

**The Vocal Construction of Self: Icelandic Men and
Singing in Everyday Life**

Volume Two

**Thesis submitted by
Robert S. C. Faulkner
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**Department of Music
The University of Sheffield
England**

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10 SINGING AND THE PHYSICAL SELF

10.1 Singing and the Body

It is an obvious truism to state that singing is a physiological phenomenon. Even though individual singers like Russell Watson might psychologically locate their voice outside of Self, as I discussed in chapter six, there is no avoiding the fact that voices are produced and projected from within physical bodies. Vocal physiology is essentially the compound physiology of many of the body's organs and musculature systems, and singing requires the simultaneous application of a wide array of these highly complex mechanisms. That vocal skills are often acquired and practiced with little, if any, declarative knowledge of this physiology and, as the men's diaries in the present study illustrate, are often engaged involuntarily, seemingly removes the physicalness of vocal behaviour from individual consciousness – the particular area of psychology that is the chief concern of the present study. It is true that the men interviewed here hardly ever articulate perceptions of physiological processes and make only very occasional reference to visceral responses to singing, but that is not to say that bodies are unimportant to them.

We have already seen how the voice is central to Baldur's physical and mental well-being and appears to function as a kind of comparator in the assessment of physical and mental health. Baldur expresses a fear of major disruption to personal identity in the event of him losing his voice through physical ill health, an experience that he suffered during a serious bronchial ailment as a teenager. In watching and listening to his parents going about their daily tasks, Baldur seems to have learnt at a very early age, and especially from his mother, that singing can be used to regulate the performance of menial physical tasks and to manage mood whilst doing them – a kind of separation of physical and psychological selves. Additionally Baldur articulates a relationship between singing and the physical Self that is fundamentally concerned with the physical spaces where bodies sound and where vocal and social connections are made. In doing so, he reinforces the significance of vocal agency in the

construction of place. These connections range from the vocal construction of domesticity to the vocal construction of ethnicity, from the construction of vocal places around the home and farm, church and community hall, to what can properly be called Iceland's national monuments – the natural landscape. Finally, Baldur regularly employs the language of the body as metaphor in his narrative about vocal experiences. As with other emergent categories from Baldur's life history, these original themes of vocal construction of physical space and places; singing, the body and physical well-being; and singing and physical work were subsequently developed following an analysis of all the other interviews and theoretical sampling of men's vocal dairies. The emergent categories relating to the voice and physical Self were substantiated in principle, clarified, adapted, and deepened to take account of other men's perceptions of their vocal lives. The discussion that follows in this chapter is grounded in this analysis.

10.2 Psychology and the Body

Before considering how men's vocal stories can be interpreted in terms of the physical Self and the sub-themes outlined above, I wish to expand on several important theoretical points about the body, psychology, and embodiment. The first concerns a particular conceptualization of psychology, the theoretical framework for a volume edited by Stam (1995) about the body's place in psychology. Stam contends that whilst it is tempting to think of psychology as a discipline of minds, there is a strong case for thinking of it as a "discipline of bodies" (Stam, 1995: 1). He argues that despite its early roots in physiology, psychology departed from the body specific, to a view of the body as an abstract container of a "quantified mind" (ibid.: 2), leading psychology into an often-sterile behaviourism. Objecting to psychology's use of the metaphor *systems* as a way of describing what are essentially organic mechanisms, Stam argues that whilst the term was originally a biological one, twentieth century corporate structures hijacked it, by linking it inextricably with the flow of information (ibid.: 3). In doing so, he argues, the body in cognitive psychology:

... has evolved into the sexless hull of the robomind, the complex machinery of information systems brought to its highest level of abstraction in the human facsimile (Stam, 1995: 4).

As Stam points out, this, paradoxically, has happened at the same time as the body has been widely recognised as the construction site for gender, race, reproduction rights, health care and genetic modification. It is surely not a coincidence that these are the kinds of themes recently explored by phenomenological methods generally and by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in particular. One such study, which also happens to share other important themes with my own, illustrates the richness of the psychological insights gleaned through phenomenological investigations into the body and Self. I have in mind the autobiographical narratives about identity, body, and sport, which are the basis of work by Sparkes and Smith (1999). The men who appear there have had their identities seriously disrupted by physical injury. Previously they were highly active in the strongly gendered physical contact sport of rugby union, with all its popular connotations as a stage for the ritual performance of masculinity. Sparkes and Smith trace men's narrative reconstructions of Self in the light of injury to their bodies and provide one of many rich phenomenological examples supporting Stam's argument that "(T)he body emerges as a topic at the same moment as the politics of identity have come to dominate the human sciences." (Stam, 1994: 5). Stam goes on to quote Turner (1994), in arguing that the body has *become* "the material infrastructure ... of the production of personhood and social identity" (ibid.: 5, my italics). But perhaps it always was; surely this pre-eminence of the body as the infrastructure of Self is essentially a very similar concept to that which James articulated almost exactly one hundred years earlier when he claimed that:

...each human mind's appearance on this earth is conditioned upon the integrity of the body with which it belongs, upon the treatment which that body gets from others [...]. Its own body then first of all, its friends next [...] must be the supremely interesting objects for each human mind. (James, 1892)

It is significant that as psychology has returned to questions of consciousness and Self which, as I explained in chapter three, was James's starting point in psychology, so too the body has re-emerged as the central construction site of Self. Following on from James, Weber's study of the "Created Self" begins with the physical Self, illustrating this preoccupation with the body as the "supremely

interesting object”, and the potential for re-inventing Self through the re-invention of the body (Weber, 2000). Cosmetics, body piercings, tattoos, surgical modification, even human reproduction, all provide opportunities to extend, restore, rearrange, erase, and preserve the body in an effort to obtain and maintain integrity with the mind. This integrity of mind and body is something of what I understand Weber to mean by his *Unitary Self* (ibid.: 114-26). I shall return later to Weber’s concepts of the Changing Self and Unitary Self when I examine singing’s potential as an agent for facilitating change and for preserving unity; presently the body and physical Self are our chief concerns. The kinds of bodily treatments that I understand James to be speaking of are far from exhausted by Weber’s literal interpretation of things we can physically do to the body. The kind of treatments that James has in mind are linked to the much wider concept of display in social life – how and where the body acts in the widest sense, and how, through these actions, identities are constructed, changed, maintained and signified. In considering this concept of display, we might argue, as Radley (1995) does, that it is embodiment, rather than just the body, that is central to psychological life and to social relationships. I concur, and suggest that an enlightening way to reflect upon the relationship between embodiment, body and mind is to consider how applying the prefix “em” to the word “body”, means, quite literally, the putting of psychological life and social relationships “into” or “onto” bodies. This is the essence of display: bodies embody, and in embodiment minds are made corporeal, they are put into action, and feelings, ideas, and qualities are given tangible, physical expression. Properly speaking minds are not put “into” bodies of course, because they were never anywhere else to begin with, but they are put “onto” bodies; they are externalised and given corporeal reality and as they are acted out, they fabricate, revise, modify, and maintain personal identity and social worlds. This is why embodiment is central to identity and something of what I believe James means by the integrity of mind and body.

The idea of display or expression in social life, prominent in the works of Goffman (1959, 1976) and Geertz (1973, 1983) and in Butler’s work on the performative nature of gender identity (1990), asks of us what it is, and how it is, that bodies embody or express? Now if display – the way the body acts – is essential to social life then it follows that much of what I discussed in the last chapter applies to the physical Self too. I have in mind here the way that men act

vocally to construct and embody all kinds of social patterns and relationships. Men literally put voices on their bodies to create and signify all manner of relationships. This collaboration between the social, or Weber's persona, and the physical, illustrates the difficulty of maintaining reductionist models of Self and reveals how, ultimately, we should view James's tripartite model as an integrated whole – a theme to which I return later. In examining individual elements of what is in fact an integrated whole in isolation, we run the risk either of repetition or of maintaining artificial divisions where none actually exist. Men's perceptions of singing's agency in Self emphasize the wholeness and integrity of Self, just as James's and Weber's models do. With this in mind I shall nevertheless attempt to focus on themes concerned with the body and physical Self that emerged from analysis of interviews and diaries, maintaining for the time being, some kind of demarcation, however artificial it might be in reality, between elements of Self.

Three specific areas of the body in *action* emerged from men's narratives and they are examined here in turn. Firstly, I wish to look at the body in men's vocal performances, examining both its regulative and signifying function and what it is that it signifies. Secondly and most substantially I wish to look specifically at the action of vocal bodies in physical spaces. This discussion will look at the variety of physical spaces that men in the study talk about as having significance for vocal behaviour. All sorts of environments appear to be defined in terms of the vocal activity that is performed in them, where physical spaces and places are actuated and signified by vocal bodies. This calls to mind work by Lefebvre (1991) and de Certeau (1984) who see spaces as being defined by the ensemble of movements performed in them. Furthermore, it seems that vocal activity does not simply materialize physical spaces in the present moment, but has the potential to reconstruct places to which singers can psychologically relocate themselves. Whilst it might be argued that these places hardly belong properly to the realm of the physical, I chose to discuss them here as an extension of thoughts about the vocal construction of place. Thirdly, I shall examine the role of singing, as it is perceived by the men as being significant for the body's general well-being and health. Men's fears about the potential disruption of self when the singing voice is threatened by physical ill health resonate strongly with Sparkes and Smith's findings from studies of rugby players whose identities were threatened by injury. I shall develop that theme by looking at ways in which men perceive vocal

behaviour as having therapeutic agency in the maintenance of physical and mental health.

10.3 The Body and Performance

In thinking about the body in musical performance, it may be helpful to be mindful of concerns about verbal communication, conversation, and verbal thought as the sole media of symbolic interactionism. It follows that all we have by way of perceptions of the body are the things that we can verbally articulate about them. I see no reason however why the perception of things – Husserl's *perspectival adumbrations* – need be limited only to those mediated by verbal thought or discourse. Vocal acts are symbolic work and they work in part at least, as other embodied expressive forms do, without the need for verbal mediation, but through a form of Self-consciousness, which is based on reciprocity between the perception of Self and the visual, tactile, and aural world (Bermudez, 1998, cited in Berger and Del Negro, 2004). Much symbolic interactionist work has, through the exclusive privileging of conversation, implicitly maintained a division between discourse and the body. In doing so it views the body simply as a “material resource”, whilst discourse itself is seen as possessing these signifying powers (Radley, 1995: 14). Research investigating the body and embodiment in musical performance on the other hand, illustrates the potential of the body's signifying powers without need for discourse or verbal mediation. Davidson has shown for example that non-expert listeners rely heavily on visual clues from the observation of bodies to make judgements about the expressive qualities of a musical performance (Davidson, 1993, 1994, 1995, 2001, 2002a). In other studies, Davidson has illustrated how:

... musical communication seems to use body movement “grammars” which have semantic codes, determined by their specific cultural contexts (2005: 4).

Davidson's surveys of instrumental and vocal performances of classical and popular musics reveal the many, varied and sometimes compound functions of the work bodies do in musical performance. Apart from using body movement to *regulate* musical performance, it seems that the body might be involved in a wide range of illustrative functions (Davidson, 2005; Todd, 1999).

I suggest that vocal behaviour may be uniquely able to facilitate a special kind of perceptual triangulation: expressive forms of musical structures, bodily gestures and the narratives in song texts themselves. These resources provide a three-dimensional matrix where meanings are configured and developed in an integrated form of symbolic interactionism that includes narrative and verbal thought, but is by no means limited to it. Now whilst I do not intend to engage in analysis of men's vocal performances or body movement as Davidson does, and although the main method for this research relies first and foremost on the traditional symbolic interactionist form of conversation, I want to remain open to the possibility that this discourse may reflect some of the non-verbal forms of symbolic expression that are clearly constructed in vocal performances. Additionally, whilst symbolic interactionism implies reflexivity normally seen as taking the form of verbal thoughts over various time scales, Berger and Del Negro's concept of reflexivity in performance, based on the philosophical writings of Bermudez, suggests that possibilities for non-linguistic forms of Self-consciousness are evidenced in reciprocities between *non-verbal thought* perceptions of the world, and perceptions of Self (Berger and Del Negro, 2004: 89ff). These reciprocities may be perceived through a whole range of senses: visual (as in Bermudez's original example), tactile, vocal or kinaesthetic.

Methodologically it is important to stress that none of this should be taken as suggesting that these frameworks or those of the body, display and embodiment discussed above, were imposed upon the present study, or on the analysis of data, a priori. As we saw with Baldur and as we shall hear from other men's narratives, the body and physical Self are important themes in their perception of vocal behaviour. It was following the analysis of these stories and the emergence of categories concerned with the physical Self and the body that I began to investigate theoretical frameworks concerning the body and psychology more fully. Men in the present study evidence physical, multi-sensory perceptions of vocal behaviour and not just verbal and cerebral ones. They emphasize tactile and kinaesthetic reciprocity and the arrangement and actions of bodies in physical spaces; a good deal of their discourse focuses on the body and the physical Self, the social and physical treatment bodies get in collective singing in a wide variety of physical settings and ways in which singing embodies social relationships.

Following on from my reservations about the status of verbal communication as exclusive symbolic signifier, and the well-evidenced argument that other senses do symbolic work too, I want to turn the analytical process on its head for a moment. Instead of beginning with men's narratives, I want to look, literally, at men's bodies in vocal performance to make some personal observations about the physical appearance of these singers in action, first in formal and then informal settings. Then I wish to examine how I see this as being integral to some of themes that men have focused upon in their narratives. It is not in any sense a strict visual methodology,¹⁶ but an attempt to illustrate how some of the thoughts and themes found in men's narratives are embodied in the physical arrangements they make for their singing. This is, I believe, a simple example of the integrity of minds and bodies that I have been discussing theoretically; it is an example of collective singing's potential for the embodiment of all sorts of ideas about the collective and the individuals who take part in it.

10.3.1 Displays of Social Cohesion and Unity

Singing in a choir is of course very different from being a vocal soloist or instrumentalist. In a large choral group, such as the male voice choir in which men in the present study sing, individuality is submitted to the collective and this is signified in all sorts of ways. Standing in several rows, few if any bodies are ever completely or individually visible. Neither can the observer avoid noticing that these are apparently all male bodies. Adding to this sense of uniformity, the male voice choir Hreimur originally wore grey jackets with the choir's emblem on the chest pocket, but more recently, these have been replaced with dress-suits. Normally there will be little if any body movement by choristers that is superfluous to the demands of vocal production itself: hands are held loosely to the sides of bodies, there appears to be no use of illustrative body movement, and the conductor alone provides the movement necessary to regulate performance. On occasions the choir might use choreographed body movements – a slight forward lunge, stamp and clap for an Estonian wedding dance (see CD 9), or rows swaying in opposite directions for an Icelandic waltz. In all cases, though the emphasis is on the whole, on the choir as a singular expressive entity, not on individual members. In certain songs, one of the choir's several soloists, like Baldur, will step out from the choir. His new identity is expressed through a wider

range of body movements and gestures previously inappropriate to the integrity of collective minds and bodies but consistent with his new status as an individual soloist in the spotlight. Even here though the soloist is very conscious of the body of the choir, and, according to Baldur, this collective homo-vocal backing group makes singing solo with the choir a cappella a far more exciting and satisfying feeling than being accompanied by a piano: “Just that wonderful feeling of me and my voice being supported by all the other guys singing behind me.” (P1)

The physical arrangement of singers and the way in which they are attired, embody; they regulate and signify particular kinds of social order and identity. Perceptions like these about the physical appearance of vocal bodies and the relationships between them can be purely visual ones of colour, form, and movement, as the example above illustrates; symbolic work about homogeneity and cohesion is done without the need for verbalisation. At other levels culturally and historically informed meaning, or what Green (1997) calls *delineated meanings*, may be constructed by verbal thought or the sub-conscious enculturation of conventions and values. Many questions about the sex and gender of this group might spring to mind in this context, but these are questions that for the time being I shall side step and save for a later chapter on the vocal construction of gender.

Returning to the men’s visual appearance in concert, Cook claims a specific delineated meaning may reside in the solo *male* performer’s traditional dinner-jacket attire. He suggests that it signifies a subordinate status, like that of a waiter – a desire not to distract from what the composer has created – and sees this as being strangely at odds with the status of the performer in the contemporary market place (Cook, 1998: 25). Given that dinner jackets were never limited to waiters and musicians, the argument is more complicated than Cook admits. The historical emergence of men’s traditional evening dress and dinner-jacket attire generally should surely be seen as the performance of a hegemonic masculine identity essentially characterised by dominance and power. In any case the canon of Icelandic male voice choir repertoire and its performance is, I suggest, much freer from the kind of symbolism surrounding the status of musical object and its composer, which, as Cook observes, has dominated Western concert and recital culture (1998). In spite of Iceland’s adoption of the Western concert-going ritual – and vocal and choral concerts are extraordinarily

commonplace given the size of Iceland's population – other vocal rituals still appear close enough to everyday social practice to make the act of singing at least as important as the objects that are sung, even I suggest, at vocal and choral concerts themselves. Instrumental concerts enjoy nothing like the popularity of solo vocal or choral concerts and I suggest that this is significant for an appreciation of musical practice and meaning here. We should notice then, how complicated delineated meanings become when music practices are imported cross-culturally and take on a new situatedness and meaning. Nevertheless, as we have already observed, the origins of the Icelandic male voice choir movement were firmly rooted in the construction site of a cohesive and homogeneous national identity that was predominantly male. The adoption, early in the twentieth century, of full evening dress by *Karlakórin*n Fóstbræður, one of the oldest and most prestigious of male voice choirs in Iceland, who also made early overseas tours as Icelandic “ambassadors”,¹⁷ seems to resonate with this kind of social order and Green's kind of gendered, delineated meaning in music. Whatever the circumstances of its historical and social emergence in a Western-wide context, or of its adoption in Iceland, dress-suites worn by men in the study when they sing in the male-voice choir, like the physical ordering of bodies, restrictions on body movement, on the one hand or unison body movements on the other, all serve the purpose of unifying individual male bodies and voices.

These themes are clearly signified and perceived, to some degree at least, without the need for verbal thought. Their understanding may be deepened by the kind of cultural and historical context provided above and these observations can now be tested against men's narratives themselves. In doing so we find that none of the men mentions either the formal arrangement of bodies or formal attire. Nevertheless, the men's narratives consistently stress the importance of cohesion, unity, and homogeneity. Baldur emphasized the importance of the choir as a symbol of unity in a politically divided county and he frequently reminds audiences and choir members that *Hreimur* is one of the most visible and audible embodiments of accord in the area. This is central to Baldur's vision of “standing together”:

It's a remarkably unified and sympathetic group, all the same what we do, always really, really closely-knit and cohesive group ... in recent

years it's been even more unified and more united in standing together in whatever it is we're doing. (P1)

Others, emphasizing the idea of cohesion where no individual members are supposed to stand out, express similar sentiments. It is particularly frowned upon if individual voices "skera sig úr", and allow their voices to be identifiable from the singular choral sound. Subservience to the collective is the aim:

You're just a link in a chain. (P5)

Publicly, we're one choir, the people that listen; they listen to the whole team! (P2)

Whilst the men appear unconscious to some of the apparently obvious ways in which they embody these ideas in concert, there can be no doubt that the audience is clearly intended to hear, see and think cohesion, unity and harmony and that these singers embody it through the way they are arranged, clothed and move.

10.3.2 Displays of Intimacy and Affection

Outside the formal settings of concert performances observers of these men's vocal behaviour would be aware of very different configurations of bodies that appear nevertheless to embody similar themes of unity and harmony, but in far more intimate ways. On coach trips home after concerts (see CD 17), while the band takes a break at local dances, at parties, or in the mountain hut, singing actuates bodily relationships and provides men with the opportunity for considerable physical intimacy, expanding the physical Self beyond the boundaries of accepted male, heterosexual relationships. There is no imposition of uniform: the men may be dressed either in smart or working clothes, depending on the occasion, and bodies are clustered together in all sorts of ways. Other men who do not sing in the male voice choir itself will frequently join in. Singers unsure of their part may team up with a more experienced singer of the same voice, or secure singers of different voices may get as physically close to each other as possible, literally, to "feel" the harmony they make. On some of these occasions the supply of alcohol may help to reduce physical inhibitions, but it is not essential and individuals may refrain from drinking alcohol altogether. Men

huddle together, arms around each other or even holding each other's hands, there may be sustained eye contact between individuals, touching of faces, cheek-to-cheek contact, even kissing of cheeks and extended embraces. Erlingur is at pains to explain that this is not a display for a non-participatory audience:

They wouldn't do it for anybody else or anything like that, if they were asked to do it they would just stop, but because it comes from just somewhere within them (P7)

Songs in four-part harmony emerge as the fruit of this physical union. If the group becomes large a member may be appointed, or self-appoint himself as conductor. It is more likely however, that interpersonal communication through bodily gestures and facial expression will somehow regulate the performance of the group. If the group is large or physical conditions difficult, there may be inconsistencies in interpretation resulting in the same song being sung simultaneously at different tempi. In some cases, sub-groups may even have decided on different songs simultaneously, resulting in remarkable bi-tonal performances. These anomalies are normally quickly rectified and unity restored, though on occasion there may be some competitive sparring – a kind of vocal *battle music* to decide on the common song, version or interpretation to be sung. The men talk about how physical proximity and touch facilitate their being sensitized to each other's voices – “að nema”, somehow “tuning in”, to pick up the frequency of those around them. This is especially true if men are trying to pick up a vocal line that they are not sure about. Getting as close to, and even being in physical contact with the next guy, seems to be the key to learning a vocal line and then singing it well together, as if the vocal line were infectious and can be caught through physical intimacy. This physical intimacy appears to be an almost embodied metaphorical representation of the experience of singing in harmony with others and serves to finely synchronize vocal ensemble and performance. Others talk about the physicality both in formal and informal vocal settings of “being physical in the middle” of harmony with other people.

It's the *physical support* of other voices ... being physically in the *middle* of these sounding bodies, especially when we are singing in harmony ... *ahhh*. (P2)

This, like many other verbal explanations of the physicality of collective vocal behaviour, is a clear example of Johnson's "metaphor of containment" (Johnson, 1987), made even more explicit in comments like the following about singing's agency in collective identity:

It (singing) just *holds* the group together for the moment in that place. (P8)

The harmony, landing *inside* of it, I fell for it straight away. Somehow you're pulled along by the sound, *completely ... absorbed by it*. (P4)
(My italics)

Furthermore, comments like these seem to indicate affective physical states, and there are several specific examples of men perceiving something like visceral responses:

The other day when we sang in Stykkishólmur and the choir and Balli sung "The Rose", I was so choked, I couldn't, I just couldn't sing – it was so special. (P7)

It's just such an astounding instrument (*male voice choir*), there's nothing more beautiful than powerful singing where each part (*voice*) is clearly defined, you just get goosebumps (P1)

I was entranced, I almost lost consciousness. (P5)

Yes, it's that ecstatic feeling that begins somewhere here and you feel it somewhere up here. (*points to his upper torso and up to his head*) (P2)

For men in the present study the act of singing appears to function as a kind of embodied "holding of Self" and other Selves, a vocal and bodily embodiment of special kinds of relationships and social orders. In formal settings public displays of unity, cohesion and order are embodied by the way bodies in the choir, to use Radley's phrase, "take a stand" towards each other and towards the audience (Radley, 1995). In informal settings, men's bodies take a very different stand; physical and vocal intimacy embodies and constructs very different kinds of harmony. But harmony it is, and the importance that men attach here to singing in harmony emphasizes even more, I suggest, a certain kind of social order. In the

twenty years I have witnessed Icelandic men singing informally in circumstances similar to those described above; I have rarely heard them sing a song in unison: harmony should always be found. In both formal and informal settings, the construction of physical and vocal relationships affords, both individually and to the group as a whole, a sense of personal and social worth and of belonging. Indeed, it provides a huge expansion to any individual Self in the group, which was appropriately summarized for me, when I was discussing this theme at a later stage of this work, by a quotation from a poem by the Icelandic poet Einar Benediktson:

Maðurinn einn er ei nema hálfur
með öðrum er hann meira en hann sjálfur.

A man alone is nothing but half.
With others, he is more than himself
(Einar Benediktson: Fákur)

10.3.3 Standing Out

I spoke above of individual soloists singing with the choir and taking on a different kind of identity for the duration of any particular song. After the song is sung the individual returns to the body of the choir again, to his rightful, anonymous place. Light-hearted banter and original rhymes are soon aimed at soloists who are seen to be assuming a superior air. As good as they may be, soloists are expected to recognise the pre-eminence of the collective group. There is however a third kind of group vocal behaviour that several of the men talk about in their vocal stories where very different kinds of bodily and social configurations are made. Five of the men who were interviewed perform, or have performed, in popular music bands. Display here clearly embodies very different kinds of relationships and plays a very different role in the construction of Self, as the following comments about playing in such a group illustrate:

It's some need to stand up and express yourself, you want to let it ... show it (P8)

It appeals to your vanity, being something. Something more than just ... somewhere, on some level. Standing out. (P3)

It hardly needs to be said that bodies display themselves very differently as vocalists and instrumentalists in pop groups than they do in the choral settings described above. This is a vocal and bodily embodiment of difference and individuality and it is clearly perceived as such.

The examples above provide evidence for ways in which individuals and collectives pursue in vocal behaviour integrity of mind and body of which James spoke. They illustrate how minds are put onto bodies, even unconsciously, to create and maintain a unitary Self, how bodies and the voice in particular, can be used both to embody personal and social identity and to construct social worlds. It was never my intention to attempt to deconstruct the physical, tactile, visual, and aural elements of the experience of singing with others. My observations, and men's narratives, implicate singing as an integrated, multi-sensory, whole body experience which, in different setting, can be seen as embodying and displaying a variety of even contradictory, social orders and identities through various configurations and movements of vocal bodies.

Interestingly all of the three kinds of collective vocal behaviour discussed above could and have taken place in the same physical space – a local community hall. It is true that in the first and last example vocal bodies are arranged on a stage in formal displays and performances, separated from, and elevated above a listening audience. In the second example vocal bodies might be arranged informally anywhere on the empty floor of the hall – dancing has stopped for the time being and singing literally fills the physical and aural space it leaves behind. This brings us to the next category of singing and the physical Self: the relationship between physical, sounding bodies and physical spaces themselves, the way in which vocal bodies actuate these physical spaces and turn them into vocal places.

10.4 Vocally Constructing Spaces and Places

Vocal bodies, as we have seen, *take a stand* towards each other in specific locations. Settings may influence the stand that is taken and the songs that are sung, and the reverse may also be true; the stand that is taken and songs sung, may influence location or at least the meaning that is made of it – the vocal

construction of place. As we have seen from the example of the community hall above, the stand that vocal bodies take is sometimes more important than the physical space in which it is taken. The community hall is multi-purpose enough to provide flexible configurations of social life. Unlike churches or traditional concert halls, the rituals performed here are not permeated by such strongly delineated meanings. This is not to say however that community halls in Iceland are neutral spaces, even if such things exist. Fundamentally, they symbolize a particular view of community, and it is no coincidence that, like male-voice choirs, community halls of varying sizes sprang up in almost every village and valley, even in the smallest communities and most remote settings, especially in early post Second World War years. They became venues for acting out the kind of collective practices central to the construction and maintenance of newly acquired independence identity and ideals of community and cohesion – the Youth Movement (Ungmennafélag), with their amateur dramatics, bridge and sporting activities; the women's unions; farmer's unions; the co-operative movement; and male voice choirs. Today most local councils struggle with the maintenance of these community centres as rural populations decline. Whilst many of them remain centres of remarkable cultural activity, central government seems intent on supporting a move to large "professional" arts complexes or concert halls in major urban centres, than in supporting these *lively* cultural centres firmly rooted in the endeavours and expressions of local communities.

From men's narratives, it is clear that all sorts of spaces and places, in addition to the community hall, formal concert hall, coach, or mountain hut mentioned above, are perceived as having significance for, and because of vocal behaviour. In a wider context, I have attempted from the outset of this study to remind the reader of the situatedness of the phenomena I am examining. This research is not concerned with singing as generic, everywhere or anywhere phenomena, it is about singing by specific people in specific spaces. Similarly, I have attempted to guard against a notion of music or vocal behaviour as simply the congenital product or representation of a particular social order, setting or place. Whilst it is certainly not my contention that vocal behaviour does not reflect social order or culture, the argument that events, rites and rituals have agency in both the construction and meaning making process of any given society is well rehearsed (Stokes, 1994: 4). More specifically, I have quoted

Björnsdóttir's work, which illustrates the agency of the early Icelandic Male Voice Choir Movement in the construction of national identity and Icelandic independence (Björnsdóttir, 2001). In very important senses, collective male voice singing made Iceland the place it was in the early twentieth century. Although it seems clear that today this particular kind of vocal agency is limited to much more local spaces and most certainly does not dominate national arenas as it did, the men in the study articulate clearly how all kinds of physical spaces are given meaning and structure through vocal behaviour displayed there.

According to Lefebvre (1991) spaces are defined by the materialization of social being and, similarly, de Certeau sees ensembles of movements as actuating the spaces in which they are deployed (de Certeau, 1984). For the purposes of this discourse we might rephrase de Certeau and argue that spaces are actuated by vocal ensembles performed in them; they are spaces where social being is vocally materialized. In materializing or actuating spaces vocally, transformation takes place, meaning is made, and dynamic, social places are constructed. Stokes and others have illustrated how a wide variety of "places", from local "Liverpool sound" to the ancestral northern territories of Australia the Kalasha minority enclave in Afghanistan, can be constructed through music (Stokes, 1994). To illustrate this point in a little more detail I have chosen two examples from other sources. I have selected them because of how much they have in common with the present men's study; the first is Erlmann's account of how, displaced from their rural homelands, male Zulu migrant workers went about "recreating" their homelands in urban township settings through Nightsong or *isicathamiya* (1996). The second is remarkably similar and is simply the observation of how men from the Welsh valleys migrating to Oxford to work in car factories, in the great British economic depression, founded a male voice octet and then a *Welsh* male voice choir (Cymdeithas Corau Meibion Cymru, 2004). Groups of people and individuals construct and reconstruct places and relocate themselves in all sorts of settings through music performance or even just through musical memories. It seems to me that all of these kinds of places are more easily mapped on Harré's referential grid that I discussed in chapter three, where time and space are psychological concepts, than on the grid of Euclidean theories, with its traditional Newtonian ontology. In so far as this is true, such places, whatever physical or geographical properties they may have, belong properly to the realm of

phenomenological. They exist in the meanings that are made of musical performance and this is how the Zulu homelands come to be in Durban, or the Welsh valleys in Oxford, England. It is not that music transports us physically to another place, but that music transports places psychologically to us and for us. In doing so spaces are transformed by the musical relationships that individuals and groups have with them and in them, musical places become intrinsic and dynamic elements of personal and collective identity.

For men in the study, singing is perceived as not only constructing a sense of place by somehow reflecting or remembering it, but as defining and constructing the place itself. In other examples, singing seems to enable the men to re-locate themselves vocally in remembered reconstructed places. Typical of the places constructed by vocal behaviour are the highly gendered public vocal spaces, clearly related to structures and institutions of hegemonic masculinity though few of the men make this connection explicit. Additionally, the men talk about more private vocal spaces, personal places that provide psychological insights into forms of masculine identity that sometimes contradicts openly public ones.

10.4.1 Singing in Public Spaces and the Work Place

According to the men in the study, many spaces in Icelandic communities are vocally materialized. Apart from the home, these are traditional work places, public meeting places such as community halls or the “Þinghús” and churches. Frequently these are actuated in highly gendered ways, so that only in churches do women appear to enjoy equal vocal opportunities. As Baldur points out:

Around here, men have been more likely to seek opportunities to sing together, except of course in church. It was pleasing both to God and to man for women to serve by singing in church. (P4)

This sex-role script following appears typical of the ways in which public spaces are actuated by gendered vocal behaviour:

The guys, up in the mountain huts ... or having brought the sheep safely down from the mountains, rejoice together by taking a song. It's the obvious thing to do when men come together.
see CD 16)

We sang a lot at sea ... when we were mending nets and getting the fish out, if it was good weather and things had gone well and people felt good. And in the harbour, I'll tell you, down in the fishhold, when we, well if the hold was getting pretty empty, landing the fish, then the acoustics were pretty good, pretty much like a concert hall. (P6)

In a break at a dance or something in the community hall, maybe the guys have had a glass or two, get together in the corner and start singing. (P13)

...or singing in the toilets at dances, you only ever hear it from the men's toilets. (P7)

Talking of men singing together informally, one of the men comments, as I have already noted that:

It doesn't leave anything permanent; it holds the group together for the moment in that place. (P8)

What it "holds" together of course, is men and a particular masculinity whose complexities and contradictions emerge from men's narratives and which will be the subject of a later chapter. Whilst public song-roles seem for the most part to reflect traditional divisions of labour, the script may however be changing. Several of the men recognise that vocal ensembles in these public spaces need not be exclusively *homo*-geneous, though I would argue that they still dominantly are:

Thirty or forty years ago no woman would have drunk out of a hipflask at a round-up, let alone sing with men who were a bit merry. Today she'll probably take a sup; you put your arms around each other and sing. (P1)

Contrasting with the explicitly public nature of these vocally structured, masculine spaces and the collective singing rituals performed in them, are men's private, vocal spaces. Gender, of course, is still significant, but divisions of labour on farms, for example, cannot simply be defined along traditional sex-role theory lines: women milk and feed livestock, they take shifts at lambing and drive farm plant.¹⁸ As spring approaches, hay stocks in the barn are depleted and the men speak metaphorically of "the sound of spring in the barn", where the increasing resonance of their own vocal being embodies the approaching spring.¹⁹

We always said that there was a spring sound in the barn when it was nearly empty. Felt good, sounded pretty good ... perhaps it was just imagination. (P6)

Here, in the barn, as in empty milk tanks and in sparsely populated landscapes, the men seem to feel an irresistible need to make an impression on an acoustic space, to locate Self vocally in a particular environment. In much the same way that a graffiti artist might make his mark in a subway, or a caveman leave his handprint on a cave wall, these vocal gestures appear to be statements about personal identity. In contrast though, they are strictly private and temporary. Like the inability to pass a mirror without looking at one's Self, the men vocally and aurally check themselves out – a reflective “Who do I hear I am?” If the acoustic is right, the singer even gets to expand his vocal Self, however fleetingly, and perhaps this is a large part of the attraction

I sing *by myself* and *for myself* when I'm in the barn. (P10)
(My italics)

I sing aloud when I'm alone, maybe you're just testing yourself. (P9)

I sing when I'm in the barn by myself – experimenting with the voice, even make up melodies and text spontaneously out of the blue and then off with the wind. (P10)

Bloody great to sing in empty milk tanks or silos, they really take the sound, you think wow. You think you're pretty bloody good. (P11)

I was alone in the control room at the power station and it's empty at the moment (*turbines are being serviced*) and it sounds like the very best concert hall. It's impossible not to take a few notes! (P3)
see CD 15)

The importance of these everyday private acoustical spaces is underlined by one of the men in the present study who has moved from a rural setting to the small local fishing town and clearly misses opportunities for vocally materializing himself, for checking himself out and turning places into vocal spaces.

I don't sing as much now we've moved into town, you're never really by yourself. Not that I desire to sing any less, but it's different. People don't sing as much in urban areas. (P5)

Húsavík would hardly qualify as a modern urbanisation in the eyes of western sociologists, but the question raised here about the impact of urbanisation on vocal behaviour raises important questions about the vocal Self and its practice to which we shall return later.

10.4.2 Singing and Domestic Space

Domestic spaces too are actualised by vocal behaviour. The much clichéd singing in the shower is practised, in fact, by many of the men in the study. Its attraction is a similar intrapersonal function as the private vocal spaces discussed above:

I think it's just the sound you get. I don't know if it's the water that does it. Just shutting yourself into a small space and sing some melody. (P4)

As we saw in the previous chapter singing has, for the majority of men in the study, played and often continues to play, a very substantial and *significant* role in family life and domestic space. Many of the men talk of singing's importance in the construction of the place they call home and some homes, like Baldur's, are identified regionally by the vocal behaviour that actualises them; family gatherings, parties, Christmas – all sorts of domestic events depend on collective singing to embody the relationships they celebrate. Guðmundur also recalls:

Always when my wife's family came together, we sang in parts, people just lined up and we just sang through the song book, took an hour, maybe even an hour and a half. Her grandfather's brother even made himself a portable harmonium. Absolutely brilliant. I hadn't met that before I met Fríða (*his partner*). (P10)

Families like Kjartan's still practice a regular vocal ritual with their three daughters aged between the ages of 10 and 19, marking and continuing to construct a place called home using the same methods they recall from their own childhood home:

Just pleasure, joy, great fun for everybody, everybody takes part (*in singing*) ... just in coming together, there's a joy in that. Maybe like if we're eating together, rather than just everybody eating at different times. (P8)

At suppertime I played the guitar and sung a few songs with my daughter as we often do and sometimes even daily and we both think its great fun. (P8)

These kinds of rituals are still practiced in many of the homes where it appears that singing focuses on the maintenance of special kinds of relationships that make the domestic space what it is. Gunnar notes in his diary "the girls were practicing the piano this evening and played some Christmas songs, so I sung along too and felt really good." (P6)

Even specific rooms like the kitchen, bathroom and bedroom are actualised through song: in the kitchen by the singing of songs which make menial tasks more bearable and even fun, and in the bedroom where parents' voices, quite often it seems fathers' voices, literally create a sleeping place for their young children, as Jón's diary indicates:

Today ended like so many others, by singing for the children when they are going to sleep and are in bed (This is) where my singing has its most and best effect! (P21)

Similarly, Gunnar transforms his daughter's bedroom with a simple lullaby: "After I had read for my daughter, I sang a song for her *Sofðu unga ástin min* and kissed her good night." (P6)

In an effort to contextualize these perceptions, we might recall here the traditional arrangements in Icelandic homes and homesteads. Even Baldur slept in a bedroom shared with three siblings and his parents until he was ten. His grandparents and quite possibly his parents too, would have grown up in a house, quite probably a turf farmstead, with a single living, working and sleeping area – the *baðstofa* – as I mentioned in chapter two. Lefebvre observes that the body defines these kinds of spaces, like those in the Eastern homes and unlike modern Western abstract ones. Subjects inhabit and actuate these spaces through

movement, speech, smell, hearing and the voice – the sensory-sensual: it is the sociological content and not any intrinsic properties of the space itself that determine sleeping, play, even household production spaces (1991). With this in mind, and considering the historical importance of the singing voice – say of the Icelandic *kvæðamaður* of whom I spoke in chapter two – in actuating evening places in these kinds of household spaces, it could be that the apparently very wide-spread practice of men singing lullabies for their children, might be a remnant of an age when bedroom doors could not be closed, and when sleeping space, like household work space, was vocally, and not architecturally, designed.

The examples above, taken from public, private, work and domestic settings show how the men talk at length about the relationship of their vocal Self to the physical environment. This physical world and its relation to Self is a key element of James's material or physical Self. Whilst Weber prefers to concentrate on what we can actually *do* physically to the body in order to build a unitary Self, what bodies and voices do, how and where they act, are clearly just different dimensions to the concept of body and physical Self. On the one hand are private spaces whose resonant acoustic properties tempt men to make a vocal impression. They check themselves out and even explore possibilities of other Selves, in much the same way as Weber talks about individuals changing Self, through clothing, make-up or, more drastically, through surgical changes to the physical Self. In contrast though, these men's acoustic signatures in empty barns, milk tanks, fish-holds or in isolated landscapes are explicitly concerned with a personal, present Self, a projection, expansion and evaluation of how "I" sound in the world. Questions arise here about the impact of urbanisation on vocal behaviour and about the absence of vocal spaces where Self can be materialized, checked out, and expanded through song. Data also reveals how public spaces provide opportunities for men to sing with other men in highly gendered, vocal and bodily displays of male unity and hegemonic masculinity – spaces that remain for the most part, male domains. Recalling Lefebvre's thoughts about domestic space, it seems clear that the public space of local community halls is also primarily defined, not by intrinsic qualities as such – though there is a stage – but by its sociological, or more specifically its vocal content.

10.4.3 Singing and Natural Spaces.

Monumental space is hard to come by in Iceland's sparsely populated island. Even what counts as monumental is relative of course, but I see little evidence that Icelanders experience much of the "recognition effect" which Lefebvre suggests the monumental affords to members of a society as "an image of his or her social visage" (1991: 139). That is not to say that such monuments do not exist; but cathedrals at both Hólar and Skálholt for example, are echoes of long since destroyed monuments of considerably greater material, and presumably more social significance. I would suggest too that the modern parliament house in Reykjavík is a less meaningful place in Icelandic identity than the natural setting of Þingvellir, home to the ancient Viking Alþingi that is seen by many commentators as the original model of modern western democracy. It is in natural spaces like this, that I believe Icelanders have constituted the "collective mirror" that Lefebvre sees as the function of the monumental. In chapter two, I made passing reference to the Naturalist poetry movement that was hugely significant in the construction of a new Icelandic identity. Glaciers, mountains, green valleys, lakes and even the sea were pressed into service to allow Icelanders to recognise themselves. It follows therefore that a huge amount of Icelandic male voice choir repertoire is concerned with both the literal and metaphorical construction of a place called Iceland. One of the most notable woman naturalist poets wrote the following text and to the prize winning song at the 1944 independence celebrations. The poem, by Hulda, who lived in one of the local valleys, is still learnt by heart and sung in a many (most?) local schools:

Hver á sér fegra fðurland,
með fjöll og dal og bláan sand,
með norðurljósa bjarmaband
og björk og lind í hlíð?
Með friðsæl býli, ljós og ljóð,
svo langt frá heimsins vígaslóð.
Geym, drottin, okkar dýra land,
er duna jarðarstríð.

Who possesses more beautiful a land,
With its mountains and valleys and blue sands,
With its northern lights, bright belted
And birch and springs on the hillsides?
With its peaceful farms, light and poetry
Far from the world's battlefields.
Protect, oh God, our precious country
While the world's battles boom.

The impact of texts like these on the construction of a new national Icelandic identity and in the struggle for independence can hardly be over-estimated. Looking through past programmes of concerts by Hreimur they all contain at least several songs that project these natural spaces as the imagery of nationhood. Sometimes they may make general references to physical features as in Hulda's poem, but very commonly, they are about specific places, valleys, lakes, woodlands. According to the men's diaries, these songs seem to be subconsciously called to mind as men find themselves in different locations. The singing of the song that belongs to this place firmly locates the men themselves in it too. Hafliði was driving along the remote Tjörnes peninsula early one morning:

I sung *Í dag skein sól* (*Today the sun shines on the blue sea*), I sung it because the environment had that impact on me, there was certainly a connection. I was in a great mood, and the sea and the coastline helped too. The singing kept me in a good mood all day long. When I sing I feel much better and I see things and life in a much brighter light. (P18)

Another man implies that a song about Lake *Ljósavatn* seemed to be waiting in ambush for him as he drove past. He is compelled to sing the song; there is no element of choice. A huge song repertoire exists, enjoying almost folk song status in the area and often composed by local amateur composers, which vocalizes many of the local valleys, dales, mountains, lakes and woodlands. Several of these occur in the men's diaries as they find themselves in, or thinking about these places, visiting or remembering them vocally.

Several men also talk about actually singing in the natural environment. The following quotation echoes men's perceptions of the voice in the spring barn or milk tanks – a vocal signature and extension of Self: "It's pretty good to sing there with the rocks, and the mountains to throw the sound between." (P5)

Perhaps these examples reflect a psychological desire not just to recognise Self in, or interact with, natural environments, but also even to control them. Unlike in urban settings "Here I am" can be sung extremely loudly here, without competition or conflict with other individuals. The following quote at least, suggests such a vocal battle with the elements in a mountain location:

I went up to the Reykjafjall Mountain this morning looking for some sheep that are missing. Took the gun, in case I should see any grouse.

Didn't see either and it was very windy up on the mountain but I started singing really loudly *Nú andar suðrið* (*Now the wind breathes from the south*) and as I walked down the mountain so the wind died down, so I sung softer too. I felt good! (P6)

The song in question, which actualises southerly winds as the harbinger of spring and is normally sung softly and lyrically, but the wind on the mountain that day in late November was certainly not a southerly. It becomes clear again how physical elements in specific places stimulate a process of vocally recognising where "I am", in this case with more than a touch of irony.

Because bodies have been in a place before, minds are able to go there again by the process we call memory. In a sense, thinking about the vocal memory of place might be seen as inappropriate here in a discussion about the body and physical Self. But places, whether real or remembered ones, are constructed, given meaning and therefore located and relocated on a personal psychological grid, as surely as they can be located geographically. In any case, the body, as we shall see, is central to memory too.

10.5 Relocating Self

Magnús provides an impressionistic reconstruction of his childhood bedroom through a song that he could not have known as a child, since it was only composed about twenty years ago, but which evokes memories and allows him to relocate Self musically:

There are songs that transport you again to childhood. That song by the guy from the Westmann Islands. Well, when I think of that song (*sings a phrase of Helgi Gíslason's Kvöldsígling*), I'm there, no question, early in the morning, the boats are going out to sea ... that song has always been like that. It must be that the words and music go together somehow. I think I feel a morning feeling in the song somehow (*the song is actually entitled "Evening Sailing"*). I've always lived here, this has always been my home, I knew all the boats, by their sound, the sound of their motor, when they came here into the harbour. I knew, I was in my bedroom here, and when I heard that sound, it was this boat that was going out. And it was just this atmosphere from, from the community. I mean the poem says that, puts you on the trail (*sings first phrase*) and, and (*Magnús sings "da,da,da,da" in time to the song and imitating the sound of a small fishing boat's motor*). I think I can really feel the rhythm of the boat (*he repeats the motor sound*). (P2)

Strictly speaking, of course this kind of relocation cannot be said to belong to the physical world. Magnús has not returned to his childhood home or community anymore than I return to Crete just because I access memories of holidays there in listening to recordings of Cretan men singing. It illustrates however, a particular kind of relationship between psychological and physical places that is significant for the construction of Self. My holiday CD collection, or in the case of the men here, their vocal repertoire, provide access to a wide range of memories which allow us to reconstruct places, and perform a virtual relocation of Self, changing mood and consciousness, recreating senses of places and communities.

A senior member of the choir recalls a performance of a song in his youth in a very special setting near his home – a huge natural rock amphitheatre, provided a 40-metre high backcloth to the staging of outdoor summer choral concerts:

I was entranced, ... in Ásbyrgi ... the Reykjavík Male Voice Choir came. I think I was seven or eight. They sang absolutely, that, well, I forgot myself completely, and the cliffs ... it resounded on the rocks. They put so much power into *Sumarmorgunn í Ásbyrgi* (*Summer Morning in Ásbyrgi – A song about the very same location. Valdi recites the whole of the last stanza*) I almost lost consciousness. It echoed in the cliffs and when they stopped, it took a few seconds to die out, and then there was so much silence, I'll never forget it. Everyone held their breath. (P5)

For Valdi, the combination of this space's natural, physical and acoustical properties, and the expressive musical elements of the vocal performance – particularly the contrast of power and silence – combined to produce, in his memory at least, an almost metaphysical relocation. Neither Magnús nor Valdi claim that accessing these memories and locations is a conscious decision, they are usually taken hostage by a phrase from the relevant song and relocated in nostalgic reconstructions of a childhood Self, home and community. In a sense all the memories of times and places accessed during the course of conversations with these men, work a bit like this in so far as they allow the relocation of Self and the reconstruction of place through musical memories. But the examples I have used here are different in so far as they were clearly very active vocal memories before my intervention focused minds on recalling vocal events. Others

like Ólafur though, suggest that this kind of remembering is a frequent occurrence:

I often associate individual songs with certain events in my life, today it was an experience long, long ago when I thought of a song that I heard at that time. It's a very weird kind of experience. A song long since forgotten, getting on for seventy years and that day seemed just like yesterday. (P12)

Gunnar gives another example of how songs relocate Self, as a song heard on the radio that morning inspires him: "It's been in my head all day. I heard it first when I was a small boy at the Ásbyrgi festival and some farmers up at the hut sung it." (P6)

10.5.1 Singing to Regulate the Body, Relocate the Mind and Make Light of Work

A similar kind of process of relocation seems to be revealed in accounts given by the men of singing in work places. Baldur observed it as his mother was at the washboard and employed a similar device himself in the cowsheds with his brother Jón. Many other men describe a relocation of Self to distance themselves from menial physical tasks or to create the right frame of mind for their execution. They make light work of it by singing light work of it. Constructing another specific place is not actually the point, distancing some part of Self from the physical body and present one is. Yet at the same time, the song may help entrain the body to the task in hand, like Baldur's mother at the washboard, doing the housework, or mending fishing nets.

I was working on the forklift truck and that gave me opportunity to sing really loudly, the choice of song had nothing to do with what I was doing, it was just an attempt to break up the noise in the fork-truck. (P21)

My daughter insisted that I sing with her while we were doing the housework. (We) sung aloud and made our mood and the chores lighter! (P22)

We sang a lot at sea ... when we were mending nets and getting the fish out. (P6)

Sometimes the task or machinery in hand might acoustically stimulate song selection allowing a relationship to be made with it which recalls concepts of reciprocity, in so far as it is possible to talk of reciprocity with the perception of inanimate objects:

The other day, when I was on the machinery, haymaking or something in the summer, I sung, it came somehow, out of the machine! (P8)

I was working at the lathe this morning and before I knew it, I'd started singing along, the lathe gave the tone, and one song just came after another. (P26)

Men even recognise the benefits of vocal behaviour not just on mood and well-being but on levels of production too:

Ever since I was young, I had to have songs when I'm working. A handicap? No, it's a blessing. Movements are quicker and concentration better. (P5)

In other cases, it simply helps "take ones mind off the monotony of a task" like driving. Singing together in the car seems to have been a national pastime here until the arrival of car radios, cassette, and CD players. Many of the men still claim their families practice it, especially with children. If men are driving alone however, they often take the opportunity of expanding the vocal Self in competition with the radio, tape, or CD: "I sing really loud when I'm driving alone. Put on a good tape and sing too. There's no danger of your being noticed." (P3)

10.6 Physical and Vocal Ailments: Disrupting and Maintaining Self

Having looked at the way elements of identity are constructed and represented in embodied vocal performances and at how singing actuates physical spaces and allows Self to be located in them, I turn now to how singing appears to relate to the body's well being and function. In the introduction to this chapter, I cited

work by Sparkes and Smith, which investigated the impact of physical injury on the identities of men who were previously very active as rugby union players. It was a helpful instance of happenstance that I discovered this text just months after Baldur had made the following comment:

If I've a sore throat or feeling a bit off, want to sing but can't, then I get really nervous and I get this feeling that I can't sing and that's really bad. I mean if it happened to you, that you couldn't sing at all, nothing at all, that must be absolutely terrible. Singing is something that you pretty much live for. *Life without song is no life.* (P1)
(My italics)

It is surely clear from Baldur's biography that this is not an overly melodramatic statement; given the serious respiratory illness with which he was afflicted as a young man and his susceptibility to bronchial and laryngitic problems, the fear he expresses is, I suggest, a very real one. In Baldur's case, it is hard indeed to see what there would be left of Self without the voice. Listening to other men it soon emerged that some of them held similar points of view. Úlfar stated it like this:

But since Christmas, after my operation, there was a long period when I couldn't sing. I'm miserable if I can't sing, it just gets on my nerves. Then one day when I came indoors singing, my wife said "Oh you're back then" and I said "Yeah, I'm back" and came in singing. She meant *I was back, me*, she thought *I was myself* again. It was just really awful. And I need to be able to do it. (P3)
(My italics, reflecting narrator's emphasis)

Like physical injury to Sparkes and Smith's rugby players, vocal disability to these men is clearly seen as threatening the very essence of Self, so important a component is singing to their core identity. One present and another former member of the choir came to my mind at this stage of analysis: neither, unfortunately, was among the interviewees that formed the sample group for the present study, but I have engaged in informal conversation with them about this issue and with their permission, I report from them here. Both sang, not only in the male-voice choir, but also with a local church choir before struggling with vocal disabilities. The former, suffering from chronic respiratory problems, took an enforced absence from the choir for several years and reported very considerable depression, which was relieved dramatically when he was eventually

able to return to the choir following more effective management of his condition. His missing of vocal activity was acute: "You see it's (*singing*) the pattern of life that I grew up with. I never knew anything else." (P13) The other singer suffered an illness that enforced total and dramatic vocal retirement; over time he claims to have reinvented himself without a singing voice through a cheerful disposition and determination to "cut his losses". More thorough interviews with these individuals would almost certainly have provided deep insights into the ways in which individuals reconstruct the disrupted Self. Do such individuals still sing in their heads? Do they listen more or less than they did before? Do they reject singing altogether? What behaviours or "hobbies" take its place? How do they feel in social gatherings where singing is so important in configuring social interaction? What sense of loss is there and how is it managed? What is it like for singers like these to find they have no voice?

Voice and Self appear almost synonymous to most of the men in the study. Singing is clearly not just a hobby; it is a "pattern of life" and, since the voice seems to reside in the core Self, it is essential for the maintenance of balance and unity. Temporary vocal disability interrupts the sense of consistency, continuity, completeness, and community that Weber sees as creating the unitary Self. For men in this study, singing appears to be such a large part of the memories and feelings across time and place – which James describes as the glue uniting our changing selves at particular, "present" moments – that the thought of life without singing threatens men's inner core:

There is never a day that goes by without my singing something, because I think that I am nourished somehow by it. I've twice not been able to sing for some reason or another in my throat and it was one of the worst things I have experienced. (P3)

As this quotation illustrates the absence of a singing voice seems to undermine these men's psychological sense of the deepest and most intimate elements of Self – an inner core, constituted, consciously or unconsciously, according to Weber, by the unitary system where components of body, persona and spirit overlap (2000: 35,114-26).

It would be disastrous if you couldn't sing. (P10)

Life without song is no life. (P1)

It's part of our upbringing, drunk with our mother's milk (*laughs*). (P10)

Neither is it the case, as the examples above might suggest, that the voice simply depends upon the body and its good health in order to play its daily role in the construction of Self. Men in the study suggest that the voice can be used both as an indicator of the body's general state physically and mentally, but that it can also be used as a Self-help therapy to maintain or improve general well-being. Men like Baldur and Úlfar use the voice to check out their general condition and to restore themselves: "It's normally the case that singing refreshes you and this was no exception as far as that is concerned." (P18)

According to Weber's theory, singing might be regarded here as an agent in the assessment of the physical and mental Self. *I am not feeling myself today* could literally be paraphrased, as *I am not sounding myself*. Acting as a sensor, interpreter and comparator in Weber's model of the control system of Self, singing and its perception can be seen as a kind of "voco-static" control system, whereby individuals negotiate between ideal and actual states of being (Weber, 2000: 153). And, if the body or mind is found to be wanting, is fatigued, or depressed, then singing is perceived as having therapeutic powers:

Grandma said that if you sang you wouldn't be travel sick, so we sang and sang. (P10)

It's so good to be able to disperse the mind and stress with a quiet song. (P15)

It's great to wake up singing, like I did this morning; it's like a vitamin shot for body and soul. (P18)

There is always a sense of well-being and being so comfortably relaxed after a choir practice. (P12)

Although it is difficult sometimes to differentiate between cause and effect, the idea of singing as catharsis is explicit in Jón's holistic body rinsing at the end of a working day, where singing plays a significant part in either or both the representation of and the construction, of a restored Self:

I think you sing most when you feel good, and where do you feel better than in the bath, washing away the day's dirt and worries. (P21)

Sometimes however it can be difficult to start the necessary treatment:

Didn't sing much today, stress at work and in my soul. It's somehow like that, that when your soul-state is not good enough the desire to sing declines, but if you managed to start singing, it is often enough to improve the state of your soul. (P3)

An overlap between physical, social, and even spiritual elements of Self has been clearly visible throughout this chapter. James's social Self, or Weber's persona, has been ever present because vocal behaviour discussed in this chapter has been concerned with how vocal bodies configure and embody social worlds, how they communicate, signify and make social meaning. Separating the body or physical Self from the social Self is as impossible a task as the separation of mind and body of which I spoke at the beginning of this chapter. Even in private vocal activity, intrapersonal communication and reflexive action is concerned with the social world that songs and singing construct and represent. Voices and bodies thus embody and structure social life in all kinds of complex and even contradictory ways, as the men's narratives have illustrated. They transform physical space into places of work, play, party, and sleep; they define physical spaces as domestic, public, local, rural, and urban, and even construct gendered and ethnic places; they enable individuals to locate themselves in these real physical spaces or to relocate themselves to remembered, reconstructed ones. Finally, we have seen how voices are perceived as having the power to configure physical bodies themselves. Singing aids in the assessment, regulation, and maintenance of physical and mental well-being, it preserves unity and balance in the core Self – the very place where physical, social and spiritual elements overlap – and we have seen how badly Self can be disrupted by physical disability that prevents vocal behaviour and the actualisation of Self and community through song. In thinking about the voice and the body I have already arrived at the concept of entropy in conscious life, which for reasons that will hopefully become clear, I particularly wanted to consider in relation to the voice and the Spiritual Self in the chapter that follows. That I have pre-empted that debate illustrates once

again the illusion of Self that reductionist models format and the reality of the essentially interdependent nature of the elements of body, persona and spirit and the role singing plays in their construction and integration.

¹⁶ For a discussion of visual methodologies see, for example, Rose (2001)

¹⁷ Stories about overseas tours by male choirs from Iceland have entered the national consciousness. Exporting Icelandic male choral singing was seen as essential to projecting Icelandic identity both in Europe and even North America. The most “legendary” include a 56 concert trip by Reykjavík Male Choir to the United States in 1946 – a trip lasting almost two months(!) and a month’s trip to Norway and Denmark by the male voice choir in Akureyri in 1952. The men converted a ship especially for the purpose and returned home with a huge cargo of cement, paying for the trip and allowing them to buy a grand piano for the town! Icelandic male voice choirs abroad was the theme for a popular full-length feature comedy film called “Hekla” in the 1980s.

¹⁸ Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir has investigated “Gender in Icelandic Fishing Communities” (1996). Unfortunately, as far as I am aware, nothing similar exists in relation to contemporary rural settings.

¹⁹ The “spring sound” in the barn is under threat from modern farming methods where voices resonating in empty barns has no particular significance, since hay is increasingly now wrapped in plastic and even left outside during winter months.



Fig. 10.1
Hreimur in concert “... publicly, we’re one choir, the people that listen, they listen to the whole team!”

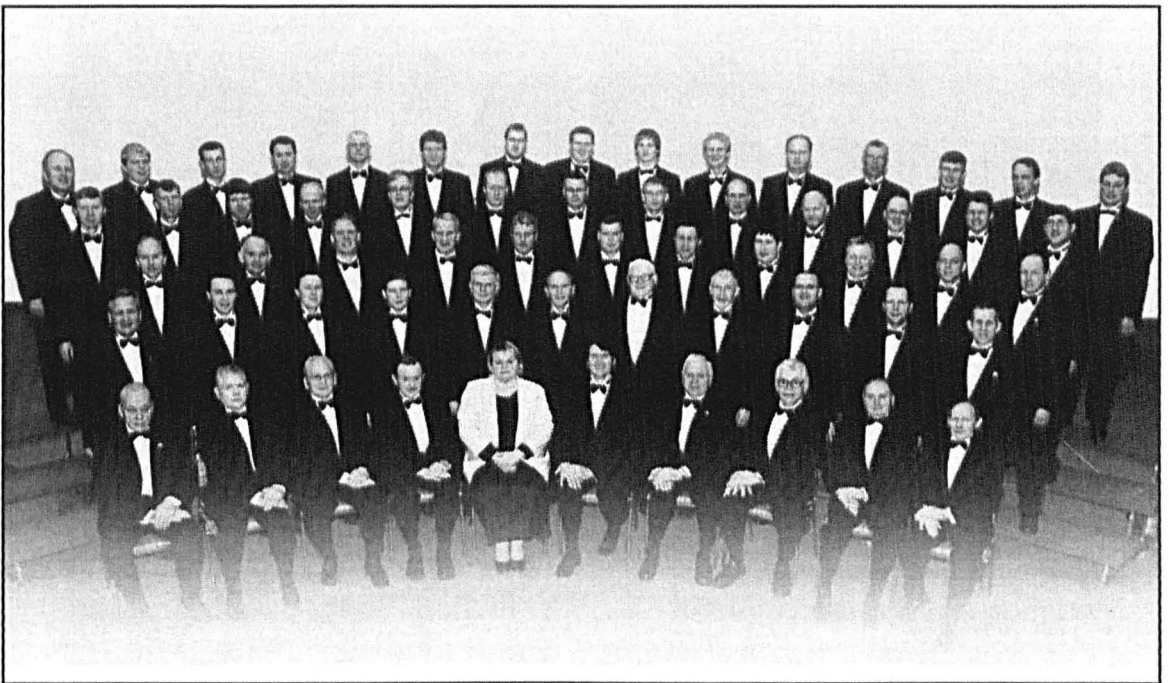


Fig. 10.2
Homogeneity?

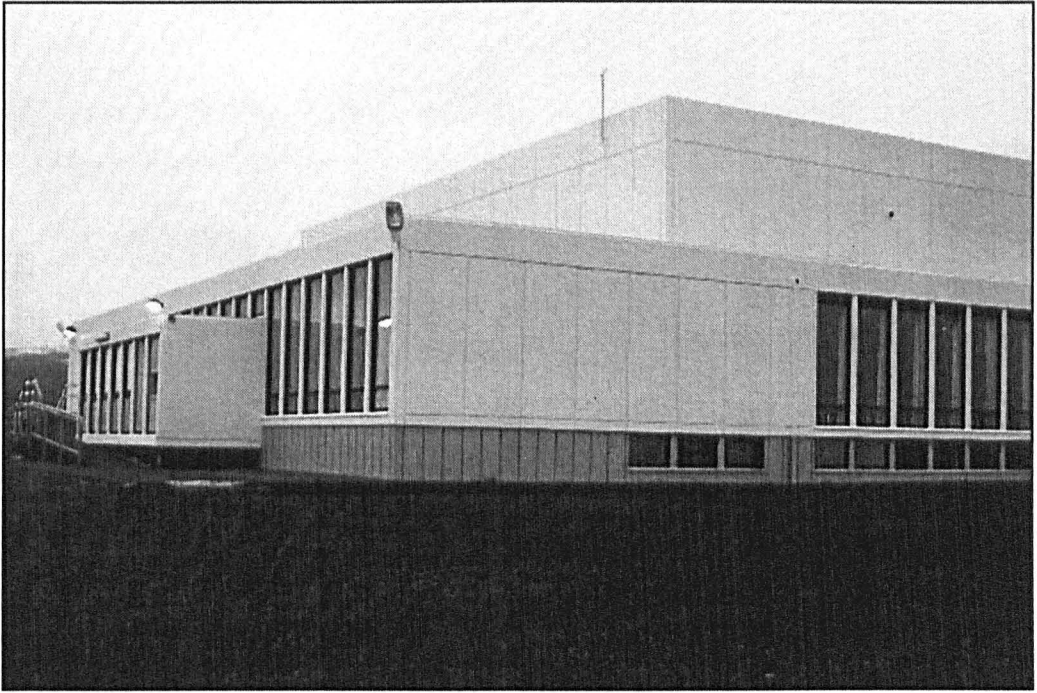


Fig. 10.3
The community hall

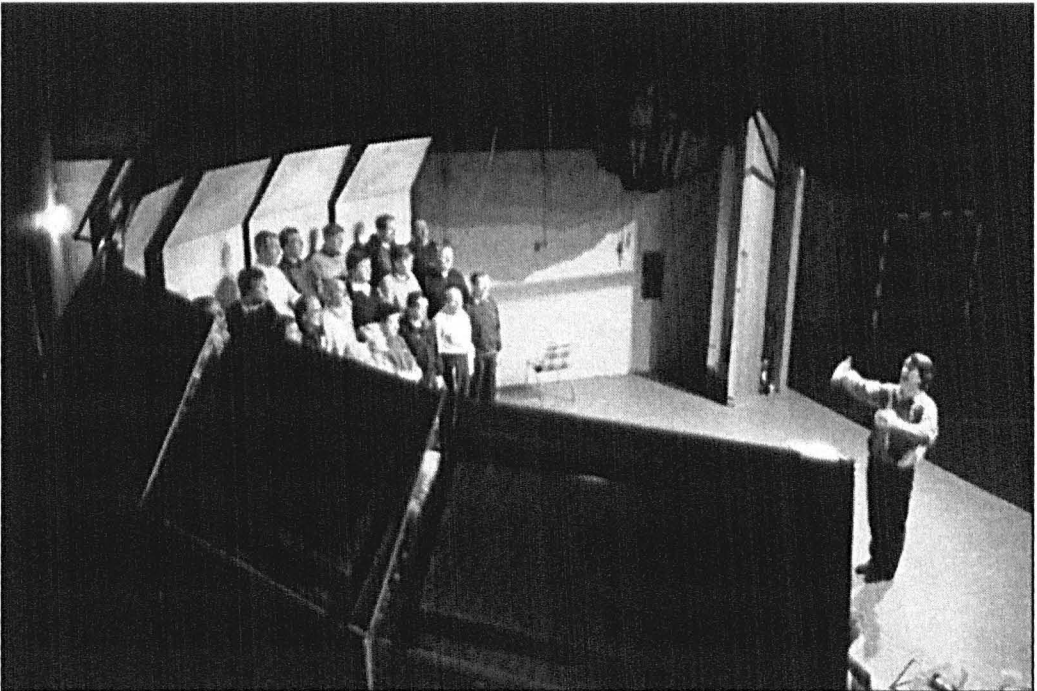


Fig. 10.4
Actuating spaces



Fig. 10.5
"It was pleasing both to God and man for women to serve by singing in church."

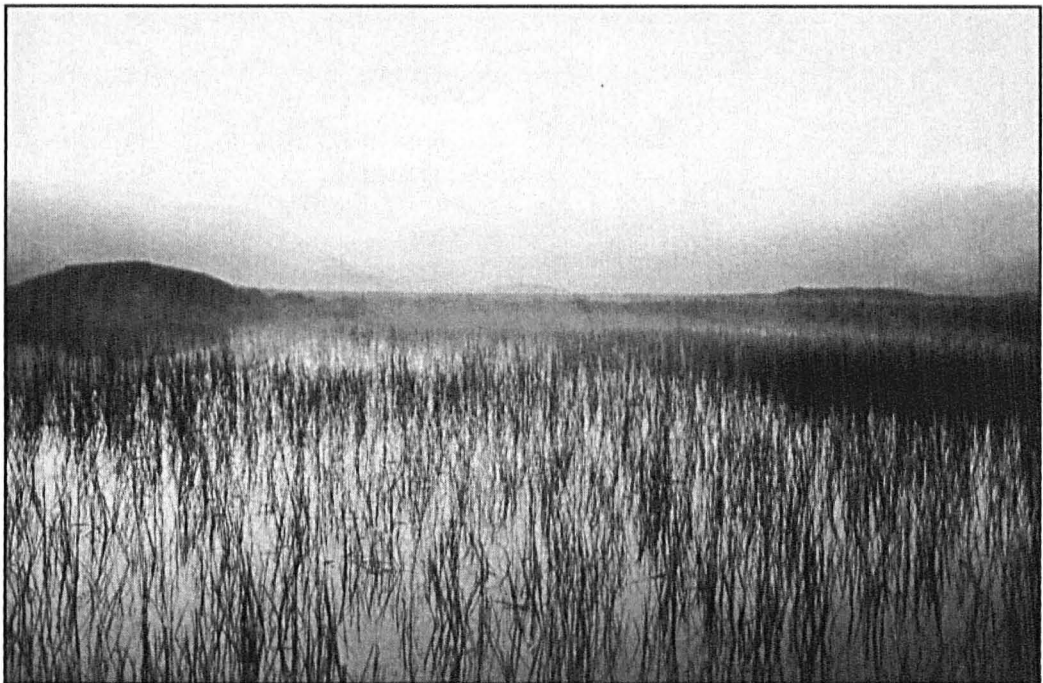


Fig. 10.6
Spring: "We always said that there was a spring sound in the barn when it was nearly empty. Felt good, sounded pretty good ... perhaps it was just imagination."

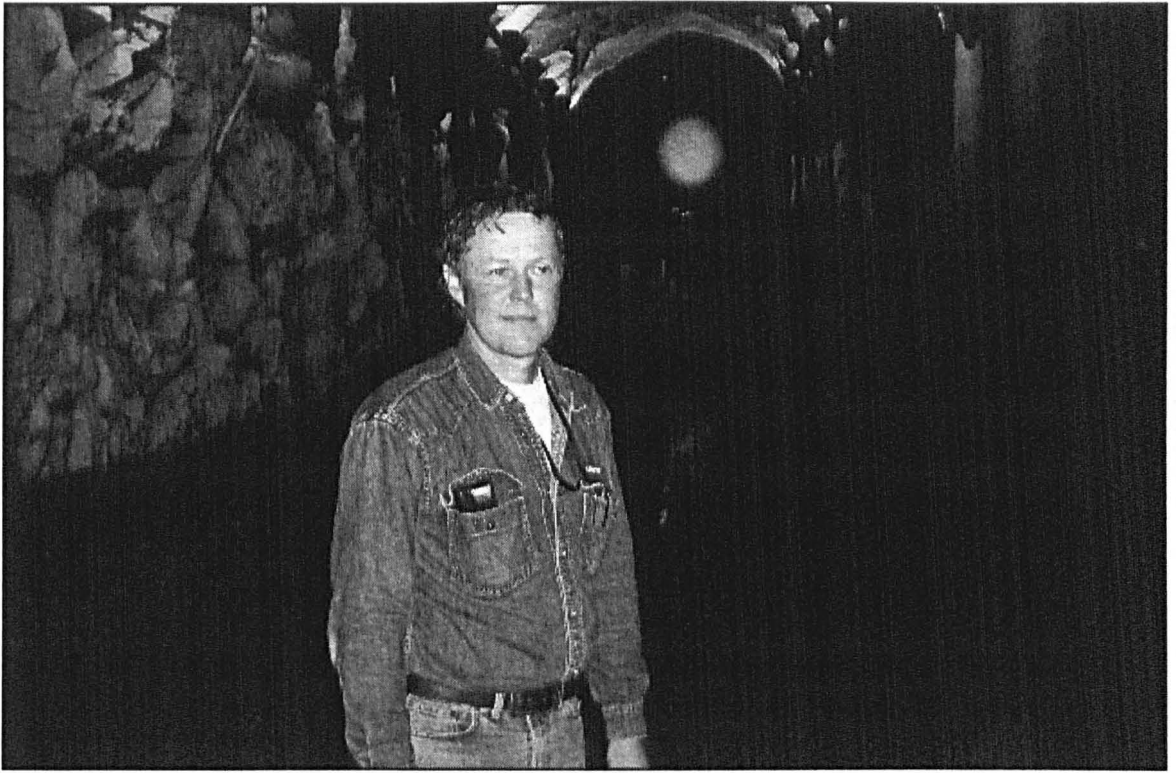


Fig. 10.7

“I was alone in the control room at the power station and it’s empty at the moment and it sounds like the very best concert hall. It’s impossible not to take a few notes!”



Fig. 10.8

The mountains of Kinn: a local natural monument.



Figs. 10.9 & 10.10
 Nature as a central construct of Icelandic national and vocal identity: Hreimur's most recent recordings keep with the tradition.



Fig. 10.11

“When I think of that song, I’m there ... I knew all the boats, by their sound, the sound of their motor, when they came here into the harbour. I knew, I was in my bedroom here, and when I heard that sound, it was this boat that was going out. And it was just this atmosphere from, from the community.”

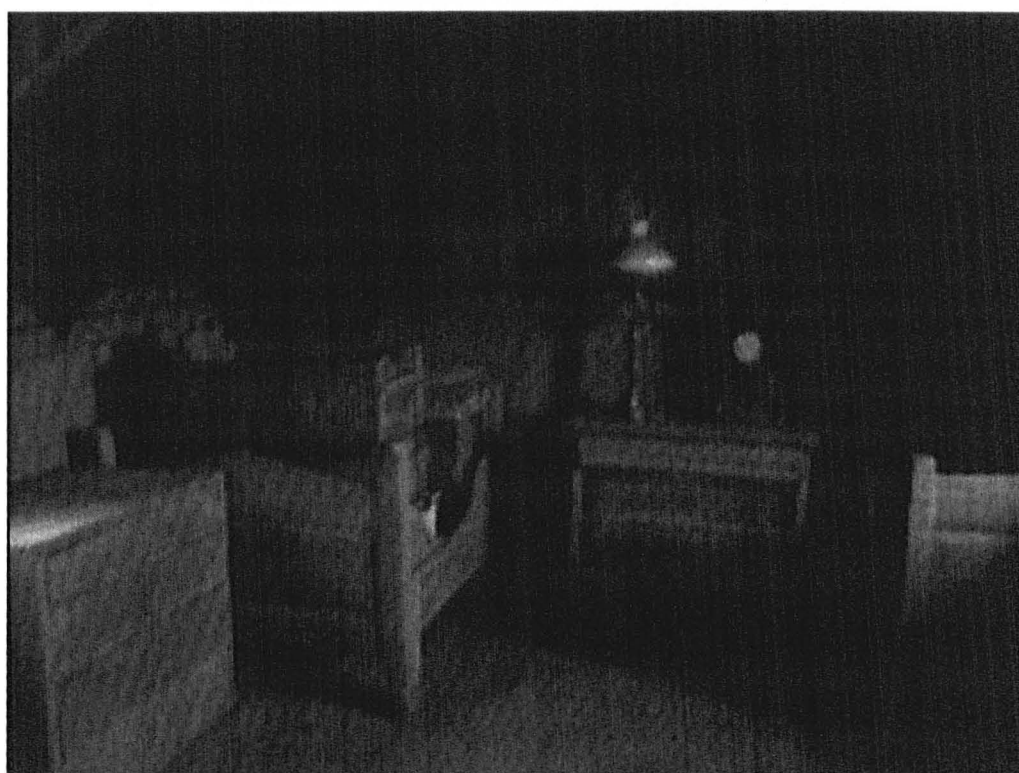
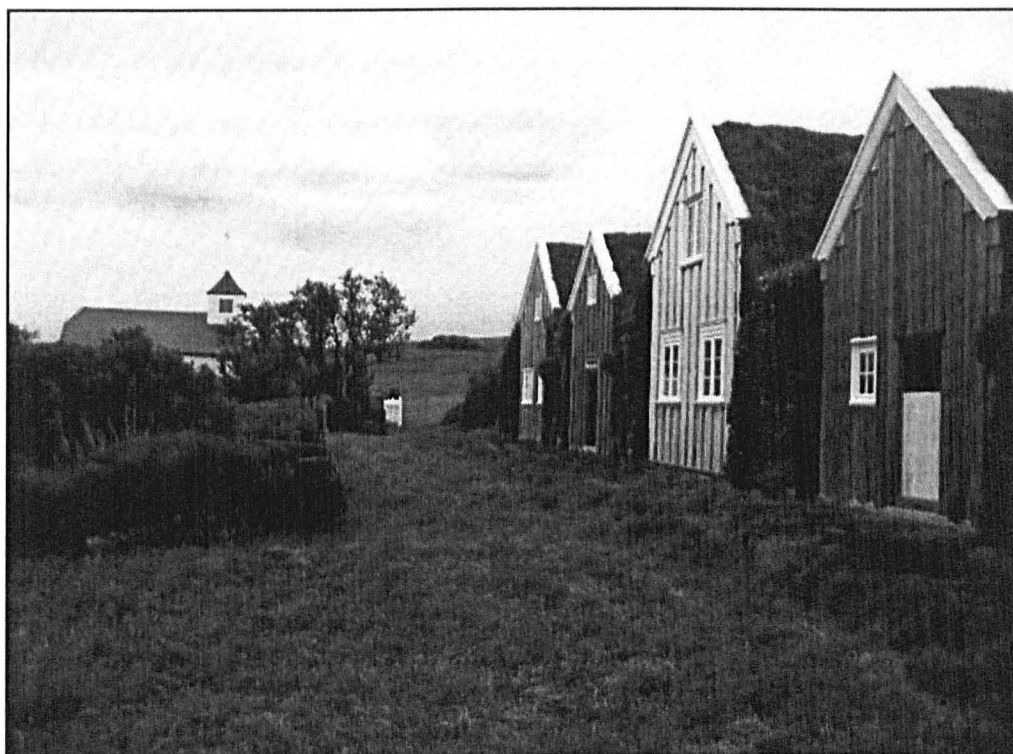


Fig. 10.12

“I was working at the lathe this morning and before I knew it I’d started singing along, the lathe gave the tone and one song just came after another”



Fig. 10.13
Sex roles and singing roles



Figs. 10.14 & 10.15
Twentieth century domestic spaces

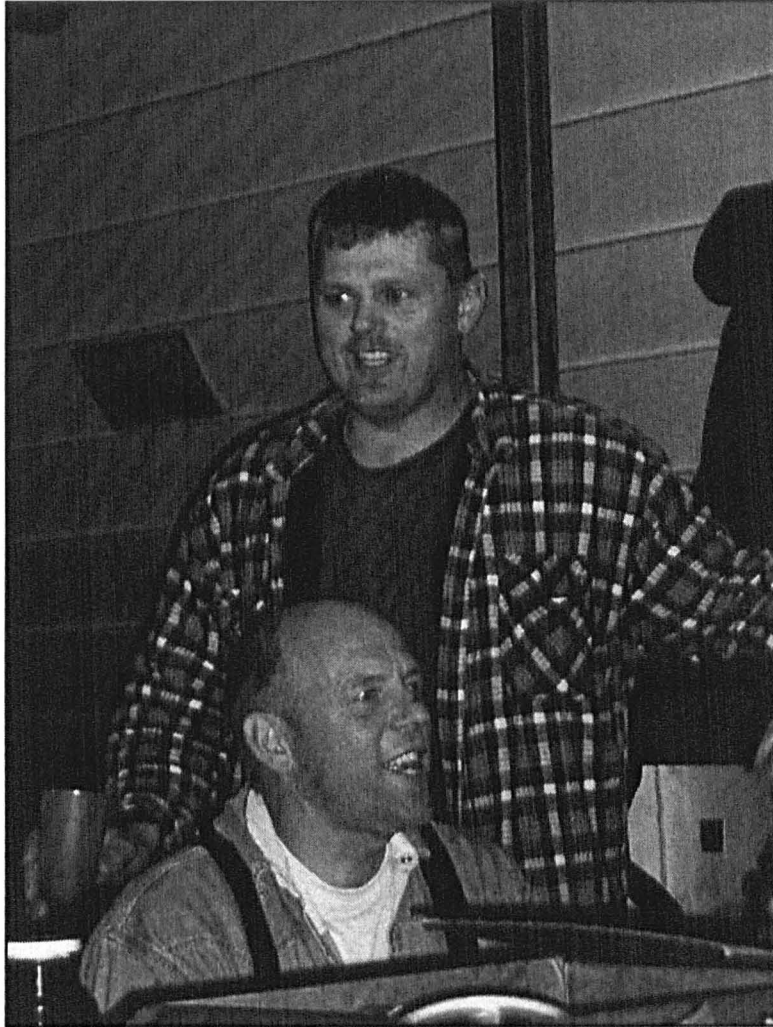


Fig 10.16
“The guys, up in the mountain hut ... rejoice together
by taking a song. It's the obvious thing to do when men
come together.”

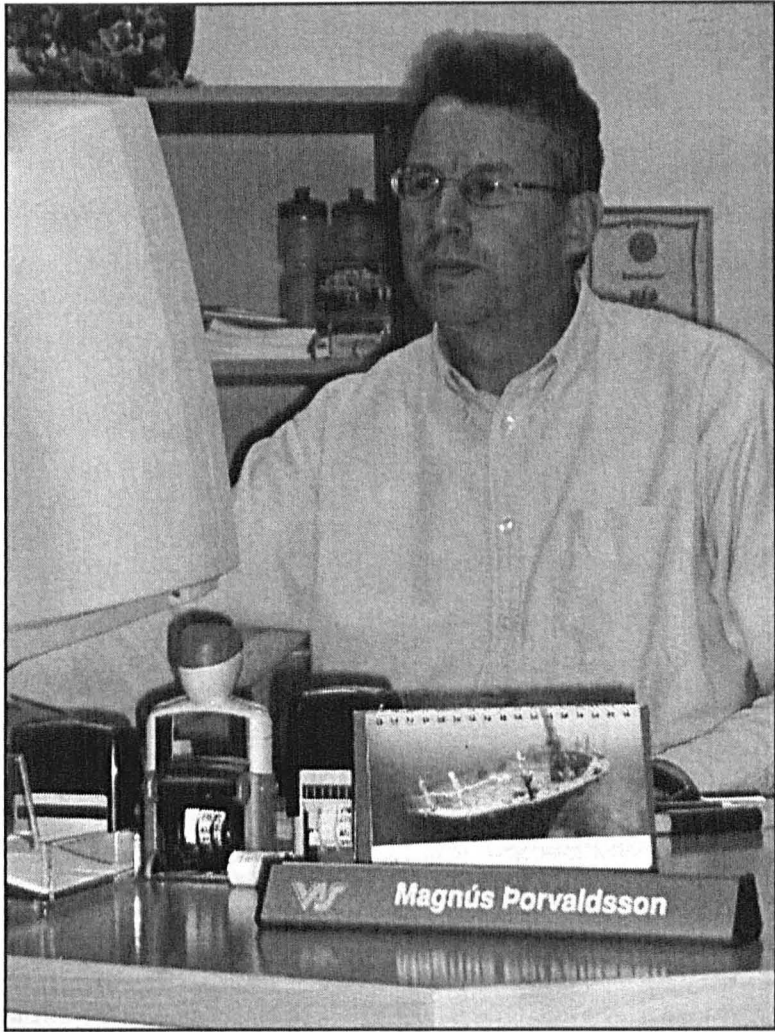


Fig. 10.17
“At least I don’t think about my job when I’m singing,
and not about any problems either.”

11 SINGING AND THE SPIRIT

11.1 Organised Religion and Singing

Singing is an essential part of the rites and rituals practiced by these men in their Icelandic version of the Lutheran religion. It will be recalled from the last chapter that churches here are actuated by singing from mixed voices, but Baldur made it clear though that gender issues are at work here too. Speaking about the social restrictions on women's vocal opportunities, Baldur explains why, in his youth at least, it was deemed acceptable for women to sing in the church choir, whilst the idea of their forming a single-sex choir never even seemed to emerge:

That was something that *had* to be, at least they thought so. And it was something that was of course pleasing to God and all that. (P1)

Following the revolution of Icelandic church music in the second half of the nineteenth century briefly discussed in chapter two, male-dominated *tvísöngur* was replaced by traditional Western European three- and four-part vocal styles. Women's voices were essential to these new musical forms and by the middle of the twentieth century every small church in the area, of which there are many, had a four-part choir. Most still have, including ten in the area covered by the male voice choir alone. Their purpose was undoubtedly liturgical, but once again, like other collective vocal groups, they signify and construct particular patterns of community and social life. In fact, these choirs sung secular music too and some sung sometimes publicly at a concert maybe once a year, typically in the spring. In most of the smaller churches, this tradition has died out over the past three or four decades and their choirs now tend to sing almost exclusively for religious services.

The vast majority of Icelanders are members of the state Lutheran church, into which almost all children are christened and confirmed. The theological paradigm however is not entirely conventional: the co-existence of very widely held "folk-beliefs" in mystical powers has been observed by anthropologists

(Wieland, 1999) and themes relating to this are common in Icelandic folk song repertoire, including songs regularly sung by the male voice choir. The famous song *Á Sprengisandi* reflects belief in *álagablettir* – haunted or deadly places (see CD 13), another, *Hornbjarg*, reflects widespread belief in hidden people or “*huldufólk*”. Although none of the men makes this point explicit, it is true to say that the practice of Icelandic song repertoire in schools and choirs and not least in male-voice choirs, maintains a strong cultural awareness of mystical powers and spirits in the collective consciousness. Even the established church itself flirted seriously with spiritualism and a considerable number of people known to me personally have sought the services of mediums. One member of the choir in his diary relates singing to mystical and metaphysical powers in a way that reflect some of these ideas:

Lots of songs seem to press themselves onto me. Gentle relaxing and beautiful songs. From experience, I know that this is an omen. At lunchtime, I hear on the news that an old friend that I worked with in the summer of '55 has passed away. We shared a great love of singing and most evenings after work we took a song together, just the two of us. Memories flood in and for the rest of the day these autumnal tones follow me. It proves that song is not just a universal language but crosses life and the grave too. (P5)

The theological cocktail that is typical of Icelandic “spirituality” and the inconsistencies and contradictions that it represents, does not stop organised religion from playing a significant part in the lives of most Icelanders. Church services are normally held not more than once a month in rural areas, and less frequently during the summer months, but at Christmas and Easter, at confirmation services and funerals especially, congregation and choir leave few empty pews. The importance of the church choir is clear in Baldur’s concern for their future as demography and life-styles change. It is obvious to Baldur that eventually everybody in the community will need the choir to do some personal work for them:

I’d be ashamed not to sing with them and people here who can sing and aren’t taking part in anything, they could support the choir, it’s the same people who want and need singing in church for their selves. (P1)

People will, sooner or later, need singing for themselves, and this is why in Baldur's view it is an almost obligatory community service: "Underneath I really feel obliged to go, even if I might be feeling a bit lazy." (P1)

The most widely sung Icelandic liturgy is a version composed by the same Bjarni Þorsteinsson whose collection of Icelandic folksongs I discussed in chapter two. The festival version in particular, sung at Christmas and Easter, seems to hold a special place in the hearts of many Icelanders as a symbol of collective spiritual identity. More recently, some members of the clergy have been pressing hard, both for the "re-introduction" of Gregorian chants and for the unison singing of hymns. The opposition this has met amongst most local church choirs and unanimously it seems, among men in the study, is vociferous. Singing in harmony seems fundamental to the configuration of their social world and spiritual expression. Objections to singing in unison are widespread and, although I have heard protests primarily from men, I have also heard women object to it too. Many of the men articulate a view of the choir as somehow "ministering" to the congregation. Those members of the congregation not in the church choir, the argument seems to be, should simply listen, and let the choir's 4-part singing do its work, have appropriate agency, and provide spiritual nourishment. This is a view even expressed by singers in the male voice choir who could quite easily sing along with the church choir but choose not to. As Guðmundur noted:

I think the choir should just sing (*i.e. not the congregation*), it's so festive, to sit there, and everybody be quiet, nobody claps, nothing to trouble you, it's absolutely wonderful. I go to church to hear good hymn singing not to hear what the priest has to say! (P10)

Whilst other men are not quite as outspoken as Guðmundur, nearly all perceive singing as a force enfusing these sacred and social events, an almost literal "breath" or "spiritus". Several of the men like Baldur find it impossible to imagine church services without singing:

People need singing in church for themselves and for singing praises to your God. A service in church without singing wouldn't even be half a service. (P1)

In vocal diaries, kept for just one week, there are numerous references to singing at church services – weddings, christenings and funerals in particular.

Went to a baptism, it wasn't a mass and so no choir, but that wasn't a problem, there were so many song folk there! (P3)

Went to a funeral today, lovely singing, sad but beautiful. (P16)

Funerals are very significant social occasions in Iceland. Relatives and friends will travel for miles, even half way around the country in the middle of winter, to attend funeral services and burials. The church at Húsavík seats close to 400 people and is sometimes full at funerals, whilst smaller country churches are often packed to overflowing. People will commonly sit outside in cars or coaches and listen to a broadcast of the ceremony on short wave radio. After the burial, all the guests traditionally adjourn to the local community hall for substantial refreshments provided by the local women's institute. Quite normally local funeral services may include as many as five or six hymns or songs, sung by a choir and possibly with a soloist too – Baldur and his brother for example both sing fairly regularly as soloists or as a duet at funerals. The music need not necessarily be of a strictly "religious" nature, and songs with the Icelandic nationalist themes of nature are common. The male-voice choir usually sings for the funerals of past members of the choir and an eclectic range of repertoire is frequently performed. Remarkably, as I write this very page, in a personally very touching (spiritual?) instance of happenstance, I have been interrupted by a request from an elderly and terminally ill ex-member of the choir, via his children and literally hours before his death, for the choir to sing several songs at his funeral. One is a melancholic *a cappella* song about a bright July night; the other is a stirring, dramatic, and very loud Russian piece about a storm at sea and fatal ship wreck! see CD 11). As people do, I wish to make meaning from this very strange coincidence and there are three points that I wish to draw out; I do so informed by having been close friends with this singer for nearly twenty years. Firstly I see his need to arrange the songs (and they are all songs, not hymns!) for his own funeral as an act of Self-therapy, an act of reducing entropy in his failing consciousness and bringing a sense of preparedness and closure. Secondly, I see in the choice of these songs a way of creating Self in the memory of others: "this

is how I want to be remembered". The ode to Icelandic nature locates the singer firmly in this rural idyll, reminding mourners that he had spent nearly all his life on the banks of one of Iceland's most cherished natural monuments – Lake Myvatn. The dramatically contrasting Russian piece with its extended bass solo recalls the singer's own former vocal prowess when, possessed of an exceptional bass voice, he sang solo regularly with both church and male-voice choirs. Thirdly, I see him as choosing a particular therapeutic style for his relatives and friends. For the most part, this will be a melancholic mood, prompting feelings of sadness and loss, but the Russian piece will provocatively challenge the sombre stability of the occasion. It will demand a very different response as surely as any musical/clinical intervention in conventional creative music therapy practice does (see Ansdell, 1995).

Icelandic funerals are very public displays of family and community. Family members and close friends generally mourn demonstratively. Whilst there are not as a rule, dramatic displays of grief, tears, and crying are very commonplace indeed and it is clear that music plays a central role in facilitating this catharsis. Men recognise this agency:

That feeling, that you get on certain occasions, with grieving, to see what singing can do, people crying, something being *pulled* out of them. You feel it yourself, what singing can do. (P4) (My italics)

Singing then is perceived by the men as having function in the cathartic changing of self, in this case in the restoration of Self and the reduction of entropy.

11.2 Spiritual Selves, Purposefulness and the Reduction of Entropy through Song

The notion that the construction of religious or spiritual selves serves little, if any, useful social function, and at worst is a virus of the mind has been widely held (see Freud, 1961; Dawkins, 1991). There are dissenting voices however: Weber following on from James, sees spirituality as a "purposefulness" beyond the Darwinian checklist of "get-up, survive, reproduce, die" (Weber, 2000: 28). Weber argues that the spiritual self is not limited to belief in traditional kinds of religion, or to the kind of practices that men observe in their diaries as depending so heavily on song. Csikszentmihalyi points out, that spirituality is always aimed

at the reduction of entropy in human consciousness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993: 239). This is clearly the purposeful aim of singing in the funerals men mention above. Furthermore, the way in which the men talk about the act of singing as a “purposefully” and regularly sought act of Self-help, reducing entropy in consciousness, implies that singing itself has a spiritual dimension for these men apart from its function in organised religion. Guðmundur Árni expresses a sentiment shared by many other men when he says, “I get a sense of release and feel good, I forget all the dissonance and hassle.” (P15) This clearly relates to the theme of song as therapy for physical Self and body with which I ended the last chapter, and to the ways in which men perceive singing’s agency in body and mind maintenance.

It’s just a really good device, if something is wrong; if you feel bad, then it’s really good to sing *yourself* away from it. (P3)
(My italics)

You feel completely different afterwards, it’s an elixir, you release something somehow, free of tension, become relaxed, even if you’re totally knackered. (P1)

At least I don’t think about my job when I’m singing, and not about any problems either. (P2)

You rest from your work, even if you’re tired, somehow, you change over into a completely different (P9)

According to Weber, the spiritual shows itself through a sense of purpose (2000: 204), a natural human state and quality that he sees as being more distinctly idiosyncratic of the human condition than just about any other attribute. Weber sees this defining characteristic not just in the pursuits of extraordinary individuals – the climbing of mountains, the relieving of poverty, the pursuit of original artistic expression or scientific discovery, but also in a myriad of mini quests. In the “small perfections” of tending gardens, riding a horse, or singing together, people find the meaning of life, “simultaneous purposes in rough harmony with the major parts of life, work, relationship and personal development.” (ibid.: 231).

From the data we have already examined there can be little doubt about the “purposefulness” of the vocal quest in which men in the present study are engaged. At the very least, any interpretation of men’s perceptions of their vocal behaviour would have to recognise the harmonisation of this particular purpose with other major parts of their daily existence. In the case of one or two men, singing appears to so pervade most other senses of purpose that it is hard, from the evidence of their narratives at least, not to see singing as a grand purpose in their lives, bordering on what Weber identifies as the monomaniacal:

Life without singing would be no life at all. (P1)

My cousin says he’d be dead if he hadn’t joined the choir, he just gets so depressed, he only lives for the male voice choir. (P10)

But the fact that singing in their lives is woven into the fabric of their wider personal and social lives, interacting with a whole range of other purposes, reminds us that this is really not the case. Singing is not pursued by these men just for the sake of singing *per se*, but as a purposeful activity that flows through and nourishes personal and social life, giving them meaning and having agency for them:

There is never a day that goes by without my singing something, because I think that I am nourished somehow by it. (P3)

For most of the men, this is a lifetime’s purpose too. Their vocal behaviour is steadfast and not just one of a stream of serial purposes, like those who flit endlessly between live-styles, beliefs, pastimes and pursuits (Weber, 2000: 227). For many of the men, like Baldur, Kjartan, and Úlfar, singing as purpose was learnt through enculturation from earliest childhood. For others, like Gunnar, who decided to join the choir after a major employment location change from the sea to the land, singing became more purposeful as he detected gaps in his social life and a lack of social connections. Singing, it seems, has filled some of those gaps and provided him with a fuller sense of community.

11.3 Vocal and Spiritual Skills

Once again it has become impossible to sustain focused discourse on body, persona or spirit in isolation. Singing as a manifestation of the spiritual self is directed at the construction and maintenance of both social and physical self. This function of vocal behaviour reflects Csikszentmihalyi's observation of the spiritual self as being concerned with the reduction of entropy in consciousness. Men's narratives supply plenty of evidence to indicate that singing clearly does this in men's lives; it restores order, harmony, and predictability to their conscious lives. Vocal skills are not traditionally seen as spiritual ones, but the kind of theoretical framework that both Csikszentmihalyi and Weber expound might well accommodate them as such and I suggest that men's perceptions of their vocal behaviour supports such an argument. In thinking about the spiritual, or what he calls the transcendental, Csikszentmihalyi considers spiritual skills and sees them as involving:

The ability to control experience directly, by manipulating memes that increase harmony among people's thoughts, emotions, and wills. Those who practice these skills are called Shamans, priests, philosophers, artists. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993: 239)

The singers in the present study, I suggest, can be seen as qualifying as practitioners of these skills in two ways. Firstly, their own narratives support observations of them both as artists and shamans, however modest. Secondly, they also fulfil Csikszentmihalyi's definition of the process of behaving in spiritually skilful ways by appearing to be able to control their experience and the experience of others, by manipulating vocal behaviours that are passed on from one individual to another. Whilst the shaman might not be widely recognised in Western society as a credible source of healing, there is sufficient evidence linking musical practices with the reduction of entropy in consciousness, and, in turn, with both the management and restoration of the physical body, to encourage a less prejudiced appraisal of this phenomenon than logical positivism long deemed respectable, or necessary. Over recent decades, music therapy has been increasingly recognised as having this potential. Emerging from a period of uncertainty about its effectiveness or, more accurately perhaps, about how best to demonstrate its clinical effectiveness (see Bunt, 1994: 9ff), a proliferation of

diverse and critical literature and more especially, wide ranging research published in music therapy journals indicate that music therapy is being recognised by large areas of the medical community. Research clearly recognises the impact that music therapy can have on mental and physical disorders ranging from autism, to Parkinsonism, from palsy and diplegia, to Down's syndrome, on individuals in coma states, with clinical depression, or suffering from terminal illness. Now, it should be clear that none of the men claim to have found relief or restoration to professionally diagnosed clinical pathologies, or psychopathologies, though many of them testify to singing's therapeutic impact in major psychological crisis and in daily stress. Speaking of a family tragedy in his youth, one of the men illustrates singing's agency as a therapeutic behaviour:

In those days there was no help in that sort of crisis (*brother's fatal accident*) so, so you just sang. And like with x who sung with us and committed suicide just last year I wrote that song then. (Singing) still works, it's amazingly good. (P3)

It is clear from the "there was no help" in those days that the singer is comparing singing to the therapeutic processes of professional psychological counselling and interestingly, even though such services would certainly be available today, the singer still practices his own vocal variation of self-help therapy. The following quotations illustrate singing's function in self-help therapy in cases of far less dramatic dis-ease – the release of tension and the regulation of mood, especially the alleviation of depression:

It's just a really good device, if something is wrong, if you feel bad, then it's really good to sing *yourself* away from it. (P3)
(My italics)

Without appearing to make excessive claims for this kind of singing as music therapy, I do wish to make two points about it from music therapy discourse. The first concerns a debate that has been going on among music therapists and community musicians about the demarcation between music therapy and community music. Ansdell has recently called for an acknowledgement of a broader music therapy practice and a paradigm shift (Ansdell, 2002: 109), and it is no coincidence, I suggest, that his argument has

emerged at a time when the music therapy community, freeing itself from the need to justify itself clinically, has been focusing discourse on diverse cultural contexts. In some cases, this has even led to a re-appraisal of links between religion, magic and medicine (see Gouk, 2000; Kenny & Stige, 2002). Ansdell suggests a continuum between poles of individual/music therapy to communal/community music as a way of understanding how these respective practices have “colonised” distinct territories. Professional boundaries apart, where one might ask would community-singing fit on such a model? Where could the regular performances of the male voice choir for old people in the community fit on such a continuum; or the singing that “pulls out emotions” and facilitates catharsis at funerals; what of the ex-choir member on his death-bed arranging and calling into his failing consciousness, songs for his own funeral a final attempt at reducing entropy in the face of terminal atrophy? Much less dramatically, but no less significantly, what of the vocal release of tension, depression, or sadness that men claim to experience on a regular, daily basis? The therapeutic impact perceived by these men is clearly bi-directional, that is to say, they work both at communal and individual levels, and the singers are both therapists for others and Self-therapists. The questions men’s perceptions raise about singing, and in particular about group singing’s status as therapy, are similar to those raised by Bailey and Davidson’s investigation into amateur group singing as a therapeutic instrument (2002a, 2002b, 2003). They report the apparent promotion of adaptive behaviours among homeless men who sing in a choir. The benefits perceived include the alleviation of depression, improvements in social interaction skills, increased self-esteem, and ordered thinking. All these I argue are examples of Csikszentmihalyi’s spiritual skills, displayed in similar ways and using the same vocal mode of behaviour as men in the present study. The point I want to make then and hope I have illustrated, is that collective singing can be seen, both from the evidence of men’s narratives here, and from Bailey and Davidson’s research cited above, as a purposefully spiritual and explicitly therapeutic activity, even though we might have problems locating it on simplistic bi-polar models of musical therapy and community musics; one dimension is far too few to represent the complicated processes involved. Reflecting on the following quotation, I suggest that it embraces something of that complexity, metaphorically and literally engaging with concepts of individual and community, entropy and

therapy – the restoration of order to mental and social lives through musical expression and form, and the experiencing of their affective and emotional powers: “You feel much better in harmony with others. Then you get that kick, that’s how it’s supposed to be.” (P2)

The second point I wish to make here before leaving the question of vocal behaviour as a therapeutic spiritual skill is really only a tangential observation, but one that might help to remove an obstacle which hinders the acceptance of a view of these men singing, choral singing or indeed any singing, as music therapy. The balance between instrumental and vocal practice among music therapists, at least in as far as it is represented by the literature, appears to support a claim that Western music therapy has possibly privileged instrumental improvisation at the cost of the human voice. Given the intimate relationship between human psyche and voice – even the word “personality” originally referred to the sound of the voice passing through the mouth hole in the masks of Ancient Greek actors – this might seem surprising. The voice’s potential in therapy is recognised by Newman in his *Voicework Therapy*, but he interestingly cites di Franco’s claim that although music therapists have great fluency in communicating through an instrument this is not true of their ability to express themselves vocally (Newman, 1999: 108). Like Newman, Rousseau clearly sees the voice as having most therapeutic potential and calls for research that examines healing functions of certain human voices and the effects of different kinds of voices on different kinds of people (Rousseau, 2000). If there is a particular quality of singing that men in the study seem to implicate themselves as having curative qualities, it is not the quality of individual melodies or vocal timbres but that of harmony. The vocal Self to Other Ratio of which I spoke of in chapter eight, and theorized as being a significant psychological construct of social self rather than just an acoustic phenomenon, seems aurally, metaphorically, physically and mentally to restore a sense of order and meaning, reduce entropy in social and personal worlds and restore a sense of belonging and community. Labelling this kind of vocal behaviour as music therapy, or as community music, seems irrelevant. No professional status or vested interests are directly at stake at least, but there are insights to be gained from looking at musical behaviours that are so purposefully employed by these men in so many areas of their everyday lives, through the lens of music therapy practice, and lessons too, perhaps, for music therapists

themselves. Music therapists might very reasonably be added to Csikszentmihalyi's list of spiritual practitioners, like shamans themselves, without denting their hard fought for clinical respectability. I argue on the basis of men's narratives, for the consideration of their voices as a manifestation of spiritual self, and their singing as the application of spiritual skills.

11.4 Singing and Peak Aesthetic Experiences

Surprisingly enough, Weber's discussion of the spiritual contains little consideration of the artist that Csikszentmihalyi sees as the possessor of spiritual skills. Whilst the spiritual self is seen by Weber as being evoked by contemplation of a sunset or in communion with nature, relatively little consideration is given to artistic or aesthetic experience here, or for that matter elsewhere in his discourse. This seems an oversight to me for two reasons: firstly in general terms the arts provide possibilities for individuals and communities to explore and reinvent themselves in myriad ways, ways that might never be possible in reality, but that in a fantastical space might facilitate the trying on of a whole range of identities – Butler's seminal discussion of drag and gender identity illustrate the kind of experimentation possible (Butler, 1999: 174ff.). Secondly, and more specifically in relation to the theme of spirit in this chapter, peak aesthetic experiences such as those that men recall and describe, appear to evoke the spiritual self, in ways similar to Weber's sunset or contemplation of nature.

The spiritual quality of singing itself is illustrated by men's description of vocal events in terms similar to Sloboda's peak aesthetic experiences (1991, 1998); there is clearly arousal of the automatic nervous system and there is a spiritual, other worldly, metaphysical intensity about them:

I was entranced, ... in Ásbyrgi ... the Reykjavík Male Voice Choir came. I think I was 7 or 8. They sang absolutely, that, well, I forgot myself completely, and the cliffs ... it resounded on the rocks. They put so much power into *Sumarmorgunn í Ásbyrgi* (*Summer Morning in Ásbyrgi - A song about the very same location. Valdi recites the whole of the last stanza*) I almost lost consciousness. It echoed in the cliffs and when they stopped, it took a few seconds to die out, and then there was so much silence, I'll never forget it. Everyone held their breath. (P5)

Other men describe vocal experiences in similar, otherworldly, almost metaphysical terms, as we have already heard:

The other day when we sang in Stykkishólmur and the choir and Balli sung *Rósin* (The Rose), I was so choked, I couldn't, I just couldn't sing ... it was so special. (P7)
see CD 7)

It's just such an astounding instrument (*male voice choir*), there's nothing more beautiful than powerful singing where each part (*voice*) is clearly defined, you just get goosebumps ... I've never heard a mixed choir that really bewitched me! (P1)

The feeling you get ... when you have sung your song, and you think it sounded well ... that's when you get this "Ah yes!". This happiness ... (P2)

Such moments are already implicated by research by Sloboda (1991, 1998) as being highly significant in terms of musical motivation. The frequency with which the men recall such peak aesthetic experience from vocal events in their early childhood is surely significant in the development of their own vocal and musical identity. There are other issues here worthy of consideration; Valdi's experience above begs the question as to what extent his emotional response was determined by context or content. What I hope these examples illustrate is that whilst these experiences are not religious in nature they can with some justification be seen as spiritual. I have deliberately not limited thinking about the spiritual self to religious systems, though I have included them in depth, because of how important men perceive singing to be in their practice. What I have tried to do too, is to look at what actions might be spiritual and what might make up spiritual experiences, in addition to conventional or, in the case of many Icelanders, rather unconventional, religious paradigms. I suggest that men's perceptions of singing's capacity to facilitate peak aesthetic experiences, reduce entropy in consciousness, and provide purpose in life, can be interpreted as a spiritual practice significant in the construction, nourishment, and embodiment of a spiritual self.

11.5 An Interim Summary of Singing and the Tripartite Self

Regardless of the fact that the men in this study sing together in a male-voice choir, the evidence that has already been examined clearly indicates that singing is far more than just a hobby to them; men themselves make claims for it as a "pattern" for living. The last three chapters have illustrated how men's vocal

patterns can be seen as permeating all elements of the classical tripartite model of Self. Singing constructs and maintains, embodies and signifies the persona, body and spirit – social, physical, and spiritual self. As we have already seen, there are inevitable and ultimately insurmountable problems with reductionist models of organic mechanisms. We have no sooner begun an interpretation of men's perceptions of vocal behaviour in terms of the body than we are pressed to consider its social implications, no sooner defined vocal skills as spiritual ones when we realize that these have physical and social applications too. The vocal patterns that men have described here fit both individual elements of this model and illustrate the way these elements are interlocked in the reality of lived experience. Even *interlocked* or *overlapping* seem inadequate to describe the kind of intermingling format of persona, body and spirit which singing appears to configure – singing as integrated Self. But because we like order and meaning and dislike entropy and disorder, I shall stick to this conventional representation in the figures below (figs. 11.1, 11.2, & 11.3), as a simplistic illustration of the essentially integrated nature of Self and the role of singing as Self. Figure 11.1 represents the integrated model of the tripartite Self that James proposed, whilst figure 11.2 illustrates Weber's revision of James's original model. At the heart of Self, Weber sees a core, where consistency, continuity, completeness, and community are essential to maintaining the unitary, balanced Self, necessary for well-being. It is clear from men's narratives that their vocal identity and behaviour play very significant roles in the construction and maintenance of that core self. Figure 11.3 represents a model of Self like this, where singing is centrally located in the core Self because of its commonality to Self's component parts of the social, physical and spiritual and by the way that vocal activity appears to hold these elements together.

Whilst I would argue that interpreting men's perceptions of their vocal behaviour as central constructs in this model of Self provides us with a good sense of fit between data and theory, I suggest that we have not yet exhausted the possibilities of interpretation that the data might support. We return later to the classical model of Self as we attempt to draw these various interpretations of vocal behaviour together in some sort of conclusion, but other themes are worth considering first. I wish to remain a little longer in the realm of identity and examine men's vocal behaviour and their perceptions of it from a different

perspective than I have to date, engaging with a theoretical paradigm widely seen as being central to the construction of identity – gender. For a long time following the initial analysis of Baldur’s case study history, I vacillated between seeing the classical model of Self on the one hand and gender theory on the other, as the best way for my interpretation to proceed. Eventually I decided that both were frameworks that would be particularly useful in obtaining as many perspectives as possible of men’s vocal behaviour and of their perceptions of it. This is unashamedly a study about men and essentially, it might be classified as an example of “men’s studies”. The vocal identities, whose role in the construction of Self we have been exploring, are worn by male bodies and we have already seen, not least from Baldur’s case study, that much of this vocal behaviour and perceptions of it have implications for, and are implicated by, gender issues. Until now, I have deliberately tended to prevaricate when interpretation of the data seemed to demand the lens of gendered theory. There have been plenty of opportunities from the outset to focus clearly on masculinity and gender: the origins of male-voice choirs in Iceland, and its role in the construction of national identity; vocal opportunities for women like Baldur’s song-loving mother; sex-roles and vocal roles in the home; the dominance of male-voice choirs and absence of female-voice choirs in Icelandic public music life; the nature of men’s homo-vocal activity in public and no less in informal spaces; the physical intimacy that singing affords men; questions of preference in vocal repertoire; and not least Baldur’s contention that a man who sings is more of a man for doing so. If these themes are to be examined in depth and if we are to assess the role that men’s vocal behaviour plays in their gender identity, and that gender plays in their vocal behaviour, then it is time to turn explicitly to gender theory.

Fig. 11.1 William James's Tripartite Self

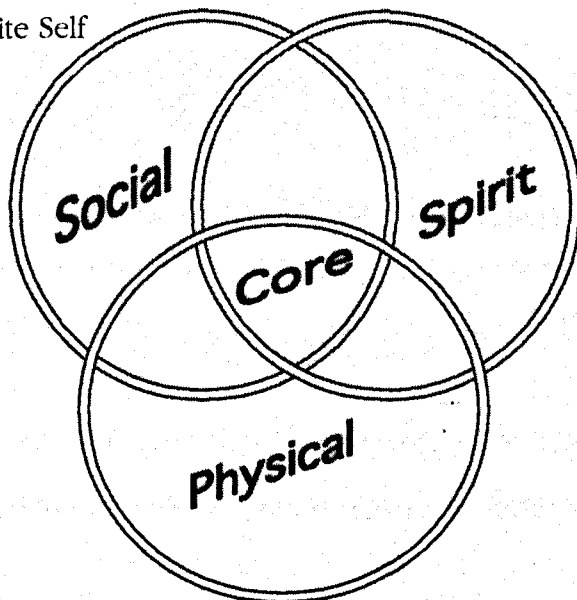


Fig. 11.2 Robert Weber's Tripartite Self

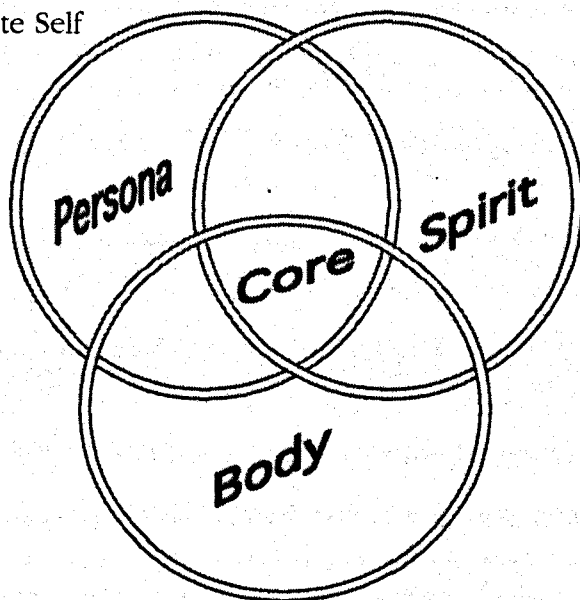
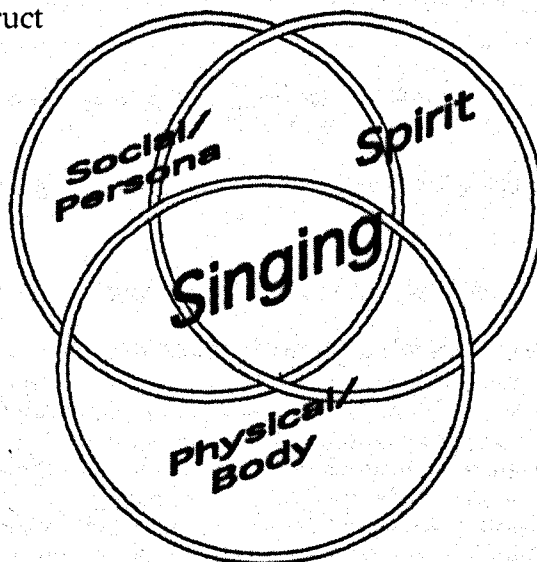


Fig. 11.3 Singing as a Core Construct of the Tripartite Self



12 THE VOCAL PERFORMANCE OF GENDER IDENTITY

12.1 Masculinity and its Vocal Performance

I have already referred to Magrini's study of Cretan vocal styles which examines themes of manhood and death (2000). The vocal styles discussed there are strictly reserved for male performers; they are performances of masculinity. Magrini's study, along with other recent ethnomusicological and anthropological studies into European folk traditions, such as Sugarman's survey of Prespian music (1997), Rice's investigation of Bulgarian folk music (1994), and several contributions to a recent volume on gender and music in the Mediterranean, also edited by Magrini (2003), all reveal patriarchal social systems, reflected, signified, and constructed through musical behaviours. In Crespia, Sugarman describes the social and vocal order as "a patriarchy of singing", transmitting central values of manhood, and justified by belief in an ahistorical maleness which determines gendered vocal behaviour, repertoire and style. In Bulgaria, conversely, we find what might easily be called a "patriarchy of playing"; men, herding animals, find themselves with the opportunity to play simple instruments like flutes, whilst women's hands are kept busy in domestic tasks, home production and husbandry. Voices are free, so women sing (Rice, 1994: 43). Despite this arrangement, and the accepted binary division of musical behaviours according to biological sex, when it comes to recording, Rice notes, male voices are suddenly free too (ibid.: 328).

Southern European ethnic groups are quite possibly seen by northern European ones as the stereotypical, "patriarchal" *other*. In contrast, Scandinavian nations are often portrayed as being at the forefront of women's rights movements and prominent in the configuration of a more egalitarian social life. Iceland is no exception; it elected the West's first woman head of state in 1980; a positive sex discrimination employment act was passed as early as 1976; women priests were first ordained in 1974; and women had equal inheritance rights from the middle of the nineteenth century. But despite apparently being at the cutting edge of visible

reform, the gendered politics of every day social order here may not be as radical as is often supposed. Women still predominantly bear the burden of most domestic tasks, they only occupy 10% of managerial positions in the private sector (Hagstofa Islands, 1997), and they dominate the traditional service *industries* where men are almost invisible in playschools, and only marginally more conspicuous in the compulsory school system. If masculinity is concerned with the confirming of some social patterns in opposition to others, and with a particular kind of agency between social patterns and structures, then there appears to be nothing particularly radical about the politics of gender here. Social infrastructures are changing nevertheless, and in an effort to encourage men to share early parenting roles, recent legislation has guaranteed equal maternity and paternity rights. There is also evidence suggesting that Icelanders have less stereotypical views of feminine and masculine characteristics than many other social groups. An international survey, covering ten countries worldwide, revealed that Icelanders saw characteristics of decisiveness, feelingfulness, talkativeness, intelligence, courage, patience, creativity, ambition, calmness and compassion as being less defined by biological sex than any other sample groups from any other country (Gallup, 1996). Contradictions abound here then, as elsewhere, about gender constructs, sex-roles, and gender identity. Even the election of a woman president can be seen, as Björnsdóttir (1989) has argued, as the confirmation of the maternal/natural view of womanhood. This view was epitomised by the nationalist movement's construction of the Mountain Woman (*fallkonan*), as a symbolic figure of nature and the maternal, who was responsible for turning Icelanders into humans (Björnsdóttir, 1989: 107ff.). Björnsdóttir's analysis is convincing, and it begs the question as to whether the election of a single mother to the office of President of Iceland, widely seen as a progressive symbol of sexual equality, and indicative of the socially constructed nature of gender, was not, in fact, or at least as much, a backward looking reaffirmation of the natural biological order.

It is this dialectic between natural biological sex differences and socially constructed concepts of gender that have dominated gender theory for several decades. In areas as diverse as politics, the work place, sports, the home and sexuality, researchers have observed and argued about the social or natural construction, performance, and function of masculine ideology, and developed

sociological, psychological, biological, and mythological models of its practice. Whilst music, in all its many forms, is one of the ways in which gender identity is created and maintained, research and discourse investigating this relationship has, for the most part, been a feminist-led challenge to the opinion that gender-specific musical behaviours are naturally determined expressions of innate female- or maleness (see Dibben, 2001). In fact, it had taken some considerable time for musicology to recognize that the claims it made for Western music's autonomy, and therefore superiority, might not be as incontrovertible as had been widely presumed, and that it too, and not just the exotic *other* of ethnomusicology, might be "bound up with social values" (Leppert and McClary, 1987: xviii). The historical- and situated-ness of gender and its relationship to western, or indeed, to any musical behaviour and musical meaning were exposed. The social constructivist argument against almost any kind of naturalism, developed originally in seminal texts by de Beauvoir and later by Butler, was applied to the practice of music as it had been to other social practices. In doing so, feminist discourse has illustrated the gender typing of musical performance (Green, 1997), of the composing of music (Citron, 1993), of musical instruments (O'Neill, 1997) of music education (Green, 1997), and of music objects themselves (McClary, 1991). These challenges to the long accepted musical hegemony, to patriarchal definitions of femininity, and to the transhistorical naturalness of music's aesthetic and social order, have opened a new dimension to musical meaning as social construction. There are some issues however, which most of this discourse seems to have sidestepped rather easily. Foremost among them, I suggest, are questions about voice and singing, and it is foremost among my concerns in the nature versus social constructivist dichotomy, precisely because it is the most natural of all musical expressions. Green explains how women's singing reaffirms patriarchal definitions of femininity and typically constructs the appearance of either sexual availability, or of motherhood – the stereotypical madonna/whore dichotomy (Green, 1997: 27ff). Nevertheless, there can surely be little controversy over the assertion that biological difference does define specific qualities of vocal expression. Now this is not to argue that these differences are simply polarised and binary either, they are clearly not. But whilst the arguments about differentiating between female instrumentalists and their male counterparts seem to support the social constructivist argument – unless the notion that women

are biologically incapable of playing or blowing as hard as men is to be taken seriously (see Green, 1997; O'Neill, 1997) – differentiating between men's and women's voices is normally unproblematic, even for untrained listeners, and even allowing for the situatedness of idiosyncratic vocal production. This is not to say that the meaning we make of voices is not socially constructed, as Green has already illustrated, but it does demand, at least, that we explore what biology might have to say about voice and sex so that we might better understand how these biological and social constructs interact. In spite of biology, the voice has provided interesting and often subversive ways of constructing gender identity throughout history. In her seminal discussion of "drag", Butler questions the reality and perception of gender and develops a theory of "performativity" with social, psychic, corporeal, and temporal dimensions. Her analysis of "drag" performance might easily be applied to a wide range of vocal contexts, in various social and cultural settings, where vocal performances, formal and informal, by both men and women, problematise and subvert the apparent "naturalness" of gender identity (1999: 174ff.). A few examples illustrate the point: the singing of young male roles by women in Western opera – say, in such contrasting musical styles as Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* and Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*; the Victorian music hall tradition of male impersonators; the use of male altos in opera and church music; men's roles in Chinese opera; the role of castrati in church (and it might be recalled that as women were allowed to sing four-part harmony in churches in Iceland, the "last" castrati, Alessandro Moreschi, was still recording after a "career" in the Sistine Chapel in Rome); and the transsexual cabaret troupe Bangkok Ladyboys. The last two examples, I suggest, are particularly significant in terms of gendered definitions of the voice and the body, and for understanding men's misuse of power in attempting to assign gender, especially in order to maintain a strictly binary view of gender identity.²⁰ It would be inappropriate to explore these themes here, but they remain dramatically under-theorized. Seeing how men's perceptions of male and female voices emerge from their narratives and relate to concepts of biological sex and socially constructed gender, and thinking about how singing might be seen as a social, psychological, corporeal, and temporal form of performing gender, is exactly where I wish to return to my own research.

12.2 Objectifying Prominence in Vocal Public Life

Long before this particular project begun, it was clear to me that men in this community were vocally privileged. Baldur recognised this fact explicitly and honestly:

I mean that these women (*his mother and other female singers*), they had other things to do at that time; they weren't supposed to be meeting up together to go to a song practice and so on. (P1)

(I) can't remember ever hearing anybody talking about founding a woman's choir. It was completely unimaginable that women should exclude themselves and get together to practice singing. Now I'm saying something that I don't have any idea about. (P1)

I suggest that what Baldur is implying was neatly paraphrased for me in a discussion with an Icelandic woman about gender. The woman, in her fifties, told me, "we weren't supposed to go further than the washing line". On further investigation, even this statement reveals itself as something of a pragmatic truth: Baldur made it quite clear that, whilst there was never any question of founding a formal women's choir, his mother and a few other women did meet together to sing songs in parts. Guðmundur, who lives in a neighbouring valley, recalled that eight or nine women from neighbouring farms met regularly in his childhood home too, primarily, he says, with the aim of singing together. Although they sung together in harmony, and according to Guðmundur, sung very well, they never appeared publicly. This is surely the significant point here – not the possibility of women coming together to sing, but the possibility of a group of women rehearsing regularly and performing in a public arena. As I said in an early chapter, a women's choir was eventually founded, but it has never secured a regular place in local public music life. Despite periodic attempts to revive it by several women musicians in the area, it is not presently active, nor has it been for several years. Men's claims that amongst "the general public, there are so many people that are much more attracted to men's voices than women's voices." (P7) and that male voice choirs are more popular than other choirs generally, and women's choirs in particular, are certainly not unsubstantiated. The statement that "nobody ever comes to their (*women's choirs*) concerts, not even women themselves", (P9) may be an exaggeration, but it reflects something of the reality

of women's choirs' relative absence from Icelandic musical life nationally and not just locally. Having listened to Baldur implicating social gender structures and sex roles, I assumed that this would be repeated in other interviews. This turned out not to be the case; none of the other men implicated long-standing traditions, the demands of domestic life, or social gender structures, as contributing factors to this state of vocal affairs. I suggest that Baldur's view of this dominance – as being related to social power structures – was formed by a childhood spent witnessing and sharing his mother's passionate love of singing, her very considerable vocal skills, and observing the confinement of women's singing to specific social spaces:

Mother sang completely, gave herself totally ... she always sang, all the time ... but I don't remember anybody ever talking about founding a women's choir. I think it was considered unrealistic that women should somehow exclude themselves and get together to practice singing! They had other things to do, they weren't supposed to be meeting up together to go to a song practice, it just wasn't on! (P1)

Almost all the men talk about mothers and grandmothers singing in the home, but, as we shall explore later in more detail, these domestic vocal spaces are not always clearly defined by traditional sex-role theories. Similarly, as we have already noted, a place was soon found for women to sing in churches as new vocal styles were introduced and formal church choirs were founded. Guðmundur recalled stories he had heard about the older vocal practice of *forsöngvar* and response; the *forsöngvari*, or precentor, an appointment in the priest's grace, was a position of considerable social status, although it was not, Guðmundur insists, any indication of vocal ability. Only men would join in with the singing²¹ in church and, in any case, the dominant *tvísöng* style was considered totally inappropriate for women's participation in any public setting. Ingólfsson (2003) confirms Guðmundur's account, adding that even women's paying too much attention to its performance might be construed as their deriving pleasure from it, and was frowned upon (ibid.: 221-2). In domestic settings though it seems that women's participation in *tvísöngur* was tolerated and that they even taught it to their children, singing with them in the absence of other vocal opportunities (ibid.: 227). Guðmundur recalls his mother and father singing *tvísöngur* together at home, indeed the inclusive domestic vocal tradition, an example of which I

recalled in the introduction to this study as an inspirational experience for me personally, is clearly evidenced in records of *tvísöngur* traditions where children would apparently join parents in this two part-singing (ibid.: 225-6).

Both the domestic vocal spaces that women were permitted to actuate, and the public ones that generally speaking they were not, could not, or would not, clearly reflect “patriarchal” definitions of femininity. Men’s narratives provide considerable insight into this demarcation of vocal behaviour and into issues of public vocal display and gender identity. When asked, for example, to justify the dominance of male-voice choirs in Icelandic musical life, most of the men emphasize both subjective questions of taste and what they see as “objective” aesthetic criteria. In keeping with biologically determinist theories (Darwin, 1981), men’s voices are perceived as being more complex, having much greater expressive potential, and wider dynamic and pitch range:

The sound of men’s voices is more enjoyable than women’s. (P2)

Just the sound is more beautiful ... something like that. (P7)

A women’s choir can never be as much of an instrument as a men’s choir. It’s the sound, somehow it’s just more exciting, more beautiful somehow, big and grand... rich, gentle and loving. (P1)

There’s so much more width to the sound – the depth of the basses and the high tenors. (P11)

There’s always something missing when there are just women’s voices, something in the sound, you miss the bass ... the depth, it needs more width. (P9)

Interestingly, the adjectives used here – enjoyable, exciting, wide, deep, beautiful, big, grand, rich, gentle, loving – include those which reflect qualities often seen as feminine. Conversely, concepts of power and aggression, frequently associated with male display are not given the prominence that might have been expected. Explicit aggression is totally absent – which is not to say that men do not claim to enjoy singing Soldier’s Choruses from various operas – power is most certainly not. The perception of men’s voices as having greater expressive potential than women’s, resonates with evolutionary biology thinking that the greater

complexity of the male voice is linked to aesthetic sexual display. Display is a word used extensively in literature about gender, and yet there is a tendency, I suggest, to see this purely as a socially constructed function, or embodiment, in the performance of identity, and to ignore anything that might suggest a link with Darwinist naturalism. Men in the study see their vocal display, and even women's perceptions of it, as having something to say here.

12.3 Men's Voices, Women's Choices

Several men in the study make claims for their singing as biological function along Darwinian lines in unprompted comments about the perception, mainly by women, of both individual and collective male singing as sexual display. For one of the men, the male voice choir's singing is explicitly concerned with sexual display and selection:

I mean in the choir, aren't we guys always the cockerel showing off? You see it in nature, doesn't that happen everywhere in nature? The male always has to display himself ... has a specific routine. (P2)

There is no doubt here that men's singing is seen, literally, in terms of display, and that it is (hetero)sexuality that is being displayed. This would seem to support Connell's argument that "enactments" where there are:

well-defined scripts to perform, and clear audiences to perform to (are) linked to a structure defined by biological difference, the dichotomy of male and female (Connell, 1995: 26).

In contrast, Baldur argues in constructivist style, that such behaviour, or at least this kind of definition of it, belongs to the historical and situated:

There's absolutely nothing like that going on ... it's something that belongs to history if it is at all, totally not. I can't see anything like that at all. (P1)

None of the men would seem to go as far as the men of the Warao in South America who believe that by singing the name of every part of a woman's body, they could bewitch her into uncontrollable sexual desire for the male singer (Olsen, 1980: 376). Even so, something of this sentiment might lie beneath the attraction that

they see men's voices having for women, and what they perceive as women's sometimes "unrestrained" enthusiasm for male voice singing:

I know lots of women that are absolutely unbearable if they've been drinking, they just want to listen to male-voice choir recordings. They never want to listen to a women's choir or even a mixed choir...men's voices, that's what they want to listen to, go absolutely mad. (P11)

Whilst I initially felt inclined to interpret this comment as no more than a display, in itself, of a particular kind of brash masculine heterosexuality, I found myself thinking about the make-up of the choir's typical audience – where women are very well represented – and about the meanings that they might be making of this display. Before I had come to any conclusions, and quite by chance, I overheard an Icelandic woman in her early twenties talk about the "*hrútasýning*" – "ram's show" – as she watched these men line up for a recent concert, and I remembered that I had heard that analogy before. This highly gendered rural tradition takes place every year in rural communities to decide which rams are best for breeding (see Hastrup, 1990). The woman refused to expand on her impromptu comment and whilst I am sure that devices of both irony and humour were used here, the sexual implications cannot be completely ignored, not least, when they are considered in the light of some of the men's comments.

In his study of the evolution of human music, Miller argues that the origins of the formation of male choruses may be located in the context of sexual selection and competition in as far as it minimalizes search costs for females (Miller, 2002: 350). In doing so, Miller challenges the often taken-for-granted notion that music made by groups is necessarily made for the group's best interests, and appears to be suggesting that the reproductive interests of individual vocalists might still essentially be at stake here (ibid.: 351). Whilst nobody suggests that the price of an admission ticket to a male-voice choir concert minimalizes the search costs for women looking for a reproductive partner, ignoring biology is not an option open to us because we are concerned here with the interpretation of perceptions of vocal behaviour – what people think vocal display might mean.

Green has argued that the *displayer* in the West is coded as "feminine" for reasons that relate to the prominence of (feminine) sexuality in the

institutionalisation of display (1997: 25). Now whilst this may well be true of the archetypal western capitalist market setting – wherever that may be – things in Iceland could only very recently be seen in these kinds of terms. It must be admitted though that the rate of change here over the past two decades, in terms of constructing these kinds of display codes in media, advertising, and in the introduction of striptease clubs, is very dramatic indeed. But looking at the institutionalisation of display over the same kind of time scale as the male voice choir movement has been ritualizing the display of male bodies and voices, I suggest that female display has not, over this period, been explicitly concerned with sexuality and seduction, but with the no less patriarchal themes of motherhood and nature, as the construction of the Mountain Woman (*Fjallkonan*), discussed above, clearly illustrates (Björnsdóttir, 1989). In attempting to locate these gender codes of display in historical contexts, it should also be noted that part of the construction of Icelandic nationalist identity has been a symbolic rejection of war and aggression ; Iceland has, for example, no armed forces, and even allowing for the Allied presence in the Second World War and a controversial NATO presence since, few battles can be said to have been fought here since days of the Icelandic Commonwealth, except for the one with natural elements and forces. This formal non-aggression pact, absence of armed forces and conflict is, I suggest, a significant element in Icelandic collective consciousness and may be one more factor that contributes to the absence of such displays in informal or formal settings. Forms of institutionalised male display linked to aggression may be, nevertheless, more common in the West than Green recognises, even if these are not in highly ritualised forms. In particular, I have in mind the sporting arena, where, say in football, the spectators themselves become displayers of provocative and aggressive display using voices, bodies and clothing. In contrast, the sports emphasized by the new nationalist movement in Iceland tended to be individual sports like athletics, swimming, Icelandic wrestling, and equestrianism. Even traditional Icelandic wrestling, a highly ritualised contest whose origins are found in the Icelandic sagas, depends on balance, agility and strength, rather than aggression.²² Additionally, the ideals of sportsmanship, and of community, explicitly fostered by the Ungmennafélag (Youth Movement), have been very significant in the display of a certain kind of masculine identity.

I see all these factors as having contributed to the configuration of national codes of formal and informal displays by men in Iceland generally, and as impacting men's vocal displays in particular. Most significantly, perhaps, men in this Icelandic setting are inevitably far closer to nature than most of their Western, not to mention urban, counterparts, and nature's aesthetic sexual displays are part of their daily existence and livelihood. The example of the ram's show illustrates this, but at the same time, its ritualization produces a whole gamut of socially constructed meanings about masculinity and sexuality. It is not surprising perhaps, that whilst social constructivists might give little consideration to display as biological aesthetic sexual display in their predominantly urban locale, the men in this study, and even women spectators, remind us of its perceived presence in vocal behaviour. What should be clear is that many of the factors that influence the configuration of the codes by which meanings are made in display change, and they are changing in Iceland in dramatic, social, technological, demographic, and musical ways.

I have attempted to make the distinction between formal and informal settings and display reasonably clear throughout this study, and, having looked at the question of singing and sexual display in formal, collective settings, it is interesting to consider these themes in ones that are more informal. Historically, the belief in male vocal display's potential to seduce women along similar lines to the Warao Indian, was even recognised by Icelandic common law. In the ancient book of Grágás, which dates from at least the middle of the sixteenth century and is related to much earlier Icelandic law²³, men were strictly forbidden to sing for another man's wife. This potential power in singing is not, however, specifically recognised by men in their own private experiences, and although some men allude to singing's agency in heterosexual relationships, most see their own vocality as insignificant in their own sexual relationships or courtship. Casual conversations with several of their partners indicate that singing was, in fact, part of the original attraction, even if men were not consciously aware of it. Two of the men, who also play guitar, were seen as being particularly attractive, and they were apparently the subject of considerable female admiration at parties because of their perceived vocal prowess. "Standing out", and getting attention, as I observed in the chapter on the body, was recognised by several of men in the study as the purpose of, and motivation for, vocal and bodily display. Not

surprisingly, given the widely recognised social and sexual meanings involved, this seems to be especially true when associated with the performance of popular music in smaller groups, or as a vocal soloist in them as young adults or adolescents.

The potential agency of singing in heterosexual relationships is illustrated by one of the men who relates an encounter some 30 years ago. Singing's potential as sexual aesthetic display is surely recognized in the following event, but it appears to be embarrassingly repressed:

I must have been 16, standing in a queue for tea. I was working at the herring processing plant. Forgot myself and began to sing a song. A Faroese girl behind me poked me and said, "Will you sing a song for me? You sing so beautifully". I didn't. I often had to collect her barrels of herring or take her salt, and she'd always ask me "Will you sing for me?" I never did, except that one time, accidentally. (P6)

Generally speaking, men only sing with partners in the wider social setting of parties or in family musical moments. Occasionally duets are performed but their function appears not linked to sexuality: "My wife and I sung a few popular Icelandic songs together in the car, just to shorten the journey home." (P4) The following comment about singing along with lyrics of songs at balls when dancing with a partner, might be seen as an intimate inter-personal appropriation of certain, possibly sexual, sentiments and the maintaining and embodying of a special relationship:

Maybe when we were dancing together at a ball or something, maybe I'd sing along with the band, I couldn't say it was, that it was for her ... but some need ...some longing. (P6)

A clearer example of how singing is used as an expression of sexual relationships is provided in the following quotation. Simply the association of the narrative figure in the text with the singer's own partner provokes an intimately private performance:

On the way home from the male-voice choir practice tonight, I was revising *Mansöngur* which we had been practicing this evening. Why?

Well maybe because it's about Hulda and my wife's name is Hulda, when I got home I sang it for her! (P14)

12.4 Sex-roles and Singing-roles

Sex-role theory has been one of the most significant concepts in gender discourse for half a century. Connell explains how its origins can be found in sex difference research, and in the concept of social role, both of which were clearly influenced by the ideas of biological difference (1995). With the growth of feminism in the 70's, the female sex role was increasingly seen as an oppressive one, and its internalization, the products of social learning, as inevitably leading to a femininity of subordination. Sex role research subsequently became a tool for challenging these scripts. Challenging and changing roles could also apply to men of course, and as early as the 1950's Hacker was writing about expectations that men might function expressively, as well as instrumentally, as "The new burdens of masculinity" (cited in Connell, 1995: 23). This theme lay mostly dormant in the gender debate until the emergence of men's studies some twenty years later. Taken up in the writings of psychologists like Pleck, it was used to encourage men to re-examine the male-role script through role sharing, therapy and self-help (cited in Connell, 1995: 24). Interestingly, these are three of the themes that have emerged in the present study of men's vocal behaviour, and I wish to examine them in more detail here in relation to gender theory.

12.4.1 Vocal child care

In chapter eight, we observed men's vocal interaction with their children and grandchildren; they sung with them whilst doing the housework, sung lullabies for them at bedtime, and sung together in recreational family musical moments (see CD 18). Now I am not inclined to make claims for a dramatic diversion from the conventional western domestic sex-role script based on this evidence. References to domestic division of labour are limited to several men, and the most detailed are provided by three men who find themselves, not insignificantly I suggest, in domestic settings where very serious disability or illness have demanded that conventional role-scripts be re-examined and re-negotiated with scant regard for biological differences:

It's Saturday ... as I got up I found myself singing part of an old Beatles song that was popular in times past. But I had jobs to do: Because of my wife's illness it's my lot to change the bed linen and as I did I sung *Í fjarlægð (In the Distance)*. Later I did the hovering, and to its accompaniment I hummed part of Liszt's Dreaming, Fikki used to swing part of it for dance. Out at the washing line as I hung up the washing I sung *Úti er alltaf að snjóa (It's always snowing outside!)*, I should make it clear that it wasn't snowing at that precise moment! Washing up on Sunday I suddenly started singing a phrase from Solveig's Song by Grieg. (P26)

Didn't sing this morning. Picked up my daughter from the play-school at 12:00 and on the way home in the car we sung together From lunch time until around 16:00 we are usually just two at home. This afternoon the song *Litla Stína (Little Stina)* was top of the pops and she demanded that I sing it aloud with her twice and it was really fun, felt good though I'm not sure I took any special care with singing it. (P17)

This; as Connell has observed, is the problem with sex-roles theories; sex-roles are defined by "expectations attaching to biological status" (ibid.: 25), and what the examples here indicate, are that physical and psychological status, and individual personality, all influence child-rearing, employment, and divisions of labour, which are the arenas where gender relationships are really configured. The three men who make most detailed entries about singing and domestic roles clearly show how physical status in the home, for example, can be seen as impacting behaviour in very specific ways; one of the men's wives is presently undergoing major medical treatment; another lives with a young family and a partner who is seriously incapacitated. A third man has a young son who needs intensive supervision because of disability; his partner works full-time, whilst he works part-time. In rejecting sex-role as a metaphor for understanding gender interaction and sex-role theory as a helpful framework for investigating it, Connell argues that it is:

... only apt for situations where a) there are well-defined scripts to perform, b) there are clear audiences to perform to, and c) the stakes are not too high (so it is feasible that some kind of performing is the main social activity going on (Connell, 1995: 26).

Those kinds of situations only arise in the present study when we consider men's formal vocal behaviour, primarily as a male-voice choir. Women obviously have

no role there, but more importantly in this version of sex role theory, nor do they have corresponding roles in any woman's vocal collective, a theme to which we will return later. Returning to roles in the home, I should state clearly that it is not my intention to even attempt to open Connell's "pandora's box" of *how* gender relationships are configured there – nor, on the basis of this study's framework, could I. The point I wish to make, and which I believe is supported by men's narratives, is simply that men's singing appears to embody and construct relationships and roles in the home, that are clearly not always defined by the expectancies of biological status. In the specific area of child-care and vocal behaviour, it is even my contention that men's narratives challenge the expectancies of biological status uncritically adopted by *mother*-infant communication research, and in the serious suggestion, by music educators, that music most suitable for infants should be similar to the voices of young females or children (Trehub, 1990). If vocal reciprocity is purely a natural (biological and acoustic) predisposition, it might be argued that there is little sense in employing male-carers in playschools. I have personally worked in a playschool for nearly ten years, and I have engaged with children, aged between six months and six years, primarily through music, without ever being aware of this biological obstacle to vocal relationships with them. Almost without exception, children leaving the playschool have very good vocal skills, and large song repertoires, at least when compared to standardised Western models of musical development. I may slightly moderate vocal projection and tone quality, negotiating, if you like, the gender code of this expression, but this is a skill that nearly all the men in the study seem to possess too. Most have practiced it in vocal engagement with their own offspring on a regular basis. The references to interaction with young children are both extensive and numerous, some need to be heard again here, others for the first time:

The day ended like so many other days, because I sung for my children when they had got themselves ready for bed and got themselves under the duvet. ... It's so lovely to see the children be quiet, listen, relax, and sleep because of this noise coming from me. (P21)

Little Gunnar has to have things to do, so after supper I provided for him, sat at the piano with him and played and sung, so he moved around in time and joined in. (P1)

Singing didn't start today until evening, in that place where my singing appears to have most and best influence – in the children's bedrooms! (P21)

This evening my daughters were practising the piano ... *Bjart er yfir Betlehem (Bright over Bethlehem – Piae Cantiones)* and *Ó helga nótt (O Holy Night)* ... I sung along and felt very good! (P6)

Sung some children's songs ... with my son Hrannar, whilst he was going to sleep. (P10)

Yesterday I was on the lake (*laying nets*) with my daughter and we sang together, it was really fun, just the two of us. (P6)

Everybody was on good form and my daughter insisted that I sing with her while we were doing the housework. (17)

My granddaughter comes to visit. She is 6. We sing a few songs together, on the light side and end with the lullaby *Mamma ætlar að sofna (Mother is going to sleep)* ... a favourite with both of us. see CD 10) (P5)

My assistant is my 6-year old granddaughter. She makes one condition – when we have finished I have to sing lots of Christmas songs with her. (P5)

Reviewing the situations involved here, and observing the dominance of lullabies, confirms that, with the couple of exceptions mentioned early, there is little evidence that these men are practicing dramatically different patterns of general infant care. Some might even see the “lullaby” phenomenon as being typical of nothing more than the clichéd “male-infant” *quality* bedtime. But men here do not normally arrive from work just in time to put the children to bed, and references to supervising piano practice, to children joining in tasks on the farm and singing along while they do, all suggest that such an interpretation would be too simplistic. Men's earliest recollections of vocal interaction in their childhood home include fathers as often as mothers. In some cases it seems that the greater autonomy which many of the men's fathers enjoyed in agricultural settings, with far closer links between work and domestic places, meant that men sung more with their own fathers than they have in turn with their own off-spring. Though

one parent is usually seen as having being more vocally active than the other is, biological sex has nothing to do with it. It will be interesting to see how these gender relationships develop with the advent of equal maternity and paternity rights, and how men behave vocally in such circumstances. Connell argues for a different kind of change if men are to share the burden of early infant care. He has the tactile in mind when he claims that a re-embodied masculinity, and not just the re-structuring of institutions, is required (Connell, 1995: 223). But given the importance of the voice in infant-adult interaction, as Trevarthan and others have so clearly illustrated (1999, 2002), I propose that a *re-embodied* or *re-voiced* masculinity might be essential too. Icelandic men in the study seem not to have allowed biological expectations of their vocal behaviour to dictate the songs they sing entirely, or with whom they sing them.

12.4.2 Vocal Therapy and Self-Help

Therapy has clearly been coded in Western settings as feminine, until, at least, the mythopoetic movement, inspired by Bly, developed an explicitly masculine therapy where men could find their real masculine Selves by practicing in the forest as *Weekend Warriors* (see Kimmel and Kaufmann, 1994). I shall return to mythopoetic masculinity later, but for now, I wish to recall briefly the kinds of vocal therapies and Self-help strategies that men in the study articulate clearly, and which I have already noted in chapters on the physical and spiritual Self. Nearly all of the men describe ways in which they use singing as a means to self-regulate mood and emotion in their daily lives. They see it as providing opportunities to unwind, forget about work-Selves and problems, to renew themselves in an almost spiritual sense, and as a means of expressing feelings creatively. More explicitly several men talk about how they have used singing in cathartic therapeutic processes at times of major life crises. No less surprising, at least from the standpoint of the traditional hegemonic masculine code, is that men articulate feelings like these as openly as they do:

It's a really good device, if something is wrong, if you feel bad, then it's really good to sing *yourself* away from it. (P3)

At least I don't think about my work when I'm singing and not about my problems either. (P2)

You feel completely different afterwards, it's an elixir, you release something somehow, become relaxed, even if you're totally knackered. (P1)

There was no help in that sort of crisis (*brother's fatal accident*) so, so you just sang. And like with x who committed suicide just last year...I wrote a song and sang it myself. *Singing still works*, it's amazingly good. (My italics) (P3)

That singing even helps this kind of openness is explicit in the comment "I think men are much more open in this kind of activity, it happens in singing." (P9) The ability to use singing in these kinds of way, as the purposeful maintenance and regulation of Self, reflects another very important psychological factor that has been widely implicated in men's explanations of, or excuses for, oppressive masculinities – that of men feeling in control of their own lives. Men's use of singing as a means of retaining and exercising control, and as an agent in the construction and maintenance of Self is an example of their personal autonomy, an autonomy that is expressed vocally in other ways too.

12.5 Vocal, Emotional and Economic Autonomy

Farrell (1993) argued that men lack power because they lack emotional control, Kimmel and Kaufman that a lack of economic autonomy, accompanying urbanisation and industrialisation, was responsible for men's feelings of being controlled rather than of controlling – of being victims of repressive power, not instruments of it (Kimmel and Kaufman, 1994: 278). Both arguments explain why men might aggressively take back the power they perceive as having lost, oppressing ethnic groups, gays, and women, in the process.

Exercising emotional control requires, I suggest, the exercising of the emotions, and this is what the arts, and singing in this present case, does. In the exercise rooms where the choir rehearses and performs, all sorts of feelings can be safely expressed, experienced, and explored, and in real-life situations, like the death of a friend or family member, the men find themselves able to use the same kind of strategies to express and control emotions. If we were to concur with the mythopoetic version of masculinity and masculine emotions, then we would not expect the men to seek such a wide range of emotional experience in song. Nor

should they reject so whole-heartedly, as they certainly do, the theories of “hard and heavy”, “macho” phenomena as being indicative of true maleness (see Tiger, 1969; Tiger & Fox, 1971; Bly, 1990; Goldberg, 1988; Farrell, 1993). According to Mieli’s psychoanalytical theory (Mieli, 1980), such phenomena are the product of straight men’s repression of what they see as feminine in men. Interestingly then, men’s views of peak aesthetic experiences in the male voice choir, and the “soft”, sustained, and contemplative repertoire seen as most effectively stimulating those experiences, reflect possibilities available in exploring the balance between the feminine and masculine in Jung’s original theories of anima and animus (Jung, 1982), rather than the mythopoetic and highly polarised masculine manifestation of them that is expounded in Bly’s *Iron John* (1990), and in other populist “Men are from Mars” psychologies. When discussing repertoire that men have found most personally satisfying, none of the men mention works that are directly associated with theatres of war or aggression, widely seen as key symbols of hegemonic masculinity (Morgan, 1994). Whilst the men in the choir sing of “fighting for the right they adore” in Soldiers’ choruses from *Faust*, *Il Trovatore*, or in the Men of Harlech, singing these kinds of songs is not seen as being exceptionally satisfying vocally or aesthetically, or as being relevant to issues of group or individual identity. On the contrary, “peak experiences” are almost without exception concerned with unaccompanied 4-part singing of sustained songs at slow tempi – frequently lullabies or contemplative themes.

Singing *Kvöldbliðan lognværa* (*Evening’s gentle zephyrs*), singing gentle, beautiful and clean, pure and beautiful. You’re not less of a man for that, you’re more. (P1)
see CD 12)

The other day when we sang *Rósin* (*The Rose*) – I was choked, I couldn’t sing, it was so special. (P7)
(CD 7)

When you sing like that, you get this “ahhhhhh, yes!!” feeling – this happiness, there’s no other measurement for singing except that feeling. (P2)

Singing in the male voice choir is a male ritual nevertheless, but it is clearly different in many significant ways to the kinds of rituals that the mythopoetic movement would call male rituals. Here, men’s singing rejects the aggressive

macho stereotype; it encourages the expression of a wide-ranging emotional life; it facilitates affectionate, tactile, homo-physical behaviour that appears to go beyond the slapping of backs, and arms around shoulders, sometimes associated with other homo-social activities. Furthermore, in different social frameworks, men use vocal behaviour as an empathetic mechanism of identifying with other people's feelings, situations, and motives, especially with family groups and young children. If, as I am suggesting, men's singing configures and embodies gender identities which are less concerned with the aggressive display of power than many other masculinities, and which are rather more concerned with displays that might easily be seen as feminine, then there may be other areas in these men's lives where they have retained a significant sense of power and autonomy, and, consequently, remain relatively unthreatened by whatever advances women's liberation may have made.

In terms of a collective Icelandic masculinity, this idea of individual autonomy and self-control were central themes in the writings of Jón Sigurðsson – Iceland's first president and one of the most significant figures in the struggle for full independence – in the later part of the nineteenth century. Björnsson (2002) contends that Sigurðsson's writings were very significant in the construction of modern Icelandic masculine identity. This autonomy was balanced by a Youth Movement (*Ungmennafélag*) ideology that encouraged individuals to work, not for themselves, but for the collective welfare of community and nation (Matthíasdóttir 2003). I suggest that there is still very considerable residue from both of these model masculine identities in this study's particular setting. It was in this area that Icelandic small holders originally established their economic autonomy by founding the first co-operative movement in 1883, thus breaking the Danish trade monopoly. Similarly, the Youth Movement was particularly strong in this area too. But how then is this view of masculinity manifest and practiced today, and how is this relevant to men's vocal behaviour? Once again, I suggest that what men say about their singing provides us with some significant insights. Quite simply, men here have the power to sing; the physical spaciousness of their locale; the ease with which – even for those living in a small town – they are able to find large private spaces; the high levels of autonomy that most of these men enjoy in their work; and the relative absence of unemployment; all these conditions suggest that men are still in control of their lives. Singing, I suggest, is

one of the ways in which this is actualised and expressed. This is part of the attraction that men in the study find in turning all sorts of spaces into vocal spaces, as I illustrated in chapter eight. They are able to project personal identity onto all manner of spaces, they hear and recognise themselves, and they exercise personal and vocal power without causing dissonance or meeting significant resistance:

I'm so fortunate to work so much by myself where my singing disturbs nobody else. (P15)

Sometimes I try to sing powerfully when I'm alone, not otherwise. (P20)

Moreover, because singing is so widely practiced in a community that shares a huge common repertoire, and where there are few, if any, significantly different musical sub-cultures, should other people be met, they are still most likely, according to the men, to find themselves in harmony metaphorically, vocally and socially. There are exceptions, as a sports teacher illustrates:

I went into the sports hall late this afternoon to teach ... it's got a good acoustic, but the students looked very oddly at me when they heard me. I didn't sing any more that day!! (P29)

The generation gap is manifested vocally; the sports teacher's behaviour does not meet with empathy, but with miscomprehension. Just this is enough to turn the sports teacher mute for the day! He might have chosen to press on and attempt to assert his authority and power, but perhaps this might have lead to ridicule.

Now before all this is dismissed as fanciful, consider the following scenarios; the car driven around urban centres, with windows open and bass speakers pounding; the pedestrian armed, with aptly nick-named ghetto-blaster sound equipment; the individual with their loud personal stereo or iPod, in a densely crowded public space, desperately trying to create some private space, some personal territory. It almost goes without saying that, in the first two examples, men will most often be doing the displaying, though a woman might be *displayed* in the passenger seat or on his arm. Because music is one of the most important accessories and means of building individual identity, it is inevitably used for the expression of feelings of loss of control, as a means of expressing

aggression and attempting to exert or reclaim power. Inevitably, the songs that are chosen will be in tension with the hegemonic community's, as the histories of rock and pop and more recently punk and rap have clearly illustrated. Of course, in the industrialised urban setting above, somebody else's voice is borrowed (bought!) in order for individuals to display power, or in an attempt to regain some. They have lost their own voices. There is no longer any space for them!

It is important that I am not perceived as claiming too much for the masculinities that are constructed by men in this study. We have seen plenty of evidence to support the argument that men's singing in Iceland reflects highly gendered, hegemonic masculine structures. Men are privileged in public musical life, and they justify this prominence with a natural/biological rationale, and with almost no regard for the social conventions and structures that discriminate against women. Most work and community spaces were defined along the lines of conventional sex-role scripts, and they were actuated by almost exclusive male vocal behaviour. In many cases, this is still true. On the other hand, whilst men's bodies are often conspicuously absent in concepts of masculinity – with notable exceptions of physical contact sports and war (Mishkind, Rodin, Silberstein & Moore, 1987; Sparkes & Smith, 1999; Morgan, 1994; Connell, 1995) – singing is seen here as a highly embodied behaviour that facilitates physical intimacy, contrasting strongly with stereotypical models of relationships between heterosexual masculine bodies. In total, we are left with endless contradictions about these men's masculinities, and about singing's agency in its construction and representation. It is surely possible too, to argue that, ultimately, all male groups like this one simply perpetuate the problem of men's position of power, even if this particular version of it might appear more feminine than many other men only clubs.

12.6 Women Musicians

Men only clubs are rarely as homo-self-sufficient as men like to pretend; men's partners play the stereotypical coffee and fund-raising role for this male voice choir, as they do in many other so called men's clubs. The men have nothing to say about that, but they do have things to say about women, like Baldur's mother, who have been important in inspiring and facilitating their own vocal development. More specifically, many of the men's narratives include reflections

upon the role of one woman whose impact on their collective singing is very considerable indeed – the male voice choir’s accompanist for the past twenty years.

Some of the men see this female presence as bringing some kind of undefined benefit, which can only be explained, I suggest, in terms of feminine display:

I think it makes a difference ... I really like women that can play well on the piano, and for a big male voice choir, that’s not worse either. It’s just my feeling, just some sort of nonsense of course ... maybe it’s just that I like women. (P11)

I think somehow a male voice choir has ... is proud that their accompanist is a woman. It’s just more fun. The appearance is much better. (P2)

I think I bear more respect for a woman in that sort of role, I mean assuming that she’s equally capable at her job. (P1)

The men have problems defining what it is about a woman that matters here. So how might her presence, and the things men say about it, be interpreted? Appearance is clearly important; the body on display here belongs to a woman, and that contrast is surely what is meant by “the appearance is better”. No attempt is made to disguise the fact that this is a female body; indeed, it is accentuated at formal concerts, usually by a long evening gown and make-up. *She* is seated, surrounded by a large group of men, one of whom has, officially at least, to maintain overall control of both the choir and accompanist. *He* is supposed to regulate the performance and, literally, to keep choir and accompanist together. The accompanist, admittedly, does not play in more than about half of a typical concert programme, the rest being sung a cappella. However, at rehearsals *she* will also help with the learning of parts, take sectional rehearsals, and, in the conductor’s occasional absence, *she* may even direct the choir publicly. In all these other roles, I suggest, *she* clearly facilitates and supports others as they make music. Even though *she* may have to play technically demanding passages, *she* is not in the spotlight, so to speak, *she* is an accompanist, a task whose subordinate nature is endorsed by the Icelandic term for it – *undirleikara* – meaning, literally, the playing “beneath”, or “below”, others.²⁴ In her discussion

of gendered musical behaviour, Green devotes considerable attention to the concept of “women enabling” other people to make music. Whilst most of Green’s passage is devoted to women’s role in music teaching as the affirmation of femininity (1997: 46ff.), I suggest that a very good case can be made for extending this concept to include the art of accompaniment. Accompanists “enable”; how many choral societies and choirs, like the one in the present study, are facilitated by women *repetiteurs*, while men conduct? In doing so, and this, I suggest, is part of the significance of the woman accompanist, definitions of femininity as mother and nature are reaffirmed. Just as the Mountain Woman enabled Icelanders to become human, the pianist here, along with other women accompanists and organists before her, enables them to be musical, and to display the fact that they are.

Other men see nothing noteworthy in the accompanist’s sex, suggesting that the qualities she possesses are not in any way biological:

It doesn’t make the slightest difference, because we are talking about a certain person, if she were the same person as a man ... I think we would be just as fond of her ... they have so much respect for her, probably more than anybody else I suppose. (P7)

I’ve never been aware of it being just a guy’s club; I mean she is one of our group. (P4)

Nevertheless, she may not be one of the boys in the sense that Fine suggests women are forced to adapt to male behaviour patterns, including coarse joking (Fine, 1997: 131). Most of the men see a woman’s presence as regulating their behaviour and stopping it from turning into the stereotypical man’s club with smutty jokes. Perhaps her very significant status in this structure is more important than her being in the minority. Perhaps, as one of the men have suggested, it is a question simply of the respect that the men have for her:

I suppose the men behave differently, I mean the sexual innuendo and jokes, they try to control themselves a little bit more ... even though she may hear quite a bit, I think it would be worse (*without a woman there*). (P5)

I have, yet again, to openly admit my complicity and hope that my interpretation here has not been too prejudiced by the fact that I am the accompanist’s partner. I

acknowledge therefore, that here, concisely, we have an archetypal representation of gendered musical behaviour. Perhaps this is made even more explicit in as much as we may be seen as the typical heterosexual couple – even down to married names on concert programmes and posters – and the embodiment of biological sex-roles. I stand, Juliet sits. What would the men, or the audience, make of a reversal of roles? It would be an interesting experiment but, unfortunately, roles cannot be swapped on a permanent basis – I am simply not a good enough pianist.

Trying to loosen the grip that my partner and I might have on this particular theme, and on men's perceptions of it, might be impossible. There is, nevertheless, much in the narratives of two men in particular that lend support to the interpretation of women as music "enablers" that Green has formulated, and which, I suggest, might be usefully extended by including the practice of accompaniment. To illustrate this point I need to re-track briefly.

Whilst this study is concerned with how men perceive their own vocal behaviour, many of the men, as we have already seen, make references to, and even define their vocal activity, in relation to women. This is what justifies giving this theme special space here. Plenty of examples have already illustrated this point; the sort of comparisons that men make between men's collective singing and women's; women's vocal place in church choirs; and women's vocal behaviour in domestic settings and in public spaces. I do not intend to re-cover that ground, but I do wish to look at some of it again from historical perspectives that two men's narratives have explicitly implicated as contributing to their perceptions of vocal behaviour.

One of the most compelling stories of women's vocalicity was that told by Baldur: his mother appears, initially, to be an exception to the hegemonic binary divisions of locally gendered musical behaviour. Even so, Sigrún's public singing was still, I suggest, within frameworks that ensured a particular kind of "feminine" coding for her vocal display. Firstly, Baldur recalls that it was the church organist that encouraged and accompanied his mother. Secondly, it seems that most of Sigrún's public appearances were for community events, like the Lion's Club meeting, where Sigrún even sung with her teenage son – clearly reinforcing the code of motherhood and nature. Thirdly, it would come as a great surprise to me to learn that Sigrún ever received financial remuneration for her

vocal displays, which are thus seen as acts of community service. All these factors, I believe, are important in ensuring that, whilst Baldur's mother was in many ways boldly challenging acceptable social codes, the framework within which this is done, is far from radical. Baldur quite clearly sees his mother's vocality as a women's rights issue, and his mentions another significant woman in the vocal and gender struggle; Lizzý, an immigrant Scots woman, had married a local Icelander whilst he was studying agriculture in Scotland. She arrived here in 1894, aged just nineteen. A singer of apparently very considerable talent, Lizzý sung widely publicly. She brought with her a large song repertoire from the British Isles (Jakobsson and Jónsson, 1990: 35) which was soon appropriated, and texts normally translated, by the local community.

Things Baldur was saying were complicating a simplistic binary interpretation of gender and musical behaviour. Sigrún may not have been the only exception; Lizzý was clearly another, and one other man, Guðmundur, talked at length about women and vocal behaviour. His narrative adds to the complexities and contradictions of the theme under discussion.

Guðmundur's mother was given a harmonium by her father, as a confirmation present, in around 1915. Selling one of only two cows he possessed to buy it, Guðmundur's grandfather was apparently subject to considerable and long-standing ridicule. In chapter two, I recalled the epidemic of buying harmoniums that spread through the county at a quite remarkable rate in the early twentieth century. Stories I have heard of their transportation on sledges across the country, and of the economic sacrifices that people, like Guðmundur's grandfather, made to purchase them and house them, are, in themselves, testimony to the power and agency that people must have perceived in the collective singing that harmoniums facilitated. Guðmundur mentions two other women as being hugely significant in "enabling" local musical life, primarily as accompanists. As in the case of Baldur's mother, the church is again important; one of the women in question was a priest's daughter from the south of Iceland, and wife of a priest who became the incumbent of one of the local rural churches in 1907. Elísabet had learnt to play the harmonium before she moved to the locality, where she directed one of the local church choirs for 30 years, taught harmonium, accompanied the singer Lizzý, composed songs, and even established a small male voice choir. Guðmundur reminded me that both these women music pioneers

moved into the area with these musical skills; Lizzý from Scotland, Elísabet from the south of Iceland. Migration, as is so often the case, is a significant factor in social and musical change, and clearly facilitated new methods of musical enculturation that spread with remarkable speed and impact. Guðmundur also mentions Guðfinna frá Hömrum, who was born in 1899. Whilst Guðfinna lived in a neighbouring valley, she studied formally for some time in Reykjavík, at the other end of the country, with Páll Ísólfsson, one of Iceland's most prestigious musicians of the time. Guðmundur's mother was one of her pupils, and went on to play the harmonium in church too. Guðmundur is clearly something of a historian, but his insights are extremely interesting for a situated understanding of gendered vocal and musical behaviour. He is adamant that there was never any male resistance to any of these women, not even to solo vocal displays like Lizzý's. Guðmundur emphasizes how "it enriched the community's life, people thought it was wonderful", and insists that payment was never made, either for playing the harmonium or for solo vocal performance.²⁵ Quite simply, "if you had the skills you were expected to use them." (P13)

The concept of a professional musician emerged slowly in Iceland during the first half of the twentieth century, and it centred essentially around Reykjavík. In this part of Iceland, at this time at least, it would be totally inappropriate to talk of professional musicians. Neither were there any of the formal trappings of public concerts or display, there were no concert halls or formal stages before the building of larger community halls. Now all this makes a difference to the way performance is coded. It appears that both women and men learnt to play the harmonium, and *served* as local church harmonium players throughout the twentieth century, in fairly equal numbers. This is in marked contrast to the only other significant instrumental tradition here – the violin. Introduced in the middle of the nineteenth century, and superseding the Icelandic *langspil*, the violin enjoyed huge popularity here for nearly 100 years. Jakobsson and Jónsson claim that there was one, and sometimes even two violins, on almost every farm in the county. Significantly though, of the 160 violinists they record in their survey of the local area, only 10 are women. Harmoniums were introduced in the area in the years following 1880, at more or less the same time as Guðjonson's 3 part hymnal (1861), and Helgason's hymnals (1878-1880) and secular songs for 4-part choirs (1877-88; 1882-1901) were being widely adopted. It is difficult to avoid the

conclusion that there was something fundamentally different about the coding of these instruments and their functions, as opposed to the violin. It might be related to Green's point that, in playing keyboard instruments, women's adopt "demure", which is to say, feminine, seated positions? I suggest, however, that a much more significantly delineated meaning – to use Green's terminology – is concerned with the feminine as *enabler* (1997). All the women here enable, not just as music teachers, though that too, but in facilitating others music making and singing, whilst they take, literally, pretty much a back seat. This resonates strongly with the construction of Icelandic feminine identity around concepts of nature and motherhood. Serving the community becomes an extension of serving the home, and in special circumstances, it even enables female singers, admittedly both married, to perform in the intervals of meetings of the co-operative, Lions's club, or farmer's union. What they performed, and I suggest the choir's accompanist continues to perform, is not the image of sexual availability – but of motherhood, of nature, nurture, and community. Two songs regularly sung by the choir also support this argument and ought to be mentioned here. The first is actually a Norwegian nationalistic song by Alfred Pauls, translated coincidentally(?) by a woman, *Pura í Garði*. The following extract might be seen as justifying women's lack of a public voice because their domestic tasks speak sufficiently for them:

Those thousands of women in faithfulness and devotion
Speaking through their works in their homes and farms.

It is difficult to ascertain how much men in the study think about this kind of sentiment in songs they sing, but the next example is a song regularly sung at gatherings in honour of women. It might be sung to thank women for providing supper(!), for a woman's birthday, or on some other occasion where men choose to cast their spotlight on women. It has even been sung for the accompanist, and whenever it is sung, I suggest, it is as a genuine and heartfelt expression that reflects something of the Icelandic masculine construction of Icelandic feminine identity:

Fósturlandsins Freyja	Freyja of the homeland,
fagra Vanadís,	Beautiful goddess,
móðir, kona, meyja,	mother, woman, girl,
meðtak lof og prís!	accept this praise and adulation!
Blessað sé þitt blíða	“Blessed is your kind
bros og gullið tár;	smile and golden tears;
Þú ert lands og lýða	You, to the nation and people,
ljós í þúsund ár!	A light for a thousand years”
(Matthías Jochumsson)	

(Freyja = goddess of fertility)

All of the women mentioned above, and many others that have been active in the musical life of these communities, would make interesting subjects for a detailed study of gendered musical behaviour far beyond my remit here. I must mention though one last historical fact that had been overlooked by, or unknown to Baldur, but which fits very clearly with his perception of women’s vocal behaviour as embodying the wider issue of women’s rights and equality. It seems that a women’s choir from five local districts was established for a one off display of *femininity* on 19th June 1915, the same day as the King of Denmark approved laws giving women in Iceland the right to vote. Elísabet, mentioned above, was the conductor. The choral event begs inevitable questions: so was that it? Who decided if it was? Why did a single sex women’s choir apparently not perform again for more than 50 years, even though plenty of highly skilled women musicians lived here? Moreover, almost 100 years later, why have women still not secured a place in public musical life much beyond the “enabling” of others? One of the men even suggests an answer that is loaded with questions about men’s awareness of gendered social orders:

I mean that men around here have been more likely to seek opportunities to sing, maybe women in the church choir ... I’m not belittling that in any way. (P11)

Men’s perceptions of women’s voices, of their female accompanist, and – for Baldur and Guðmundur at least – of the personal lived experience of women singers and accompanists in musical roles that did indeed take them further than

their “washing line”, combined with what men *do not* perceive (in terms of other social and domestic factors), illustrate some of the meanings that men make of women’s musical behaviour, performance, and display, and the meanings that formed, and, apparently, continue to set the parameters for women’s musical behaviour.

12.7 Public Display as Power

Whether or not men here enjoy more control and autonomy over their individual lives than many other groups of contemporary Western men, there still seems a fundamental and deep-seated need to signify and display their masculine identity, by coming together and performing this particular vocal and visual version of it, for other people to hear and see. It may appear to be a less aggressive and more feminine version of masculinity than men often perform, formally or informally, vocally or not, but displaying it is still important:

Of course we spend a lot of time practising and even though we enjoy singing and get a lot out of this, we still get a lot of pleasure from sharing that with other people, showing other people what’ve been doing and let other people feel what we can do, I think it’s all part of this. It’s essential to share with many more people. [...] I really enjoy it, a little nervous, always excited and great fun. (P1)

Artists, and singers no less, I argued when considering the spiritual self and singing’s role in catharsis and healing, have power. The men testified to this power in relation to singing’s affectiveness at funerals, and some of them perceive it too as they perform at concerts and exercise power over audiences in other settings:

I can’t hide the fact that soothing other people, influencing their mood ... You do it in a game, it’s not like a propaganda centre, it’s a game ... you hear that the audience is held captive and you sing a note that everyone is listening for, that’s incredible influence that that person has, power. (P2)

The quotation seems to suggest a differentiation between a benevolent kind of power, and propaganda, which I detect here as meaning the misuse of power. Music can of course be used to deliberately mislead, misuse, or oppress people, but the concert here is apparently perceived as a game; people come to be played

with, and a good performance has the power to do it. Finding that your singing has that power in performance is clearly a large part of the attraction:

You feel that other people get pleasure, from what you are doing. You get the reward, you get the bonus. You feel it if you do it well. (P2)

I discussed in chapter eight how clear it was that the choir was visibly a body of men. Whilst displaying the male body *per se* appears totally unimportant to the men, and, for the most part, individual bodies are disguised in a black mass of dress suits, displaying what men's voices can do, is important for them. Several men mention this as a reason why they prefer singing in the male-voice choir to singing in a mixed choir. In particular, two first tenors claim that:

Showing what you are made of. Singing tenor for example in a male voice choir. First voice, it's demanding in a particular way, rather than singing in a mixed choir, yeah, I mean singing at full power, or even the finest falsetto ... (P1)

It's easier to learn and easier to sing ... I mean singing the melody, it seems to lay better with the voice. (P3)

You never give it everything you've got in a mixed choir, not unless it's something very special. (P3)

Singing in the male-voice choir appears to present opportunities for men to show what they are capable of, how expressive they can be; they are literally displaying the range of powers that they possess. This is the performance and test of a particular version of masculinity:

I am more of a man because I sing ... not that I am some soft man. I think it is exactly that we are as much, if not more manly, because we can sing, gentle and beautiful and clean, pure and lovely. You're not less of a man for that, you are more. Seriously! (P1)

Like resonant spaces in the barn, power station, or shower, the concert hall gives feedback. Its feedback however, is significantly different; whilst singing alone in those other spaces is a self-check up, singing publicly, means that others do the assessing. As long as that feedback is positive, and the men clearly think it usually

is, the response confirms that, whoever these men *are*, they are approved of. Being approved of brings huge benefits in terms of self-confidence and positive self-image, and although this is confined here to a vocal arena, it most likely has spillover effects into other areas of personal and social life. In performance itself, being positively recognised brings great pleasure:

You feel that other people get pleasure, from what you are doing. (P4)

... we still get a lot of pleasure from sharing that with other people, showing other people what've been doing and let other people feel what we can do (P12)

Feeling that they have contributed to other people's sense of well-being is clearly important, and being thanked directly for it confirms the value of the activity in which they engage:

... really fun to sing for the old people who are always so grateful. (P17)

The concert went well; it's so good to sing for the old folks. It gives us so much to sing for grateful audiences. (P16)

Even here then, the demarcation between serving people and the community – the justification for singing in the church choir, and pleasure - the justification for singing in the male voice choir, becomes blurred:

It (*singing in the male voice choir*) is for pleasure, not service. And if the Male Voice Choir was some sort burden, if there had to be a male voice choir for some reason, it would be difficult for men to do it. (P11)

12.8 Becoming a Man

I noted above how Mieli's psychoanalytical theory sees men's "hard and heavy" display as the product of straight men's repression of what they see as feminine in men (Mieli, 1980). This, I suggest, is something very similar to Adler's "masculine protest" which I had casually hypothesized at the beginning of this dissertation as being a root cause of the widely recognised resistance to singing among boys in the West (Adler, Adam. 2003; Hall, 2005). I suggested that the soprano unbroken male voice had become coded as feminine in such a way that it

has become a threat to boys' masculine identity and, consequently, singing has become a thoroughly undesirable activity. Many of the men in this study lend support to this notion, both in accounts of their own experience as children, and in what they often see as the very different vocal experiences of their own children and grandchildren, especially in educational institutions. Men's narratives, I suggest, reveal how an increasing resistance to singing among boys over the past fifty years, seems to have been accompanied by the formal institutionalization of vocal enculturation, and its increasing alienation from daily social context. For Baldur and men older than him, vocal enculturation took place almost exclusively in the home and extended family settings: formal schools hardly existed, and by the time children attended them, singing appears to have become firmly embedded in everyday practice. In dramatic contrast, schooling today follows the typical Western model. Even extensive infant day-care facilities are now available almost everywhere. While arrangements for infant day-care tend to be more flexible in rural areas, infants may be in care in urban areas for very long hours. Despite what the men here say about regular vocal interaction with their offspring, the arena and processes of vocal enculturation have clearly changed. As compulsory schooling was extended, both in terms of the length of the school year, and the number of years pupils attended, most schools seemed, originally, to have attempted to sing in similar kinds of ways as the wider community did. Eiður attended a local rural school in the 70s:

There was always singing on Fridays after lunch, it was tremendous fun.

Everybody joined in. (P4)

Boys too? (RF)

Yes, yes. (P4)

Collective singing was a regular part of the school curriculum, but men's narratives suggest that, even in the 1970s, it was coming into increasing conflict with boys' identities, especially in urban settings. It is worth noticing too that vocal practice in schools is already, and inevitably perhaps, becoming arbitrary. It fills a slot on a timetable; any slot might do, though I suggest Friday afternoon is not insignificant. It is becoming dislocated from real social practice and everyday life, and, I suggest, increasingly reified, even though it still appears to play some significant role in celebrating collective identity.

Úlfar arrives in a small town as a teenager and goes along to an audition for the secondary school choir. “Moving from the country, where it was always, always this singing. It was always singing with everything,” (P3) Úlfar discovers that “It was just girls. I mean I was completely new there, a bit shy and um.. one boy and twenty to thirty girls, it just wouldn’t do.” (P3)

Until 1976, “song” was a compulsory subject on the national curriculum, when it became known as music. Though still compulsory, most schools are failing to comply with curriculum orders (Menntamálaráðuneytið, 2003), commonly giving up the teaching of music after about Year Four, as gender issues become increasingly significant for individual identity. That the continuity of vocal traditions is under threat, is obvious: as a teacher of music education for undergraduate B.Ed. nursery teacher students, and as a regular clinician in play- and primary school in-service music programmes on a national basis, I feel qualified to suggest that, regardless of national curriculum expectations, vocal practices are, at best, very inconsistent. If men in the past have had their vocal confidence boasted by the public privileging of their vocal behaviour, the same cannot be said for many of the women who now find themselves having to provide a vocal role model, sometimes a fairly exclusive vocal role model, for children in kindergarten and primary education. Male dominance of the vocal arena has had other kinds of impact on women’s vocal behaviour too; I mentioned above men’s pleasure of being vocally “on top”, and, in the passage about competition in the chapter on the social self, I talked about a tendency for men to want to sound like “helden tenors” in informal settings. I suggest that what has happened, is that just as women were obliged to sing the alto voice on the rare occasions they were allowed to sing *tvisöngur* (Ingólfsson, 2003: 226), so, in many community singing situations like the mid-winter feast of *þorablót*, on birthdays, and in other social meetings, men pitch songs so high that women very frequently sing the melody in the same octave as the men. Women’s predominant use of the chest voice, at the expense of their rarely using their soprano head voices, is a phenomenon that I have frequently witnessed both in these social gatherings and in kindergarten settings. It is possible that men’s voices may have undermined women’s ability to fulfil the singing roles now expected of them, and unwittingly contributed to the break down in continuity of vocal tradition.

Reflecting on the vocal experience of boys today, men echo Úlfar's experience in suggesting that there is more resistance in smaller urban areas than in rural ones. Some of them suggest that the resistance is now so strong that public displays of *feminine* voices, and of musical styles that are not coded as "hard and heavy", have become "no go" areas, even for very young boys:

It's the spirit of the times somehow ... When my son sung in the school choir, he was the only boy, I was most happy that he put up with it himself. (P2)

Others suggest that the high level of organised sporting activities, especially of team games in urban centres, provide more convincing models of what boys should do:

The boys are so busy with sports, handball, and football, just name it and it takes them over completely. (P1)

Baldur notes the contrast with a local rural school where singing still enjoys a relatively high status among boys. The school is where the men's choir rehearses and many pupils' parents and grandparents sing in it. It is also, where the choir's director and accompanist teach and the several current male voice choir members in their teens and early twenties were all pupils there. Factors of individual family, parent, and teacher role model, singing's continuity in the community, and the rural setting, are all, it seems, implicated in singing's status in the school, and in its ability to confound the increasingly accepted institutionalised "feminisation" of singing.

Men's comments do not exhaust the possible contributory factors in the apparent change in singing's gender code. The dramatic changes in social and economic structures, in the media, and in technology, have all, I suggest, contributed to the reconfiguration of singing as gender display. There is certainly no shortage of teenage boys performing rock and rap in Iceland (even in rural schools), but then, in doing so, they have, vocally at least, become men. Misusing Simone de Beauvoir's idea that women are not born women, but become them, I suggest that this sentiment captures something of the psychology of boys vocal masculine protest – the sooner we sound less like women, the sooner we become

men, so better not to sing until we stop sounding like women. This is not however, the personal experience for most men in the study. Many of them even talk about the fact that their voices changed almost unnoticed: "I never stopped singing, I never really lost my voice, it just developed slowly." (P3) For others, the breaking voice was seen as impacting vocal behaviour, but it was still only a transitory period, vocal traditions and skills had been embedded firmly enough for them to quickly resume wide-ranging vocal activities:

When we were at Laugar school (*14-18 years*), the girls sang more, but that has a natural explanation ... we were naturally at the age when many of the boy's voices were breaking. (P11)

Like so many of the interpretations I have made, I wish to stress that they remain speculative, and that they contribute, at best, to interim theory. It is, nevertheless, an interpretation supported by the things that men have to say about boys and singing, and it illustrates that gendered meaning in vocal behaviour changes, sometimes fairly rapidly. The processes involved in this change are complex, and I have only scratched the surface of them as far as I feel men's narratives have allowed me to.

12.9 Summing up Men's Vocal Behaviour as Gender Identity.

All of the themes above need much fuller discussion and theoretical refinement than space here allows. Furthermore, considering the impact of vocal behaviour alone on gender identity, and separating gender identity from other elements of self, presents major problems for theorists suspicious of reductionist thinking. I will address that question in the closing pages of this study, returning briefly to some important points about men's vocal construction of gender identity. It might be helpful though, to draw some of these points together in an interim summary here.

Men have clearly illustrated the role of vocal behaviour in the construction and maintenance of complex, and often contradictory, masculine identities. Their perceptions challenge ahistorical views of masculinity and yet, paradoxically, they support singing as biologically determined function in sexual display. On the one hand, a "vocal patriarchy" (Sugarman, 1997) continues to contribute to a cultural dynamic, almost inaudible to men in the study, but which institutionalised, and

still sustains, men's dominant position in social life. On the other hand, men's vocal behaviour is more than a representation of hegemonic gender ideology; it signifies a masculine identity that values the ability to express publicly, qualities of gentleness, affection, and love; informally, it facilitates tactile, physical relationships between men. In short, it reveals both *feminine* and *masculine* influences in vocal, social, and mental lives. Men's perceptions of women's roles in enabling musical behaviour in these men's lives, and in the wider community, have been explored. Two voices in particular were sensitive to, and well informed about, the specific historical situatedness of gendered patterns of musical behaviour. At the same time, all the men justified the dominance of men's choirs as an issue of aesthetic taste, and not of social structures and barriers. In spite of the study's explicitly homo-social setting, men's perceptions cast doubt upon mythopoetic theories of "weekend warriors" (see Kimmel & Kaufmann, 1994), and challenge traditional sex-role stereotypes. Men's vocal relationships with young infants, the importance of physical intimacy in singing activities, their use of singing as Self-therapy, in domestic chores, and as agency in wider social and emotional life, all illustrate the complex and dynamic nature of men's masculine identity, and its construction through song. Their perceptions also illustrate how the voice has agency in changing the perceived gender order. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the perceived changes in the way that their children and grandchildren are coding the voice and singing. As vocal enculturation has become increasingly institutionalised in formal, and dominantly female, education settings, alienated from family and everyday practice, so singing, at least in the kind of forms that have traditionally been seen as important here, becomes feminised, and a more commercially, technologically, aggressively displayed form and coding emerges. The point about masculinities, is what counts as masculine, and to whom. This clearly applies to vocal behaviour:

I am more of a man because I sing ... not that I am some soft man. I think it is exactly that we are as much, if not more manly, because we can sing, gentle and beautiful and clean, pure and lovely. You're not less of a man for that, you are more. Seriously! (P1)

Closing this chapter in a state of some disorder is probably an accurate reflection of singing's agency in constructing, maintaining, and even changing forms of

gender. We have heard about many versions of masculinity from men's narratives, and about how these masculinities are performed in all sorts of meaningful ways, in both formal and informal vocal performance. What is clear, at least, is that singing is a significant corporeal and theatrical form of gender performativity in the lives of men in this study.

²⁰ Connell provides critical insight into the surgical re-assignment of gender, and into what he sees as hegemonic masculinity's re-assertion of the polarized gender dichotomy, and its rejection of gender ambiguity (Connell, 1995: 222-224).

²¹ At least the men were supposed to join in with the precentor! Guðmundur recalled for me a "vocal revolution" at his local church in the 1860s; local farmers (men) apparently agreed not to respond to the Forsöngvari/ precentor. Guðmundur suggests that there were elements of both vocal and local politics. Refusing to sing in church was an act of defiance that earned the severe reproof of the parish priest Sr. Benedikt, who called the farmers together immediately after the service. Apparently one of the ringleaders was encouraged to migrate west (to Canada) by local authorities. Guðmundur did not think that it was just because of this incident, but that it may well have contributed to it! Another version, which Guðmundur claims is not the complete one, can be found in Sagnabættir Benjamíns Sigvaldasonar, 2. hefti. Reykjavík: Iðunnarútgáfan, Oddi H.F.

²² Even Olympic boxing has only recently been legalized in Iceland!

²³ *Grágás* appears in an inventory in 1548 at *Skálholt*, but it is certainly very much older and clearly related to the early 12th century coding of law. Its significance lies particularly in the fact that, since there was no monarchy, this legal system operated without executive authority, hence the famous “among Icelanders there is no king, only law” (Adam of Bremen 11th century, cited in Byock, 2001). This is another important contribution to the idea of “independent people” – a central construct of Icelandic identity.

²⁴ Interestingly, there has been a recent tendency amongst Icelandic accompanists to use the prefix “*með*” or “with”, instead of “*undir*” or “below”. An accompanist becomes, therefore, “*meðleikara*” – “playing with”, and implying equal status.

²⁵ Records actually exist of a travelling “professional” female *kvædamenn* known as *Kvæða Anna*, who, in 1421, lent the monastery at *Þingeyrar* 500 pounds of butter in a famine. Other records talk of *Kvæða Ingibjörg* – “an unmarried woman in *Biskupstungur*” (in the south of Iceland) in middle of 19th century. The use of the nickname *Kvæða* suggests widespread recognition of their status. Both are cited by Steingrímsson (2003). Even locally in the 20th century, one of the most renowned *kvædamenn* was Margrét Hjálmarsdóttir, although there is no suggestion that she received any financial remuneration. She taught Þorgrímur, who appears in this study, and sings here on the CD. He is one of the few remaining practitioners.



Fig. 12.1
Autonomy?

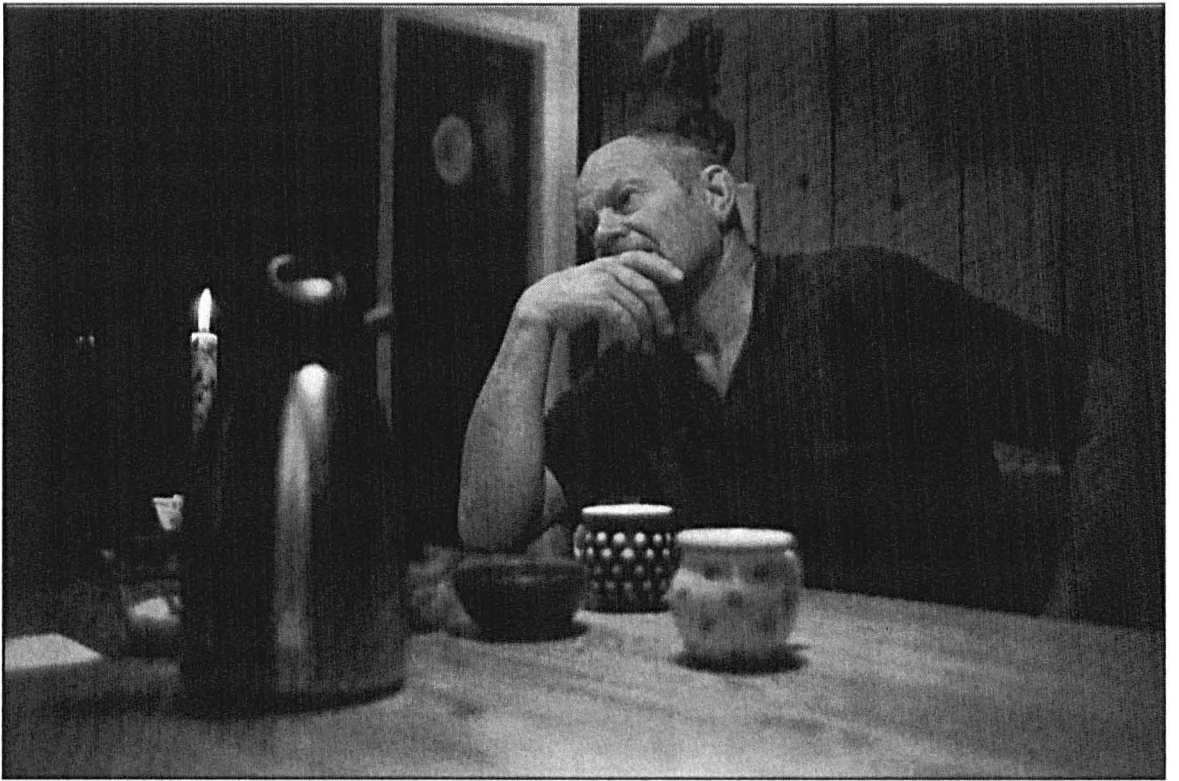


Fig. 12.2
Guðmundur, the story-teller

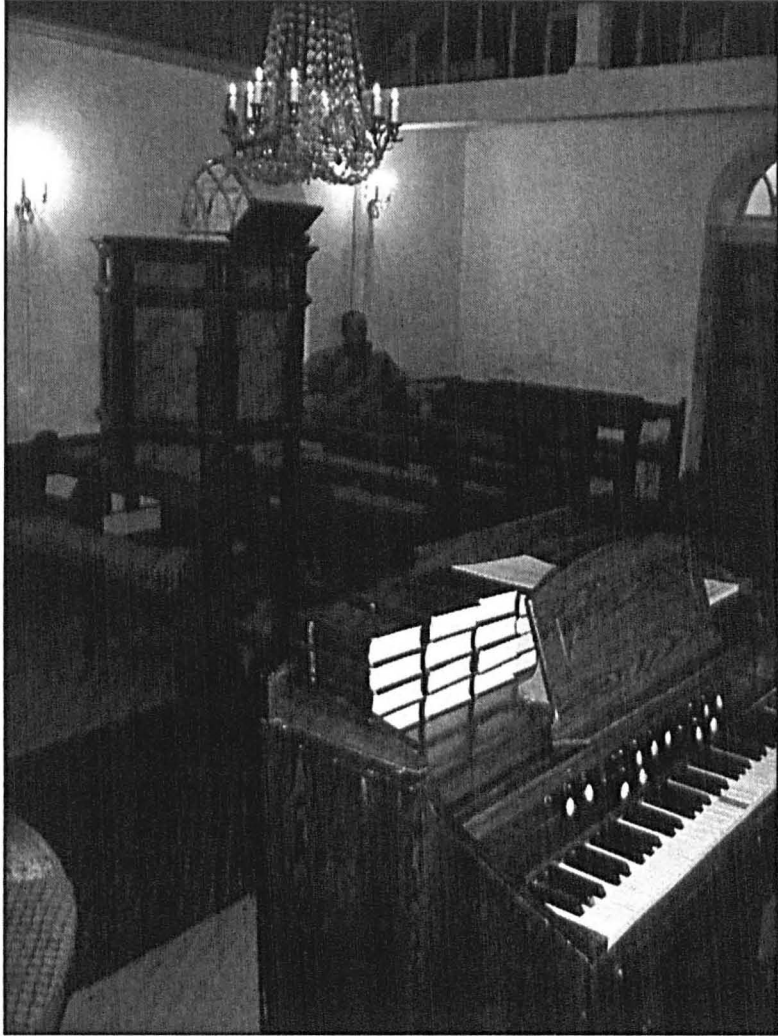


Fig. 12.3
The harmonium

13 CHANGING SELF AND VOCAL BEHAVIOUR

I no longer sing with the same bright treble voice heard in the vocal performance that I recalled in the introduction to this study. I have even forgotten most of the songs I sang then, but I have learnt hundreds more. As far as I know, nobody that I knew when I was nine or ten years old, lives within a thousand miles of me today. I know a thousand people here in Iceland, who, even if they existed then, might just as well have not, at least as far as *I* was concerned. My own son is now older than I was when I sang that song, and he was born, and has grown up, in an environment far removed from the one I knew then. I suppose if I had been asked about Iceland, I might have proffered the idea that it was a land full of polar bears and eskimos. I was badly informed. I own one or two photographs of myself, and even a couple of recordings of my singing solo, taken, and made, respectively, within a year or two of that event. Things have changed; looking at, and listening to this memorabilia, I hardly recognise myself, and yet I imagine myself to be the same person. This is one of the paradoxes of Self. The final analytical chapter of this dissertation looks specifically at the changing Self, and at singing's perceived role both as an agent in those changes, and in the maintaining of continuity and consistency, through which we are able to recognise ourselves, in spite of those changes.

James asked how it could be, that he could wake up today the same person he was when he went to sleep yesterday. He proposed that this was possible because a core of memory, and a feeling for unity across the time-span of our lives, hold together a sense of identity in the face of the myriad changes that beset us (cited in Weber, 2000: 116). This is how I recognise myself in my first solo vocal performance, and in thousands of other vocal events, and life experiences, that I have lived since. I am able to remember and reconstruct them in a way that nobody else can, they are mine, and *I* am theirs. This is not just the truism it appears. This applies too, to the memories which men have shared with me in this study; it is not just that these memories belong to the rememberer, but that they are the rememberer, they are the building bricks of whoever they think

they are. Memories form part of that central core Self, constructing a sense of who I am. In accessing them, I find a sense of continuity and unity – they are a constant reminder of me.

If vocal memories have only been accessed by men for the sake of this study, then the Self constructed here would be something of a fabrication. It must be admitted that Self is always somewhat like that – pragmatic truths helps us present a unified front. But distorting the truth too much, especially with those we meet regularly, as these men and I do, is far too great a threat to the integrity of Self for it to be maintained for long, except in most exceptional circumstances (ibid.: 117). The vocal memories recalled here have inevitably been privileged, to some extent, for my benefit. Nevertheless, given the richness of men's narratives, their claims to have accessed these memories fairly regularly prior to my intervention, my earlier declared intent not to "spurn the effort that respondents themselves make to speak the truth" (Connell, 1995: 91), and the fact that men's diaries provide extensive evidence that everyday vocal behaviour is still, by and large, consistent with those memories, I think singing's place in these men's core Self, and in the sense of unity essential to it, is irrefutable. This is not of course to say that individuals in the study all configure the same kind of vocal core, or maintain the same kind of unity, anymore than they always sing the same songs. Although they share a great deal of common repertoire, sing together in the same choir, and share the same setting, their vocal narratives are sometimes very different indeed. This is the reality of a psychology of individuality. It is clear though that singing's remembrance provides all the men interviewed in this study with a sense of Self's permanency and unity, and their present singing must provide therefore, provide an inevitable sense of continuity and consistency. Because of the dominance of collective singing in their vocal behaviour, singing specifically provides a memory and sense of connectedness and community. Because singing is not just a hobby to be engaged in once a week at choir practices, but permeates, broadscale, the fabric of social and psychological life – of material, social, and spiritual self – then it provides the men with a sense of completeness and integrity too. In all this, we see that men's vocal behaviour configures both consciousness and social experience.

Paradoxically, change can both threaten unity, and contribute to it. Although major and continued disunity threatens our well-being, threats to it

cannot be qualified, in themselves, as inevitably negative or undesirable; as Weber has explained, threats to our sense of unity are often the means by which we grow – in new relationships, or in dramatic changes to old ones, in a challenging new job, even coping with serious illness. Sometimes change is forced upon us, sometimes we choose it for ourselves. In either case, we can adopt expansive or contractive strategies to restore a sense of balance, unity, and integrity. We might resign a demanding, all-consuming job because it threatens our family life, or take on a new one because we feel unfulfilled. We may change our view of life's purpose in order to cope with serious illness, or make some radical life-style choice, to fit what we see as life's purpose.

13.1 Music as Change

Music too has the potential to create and restore, or to undermine and disrupt an individual's sense of unity, though we normally associate it, as men in the study clearly do, with the former. Presumably, we do not engage in music that threatens our unity and integrity, unless, of course, we wish to stretch ourselves and expand Self. Then we set ourselves new, more ambitious goals that might make more demands on our musical skills. In performance, we might demand more of ourselves technically, or of a particular interpretation; in listening, it might be an effort to expand our musical tastes, trying to get *into* a musical style, or form, that was previously alien to us. This kind of self-critical reflection is probably fairly uncommon in everyday life; *I know what I like*, may frequently really mean, *I like what I know*. At its most stubbornly parochial, this absence of self-critical reflection may lead to the kind of repetition and predictability of which Adorno was so critical (see De Nora, 2003). All the same, it is this predictability that allows individuals to access music to do certain jobs. Conscious choices are made to act in certain musical ways *I know I like*. This is not normally done with the dialectical in mind, but with the aim of creating, or restoring unity and balance in Self; a song is sung by the men and their families at a birthday party to create a sense of unity in social lives; a very different song therapeutically restores Self at a funeral; another is sung by a man, alone in his empty barn, in an expansively expressive vocal act of balancing Self with a material space. Sometimes, as we have seen, the choice of song appears to be made at a sub-conscious level, almost as if these songs had a life of their own, when, of course they do not. For now, the

point I wish to make is simply that many of the men in the study frequently find themselves in the position of being able to sing any songs they wish, and that their singing in choirs is also a matter of individual choice. Choice, as we shall see, is very important in terms of the work that music is able to do on us.

The element of choice has already been shown as being important in music's agency in *Self*. Research by Sloboda, O'Neill, and Ivaldi (2001), has illustrated how the element of choice has clear implications for positive changes to emotional states. Reporting a direct link between the level of personal choice participants exercised over the music they listened to, and music's functionality, Sloboda et al, showed that personal choice increased the likelihood of individuals becoming more positive, more alert, and more focussed in the present (ibid.: 9). In other words, the ability to control the music that was listened to enabled listeners to better control themselves. Increasingly though, musical choices are denied people in everyday Western life, and individuals may exercise little autonomy in many everyday musical experiences. Attempts to locate *Self* vocally in almost any urban space are very likely to be seen as unsociable ones, and as a denial of other people's space. Having lost their own personal voices, idle musical minds become targets for others to control, often for economic ends, in work-, recreation-, and marketplaces. Once again, the music is, ideally, not dialectic; it is supposed to do its work almost subliminally. Quite often it seems, though, that music forced upon us in shopping malls, restaurants, airlines, phone call centres, from other people's personal stereos, teenager's blaring bedrooms, and cars, and even in our own workplace, causes some people unease, and provokes a confrontational dialectic. Examples like these, illustrate that music, especially when coupled with modern technology, urban settings, and cultural plurality, has the obvious potential to disrupt *Self*, to increase entropy in consciousness, and dissonance in social lives.

Sloboda et al's investigation into music's functions in everyday life shows that listening changes states of consciousness, and that the level of choice an individual has over the music he listens to, relates to its functionality. DeNora's ethnographic study (2000) grapples with similar questions from a very different theoretical framework. Looking at how fifty-two women use music in settings where individuals enjoy very mixed levels of musical choice, the study provides rich details about music's agency – its power to change *Self*. In karaoke evenings, shops, aerobic, and music therapy sessions, DeNora's participants use

music to manage personal and social life, balancing Self with environments, situations, and tasks. This is clearly what the men do here in the present study. Acknowledging this commonality, I wish to turn now to the role of singing in the changing Self, and examine how men use vocal behaviour as an agent in this changing Self. In doing so, I shall be particularly mindful of DeNora's work, and even borrow one of her interpretative frameworks, developed in her recent rethinking of music sociology (2003). At this stage, it seems pertinent to point out four fundamental differences between my own study and DeNora's; the first, is the dramatic contrast in setting; the second, concerns my weighting of frameworks towards the psychological, in contrast to DeNora's sociological emphasis; thirdly, my focus is exclusively on vocal behaviour, whilst DeNora's is on various kinds of musical behaviour, though none of them are quite like those that the men engage in. Finally, whilst DeNora has tended to focus on Musical Events, a theme she develops theoretically in a more recent publication, I, in addition to looking at individual one-off musical events in specific settings, have attempted to reflect on music's perceived agency over the life span of individuals. Actually, this flow of consciousness – by which I mean the life span of experiences, or at least the memory of them – and its relationship to the meeting of specific musical events and life experience, is clear in DeNora's model of the Musical Event. It is a short step then, to recognise, as I argued earlier, that phenomenology is of absolutely central importance in DeNora's model, and that there may be good reasons therefore, to caution against the over objectifying of these Musical Events. What is clear from DeNora's model, is that it is a whole lifetime of musical, and non-musical experience, that explains music's function, and the changes it makes to any particular individual, in any particular event. Musical Events like DeNora's, are inevitably like still frames in a moving picture. How music came to do the work it does tends, in such cameos, to be a relatively unproblematic process, especially because of the way a lifetime of complex, and often contradictory experiences, are simplified into several specific and seemingly straightforward preconditions. The more snapshots we are able to see, of how different musics work at different times, in any individuals lives, the more we begin to assemble something that resembles the moving picture of lived experience, and the more sense we are able to make in turn, of those individual frames or events.

With this in mind, I wish now to look at some of the men's experiences of how singing and change interact in ways not dissimilar to DeNora's theorizing of Musical Events. Because I want to reflect something of how men perceive their whole singing lives, I am going to have to rely sometimes on rather distant memories of vocal happenings. This is not the weakness that it might appear; what matters essentially, is how they are remembered, and how that remembrance continues to influence singing's function as an agent in changing Self. These are not, it should be stressed once again, changes that can be simplistically mapped on to the Newtonian-Euclidian grid, but psychological perceptions of changes, reconstructed at a particular moment in time. The discourse that follows can be divided into two parts. Firstly, I am going to examine a wide range of issues where men see singing as effecting change, using one or two specific examples in each case of what I shall call, following DeNora, Vocal Events. These are thematically arranged still frames of vocal incidents from the lives of many of the study's participants. They illustrate singing's power as an agent of change in a wide range of experiences – from the everyday micro, intra-personal changes of mood, similar to those that Sloboda et al reported, to changes in bodily actions, in social relationships, and in major life-transformations. In doing so, I shall limit the contextual to that which seems directly relevant to the frame we are looking at, though deciding what exactly is relevant to the outcomes that musical behaviour produces, is not a straightforward process. Secondly, I shall attempt to look, longitudinally, at changes that singing is perceived as having afforded over a singer's life-time, trying, however crudely, to review a moving picture of singing's agency, and highlighting some of the threads that are perceived as having enabled singing to do the work it does in changing individual lives. Because of the problems faced in keeping all of those threads in vision, I shall use some analytical tables to review two changing vocal lives. I shall use analysis of the vocal lives of two of the most prominent figures in this study – Baldur's and my own. Reviewing my own vocal life in these terms serves two purposes: firstly, it adds to my own personal revelation, and continues to recognise my own subjectivity as researcher; secondly, it provides an interesting contrast with the vocal lives of the other men here. In both cases, my aim is primarily to illustrate the perceived accumulative effect of vocal experiences in terms of the changing Self. In doing so, and by changing focus between panoramic and close-up

perspectives of these Vocal Lives, I hope to be better able to locate individual Vocal Events, and the changes they are seen as having afforded in the wholeness of life-experience perceptions, and relate them to men's construction of a unified, integrated Self.

13.2 Changing Mood

Singing is so easily able to change boredom into a smile, into positive thoughts and presentation. (*"framkoma" = presentation; lit. the way we come forward or present ourselves to others*) (P18)

This concise note from one of the men's diaries is typical of many other entries, and of many stories told in interviews. It is noteworthy for its conciseness, but also for the way in which it clearly articulates the chain reaction that singing is seen as setting in motion. It is not just that singing changes the mind, but it changes facial expression, and changes the way we present ourselves to others. The implication is that singing changes relationships with other people too. Recalling Weber's persona as being, amongst other things, the way we present ourselves to others, the quotation above implicates singing as a very significant and effective technology of this persona. The change maybe indirect, but the sense of continuity is clear, singing changes mind, then the body, and then other bodies – music's functionality resonates after the singing is done.

Others articulate singing's functionality in changing personal state by, literally, moving Self away from negative situations or states. Self is sung to a better place as the following quotation makes quite clear: "It's just a really good device, if something is wrong, if you feel bad, then it's really good to sing yourself away from it." (P3) Similarly, singing can change conscious states by blotting out undesirable thoughts, as Magnús makes clear in his, "I don't think about my job when I'm singing and not about my problems either." (P2) The following extract is particularly interesting, although it is, in fact, an example more in keeping with Sloboda's study of listening's functionality in changing self:

I selected a song on a CD to help sedate me! I turn off the TV, dim the lights, and let that lovely song sound inside me. After a short time, I'm relaxed, sleepy, and ready for bed. (P5)

What is very special about this particular Vocal Event, is that the song chosen is the men's choir's own recording of Brahms's lullaby. Whether or not it is actually possible to sing one's Self to sleep, this is a kind of vocal Self-sedation. At the opposite end of the day, singing's positive agency is considered obvious: "I woke up singing in my head, that's always a good omen for the day ahead." (P5)

In many other instances, men recognise how their singing can change other people's moods and states of consciousness. Singing's sedative powers are well known and well practiced by men in the study. Jón, in particular, seems intrigued by the change that singing brings about in his own children, he sees this as the most powerful piece of agency in which his voice is engaged, and he notes it in his diary as a very special Vocal Event:

Today ended like so many others, by singing for the children when they are going to sleep and are in bed. ... (This is) where my singing has its most and best effect! (P21)

It's so lovely to see the children be quiet, listen, relax, and sleep because of this noise coming from me. (P21)

Many of the men talk about how singing changes other people; the joy seen on faces of senior citizens at the residential home; the audience at a concert, held captive, as Magnus suggested, as their emotions are "toyed" with; the young infant showing reciprocity in voice, facial expression, and movement, as she joins with grandfather in a performance of a song about a horse galloping home. Far more dramatic though, are two related Vocal Events that Úlfar recalls about his use of singing as a cathartic Self-help therapy, helping him to cope with two untimely and tragic deaths, of his brother, and later, of a close friend. Singing clearly allows the cathartic expression of loss and grief, in the absence of therapeutic or counselling options:

In those days, there was no help in that sort of crisis (*brother's fatal accident*) so, so you just sang. And like with x who committed suicide just last year. Singing still works, it's amazingly good. (P3)

In the latter event, Úlfar even composed a song himself – a very personal memorial to a lost friend, and a meeting place for future acts of remembrance.

13.3 Changing Relationships

Singing changes relationships in all sorts of everyday situations far more mundane than this last example. It appears to change relationships because it joins people together, it changes their connectedness, and this is surely the part of the appeal of changing other people's emotional state through singing – establishing a reciprocal relationship.

When there are get-togethers, dances or something, people start singing in harmony, then you mix with that group, just to take part, to join in with others. We sung for an hour and half at a party the other day. (P3)

I suggested to this particular speaker, that many people might just put a CD recording on the sound system. This is how the conversation continued:

Yeah, sure. But this is essential, and everybody normally takes part, they all sing along. (P10)

And should everybody sing? (RF)

There's no compulsion but it's somehow like that. When people start singing, then other people have to sing along too. (P10)

Another man, we have already heard, explained it thus: "There's so much joy in people doing something together rather than just by themselves ... it is like some sort of treaty." (P8)

Singing clearly changes the way people relate to each other. Consider how things change in terms of the configuration of parent-offspring relationships, in the following two Vocal Events that Gunnar recalls. Gunnar is articulating particular qualities of relationships that are embodied by vocal display: An affectionate, admiring, but respectful distance is kept, in Gunnar's seemingly conscious decision, not to sing with his father, but to take a proud pleasure in just listening quietly to him. Almost four decades later Gunnar sings a duet with his own daughter in remarkably similar circumstances, where they adopt strategies that are far more expansive:

Dad had a really lovely voice, not big, but mild and beautiful, he often sung while he was working. When we were rowing into land during the bright summer nights, there were many mouths to feed, he often sung, I never joined in, I was just eight or nine, I thought I might mess up this lovely sound. (P6)

Yesterday I was on the lake with my daughter (*laying nets*) and we sang together, it was really fun, just the two of us. (P6)

Singing has made major changes to Gunnar's life in other ways. Whilst he always sung along when working at sea, he had not sung in any kind of formal setting. Being away from home for long periods, often landing fish in Scotland, or in mainland Europe, Gunnar, not born in this particular community, admits that he found himself socially isolated, when he decided to stop fishing and work full-time on the farm, originally owned by his wife's parents. Gunnar describes himself as shy, but since he begun singing with the choir Gunnar says that this has changed. Joining it was a conscious choice to change social Self, which stretched Gunnar vocally too. Other individuals seem to change Self dramatically through vocal activity that presents contrasting sides of their Self, like the two faces of a Janus mask:

The most laid-back guy could become, well, their behaviour and gestures, completely different when they sing in the choir. People change a lot in singing. (P11)

Returning to singing and relationships, I have already looked in detail at the remarkable impact that singing had on Baldur's relationship with his mother, and, indeed, with his whole family and kin group. Several other men meet up regularly to change relationships and moods, by singing together informally. Kjartan described the regular family music making as being like a family sitting down to a meal together, "instead of everybody eating at different times". There are dozens of examples crossing the whole range of social relationships, from intimate personal ones, to extended family members, acquaintances, and even total strangers, like the men in the male-voice choir from Reykjavík. Men sometimes use the expression "song brothers" when speaking of other male-voice choirs. Whilst it is difficult to deny the strong gender connotations of this cliché – it is equally impossible to deny that singing is seen as changing the way people here, and not just men, are related to each other.

13.4 Changing Actions

One of the ways we relate to each other is, of course, physically. Few things embody and construct relationships more than the way bodies act together, the way they touch, and move in relation to each other. I attempted to explain the erroneousness of binary models of mind and body in chapter eight, but singing, nevertheless, changes the way our bodies act. In the following quotation, singing is seen as being able to remove tension from tired bodies, despite, paradoxically, the fact that singing itself requiring physical exertion:

You are completely different afterwards, it's an elixir, you release something somehow, free of tension, completely relaxed, even if you're totally knackered. (P1)

In the chapter on gender identity, I observed how singing changes the way men's bodies act towards each other. In doing so, it confirms the temporality of gender identity. Whilst singing together, men are able to be physically intimate with each other; touch is permissible, desirable, and functional, both in terms of the vocal performance, and of social connections. Notice again that it is both mind and body that change. The changes in physical actions that bodies can take towards each other are intricately linked to the changes that have been made in the mind. In other words, what is important here, is what singing enables minds to make of the action bodies take – how bodies are coded in singing.

Vocal behaviour changes other bodily actions too; the men's narratives talk about how singing regulates the body in tasks ranging from housework to machine-tool making. In some cases, this seems to be a rhythmical synchronisation of motor-movement, with musical movement. Apart from this changing of the body, the mind may be changed too; either it can be re-located in some other setting, in order to distance mind from body, or it may identify itself, through association with the physical task in hand. One man is working, packing smoked lamb, the traditional Icelandic Christmas fare, and another is putting out Christmas stock in a hardware and household goods store, both find themselves singing Christmas songs. Another man notes in his diary, how:

Without any outside influence as I was working at the lathe, except that the piece I was turning was from a boat, I found myself singing "The

catch is good on a boat near Greenland” and a little later I was singing a song about inviting Violetta out in my boat, an Italian folk song I think. (P26)

13.5 Changing Musical and Vocal Self

It might seem ridiculously obvious to state that singing changes individuals vocally and musically. It is, however, less straightforward than it appears: In the introduction to this chapter, I briefly outlined why people tend to choose music that they know they like – the repetition enables it to function in a certain way, and to do certain jobs. I pointed out that sometimes individuals do not accept this status quo, they change themselves musically; this must be true of any progressing musician, as long as they continue to seek out further challenges and accomplishments. There is not always the motivation to do so however. Having obtained a level of musicianship, in whatever forms are seen as having local social and cultural currency, there may be no perceivable benefits in continuing to pursue expansive policies. Indeed some communities take a positively dim view of creativity and innovation that challenges the status quo (see Lubart, 1999). So, having acquired a reasonably high level of vocal and aural skills, sufficient at least to sing well, sing in harmony, and even harmonize by ear, and having learnt large sections of the dominant repertoire of this setting, there may not be any need to expand Self further, and singers may just sing, instead, “what they know they like”. A significant factor that may have limited the influence of this kind of conservatism locally is clearly the impact of migration. Looking back, we have already noted examples of this phenomenon; the return to Iceland of musicians who had studied in Europe from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards; the arrival in the locality of women music “enablers” like Lizzý, and Elísabet; the endless stream of foreign music teachers – like myself – throughout the twentieth century which I mentioned in chapter two; and, more recently several local musicians who have studied overseas. It is easy to see that following the musical revolution here around the beginning of the twentieth century, modest challenges to communities, and to individual musical Selves, were fairly constant. This has protected, to some modest degree, against the kind of musical introversion that had dominated Icelandic musical and vocal life in previous centuries, when contractive strategies were employed, simply to survive the remarkable hardships

of everyday life here. Creative expansion and innovation could hardly have been high on the list of priorities.

There have been changes then, to the musical challenges that members of the male-voice choir have faced. Such challenges are an important part of motivation, and many of the men in the study talk about how they have been stretched vocally over the years, without being specific about exactly what that means in technical terms. Being more consistently in good vocal form, is one of the perceived results of this expansive vocal policy.

It is in the area of interpretation and ensemble, that men see most changes to their musical and vocal Selves. Many of them express a growing awareness of its importance, and of the options open to performers. Secondly, many of the men talk about musical moments of expressive intensity, their aspirations to sing a high note pianissimo, to sing big songs with “boldness”, the importance of giving a soloist just the right amount of support, of listening to other voices more carefully, of following the conductor attentively to produce a cohesive expressive interpretation.

The other question I mentioned in relation to the changing musical Self, was to do with musical taste. Most of the repertoire of Icelandic male-voice choirs has traditionally been based on the Icelandic romantic nationalist repertoire, which, for the most part, reflects the unity that collective singing in Iceland over the past 150 years has constructed and maintained. Repertoire has expanded though, so that Hreimur has sung a wide range of European folksongs, works by Poulenc, Schubert, Grieg, Verdi, Wagner, Weber, and contemporary Canadian folk-song arrangements. Many of the men found some of these pieces aurally very challenging; harmonies in the Grieg, and Poulenc’s unpredictable melodic lines, have all been commented on to me, as demanding considerable personal and musical expansion. The most challenging threat to men’s musical unity came, surprisingly, from a young local composer who was studying composition in St. Petersburg Conservatoire, Russia. The choir fairly recently learnt, and performed, two short songs by him, dedicated to a choir member – more especially, to the composer’s father on his 50th birthday (see CD 20). This is not the place to engage in a musicological analysis of works. It is enough to appreciate that these works were contemporary in a classical sense, without being in any way avant-garde, they were demanding for most members of the choir both vocally and

aurally. Learning them was one of the more difficult tasks that most of the men have undertaken, and it is my certain conviction that they would have given up, had it not been for the way in which they were related to these pieces. This is an important point; community and continuity enabled men in the choir to take up this challenge in a far more positive way than would otherwise have been possible, and even going so far as to justify the works, to sometimes challenged listeners. The composer, quite simply, is a local; he is one of us, a former pupil of the director, a son of a senior choir member, and the pieces were explicitly Icelandic, both in terms of text and in terms of musical devices. In resonating strongly with many other elements of Self, a partial conversion of Self was attainable; changes to musical Selves were possible.

Some of the men, myself included, have had to compromise their musical tastes in other ways too. This has sometimes meant individuals cutting back on aspirations to sing “serious” music, and singing popular music, because they are aware that this makes for an important connectedness with some people. This is the contradictory nature of the changing Self, as Weber makes clear (2000: 144ff.); cutting back on personal aspirations – being contractive – is sometimes expansive in other areas, like the development of social connections. These are the changes and compromises that we make.

13.6 Changing Communities, Places and Nations

Changing relationships on the kind of scale that we have observed, cannot fail to have a significant impact on local communities, especially given their small populations and relative homogeneity. In an earlier chapter, I discussed how singing appears to have been used, quite deliberately, to change communities and even the Icelandic nation. Men’s narratives also articulated the relationship of Self to material space, how singing actuated all kinds of spaces and gave them meaning. Communities are not places, nor of course are nations, but they are actuated in spaces, and therefore inextricably linked to them. The spaces that men talk about were remarkably varied, ranging from the domestic to the ethnic, from monumental natural landscapes to man made multi-purpose community structures, all waiting to be given definition by the actions that take place in them. None of these spaces is changed physically by the vocal behaviour that takes place in them. What happens is that they are brought into a particular conscious,

or sometimes sub-conscious, relationship with Self. Places are constructs of consciousness, of Self, and singing has the power to change to the view we have of them; this is how men's singing, and even mixed-voice singing, came to construct twentieth century Iceland with its central values of nature, independence, and community. Nationalist orators and commentators in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century clearly saw collective singing as a way of changing society. Amid the famine, disease, oppression from a foreign imperialist power, and natural disasters culminating in the 1874 eruption that spread poisonous ash all over the north of Iceland and destroyed livestock and livelihood, pessimism, hopelessness, and gloom were seen as widespread. Nevertheless, from this literal ashes and sackcloth situation a new mood of optimism, pride, and enthusiasm was to be constructed and embodied by collective action. Collective vocal action, as we have clearly seen, was an intrinsic part of this sea change. If music can change individual mood, then presumably, it can also change the mood of a nation.

We have seen how men's collective singing changed Icelandic identity. In doing so, it established new social orders and a particular nationalist identity and masculine code. This is clearly not the outcome of a single Vocal Event, but of many. If we take the example of male-voice choirs we can, nevertheless, point to the first such Vocal Event, the first public concert of a male-voice choir in Reykjavik in 1854. This was followed by similar Vocal Events and outcomes that were presumably limited initially to changes of perception in individual consciousness, but which soon became noticeable in changes of perception in collective and national consciousness too. Baldur saw that attempts by women to sing together on an organised, public platform would threaten these social structures whose configuration was, in part, one of the outcomes of these earlier Vocal Events. He also saw singing as changing, albeit very slowly, the social structures of gendered workplaces and arenas like the sheep corral:

Thirty or forty years ago, no woman would have drunk out of a hipflask at a round-up, let alone sing with men who were a bit merry. Today she'll probably take a sup; you put your arms around each other and sing. (P1)

Whilst I suggest that this is a far less common Vocal Event than the narrator implies, it does reflect the possibility of singing changing these structures. The relationship with the woman who takes a sup from the hipflask appears to be devoid of long entrenched social and sexual codes, or at least far less strongly configured by them. One such Vocal Event is clearly not enough.

Similarly, we have noted how some of the men's singing can be seen as modest changes in accepted social codes, sex-roles in terms of infant-care, and even, on occasion, the division of domestic tasks. In another very different example, singing in the male voice choir can be seen as change along the lines of local, social, and political structures because of the way in which it cuts across present council and parish boundaries.

In recent decades, changes in this collective vocal behaviour, especially with the institutionalisation of vocal enculturation and increasing urbanisation, have changed communities too. Increasingly, rural communities, and the role that singing plays in them, appear as something rather far removed from contemporary Iceland and especially from the dominant Reykjavík conurbation. There can be no doubt about the impact of these changes on vocal practices, or about the influence of technological developments. Two examples illustrate the point; the huge reduction in singing in cars, following the introduction of in-car sound systems, was noticed by many of the men in the study, and one man makes the following comment about the impact of sound systems on adult-offspring vocal interaction:

I sung most with my oldest daughter (*16 years*). Maybe it's because there is a cassette recorder in every room and I mean the youngest, she's five, she listens to that. There's still a need for it. You're just able to get out of it. Tired ... more comfortable. (P4)

When thinking of vocal behaviour and large scale changes in social structures and community it is essential to recognise that, even though I have been attempting to illustrate how singing is perceived as changing personal and social self, it is neither possible, nor even desirable, to talk unequivocally about precedence. Best seen at the level of these large scale social changes, like those to Icelandic identity, it applies too at the personal level, where people turn up at parties with expectations that change singing, or where an individual's mood calls

upon a certain vocal behaviour. This emphasizes the need to recognise as DeNora does, that:

music is thus not about or caused by, the social; it is part of whatever we take to be the social writ large. Music is a constitutive ingredient of social life (2003: 151)

Because, as we have seen, separating social from personal lives is really little more than an interpretative process, we might equally say that music, and more specifically here, singing, is a constitutive ingredient of the whole Self. The extent and quality of singing's constitutive role, even in these men's lives and consciousness, varies. For Baldur, it is a constant means of ordering experience, controlling Self and being social – almost to the level of Weber's monomaniac. For others, like Gunnar, singing appears to have moved in and out of everyday experience and perception with less predictability; occasionally it has taken a leading role, as in his interpretation of the incident with the Faroese girl salting herring; more often it has been somewhere in the background of experience and consciousness as trawlerman and farmer; and more recently, following his joining the choir, it has become a far more significant element of Self. At different moments over a day, a wide range of phenomena can be experienced as "Self" (James, 1890). For men in the present study singing is frequently experienced as Self, but its significance as a constitutive ingredient of Self varies on a daily basis. Every day, every hour, its importance in terms of organizing phenomena, controlling self and social life, will be subject to change in individual lives. In choir practices and concerts, it will be firmly in the foreground of experience and consciousness; in everyday tasks, it might be an unfocused background; endless configurations are possible. And just as it can be in the fore of individual experience and perceptions of them, so it can too, in collective experience. The changes that singing can make to national life, identity, and consciousness are dependent on a significant proportion of the population sharing in similar sorts of outcomes in similar sorts of Musical Events. The days when any one particular kind of music or vocal event involving limited musical forms, could be expected to produce relatively common outcomes, such as we have witnessed here, may have passed. They have been replaced, even in Iceland by a musical plurality, individuality, and by the increasing proliferation of musical sub-cultures.

13.7 Vocal Events in Vocal Lives

Whatever the real erstwhile strength of this male-vocal hegemony, even the men in this study illustrate that there is considerable diversity among them individually, as to how Vocal Events have shaped and changed their lives. The analytical tables that follow attempt to put the kinds of changes discussed above into the context of individual lives. The form for these tables is borrowed and developed from DeNora (2003). In her analysis of music's agency in individual musical events DeNora theorizes the Musical Event as being made up of three temporal elements of pre-event, event, and post-event. The pre-event is made up of preconditions – conventions, biographical associations, and previous practices, which have bearing on the actual event under investigation. In DeNora's model the event itself features five components: the actor who engages with the music; the music engaged with; the act of engagement (performing, listening etc); the local conditions of this engagement – which are concerned with how the actor came to be engaged with music in this particular way at this particular time; and the environment, which include material cultural features and interpretative frames that are in situ. I suggest that there is considerable overlap between local conditions and environment defined in these terms, and so I have done away with this distinction, without, I believe, undermining the usefulness of DeNora's model. More problematical though, are the model's temporal dimensions in the tradition of Euclidian time and space paradigms. It is my contention however, that it is precisely the epistemological problems with maintaining these temporal parameters that define this model as essentially psychological and phenomenological: the engagement with the music, as far as we are able to glimpse it, is, inevitably built on retrospection, and relies on after-the-event narrative construction. As such, the pre-event, event, and post-event all become post event; they are psychological time-bands not real Euclidean ones. This should be borne in mind both in their reading, and in the reading of my Vocal Events, especially of the tables that follow. The problem with the "present perfect" musical experience is illustrated by DeNora's efforts to provide a "running commentary" on a musical event by getting "microphoned" participants to "think aloud" whilst on a shopping expedition (ibid.: 108). It ends, as DeNora herself admits, in failure, and although DeNora sees its shortcomings as being primarily related to her role as researcher, I suggest that there are at least equally

major problems with this kind of intervention in terms of the on-going stream of consciousness of participants. It is hard to imagine that consciousness of, and in, an experience, remains unaffected by the process of “having” to think about it aloud. At the very least, it probably distracts from, or desensitizes, other perceptual modes that I have mentioned earlier in this study. This is an issue I wish to confront with regard to my own research method in the final chapter of this dissertation. The important point for now is that these musical events are concerned with states of consciousness, and with Self, and with the perceived changes that are affected on them by music’s agency – these are the outcomes of musical events.

Essentially, I remain faithful to DeNora’s model. The actors here are Baldur and I. Primarily the engagement is a vocal one, or a reflection upon vocal behaviour, but I divert sometimes from this when other kinds of musical engagement have been seen as having significant impact on Vocal Lives, as, for example, in the case of Baldur listening to his mother singing, and in my learning to play piano and clarinet. Because, however, I am concerned with a longitudinal view of music’s agency, I have tried to illustrate the perceived accumulative effects of perceptions of previous vocal experience outcomes that become, in turn, conditions for future Vocal Events and their interpretation. I have concentrated on a selection of key Vocal Events as they appear to be prioritized by our narratives – they are by no means exhaustive. Baldur’s perceived outcomes are drawn both from his diary and from interview with him. In my case, some of the events were discussed in the introduction to this study; others are introduced and expanded here. The tables illustrate how previous perceptions of vocal experience are built up, to form multi-layered pre-conditions for subsequent ones. Arrows in the diagram indicate the continuing agency of perceptions about past vocal behaviour in “present” ones, at least in so far as this is perceived to be so in narrative accounts of them. Some perceptions, like “singing makes people feel better”, appear to underlie all of Baldur’s vocal behaviour – it is a guaranteed outcome! The consistency of these outcomes underlies the way in which memories of vocal experiences contribute to unity of Self. In contrast, other outcomes vary according to the nature of the vocal experience and, on occasion, the changes in perception they afford are very dramatic indeed. They are visible immediately on the tables by the absence of previous “outcomes”, and/or by the presence of new kinds of

“outcomes”. This can be best seen in Baldur’s reflection upon his “not singing because of tuberculosis” or in my visit to the Icelandic family in London.

In Baldur’s case (Figs. 13.3a & b), outcomes of early vocal experience very quickly produce a rich profile, where singing’s agency is firmly rooted in everyday domestic setting, in inclusive vocal socializing, in personal mood and consciousness, yet includes strong elements of solo performance too. In contrast, significant vocal events in my own vocal life begin much later (Figs. 13.4a & b); I have no specific memories of vocal behaviour before the age of about 9, and for more than a decade, outcomes from vocal behaviour fabricate very different social configurations to those produced by Baldur’s singing. My vocal behaviour is exclusive, relationships are dominated by audiences and performers, singing constructs the “special” not the “everyday”, and it constructs the solo performer’s identity. Whilst there are outcomes in terms of personal life and mood, they are still firmly rooted in solo performance and in its approval. Following my joining of a local church choir, singing even takes me to a new “adopted” home. Singing appears, on reflection, to have been my *bus ticket* out of what had become a very unhappy early childhood home, following my parents’ acrimonious separation. Even so, singing in my new home, still only occupied a special “practicing” space, and occasional performance space for guests, not a device for organising everyday consciousness and life. Two dramatic musical events have life-transforming impact here, and they evidence the power of Vocal Events to make dramatic changes to Self. Both have been discussed already and there is no need to repeat them here in detail; the first is my first solo song performance, and the second, my listening to the vocal behaviour of an Icelandic family in London.

In Baldur’s case, the Vocal Event route to solo performance is a very different one, the change is far less dramatic than my own vocal epiphany. The solo performer identity begins in Baldur’s mind from his grandfather standing him up in a chair to perform, is built upon by watching his mother sing, then by singing publicly with his brother at school, the performance of duets with his mother, and by increasingly regular public performances. His performances though, are not just in the typical solo performer arenas of concerts halls, and with the notable exception of solos with the male-voice choir, Baldur’s solo identity remains, for all the developments and changes it undergoes, firmly embedded in everyday domestic settings and in the community rites of funerals, clan-

gatherings, and the like. Furthermore, Baldur has learnt from a very early age the power singing has in regulating and changing Self in times of frustration, tiredness, and sadness. Every day in Baldur's life appears full of many Vocal Events where singing changes conscious states – his own, and according to Baldur, those around him. The one hugely dramatic interruption to this vocal pattern is noticeable on Table 13.3b at once: when Baldur is taken seriously ill with tuberculosis, outcomes are not just a perception of a serious threat to physical well-being, but to one of his life's most important purposes and functions – singing. Whilst Baldur is able to restore his vocal Self, re-establishing and developing earlier patterns of vocal behaviour there remains a constant fear of losing his *voice*. Patterns experienced in Baldur's childhood repeat themselves with grandchildren, though less so, it seems, with his own children. Singing in the choir, especially singing songs like *Kvöldbliðan* (Figure 13.3b), seems to provide a quintessential embodiment of singing's central and richly layered role in an integrated and core Self

Figure 13.4b focuses on three Vocal Events in my own life since my arrival in Iceland; the first is the experience of conducting the male voice choir generally, where significant outcomes include an increasing understanding of what singing together means for these men in this particular setting, social and musical pleasure, and the sense of purpose that this has given me. Not surprisingly then, outcomes in my Vocal Events come to resemble much more closely those of Baldur and, I suggest, those of most of the other men in the study. They have changed very dramatically from the earlier functional “concert” performance outcomes that dominate Figure 13.4a. The second event on Figure 13 4b recalls a very recent Vocal Event: following a male voice choir rehearsal for a funeral of an ex-choir member, discussed earlier, I was walking home on a mid-night sunny, July night, recalling the words of the song “the bright, gentle July night” and reflecting upon the exceptional quality of singing that evening, and looking at the mountain view. As I did so, I suddenly felt much more content about a major life decision that I was facing about my future in Iceland. The remembrance of the song just sung restored a sense of order and reduced atrophy in my own conscious life – which had been considerable in previous weeks. At that moment, I felt well connected, by the memory of the song, to these men, to this natural setting – the country's national monuments in midnight sunshine – to the family of the

departed chorister. The event combines elements of the social, physical and spiritual Self that this study has focused on, and it provides yet another vignette of the kind of work singing does in organizing personal life. The final event in my Vocal Self table is my reflection upon this study itself. The outcomes are the formation of ideas and theories about how Self is located in singing; how singing constructs, regulates, maintains, and changes Self; how singing in everyday life can be seen as social, physical and spiritual Self; how singing can be seen as gender identity; how singing plays a role at the core of Self, in maintaining cohesion and unity – how singing is experienced as Self. In turning to the final chapter of this study, I shall attempt to sum up those ideas, their limitations, their implications for future research and for the development of theories about vocal behaviour and everyday life, singing and its function in personal and social life, and singing as the construction and experience of Self.



Fig. 13.1
Singing popular songs by local amateur composers

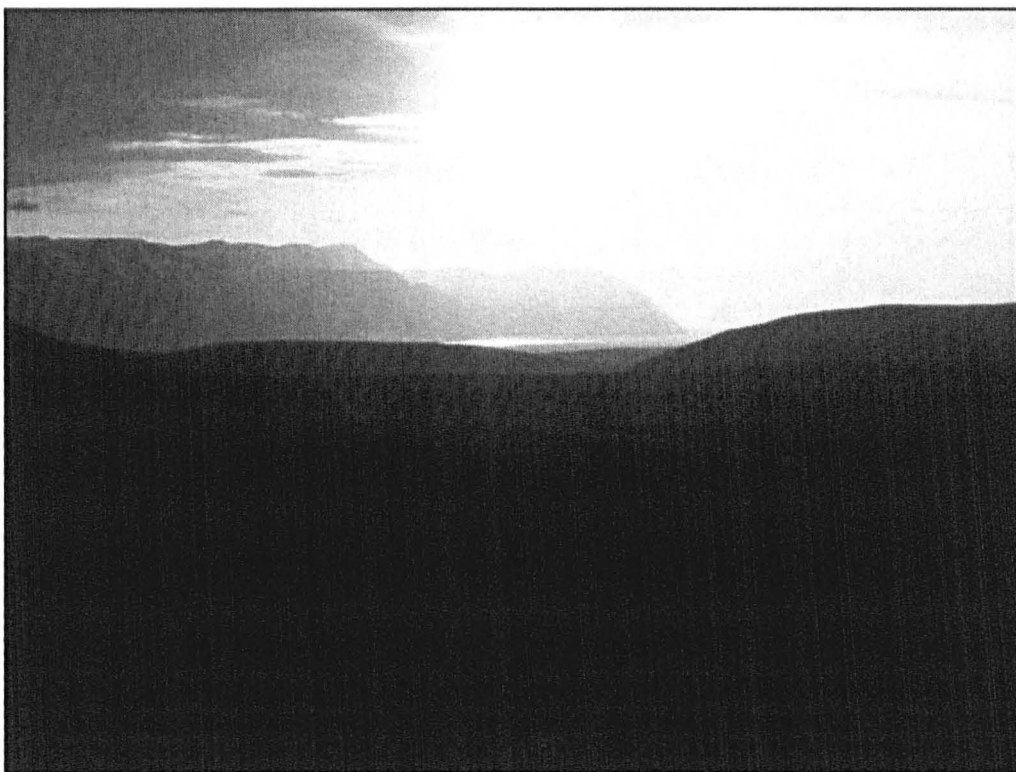


Fig. 13.2
"The bright, gentle July night"

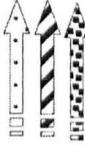
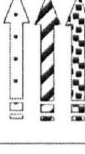


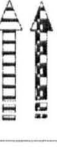


"Baldur: A Vocal Life"		Early Childhood			Childhood			Adolescence 14 years		
Memory of Vocal Event:	Singing with grandparents "on every meeting" and "in harmony"	Stood in a chair by grandfather to sing	Singing at Christmas	Listening to mother sing at the washing board	Singing with older brother whilst milking	Singing with older brother in 2-parts at school concert	Singing duet with mother publicly	Singing in harmony at parties and gatherings		
Preconditions:	memories of previous outcomes/perceptions become preconditions for later vocal events									
Music:	Icelandic national songs - strong on nature.	Not specific but similar repertoire.	Christmas songs and hymns.	"Beautiful Icelandic Songs"	Original songs and lyrics.	Songs from Icelandic musical "Deilium Dublins"	2 or 3 songs in harmony. Sentu í hómshljó mór.	Icelandic national songs.		
Local conditions:	Social relations of domestic setting. Kinship ties. Visiting grandparents.	Social relations of domestic setting. Kinship ties. Visiting grandparents.	Social relations of domestic setting. Kinship ties. Local Christmas values & customs.	Social relations of domestic setting. Kinship ties. Gender relations.	Social relations of domestic setting. Kinship ties.	Social relations of community and of public performance.	Social relations of community.	Social relations of community.	Social relations of community.	Social relations of community.
Environment:	The maternal grandparent's farm house. ...who forget themselves in singing, even if they should be out making hay!	Maternal grandparent's farm. the grandson should have a platform for performance.	Home, larger family group in small space, simple wooden Christmas tree, candles	Home, mother at the washing board ... Singing something beautiful... Baldur observing.	Working in cowshed. Making up up songs together.	School, small community hall.	Leons Club meeting. First public performance as a man. Comm. hall.	Unspecified domestic or community setting.		
Outcomes:	memories of previous outcomes/perceptions become preconditions for later vocal events									
this Vocal/Musical Event affords the perception that:	I have special vocal relationships with grandparents My family = singing Coming together is appropriated/embodyed in singing together Guests should be offered vocal refreshment Singing makes people feel better - it's an enabler Singing makes you feel "well" connected socially Singing is inclusive Harmony feels good	 I have self-confidence to sing/perform I receive positive reinforcement for vocal performance I feel better when I sing	 That celebrations should be vocal							
Memories of previous outcomes/perceptions become preconditions for later vocal events				Singing helps everyday tasks Singing can relocate Self to other places Women have fewer vocal opportunities My mum changes things by singing Listening to my mother sing is wonderful	Singing helps everyday tasks Singing can relocate Self to other places Women have fewer vocal opportunities My mum changes things by singing Listening to my mother sing is wonderful	I can hold harmony by myself My brother and I have a special vocal relationship	My mum and I have a special vocal relationship. People go home happier having sung			

Fig. 13.3a
Vocal Events in Vocal Lives: Baldur

"Baldur: A Vocal Life"		Adulthood				December 2003		December 2013	
Memory of Vocal Event:	Outcomes of previous Vocal Events from Table 1	Not singing due to tuberculosis	Singing in church choir	Singing in Male Voice Choir	Male Voice Choir Rehearsal	Singing with one year-old grandson	Walking up	Singing Kveldblid in concert	Driving the lorry - singing
Preconditions:	memories of previous outcomes/perceptions become preconditions for later vocal events	None	Previous experience of church choir (SATB)	Male voice choir repertoire.	Children's songs played and sung at piano.	How is my voice today?			
Music:	None	None	Male voice choir repertoire.	Male voice choir repertoire.	Children's songs played and sung at piano.	Vocalizing.	Kveldblid; F. Sjöer.	Song about Reykjalá.	
Local conditions:	Serious illness, away from home	Serious illness, away from home	Social relations of "masculine" settings. Local concert/performance values & customs.	Social relations of "masculine" settings. Local concert/performance values & customs.	Feeling knackered, tired and tense.	Concerns about physical/vocal health.	Social relations of comm. Public performance.	Kindred ties to locality. Reykjalá is the location of the marriage home.	
Environment:	Krispnes Hospital for six months	Krispnes Hospital for six months	Church choir in Kirk at teenager, then at parents self. Church choir in Hólarvík.	Community/concert hall. Singing with 50 men on a regular basis. (TTBB)	Community hall. Meeting and rehearsing with men in the choir.	Home. Bathroom. Early morning, checking myself out!	Concert hall. Public performance of an unaccompanied song.	Driving in the valley. nothing on radio, turned off. Starts singing.	
Outcomes:	perceptions/memories of previous Vocal Events become preconditions for later ones	perceptions/memories of previous Vocal Events become preconditions for later ones							
this Vocal/Musical Event affords the perception that:	<p>I have special vocal relationships with grandparents</p> <p>My family = singing</p> <p>Coming together is appreciated/embraced in singing together</p> <p>Guests should be offered vocal refreshment</p> <p>Singing makes people feel better</p> <p>Singing makes you feel "well" connected socially/community</p> <p>Singing is inclusive</p> <p>Harmony feels good</p> <p>I have self-confidence to sing/perform</p> <p>I receive positive reinforcement for vocal performance</p> <p>I feel better when I sing</p> <p>That celebrations should be vocal</p> <p>Singing helps everyday tasks</p> <p>Singing can educate self to other places</p> <p>Women have fewer vocal opportunities</p> <p>My mum changed things by singing</p> <p>I can hold harmony by myself</p> <p>My mum and I have a special vocal relationship</p>	<p>What would my life be without singing?</p> <p>I cannot pursue music further studies</p> <p>What am I without singing?</p>	<p>Singing in church choir = community service</p> <p>No singing = no church ritual</p> <p>I sing praises to my God</p> <p>Women had to sing in church</p> <p>Singing makes funerals "beautiful" & helps people grieve.</p>	<p>I have a special vocal relationship with my grandson.</p> <p>I can sometimes give it everything I've got, which I can't in SATB</p> <p>I get goosebumps and benched singing in a male voice choir</p> <p>Other people feel us, empathise with us without singing</p> <p>Sharing with an audience is essential - shaking who we are!</p>	<p>Feeling me of tension - singing is a therapy</p> <p>That men singing is a different, more expressive sound.</p> <p>It's fun being on top - having the melody</p> <p>I get goosebumps and benched singing in a male voice choir</p> <p>Other people feel us, empathise with us without singing</p> <p>Sharing with an audience is essential - shaking who we are!</p>	<p>I have a special vocal relationship with my grandson.</p> <p>Men can be amazingly beautiful, rich, loving, pure</p> <p>This is as good as it gets</p> <p>I am more of a man!</p> <p>Singing about alcohol is fun!</p> <p>Singing makes you feel connected to places, (my places!), to environment and weather</p> <p>I locate myself here in singing!</p>	<p>Men can be amazingly beautiful, rich, loving, pure</p> <p>This is as good as it gets</p> <p>I am more of a man!</p> <p>Singing about alcohol is fun!</p> <p>Singing makes you feel connected to places, (my places!), to environment and weather</p> <p>I locate myself here in singing!</p>	<p>Men can be amazingly beautiful, rich, loving, pure</p> <p>This is as good as it gets</p> <p>I am more of a man!</p> <p>Singing about alcohol is fun!</p> <p>Singing makes you feel connected to places, (my places!), to environment and weather</p> <p>I locate myself here in singing!</p>	
perceptions/memories of previous Vocal Events become preconditions for later ones									

Fig. 13.3b
Vocal Events in Vocal Lives; Baldur (continued)









	10 Years	12 Years +	16 Years	24 Years
"Robert: A Vocal Life"	10 Years	12 Years +	16 Years	24 Years
Memory of Vocal Event: Listening to and learning "Country Boy"	Performing "Country Boy" at school	Joining a church choir	Singing solos as child	Singing at Royal Academy of Music. London vocal scene
Preconditions:	Memories of previous outcomes/perceptions become preconditions for later vocal events	preconditions for later vocal events	Singing lessons with Arthur Reckless	Visiting Icelandic family
Music:	Country Boy	Anglican hymns and anthems	British folksongs and ballads, Italian art songs, Anahí	Classical song, opera and choral repertoire
Local conditions:	Domestic relations. Social relations.	Social relations Christian/Anglican rites and rituals	Social relations - teacher/pupil Social relations of public performance. New domestic relations in "foster" home.	Social relations - teacher/pupil Social relations of public performance.
Environment:	Home. Charlie, the lodger, played "country and western" guitar and sang.	Church	Unspecified public vocal arenas. Church, community theatres/halls	Royal Academy, teaching studios, opera theatre, concert halls, opera house etc.
Outcomes:	Outcomes:	Outcomes:	Outcomes:	Outcomes:
this Vocal/Musical Event affords the perception that:	 Singing makes people feel better  Singing makes you feel "well" connected socially I have self-confidence to sing/perform I receive positive reinforcement for vocal performance I feel better when I sing	 Singing can take me to another place - out of unhappy home  Singing is exclusive	 Making music is exclusive I need to play piano, read music  Music makes me feel better	 Singing is inclusive Reading skills are not essential We might all be "singers"  Families can = singing Ordinary people can sing in harmony Singing helps everyday tasks
Memories of previous outcomes/perceptions become preconditions for later vocal events				

Table 13.4a
Vocal Events in Vocal Lives: The Researcher

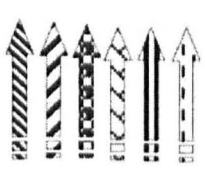
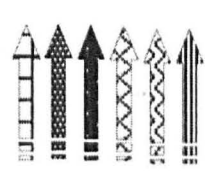
"Robert: A Vocal Life"		July 2005	40 Years+
Memory of Vocal Event:	Outcomes of previous Vocal Events from Table 3	Conducting male voice choir	Researching men's vocal behaviour
Preconditions:	Memories of previous outcomes/perceptions become preconditions for later vocal events Experience as choral conductor.	Preparing for funeral of ex-member of choir. Working home 23:00, sun still up, bright. July night. Reflecting on rehearsal. I have to make decision about staying in Iceland.	Conversations, analysis, theorising.
Music:	Male voice choir repertoire	No máttu hegi	
Local conditions:	Social relations, "masculine settings"	Social relationships, "Masculine settings"	Social relationships. Academic values, theoretical frameworks.
Environment:	Concert halls, community halls in Iceland and Europe	Community hall and Icelandic nature - mountain view.	Unspecified, Iceland, Sheffield.
Outcomes:	Memories of previous outcomes/perceptions become preconditions for later vocal events Singing makes people feel better Singing makes you feel "well" connected socially I have self-confidence to sing/perform I receive positive reinforcement for vocal performance I feel better when I sing Singing can take me to another place Singing is inclusive I might not be a "singer" Music makes me feel better Singing is inclusive Reading skills are not essential We might all be "singers" Families call = singing Ordinary people can sing in harmony Singing helps everyday tasks		
this Vocal/Musical Event affords the perception that:			
Memories of previous outcomes/perceptions become preconditions for later vocal events	That men singing is a different sound - with great expressive potential Other people feel us, empathise with us without singing Sharing with audience is essential - showing who we are Conducting the choir gives me pleasure and purpose Singing means so much to these men	I feel more at ease about staying here Singing makes you feel connected to places, (my places!), to environment and weather I locate myself here in singing Men can sing magically beautifully	Idea about how Self is located in singing, how singing constructs, maintains, regulates, changes Self - social/physical/special/ gender identity. How singing works in Everyday Life.

Fig. 13.4b
Vocal Events in Vocal Lives: The Researcher (continued)

14 SINGING HIMSELF

14.1 Closure and Phenomenology

It is the accepted convention to draw the main findings, or results, of a research study together in a series of conclusions. Closure is considered important; it sets parameters, and gives form and order. Phenomenologically speaking, things are not so straightforward; experiences, or at least the memory and perception of them, are far more open-ended. Some perceptions of experiences are brought to the foreground of consciousness, and others recede; some things are forgotten, others remembered. Even things that we thought we had closed upon decades ago – like the song Ólafur claims not to have thought of for nearly seventy years – suddenly jump out on us from the shadows when we least expect them. Self changes, but closure in conscious life is surely an illusion, however hard we sometimes try to enforce it, in what might be the most dramatic of Self-conversions. In recognising this, we acknowledge that the experiences and perceptions that have been central to this study are not exhaustive in any way. Things have undoubtedly been forgotten, or even ignored – narratives, like memories, are inevitably selective. The stories told here are certainly only edited highlights of far richer and more complex singing lives. That the data examined are selected and edited highlights should not, however, be seen as a weakness of the research methods employed here. On the contrary, this is the very strength of phenomenological narrative research methods; as we have seen, individuals go about constructing and maintaining a unified Self, or projecting an appropriate social Self, in appropriate social settings, in exactly this sort of way.

Similarly, it is not my intention that any theories and conclusions drawn from this study should be seen in terms of closure. Whatever general theories are tentatively proposed, they remain for the time being, provisional hypotheses. Before attempting to draw together some kind of summary of this study's findings, it is appropriate to reiterate the provisos and limitations that frame them. In doing so, the claims I make for the findings of this study become firmly situated and, hopefully, not excessively or unjustifiably generalised.

14.2 Limitations

Firstly, and returning to the theme of men's narratives with which I begun this chapter, it should be clear that the most important data examined here are not vocal experiences themselves, but men's reconstructions of them (see Charmaz, 2000: 514). Recognizing the centrality of the perception of things is to define this study as essentially psychological, and to remove the burden of having to test the validity of these perceptions. They are valid because they are perceived as being so, and thus, following Charmaz, "(I) claim only to have interpreted a reality, as (I) have understood both (my) own experience and our subjects portrayal of theirs (ibid.: 523)".

Because we rely on narrative construction to express perceptions and experiences, the interpersonal dynamics of those building sites ought to be acknowledged too. Specifically, in this study, this means recognising how my asking men to talk about their vocal behaviour, privileges that behaviour and the stories that are told about it. My close relationships with the participants can easily be seen as compounding the construction of narrative. On the one hand, it can be seen as privileging their vocality, leading some men, perhaps, to overestimate the importance of vocal behaviour in their lives, because of my vocal associations with them. On the other hand, it seems to have enabled men to speak with a great deal of openness, sometimes about extremely sensitive and personal issues. No assurances can be made about the balance between how men might have interpreted their vocal behaviour especially for my benefit, because of our close relationship, with how that close relationship might have facilitated their honesty in the telling of vocal histories. Questions about my role in these narrative construction sites, and my agency in the on-going vocal lives they focus on, are extremely important and I shall return to them in the following pages. Whilst still thinking about the narratives themselves though, I wish to repeat a warning I made earlier. It concerns the need to acknowledge the problems of translation when original narratives are constructed in a language other than the one in which subsequent analysis and interpretation take place. These problems, and they apply to the present study, are acknowledged simply by recognising – and studies often fail to do so – that translation itself is an act of interpretation.

In the chapter on method I explained how, with the notable exception of the original case study of Baldur, interviewees were chosen at random. Whilst the extent to which the sample group is representative of the men in the choir as a whole may be debatable, I suggest that it is, in fact, a fairly representative sample. What is clear is that many of the men's vocal stories not told here are, as the following examples suggest, as rich as those that are. Only one of the choir's four regular soloists is interviewed here, and only one other is a diarist; one of these other soloists sings regularly in a male vocal quartet all over Iceland that has also released a long-play recording. Many other men who are neither interviewed here, nor took direct part as diarists, sing in more than one choir, whilst others have taken part in amateur musical and operatic productions. One of these men is an amateur pianist of considerable ability, especially in the performance of jazz – though, interestingly, his playing the piano is a very much more private affair. Once again though, it is important to remind ourselves that this study is not concerned with aggregates, but that it has attempted to develop theories about men's vocal behaviour as a psychology of individuality, extending from idiographic norms towards generalizations. Such a framework makes questions about the make up of the sample group less important, as long as claims about findings are not excessively generalised. The most notable shortcoming, in terms of the representative nature of the interview participant group, is clearly the absence of any of the youngest members of the male-voice choir. Local demography, and the tendency in rural areas for teenagers to leave the locality for further and higher education, make the position of the three teenagers in the choir particularly interesting. Superficially, at least, their stories seem not dissimilar to those told by older members of the choir – their fathers sing in the choir, they come from families with strong vocal traditions, and they have all played in popular “functions” bands, even flirted with heavy rock styles. Whilst the omission of their stories has undoubtedly denied some interesting insights, their absence from the randomly selected sample group re-enforces the homogeneity of the interview group itself.

The self-selection of diarists might also be criticised as having influenced findings, just as similar concerns might be voiced in almost any psychological survey where there is no compulsion for participants to reply. Those that did reply might, in doing so, imply a commitment and interest that others may not share.

This argument, however, is certainly not supported in the cases of many other men, like those briefly mentioned above, who took no direct part in the study. Hardly any men formally declined to take part as diarists, but, in practice, many of them claimed that they kept forgetting to make entries. Others expressed doubts about whether they could write anything that would be of interest, or felt insecure about what that ought to write. Perhaps the form of the diaries was too open for some of the men to feel confident in responding, several of them at least stated that they would be much happier to take part in interview. Perhaps other men did not actually want to take part in the study but felt unable to say so, possibly for fear of offending me.

That the diaries in the present study are used primarily for the theoretical sampling of themes developed from the original analysis of interviews, rather than for the generation of primary data, neutralizes some of this criticism. The men themselves though, did highlight some other problems with the diary method of sampling experience that ought to be acknowledged here:

I can't deny that being conscious of the need to write everything about singing down can control whether I sing the whole of a song, or whether I sing it out loud, because, as soon as I start singing along, I find myself thinking, "Ah yes, now I must write that down later". So perhaps I would have sung more of each song, and more songs, if thoughts about the diary hadn't always been around. (P26)

Another writes:

It surprises me how little I seem to have sung this week. I thought it would be much more, because inside, I think I sing more than I actually did. It disturbed me, having to keep it all together. Pretty often, it happened that I begun, unconsciously, to sing or hum a song and I found myself stopping, because I begun to think that I mustn't forget that, and consequently the result was that I stopped singing. (P2)

In doing so, the narrator illustrates the problem with DeNora's real-time reflection as a genuine Musical Event. Other concerns are that music is so much an all-pervading part of normal conscious states that it is impossible for individual men to remember what they have sung, where, or why:

I have to admit that music follows me wherever I am and it's difficult to be specific about the place or time, what song it is I'm singing, or whistling, or what I was thinking, it's just so rich in my existence. (P17)

Whilst by no means identical to the Experience Sampling Methods (ESM) developed by Sloboda, O'Neil and Ivaldi (2001) from Csikszentmihalyi and Lefevre (cited in Sloboda et al 2001: 11), the diary method used here is significantly similar. In Sloboda et al's study into listening's function in everyday life ESM participants were randomly paged to complete response forms. The investigators in the study noted the impact of this strategy on the reflexive process of reporting, but concluded that they saw "no reason, to believe that participants are systematically and substantially altering the pattern of musical exposure as a response to the demands of the ESM task" (ibid.: 24). As far as my own study is concerned, there are at least two reasons to give more careful consideration to the potentially compounding effect of these kinds of experience sampling methods. The first is that the nature of vocal behaviour is fundamentally different from listening. The kind of everyday listening, of which Sloboda et al and DeNora speak, depends on external stimuli, over which, as we have already noted, listeners may actually exercise little control. Men's singing in this study may sometimes be stimulated by listening to the radio, or to recordings, but comes more frequently from other internalised sources even though they appear frequently to have been "subconsciously" stimulated by external factors like tasks men are engaged in, or places in which they find themselves situated. Secondly, and this may have relevance for Sloboda's study too, the question ought to be asked, not just about the impact of these interventions on the patterns of musical exposure themselves, but upon states of consciousness and the narratives that are constructed about them. It is difficult to see how singing is able to do the subtle and complex kinds of work that men reflectively claim it does, when those processes are interrupted, sometimes, according to the men, almost immediately, by thoughts about the need to be reflexive in reporting them. This begs the question as to what goes on subsequently in terms of consciousness, as men may find themselves constructing narratives about this musical incident until the pager rings at any unexpected moment, or until the participant can get to his diary to make an entry. For the time being, and for as long as we are unable to monitor streams of consciousness in detail without intervening in them, these limitations

ought to be recognised. With this in mind however, it should be noted that in both general terms, and in many specific examples, the sort of work that singing was perceived as doing was remarkably consistent, regardless of whether the subjects were involved in relatively short-termed reflexivity in their diary entries, or in long-term reconstructions of their vocal lives. This, at least, can be seen as supporting the reliability of the methods employed here, and negates some of the criticisms that have been levelled at studies relying exclusively on long-term retrospection.

14.3 The Reflexive Researcher as Interpreter and Subject

I turn now to my role as researcher and interpreter, a role that is seen as fundamentally important in all Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, even when the researcher is far less entangled in the study than I clearly am here. Normally this kind of reflection focuses on the researcher's role in the formation and collection of data, and, no less, on their analysis and interpretation. In my own instance, further problems need to be recognised: some may see me as being highly compromised by my complicity in men's present and past vocal lives, and by my personal relationships with them. What is indisputable, is that my position in this setting, by which I mean both my role in the community itself, and in this theoretical study of it, is a very complex one indeed. As a long-time immigrant, long established practicing community musician, and, more recently, as researcher, I am, properly speaking, neither insider, nor outsider. Whilst I reject the suggestion that this in any way negates the validity of the present study, it is a very special feature of it, and a clearer exposition of the issues that surround *Me* – as director, teacher, friend, and researcher – ought to enable a better contextualised interpretation of this research. Whilst I have already drawn attention to some of these issues in earlier chapters of this thesis, they are re-examined here because understanding them is essential for a properly focused summary of this study's findings.

Over the past decade or so ethnomusicology has developed a healthy habit of problematizing the researcher's position in the field (see Barz and Cooley, 1997). It is a practice increasingly common in general ethnography too, but with the exception of IPA and some other grounded frameworks, it has been far less prominent in psychology, and absent altogether from music psychology. It is

impossible to claim that my efforts at this kind of reflexivity are novel, even though, in so far as this study aspires to be concerned with the psychology of music, they have been conspicuously absent from research in this specific discipline.

As early as chapter two I quoted Rice's claim that accepting who we are, as researchers in the field, ought to make us self-conscious and embarrassed (Rice, 1994:9). From the very beginning of this research project, I have attempted to be conscious of myself, and, in doing so, I have become increasingly aware of the uniqueness of my particular situation as researcher. Whilst I realised that my situation was very different to most ethnomusicologists, who, like Rice, had engaged in this kind of reflexive analysis, I found that an interesting comparison could be made with Chiener's position as a native researcher in Taiwan (Chiener, 2002). In making that comparison, I am able to illuminate some of the issues that emerge in this research because of who I am as researcher, teacher, director, and friend, in one and the same community.

Both Chiener and I were originally encultured into musical practices, and immersed in the communities practicing them, without a researcher identity-tag. In Chiener's case, she first entered what was to become her research field several years later, as a "new learner" of the Taiwanese genre *nanguan* (2002: 463). I originally entered the setting that was to become my research field more than a decade later, as a new teacher – as an authority. This is, I am sure, how the community here saw things; I, for my part, never saw it as being as simple as that.

My partner and I came from metropolitan London to the north east of Iceland with certain skills that our hosts valued. This was, in fact, the specific reason for our coming to Iceland – to use our musical skills, essentially Western classical ones, in a setting where we felt, having already met people from this community, that they would be appreciated and used. In other words, we moved here with a vision of being musically "useful" to a particular community and not specifically with the view of studying or learning to perform a specific genre or genres. I would deny vehemently any suggestion that we arrived here with the mindset of musical missionaries or cultural superiority; on the contrary, we arrived in considerable awe of these people's daily vocal lives, and of their extensive and well-established musical activities. Nevertheless, the community seemed to receive us as if we were the bearers of gifts, and I see in that a remnant

of the kind of attitudes that were typical of the musical revolution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries discussed earlier in this thesis. Romantic Nationalist musical forms were embraced as if the practice of them would be causal in establishing an independent Iceland and in modernising society – perhaps they were. What is clear is that throughout the second half of the twentieth century foreign music teachers have been welcomed here as facilitators of what was seen as a very important social activity – singing, and as providers of instrumental tuition in the classical western tradition. As teachers of this community's children and directors of organised choral activity, including children's choirs and church choirs, as well as the male voice choir, my partner and I did not feel like foreigners for long, and rarely have since. We were warmly welcomed and quickly felt accepted, even adopted and protected, by the local community. As best I know, we have never been subject to any kind of negative behaviour because of our immigrant status, anywhere in Iceland. This is not to say that we have not been the butt of jokes about our Icelandic skills, the cod wars, or a whole range of other issues: this was even evident in several of the interviews. But given the nature of a great deal of everyday Icelandic interaction, we have always seen this as a measure of our integration, not our rejection. Our children too, have always been accepted without question. From the birth of our first child, just over a year after our arrival here, local families literally queued up to offer the baby-sitting services that would facilitate our making music with other people in the community. We have always had a keen sense of interdependency.

Efforts at speaking Icelandic from our first days here seemed to speed up our sense of integration at professional, social, and personal levels, however difficult it was initially to understand and to be understood. I have occasionally been conscious of antagonism towards those foreign music teachers who appear to make little effort in this direction. But both my partner and I wished to be learners too, and from the first day I attempted to teach in a new language, whether I was teaching individuals, or whole classes. It was clear to me too, from what I had already experienced of Icelanders' singing, that I ought to be willing to explore more aural/oral methods of transmission than I had previously been used to, that I should aim to learn as much Icelandic repertoire as possible, and that I should explore the various vocal styles and genres practiced here. With the exception of *kvæðaskapur*, these styles were not particular alien to me and presented no great

challenge musically. But being regularly in the curious position of “teaching” Icelandic repertoire to Icelanders often felt a very demanding one, firstly, and most practically, in terms of language and, secondly, because of my desire to respect their musical traditions and practices. I believe that my efforts at immersing myself in Icelandic society, language and vocal repertoire did, in some ways, counterbalance my potential position of power and authority towards a more equal relationship where I could be recognised as both learner and teacher. Certainly learning Icelandic from children aged between 6 and 16, as I attempted to teach them music, was a very democratizing process with significant implications for teaching strategies and teacher-pupil relationships. The fact that we have chosen to remain here for nearly twenty years, when many other options have been open to us, suggests that the attachments we have developed in this community are particularly strong ones.

There can clearly be no denying agency between the community and me at all sorts of levels over a period of time far longer than even the most extended research field trip. More specifically, and perhaps even more significantly, there can be no denying the impact that I have had on the vocal lives that are studied here either; it cannot even be said that this impact is limited to my having directed their male-voice choir for nearly two decades, which, just in itself, seems enough to entangle me in the processes and behaviours being examined. The school where I teach has been nationally recognised for its emphasis on the arts, and on music in particular. The development of composing in the classroom here, which I introduced, was totally innovative in its time in Icelandic music education. More recently, a project I instigated at the school – which is based on Zimbabwean marimba and mbira performance, music from southern and southeast Africa, and on oral transmission and peer teaching, was the first performance based world music project in Icelandic schools. All of this must have influenced in some way the attitudes of the community, and of the men in this study, both towards music and towards me. It seems reasonable to assume that my actions here, be they musical, social, or personal, have influenced some of the central themes of this study.

I did not find this choir however, and nor did I instigate the kinds of singing behaviour that are reported here. The stories told here often go back decades before my first visit to Iceland. It is hopefully clear that the importance

attached to singing in this community was very significant long, long before the arrival of this professionally trained singing teacher/singer/director. Even my own presence here, it can quite reasonably be argued, was caused by the previous fact of these vocal traditions. We have seen that the particular singing forms and practices in which men in the study engage are the dynamic products of agency at all sorts of levels over a very long time-scale. I have sort consistently to respect these values and traditions in my everyday music practice here, and I do not think that I could be accused of having radically changed this vocal behaviour, even though I have unashamedly been a prominent agent in its continued development in recent years. I have in all probability, just like Bruner's tourist ethnographers cited earlier, reinforced, and even privileged singing in this particular community and in this male voice choir. Men have sometimes talked to me about how they have reassessed the value of this activity because "somebody like you" (i.e. a trained musician from overseas) has said, and shows in action, how much "you" value it. The choir has certainly flourished, and its achievements have been widely recognised, during the time that I have directed it. It seems reasonable to suggest that the men feel more positive about this part of their vocal lives, indeed all of their vocal lives, than they might otherwise have done had the choir struggled, or even perhaps folded, as other male voice choirs have here from time to time. There are, nevertheless, more than two dozen very active male voice choirs all over Iceland, and I have no evidence to suggest that vocal behaviour here is fundamentally different to that that is practiced in other communities like this one, much less so, that it is fundamentally different because of my presence here.

Undoubtedly, the choir has sung some songs because I have been its director that they would not have sung had I not, but core repertoire has not changed dramatically. When I begun directing the choir I soon became aware that the impact of the cultural cleansing of Iceland's older musical traditions, of which I spoke in chapter two, was still manifest in many people's attitudes. In extreme cases, one or two individuals were positively antagonistic towards Icelandic folksongs, especially *tvísöngur*. I am guilty, like many other choral directors around Iceland, of encouraging people around me to re-examine those forms. My modest achievements in this direction still only really stretch to the inclusion of pieces in this genre on foreign tours or for foreign visitors. Even here though, things are far more complicated than they appear at a cursory glance: the example

I used about the piece of music composed by a son of one of the male-voice choir members illustrates the complicated interactive agency at work. The son, Örlygur, was a pupil of mine both in classroom music and on the clarinet; my partner, Juliet, taught him piano. I encouraged him to compose and improvise from an early age. After seven or eight years of tuition with us, he continued studies in Reykjavík, and eventually went on to study composition at the conservatoire in St. Petersburg in Russia. It was there that he wrote the pieces for his father that were to prove so challenging for some of the men in the choir, and which explicitly recalled these older, but still controversial, Icelandic genres (CD 20). My specific point here is to illustrate how difficult it is to deconstruct my agency in the what, where, when, why, and how people have sung here for the past twenty years. The texture of this agency is intricately interwoven, and unravelling it, I suggest, is impossible. Moreover, if it is impossible to deconstruct my role as musician, teacher, singer and director from this community's musical and social life, what then of my role as researcher?

After Chiener's initial spell in the field she returned later to the same setting as a fully-fledged researcher to find that her hosts and participants viewed and handled her in very different ways (2002: 470-1). I never actually left "the field" here in Iceland except for short periods of time and extended vacations. Neither am I sure, when it was, if it was at all, that I obtained the researcher tag in the eyes of my participants. Unlike Chiener, I have not detected any particular change in the way I feel men in the study view me. To that extent, the interviews I conducted with them felt like extensions of all the other conversations I had had with them. During and since these interviews, I have been conscious of the same kind of banter that I described earlier. Moreover, sometimes it has been directed, as it always was, at me. Jokes over the past months about Dr. Bob, like the banter aimed at soloists or individuals in the choir who appear to be getting big ideas about their status, have been aimed, I suggest, at keeping me where I was before. It is, nevertheless, impossible to deny that men's vocal self-esteem and the importance they attached to singing may have increased in the knowledge that I was undertaking this study – being the subject, individually or collectively, of positive attention tends to have that affect. Just as some men have claimed to value the male voice choir more because of the way they perceive that I value it, so the same may be true for other parts of their vocal lives privileged by the

undertaking of interviews about them, and by the knowledge that this dialogue was to be given special status as a research study. In defence, I had not been very specific about the scope of themes that formed the interview schedule before hand most of the interviewees still seemed surprised that I should be so interested in their everyday singing.

I can only draw attention to thoughts about my agency in men's continuing singing behaviour, and to its possible impact in the construction and collection of data for this study, and on the analytical and interpretative processes to which it has been subject. I cannot explain exactly how this agency has affected men's singing or the things men said to me in interview: I can only recognise that it inevitably has. Would these men be singing at all today but for my presence? If I dared to suggest that this might be true I would be laughed out of the community hall, chastised with the popular and humbling phrase, "There is always somebody to take your place". It is one of the paradoxes of the interdependency in this community, which I mentioned above, that the phrase "nobody is irreplaceable", is so freely used here. Nevertheless, things would, of course, be different had I never come to Iceland, or if I had come for the duration of a traditional field trip as a formal researcher.

I find it hard to imagine that any of these men would have been fearful of expressing a wide range of views and opinions because, for example, I direct their choir. I am aware of their respect for me, but not as an authoritarian figure is respected, or is it feared? They are not unused to expressing opinions about repertoire we perform for example: straight talking is the norm here, I suggest. Were men careful to say nothing in their interview that might have contradicted earlier conversations? Knowing me as they did, did men attempt to gratify me and produce narratives that they perceived as being consistent with my aims? Did they try to help me because of their respect for me, and, in so doing, did they construct "Robert-sensitive" narratives? Alternatively, did our relationships facilitate a particularly open and honest exploration of what are sometimes very personal issues? All of this is probably true. At any time, and at many times, over the past twenty years I have undoubtedly been influencing the phenomenon researched here and the kinds of things men might say to me in my researching it. No claims have been made here for objectivity: I prefer however to see my long field-trip in Iceland, my special location as an outsider-insider researcher, friend, and teacher,

as facilitating a very particularly situated interpretation of men's perceptions of their vocal behaviour, a situatedness not usually available to the ethnographer or researcher on normal field trips.

In collecting data to inform my interpretation of men singing in this community I have tried to be as thorough as possible in examining a wide range of historical, ethnographical, musicological and sociological data. In all these areas, I have approached sources critically, reinforcing interpretative and psychological frameworks and my complicity in them. Similarly, I have attempted to guard against over-interpretation and recall here Berger's warning about the danger of attributing "a weight or profundity to a form of expression that it does not possess in the experience of its practitioners" (Berger and Del Negro, 2004: 22). Once again, I suggest that my position as outsider/insider has provided an insightfulness which has been particularly useful in exercising caution about the assumption of consequential links between men's vocal practice and social life, culture, history or biology, and in grounding interpretations and claims that I have made for men's vocal behaviour in their narratives and diaries. In doing so, I have gone to considerable lengths not to over-state homogeneity, but to highlight both group similarities and individual difference.

From the opening pages of this dissertation, I have emphasized my own maleness and vocality, and in the previous chapter, I provided more details of my own vocal life. In doing so, I have revealed something of my own personal motivation for undertaking this study. In recognising this, I would not however, agree to a simplistic interpretation of precedence, and I argue that this study has been hugely significant in my reflecting anew upon my own vocality and masculinity, and on their roles in my changing Self and on-going vocal life. I have attempted to be very explicit about how my personal vocal life history, the psychological perceptions I have on things, and my own institutional and social experiences have combined in the reflective interpretations, and in building of theory that I have undertaken here.

All this re-enforces the absurdity of negating my own lived-experience and conceptions, either in the interpretation of other men's experience and the meaning that I assign to them, or as agents in these men's experiences themselves and in the meaning that they make of them. That ignoring the researcher's implicitness in a whole range of research frameworks was ever even thought possible

reflects an obsession with the need to maintain a particular kind of objectivity, which I discussed in chapter two. In reality, it is neither desirable or even possible; I am an essential quality of this research, and in keeping myself visible as a subject in this study, I also hope to have illustrated both similarities and differences in the ways in which Self comes to be located in singing, and singing centrally located in the core Self, beyond the Icelandic experience. This is important because it points to ways in which the present study's findings have potential for further exploration far beyond its own idiographic, idiosyncratic situatedness and towards more universal norms.

14.4 Significant Contextual Themes

Chapter two was devoted to contextualizing this study in terms of its particular, musical, historical, sociological, and political setting. Even at that early stage, I urged caution, as Pálsson and Durrenburger (1996) have done before me in their anthropologies of Iceland, in over-homogenizing this place and its people. Nevertheless, having listened to men's narratives, and to my analysis of them, it would seem appropriate to summarize those themes that appear to have most significance for men's vocal behaviour, and for their perceptions, and my interpretations of it.

Firstly, I suggest that a great deal of men's everyday vocal behaviour can only be understood in terms of the construction of Icelandic nationalist identity. New 3- and 4-part choral styles, introduced in the late nineteenth century musical revolution, configured not just a new national identity, but very different kinds of social life. In doing so, older "indigenous" vocal styles of *tvisöngur* and *kvæðaskapur* were soon negatively associated with "dark ages" of poverty, subjugation, oppression, and hardship, from which a new, independent Iceland was soon to emerge, bringing remarkable contrasts in economic fortunes. Singing was clearly in collusion with many of the central elements of this new identity – nature, independence and community – in what was essentially its rural building site and particularly among its most active practitioners – the farming classes. It is surely no coincidence that the preface to Helgason's four-part songs contains an enthusiastic appeal to his fellow countrymen to take up singing – "this beautiful recreation" – in the home. Helgason continues that singing has been neglected for too long and that progress is essential. In doing so, "sowing" in this "unploughed

field” – note the rural analogy – would ensure Iceland a bright future (Helgason, 1882). My experience in London, with which I begun this study, and many of the experiences I have recalled here, are, I suggest, directly related to this exhortation.

Similarly, the construction of this identity, and the practice of collective singing, have had, and continues to have, significant gender implications – both in terms of hegemonic masculinity and men’s dominance of public vocal spaces, and in the configuration of the feminine as mother and provider along the lines of the national image of the Mountain Women. Singing was an integral part of this Iceland, and the issues of autonomy, rural space, family and kinship, have all been given voice, both by men’s narratives, and by the songs they sing, not least in the male voice choir tradition.

Whilst I suggest that these themes are all significant to the situatedness of men’s singing in Iceland, and to its configuration of social life and personal life, men in the study are not all equally conscious of them. Whilst themes of family and kinship are seen as being very important, other historical issues are explicitly voiced by just several men, most notably by Guðmundur and Baldur. They alone provide clear historical, social-constructivist perspectives to their perception of men’s vocal behaviour.

Similarly, most of the men appear unwilling to admit to the possibility of their vocal behaviour having biological function as sexual display, despite very considerable allusions to it in these terms by both men and women. Instead, they prefer to see their dominant and privileged vocal position as relating to men’s voices naturally wider range of expression and, therefore, to a matter of aesthetic objectivity. Baldur and Guðmundur apart, men appear unaware of the social structures that may have limited women’s collective vocal opportunities. Yet many of the men appear to see having a woman accompanist as being particularly positive, both for the way men conduct themselves, and for the image that the choir displays.

The social, economic, and technological changes that many of the men in this study have witnessed are far more dramatic than those experienced by most contemporary Western men. The older men have seen society transformed from an agrarian, pre-mechanised state to an affluent modern society where information technologies are more common than in most Western countries. Urbanisation and mechanisation are seen as having impacted vocal behaviour; the lack of space in

even modestly built-up areas; car sound systems, the use of recorded musics as “virtual lullabies” for young children, farm-machinery and other plant are all seen as changing, and in most cases, curtailing singing. Trends in employment and migration also appear have also had considerable impact on patterns of domestic life, “family scripts”, the practice of kinship, and the vocal behaviour that actuates domestic spaces.

Another contextual point needs to be highlighted again here and this relates to the relative absence of instrumental traditions in Iceland prior to the middle of the 19th century, and to the continued dominance of vocal forms thereafter, where instruments, as we have seen, were still subservient to vocal expression. Tomlinson traces the course of late eighteenth century and nineteenth century attempts to purify music from mimetics (see Kant, cited in Tomlinson 2003: 35), by creating a division between an “exclusionary category” of western instrumental music and *song*. This of course, went largely unnoticed in Iceland, and even the considerable efforts to follow this trend, after the import of Western instrumental and orchestral traditions in the twentieth century, failed to undermine singing’s central place here, where it remained free to do mimetic work in sensible everyday worlds, at least until the introduction of institutionalised music education begun to complicate matters.

Finally, whilst this study was never primarily supposed to be concerned with musical works in detail, there are some very important points to be drawn out that relate to the musical works themselves. I noted earlier how older “indigenous” vocal practice became anathema to a whole generation of Icelanders because of its pejorative association with the past. Now traditionally, the construction of identity through music is concerned with the “means by which people recognise identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them” (Stokes, 1994: 5). As a rule, this is seen as meaning that a particular social group will employ a kind of music that is distinguishable from others, and that facilitates differentiation between “In” and “Out” groups (see Tajfel, 1978). In the case of the Iceland’s nineteenth century music revolution and subsequent construction of nationalist identity, things are no so straightforward. Here, positive distinction is more complex and contradictory, for whilst there was a strong reconstruction of selected elements of Icelandic’s former Viking glory, there was also a desire to modernise and “catch up” with the rest of “civilised and educated” nineteenth

century Europe. Nowhere is the latter half of this paradox more obvious than in Iceland's mass importing of Romantic European music. This might lead us to hypothesize as Shepherd has done (1991), that any particular musical style can carry cultural and social implications simply because the group or society in question externally imposes a set of meanings or significance on the music in a manner completely arbitrary to the music's basic qualities. But whilst this appears to be the case superficially, it is my contention, based on men's narratives, that there are elements of music's basic qualities at play here that were particularly relevant to the particular social circumstances of its reproduction in Iceland. What I have in mind, is the importance of harmony as a means of recognising the uniqueness of "individual" voices within a wider, cohesive, and relatively homogeneous framework – whether in the home or in wider social settings. This was the essence of the new Icelandic identity, and sensible vocal practice like this ensured that vocal works have continued to have agency in the personal and social lives of men here more than a hundred years later. In doing so, they have resisted tendencies, prominent in mainland Europe, to objectify both musical works (and composers) and vocal behaviour itself.

Sloboda et al make the point, as other have before them, that:

No proper account of music's function can be given in the absence of an understanding of the social context in which music engagement takes place. (2001: 12)

It has been my intention to attempt to provide that understanding by considering context in a critical framework, as opposed to simply providing facts about it, and by linking it clearly to vocal behaviour itself through my interpretation of men's narratives. Singing's function here is, I suggest, shown to be concerned with music's agency in consciousness, just as it was in related studies by Sloboda et al and DeNora's study. In the present study though, this consciousness is not just a matter of moderating mood, but of regulating the whole and component parts of Self. Singing affords men a particular perspective of themselves, and of how that Self relates to the particular historical settings of the world around them.

14.5 Singing Self: A Summary

14.5.1 Singing and the Social Self

Men's narrative stories of their vocal lives, supported by evidence from vocal diaries, illustrate myriad ways in which Self is created, maintained, changed, expanded, and located in singing. Men's everyday vocal behaviour, combined with their singing in the more formal setting of a male voice choir, provide a wide variety of singing experiences that cross and configure the whole range of social and personal life, of interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. Their singing can be seen as the three key components of Self – the physical, social, and spiritual. Emergent themes, initially from Baldur's case study, and then from other extensive vocal life history interviews and from the theoretical sampling of vocal diaries, corresponded clearly to this tripartite model of Self originally proposed by James, and developed more recently by Weber. Men's vocal behaviour constructs the kinds of physical, social, and spiritual Selves that are central to this classical theory of Self. Furthermore, men's narratives and diaries indicate that singing is such a significant construct of Self, that it can be seen as core to it, essential for maintaining unity and integrity, not least through the huge repertoire of vocal memories that hold Self together. At the same time, singing has agency in changing Self, ranging from the everyday modulation of mood, or the entrainment of bodies to tasks, to large-scale life-transformations and conversions.

Singing is implicated here as a fundamental way of socializing. The communication networks that singing dynamically maintains range from private family scripts to large social groups. At the micro level of interactionism, men use singing for interaction with their young offspring, especially in the form of lullabies. Many of the men were encultured to these family-scripts from early ages and follow them themselves, as far as changing social structures, especially in employment, seem to permit. Songs are used in the home to help with domestic tasks, to change mood, or for no other reason than to celebrate being a family, in the same way that a family might sit down to a meal together. This vocal way of constructing and celebrating family extends to wider kin groups, where singing embodies harmonious relationships. In several cases in the study, families see singing as being a part of their public identity, and sometimes clans are defined by their vocal behaviour and recognised by it over the whole region, almost to a

national level. Wider vocal networks exist, and these are audible at community gatherings, parties, balls, and Midwinter feasts. In formal settings, men enjoy special vocal relationships with each other through the Male Voice Choir Hreimur, where important and highly valued connections are made with other men within the choir, with men in other male voice choirs and not least with audiences.

Singing appears to function as a technology of empathy and sympathy that allows different individuals, across a wide spectrum of social life, to configure a network of social-connectedness. Reciprocity is a central element of the making and maintaining of these relationships, and singing is clearly used as a reciprocal technology of human relationships, as a way of finding synchrony with other individuals or groups. The reciprocity enjoyed by men when singing with young infants is clearly not the same as that enjoyed when singing with other men at a concert, or that they perceive when singing with other men in intimate arrangements at informal settings. Yet another reciprocal format is present between men and non-participatory audience. Men articulate all these kinds of agencies, but some of their most expressive symbolism is reserved for efforts to describe the reciprocity experienced in singing in harmony with other men. The unanimous and vehement preference for singing in harmony embodies, I suggest, an ideal configuration of social life. Finding an appropriate Self-to-Other ratio acoustically, vocally and aurally, is quite clearly seen as an embodied expression of finding a proper Self-to-Other ratio in social and psychological life. This, I suggest, from the evidence provide by men's perceptions in this study, is one of the most important functions of singing in harmony – reminding ourSelves what the template for a harmonious, connected social life might sound like. Such a theory provides a far more musical explanation for the perceived “social” benefits of engaging in choral singing, noted in other research, but which, in their undertheorized form might just as easily have been derived from a host of other social activities. Singing's links with evolutionary development and with infant-adult interaction, both appear to be exploited in these rituals, which are both metaphors for, and agents in, the construction of community.

This idea of singing as social life and community becomes particularly pertinent given the dramatic changes in social life in Iceland over the past 150 years, and given the importance of collective community identity in those

changes. Triangulation between biological theories which recognise roles linked to our evolutionary past that singing may still act out, social constructivist theories that recognise the role of social structures and historical situatedness in vocal behaviour, and a psychology of individual lived experience which gives due credence to what it is about a vocal experience that people perceive as being personally significant, may, I suggest, facilitate a richer understanding of music's function than studies which insist on maintaining clear demarcations between paradigms. Central to understanding music's function in personal and social life are frameworks that explicitly recognise the importance of phenomenological research methods, and a music psychology of individuality. This is what links both this study with DeNora's seminal work, and even Sloboda et al's ESM survey, when both, superficially at least, appear to be framed by very different theoretical frameworks. In fact, all these studies wrestle with similar questions, and they all depend upon reflective symbolic interaction to reveal insights into the work music does as an agent in personal and social life.

14.5.2 Singing and the Physical Self

Men in the study articulate ways in which the physical Self is located in singing. In actual fact, men have little to say about bodies themselves or about the physiological processes involved. Given the importance attached to the body as a significant construction site of identity in recent research and discourse, this might appear to make a fit with men's singing here problematical. But it should not be forgotten that the voice is a specific element of embodiment just as much as other bodily phenomenon – the muscles of a body-builder, body-piercings, clothing or physical gesture. Perhaps though, it might be more appropriate to talk here of *emvocalment* or *emvoiced*. In any case, James's physical Self is not in any sense limited just to the body, but to the physical and material. The physical location of men's bodies and relationships to those physical spaces are very important to the way they behave vocally. More specifically, actions and arrangements of vocal bodies, in both formal and informal settings, can be seen as embodying particular social orders and relationships. Cohesion, unity, intimacy, and affection are all expressed by vocal bodies, apparently, because the meaning that the conscious mind makes of these actions is very different in the context of vocal behaviour. There appears to be no sexual connotation in singing with others, though there

may be for singing *to* others, and body contact is most certainly not associated with homosexual activity.

Singing is also able to entrain the body to physical tasks, or to distance some part of Self from a physical task in hand, by relocating Self in a remembered place. Similarly, all sorts of physical spaces are actuated by vocal behaviour. A whole song repertoire for example, vocalizes local natural features - mountains, lakes, and valleys – spaces, like community halls, are materialized by songs and singers and the same applies to work and domestic spaces. Men especially seem to enjoy practicing vocal autonomy by locating and often expanding their vocal selves in resonant environments or in battles against the natural elements. They seem to want to make an acoustic mark or signature on physical settings, something like the present tense, vocal equivalent of the graffiti “I woz ‘ere”. The absence of competition for physical space in rural areas, compared with the perception that people sing less in more densely populated residential areas that hardly qualify as urban, raises interesting questions about urbanised voices, oral and aural spaces, the construction of personal identity and musical behaviour, which have been superficially touched on here.

Once again though, reciprocity seems central to understanding the relationship between physical spaces and vocal behaviour. Now whilst it may seem strange to talk about reciprocity with inanimate objects or spaces like the sea, a mountain, lake, milk tank or barn, the important point here I suggest, is that these spaces only become places because they are perceived as such. The reciprocity, of which I am speaking, is reciprocity between the perception of things – spaces and places – and the way men behave vocally in them and with them. This is, I suggest, how men come to locate and identify themselves in these physical spaces and value the experience of constructing a relationship with them through vocal behaviour and the changes in consciousness that it affords in providing “fit” in various physical settings, an oral and aural awareness of Self in particular environments.

Finally, in thinking about the body, men explain how important singing is in terms of physical and mental well-being. Singing sometimes provokes visceral responses, it is frequently able to change mood, help the body unwind and relax and it is also seen as a comparator of bodily state – a kind of voco-static control system where bad voice equals bad body. When physical ailments threaten the

voice, several of the men suffer simultaneously from a serious disruption to their personal identity that certainly might be called identity loss, and that indicates the key role that singing plays in Self.

14.5.3 Singing and the Spirit

Men's spiritual Self is also located in singing and not just because of the very considerable importance of the Lutheran Church in most of their occasional, if not everyday lives, but equally, because of its significance in the reduction of entropy in consciousness, recognised as the goal of spiritual and religious endeavours. Singing plays very dynamic roles in the rites and rituals of men's religious practice, especially as an agent for catharsis and for the expression of community at funerals. Indeed it seems that singing's role in the religious church experience is more significant than almost any other constitutive element of religious practice here.

Following Weber's theorization of spiritual Self as a "purposefulness", men quite clearly pursue singing purposefully, sometimes - remembering Baldur's "Life without singing would be no life at all" - it verges on what Weber would call the monomaniacal. Men employ what might quite appropriately be called spiritual-vocal skills in something like the shaman tradition. They use these skills to reduce entropy, to heal dis-ease, release tension, maintain balance, and restore wholeness and unity to Self, sometimes in the face of threats to it in the form of major life crisis. Singing also keeps alive remnants of folk spiritual-beliefs that have traditionally been a strong feature of Icelandic spiritual identity. Furthermore, descriptions of peak aesthetic experiences in singing clearly suggest "spiritual" qualities too.

14.5.4 Singing and Gender Identity

Departing, strictly speaking, from this particular model of Self, men's reflections upon their vocality and my interpretation of them, construct specifically situated masculine identities whose complex and contradictory nature make an interesting addition to contemporary ethnographic studies of masculinities and music gender studies.

Many of the vocal networks exposed by men's narratives are clearly configured by gender issues. This is illustrated in a wide range of examples; the

objectification of women's absence from public vocal arenas and their role as musical providers; vocal and sex-roles in the home; the significance of male voice choirs in constructing Icelandic nationalist identity; the role of singing in aesthetic sexual display; men's vocal display and its links to emotional and economic autonomy; the employment of both competitive and collaborative vocal strategies; men's use of singing as self-therapy; the importance of homo-physical intimacy, touch and body contact; and their expressive descriptions of peak-aesthetic moments in sustained, soft harmonies. All these themes appear to combine to construct complex, contradictory, and temporal masculinities through a variety of vocal behaviours and the meaning that is made of them. In other words, singing is a primary agent in gender identity - the making of "a man". This is consistent both with general performative theories of gender identity and with recent discourse in men's studies about the plurality of masculine identity.

14.6 Singing as the Core of Self and its Agency in Unity and Change

As James's and Weber's holistic theories of Self would predict, sustaining divisions between component elements of Self has been untenable in this study. Despite the use of these separate categories for analysis and structured discourse, the kinds of vocal experiences that men's narratives and diaries ultimately construct are integrated, unified Selves, not disparate ones. Neither is men's singing here adequately defined simply as an example of the way in which people seek unity and meaning in their lives through the pursuit of particular hobbies, recreational activities, or life-style choices. This is not to say that singing is necessarily unique; other kinds of activities and behaviours do similar kinds of work in the construction of Self, and we shall examine research relating to some of them in a moment. Nevertheless, the way singing permeates so many areas of everyday life implicates it as a fundamental and extremely comprehensive Self-management strategy. Thus, singing is not reserved for Thursday night choir practice, or for singing in church on Sundays; it is not confined to just one particular social group, but is used, with one or two exceptions, in a very wide range of social settings. It is used in formal and informal situations, and in all sorts of physical settings. It works both as a medium for private reflection about Self, for the public projection of Self and for the reception of other individuals.

The work singing does in the lives of these men points to singing's huge potential as a technology of Weber's projective and receptive empathies, seen by him as a primary structure of the expansive Self (2000: 157-9). This has been clearly shown both in the way singing is used to create reciprocal, empathetic, social networks with infants, family, friends and other men in the choir, and in the importance those men attach to singing in harmony. It would be easy to take the musical concept of harmony as being no more here than a metaphor for social and personal harmony, but I am extremely reluctant to do so in this context. The men present a case for singing in harmony as far more than a metaphor for personal relationships and social patterns, as if singing were a kind of virtual reality. They seem to suggest that singing in harmony with other people should be interpreted as the actual dynamic practice of social and personal life itself.

In thinking about what often appear to be the particularly well integrated Selves that singing seems to formulate in this setting, it ought to be admitted that the potential to compartmentalise Self is probably far greater in urban settings where individuals may manage to keep work, recreation and family, and their respective constructions of Self, from meeting each other, and where there is a greater tendency for individuals to specialize. This is less likely to be the case in the present study's setting, and so it could be argued that Self might, in be less fragmented in general in smaller, interdependent communities, than in many contemporary urban ones. Nevertheless, this does not distract from the fact that it is singing in particular that plays so large a part in the everyday construction, maintenance and changing of Self; that it is singing voices that are heard continuously at the interfaces between social, physical, and spiritual Self, blurring boundaries and thoroughly permeating Self. Nor does singing appear to hold Self together just because it conjoins these elements of the tripartite Self; a central technology of the unified Self, according to both James and Weber is memory, and it is clear from this study that memories of songs, and of singing, play a very significant part in maintaining unity over a life-time of experiences. The remembrance of songs sung is a major constituent part of the glue that both James and Weber see as holding Self together. Singing songs together at family get-togethers becomes rather like looking through the family photo-album. The anamnesis of singing – what I sung, who I sung it with, where I sung, how and why I sung it, and, above all, how I felt in singing it, and what the singing actually

did – gives men access to a myriad of past Selves and confirms that they are who they thought they were. The extent to which this remembrance is fore-grounded in daily conscious life varies, but from men's accounts it seems that this anamnesis of song is a regular habit and not one undertaken just for my sake in interview.

It seems quite proper to claim that men's vocal behaviour is a key, central, and unifying element in their core Self. This appears to be true, though clearly in different ways, and to various extents, for all the men in this study. Their lives configure different kinds of vocal matrixes as we saw in the absence of singing in Erlingur's childhood home. We are reminded then by the evidence, that these are individual lives, but that men's singing has come to form in all cases, and by various routes, something quintessential to Self. This is evidenced too in the ways that men articulate the disruptive impact that vocal disability is perceived as having on Self and identity, and in the myriad ways in which singing is used as a technology for regulating personal self, as a Self-therapy, and as a media for presenting social Self and for connecting with others.

Compared to Weber's model, we find ourselves dealing here with a specific technology of Self, rather than the generalities and eclectic examples of practices that Weber uses to develop his theories. In so far as Weber's work, like James's before him, is essentially philosophical, this study provides empirical support for his model; singing is evidenced by men in this study as a technology of the life-long quest of creating, regulating and reshaping self and its various component elements. I have already mentioned Weber's reliance on the body in his exposition of Self; that so many of his examples are concerned with the appearance of bodies is probably a fair reflection of contemporary Western society's obsession with body image. In a sense, the present study substitutes voice for "body", except that the voice is the body. I see Weber's omission of more detailed reflection upon the arts' potential in the processes of creating and maintaining Self as a significant one. Although Weber leaves the option of artistic expression open, it seems surprising that this fundamentally human activity and technology of Self should be so under-represented. This does not undermine Weber's argument, though perhaps it says something about genuinely personal artistic expression as a means of creating Self in contemporary Western society. Such personal expression, I suggest, is not the same as the "identifying" with somebody else's artistic expression as a consumer of it, though in many ways it

may be similar. I postulated in the introduction to this study that recordings of other people's voices might be able to do some of the work that our own voices traditionally did, and I expanded on this point when talking about masculine identity. The work that singing is reported as doing here appears to cover a greater sphere of personal, social, physical, and psychological life, than other people's voices, by themselves, are able to. The study shows how this works out in detail for these men both as individuals and as a group, but it is that singing has this kind of potential function in the everyday lives of individuals, both *as*, and *in* Self, that is perhaps the most important finding from the present study.

In thinking of the life-long quest of creating, regulating and reshaping self, we are reminded that the notion of Self as being temporal is central to both James's and Weber's theories. Neither consciousness nor bodily states have any real permanence, and identity; like vocal acts, is dynamic and evolving. As Weber's account of how Self develops has attempted to illustrate, the changes that are made to Self may be forced upon individuals, through physical injury or atrophy, or even through identity theft. But they are also, and more normally, implemented by choice – choices made, among other things, about the way we present ourselves to others, and the way we express ourselves. Singing is strictly speaking a matter of choice and making the decision to sing is shown by men in the study to have agency in changing Self, sometimes with the specific and deliberate aim of maintaining unity and balance, of expanding or contracting Self, in just the kind of ways that Weber discusses. The men in the study clearly make deliberate decisions, like choosing to join the male voice choir, as part of that developing Self, but in every day life, they frequently turn to singing so habitually that it seems not to have been a conscious choice at all. In such cases, we have to accept that processes of enculturation have been very persuasive indeed, and that the environment here often presents no restrictions to unconsciously and freely flowing voices, neither has it, until fairly recently, presented significant sub-cultural or sub-singing alternatives. The constant reiteration of singing makes it difficult to separate conscious vocal acts from unconscious ones. This is the kind of dilemma that Butler has come to accept in relation to the performative nature of gender identity (1993). The dilemma concerns the extent to which individuals are in fact free acting agents (specifically, in Butler's case, in the performance of gender identity) and the limitations that the reiteration of certain hegemonic

performative norms place on individual ability to make conscious choices about the things they do and how they perform. Applying this to the present study it ought to be asked if men in the study have merely imitated dominant gendered singing norms, because their identity depends upon them to such an extent that their voices (bodies) are compelled to sing in a constant quest to embody the fantasy of a gender/Icelandic core? It may be that models like James's and Weber's over-estimate free-will, or at least over-simplify it, in terms of a great deal of the everyday maintenance of Self in which individuals engage without being reflexive about it. This seems to be true of a great deal of the singing in which the men engage. The extent to which these men can be seen as autonomous agents shaping their own Self through singing depends too on the view that is taken of the situatedness of their vocal lives. I have attempted to reject an ahistorical view of them and to sieve carefully the potential impact of the hegemonic singing norms through the stories men have constructed about their vocal lives. What that revealed is that individuals' awareness of these norms and structures varied very considerably indeed. What we cannot be sure of, is the exact impact that these things have on the way individuals actually sing.

The issue of choice does not undermine singing's essential agency, though it does raise the question about how consciously that agency is directed to regulate Self in many everyday situations. This was true too of listening scenarios in studies cited above by Sloboda et al, and in some of the ethnographies in DeNora's work. In articulating how singing can regulate and modulate Self in everyday life, this study resonates strongly with both these investigations into musical function. Whilst the kind of changes reported there, and by men in this study, may be short-lived changes of mood, examining men's life stories and vocal behaviour from longitudinal perspectives, shows that outcomes from singing appear sometimes to have very long term implications indeed for the changing Self. Singing even appears to affect major life-transformations; examples include Gunnar's starting to sing in the choir, Baldur witnessing his mother's domestic vocal behaviour, my own vocal "conversion" in an Icelandic home in London and the many other less dramatic shifting Self experiences that all the individuals in the study report. There is a tremendous shortage of research that looks longitudinally at musical experiences in an attempt to trace their impact on the life-long task of building and maintaining Self.

14.7 Constructing a Gendered Self: Singing Songs and Playing Sports

It is hardly surprising that James's model of Self contains little exposition of what came to be seen, only very much later, as one of the most significant elements of identity – gender. Whilst Weber briefly considers the use of cosmetics in gender identity, it is not a central concern of his either. So in adopting interpretative frameworks from both general theories of Self on the one hand, and from those of gender studies on the other, I hope to have illustrated something of how gender identity has agency in the constructs of this classical model of Self because of the ways in which singing, as gendered behaviour, permeates all levels of social and personal life. What we have here then, are particular examples of the kinds of masculinities that singing is able to construct. The complex and often contradictory masculinities, which men in the study construct through their various singing behaviours, resonate strongly with the idea of plurality found in recent men's studies, notably in work by Connell. At the same time, they reject the view of men's singing as embodying the simplistic masculinity of power, strength, and dominance that the casual observer of male-voice choirs, and the mythopoetic expectations of Bly, and others like him, would have predicted. In looking at the kinds of masculine identities constructed by men through singing, it might be helpful, in closing, to briefly compare this study's findings to several pieces of work on men, Self, and sporting behaviour. The comparison seems particularly appropriate because, music apart, few other everyday practices have been seen as holding so much sway in the construction and performance of masculinity as sporting activities.

It is to be expected therefore, that there might be significant literature concerned with sport and masculine identity. Most of the research reported in the volume *Talking Bodies* (Sparkes and Silvennoinen, 1999) share the same kind of narrative, constructivist framework as the present study. What separates the research there from mine is, essentially, only that a different behaviour is examined for its agency in men's construction of Self. One of these studies was cited earlier in relation to the impact that men perceived vocal disability having on the maintenance of Self, and where the loss of singing voice precipitated serious identity crisis. What is particularly significant about that study by Sparkes and Smith (1999) and, it seems, many others concerned with men, sports and identity, is how identity is dramatically foregrounded in these men's conscious lives when

it is fundamentally undermined. Some might argue that men's lack of personal reflection in everyday life is a typical feature of masculine identity. Nevertheless, it may equally be the case that the tendency to examine identity in the face of physical or mental disruption originates from its prominence in health issues research, and its historical importance in qualitative and narrative paradigms. This may point to a potentially fruitful way forward for future research exploring vocal identity: changing identities could be examined in the face of vocal impairment, or following the loss of singing voice, among individuals for whom singing has been a central construct of Self, as it has for men in this study.

Several other studies in this same volume, focus on men's identity and sport, and point to its agency in the construction of Self along similar lines as the present study. Brown (1999) explores the social meaning of men's bodybuilding, and reveals the attraction of embodied displays of "male power" and "physical capital" (1999: 103). This is not dissimilar to many of the things that men have said about singing: in the same kind of sense that "my body speaks for itself" (ibid.: 102) can really be read as my body speaks for my Self, the same was true too of "my voice speaks for my Self". In the present study we have heard how singing in the male voice choir was attractive to lots of men as what I have called *emvoiced* displays of male power and social capital. But male power as *emvoiced* by men's singing in the male-voice choir, not to mention in other everyday arenas, is clearly not the same as the embodiment of male power in bodybuilding. Moreover, the kind of Self that is constructed in bodybuilding activity is a precarious and fragile venture where, whatever the potential "cultural capital" – or in this case "physical capital" – risks to health and therefore, paradoxically, to identity itself, are, in fact, very high. This is the masculinity of physical strength and power, of competition and dominance, and whilst all these themes have been mentioned in this study too, they do not obtain this kind of hegemonic status.

The problem with comparing this research with the present one is that it is difficult to see how the bodybuilder's Self interacts with the rest of Self and affects other everyday behaviour. Whilst individuals in Brown's survey appear to pursue these projects with almost monomaniacal purpose, we get little insight, for example, into how this impacts relationships with other people outside of the bodybuilding cadre. A very different focus on sport and the social Self is, however, the theme of a narrative study about the impact of sport and the body on

a father/son relationship by Sudwell (1999). Sudwell traces his changing Self, and a changing relationship with his father, through sporting behaviour, physical changes in both their bodies, and through the problems that they encountered at various stages of their lives in embodying hegemonic masculinity. There are echoes here then, of how some father and son, and even mother and son relationships, were seen as being actualised through singing partnerships, even though they are not specifically focused on in the present study to anything like the same degree as they are by Sudwell.

Taken together, this research about men, sport, and identity indicates that sport may well do the same kinds of work as singing does in the present study. But fundamentally, they differ in two ways: firstly, if this volume is representative, there appears to have been a tendency to look at sporting behaviour in a less holistic context than I have attempted here; secondly, the kinds of masculine identity constructed by these narratives about sport appear to be more monochrome than those constructed by men in the present study about singing. Primarily this seems to be because of the apparent obsession with the physical body and its function in gender performance. Now in a sense, the second point here may be a direct consequence of the first: the masculinities that are constructed may appear relatively uncomplicated because they are masculinities that only apply to performances that occupy limited areas of experience. What is missing, and what might make a more useful comparison with the present study, is an investigation into the role of sport, or of a particular sport, in the construction and maintenance of Self in more holistic biographies. Are there individuals who use sporting activities in the kinds of diverse ways that most of the men here use singing? Are there specific sports or sporting activities that lend themselves more particularly to the kind of multiple functions in social and personal life, to constructing, regulating, changing and maintaining holistic Self, in ways similar to singing's agency in the present study? Perhaps: but it is difficult to see specific sporting behaviours that are flexible enough, for example, for men to be able to use them to create empathetic social networks both with very young infants and with a group of adult peers. Similarly, singing does not make exclusive demands on the body, or even on the mind, and it seems difficult to imagine many sporting activities that have the flexibility to be practiced simultaneously with other behaviours in the way that singing does. Hands do not

need to be free and no external props or special settings are required; this is what makes singing such a flexible and portable agent in so many areas of everyday life, and in various constructs of Self. The distinction here between what people might have to say about singing simply as an occasional, special, recreational activity, and what they have to say about singing in everyday situations, is an important one in assessing the significance of the present research. This is what sets it apart from other studies into the choral phenomenon and from research looking at other recreational behaviours as constructs of Self, none of which is to underestimate the impact of the perceived outcomes to Self that research into these activities has reported. Yet another significant feature of this research is, in fact, the way that men's narratives about singing blur those borders between the everyday and special singing event, and problematizes definitions of singers and performers. Furthermore, even the recent research into music in everyday life has no particular focus on vocal behaviour, and little of it goes to the same lengths that this study has either in terms of a life-history approach or in an effort to provide a contextual interpretation of them which pervades a range of music disciplines.

14.8 Future Research

No studies, as far as I am aware, have attempted to specifically examine singing as an everyday phenomenon in contemporary settings from psychological perspectives as I have here. It is obvious therefore that the potential for developing music and everyday life research along vocal lines is considerable. Whilst it appears to be assumed that everyday usage of music is essentially concerned with the consumer act of listening, no studies appear to have investigated the extent to which individuals have lost their own personal singing voice. Are the claims here about the problems of singing in urban settings verifiable or simply based on prejudice about a "rural idyll"?

If singing in particular is able to do the kinds of work that men here suggest it can, then questions might also be asked about how other categories of music manage to do similar work. I have in mind here Tomlinson's suggestion that "song is not so much a musical thing, as music is songish" (2003: 42). Following that, an anamnesis of the things songs and singing specifically can do, similar to the one that men have undertaken here, might help us to understand

music's function generally. In doing so, we might wish to examine in far more detail the relationship between inflected voices and communication, not just as psychological phenomena, but also as a neural-aural-oral one. Whilst Rosseau (2000), has made a recent and provocative call for research along these lines, especially as they relate to the voice, healing and music therapy, these apply equally to wider social settings. Another point that Rosseau makes, and which men in the study here have clearly illustrated, is to do with the functions of voice in the light of technological developments. In the case of the men in the study, other people's "bought" voices take over functions that previously belonged to any or all individuals – like singing lullabies, or singing in the car. Rosseau cites evidence that developments in virtual technologies are limiting the range of the human voice's expressiveness and even perhaps curtailing it altogether. The point here for future research is that vocal function, whatever its biological origins, is not constant, but that it is constructed and historical.

In these terms, the impact of new technologies on the everyday voice remains a seriously under-researched area and threatens to remain so while millions of people lose their own personal voice or worse still perhaps, become unresponsive to others. In attempting to understand musical and vocal function, it seems that narrative and experience sampling methods together, might provide reliable ways of surmounting some of the problems that each, individually, can be seen as having. Both are under used research methods.

The present study also argues for a more fundamentally and explicitly phenomenological approach to questions of music's function generally. Such frameworks may challenge the dominance of other research methods widely applied in social psychologies, sociologies, and ethnologies of music and may provide us with fresh and enlighteningly new perspectives on a range of musical phenomena. This is particularly essential if we are to understand how music works in individual lives in terms of regulating consciousness and Self. Future music research on a wide range of issues needs to take on the challenge of building theories from a music psychology of individuality, of working from the nomothetic to the universal.

The specific findings here about how these men construct, maintain and adapt Self vocally, need to be developed in similar kinds of studies elsewhere to illuminate what singers, or more specifically men singers, might have in common,

or not, in different cultural settings. Preliminary of analysis of interviews I took with men in Newfoundland and a university in the United States of America, suggest that the motivations that surround their involvement with Barber Shop singing and a University Glee Club respectively, are different in significant ways to the men in the present study. The importance of formal competition for barber shoppers also noted in Stebbins's study, and for the university vocal group, illustrates the point. In addition, my unpublished data appears to suggest that the location that singing enjoys in Self in both these groups is a very much more restricted and less integrated one than men in the present study report. Linked to this idea is the suggestion that studies looking at the motivation for amateur singing, choral singing, and other organised collective vocal behaviour need to develop frameworks, like the ones used here, to explore what and how it is that music does, that other social activities or hobbies might not.

Other areas of potential research that might be developed from this study are studies that problematize the often "a priori" acceptance of distinctions between professional (functional) and non-professional (dysfunctional?) musicians - or more specifically singers - and between everyday musical behaviour and "special" musical behaviour. Phenomenological psychology, I suggest, once again points the way forward. Similarly, and as I believe seminal research by Willis (1990) and DeNora (2000, 2003) has already illustrated without specifically acknowledging it, music studies in the phenomenological psychology paradigm generally, and using methods like interpretative phenomenological analysis in particular, will enrich understanding of music's function in personal and social life, in identity and the construction of Self. In doing so, it should also allow researchers to feel more comfortable in producing studies whose findings are firmly and properly situated, conclusions that are essentially interim, and theories that are unashamedly conditional.

14.9 "Sing Yourself to Where the Singing Comes From"

I was fortunate enough two years ago to hear the Irish Nobel Poet Seamus Heaney read a selection of his own poems in a small local theatre. Liam O'Flynn accompanied him on the Uilleann pipes. Sitting there with my wife and 16 year old son, I was aware of my son's sudden arousal as Liam begun a piece called *The Foxchase*. We used to own a cassette recording of this piece, bought on a trip to

Donegal about twelve years ago, played for a few months on car trips after returning home, before it was lost. My son remembered it immediately. For me detailed memories of happy, wet days in Ireland came flooding back. I have since ordered a CD recording of the piece and these memories can be more easily accessed. After the recital, we had the pleasure of meeting the artists and Seamus, unprompted, wrote the following, in my well-worn copy of his *Opened Ground* (1998):

Sing yourself to where the singing comes from.

It comes from a poem called the *At the Well-head*:

Your songs, when you sing them with your two eyes closed
As you always do, are like a local road
We've known every turn of in the past –
[...]
So sing on,
Dear shut-eyed one, dear far-voiced veteran,
Sing yourself to where the singing comes from (1998: 439).

Now it may well be the case that Seamus Heaney writes this very same dedication in every book he signs, but I have just one copy and have met him just once and this little happenstance, as I was working on this study about people singing, was immediately very meaningful to me. I like poetry and read it a lot. What I value most about it is the ability of a poet to get to the quintessence of things in few words. As I close this study I wish to allow Seamus Heaney and then Walt Whitman to provide succinct abstracts of the present research; I believe that they encapsulate the kernel, the eidos of much of my interpretation of men's vocal behaviour and their perception of it. The Heaney reference above reminds us how singing and the remembrance of singing, acts in maintaining unitary Selves through changing lives. It is a particular example of William James's memory as the glue that holds Self together. Men sing themselves to all sorts of places and central to the fact that these are specific places, are the relationships that have been and are continue to be acted out in them – the well known "local roads" whose "every turn" is known. Men sing themselves to people and places,

to memories and moods of them – this is a central function of their vocal behaviour.

Considerable discourse in music research has been concerned with explaining music's function, especially in ethnographic literature. Merriam formulated ten functions from what are essentially non-western communal contexts and collective outcomes. In contrast, DeNora and Sloboda et al, illustrate music's functionality in terms of the individual and contemporary Western settings. The present study reconciles these differences by looking at both the individual and collective – definitions that in any case, it might be argued, are essentially interpretative ones - in settings that can be seen as occupying a position somewhere between these two cultural poles of contemporary western and the exotic *other*. Evidence in the present study suggests that music and singing in particular has functionality in creating, maintaining, and changing Self. This explains how singing works in terms of regulating individual personal state, configuring social life and in constructing social structures we call community. All this is possible because of the impact that men see singing having on conscious life: singing is able to reconfigure consciousness. Its greatest impact, I suggest, is not directly on things themselves, but on the perception of things. In doing so, individual feelings and mood, senses of family, community, and masculinity, even the mood of a nation, can all be changed, because the singer hears them and perceives them in different ways through taking vocal action. The adumbration of relationships and social structures, that singing affords men in this study, is a harmonious, cohesive one, providing glimpses of a model of the way social and personal life might ideally be.

Weber quotes Walt Whitman's reflexive poems *Leaves of Grass* throughout his study of the *Created Self* (2000). In doing so, he provides further insights into the nature of Self. The claim that:

I celebrate myself and sing myself (Whitman, 1918),

...was surely intended by both Whitman and Weber as a metaphor for a wide range of expressive behaviours through which individuals create and perform Self. The men in this study however, articulate a far more literal interpretation, where complex and evolving identity becomes not just performative in the general

terms of social constructivism, but more specifically a singing performance, a vocal construction of Self, a song configuring personal and social life, singing *as* Self. The men in the study argue just as strongly for the importance of communal singing or a “we celebrate ourselves and sing ourselves”. In singing together and as individuals, these men purposefully ritualise the construction and performance of identity, presenting and regulating cohesive, unitary, yet multi-facet selves, and connecting them intrinsically and intimately through the enactment of physio-vocal relationships, to a wide range of other people and places. In doing so, they configure a very special version of Self and display a very special embodied identity – an em-voiced Self.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

The aim is for open, semi-structured interviews, encouraging participants to talk freely in their own words about:

- a) their singing histories and vocal experience
- b) their singing in the male voice choir
- c) their singing in present everyday lives
- d) their feelings about their voices and Self, including gender, and any other issues that they feel are relevant.

The following categories are not exclusive. Possible probes and prompts are also included below – they are not specific questions!

SECTION 1: YOUR HISTORY OF SINGING

I was hoping that you might be able to tell me your own personal history of singing. You could describe any singing experiences or events you wish, recent ones, ones from your childhood, you decide. I would like to know what those experiences have meant to you and what singing means to you today. You may start wherever you wish.

- What are your earliest memories of singing?
- What other singing do you remember from your childhood?
- In the home?
- In school?
- Elsewhere?
- With whom?
- What songs?
- Hearing others sing? Live? Other broadcast or recorded media?

- As a teenager, your voice breaking?
- What about singing and the opposite sex? Do you have any memories linked to that in any way?
- What role has singing played in your adult life?
- What about singing with your own off-spring?
- What about singing in more recent times?
- Can you tell me about any changes in your singing behaviour or in attitudes towards singing throughout your life?
- Can you describe how you felt about any of these experiences? Or how you feel about them now?
- What sort of moods and feelings surrounded/preceded/followed the experiences described above

SECTION 2: YOUR SINGING IN THE MALE VOICE CHOIR

I would like you now to turn your thoughts to singing in the male-voice choir and to describe, as best you can, what that is all about. Why do you do it?

- What do you get out of it?
- (In rehearsal? In performance? Socially? Musically?)
- Does singing with the choir mean anything else to you personally?
- Tell me how you came to be singing in the male voice choir?
- What has been most memorable for you and why?
- Do you think male voice choirs mean anything in particular in Iceland ?
- What do you feel about the sort of songs we sing in the choir? Describe how you feel when singing some of them.
- Could you tell me anything about the way the men behave together?
- (In rehearsal? In performance? Anywhere else?)
- How would you describe the relationship between the choir and me?
- Does having a female accompanist make any difference to anything in the choir?
- Can you describe for me any other choral or formal group singing experience you may have been involved in?
- Can you describe how you felt about any of these experiences? Or how you feel about them now?

- What sort of moods and feelings surrounded/preceded/followed the experiences described above?

SECTION 3: YOUR EVERYDAY SINGING

I am wondering too about your singing in ordinary everyday life situations, outside of the choir or other choirs you might sing in. Are you conscious of your singing very much? Perhaps you could talk about that and describe some examples for me if you can.

- When did you last sing (not in the choir), can you describe it - the circumstances, moods and feelings surrounding it? Why?
- At home?
- At work?
- Alone? With others?
- Have you sung today?
- When do you sing most?
- Describe a few examples for me if you can?

SECTION 4: YOU AND YOUR VOICE

Finally I would like to just ask you about a few further points such as:

- How would you describe your voice?
- Are you happy with the sound of your voice?
- What does it feel like to sing?
- How is singing important to you?
- Why do you think you sing?
- Does your being a man make any difference to your singing?
- What do you think singing means to men?
- Is singing with women any different?
- Do you see yourself carrying on singing throughout your life?

Is there anything you would like to add to this? Anything you feel that I ought to have asked you about?

Appendix B

Instructions for Diarists

Thank you for agreeing to keep this vocal diary! Every day for the next week please write down anything you remember about your singing during that day. Please make entries at least once a day (more often is better, say at lunch-time and in the evening, or when ever you can during the day) Record the details of what you remember singing, but don't forget to write about what you were feeling, thinking or doing at time. The ideas below might help, but they are only suggestions. Add whatever you like and as much detail as you can!

Thank you!

- Have I sung since my last entry?
- Aloud or just in my head?
- Where, when and what was I doing?
- Who was I with?
- Why did I sing?
- What did I sing?
- Why do I think I sung that particular song?
- Did I take any particular care with singing it? How did I project my voice?
- Did I sing it all the way through?
- In what sort of mood was I?
- Did singing change my mood in any way?

Appendix C

Samples from Interview Transcripts

Extract from interview with Baldur

R.F.: O.K. Baldur, here we go then. I was hoping that you might be able to tell me your life history as it relates to singing. Anything you like about singing in your life, whenever or wherever, what singing has meant and means to you.

B.B.: To tell the truth, as far back as I can remember, I remember singing, and my, naturally, I grew up with that. Mum was always singing.

R.F.: Always?

B.B.: Always, she sang at her work all the time and and when she was working, in the kitchen, washing up, when she was doing the washing on the washboard, she always sung. And then there was a great deal of singing at home generally, just just naturally people came, women to practice singing with my mother, and also the first organist, that I remember, Kári. He really loved mum's singing, accompanied her a lot and they would go home to him, we would go with her too, or he would come home to us. And and I can tell you that, that they founded a church choir, can't remember what year that was, but, but I remember that there were choir practices and we were often allowed to go along too. (unclear)

R.F.: How old are you then?

B.B.: Just, just, yeah they're some of my first memories, yeah 5, 6 years old.

R.F.: And you just sat and listened?

B.B.: Yeah and they sung, both mum and dad.

R.F.: Did your father sing as much as your mother?

B.B.: No, no. Not as much. But all the same he always sung in the church choir, and if they were practising for anything special. They both took part in productions of drama, plays, which was done a lot in those days. I remember another childhood memory, going to rehearsals and they did that both together, and by themselves, and usually it was something to do with singing.

R.F.: Did they sing much together?

B.B.: They didn't sing together. Not like that. I don't remember that. Dad sang a lot when he went out to milk, cleaning up all the containers and then he sang, (unclear) probably more in a lighter vein.

R.F.: Ahah.

B.B.: Mum sang more, the songs that we grew up with all the time, they were these, these beautiful songs that, that she told me both her aunt had sung, and this famous "Lizzie".

R.F.: Icelandic songs?

B.B.: All Icelandic.

R.F.: National songs and?

B.B.: No that's not right, what I said, they weren't all Icelandic songs. Because many of these songs were songs that had come with Lizzie, like say, *Þó leið liggja um borgir (Home, Sweet Home)* and, and many of these songs were songs from abroad with Icelandic texts.

R.F.: Ahah. But she wasn't singing opera arias or anything like that?

B.B.: No, no. No, no, no. Definitely not, and never went out into that.

R.F.: Right. But when she was working here at home she was singing properly, she wasn't just humming along or something?

B.B.: No, no. no. She sang always completely gave herself totally, I remember really well, when she was singing, especially when she was at the washing board, must have been an absolutely dead boring job, as you can imagine, rubbing the washing on the board, and then she sang completely then she sang it was just these, these Icelandic songs, these beautiful songs.

R.F.: Ahah.

B.B.: And she, I remember too, when she came, when she played on the guitar and then there was a lot of the women, there was maybe part singing, sort of, sort popular songs (lit. slogans, hits). There was part singing of songs, like "*Sestu herna hjá mér, ástin mín*" (*Sit here with me my love*), something like that, other beautiful songs, *Fram í heiðanna ró (Home on the range)*. (unclear) They called themselves "sisters", often 2 or 3 voices, they were together a lot during these years, I remember. Mum played on the guitar and they all sang together.

R.F.: Always in harmony?

B.B.: Always some part-singing, always. Then there's also that, I remember from my very earliest years, when we went to visit grandad and grandma at Hömrum, we always begun by singing and we never went home without singing, and in parts.

R.F.: That was when you went to visit, just an ordinary visit?

B.B.: Yeah, when we went to visit, and, naturally, we always tried to take part, we were, he let us sing, always, from the very first time we could stand up. Grandad directed that, he was hard (lit. strict) about that. And it was absolutely obligatory, we couldn't leave Hömrum unless we had sung one or two songs, before we went home.

R.F.: Was that a big group or what?

B.B.: We were naturally, well until Rikka sister was born 1961, we were, it was mostly when we were small, the three boys, and then Hilla (*sister*), that was when it was most. And then there were always so many people in the homes. There was another family in the home and many children, and, and they all sang. And and it was probably something in this particular family (*lit. dynasty*) I think. Singing was I think you could say well if you felt bad, it was a principle of old grandma yeah if you felt bad then it was good to sing. And if, well that's why, when I think of my mum washing the washing, must have been really boring, and difficult, then she choose to, to do something just enough bloody fun sing. And yeah.

R.F.: And do you agree with that?

B.B.: Yeah totally, completely. If you're if you feel bad, or you're angry.... then there's nothing better than to sit at the piano and and or sing.

R.F.: What happens then, when you sing? What changes?

B.B.: You, you think differently and feel a bit better, not least if you're angry and maybe sing something, something sad and then something gentle (*lit. mild*), you're soothed by it. And just the same when you're sad then, then you find an outlet.

R.F.: You spoke earlier about mum and dad always singing at home when they were working, housework and dad out in the cowsheds.

B.B.: Yeah.

R.F.: Did you sit down together as a family to sing together.

B.B.: Yeah, that was actually maybe not much, but, well, yeah it was done too, but I don't remember so much in those years that we sang much together like that, just the (*immediate*) family. Most definitely if we had any guests, I mean there were always lots of guests, lots of people visiting, then we took a song

R.F.: Did that apply to most visits?

B.B.: I would say most visits. Of course sometimes there were men that came just to meet dad (*for business, father was head of local council*), then they didn't, completely different thing.

R.F.: No, no.

B.B.: But people who were coming to visit in the evening. It's a bit special, there wasn't an instrument at Ránga until yeah that's a thing 56 or 58. I must have been 10 years old, dad bought an organ (*harmonium*).

R.F.: How did you go about singing then?

B.B.: Well, we just sang, we weren't Well, actually on the next farm there was a harmonica. Einar owned it and actually there was another man, not far away, he had a harmonica too, and they often came with their harmonicas to Rangá (*Balli's home*) and that was probably done a bit before. On the other hand, we went so much to.... it was only a kilometer or so to the organist's farm

R.F.: Who was that?

B.B.: Kári Arngrímsson. He was a good organist and was really enamoured with my mum's voice, mum went there a great deal, to sing and (unclear). And then at Engihlið, the next farm, there was a harmonium there too.

R.F.: Instruments all around?

B.B.: Yeah you could say that.

R.F.: How did you feel listening to your mother sing?

B.B.: I thought always, I'd never thought it was anything but absolutely wonderful. I always thought she had a tremendously beautiful voice. And when I think what I've sometimes listened to, I've really been bored not that it's necessarily ugly, just not appropriate.

R.F.: Was she singing for you or?

B.B.: No! I never really had the feeling she was especially singing for us. Not directly anyway. Although she was always encouraging us to take part in it. I mean we were encouraged to sing in the church choir as soon as we could, as soon

as we could control our voices. I couldn't even say when it was I really begun to sing proper tenor, sometime after confirmation.

R.F.: Did you children sing alot when you were little?

B.B.: Yeah, I think we were always singing as I said, it was always a principle of the old man (*grandad*), he taught us, learnt these particular songs, *Fjöllin blána* (*Blue Mountains*) and and *Ó hve fagurt er að líta* (*Oh what a beautiful sight*) and these sorts of songs, that were compulsory to learn. We were naturally always singing. And often we were just set up on a chair and allowed to sing loudly.

R.F.: Yeah?

B.B.: But, but later it was I didn't really begin school until I was 10 years old, it was a peripatetic school in those days, and I was allowed to take part in the schooling at home, home at Ránga and Offeigstöðum, I was allowed to take part, join in, even though I wasn't really old enough. (unclear) And at school when I'm around 12 years old, something like that, then we were always allowed to sing, I remember singing at a concert, when I was 12 or 13 years old. We sang together, me and Jón and sang at the school festival. There was a play naturally, or plays, and we sang, in two-parts, moreover. I remember it was very popular then, songs by Jon and Árni Múlaason, the play *Dubronis*, we sang all the songs, knew them backwards.

R.F.: What were you then 12, 13?

B.B.: Yeah, then we're probably 12, 13, yeah, yeah. And we sang alot then, together, Jón and me, and carried on after that. And, and then, Jón went off to grammar school and we parted, didn't sing anymore together, not like that anyway. We met of course, he was free at the weekends and all that. The first time that I really sang publicly, mother wanted me to sing with her. I must have been at least 15. It was a Lions' club meeting, it (*Lions' Movement*) was just starting here, and they (*Reykðæling, from Baldur's grandparents' valley, in the Lions Club*) wanted us to come and sing together. Sung 2 or 3 songs, went really well, well, considering. Mum had a brilliant voice of course and sung really and I incredibly little voice and a bit pathetic, I thought (*laughs*). But she knew how to project her voice so that I was decently presentable. It was so well received that we were asked to sing again together.

B.B.: Yeah, yeah.

R.F.: What did you think of that?

B.B.: I really enjoyed it, but I was really nervous, and, and it begun often then the

R.F.: Ahah.

B.B.: the county meeting, Þorrablót and this and that.

R.F.: What was it like singing with your mother?

B.B.: I thought singing with her was absolutely fantastic, and, and I would have liked to have been with the voice I've got now and sing with her, as she was then.

R.F.: And your Dad what did he think of this? Wasn't he jealous at all.

B.B.: No, no. He was really very proud of it, as he's always been with all of us. He always did all that he could so that she could sing as much as possible.

R.F.: I see. When you look back now, thinking of all this singing in your home, why do you think you were doing this?

B.B.: (*pause*) It's naturally difficult I mean it was something that was simply in our blood, (*pause*) and it's been especially in more recent times, was always, when the family came together, never came together without singing. Yeah, it was just, people were happy and felt better, went happier home. It had that sort of influence on people, no doubt about that. For myself I'd say that, if you went to a birthday, or some sort of gathering, Christmas for example, when we've always met up, all the extended family, my mother's family and naturally, my father's family was there, naturally, aswell, there was always singing, I'd have to admit that, tremendous singing, just 4 part singing, we never knew anything else other than singing.

R.F.: What sort of feeling was that, to be amongst 20 members of your family, everybody singing.

B.B.: I think it's quite, quite fantastic. I have to admit that, quite astounding, to have grown up, that it was just like that, (*singing*). Look at Nonni (*sings in Hreimur, Baldur's uncle*), from as far back as I remember he, in any sort of gathering where people might sing, they would get themselves together, yeah, Nonni, Ketil and others. This guy sang tenor, another bass, someone in the middle voice, it just happened automatically. Nobody organised the voices or parts, they just got together, it was people who were used to singing from childhood. It had always been somehow like that, singing and music, I mean my grandfather's sister lived on the next farm, and she was married to my grandmother's brother,

she played the organ, he played the fiddle, and they were wonderful moments, as a child, to visit them in Engihlið, and get Hulda to play on the organ and him on the fiddle. It was wonderful and, and I experienced something there quite unique.

Extract from group interview

R.F.: I wanted to begin by asking you what you get out of singing with the Male Voice Choir Hreimur.

G.J.: It's absolutely pointless! (laughs)

R.F.: Amazing what people are prepared to sacrifice for something that is absolutely

J.G.: Pointless!

P.I.: For something that gives you so little? Yeah I don't know.

G.J.: No, I mean I just said that, of course there's a point to it all.

R.F.: Do you ever think about why you are involved in this. It takes up a tremendous amount of your time and

P.I.: Yeah, yeah of course sometimes you ask yourselves why you spend so much time in this I never come to any conclusion and just turn up for the next practice.

R.F.: That's what it's like?

P.I.: Pretty much.

G.J.: Well I think it's the social thing mainly, you know, meeting people at the practice especially if we don't sing much if the conductor is in a good mood (everybody laughs!) and a long coffee break! (laughs).

R.F.: So it wouldn't make any difference if we just met here and play cards or something.

G.J.: No, no, I don't think we could be bothered to get out if there wasn't a singing practice.

R.F.: Ahah.

G.J.: Yeah, I mean people don't meet up unless it's something like that.

J.G.: There has to be to some reason to meet up. Recreation or

G.J.: Do you think we would have meet up here this evening, this group for example, if you hadn't rung us and asked to come along?

R.F.: No probably not but it's maybe not quite the same, whether

J.G.: The question is whether it's not just like our visit to the pub, you know like the British or the Irish, whatever, go and say "I'm going to have a pint at the pub", we sing instead.

P.I.: It's part of our upbringing, drunk with our mother's milk (laughs).

R.F.: Would it make any difference then if we just came together to play football?
Why don't we do that?

Þ.I.: (laughs) Haven't done anything else except turn up to practice singing, football or the band (plays bass in popular local dance band) for decades.

J.G.: But I think singing, I mean of course we enjoy that Well I do anyway. I mean years ago I really didn't enjoy singing that much, but I was so jealous of all these guys travelling abroad, so I thought I'd give it a try.

R.F.: Was that really what it was like?

J.G.: Yeah I really didn't have any particular interest in singing before I begun.

R.F.: In the choir?

J.G.: Yeah in the choir.

R.F.: You hadn't sung much before?

J.G.: No, very little.

R.F.: Your brothers had sung a bit hadn't they?

J.G.: Yeah, I mean in the church choir up there, like me, a few years before I came into Hreimur, Johann a bit longer maybe.

R.F.: Why were you in the church choir?

J.G.: Because Þráin forced me into it. (laughs) "We need a bass!"

R.F.: And why the male voice choir?

J.G.: I was jealous of the trips abroad. They were such fun.

K.S.: The social thing.

J.G.: The social thing. And all the other trips of course. I think I wouldn't stop in the choir now even if we didn't go abroad (laughs).

R.F.: I see. What do you have to say about that Kjartan, you've not been singing long in the choir, not like these old timers anyway (*they laugh*). What was it that made you come along?

K.S.: Well it wasn't just the social thing I don't know I'd always aimed to get into some sort of singing, I think it's fun to sing.

R.F.: Why had you always aimed to get into some sort of singing?

Þ.I.: He's always sung!

K.S.: Yeah I've always gone out in the corner at Þorrablót and sung

G.J.: And sung a lot! (laughs)

Þ.I.: He's sung since he was tiny (*gestures with his hands*).

K.S.: But never with a choir or anything like that, a tiny bit with a church choir one winter I think.

R.F.: What have you got out of singing with us this last year then? There haven't been any trips abroad (*they laugh*).

K.S.: Pleasure.... it's just something, it's just fun....singing endlessly.

G.J.: I don't know really what one get's out of this singing I don't know

J.G.: I think that even if you're tired, you rest with this. Even though it can be tiring in some ways to stand up on the staging.

P.I.: It's just body-building.

J.G.: Yeah.

R.F.: But relaxing all the same, Jon said.

J.G.: Yeah, you rest from your work, when you've maybe been tired at work and all that, then somehow, you change over into a completely different.....

P.I. Yeah, I mean when I'm dog-tired and bored of driving the bloody milk tanker here there and everywhere, it's so relaxing and gives you so much, I mean even if you just go shovel shit out of the stables, you get such a release, forget about the time, and really relax.

K.S.: Don't you sing in your work? I mean like you when you're driving?

P.I.: Yes, yes, yes.

K.S.: Yeah I mean don't you?

J.G.: I have to admit I don't here (*school caretaker*) I used to when I worked in my last job, then I sang a lot at work.

G.J.: I never sing better than for my sheep!

K.S.: Exactly!

G.J.: Well, that's what it feels like.

R.F.: Is that true?

(*everybody laughs*)

K.S.: Yeah, my cows praise me! (*laughs*)

P.I.: Yeah they're a good audience! I sometimes can't hear my GSM when I'm driving because of the bloody noise I make! (*laughs*)

R.F.: Are you singing along with the radio?

P.I.: Yeah I, most often, and usually I sing better than whoever is singing on the radio.

G.J.: I sing usually, just by myself, for myself.

K.S.: Don't you use the radio?

G.J.: Not at all.

R.F.: Is yours a competition then Lommi, with the radio?

P.I.: No, well, I mean, I normally try to sing better than them, but it's no competition. *(everybody laughs)* You know, driving all day with the radio on.

J.G.: Be careful not to end up like Óskar Pétursson *(Tenor soloist, popular nationally)* he was helping Kristján Jóhannesson *(Tenor soloist - popular nationally, but has had international success, i.e. in Italy)* with a song and drove off the road!!! *(laughs)*

P.I.: Yeah that's right!

R.F.: Kjartan you sing at work without the radio then?

K.S.: Yeah, when I'm in the cow shed sometimes.

R.F.: What do you sing then?

K.S.: Everything!

R.F.: Everything?

K.S.: Lots of male voice choir stuff this winter! *(laughs!)*

R.F.: What just the second tenor part?

K.S.: Yeah practicing, I'm practicing.

R.F.: You're practicing second tenor? And do you hear the first tenor or second bass or something? *(pause)* I mean can it be fun just to sing just second tenor?

P.I.: Yeah, yeah, must be.

R.F.: No, I just ask.

K.S.: It's maybe just some of the songs, might not be the whole lot!

P.I.: Yeah and when you get a song on the brain.

G.J.: I think that's one thing, you get a song on your brain and you sing it all day.

K.S.: I'm sometimes asked to change the song! *(everybody laughs!)*

R.F.: What? The cows ask you to change the song? *(laughter)*

K.S.: No Sonja asks me to *(his wife)*

R.F.: Does Sonja sing with you at work?

K.S.: Yeah, yeah.

R.F.: In harmony, or

K.S.: No, no.

G.J.: It was just the couple at Helgastaðir that did that.

R.F.: And you sing a lot in the sheepsheds Guðmundur?

G.J.: Yeah, yeah. *Sumar í sveitinni* (*Summer in the country*) and (*unclear*) (*laughter*).

R.F.: Why do you think people do that?

(Pause)

P.I.: Pass the time.

J.G.: Yeah, I think it's something like that.

P.I.: Yeah, when you're driving some straight and boring road, there's nothing else to do except sing.

G.J.: It's when you're not really thinking, not thinking about anything, maybe it comes unconsciously, I don't know.

R.F.: Could be?

G.J.: Yeah comes spontaneously when you're not thinking about anything particularly resting the brain! I don't know.

R.F.: Yeah.

J.G.: Well, like some people go out to run and are revived, and relaxed, completely different. Thinking about something completely different. Yeah, like Guðmundur says, rest the brain, change your thinking, sing.

R.F.: There's some difference though between singing at work, your brain being somewhere else, because whatever you're doing you can still do, but I mean when you are just singing, and concentrating on singing say at a rehearsal.

P.I.: Yeah, yeah.

J.G.: Yeah of course you make more effort to do it better than you do in the cowshed or whatever. I think that sometimes when you're just singing along like that you often experiment with singing, not always trying to follow the melody.

R.F.: Experimenting?

G.J.: Yeah, I sing when I'm in the barn by myself, experimenting with the voice, changing, even make up melodies and text spontaneously ... out of the blue and then off with the wind.

R.F.: Do you do you that?

G.J.: Yeah it happens.

R.F.: A lot, or just once in a while?

G.J.: Not much (laughs) but it happens.

P.I.: It happens a lot to Guðmundur.

G.J.: Happened the other day, whole song the other day.

R.F.: What, just out of the blue?

G.J.: Yeah, yeah.

R.F.: Melody, text.....all at once?

G.J.: Yeah.

R.F.: And what several phrases, structure?

G.J.: Yeah, yeah, A few phrases that rimed well together. I was sharpening some knives and not really thinking and *(pause)*

R.F.: And?

G.J.: Yeah, yeah *(laughs)* and best that it isn't heard anywhere *(laughs)*.

K.S.: Don't you remember it?

G.J.: No, no. I can't remember My daughter Rán (13) sat there and listened, she was trying to sing some rubbish in English *(everybody laughs)*, I told her it would be better if she sang something in Icelandic, she said, "I'm composing it".... I told her she could compose in Icelandic, so I just started singing it.... singing, a few lines repeated it a few times.

R.F.: All original?

G.J.: Yeah all original, maybe not good enough to sing in the male voice choir though! *(laughs)*

J.G.: Yeah maybe need to arrange it a bit better. *(laughs)*

Extract from interview with Gunnar

G.H.: My father's family, they sang alot.

R.F.: You remember your father singing?

G.H.: Me? Yes, yeah, yeah.

R.F.: What what was that like?

G.H.: I thought it was well in my memory that he had a really lovely voice, not a big voice, but a really mild and beautiful voice I thought so yeah and he often sang while he was working.

R.F.: Were you helping him then?

G.H.: Yeah, yeah, yeah both during the haymaking and also we had a small boat that we rowed out to fish to provide extra food for the home, there were many mouths to feed. I remember especially when we were on our way back to land, we normally went out in the evening, at night, during the bright summer nights, went out into Öxarfjord, and, and he often sang when we were coming back into land.

R.F.: On the way back? Do you remember any of the songs?

G.H.: *Nú anda súðrið (Now the wind breathes from the south)* (pause), no it's not called that what is it?

R.F.: *Ég bið að heilsa (I Send My Greetings)*

G.H.: Exactly by Ingi T. There were other old beautiful songs.

R.F.: Were they generally these beautiful, traditional songs?

G.H.: Yeah....

R.F.: Did you sing too?

G.H.: No, I never did.

R.F.: Just listened?

G.H.: Yeah just listened. I was often very sleepy, I was just a young lad when I started, 8 years when I went first, when it was really good weather. It's a really vivid and strong memory, singing as we came into land, especially if we had had a good trip.

R.F.: What sort of feeling was that?

G.H.: It was wonderful, wonderful, unforgettable.

R.F.: Can you describe it anymore?

G.H.: It just lives as a beautiful memory, it's really clear in my mind if we were going maybe at maybe 5 or 6 in the morning and there was no sea breeze,

completely still like a mirror, and you could find the smell of birch trees on the sides, birch smell, and I remember so well, him at the helm, singing.

R.F.: Did you sing a lot as a child yourself?

G.H.: Yeeaah really quite a lot, quite a lot and I forgot myself sometimes. I was a bit shy about letting other people hear me, yes I was.

R.F. Are you shy by nature?

G.H.: Yeah I am, it's my nature. I must have been 16, standing in a queue for tea. I was working at the herring processing plant. Forgot myself and began to sing a song. A Faroese girl behind me poked me and said "Will you sing a song for me? You sing so beautifully". I didn't. I often had to collect her barrels of herring or take her salt, and she'd always ask me "Will you sing for me?" I never did, except that one time, accidentally. You've never seen that, it had all changed when you came here.

R.F.: Yeah, just in pictures and on film.

G.H.: Ahah they would call for a barrel or salt, the women, it all had to run smoothly. But always when I took a barrel or salt to her, "Will you sing for me?"

R.F.: I see.

G.H.: Yeah. yeah. I'll admit I sung a lot at sea, later on. We sang a lot, really quite a lot, that's to say when we were mending nets and getting the fish out of the nets, if it was good weather and things had gone well and people felt good. And in the harbour, I'll tell you down in the fishhold, when we, well if the hold was getting pretty empty, landing the fish, and the hold is nearly empty, then the accoustics were pretty good in the hold. It was like, pretty much like a concert hall.

R.F.: Ahah.

G.H.: And I remember, remember especially one guy that sang with me, and we sang and sang.

R.F.: In harmony?

G.H.: Yeah that too he was from Keflavík, good singer. It reminded a bit of when I was at home in the country, and, and in the spring when the barn was nearly empty these barns, well it was dry hay, we always said that there was "a spring sound in the barn", when singing began to sound good in the barn.

R.F.: Spring sound in the barn?

G.H.: Yeah.....

R.F.: And did people sing more then?

G.H.: Yeah, yeah, well at least personally speaking.

R.F.: Anything special?

G.H.: No, no nothing special, just whatever was popular at that particular time, popular songs.

R.F.: Men weren't just humming they really sang?

G.H.: Yeah, yeah. Well, I was put some effort into it. And let it, let it resound that's called "Spring sound in the barn". And it reminded me of when the boat was emptying the hold

R.F.: What sort of feeling was that really?

G.H.: Well you felt good, and thought it was good. I mean it didn't sound bad, it sounded really pretty good. Ha? Perhaps it was just imagination.

Extract from interview with Eiður

R.F.: So when you were in your early twenties you joined the church choir. What made you decide to join the church choir?

E.J.: I was encouraged to do it by the Rangá brothers (*see Baldur B.*) (*laughs*) It begun with my going to a birthday party in Torfunes, shall I tell you about that?

R.F.: Yes please.

E.J.: Well it was the first time, since I had been a teenager, adolescent I went to Diddi's birthday party, I suppose he was thirty. There was this amazing singing. I ended up singing with them, took full part in that had probably had a glass or two and therewith I was taken into their group (*literally: become one of their number*) (*laughs*) and told to come along and sing in the church choir and I did and got a lot of pleasure from that.

R.F.: Do you remember that moment very well, singing together at the party?

E.J.: Yeah, yeah I thought it was tremendous fun, just It was the first time I got this feeling for singing in parts, that I've always been so attracted to.

R.F.: That was the first time you had experienced this feeling?

E.J.: Yeah in reality it was I mean for me, personally. I'd often heard singing in harmony.

R.F.: Wasn't it difficult to find your part? I mean when you were singing with these guys at the party?

E.J.: Yeah somehow I just had a feeling for it.

R.F.: How many of you were there?

E.J.: Oh loads of people....

R.F.: Just men?

E.J.: Naaa.....but you know Diddi and Balli, Práinn, big singers.

R.F.: Yeah!

E.J.: Massive singing.

R.F.: What sort of feeling was it?

E.J.: It was just tremendously enjoyable.

R.F.: And you go along to the church choir. Was that as enjoyable as singing at the party?

E.J.: Yeah yeah, I was, I thought it was really enjoyable. I got a lot of really good instruction from Balli it was good to follow him and learn the part.

R.F.: Was that some sort of formal instruction?

E.J.: No, just following him....

R.F.: Imitating?

E.J.: Yeah I mean we didn't have any notes or anything but he knew all of these songs (*laughs*) and they did, just the whole hymn book. I just copied them.

R.F.: And that went well?

E.J.: Yeah, yeah.

R.F.: Were you singing anywhere else at this time, did you sing by yourself or anything?

E.J.: At this time? I don't remember that I was.

R.F.: How old were you when you joined the Hreimur male voice choir?

E.J.: 82, I suppose.

R.F.: So you were what 22? Why did you go to the male voice choir?

E.J.: It was due to their encouragement, Rangá brothers, they were always talking about my coming along to the choir.

R.F.: Had you heard much male voice singing before?

E.J.: Before? I had we had a record player at home. Mum bought the old record of the male voice choir festival Hekla, I played that.

R.F.: Much?

E.J.: Yeah, yeah. Well I listened naturally as well and enjoyed that.

R.F.: What did you think of this singing?

E.J.: I thought it was fine and I remember that some time I went to a concert with the Male Voice Choir Prymur, as a kid. And a concert by Hreimur, that was founded what 75 wasn't it?

R.F.: I think so. What did you think of these concerts?

E.J.: They gave me pleasure, as I've always said this singing in harmony.

R.F.: So you go along because of your friendship with your neighbours. Would you have gone otherwise?

E.J.: I just don't know no, I, no I think you need some encouragement. I had probably not that age, just gone along. I was very young then really.

R.F.: Were you the youngest?

E.J.: Yeah, I thought that it was O.K.

R.F.: You never thought of it as some old guys' club?

E.J.: No, no, I think I just got so much encouragement and and I, I got alot of praise from them, from the Rángá brothers, that I could sing, not that I had any great voice or anything.

R.F.: So they were very complimentary?

E.J.: Yeah I remember it like that.

R.F.: That wasn't boring for you either?

E.J.: No, no, And I just went straight into second tenor. They had decided that, sung with Arngrímur from Þórodstaður, Theodor from Skríður, I remember all the guys that stood around me. Gisli from Lækjarhvammi.

R.F.: And what was it like singing in the male voice choir.

E.J.: I thought that it was I fell for it straight away.

R.F.: Good feeling?

E.J.: this sound (*lit. harmony*) that you land inside of! We practised in Hafralækjarskóla quite a small space, and I thought the songs were beautiful especially songs like *Nú máttu hægt (The Bright July Night)* og *Nú hnigur sól (Now the sun sets)* you know.

R.F.: The slow, relaxed ones then?

E.J.: I've always been more attracted by these old old songs you know?

R.F.: But the songs you named are not just old they are also very slow and relaxed too?

E.J.: Yeah, yeah and they're the songs somehow that lead me forward somehow they were pretty easy to learn, and so beautiful just purely you sang them somehow completely absorbed. Yeah, somehow.... when the sound is beautiful, these relaxed songs, yeah, mainly this sound that means the most.

R.F.: How do you feel then in that sort of sound?

E.J.: Really well, somehow you're pulled along in the sound (pause)

R.F.: Some people talk about typical male voice choir songs as being big songs like *Stout-hearted Men* and *Brennið þið vitæ (Light the Watchtowers)*, do you like these songs particularly?

E.J.: Well, much less.

R.F.: So the male voice choir shouldn't just sing stuff like *Stout-hearted Men*.

E.J.: No, no defintely not.

R.F.: But it's O.K. to sing them too.

E.J.: Yeah, yeah it's good to have variety

R.F.: What have you got out of singing with Hreimur?

E.J.: Yeah I've got a tremendous amount out of it: the pleasure of learning all these songs, I think that, that's really of great value to me, learning all these songs and texts, then there's all that great social thing that it is ... and just fun when it goes well, when we perform well the pleasure of making other people happy....

R.F.: Is that a large part of it, making other people happy?

E.J.: Yeah I think so I think, I think it's really worth a lot when people say the choir has sung well, then you think that you've done something worthwhile, something good it's a nice feeling when you get support.

R.F.: Is that because you're happy that your giving other people something nice or because you enjoy the praise you receive?

E.J.: Yeah well both naturally if you can make people happy and that too, doing things well.

R.F.: How do you know if you're doing things well?

E.J.: I really, really, well you find that from the audience and you hear it around you, you see on the conductor.

R.F.: The conductor?

E.J.: Yeah of course, I think too, it's really fun, you know as people say, when you really hit the target, everything gels together and you just sing some song. Like maybe, I don't know maybe have a glass or two some dance or something and when it's finished then the guys might get together out in the corner and start blowing out their chests a bit.

R.F.: What's happening then?

E.J.: It's some sort of struggle or competition they're maybe not totally in control because of the booze.

R.F.: Competing for what?

E.J.: Who sings the loudest or highest probably. But I still think it's fun to get together and sing in harmony like that, sing songs like that, find the sound. I, we me and my wife, we used to do that in the car, really a lot so it's sort of died out.....I'm ashamed to say we did that *Ýfir kaldan eyðisand* (*Over the Cold Deserted Sands*), and all that we sung it in harmony, loads of songs.....

R.F.: When you were driving?

E.J.: Yeah coming from Húsavík, driving south

R.F.: Is that before you had any children?

E.J.: Yeah, just when we first started living together, soon after that.

R.F.: Anywhere else out walking or something?

E.J.: Always when we were in the car.

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R.F.: Ahah

E.J.: There's almost certainly a need for it I mean you're just able to get out of it. Tired more comfortable.

R.F.: We'll come back to that in while. Let's turn again to the male voice choir. What's the relationship like between voices, I mean you're second tenor?

E.J.: Yeah?

R.F.: Well what's it like to be second tenor and not second bass for example.

E.J.: Well I have a feeling for it not that I could ever sing first tenor , second tenor just suits the range of my voice much better. I think I'm probably getting close to first bass.

R.F.: Happy with your voice?

E.J.: Yeah, yeah.

R.F.: How would you describe it?

R.F.: Is that before you had any children?

E.J.: Yeah, just when we first started living together, soon after that.

R.F.: Anywhere else out walking or something?

E.J.: Always when we were in the car.

R.F.: What were you doing?

E.J.: I was just driving and we decided to sing a song....

R.F.: No radio?

E.J.: It must have been turned off. I've always had a radio in the car.

R.F.: But you don't do it now?

E.J.: Rarely.

R.F.: Have you sung much with your children?

E.J.: Maybe not much

R.F.: You talked about your father singing for you when you went to bed. Did you sing for your children?

E.J.: Not much, I haven't maybe most with Andrea (*oldest daughter 16*). Maybe it's because there's a tape recorder in every room, and, I mean Hildur, (*youngest 5*) she always listens to the tape recorder, so you don't so much for that reason, I suppose. They listen to a tape or something. I read sometimes for them.

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