Reflections on popular music and collapse phenomena

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ABSTRACT: When watching a film, the object which one most notices is not the light and sound per se, nor is it the nearby vibrating speaker or flickering screen. One encounters instead a performance or a fictional world. Robert Hopkins describes this experience of a fictional world as *collapsed seeing-in*. Enrico Terrone extends this idea to recorded music: The object which one most notices is not the sound or the vibrating speaker, but a fiction. Yet, he suggests, the fiction one encounters in pop music is not a story but a feeling. We explore and extend this idea, arguing that the experience of music is more diverse than the experience of film. There are many possible collapse phenomena, distinguished by what the listener's experience collapses to. Possibilities include the fictional first-person experience of the song persona's emotions, fictional second-person heartfelt connection to the song persona, third-person experience of a fictional musical performance, and fictional first-person experience of the agency of playing the music.

KEYWORDS: popular music, listening, collapse phenomenon, musical experience

Robert Hopkins (2008) identifies what he calls the *collapse* phenomenon in the experience of watching a movie: An audience member is primarily aware not of the representation itself (the projected image and the recorded sound) but instead of the things represented. The experience collapses to the contents— that is, one is aware primarily of objects and events in a fictional story. Drawing an analogy between movies and recorded music, Enrico Terrone (2020) argues that pop music also exhibits the collapse phenomenon. In the case of music, Terrone argues, one is aware of the emotional content of the track.

We argue that the phenomenon Terrone describes is possible but does not predominate. Listening to recorded music allows for different types of experience— different collapse phenomena which can be distinguished by what shows up to the listener.

In section 1, we explain Hopkins' account of the collapse phenomenon which occurs when watching films. In section 2, we explain Terrone's extension of this idea to recorded music. The experience he highlights is (we argue) possible but not as common as he suggests. In section 3, we distinguish other collapse phenomena beyond the ones identified by Hopkins and Terrone. These are (we suggest) particularly relevant to the experience of music. In section 4, we suggest that some contemporary performance practices can make collapse occur even in live performance.

1. The collapse phenomenon for film

When we watch a movie or television program, in one narrow sense what we see are images on a screen. But for live-action shows the images on the screen are of people playing parts in a production. Hopkins distinguishes what he calls two tiers: the events that were filmed (actors reciting dialogue, stunt people falling off screen onto padded mats, and so on) and the story that those events are meant to convey (characters talking, characters falling off of buildings, and so on). It is possible to see both tiers when looking at the screen.[1] Hopkins calls this *tiered seeing-in*.

Typically, however, we are not aware of the people as actors or stunt people. Rather, the conspicuous objects of our awareness are the characters, the action of the plot, and the fictional world. As Hopkins writes, "What we see in these various forms of film is merely the stories they tell" (Hopkins 2008, p. 154). He dubs this *collapsed seeing-in*, because our experience collapses so that what shows up to us in the moment is just the second tier. Phenomenologically, we might also think of this as the *withdrawal* of the awareness of actors and their techniques, leaving only the experience of the fictional events depicted.

Of course, collapse is not inevitable. In a bad movie, with bad acting, bad direction, and bad scripting, the audience can be painfully aware that what they are seeing on-screen are actors. In the worst case, the viewer might *only* see actors and have no experience of the story at all.

Yet the absence of collapse does not necessarily mean that a movie is bad. Curiosity about or knowledge of skilled performers may actually encourage attending to them as actors exercising their craft. For example, a viewer might try to attend to what it is that the actress Meryl Streep does to see her convincingly as the character Margaret Thatcher in the 2011 film *The Iron Lady*. Streep comments about the role, "There is a point in the process where I don't distinguish between whether I'm doing her

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[1] One is aware of them both, but in different ways. As Hopkins puts it, one sees the actors as representations of the characters. The question as to how to think about the simultaneity of these is left for another time.

or I'm being me. I feel like me and I sound like her" (NPR Staff 2011). Yet one may instead lose focus on Streep as an actress. Because the performance is successful, it is possible to experience it as collapsed. As Hopkins writes about the general case, "We can slip between tiered and collapsed seeing-in, depending on how we direct our attention" (Hopkins 2008, p. 152).

In other cases, the audience may experience both tiers on an ongoing basis as a result of deliberate production decisions by the filmmakers. For example, in the television show *Orphan Black* (2013-2017), the actress Tatiana Maslany plays more than half a dozen different characters who are clones. The performance is successful enough that the audience often has the collapsed experience of the particular clone going about their activities. This holds up even in scenes where one of the clones is (in the story) impersonating one of the others. For example, Maslany successfully portrays Sarah impersonating Rachel (in a third season episode) as something that the character Sarah does rather than just acting the way she does when she is playing Rachel. Maslany's performance is sufficiently convincing that it is easy to think of them not just as different characters but also as different actresses.

A live recording of a stage play—or a film that is meant to feel like a stage play—might confront the audience with both the story and the artifice of storytelling. For example, Wes Anderson's adaptations of several short stories by Roald Dahl have "the cast reciting Dahl's words directly to the audience while acting them out, and set pieces cycling in and out as if in a stage play" (DiLillo 2024). One of these, the *Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*, won the Oscar for Best Live Action Short Film in 2024. The story is engaging, but one never loses sight of the staging and presentation.

So the collapse phenomenon is common, although not ubiquitous, in the experience of recorded television and movies. Terrone's central idea is that another recorded medium, popular music, might exhibit it too.

2. The collapse phenomenon for music

A typical popular music recording is a different kind of thing than a live performance. Like a movie, a record is often the result of many different performance events distributed across a range of takes. These may be combined with samples recorded from other sources, manipulated in various ways, and combined by arduous editing. That is, the product is not a performance or a song, but a *track* (Gracyk 1996, Zak 2001, Kania 2006).

Although Terrone acknowledges this point, he sticks to calling pop recordings *songs* rather than tracks (Terrone 2020, p. 435). This elides the important gap between the literal events of music production and the sound which the listener hears. The production involves labor in the studio that maps onto sounds in the track in what is often only a fragmentary and disordered way. This includes recording different instruments at different times, making a composite vocal or instrumental line out of many different takes, pasting the same musical phrase rather than playing it multiple times, and so on.

We return to this point below. But first we take up Terrone's extension of Hopkins' idea from movies to music.

2.1 Thoughts and feelings

When we listen to recorded music, in a narrow sense what we hear are sounds produced by a machine. But for pop music, the sounds normally include lyrics which convey content.

Terrone acknowledges that there are story songs, where the fictional content is an explicit narrative. He gives the example of Harry Chapin's "30,000 Pounds of Bananas" (Terrone 2020, p. 448). In that track, Chapin tells the story of a delivery truck entering the city of Scranton, Pennsylvania. The listener hears Chapin narrate the events, rather than seeing them directly, so they do not experience the fictional events in the track. Terrone argues, however, that story songs are atypical. It is more common (he claims) for a pop track to express an attitude or an emotion. The primary object of the listener's awareness (the fictional content to which their experience collapses) is not a series of events but an emotion and feeling. To consider a specific example: When listening to David Bowie singing "Space Oddity", we do not experience (imaginatively) the space capsule in the way we do when watching a movie like *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Instead, we experience a feeling that might be described as lonely helplessness.

Terrone summarizes this as the suggestion that, "the listener can enjoy the impression of experiencing a recording of a series of thoughts and feelings, even though she knows that this is a recording of *a performance representing* a series of thoughts and feelings" (p. 439, italics in original). This may look similar to the view, which Tolstoy holds for all art, that "auditors are infected by the feelings which the author has felt" (Tolstoy 2021 [1904], ch. 5). The difference is that, on Terrone's account of popular music, the feelings are not ones which the singer is feeling as themselves but instead ones felt by the song persona occupied by the singer. In experiencing a pop song, he writes, "we can directly experience thoughts and feelings of a character" (Terrone 2020, p. 445). To continue with the example: The lonely helplessness is not that of David Bowie but instead of the character Major Tom himself.

One might object to Terrone that collapse to thoughts and feelings is not unique to pop music tracks. Perhaps it happens regularly with other arts, such as poetry. The analogy with Tolstoy even suggests that it can happen with all art. Up to a point, this could be a friendly amendment of Terrone's account. His central claim about recorded tracks is that (like recorded video) music tracks especially encourage phenomenal collapse and that (unlike video) what tracks collapse to is the experience of feelings. And because of this latter point, he maintains that "[recorded] songs… have a special capacity of providing access to other minds" (Terrone 2020, p. 452).

2.2 Heartfelt connection

Terrone concludes provocatively that listening to music allows us to overcome the problem of other minds. He writes that "a subject of experience is the only one who can know 'what it is like' to feel what he or she is feeling. Pop songs encourage us to play a game of make-believe whereby we can somehow overcome this cognitive limitation. We can discover what it is like to experience what another subject is experiencing by listening to his or her mental states" (Terrone 2020, p. 452).

One might object: Even though it is access to fictional mental states rather than real ones, the phenomenology of directly experiencing someone else's mental states would be like alien or psionic telepathy from a science fiction story. We do not have experiences like that when listening to music![2]

Perhaps this objection could be answered by understanding the connection to the emotional content not on the model of science fiction telepathy but instead on the model of normal human empathy. Mario Attie-Picker, Tara Venkatesan, George E. Newman, and Joshua Knobe argue that the value of listening to sad music is that it creates a sense of *connection*. This kind of connection is not some exotic thing which is unique to music. Instead, they write, "the connection involved in music is very much like that of heartfelt conversations" (Attie-Picker et al. 2024, p. 51).[3] Fine, but to *what* or *whom* one is connected? They decline to answer, concluding: "We value sad music because it connects us. To what exactly is a question for another day" (Attie-Picker et al. 2024, p. 62). Terrone's suggestion provides an answer: The connection is with the character played by the singer—i.e., the song persona. So drawing this connection both provides some defense of Terrone's account of experiencing pop music and fills a lacuna in the account of connection given by Attie-Picker et al.

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[2] Unless one is very high, and then it is the drugs rather than the music that account for the phenomenon.

[3] Regarding the role of empathy in heartfelt being-with, see also Darwall (2024, ch. 8). Darwall argues that heartfelt connection is a second-person, interpersonal relation, making it pressing to consider who the listener connects to when they listen to music.

In many cases, the song persona is fictional. Some singers, however, adopt what Ley Cray (2019) calls a transparent performance persona. The audience is invited to think of the character that the singer is playing as being the singer themself. Such sincere singer-songwriters might express their own personal feelings. For example, the self-destructive angst expressed by Trent Reznor in "Hurt" is drawn from his own experience. In cases like that, the feeling of connection might not be just to the character in the song but to the singer themself. It is less clear what to say about the angst expressed in Johnny Cash's influential cover of "Hurt". Perhaps Cash uses Reznor's lyrics to express his own emotions— or perhaps Cash just plays the Reznor character in his performance.[4] In any case, the emotional connection created is to the persona.

Nevertheless, this does not quite vindicate Terrone's account. After all, his claim is that listening to popular music exhibits the collapse phenomenon. The results of Attie-Picker et al. show instead that listening to music provides a feeling of connection, a feeling which is like the feeling of connection that results from heart-felt conversation. Since heart-felt conversation does not explicitly involve the collapse phenomenon, neither does connection through music.

One possible response would be to insist that what makes conversation heartfelt and empathic is in fact some kind of collapse. But even if it is some kind of collapse, it does not seem like the kind identified by Terrone. Heartfelt conversation typically involves an awareness of the presence of the person in their embodied particularity rather than awareness merely of their emotional state.

A different response would be to say that there is something distinctive about the emotional connection made in music which sets it apart from the second-person relation of heartfelt connection. Perhaps surprisingly, Attie-Picker et al. argue in a separate paper (with Venkatesan as the lead author) that enjoying sad art involves *appropriation*, taking the sadness to be an expression of one's own emotions (Venkatesan et al. 2025). In a passage they cite approvingly, Arthur Danto writes that literary reference is "about each individual that reads the text at the moment that individual reads it" and that the reader identifies themself "with the actual subject of the text" (Danto 1984, p. 170). For music, the thought is that the listener appropriates the emotions of the song persona, experiencing the work as an expression of their own emotions. Yet it is not clear that this line of response can save Terrone's account. First, Venkatesan et al. and Danto make this claim about all literary art; while Terrone argues that collapsed experience of the persona's emotions is a special feature of recorded music. Second, the value of appropriation is that the listener recognizes the singer or the songwriter as having emotions like the ones that the listener themself has. As Venkatesan et al. put it, "part of what makes people feel drawn to

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[4] Regarding the appreciation of cover versions, see Magnus et al. (2022) and Magnus (2022).

expressions of sadness in art is their power to make people feel less alone" (Venkatesan et al. 2025, p. 24 of on-line first version). The persona's emotion and the listener's emotion are the same type— both sadness, for example— but separate instances of sadness. This aligns *appropriation* with *connection*, both as fundamentally second-personal. When a listener experiences a song as an expression of their own emotion, on this reading, they feel connected to others who have similar emotions.

2.3 The feeling of singing along

To sum up the action so far: Terrone's claim is that the experience of pop music typically involves what we might call *collapsed feeling-in*, where the primary object of experience is not the sounds, the performer, or the fictional narrative recounted in the song. Instead, the collapse is to the feelings of the character in the song. The feelings are not experienced indirectly, as when I see the anguished look on someone's face and thereby know that they are in pain. Instead, the feelings are experienced immediately, in the way that we often experience a fictional world when watching a film.[5] In the previous section, we argued that this fails to align with the experience that a listener has if they encounter the character in the song as a conversation partner.

In order to actually experience the feelings of the song persona, one must engage with the song in the first-person. This does not occur when the song persona is treated as an interlocutor. However, one common way of experiencing recorded music is to sing along with it. And in that case, the audience puts themself in the role of the song persona. As Aaron Smuts writes, "While listening to songs, people commonly vocalize. They sing or talk out the lyrics. The words sometimes become their own. In the process, listeners often assume the singer-persona" (Smuts 2013, p. 127).

When singing along, the listener does— or at least can— have the feelings of the song persona show up as the central object of their attention. When they know the song well, the listener who sings along does not need to focus on the words themselves. Instead, they can occupy the song persona just as much as a performer who is singing the song. This is especially true when they are themselves already prone to emotions of that kind— paradigmatically love or heartbreak, but also angst, fear, pride, and so on.

In this respect, listening to music is different than watching a movie or reading a novel. It is possible, (we suppose) to adopt a character when reciting a monologue along with an actor on-screen, but most of us are not method actors who inhabit fictional characters in that way. Terrone argues that the distinct feature of music is experiencing the feelings of the song persona directly— and this can occur when

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[5] If Terrone's claim were not this strong, then it would not make sense for him to say that the experience amounts to overcoming (or pretending to overcome) the problem of other minds.

singing along. But if, as we suggest, it does not occur in other kinds of listening, then it is not nearly as ubiquitous in pop music as Terrone suggests.

So, we argue, Terrone is right that experiencing recorded music can involve the collapse phenomenon, where the thing to which the experience collapses is not a third-person narrative (or a second-person heartfelt connection) but instead a first-person emotion. However, our defense of this claim restricts it to when the listener sings along and positions themselves in the role of the song persona.[6]

In the remainder of the paper, we argue that there are further kinds of collapse which are possible— even common— in listening to popular music. Making this point requires revisiting the collapse phenomenon and distinguishing kinds of collapse that are not discussed by Hopkins or Terrone.

3. Elaborating on the collapse phenomenon

Whereas Hopkins and Terrone distinguish just two tiers (the performance and the fiction), we want to distinguish between three: the actual production events, the edited-together fiction of a unified performance, and the fiction represented in the unified performance. This will allow us to recognize other kinds of collapse. We begin with this distinction for film and then extend it to music.

3.1 For movies

Recall Wes Anderson's adaptations of the Roald Dahl's short stories. The experience of watching one of these might feel like the experience of watching a live stage play. However, the filming was certainly not done in one take, and it's likely that the segments were not even filmed in the order in which they are finally presented. So Hopkins' first tier (of a coherent and in-sequence performance) is itself a fiction. As Hopkins comments about a different example, what is presented on-screen as a single, continuous conversation is the result of "a disjointed series of brief conversational fragments, scattered over a far longer period of time and, quite possibly, over space" (Hopkins 2008, p. 152). Because Hopkins' focus is on collapsed experience of the second tier (the narrative), he counts both the actual events of production and the edited performance as being in the first tier. For our purposes, however, we want to distinguish these. On the one hand, there are production events spread perhaps across weeks of shooting with different combinations of cast in different locations. On the other, there are those events cut together so that they appear to the audience as one continuous performance.

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[6] Nothing in our argument requires that the singing along be out loud. Perhaps the same phenomenology could result from sub-vocalizing the lyrics. However, one of the present authors finds that it is much more muted unless they actually sing out loud.

This distinguishes three tiers: the production events, the (partly fictional) performance, and the fictional story.

When watching a movie, a viewer might be primarily aware of the performance tier, the story tier, or both. The actual production events can only be experienced by separate research, like watching a making-of documentary. A viewer interested in the craft of film-making might speculate or infer about the production events, but does not see them in the images on the screen.[7]

The collapse phenomenon, as Hopkins introduces it, is when the viewer is primarily aware of the story tier rather than the screen image itself or the performance tier. Yet we might think of a user who is primarily aware of the performance tier— and not the screen image itself— as still experiencing a kind of collapse.

Objects which might appear to someone watching a film:	Objects which might appear to someone listening to a track:
Lights on the screen and sounds from the speakers	Sounds from the speakers
The fictional performance created by editing and post-production	The fictional performance created by editing and post-production
The fictional story of the film	The fictional song persona

Figure 1: Tiers in the experience of movies and music.

3.2 For music

Just as for movies, we can distinguish three different tiers for popular music: the production events, the fictional performance of the music, and the fictional content of the track.

We discussed collapse to the fictional content of the track above. But a collapse phenomenon can also occur when the audience primarily experiences the fictional performance. This is not a possibility that Terrone addresses. Instead, he focuses on collapse to what we have called the final tier. He argues that

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[7] There are exceptions, as when poor editing and production allow a viewer to see parts of the production. For example, if a boom mic is visible at the edge of a frame, then it is arguably just part of the production rather than part of the fictional performance tier.

the fictional content which the audience primarily experiences is not a story, but is instead emotions and feeling. Nevertheless, experiencing primarily the fictional performance— a kind of collapsed hearing-in— seems common. Think, for example, of someone attending to the fictional performance in order to play the song in a cover band.

A pop music track produces a continuous musical object from discontinuous events in the studio. To take a vivid example, Billy Eilish's vocal part in her 2021 track "Happier Than Ever" is a composite of 87 separate takes (Kraftman 2022). It is nonetheless natural to hear her part as a coherent, continuous performance. This is not merely to hear it as a continuous sonic event (the sound coming out of the speakers) but to hear it as if she were singing it in one take. Experiencing the result as a performance in this way is to engage with a fiction, to play a perhaps unwitting game of make-believe.

In some cases, the fiction is more explicit. For example, Natalie Cole's 1991 "Unforgettable" has her singing along with recordings of her late father, edited so that they sound as if they are performing a duet. Listeners may well know that she is singing so as to pair with the earlier recording but nevertheless hear it as a duet.

The Beatles planned to do something similar in 1995, with the then-surviving members working in the studio to play along with a 1977 recording of the late John Lennon singing "Now and Then."[8] They were unable to make it work, but revisited the project after guitarist George Harrison had died. So the Beatles' 2023 track of "Now and Then" incorporates newly restored material from Lennon's 1977 recording, Harrison's guitar part from the 1995 sessions, and new material recorded by Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr. Insofar as the production effort is successful, listeners might experience the track as if it were a performance by the four band members together.

To our ears, the Beatles' "Now and Then" is not ultimately successful. We hear it more as a recorded montage than as a coherent performance. That is just to say that we do not experience a collapse phenomenon when listening to the track. Some listeners do; one writes "it sounded like all the Beatles were in the same room" (Childers 2023).

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[8] In 1995, the then-surviving Beatles also recorded "Real Love" and "Free as a Bird" which both combined new material with demo vocals by Lennon. Those illustrate the same phenomenon, but "Now and Then" is more striking because the final track ended up including posthumous material from Harrison as well.

In collapsed hearing-in, where the listener hears a fictional performance, it is usually experienced in the third person. As the listener describes when "Now and Then" is successful for them, they hear it as the Beatles being together.

Because his focus is on a song's story and the song persona, Terrone attends almost exclusively to song lyrics. But collapse to the fictional performance occurs for instrumental and musical elements as well. Listeners are largely oblivious to different takes of an instrumental part having been composed together with careful editing. Indeed, pulling it apart would require information that listeners typically do not have access to. Even if the part is a single take, many features of a performance are mostly invisible in normal listening— e.g., how a guitar line was fingered, what kind of guitar was played, etc. Digital editing increases the distance between performance acts and final sound, as when the timing is quantized and effects are used to change the pitch, localization, and timbre of the sounds.

There is also an instrumental analogue to the kind of collapse that can occur when singing along. When doing air guitar or drumming along, the listener engages in a make-believe that they are the performer. This pretense may allow them to engage the fictional performance as if it were a first-person product of their own agency. This is never a perfect illusion, of course, but it gives the listener some sense of *doing*— a sense of what it's like to be inside the performance, but without the burdens of actually needing to exercise the skill required. Air drumming and air guitar as well as some dancing and quasi-conducting (e.g., accentuating hits in the music with fist-pumps, and so on) similarly submerge the details of performance under an attitude of making the music. Unfettered by the complications of detail involved in the actual playing of the drums or guitar, such activities can make the emotive content of the performance salient while withdrawing the details.

At a particular moment, the semantic contents of the lyrics might not be an explicit object of awareness at all. A listener can slip between hearing the fictional story being told, relating to the fictional emotions of the song persona, and rocking along with the fictional performance of the music, depending on how they direct their attention. By singing or moving along, they can also slip into experiencing the fictional feelings of the song persona or the fictional agency of performance.

4. The collapse phenomenon and live performance

Terrone argues that the collapse phenomenon is a feature of listening to recorded music in contrast with listening to live music. Imagine, for example, someone singing and playing guitar on a bench in the park. A listener standing in front of them does not experience collapse. There is no difference between the

musical production and the coherent performance, and the embodied presence of the performer makes it impossible for the listener to experience the emotional content of the song separately from the performer's presence. In other cases, though, modern music technology complicates the performance situation.

Traditionally, and under a certain kind of normal circumstances, the experience of live performance of music— like that of live theatre— might seem to force a focus (collapse) into our middle level of a coherent act of performance. The context and trappings of live performance are much like those of a stage play, where audience and performer share a real space and horizons of the experience that include lighting, backstage entrances, a room full of other people experiencing the performance, and the like. This seems to prevent a collapse and withdrawal or disappearance of the acts of performance as such. Real performers are sharing the same space and time as the audience members, and are nearly unavoidably experienced as such.

Under these traditional constraints of live performance, there is no gap of multiple takes or editing between the art of making the music and the performance itself. Live music happens in real time, so there is no comping together various vocal takes, playing the solo independently a few times to get it right, or similar kinds of things that are standard parts of producing both film and recorded music, and which provide a kind of illusion of unified performance central to the middle tier of experiencing the film or the music.

With purely acoustic live performance, and some performances using electronics and amplification as well, the spatiality of the performance is further encouragement for seeing and hearing it as a unified performance accomplished by multiple musicians playing their own parts and located in particular places in the listener's shared space with them.

But with modern techniques of live sound production the experiential distance between live performance and recorded track decreases significantly. When all the sound heard by the audience is processed and mixed through a central board, the audience is not presented with the musicians as separate sound sources. So their distinct locations might disappear, making the whole performance show up as one sound. Moreover, there can be significant levels of modification and processing between the action of the performer and the sound heard by the audience. The live use of Auto-Tune, as well as the active technological doubling or harmonizing of parts, push the hearing-as of a live performance in the direction of hearing-as a recorded track. And a performance might be less than fully live, using backing tracks ranging from minimal percussion that is not much more than a click track to full-on instrumental and vocal tracks. In the extreme case, most of the actual audio heard by the audience may be either pre-

recorded or produced by samplers and synthesizers running from programmed control tracks (such as MIDI).

In cases like these, the actions taken by the performers on stage might withdraw from the audience's awareness, replaced by the fictional performance constituted by fragments of what happens on stage along with various electronic elements. This resembles collapse to the fictional performance which listeners experience when listening to a studio-produced track.

This underscores the diverse possibilities of collapse in musical experience.

5. Conclusion

When watching a movie, there is one primary collapse phenomenon where the viewer is aware of the talkings and doings of the film's fictional characters. On the same model, Terrone argues that there is one kind of collapse that is typical when listening to a pop music track:

- Fictional first-person experience of the song persona's emotions.

We agree that this is one possible kind of experience, especially when listening and singing along. However, we have also discussed several other ways that listeners might hear a track:

- Fictional second-person heartfelt connection to the song persona.
- Third-person experience of the fictional musical performance.
- Fictional first-person experience of the agency of playing the music, as when miming an instrument.

Each of these is a collapse phenomenon, in the sense that a fictional object becomes the listener's primary object of awareness.

There are further kinds of experience which are possible when listening as a group, where the primary objects of awareness are real or imagined connections to other members of the audience. But these lie beyond the scope of this paper.[9]

Particular listeners might experience all or just some of these phenomena. And it is possible to shift between them, by redirecting attention and taking different actions while listening. We suggest that none of these is the normative or defining way to experience popular music. Rather, they are all legitimate and offer their own peculiar charms.

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[9] See Polite (2019).

So Terrone is right that listening to popular music is like watching a film in that both exhibit collapse phenomena— but he is wrong that there is a singular typical collapse phenomenon for music. Whereas collapsed seeing-in is the primary collapse phenomenon at work when watching movies, there are broader possibilities when listening to music.

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