

# **Dialect dissonance: The mediation of indexical incoherence**

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## **DIALECT CONSONANCE**

Dialectology and the sociolinguistics of language variation and change are generally premised on the idea of semiotic coherence.<sup>1</sup> A more evocative term is ‘consonance’, which most literally applies to ‘sound’ and so to phonetic dimensions of speech, including dialect. Dialect consonance implies that speech styles ‘coherently ring out’ or ‘harmoniously sound out’ the social environments and speakers with which and with whom they are associated. It is not an exaggeration to say that without the assumption of dialect consonance, there would be no social and regional dialectology. Dialects have to be, in a general sense, ‘consonant with’ some social or regional formation in order to come to our attention and to function in a social sense.

Of course, there are many complexities and caveats in *how* dialect forms and styles come to be heard as consonant with social contexts. Current research in the sociolinguistics of indexical relations tends to emphasise the indirectness and the indeterminacy of social meaning (e.g. Eckert 2016; Gal 2016). It also emphasises the processual and reflexive nature of meaning-making (e.g. Agha 2007; Silverstein 2016), and these will be important considerations in the present chapter. But let us persist, for the moment, in stressing the central point. For a way of speaking to ‘work’ as a dialect, there has to be an achievable coherence, or consonance, between forms and meanings. This is best referred to as semiotic consonance, because the idea of semiosis offers a more rounded approach to meaning, usefully blurring the distinction between the linguistic and the social; social meaning, after all, resides in the holistic perception of linguistic styles playing a part in the semiotic constitution of the social.

This idea has been theorised by Feld (e.g. 2015) who conceives of ‘acoustemology’ – a shortened version of the phrase ‘acoustic epistemology’. This refers to the

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potential for sound to function as a resource for knowing – particularly, in Feld’s conception, knowing a place or a culture. Once again, this idea goes well beyond a correlational view of sound and culture, the one co-varying with the other. It makes the claim that to know certain sounds is an element in our discovery and appreciation of certain sorts of cultural distinctiveness. Dialects are acoustemological resources. Their semiotic consonance is an element of how we know certain groups and places through language, and how these dimensions fuse into an appreciation of understandable distinctiveness.

The sociolinguistic concept of style gives another way of addressing these same semiotic processes. The concept of style presumes that sets of coherence relationships exist, firstly ‘internally’, *across* particular linguistic/semiotic features. A style’s constituent features ‘make sense’ as a meaningful gestalt; styles are necessarily meaningful, whereas individual linguistic features are likely to be meaningless or at least ambiguous. Then, in a second dimension, a style’s consonance cannot be achieved without coherence also existing *between* the linguistic/semiotic complex *and* its particular social values. These are the qualities that give any style a degree of stability and meaningfulness within a particular sociolinguistic ecology. When we invoke the word ‘style’ as a countable noun (‘a [singular] style’), we are therefore doing more than acknowledging featural coherence – the idea that this feature and that feature ‘belong together’ (which was an early sociolinguistic insight into style, see Ervin-Tripp 1972). We are also endorsing the value of a style as a culturally consonant formation. On the other hand, we also know that we need to keep nominalised ‘styles’ theoretically in continual tension with the verbalised concept of ‘styling’, because the stability and consonance of styles are always provisional and subject to being reconfigured in creative, local acts of stylistic practice (Coupland 2007).

### THE MAKING, REMAKING AND UNMAKING OF SOCIAL MEANING

The processes I want to explore in this chapter are ones where existing patterns of dialect consonance are torn apart – that is, when we see *dissonance* being actively created. I want to suggest that media have unique resources that allow them to stage not only stylistic consonance but, sometimes, stylistic dissonance, and dissonances of different sorts. But before we get to that, it seems necessary to acknowledge that, in the sociolinguistics of style, there has *always* been an appreciation that dialect styles are prone to being reconfigured (‘reaccentuated’ is Bakhtin’s word; see, for example, Bakhtin 1986: 79), and moulded into new semiotic relations. This makes it necessary to address questions like these: ‘So what is new about stylistic dissonance?’; ‘Don’t styles always go through processes of being unmade and remade?’.

This section makes the case that, despite acknowledging degrees of fluidity in relation to styles and styling, sociolinguists have oriented almost exclusively to consonance and the achievement of normativity, as opposed to dissonance and the achievement of counter-normativity.

The dualistic, dialectical approach to style mentioned at the end of the previous section – styles as culturally coherent ways of speaking, but also styling as norm-(re)configuring social action – was implicit in the earliest sociolinguistic approaches to style (e.g. Bell 1984; Coupland 1980), although the more creative, dynamic, interactionally-focused side of the dialectic has kept on being ‘discovered’ in subsequent treatments. (Creativity clearly caught up with structure in the hierarchy of sociolinguistic interests some years ago.) It has certainly been important to keep challenging the deterministic assumption, if it still exists, that the social meanings of speech styles can be adequately explained by pointing to socially-correlated indexicals. On the other hand, researchers taking a constructionist and an emergent view of style need to be clear about what exactly is being unmade and remade in the local contexts that they study.

One influential instance is Eckert’s research on adolescent style groups at Belten High. When Eckert (2004) retrospects on her own ethnographic fieldwork in Detroit, she concludes that, in her data, ‘a sense of place’ is stylistically achieved through “an adolescent social order...based, not on birth, but on speakers’ own construction of their places in that social order”, and that those constructions in turn reflect young people’s variable ‘urban associations’ (*ibid.*: 116). This finding corrects the possible presumption that there would be consonance between young people’s speech styles and structures of social class in the urban speech community – that the style group referred to as Burnouts might have been ‘doing class’ in their distinctive way of speaking. Eckert explains how sociolinguistic norms in her data arose and became consequential for young people in relation to participation orders *both* within schools themselves *and* within the wider, class-structured urban community. A sense of place, both socially- and geographically-speaking, is what Eckert showed to be ultimately achieved stylistically in the interaction between school-based and city-based orders of symbolic action. We might see this process as the unmaking of a speech–class consonance, and the making of more particular, more local consonances that can ultimately be labelled as Jock and Burnout social styles in school. In her recent theoretical accounts of variation (e.g. 2016) Eckert emphasises stylistic agency, but her focus remains on the achievement of indexical order, and on consonance in the sense introduced in this chapter.

Agha’s theory of how norms settle around what he calls speech registers are based in this same idea. Agha occasionally refers to something similar to consonance when he uses the term ‘congruence’ (2007: 161). He says that sociolinguistic norms may be based in observed correlations, such as ‘people of type X say Y’, but,

following Silverstein, he emphasises the importance of metapragmatic processes through which patterns of spoken usage are ‘reflexively grasped’ as being ‘normal’, and he says that it is ‘reflexive models’ of this sort that normalise patterns of usage (2007: 124–5). Agha therefore views linguistic standardisation as the sedimenting of a reflexive model of speech that is based in judgements not only of normality or typicality but also of ‘appropriateness’, ‘good-ness’, and so on – presumably including what Kristiansen (1997) calls ‘the best speech’. For Agha, enregisterment is the general process by which styles ‘are given distinctive forms of metapragmatic treatment in use’; it is the process whereby styles are ‘reflexively endogenized to a register model’ (2007: 186). This account is, once again, based in the idea that social meanings, conventionalised in stylistic usage, come to be perceived as coherent, or congruent, or consonant with groups of speakers and/or contexts of use. Stereotype-conforming usage then further consolidates the normativity (or further entrenches the enregisterment) of a style. Agha’s focus on interaction therefore feeds into a theory of consonance, rather than opposing it, even though he also stresses the dynamic and transformative potential of social action.

Labov’s theoretical work on language variation and change has itself oriented to a conception of consonance, but without using this term. Labov’s quest to document and to explain orderly variation brought ‘orderliness’ into conceptual opposition with ‘variation’. Indeed, Labov has suggested that sociolinguistic variation and change are basically a disruptive force – “a disturbance of the form/meaning relationship” (Labov 1994: 9). He says that this leads to a ‘Darwinian paradox’, as follows. The “fundamental mechanism” of “the evolution of species” is “absent” from “the evolution of language” (Labov 2001: 14–5). Labov’s argument is that Darwinism would predict an ever-strengthening relationship of consonance between linguistic form and social meaning, when in fact we know that children end up not (or not entirely) speaking like their parents: the forms of vernacular speech change inter-generationally, even when they (arguably) index the same social meanings.

If sound change is, as Labov says, “maladaptive” (*ibid.*: 10) in a Darwinian sense, then its negative effects are mitigated by the orderliness of patterned variation that he has described. In this view, linguistic normativity makes variation predictable and generally orderly. But well beyond variationist theory, we very regularly find the idea in sociolinguistics that the social world of language use only becomes manageable because of a sufficient consonance between the social and the linguistic. Local stylistic operations may fleetingly infringe and even reshape sociolinguistic norms, but there is a consensus that this is typically in the service of establishing revised forms of consonance. In other words, there is a consensus about consensus, and a general tendency to see orderly meaning within sociolinguistic diversity.

But can there not be real and profound *dissonance* too? What might real dissonance look like and where might we find it? I will consider two specific cases, be-

low. The first is a long-running series of UK television advertisements for *Boddingtons Bitter* (beer); the second is a series of sketches, referred to as ‘the World War II Pilots’, from a popular BBC television comedy sketch-show, *The Armstrong and Miller Show*. In each case, dialect-play is a central part of the construction of dissonant indexical meanings, where dialect indexicalities conflict strikingly, either in opposition to visual and other contextual tropes, or ‘internally’, breaking co-occurrence norms for dialect styles. These performances manufacture a degree of semiotic uncertainty that can be ideologically productive. They arguably manage to destabilise familiar presuppositions about dialect and class.

Once again, however, it is necessary to consider the view that we already know about dissonance. Haven’t there been studies of non-consonant stylistic performance, when norms are infringed and expectations are confounded in interaction? It is undeniable that stylistic counter-normativity is far from being a new idea. All the same, it seems to be true that, when dissonances have been recognised, they are always ‘minor’ instances, ones where the presumption of consonance has allowed us to interpret dissonance as a functional side-effect of a consonant sociolinguistic system. ‘Major’ cases (like the ones to be discussed below), on the other hand, are ones that have potential to throw such a system into crisis.

As discussed in the first section, functioning within a sociolinguistic system premised on consonance allows social actors to act on the presumption that a known way of speaking (a dialect, an accent, a genre, a register, in fact any culturally recognised style in the open sense of that term – an ‘enregistered register’ in Agha’s terms) can, within limits, be reliably taken to index the social group or social circumstances of usage with which it is associated. It is therefore possible to ‘read’ a style (again within limits) as indexing a persona – possibly focused as an abstracted prototypical speaker, or possibly as an actual, particular individual with stereotypically known social attributes and incumbencies – or as indexing a mode of practice in which predictable social actors will participate. Consonance implies that all recognised styles, we might say, ‘know their place’ in the social matrix. More accurately, we might say that it is a condition of sociolinguistic competence for speakers/actors ‘to know the place of style’, where ‘place’ actually refers to a very wide-ranging profile of social and contextual considerations, not just locality (cf. ‘discourses in place’, in the sense of Scollon and Scollon 2003).

It is important to emphasise that achieving and respecting consonance, even though this seems to be a dominant assumption, are often repressive ideological processes. ‘Knowing one’s place’ (which is usually an objectionable expression in itself) includes what Lippi-Green (2011) calls ‘language subordination’, actively relegating individuals and groups to low-status social positions on the basis of speech style characteristics. Ideology critique needs to question the positions from which the normative judgements implied in ‘knowing your place’ are made, and

what impacts are created and felt, how and by whom. In saying that dialect sociolinguistics is premised on consonance I do not mean to suggest that sociolinguists have acquiesced to the power-coding of sociolinguistic norms. In fact the opposite is the case, and sociolinguistic explorations of counter-normative practices have generally been motivated by awareness that infringing consonance can be a progressive force for change. This is my motivation in exploring dissonance too. Even so, studies have tended to view ‘minor’ dissonances as characteristics of predominantly consonant sociolinguistic arrangements. Later in the chapter I will show how the construction of more ‘major’ dissonances can do the work of ideological critique.

So what do ‘minor’ dissonances look like? As I have argued above, a degree of dissonance (under various descriptive labels) has been recognised to be an important but almost universal resource in the management of self-identity and interpersonal relations. Labov’s original (1972) perspective on style, including his principle stipulating that ‘there are no single-style speakers’, was an important early acknowledgement that something like non-consonance – if this means people speaking outside the narrowest bounds of their supposedly social-category-constituted styles – is a general characteristic of sociolinguistic performance. Whether interpreted as contextual effects of variable attention to speech (Labov 1972) or as strategic interpersonal convergence/ divergence within the accommodation theory paradigm (Giles and Powesland 1975), it was recognised very early on that non-fully-consonant practice was commonplace and lay at the heart of the negotiation of social meaning. On the other hand, and particularly in retrospect, we can see how Labov’s and Giles’s early perspectives both implied that non-fully-consonant practice (what was simply called ‘style-shifting’) was actually interpreted as *reconfirming consonance* at a more abstract level. Style-shifting for Labov was characteristic of all social groups’ speech, but particularly characteristic of lower-status groups’ predictable speech under more stressful and monitored conditions of speaking. For Giles, convergence and divergence were options *within the normative bounds* of speakers’ interpersonal accommodation strategies. These shifts were not seen as challenging the integrity of a speaker’s sociolinguistic identity, nor as challenging the wider normative frameworks in which speakers operated. When criticism of the implied conception of ‘the authentic speaker’ surfaced in relation to variationist sociolinguistic research (Bucholtz 2003; Coupland 2003; Eckert 2003), it was largely a reaction against the historical over-consolidation of sociolinguistic structure; this perspective was too accepting of the principle of consonance (see Coupland 2010, 2014b for a more detailed discussion of authenticity in sociolinguistics).

Agha has considered what he calls ‘contrary-to-stereotype effects’ in the negotiation of social meaning in interaction, “cases where co-occurring signs partially modify the stereotypic effects of the register token, thus formulating a non-default

construal *for the overall text configuration*” (original emphasis) (2007: 161).<sup>2</sup> He gives the example of reported speech (constructed dialogue), which is a particularly straightforward instance of semiotic system-conforming (and system-confirming) practice, where predictable indexical associations of a voiced other are brought into play. In other words, a speaker who is already perceived as acting within the bounds of his or her own stylistic bubble of socially consonant meanings is able to momentarily break out of that bubble and embed a different voice in her or his talk, representing it with its own alternative semiotic consonance. In the process, neither form of consonance is necessarily challenged or reaccentuated, although that is also a possible effect. This is classical Bakhtinian territory, as in the following:

...others’ utterances can be introduced directly into the context of the utterance, or one may introduce only individual words or sentences, which then act as representatives of the whole utterance. Both whole utterances and individual words can retain their alien expression, but they can also be re-accentuated (ironically, indignantly, reverently, and so forth). (Bakhtin 1986: 91)

Agha also considers cases which (in his use of the term) have ‘tropic’ (performative) significance where “*the non-congruence of co-textual frame and register token* implies a metaphoric persona for the one uttering that token” (2007: 161, with original emphasis). This is Gumperz’s ‘metaphorical style-shifting’ (1982), equivalent to Bell’s (1984, 1999) ‘initiative style’. The processes of persona management analysed in my own early work on style (e.g. Coupland 1980, 1984, 1985) span the stereotype-conforming and stereotype-non-conforming ‘types’ that Agha recognises. Notwithstanding subtle difference of interpretation across all of these perspectives, they share the stance that metaphorical styling represents productive use of a stable and dominant semiotic framework of meaning–style associations, provided that (Agha says) particular contextual conditions are met. He mentions, for example, that metaphorical styling is only likely to function as designed when relevant people are acquainted with the stereotypes being performed, and when aspects of the performed identity are contextually “cancelled” (*ibid.*: 163), e.g. presumably by a recipient recognising that a voice is being performed.

Stylisation (see the multiple references to Bakhtin’s treatment of the concept in Morris 1994) and crossing (Rampton 1999, 2006; see also Coupland 2001, 2007) are processes that clearly go beyond consonance. Stylisation in my own account

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<sup>2</sup> Jacob Thøgersen helpfully suggests that the critique of ‘consonance thinking’ in sociolinguistics would benefit from a general (socio-)psychological framing, e.g. in terms of schemata or Tversky/Kahnemann’s ‘heuristics and biases’. Humans seem to be programmed to see patterns rather than randomness. This might offer a good account of the perceptual fallacy that makes us see dialectal consonance and not dissonance.

emphasises the designed-in obscurity of social meaning evinced by a styliser, a performer who (at some level of consciousness) is motivated to create a culturally familiar persona for herself or himself, and sometimes for others, whose relationship to the performer is not easily or securely inferable by addressees or other listeners. ‘Whose voice is this?’ and ‘Why am I hearing it here, now?’ are among the interpretive puzzles raised by stylisation. As Rampton says, stylisation is an ‘as if’ design whose indeterminacy is key to its relational and other contextual effects. In his schools data, for example, Rampton (1999) says that acts of crossing into Stylised Asian English were associated with liminal moments – interactional episodes on the margins of institutional categories – when authority structures might have been more negotiable, and when vocal play could challenge dominant norms of interpretation. In stylisation, then, and particularly in Rampton’s extensive ethnographies of school interaction, we see the locally destabilising potential of non-consonant styling.

Yet the deployment of versions of ‘one’s own national accent’ in a local radio show in Wales (Coupland 2001), or of Stylised Asian English versus Creole-influenced style in a multi-ethnic school in the English Midlands (Rampton 1999), and fleeting uses of Posh and Cockney accent styles in London schools (Rampton 2006), still don’t qualify as ‘major’ acts of dissonance. Madsen (2015: 151) discusses the often difficult process of distinguishing stylised from non-stylised utterance, both for social actors and for analysts, and she observes that the speaker’s choice of linguistic features in acts of stylisation in her Danish data is far from random. Indeed, the ‘success’ of stylised performances relies on addressees’ and third parties’ ability to read the indexical references of voiced personas, at least to some extent. Therefore, although stylisation certainly achieves local ‘minor’ dissonances, and although it generates a level of sociolinguistic reflexivity that *might* trigger significant critique of consonance, it does not necessarily achieve this. ‘Major’ dissonant practices, on the other hand, have the power to confound the principles of semiotic coherence on which consonance rests. They are semiotically transgressive.

The consonant relations most immediately relevant to the two examples, below, are presumable but in themselves repressive associations between speech style (in its phonological and lexico-grammatical features, sometimes also linked to visual representations) and social class. In the first case study, the stereotype in question is that of Manchester speakers (and, more broadly, speakers of English in the north of England) being unsophisticated and non-elite. In the second case they relate to the stereotype of young urban ‘street’ speakers (again in an English context) being immature and vain, although other stereotypes are also activated in both cases relating to age, gender, region and time (time-period or epoch). But what is most significant in the data is how these repressively consonant relations are pulled apart in the mediated episodes to be considered. The sociolinguistic stereotypes activated in the



data are, by various means, brought into highly dissonant relationships which call into question the familiar symbolic architecture of what it means to be ‘from Manchester’, to be ‘northern’, to be ‘youthful’, and so on.

### CONSTRUCTED DISSONANCE IN TV ADVERTISING: ‘*THE CREAM OF MANCHESTER*’

Various mediated genres – at least, specifically staged realisations of specific genres – have the potential to push the boundaries not only of the sociolinguistically familiar but also of the sociolinguistically plausible. (Plausibility is a baseline criterion for consonance.)

A particular series of TV advertisements for *Boddingtons Bitter*, using the tagline ‘The Cream of Manchester’, ran on commercial television in the UK from 1992 for most of the decade. (The fact that the ads were run more than twenty years ago is important to my commentary on sociolinguistic change – see below.) ‘Cream’ here refers to both the ‘creamy’ (frothy, smooth) texture of the beer and, more abstractly, to the product being a supposedly elite product (as in the borrowed French expression *la crème de la crème*). Up to 1992 *Boddingtons* had been a brand marketed and consumed almost exclusively in Manchester (with only 5% of sales outside the north-west of England), until it was acquired by the *Whitbread* food and hospitality conglomerate in 1989. Partly on the basis of the ‘Cream of Manchester’ advertising campaign, which won several ‘best ad’ awards, *Whitbread* were able to more than quadruple sales of *Boddingtons* through the 1990s, making it the UK’s best-selling canned beer. The ad campaign was reported (in the *Financial Times*) as having revitalised the image of the city of Manchester as well as the image of the product. A Wikipedia entry ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boddingtons\\_Brewery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boddingtons_Brewery), retrieved September 2016) comments that the ads “achieved the seemingly impossible task of making bitter [beer] glamorous”. It also suggests that *Boddingtons* became the third-best-known attribute of Manchester, after *Manchester United* (the football team) and *Coronation Street* (the TV soap opera).

Among other forms of dissonance, the series of ads makes regular play of dialect dissonance, in the sense that small elements of dialogue are voiced in a stereotypically Manchester dialect – mainly phonologically indexed but with occasional salient ‘northern’ or Mancunian lexis – in visual contexts and soundscapes that have been elaborately styled to be opulent/elite, exotic or cool (at least according to traditional criteria). The basis of the constructed dissonance is therefore similar to a ‘high’ versus ‘low’ semiotic contrast (cf. Rampton 2006: 341ff., but see below) whereby conventional images of elite or otherwise enviable culture are brought into conflict with stereotyped associations between Manchester/ north of England work-

ing-class and ‘ordinary’ culture and speech. The theme of ‘cream’ is articulated in quite surreal ways, based around different linguistic and visual puns. The ads coalesce not only the meanings of ‘cream’ as in creamy beer with ‘cream’ as in elite, but also ‘cream’ in the context of ice-cream and face-cream (as a beauty product).

One famous ad in this series (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEEU1nQeGNA>) opens with a young, bodily-sculpted, black male athlete bursting into view through a sheet of golden flame, then running faster than human speed through a desert landscape in which some sort of vehicle is also glimpsed, also moving implausibly fast. (It is unnecessary to provide a line-by-line transcript because most of the ad is dialogue-free. When spoken elements are transcribed, here and in the second case study, syllabic stress is marked by underlining; unhearable utterances are marked by (( )); short pauses are marked as (.); and audience laughter is indicated by XXXX.)

The athlete, who we sometimes see in fast-edited close-ups of his eyes, feet, sweat-drenched torso and muscles, leaps from the pinnacle of one huge termite mound to another, spans water-filled ravines and sprints in pursuit of the anonymous vehicle. The female driver eventually sees the athlete in her rear-view mirror and skids to a halt in a cloud of dust. At that point (about half way through the 40-second commercial) the pulsating heavy-base techno-beat soundtrack (reminiscent of The Prodigy’s *Firestarter*) dissolves into the tinkling bells of an ice-cream van, played through the van’s small, crackly PA system. (Ice-cream vans are a traditional urban summertime phenomenon in the UK, where ice-cream sellers announce their presence with tinkling versions of hackneyed tunes played over rudimentary PA systems, attracting children to buy their pumped soft ice-cream.)

As the athlete reaches the van, the female, now styled as an ice-cream seller, puts a pint of *Boddingtons* in front of him through the serving window. We hear the beer glass being put down on the counter (a nicely mundane acoustic touch, contrasting sharply with the earlier sound track). The athlete gulps the beer noisily (another dissonant sound). She asks him *do you want a flake in that love?*. He raises his eyebrows, nods and appreciatively replies *ta*, ‘thank you’. A final still shot shows a picture of a pint of Boddingtons beer with a chocolate stick in it, with the tagline “Boddingtons – The Cream of Manchester”, in front of a moving image of the ice-cream van resuming its hectic desert journey.

The most immediate planned dissonance here is the fact that the two protagonists speak with Manchester accents, in a context designed as a scene from a high-octane super-hero adventure film. Very few phono-opportunities for Manchester voice are present. In the athlete’s case it is simply the fronted, raised, nasalised long /a/ of *ta*, but this is bolstered by a visual and acoustic shift from the athlete being represented as a sprinting, muscled super-hero figure to being represented as a pleasant-looking, non-threatening, rather vacantly smiling man who drinks beer

noisily and appreciatively when he is thirsty. His reformatted ‘ordinary Mancunian’ semiotic demeanour matches that of the ice-cream seller female, whose attractive face we have previously glimpsed only in close-up, perhaps with sexualised overtones, as she speeds through the desert, before she resolves visually into a conventional image of an ice-cream salesperson, wearing an old-fashioned pink and white dress. Dialectally, she also has ‘northern’ [ʊ] as opposed to [ʌ] in the address-form/term of endearment *love* (using his lexical sets notation, Wells [1982: 351] says that the absence of the FOOT – STRUT split [where these terms represent paradigmatic vowel qualities in specifiable sets of words] is one of the two most important characteristics of northern English accents). She also contracts *want a* to *wanna* (which is a more salient contraction than *wanna* for *want to*). When she asks the athlete if he *wants a flake in that*, she is voicing what an ice-cream seller might ask a child – a ‘flake’ is a branded type of flaky chocolate bar conventionally offered with a cone of soft ice-cream. Its cultural association is that it is a child-like preference, and its combination with soft, pumped ice-cream can possibly be called ‘tasteless’, at least from an elite perspective.

The ad therefore constructs two radically different semiotic frames, each of which is internally consonant across many inter-linked semiotic and stylistic dimensions. The acoustic/acoustemological dimension includes music, sound effects and (dialectal) voice. The visual dimension includes body-imagery, facial expression, the display of key artefacts, scenic backdrops/landscapes and camera focus (how the camera work focuses our attention on specific details and combinations). Sound and vision combine to construct two different action scenarios, populated by very different personas. We can refer to the first frame (the scenario framed as the ad begins) as a ‘heroic–dynamic’ frame. Its two participants are engaged in some unspecified but serious and perhaps sexual dramatic quest, dashing through a hostile desert environment. The heroic–dynamic frame carries many cues to its own mediational context. It is clearly styled as a filmic frame, specifically in the genre of surreal action/adventure films. The second frame can be called a ‘mundane–domestic’ frame. Its two characters, although they are the same embodied individuals as previously, are now styled, dialectally, as being ‘from Manchester’. In this second frame the earlier heroicism is abruptly displaced by the protagonists being revealed to be ‘ordinary Northern folk’ living out the familiar activities of serving and drinking beer, curiously embedded in the practices of buying and selling ice-cream from a mobile van.

Dissonance is achieved, in real time, by shattering our (the audience’s) confidence in the consonance of the first frame, and more enduringly, by forcing us to reflexively question the stylistic incongruity of the two frames. What is incompatible with what, and why? Can we enjoy *Boddingtons* beer in the way that children enjoy ice-cream? Is filmic ‘cool’ really inaccessible to ‘ordinary people’? Why

shouldn't an attractive young woman from Manchester be 'pleasant', sexy and a wild driver at the same time? Why shouldn't a super-human action-hero have a Manchester voice and slurp his beer?

A second example from the same series of ads (see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mp646\\_H\\_xo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mp646_H_xo)) constructs different but in some ways equivalent dissonances. It opens with a panning shot of an elegant young woman, seen from the waist down wearing an evening dress and high heels, walking past a sunken bath with an elaborate ceramic crest in an open-plan room containing a few highly distinctive decorative features – a cello, a live swan, a dressing table. It is sunset and she is finishing her preparations for a romantic evening out. As she sits at the dressing table containing some expensive-looking cosmetics and perfume, we see her beautiful, carefully made-up face in close-up. She slowly applies a creamy substance to her cheek. The ambient music is a slow, bluesy riff, with heavy bass and Hammond-type organ chords, to which a saxophone will later add a melody line. As the woman sensuously rubs the cream into her cheek, a female voice-over very slowly and intensely says *soft* (.) *smooth* (.) *luxurious* (.) *sensation* (.) *of pure cream*, with all sibilants lengthened and heavy breathy voice throughout. Dialectally, the voice-over is performed in conservative RP, e.g. with [ju] in the second syllable of *luxurious* and [jɔ:] in *pure*.<sup>3</sup>

This time, we might refer to the initial frame as a 'romantic–elite' frame. The first dissonant element in the sequence is that, timed within the voice-over word 'sensation', we see a close-up of the woman's hand dipping into a glass of *Boddingtons* beer (identified as such by its standing next to an open beer can carrying the brand name). The act of dipping her hand into the beer is accompanied by a mood-breaking, 'plop' sound effect (not unlike the audible sound of the beer glass being put down on the counter of the ice-cream van in the athlete ad). So this introduces another realisation of the 'mundane–domestic' frame that we encountered in the first ad. The romantic–elite frame resumes, however. The woman senses that her partner is approaching, and she moves to hide the fact that the cream she is applying to her face is beer froth.

The handsome, elegant male partner arrives purposefully, wearing a smart 'black tie' evening suit. She stands and he nuzzles his face against her hair, to smell her perfume. He says *by heck* (.) *you smell gorgeous tonight petal*, which is the

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<sup>3</sup> Anne Fabricus has very helpfully offered an auditory analysis of the data in this chapter, in parallel with my own. She suggests that the word 'soft' in the voice-over sequence has a slightly more open/less rounded LOT vowel, suggesting an American-style realisation, although that characteristic is not maintained in the vowel qualities of the rest of this utterance. The intervocalic /r/ in 'luxurious' is tapped /r/; the GOOSE vowel qualities are high-back; the FACE vowel in 'sensation' has a reduced KIT vowel off-glide; these are all conservative RP realisations.

most striking dialectal dissonance in the ad. *By heck* is a stereotyped ‘northern’ expression of surprise, delivered here with /h/-less onset to the *heck* element, but of course it also leaks the male character’s lack of discursive sophistication in prefacing the compliment that follows. *You smell gorgeous* is a particularly crass stylistic option for complimenting a partner in a romantic encounter (‘you smell...’ perhaps contrasting with ‘your perfume is...’, and ‘gorgeous’ perhaps contrasting with ‘lovely’, by being too physicalist and objectifying as an appraisal). The realisation of /ɔ:/ in the first syllable of *gorgeous* is more open than in RP, and hearable as ‘northern’. *Petal* (particularly with its glottal stop realisation of /t/ and the second syllable reduced to syllabic [l]) is another north-stereotyped term of address and endearment (cf. *love* in the ice-cream, seller’s utterance in the athlete ad).

So the male partner turns out to be neither romantic nor elite. The glamorous female is able to function in both modes. As she turns to camera, she gives the audience an eyebrow flash, unseen by her partner, implying that her use of beer froth as face-cream has succeeded. We (the audience) are complicit with her strategy of using apparently ‘mundane–domestic’ resources in the service of ‘romantic–elite’ ambitions. He bends over the dressing table, slurps noisily from the glass of *Boddingtons* (much as the athlete did) and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. He arranges her expensive coat over her shoulders to leave, and the sultry female voice-over returns, saying *Pamper yourself with Boddingtons (.) the Cream of Manchester*, the last phrase heard against a close camera shot of the beer glass, the beer can, a pub-style beer pump and a written version of the same tagline.

Across these two instances, and in the ‘Cream of Manchester’ ad series as a whole, the stylistic trope being played out is something like *bathos*, which we can define as a sudden fall from the sublime and the exotic to the commonplace and the banal. However, a bathos interpretation seems to require us to acknowledge that the respective linguistic, visual and acoustic indexicalities *do actually* fall into sets that we are happy to analyse as ‘sublime’ versus ‘banal’, ‘high’ versus ‘low’, and so on. In turn, it seems to require us to endorse the ‘sublimeness’ of dynamic super-human chases through the desert (in the athlete ad), and similarly with the elite romance scenario and characterisations (in the evening out ad). More perniciously, it seems to require us to endorse the view that Manchester/north of England speech, demeanour, taste, ways of drinking, etc. *are actually* common or banal. But in fact the ads do *not* construct the ‘before the fall’ and ‘after the fall’ dissonances in this simplistic manner.

In each of the ads, the so-called ‘sublime’ scenario (and in each case this is the initial semiotic construction in the sequencing of the ad) is thoroughly tropic – it is a rather tired stylistic trope, a construction that we are already very familiar with. As noted above, the mix of techno sound track, fast-edited close-ups of moving bodies and vehicles, exotic landscapes and so on is a confection that we know from

high-action adventure films. The genre and details of its stylistic mediation have in fact been borrowed by other sorts of product advertising: they are commonplace, for example, in ads for cars and sports equipment. We may or may not find this projection ‘sublime’, and it is certainly not ‘high’ in a conventional social class-related sense, but we ‘know its place’ as the style of a genre that has been *projected as being* sublime, but which is also easy to think of as heavily clichéd.

Something very similar is the case with the romantic–elite frame in the second ad, which can easily strike us as both clichéd and, this time, passé, in the manner of James Bond films made several decades before the 1990s. (Could *Boddingtons* beer stand in for a chilled vodka martini?) Opulence is clearly in evidence in the ‘before’ (romantic-elite) frame, but it is also arguably a tasteless or at least formulaic version of elite romance (and to that extent it does not pattern well with the ‘high’ versus ‘low’ semiotic contrast that Rampton discusses in association with Posh versus Cockney stylisations in his data). In these ways the constructed dissonances do *not* simply endorse the view that Manchester-ness and northern-ness are ‘banal’ or ‘mundane’. Projecting the two initial frames in the two ads as being *open to* this interpretation is a mediational device of the ads, which simultaneously also invite us to reassess the nature and bases of these stereotypes.

We return to this line of argument in the conclusion section, but we should turn next to the second case study, a particular instance of the World War II Pilots sketches from the (2007–2010) BBC television *Armstrong and Miller Show*. (Note that this is a relatively contemporary case, whereas the *Boddingtons* ads were in circulation two decades ago.)

## CONSTRUCTED DISSONANCE IN TV COMEDY: *THE WORLD WAR II PILOTS*

Dialect dissonance in the *Boddingtons* ads was based in a dialect, at least potentially, ‘not knowing its place’. In the World War II Pilots sketches, dialect dissonance is based *both* in dialects being arguably ‘out of place’ *and* in dialect performances that are *internally* dissonant. What follows is a transcript of one particular sketch in the broadcast BBC (UK) TV series of *The Armstrong and Miller Show* (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4pnTrjEjd0>).

**Extract 1: The World War II Pilots discussing trousers**

The two pilots, wearing fur-collared flying jackets are sitting in an airfield hut, playing cards, smoking pipes and listening to the radio, which is an old-fashioned wireless radio set with a ‘tinny’ acoustic quality. The sequence is filmed in black and white. Chirpy big-band dance music is playing on the radio, until it is interrupted by a radio announcer.

- 1 [Radio announcer] this is the BBC (.) we interrupt the Light Programme  
 2 for a newsflash (.) Whitehall has confirmed that the Nazi invasion of  
 3 Greece has been successful (.) and that a full-scale evacuation of Allied  
 4 ground troops, aircraft and air crew (.) has taken place (.) in a statement (.)  
 5 Mr Churchill said that although the days ahead wou-  
 [Armstrong leans over and switches off the radio. The pilots are looking grim.  
 There is a seven-second pause. Miller looks at Armstrong, anticipating a comment.]  
 6 [Armstrong] I bought some really nice trousers in Camden  
 7 [Miller] yeah? XXXXX  
 8 [Armstrong] they’s well hard-core with all pockets and shit XXXXXXX  
 9 [Miller] you gonna wear them in the plane when you’re doing fighting and  
 10 this and that? XXX  
 11 [Armstrong] you know what?  
 12 [Miller] what blood?  
 13 [Armstrong] I isn’t allowed or something XXXXXXXXX  
 14 [Miller] no way  
 15 [Armstrong] fo sho [for sure] they ain’t uniform or something XXX  
 16 (.) and I can only wear uniform (.) this is me and they is awesome trousers  
 17 man this is ((them)) XXXXXXXXXX you’ve got to wear uniform  
 18 [Miller] that’s so unfair that’s like massively disrespecting of your trousers  
 19 XXXXXXXXXX  
 20 [Armstrong] you know what I’m saying?  
 21 [Miller] at my school right at my school we had a non-uniform day (.) and  
 22 if you brought in two bob you could wear your own clothes (.) and that  
 23 was a well strict school man XXXXXXXX Winchester XXXXXXXXXX  
 24 [Armstrong] they should let us do that here right? because they’re like  
 25 restricting me as a person they’re removing my rights (.) we’re supposed  
 26 to be fighting for freedom and they’re taking away my trousers XXXXX  
 27 [Miller] you just want to be you isn’t it?  
 28 [Armstrong] isn’t it though?  
 29 [Miller] isn’t it? XXXXXXXXX  
 30 [Armstrong] I’m always myself and I don’t care what anyone says  
 31 because this is me I’m myself and I’m always me yeah and that’s what I am  
 XXXXXX  
 32 [Miller] that’s so true because some people just aren’t themselves are  
 33 they? (.) they’re like someone else or something and they’re not them  
 34 XXXXXX  
 35 [Armstrong] I like it when we talk about the deep stuff XXXXX

- 36 anyway I'd better catch you later I've got to go and talk to the group  
 37 captain  
 38 [Miller] why?  
 39 [Armstrong] something about me painting my Spitfire yellow (.) he says  
 40 I'm not allowed  
 41 [Miller] harsh

There is near-consistency of phonological (accent) style through the entire sketch. All three speakers use conservative RP voice, which is consistent with the visual periodisation of the episode (the World War II Royal Air Force uniforms, the look and sound of the radio set, the historical detail of the wartime announcement, etc.). Indeed, World War II pilots, as a social and for that matter an acoustemological category, have been stereotyped as conservative RP speakers in several other TV programmes. The BBC announcer (lines 1–5) has very close [æ] in the words *Programme*, *newsflash* and *evacuation*. He taps the intervocalic /r/ in *for a news flash*. Some of these features and the overall conservative RP style are matched by the Armstrong and Miller pilot characters, e.g. in Armstrong's close [æ] in *Camden* (line 6) and Miller's similar quality of [æ] in *this and that* (line 10). The same quality is used by both pilots in their uses of the *man* address tag (lines 17 and 23). The announcer has near-monophthongal [ɑ:] smoothing of the /au/ diphthong in *ground troops* (line 4, see Wells 1982: 238), and Armstrong also has /au/ smoothing in *trousers* (line 6), while Miller has a very open second element of the diphthong [ɛɑ] in *unfair* (line 18), of the sort that Wells (1982: 281) associates with "upper-class" RP. There is no /h/-dropping or (so-called) G-dropping (alveolar for velar nasal), and so on. The announcer and Armstrong have short [ɪ] in the final syllables of *Nazi* (line 2) and *really* (line 6) (cf. Wells 1982: 257 on the conservative RP feature of 'HAPPY-tensing') – the feature doesn't arise for Miller. The conservative RP style of all three voices is consolidated by particularly clear enunciation of phonetic segments, including preservation of consonants in consonant clusters. In the announcer's case, electronic manipulation of the acoustic signal introduces high-frequency noise which gives the impression of 1940s low-fidelity broadcast radio (cf. Thøgersen, this volume).

But phonological styling is only one part of the semiotic performance. Dialect-internal dissonance is achieved through the striking juxtaposition of conservative RP pronunciation with elements of 'street' or 'urban youth' lexico-grammar and pragmatics in many of the pilots' utterances, and this stylistic incongruity is (as is evident from the audience's laughter in response to particular sequences) very obviously at the heart of the constructed humour. As 'street' features we have *trousers* being described as *hard-core* (line 8) and *awesome* (16), *blood* used as a form of address (12), *and shit* as a general extender (8), *no way* as an expression of surprise (14), and *well* and *massively* as intensifying adverbials (18, 23). There are also sev-



eral instances of non-standard subject-verb concord: *they's* (8), *I isn't* (13), *they ain't* (15), *they is* (16); non-cohesive *isn't it* is echoically repeated across three turns (27–29). The expression I have transcribed as *fo sho* (line 15) (which is in fact realised with quite long diphthongal glides) is perhaps best treated as an independent lexical 'street' feature, rather than a phonological divergence from RP in pronouncing 'for sure'. The only other candidate for non-RP pronunciation in the pilots' utterances is Miller's *gonna* (reduction of 'going to', in line 9), although unreduced 'going to' would be heard as hypercorrect in most RP contexts. As mentioned above, the pragmatic address-tag *man*, realised with a conservative RP vowel, imposes a dated (in context, a 1940s) RP pronunciation style upon a relatively contemporary discourse feature that would typically have a more open quality.

This basic pattern of conservative RP pronunciation with 'non-received', 'street' lexico-grammar and pragmatics radically fractures normative co-occurrence relations across levels of indexical signification, and more generally challenges the integrity of each of the two forms of consonance associated with conservative RP and 'street' demeanour. It destabilises the idea – which, of course, is usually presumable – that the pilots are speaking in any coherent culturally familiar style. They very clearly do not conform to either 'standard' or 'non-standard' style, and these analytic concepts are themselves destabilised in the performance – they provide rather little purchase on what is stylistically going on. Indexicals point in radically different directions, simultaneously: to 'old-style RP' in an epochal/historical sense, but also to contemporary 'street' ways of speaking in the pilots' mixed constructions; to adult as well as youth styles; to supposedly elite and to vernacular reference groups. All the same, as characters, the pilots derive no positive value from either RP or 'street' meaning constellations. This is not only an effect of dialectal incongruity. They are thoroughly unconvincing as 'street' speakers, but also as RP speakers (each category being conventionally associated with some form of positive authority or 'strength') by virtue of their self-centred concern with trousers and their general fecklessness.

There are other powerful, local stylistic effects in the extract too. Armstrong's line 6 utterance has no 'street' linguistic features, yet it is thoroughly incongruous in relation to what the radio announcer has just said and in relation to how the pilots' apparent emotional reaction to the news is visually styled. Their appearance is fully in character with the Royal Air Force context of the WWII period, through their uniforms, helmets, etc., and in their facial expressions they also look serious and concerned at the grim radio announcement about military developments, and throughout the extract. Yet discursively, in the content and the pragmatics of their talk, the pilots style themselves as being 'out of place' (if 'place' refers to their positions as 'military personnel'), even before we meet their dialectal excursions into urban youth 'street' talk. At lines 7 and 9–10, Miller appears to be ready to take

Armstrong's declaration that he has bought some *really nice trousers in Camden* at face value, and to believe that this is pertinent and interesting information in that context. His question about whether Armstrong will wear the trousers *in the plane* when he is *doing fighting and this and that* suggests he is entirely unmoved by the Nazi invasion of Greece and generally uncommitted to his professional role. There are already fundamental dissonances structured into his performed persona.

In fact there are repeated hints in the discourse that the pilots' world views and views of themselves are more like those stereotypically associated with 'immature youth' than with 'military personnel'. As the audience, we are given plenty of reasons to doubt the validity of the sketch title's category 'World War II Pilots'. Is this what these characters really are? Aren't they *living out* 'immature youth' identities, and might this be rationalised as somehow coherent with their adoption of 21<sup>st</sup> century multi-ethnic youth speech? The pilots are (again, from a pragmatic standpoint) petulant and childish about not being allowed to wear clothes of their own choice and, in Armstrong's case, about not being allowed to paint his Spitfire yellow. This is certainly petulance and immaturity from the point of view of military practices (of any era), but it is also petulance and immaturity from the point of view of contemporary youth cultures. The two-part exchange about *being yourself* (lines 30–33), for example, is scripted to sound vapid and entirely unconvincing, textually evidenced by Armstrong's (line 35) meta-comment (picked up by the audience as highly ironic, hence their laughter) that the exchange has been the sort of conversational *deep stuff* that he likes.

The pilots' references in the extract to school experiences give us a further way to interpret their stances on dress, identity and autonomy. The theme arises at line 15 when Armstrong complains that he is disallowed from wearing his new trousers because they *ain't uniform or something*. 'Uniform' is a relevant concern in both (adult) military and (child) school contexts (at least in the UK), but it becomes clear that the pilots construe it mainly in terms of institutional demands to wear 'school uniform'. Miller's story (beginning at line 21) is a story about an *upper-class* school context, and the *non-uniform day* convention at Winchester College (an elite private, fee-paying school). This elite connection gives access to more particular stereotypes about 'petulant youth', in the specific context of privileged, privately educated, middle-class children. This social class consideration sets off interesting and again highly dissonant reverberations around the incongruent mix of conservative RP and vernacular 'street' vocal features that the pilots adopt. Are they 'posh boys' who have carried their privileged middle-class pasts into adult military service? This idea is itself something of a familiar trope, e.g. perpetuated in classic films about the Royal Air Force. But are they also characters locked into their middle-class English roots (witnessed by their phonological style) who nevertheless *aspire* to embrace the forcefulness and global 'cred' of 'street' speech ('Multicultural

London English', as documented by Cheshire et al. 2011, might be the best contemporary reference for their lexico-grammatical choices)?

The pilots' *non-use* of 'street' youth features is stylistically productive too. As noted earlier, Armstrong's first turn (line 6) uses no 'street' grammar or lexis, and this allows his description of the trousers, in the phrase *some really nice trousers*, to itself be radically dissonant with his next turn's 'street'-loaded style, *they's all hard-core with all pockets and shit*. *Really nice* and *all hard-core* are style-fragments from fundamentally different, internally consonant social contexts. Performatively in the sketch, this creates the impression of a character (Armstrong) who is indeed striving to adopt a speech style that he lacks adequate control of – Armstrong as a pilot (or overgrown youth?) who is not only 'out of place' in the 1940s RAF but somehow *aspiring to be more* out of place, and indeed *out of time*. To the extent that pronunciation is more deeply coded as a speaking habitus than lexico-grammatical features are, we (the audience) are tempted to read Armstrong's incongruent and internally dissonant persona as being, at base, a middle-class speaker who, intermittently and unconvincingly, affects a personal guise (on the one hand) of being a World War II pilot, and (on the other hand) of being a 'street youth', and this notwithstanding the fact that the 'street' style in question would not be enregistered in the UK for a good sixty years later than the performed context of the Second World War! This is a mode of performance that reflexively eats away at the indexical bases on which it is apparently founded.

## DISCUSSION

The cases I have considered firstly illustrate the sheer range of stylistic operations that mediation makes possible, and the potential intensity of mediated stylistic effects. The *Boddingtons* ads were crafted by elaborate filmic techniques that I have only briefly touched on in the analyses. Mediatisation in Jaffe's sense "involves all the representational strategies and choices involved in the production and editing of text, image, and talk in the creation of media products" (Jaffe 2011: 563). In addition to the technological affordances of filming, soundscaping, editing, sequencing, overlaying, and so on, whose effects we see in the ads, there are elaborate design principles at work. These include complex intertextual references, both between 'The Cream of Manchester' ad series and other film and TV genres, and across particular instances of the series. Even casual observers will recognise how indexical meanings are shaped and reshaped in successive versions of the 'Cream of Manchester' ads, and particularly their core, repeated dissonance of 'exotic' and (in some sense) 'high' culture versus 'Mancunian low'. The studio-recorded 'World War II Pilots' sketches are much less elaborate in technological regards, but even

here we see considerable resources of sound/vision intermediality being richly exploited, as well as the virtuosity of the actors in bringing carefully scripted incongruities to life through techniques of vocal and bodily performance.

This implies that the sociolinguistic analysis of mediated styling, based as it generally is on a history of analysing observed, unmediated face-to-face interaction, may need to expand its range and look out for more ambitious stylistic effects, including those that have come to be called 'spectacular'. It is not that social actors in face-to-face interaction cannot generate semiotic dissonance. As I suggested in my brief comments on stylisation and crossing, above, degrees of dissonance are certainly structured into these processes, even though I also argued that they ultimately orient more to the maintenance of consonance. The historical bias of mainstream sociolinguistics *away* from media data and media processes has been one factor in dulling our interest in stylistic dissonance, because more intense forms of dissonance are more possible to bring off via technological media, particularly in fictional and surreal genres.

For the same reason, we might expect the 'so what?' response to the sorts of data I have analysed here. Are dissonant effects simply ludicrous, or trivial by virtue of their incoherence? Are they too chaotic to take seriously? Shouldn't we ignore fictional representations and performances? I believe not, and that what we see in the data is not actually semiotic chaos, in any case, but a rattling of the anchor chains that have underpinned consonance. In discussing Agha's theorising of enregisterment, I pointed to his incrementalist view of change towards the consolidation of sociolinguistic norms. Agha concludes his 2007 book by saying that "semiotic activities and practices are unfolding in someone's backyard or TV screen or nation...and forms of belonging or exclusion are, even now, being re-figured and regrouped by them" (Agha 2007: 385). This is certainly an interesting view of sociolinguistic change, and a useful reminder that sociolinguistic norms not only shape, but are shaped in, interactional experience. But perhaps this view also follows the assumptions of language change research too closely. Language change has been theorised as an incremental process, based in the slow accumulation of small instances of innovation in the speech (and perhaps changes in beliefs about speech) of large numbers of social actors. Mediated stylistic spectaculars lie well outside the remit of this model.

At a deeper level of theory, another objection arises. Isn't it true that, in the acts of staging dissonance, performers (and media) cannot help consolidating the very consonances that they seek to undermine? Isn't dissonance parasitic on consonance? Don't the present case studies consolidate sociolinguistic norms at the same time as constructing dissonance across them? The argument goes back to Foucault, who pointed out that the transgression of boundaries (or 'limits') cannot avoid continually working to, or against, or in the presence of, those limits. To that extent it is pos-

sible to see transgression (e.g. the fracturing of consonance) as, somehow, simply the other side of the coin of consonance itself. Foucault's abstract and metaphorical prose sometimes seems to imply precisely this:

The play of limits and transgression seems to be regulated by a simple obstinacy: transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable. (Foucault 1977: 33–34, cited in Jenks 2003: 90)

Yet to say that transgression and limits are mutually contingent concepts (cf. Pietikäinen et al., 2016) is very different from saying that transgressive acts inevitably fail to leave a legacy of change. Foucault's "horizon[s] of the uncrossable" need not be located in the same position as they were pre-transgression. Indeed, Foucault's role in laying ground for a postmodern consciousness, where *limitlessness* of various kinds is a defining attribute, is itself evidence of how transgression can leave a legacy of radical change.

We can take a far more positive stance on the possibilities of change through dissonance by following Bakhtin. Bakhtin's 'carnival' (literally 'the removing of meat'), is again amenable to being interpreted as a temporary condition (originally a pre-Lent festival of indulgence and extravagance) (see Bakhtin 1968; Jenks 2003: chapter 7, who summarises carnival as 'the world turned upside down'). But carnival is not merely reality momentarily unchained; it is the reconfiguration of reality according to alternative frameworks of value. This is its connection to stylisation, in that a stylised reality, through its carefully styled, 'as if' constitution, *might just* be credible as 'the real thing'. Construing structured reality as being plausibly absurd is a fundamentally critical orientation – an act of systematic *reconstrual* – whose effects can endure. Carnival creates a condition where, in particular, 'low' cultural forms can, yes temporarily, take precedence over normatively 'high' cultural forms. But this sort of time-bound reconstrual makes it impossible, thereafter, to *not* see the ludicrous potential of structure, to *not* recognise the equally time-bound nature of normative consonance. A heteroglossic view of language and style, and indeed of the social world, once construed, is difficult to set aside.

In making assessments of potential and actual sociolinguistic change, and in the context of media processes in particular, we should keep in mind several simple facts about mediation. Mediated stylings (certainly of the sorts I have examined here) are typically *not* strictly time-bound events. They are often high-profile, multiply consumed and iterative events. I have commented on the selected episodes as if they were one-off broadcast events, but a simple online search confirms how they have circulated repeatedly and over lengthy periods of time, and how ready people

have been to engage with their representations. Mediated styling (as Agha fully acknowledges) is therefore not something outside the realm of meaningful human interactional experience – our experiences of indexical relations are massively ‘mediated’ by media. Mediatisation – in that other, historically salient, sense of the “meta processes by which everyday practices and social relations are historically shaped by mediating technologies and media organizations” (Livingstone 2009: 10) – goes a considerable way towards defining what is distinctive about the current late-modern age.

A closely related facet of late modernity is summed up by the concept of high reflexivity (Archer 2012), and media have come to play an inescapably central role, not so much in ‘reflecting’ society and language (an idea which vastly understates the agentive and culturally constitutive functions of media in general), but in projecting multiple reflexive models of society and language. Few would doubt that we have come to live in a more semiotically complex sociolinguistic world, and that the old certainties of language/class relations have become less reliable. If we think of sociolinguistic change (Androutsopoulos 2014; Coupland 2009, 2014a; see also our introductory chapter, this volume) as the reconfiguration of language–society relations, in the context of profound social changes such as mediatisation and reflexivisation, then we should expect media creativity to be a key point of articulation. All this suggests a *prima facie* case for the significance of mediated styling in sociolinguistic change.

But what particular indexical instabilities can we say, in summary, have been produced in the data we have examined? As we have seen, each of the *Boddingtons* ads conjures up some sort of exotic scenario, into which it then dissonantly pitches small snatches of stereotyped Mancunian voice and demeanour. The speeding female driver and the muscled athlete, then the glamorous and opulent romantic couple, all turn out to be ‘ordinary Mancunians’. We initially find them to be ‘out of place’, if only because the sequential organisation of the indexical displays (‘before and after’) implies that they are, and when we are drawn into sharing this inference, we are on the brink of confirming pernicious sociolinguistic stereotypes about Mancunians (and perhaps all English northerners) being lower-class, lacking taste, being excluded from ‘cool’, and so on. But then again, we realise that the Mancunians, having been revealed to *be* Mancunians in the ‘after’ segments, *were* and *are the characters doing-being exotic*. Their Manchester-ness has not excluded them from taking part in hyper-adventurous or hyper-romantic lifestyles and experiences. The Manchester characters, supposedly like *Boddingtons* bitter, in fact *are la crème de la crème*. They can call each other *love* or *petal*, and slurp beer, and still take part in exotic scenarios of various kinds.

Most generally, the *Boddingtons* ads therefore confound pre-existing stereotyped categories and category-bound practices (linguistic and other). The ‘after’

segments of the ads leave us to ruminate about the assumptions we may well have made in relation to the ‘before’ scenarios, and particularly about the social categories that we might have associated with those scenarios. In other words, it is not solely the category of Manchester-ness that comes up for reconsideration; it is also the categories on which ‘exotic’ scenarios were based, with the possibility that they are not so ‘cool’ after all. The central dissonances open up possibilities for critical reassessment in both directions. The audience certainly doesn’t need to align with *either* of the traditional consonances that are on display. They/we are positioned as reflexive consumers and critics, invited to reflect on the dissonant scenarios that are on display, and this created non-alignment carries an opportunity for change.

A very similar effect accrues in the ‘World War II Pilots’ sketch. The class-based sociolinguistic dissonance between ‘street’ youth culture and upper-class military personnel (and schoolboys) opens up critical possibilities, and once again it does this in both directions. The pilots’ incongruous fusion of conservative RP and ‘street’ talk brings two clichéd styles (conservative RP being more obviously so, although ‘street’ talk is itself frequently parodied) into dissonant opposition with each other, and the pilots themselves, as argued above, are ‘out of place’ in relation to both of them. Beyond that, their discourse indexes immaturity and self-absorption which might, I suggested, be referenced either as middle-class posh youth or as ‘street’ youth, perhaps both, and perhaps even as a trait of RAF pilots with privileged pasts. Familiar social and linguistic categories are again rendered unstable, therefore, and we are left with a clutter of indexical features and styles floating free of their presupposed social targets. A reasonable generalisation from both case studies would be that the data are richly imbued with sociolinguistic indexicalities that are mediated so as to *fail* to connect with the social matrices that a sociolinguistics of consonance would expect them to connect with.

I came to focus on the *Boddingtons* data here because, when I have discussed it with students and colleagues, there has been a common reaction that ‘those ads wouldn’t work nowadays’. The ads’ sociolinguistic premise that Manchester speech and demeanour *could*, if only in crassly stereotyped ways, and if only as an initial presumed consonance, be considered ‘unsophisticated’ and ‘common’, and therefore dissonantly opposable to high-culture experience, does indeed seem to have lapsed in the UK. The ads themselves, I have been suggesting, are likely to have contributed to this change, by destabilising underlying categories. The necessary detailed research is lacking, but Manchester and northern English speech no longer index working-class-ness in the way they apparently did. The proposition that the whole of ‘the north of England’ was constituted by a single social class was always preposterous, but today, an association between northern-ness and female glamour, for example, is entirely unremarkable. Changes in patterns of class self-ascription and class definition in the UK have had a direct bearing on this change (some rele-

vant sociological research is reviewed in Coupland 2009). UK broadcast media themselves have progressively retreated from their historical preference for RP in ‘serious’ genres, and this has left the talking media displaying a far more mixed indexical structure. Alexander Armstrong (who plays one of the pilots), for example, is a conservative RP speaker in most of his TV roles, which include other comedy and non-comedy formats and being a well-known game-show presenter. In fact, Armstrong is one of several contemporary prominent ‘light entertainment’ figures who have broken the indexical relationship between RP and ‘serious broadcasting’, just as ‘serious’ domains of TV and radio have come to be populated by a wide range of non-RP speakers, shifting the boundaries around what we might think of as ‘standard’ or ‘the best’ speech.

Behind my arguments in this chapter is the hypothesis that indexical consonance in relation to dialect, but also more generally, has principally been a trope of modernity, whereas late modernity is in itself a more dissonant, less coherent, less cohere-able epoch, and that mediated dissonances may even have helped to nudge late modernity into existence. Counters to this suggestion come in the form of arguing that creative speech play has been a characteristic of all epochs (e.g. McDowell 1992), also the point that the richest theorising of polyphonic dissonance emerged in Bakhtin’s literary-critical writing (see e.g. Morris 1994: 89ff.) about Dostoevsky’s novels (died 1881). But there are some strong precursors that can support future research on this theme. Rampton’s invocation of the concept of ‘the grotesque’ (Rampton 2006: 346ff.; see also Jenks 2003: 168–169) is one, particularly in his development of the idea that “the grotesque involves hybridisation and inmixing, transgressing the boundaries that separate high from low” (*ibid.*: 349). Another is theoretical work by Archer (e.g. 2012), particularly her analyses of how the heightened reflexivity of late modernity is liable to scale up into what she calls “hyper-reflexivity” an invasive cultural condition where coherent life-choices become difficult to make, because traditional sources of rationality and convention have fallen away.

From Bakhtin, once again, and despite the time-lapse between his original writing and the present day, we can be inspired by the idea that artistic creativity – and not least the creativity that proliferating media nowadays resource – is sometimes able to both represent and give meaningful shape to major social changes in which we are caught up. It can be the reflexively metalinguistic representation that actually consolidates sociolinguistic change. Bakhtin recognised, for example, how Dostoevsky was able to capture “the contradictory nature of evolving social life [in Russia], not fitting within the framework of a confident and calmly meditative monologic consciousness” (Bakhtin, cited in Morris 1994: 90). What is often referred to as globalising late modernity is seeing no less fundamental a change, into no less contradictory circumstances. Bakhtin also recognised the importance of style and



styling in the distinction between monophonic and polyphonic forms of representation. “To be sure”, he says, “language diversity and speech characterizations remain important in a polyphonic novel, but this importance is diminished...For what matters here is not the mere presence of specific language styles, social dialects, and so forth...what matters is the *dialogic angle* at which those styles and dialects are juxtaposed or counterposed in the work” (Bakhtin in Morris 1994: 104, original emphasis). Dissonant styling might usefully be interpreted as a sociolinguistically productive tweaking of dialogic angles.

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