys' "A Certain Romance" where the voice of, presumably, engineer Ewan Davis can be heard to say "shall I keep rolling?" In Valerie, Mark Ronson can be heard to say, presumably over the live room speakers, "Hi it's rolling", with a dry, close miked Winehouse replying, "I'm sorry Charlie Murphy, I was having too much fun". This is followed by a very reverberant Winehouse beginning her vocal performance. The differences in reverb between the reflexive moments and the track itself in both "Heart of the Wound" and "Valerie" also raise another question: were these moments edited on to the front of the track for effect, rather than being contiguous with it?

iii. The musical director. For example James Brown's instructions and exhortations to the J.B.s on cuts such as "Doing It To Death" and "More Peas". While it is clear that the tracks in question are far from just unrehearsed jams, Brown's interjections give the pieces an intense feeling of "liveness" or immediacy because the exact nature of the finished piece is being revealed not just to the audience as they listen, but to the musicians while they play. There's also an element here of revealing the competency and slickness of the band, as if opening up the bonnet of a cherished high performance car at a concourse event. There's the sense that Brown is essentially producing a live mix of pre-prepared ideas, in much the same way as a DJ or producer might trigger and mute pre-prepared musical sequencer on a DAW or via sequencing software such as Ableton Live. As well as instructions to individual band members, Brown asks some of the musicians direct questions and jokes with them, with their responses audible, but mostly off mic. This range of commands and interactions serves to locate all of the musicians in the same recording space, thus emphasising the live nature of the recording. The performance of the pieces also becomes part of the subject, with musical instructions transformed into vocal riffs ("down in D...funky D...shakin' D") There is also a sense in which the audience may feel as if they are eavesdropping on a rehearsal, and are themselves drawn into the studio space by these regular interactions.

iv. The MC as musical director/producer. The MC directs one of his production colleagues to modify the mix that he is hearing while performing, which also becomes the version the audience hears. This gives the record a sense of immediacy, and allies it to the live production through turntablism of hip hop's roots. For example, Rakim's instruction to the engineer towards the end of "Paid In Full":

"Yo Eli, turn the bass down, and just let the beat keep on rocking, and we're out of here." It could also be argued that this allies the MC with some of the great bandleaders of black music, such as James Brown, George Clinton and Fela Kuti.

v. The extended conversation or interruption. These are less frequent than the count in or "are you ready?", but remind the listener not only of their being a production team involved in making the record, but also, as with the previous examples, we are presented with the juxtaposition of the band both "in" and "out of character". For example, Ken Scott's conversation with David Bowie at the start of "Andy Warhol":

KS: This is Andy War-hole and it's take one! [presumably to the tape op] Take one.

DB: It's Warhol actually

KS: What did I say?

DB Hole. Its hol, as in hols

KS: Andy Warhol

DB Wha? Andy Warhol. Andy Warhol. Like hol.

KS: [either not getting it or not interested] Andy War-hole take one

DB: [plays chord on acoustic guitar] Ah. Are you ready?

KS: Yeah

DB: Hahahahaha!

Other examples include the break in the middle of "My Sweet" by the Hot Club de France where the musicians discuss whether or not a guitar solo should be performed, and the version of "Skag & Bone Man" by the Libertines that features as a B side to "The Delaney" where the song comes to a halt in the middle, and the musicians acknowledge that they have missed out a section, before resuming for another chorus. On "Revolution 1", we can hear Paul McCartney beginning the acoustic guitar part, before stopping to say "take 2?" with a more off-mic response of "okay" from one of the other Beatles.

vi. The acknowledgement of the recording media. Examples include the sound of the tape speeding up at the start of "What A Waster" by The Libertines and "Black Dog" by Led Zeppelin, or rewinding at the start of "Is This It" by the Strokes. The intention, I would suggest, will vary depending on the age of the recording. Led Zeppelin, may have been doing nothing more than signalling the beginning of the record, but later uses could be trying to align the productions in question with a traditional, and thus more authentic recording medium.

Breaking The Fourth Wall & Authenticity One significant band appears to be very fond of employing reflexive devices. Of the eighteen songs on Oasis' best of album, Stop The Clocks, nine contain reflexive elements applicable to a range of

the categories discussed, as outlined below:

- a) The tape machine can be heard running up to speed on "Some Might Say"
- b) At the start of "Talk Tonight", either Noel or Liam can be heard to say "just take me watch off" (accompanied by the jangle of a watch being removed), and one or other of the Gallagher brothers coughs over the guitar intro.
- c) There is a very pronounced and reverberant cough at the start of "Wonderwall". On the version appearing on *What's the Story, Morning Glory?* this cough occurs at the end of the previous track, "Roll With It". It is interesting that it was considered compositionally significant enough to be placed at the start of "Wonderwall" when it was remastered for *Stop The Clocks*.
- d) At the start of "Cigarettes & Alcohol", the heavy hiss of a guitar amp is followed by the sound of a chair moving, what sounds like a guitar being picked up, and a short whistle.
- e) At the beginning of "The Masterplan", two voices can be heard in the control room, one of them saying "get the count-in, where is it?". This is followed by giving the count-in to the performers in the live room, with what sounds like off-mic performers in the live room acknowledging this. As whatever is providing the count-in is not heard, this points to the use of a click track on the recording.
- f) More live room whistling at the start of "Live Forever".
- g) "Yeah, we're on" and a giggle at the start of "Half The World Away".
- h) Count-in and instructions ("cue the bass") on "Go Let It Out", which are very dry in contrast with Liam's reverberant vocals, and so sound as if they're coming from the control room.
- i) Count-in on "Songbird".

In a previous paper (Morey, 2008), I referred to Moore's (2002) discussion of authenticity, and how this might clarify why many fans of the band Arctic Monkeys appeared to have a preference for less professional sounding demos over the more high fidelity and accomplished (in terms of musicianship) album versions. I think that it also helps to illuminate the intentions behind this high volume of reflexive moments on Oasis records. To briefly summarise Moore's argument, his central point is that authenticity is "ascribed, rather inscribed" (2002, p210) and as such it is a commodity earned by the performers and bestowed by the audience. With regards to the sound of a recording, "intimacy...and immediacy (in the sense of unmediated forms of sound production) tend to connote authenticity". (ibid, p211). Moore offers three ways in which an artist can earn authenticity in the opinion of his/her audience:

- i. Through communicating in a way that suggests the artist is drawing on his/her own personal experiences, and in a production style that sounds unmediated by studio tricks or effects.
- ii. Through validating the audience's experience through a sense of connection with the artist's performance style and subject matter.
- iii. Through the delivery of a style or genre of music which can be perceived to be part of a tradition to which authenticity is generally attributed.

I would argue that while authenticity may only be awarded by an audience, Oasis are trying to ascribe their recordings with authenticity on a number of levels. Most of the examples above lead the listener to imagine that what follows is a live performance albeit in the studio, and the decision not to remove these reflexive devices before, points to what we hear being an unmediated "warts and all" production. Wiseman-Trowse (2008) has argued that Oasis' projection of their working class identity is a performance of class, and as such, some of these reflexive moments can be seen as "the lads at work" and an attempt to break down the barrier between band and audience. With others, there can also be an attempt to locate and authenticate the recordings within a tradition. Zagorski-Thomas (2008) suggests that "the perceived authority that stems from speaking with a particular voice" is integral to Oasis' production, in this case the production sound of late 1960s and early 1970s rock music, and that the band's use of analogue tape and valve or tube amplifiers is an attempt to assert a "voice of authority" that is "the perceived golden age of rock". In examples (a) and (d) above, I would argue that Oasis are attempting to signpost this authority and their authenticity through revealing these production elements.

To return to Paul's (2004) discussion of *platea* and *locus*, I believe there to be an argument for the majority of the examples of reflexivity outlined above to have the effect of moving the "action" of a studio recording from the upstage area to a performance space that is more "continuous with the audience" (p236). This may at first appear to be a contradiction, in that a number of the examples I have offered expose a certain artificiality to the production process in revealing the likelihood of mediation such as click tracks or overdubbing, or of the performers "getting into character". With reference to film, Stam (2000, p152) has argued that "realism and reflexivity are not strictly opposed polarities but, rather, interpenetrating tendencies quite capable of coexisting within the same text." If this is the case, then the reality or authenticity of the studio performance has not been compromised. In stead, these reflexive devices locate the performers in a studio, which, with the post-modern listener's awareness of a production process in pop music, helps to increase the authenticity of the listening experience. We are listening to elements of a live performance, even if overdubbing may have occurred, rather than the shuffling and arranging of musical elements on a DAW or sequencer. All of the examples of reflexivity I have found so far have come from forms of music where the immediacy and authenticity of a performance has value to the audience (rock/metal, hip-hop, soul-funk). In forms such as many types of largely instrumental dance music, there is no need to locate performers in a space, even if the size of a notional performance area has been defined by the use of reverb and delays. The action happens "upstage" with the proscenium arch intact, although the barrier between audience and performance will blur in a different sense, when the music in question becomes part of a DJ set that leads to a symbiosis between DJ and audience, with each side modifying their performance in reaction to the other.

Generally, the device implies an authenticity to the recording, especially as some of the examples are very quiet, and would quite possibly be missed unless listening carefully. Some of them were, perhaps, originally intended as in-jokes among the production team, and many of the older examples could be appreciated as having the same effect as a very short snippet from a "making of" DVD, except that they are interpolations within the musical events, and have a much more immediate effect on our perceptions. There is also a paradox at work here, in that in film and theatre, the fourth wall is often broken when the characters momentarily ignore each other and address the audience; in the pop record, the reverse is true, as the examples I have described here are the points when the audience is effectively ignored, either because the focus is on the enactment of the performance to come, rather than the performance itself, or because, as with the James Brown and Hot Club de France examples, the musicians are performing for the entertainment and enjoyment of each other rather than the invisible audience. Perhaps this is where the power of these moments lies; by still listening, but not being performed to, we become complicit in the unfolding musical narrative.

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Discography Note: Date refers to year of release of the CD used for reference, rather than the year of original release.

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