

FREUD AND THE PROBLEM WITH MUSIC:
A HISTORY OF LISTENING AT THE MOMENT OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

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An analysis of voice in performance and literary theory reveals a paradox: while voice is generally thought of as the vehicle through which one expresses individual subjectivity, in theoretical discourse it operates as a placeholder for superimposed content, a storage container for acquired material that can render the subjective voice silent and ineffectual. In grammatical terms, voice expresses the desire or anxiety of the third rather than first person, and as such can be constitutive of both identity and alterity. In historical discourse, music operates similarly, absorbing and expressing cultural excess. One historical instance of this paradox can be seen in the case of Sigmund Freud, whose infamous trouble with music has less to do with aesthetic properties of the musical art form than with cultural anxieties surrounding him, in which music becomes a trope for differences feared to potentially “haunt” the public sphere. As a cultural trope, music gets mixed up in a highly charged dialectic between theatricality and anti-theatricality that emerges at the Viennese fin-de-Siècle, a dialectic that continues to shape both German historiography and the construction of modernity in contemporary scholarship.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Michelle Duncan was born in Yankton, South Dakota. Both of her parents were teachers; from early on, a culture of learning informed her worldview. When she was three, her family relocated to Downers Grove, Illinois, while her father pursued advanced degrees at Loyola and Northwestern in Chicago. While there, she, her older brother, and her parents took advantage of cultural opportunities unavailable in South Dakota—plays, musicals, art exhibits, and Chicago Cubs games—and developed an appreciation for international gastronomy. During summer breaks, they often traveled throughout the United States, often with a tent and their Ford station wagon. When Michelle was nine, her family returned to South Dakota.

Throughout her youth, Michelle loved books, music, and the performing arts, and she became an accomplished pianist. In middle and high school, she participated in numerous ensembles and theatre productions, earning distinction as a singer and actress. After graduating from Aberdeen Central High School, she studied voice performance at the University of Colorado, Boulder. She saw her first opera in Denver, a production of *Turandot* at Opera Colorado featuring Hungarian soprano Eva Marton, which made a profound and lasting impression. Deciding to see more of the world, she traveled to the Netherlands and Germany, where she lived for eight years—studying voice, seeing many concerts and operas, and developing a love of Germanic language, literature, and culture.

After several years working in the classical music industry, she and her two

young daughters moved to Oakland, California, where Michelle enrolled as an undergraduate in Mills College, studying voice, German, and Comparative Literature. Her senior thesis was a study of Beethoven's opera, *Fidelio*. Michelle graduated with honors from Mills with a BA in German Literature, and earned the Marie Naumann-Etienne Prize for Excellence in German Studies.

Dedicated to the memory of my mother, Belva Trask Duncan, 1940-1998
And to my daughters, Sara and Hannah, with enormous love and gratitude

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To my children, Sara and Hannah Kellermann; to Troy van der Plas and his family in the Hague; to my partner, Michael Gibson, and his parents, Marva and Walter Luttrell and Dr. Harris Gibson; to my late mother, Belva Duncan (d. 1998) and late grandmother, Gertrude Trask (d. 2011); and the rest of my professors, friends, and family members who have had a hand in this endeavor, however large or small. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and encouragement. I could not have done this without you.

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PREFACE

The habits of a lifetime when everything else had to come before writing are not easily broken, even when circumstances now often make it possible for writing to be first; habits of years—response to others, distractibility, responsibility for daily matters—stay with you, mark you, become you. The cost of “discontinuity” (that pattern still imposed on women) is such a weight of things unsaid, an accumulation of material so great, that everything starts up something else in me; what should take weeks takes me sometimes months to write; what should take months, takes years.

--Tilly Olson

Silences

INTRODUCTION

As the person who developed the art of the talking cure, Sigmund Freud provides us every reason to consider him one of the most adept listeners in modern history. At the same time, the art and science of listening that Freud pioneered is surrounded by problematic and unexplored boundaries. One key area, often mentioned but never explored in depth, concerns Freud's assertion that he is unable to enjoy and to understand music. In light of this assertion, it is curious that he sought the contribution and expertise of key musical figures during the early, formative years of psychoanalysis. Given the importance of musical culture during fin-de-Siècle Vienna, Freud knew that by including Max Graf and David Josef Bach as two of the first members of the Psychoanalytic Wednesday Society, he was engaging with core participants in this saturated moment of cultural conflict and modernism. Did he assemble these musical personalities in his early circle to task them to listen for him, and thus to help him understand the potential role of music in both his psychological and metapsychological arguments? Since Freud forever changed the way that we listen, what do we hear when we listen for Freud--in psychoanalysis, in music, and in the historical as well as the theoretical dimensions of their interrelation?

In this study, I analyze how sound, voice, and music circulate both in modern history and in contemporary theoretical discourse. The first half of this work maps out methodological considerations central to working on the resonant dimension of opera studies and media studies in the field of German intellectual history.¹ My primary

¹ With the exception of Chapter 2, when I employ the phrase "opera studies," I am thinking of opera as a particular type of media, and thus, as particular branch of media studies. Opera's status as a type of media is especially relevant after Wagner,

intervention is to address resonance as material, and to expose methods for identifying and articulating the material effects of its presence given its paradoxical status as an ephemeral object. Temporality emerges as a key problem: how does one negotiate the presence of sound given Heidegger's caution against the "metaphysics of presence" that has formidably shaped theoretical discourses of modernity? And how does one resolve the problem that text, a silent medium, is the primary archive of sounds from the past?

The second half of this study contextualizes Freud's early work as embedded in the Wagnerian Cultural Politics that dominated fin-de-Siècle Vienna. I argue that Freud's trouble with music has less to do with aesthetic properties of the musical art form than with cultural anxieties that transform sound and music into a trope for theatricality, alive with the "dangers" of alterity seen to "haunt" the European public sphere. On one hand, Freud's orientation around Aristotle (and Plato) is a political move meant to distance himself from an anti-Semitic chain of association between "music," "theatricality," and "the Jew" in modern culture. On the other hand, Aristotle (and Plato) provides Freud with an alternative, holistic model for the role of theatrical representation in modern culture. I demonstrate that the vision of culture Freud begins to articulate in the first decade of the twentieth-century is largely a concerned response to Richard Wagner's pervasive influence--both in the theater and in the theatrical constellation of the body politic.

whose *Gesamtkunstwerk* is both a work of art, and a type of mass media hugely influential upon the medial innovations such as radio and film that begin to emerge around the turn of the century, and later upon the "new media". See, for instance, Norbert Bolz's *Theorie der neuen Medien*, München: Rabin Verlag, 1993, and Matthew Wilson Smith's more recent, *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace*, New York: Routledge, 2007,

This project began when I learned that Sigmund Freud's famous patient, "*der kleine Hans*," was Herbert Graf (1904-1973), stage director at the Metropolitan Opera from 1936-1960 and director of the Grand Theatre in Geneva from 1965 until his death in 1973. Known throughout the opera world, he staged productions for the Salzburg Festival with Wilhelm Furtwängler, Dimitri Metropoulos, and Georg Solti, and for Maria Callas at the Teatro alla Scala and the Arena di Verona.² Published in 1909, Freud's *Analyse der Phobie eines fünfjährigen Knaben (Analysis of a Phobia in a Five Year old Boy)*, was the first case study to provide evidence that supported Freud's theory of infantile sexuality published four years earlier, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie (Three Essays on a Theory of Sexuality, 1905)*. Though Herbert Graf's development from a phobic boy to a well-known figure in the international opera world possibly had little to do with his early psychoanalytic treatment, it was a coincidence of Freudian proportions that made me start to ponder Freud's relationship to music and to opera.

As is well known, Freud performed the treatment of little Hans only secondarily. Hans's father, Max Graf, who was an early member of the Psychological Wednesday Society, consulted closely with Freud in long conversations about the boy and became Freud's therapist surrogate. The elder Graf was also musically inclined as a composer and prominent Viennese music critic. He studied with Eduard Hanslick at the University of Vienna and with Anton Bruckner at the Vienna Conservatory, wrote for a number of Viennese periodicals including *Die Zeit* and the *Österreichische Rundschau*, translated Romain Rolland into German (*Paris als Musikstadt, 1904*), and was the author

² In addition to his work in the theater, Herbert Graf wrote about opera for the general public. His works include the following: *The Opera and its Future in America* (New York: Norton, 1941); *Opera for the People* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1951); *Producing Opera for America* (Zurich: Atlantis Books, 1961).

of numerous books on various musical subjects.³ Hans's mother, Olga Hoenig, an actress, was for over a decade an early patient of Freud's. In Max Graf's words, she was "eine sehr interessante, sehr geistvolle und sehr schöne Frau," but also "zweifelloos eine Hysterikerin," which Graf found "anziehend und interessant" (Eissler 19). It was through Hoenig that Max Graf became curious about psychoanalysis. Hoenig eventually led Graf to Freud.

Though Graf had been acquainted with Freud since at least 1899, by 1905 he was officially listed as a member of the Psychological Wednesday Society. Freud first convened the Wednesday Society in 1902 to discuss cultural topics of potential concern to psychoanalysis.⁴ In addition to Freud, the first five members of the Wednesday Society were physicians: Wilhelm Stekel, Alfred Adler, Max Kahane, Rudolf Reitler, and Paul Federn (Rose 15). Two of the next three members, including Graf, had strong musical connections. David Josef Bach was a boyhood friend of Arnold Schoenberg and studied with Ernst Mach at the University of Vienna. He became music critic of the *Arbeiter Zeitung* in 1904 after the death of Josef Scheu. In October of 1904, the same year he founded the *Arbeiter Sinfonie Konzerte*, one of his many activities to try to make the fine arts accessible to the working class, Bach introduced the readers of the *Arbeiter Zeitung* to Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* ("Beim Schreiben" 1-3).⁵ Around

³ During the decade of his acquaintance with Freud, Max Graf published *Wagner Probleme und andere Studien* (1900), *Die Musik im Zeitalter der Renaissance* (1905), *Die Innere Werkstatt des Musikers* (1910), and *Richard Wagner im "Fliegenden Holländer."* *Ein Beitrag zur Psychologie Künstlerischen Schaffens* (1911).

⁴ For an interpretation of the work of the Psychological Wednesday Society and its members, see Louis Rose, *The Freudian Calling: Early Viennese Psychoanalysis and the Pursuit of Cultural Science*. (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1998).

⁵ Thanks for Louis Rose for bring this article to my attention.

the same time, Federn introduced Eduard Hitschmann to the Wednesday Society. Like Federn, Hitschmann was also a physician, but his wife, Hedwig Schick, was a singer, voice teacher, and speech therapist.

Given these circumstances, it is curious that Freud's biographers depict him as unmusical, if not averse to music. Had he been so ill disposed toward music, it is indeed curious that he included two prominent musical figures to participate in the conversations regarding psychoanalysis and culture during the formative years of psychoanalysis. If at times Freud stubbornly rejected music, all the more reason to investigate his incentive for doing so. This study began, then, as an attempt to better discern Freud's relationship to music, and to understand Freud's interest in Graf and Bach. I sought to learn what contributions these personalities made to the early discussions of the Wednesday Society, what influence their musicality may have had upon Freud, and what impact Freud may have had upon the musical circles of Vienna. As my work progressed, however, I realized that the work that they undertook in the context of the Wednesday Society, their relationship with Freud, and their cultural influences were markedly different. As a journalist and Social Democrat, Bach was primarily concerned with the politics of culture and social policy—most notably, the *Bildung* of the working class. He strongly believed that cultural inheritance should be democratic, and thus, that "high art" belonged as much to the working class as to the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, he believed that because *Bildung* offered the working class the opportunity to mature intellectually and spiritually, it was a possible means of instigating cultural revolution. Through research trips to the Arnold Schoenberg Center in Vienna, to the Bach Nachlass in Sussex, and to the University Cambridge Library,

which received a number of works from Bach's library, I learned the extent of Bach's vast artistic influence--from literature and the visual arts, theater, and music composition--in early twentieth-century Vienna.⁶ Bach went on to become general editor of the fine art and literature section of the *Arbeiter Zeitung* in 1917, director of the *Sozialdemokratische Kunststelle* in 1919, and general editor of the *Kunststelle's* cultural newspaper, *Kunst und Volk*, which he ran until 1934.⁷

Whereas Bach studied psychoanalysis for insights regarding the liberation of human potential in a transformative society, Graf focused on psychoanalytic theory as it relates to music and the creative process.⁸ Unlike Bach, who thought about

⁶ My thanks to Therese Muxeneder at the Arnold Schoenberg Archive in Vienna, and to Robert Schoenberg, who learned of my interest in Bach and emailed me information about the Bach Nachlass in Sussex. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Jared Armstrong, who tirelessly labored to keep Bach and his life's work in the public eye and who generously hosted me during my trip to Crowborough, East Sussex. Likewise, I am most thankful to Dr. Philip Marriott, adopted son of David Bach's nephew, Herbert Bach, and his extended family, also in Crowborough, for their many kindnesses. And finally to Caius College, Cambridge, and Dr. Joachim Whaley, Senior Lecturer in German, who so kindly hosted me while researching the books from the Bach Nachlass that are held at the Cambridge University Library.

⁷ For information about Bach's many activities and influences in Vienna, see Henriette Kotlan-Werner, *Kunst und Volk: David Josef Bach 1874-1947* (Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1977) and a special issue of *Austrian Studies* about Bach's life and times with papers presented at a conference on Bach at the Austrian Cultural Forum, London: *Austrian Studies: Culture and Politics in Red Vienna*. Vol 14, 2006.

⁸ Although historians have interpreted the artistic efforts of the Social Democrats under Bach's leadership as a naïve attempt to nobilify the working class, I see Bach's efforts as a fairly radical push to dislodge art from bourgeois traditions. Given the staunch resistance of much of the Viennese concert-going public to new music, Bach's support of premiering new works at the *Arbeiter Symphonie Konzerte* to an audience that had no preconceived notions about musical tradition and propriety was a brilliant move. Given Bach's achievements, one could question the extent to which much of the Viennese new music belongs in the category of "high" art, since that same music was far better received by working class audiences. Bach strongly believed that radical tonality offered the working class new possibilities for conceiving of itself and of its future--indeed, that it embodied revolutionary potential.

psychoanalysis in order to better understand contemporary society, Graf crafted a number of applied psychoanalytic studies meant specifically for Freud and the Wednesday Society. A careful look at these essays reveals that Graf worked closely alongside Freud, collaborating not only on Herbert Graf's case, but also on ideas regarding the origins of artistic creativity and the representational process of theater. Although I remain interested in Bach, I focus here on the relationship between Freud and Graf because their collaboration sheds light on the original problem I set out to understand: the underlying reasons for Freud's problematic relationship to music. Whereas Bach's work with Freud was short-lived, Graf's work with Freud on the creative process, theatrical representation, and Richard Wagner explain not only Freud's crisis with music, but also his complicated insight and understanding regarding theatricality.

The intellectual cooperation between Freud and Graf can be seen in the conversations of the Wednesday Society, and the essays both authors produced between 1905 and 1910. As I discuss in chapter four, the fact that Freud gave to Graf his most important text on the theater, *Psychopathische Personen auf der Buhne*, while or shortly before Graf was writing "Richard Wagner und das dramatische Schaffens" (1906) and "Probleme des dramatischen Schaffens" (1907) suggests that Freud wrote this text as a template for Graf's thinking about representation in theater in general and opera in particular. This is both methodologically and historically significant because it alters the vantage point from which to assess Freud's understanding of theatrical representation, shifting focus away from the spoken theater of Shakespeare and toward the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Wagner. This is not to say that Freud was a closet Wagnerian;

on the contrary, Freud wrote about representation in theater as a veiled response to the Wagnerism of his time, explicitly formulating his theory about theatrical representation after Aristotle in an attempt to structure or at least reframe Graf's thinking about modern theater and opera.

By specializing in opera studies as intellectual history, my focus is not the history of opera, but the history of culture as it responds to operatic discourses revealing social and cultural concerns about modernity.⁹ This study is influenced by innovative work by historians such as Celia Applegate, Leon Botstein, David B. Dennis, and Michael P. Steinberg that has reframed our understanding of German music and opera as cultural forms central to discourses about the nation, as well as the (national) subject.¹⁰ As this

⁹ Michael P. Steinberg's *Austria as Theater and Ideology: The Meaning of the Salzburg Festival* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000) is the standard bearer of the relationship between theatricality and cultural history, not only of the Austrian fin-de-Siècle, but also of cultural history in general. Steinberg's primary precursors on Austrian cultural and intellectual history are Carl Schorske's *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1961), William McGrath's *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Vienna* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1974), and William Johnson's *The Austrian Mind* (Berkeley: U of California UP, 1983).

¹⁰ See Celia Applegate, "What is German Music? Reflections on the Role of Music in the Making of the Nation," *German Studies Review* (Spring, 1993) and, with Pamela Potter, ed., *Music and German National Identity*. (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2002); Leon Botstein, "German Jews and Wagner," In Grey, Thomas. *Richard Wagner and His World* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009); "Max Weber and Music History," *The Musical Quarterly* 93 (2): 183–191; "The Jewish Question in Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 94 (4): 439–53; "Alban Berg and the Memory of Modernism," In Christopher Hailey, ed., *Alban Berg and His World* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010); and with Edward Timms and Werner Hanak, eds., *Quasi una Fantasia: Juden und die Musikstadt Wien*, (Vienna: Jüdisches Museum Wien, 2003); Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000); David Dennis, *Beethoven in German Politics, 1870-1989* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996); Karen Painter, *Symphonic Aspirations, German Music and Politics, 1900-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2008); Pamela Potter, *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998); and Michael P. Steinberg, *Austria as Theater and Ideology: The Meaning of the Salzburg*

body of scholarly material grows, the field of German Studies increasingly recognizes the seminal role that music and opera have played in the construction of German and Austrian subjectivity.¹¹

As a cultural event rather than a purely musical, literary, or theatrical object, opera is an art form that combines disciplines, and thus poses challenges to traditional, disciplinary methods of inquiry. By integrating performance studies into my cultural analysis, my goal is not to map one disciplinary procedure onto another, but to translate concerns among disciplines and to explore the impasses between them. Exploring the margins of disciplinarity proves especially fruitful in the case of opera, as that is the location where philosophy has relegated this “special” type of art form.¹²

Performance studies is itself an emerging, interdisciplinary field that began development in the 1960s through the converging interests of anthropologist Victor Turner and theater theorist Richard Schechner, on the one hand, and the influence of

Festival (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000); *Listening to Reason: Culture, Subjectivity, and Nineteenth-Century Music* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006); *Judaism Musical and Unmusical* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2008). For a recent overview of various approaches to the cultural history of music, see Jane Fulcher, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the New Cultural History of Music* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011).

¹¹ See especially the work of David Levin: *Richard Wagner, Fritz Lang, and the Nibelungen* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999); *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2010); and his most recent work on Wagner, such as “A Picture-Perfect Man? Senta, Absorption, and Wagnerian Theatricality,” *Opera Quarterly* 21:3 (2005) 486-495.

¹² See Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth-Century*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996). As I discuss in chapter one, Abbate has shown that in Rousseau’s *Essay on the Origin of Languages* and Paul de Man’s critique thereof, “both writers revert to music at a moment of crisis in the argument, a moment when proof fails and the discussion becomes a performance” (18). “Music” becomes a refuge for theoretical arguments that have reached a logical impasse.

speech-act theory and the work of linguists John Austin and John Searle, on the other. As a field, performance studies scholarship tends to gravitate toward popular social events such as rituals, festivals, parades, etc., rather than toward events traditionally thought of as “high” culture such as opera. My focus on performance directs my attention toward opera as a socio-cultural event that reflects, performs, and produces meanings in historical context, thinking less about the aesthetic standards of a particular work that validate its status as “high” culture and more about the extra-operatic effects of a performance. In Vienna at the fin-de-Siècle, both operatic works and the extra-operatic are largely concerned with constellations of community, framing insider or outsider status through markers indicative of nationality, class, gender, or race through musical, linguistic, or performing codes that signal essence and alterity. An exploration of the dialectical relationship between opera and the subject thus reveals a dynamic (and resonant) social space where identities take shape.

Considering the performance effects of opera in history relies upon close reading, although at times, performance becomes the text. In terms of a “text and context” model of intellectual history, this means that primary (operatic) texts (libretto, score, etc.) are less my focus than the performances of those texts in the larger context of operatic (and thus identity-driven) society and culture. Engaging with opera as a social sphere invites one to question both the history of performance and the performance of history, and thus emphasizes critical issues around temporality. Fluidity between text and context, performance and history, invites possibilities for rethinking the status of ephemeral events.¹³

¹³ For a discussion of “performance remains” and “ephemeral evidence,” see Rebecca Schneider, “Archives: Performance Remains,” *Performance Research*, 6/2 (2001),

Attending to temporality is critical when addressing opera, as opera performance relies upon textuality (the libretto, the written score, or instituted performance practices such as the theatricalization by the *Regie* inasmuch as it is not improvised) and upon a performance presence that is impermanent and predominantly haptic, such as the aural and corporeal realm (the resonant sphere produced by voices and the orchestra and live variables on location that shift from performance to performance) and the explicit corporeality of bodies that calls attention to the doubling effect of the theater. Indeed, I argue in Chapter one, the tension that is created in opera between the textual (theatrical realm) and the haptic (performance realm) is precisely what makes opera such a startling, exciting, and potentially “dangerous” and destabilizing art form.

Although theatricality and performance are theoretical models that have been productively adopted by scholars in many disciplines, both in the humanities and in the social sciences, a more precise meaning of theatricality and performance and especially the tension between the two concepts has been addressed by scholars in theater and performance studies, in part because of the desire to retain a degree of specificity about “theater” within the field of theater studies, and in part because those terms indicate widely divergent meanings even within disciplines.¹⁴ In colloquial usage

100–8; and José Esteban Muñoz, “Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 8/2 (1996).

¹⁴ The most important texts in theater studies addressing theatricality are Marvin Carlson, “The Resistance to Theatricality,” *Sub-stance* 31/2-3 (2002); Josette Féral, “Theatricality: the Specificity of Theatrical Language,” *Sub-stance* 31/2-3 (2002) and “Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified,” *Mimesis, Masochism, and Mime: The Politics of Contemporary French Thought*, ed. Timothy Murray (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1997), 289-300; Erika Fischer-Lichte’s “Theatricality: A Key Concept in Theater Studies,” *Theatre Research International* 20/2 (1995), 85-90; Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C Davis, “Theatricality: An Introduction,” *Theatricality*, ed. Postlewait and

“performance” indicates, as in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “an act of staging or presenting a play, concert, or other form of entertainment.” In performance studies, however, it indicates a particular dimension of the theatrical performance that I link to the operatic. Josette Féral, who skillfully differentiates theatricality and performance, argues that the two registers have independent and at times competing functions. Theatricality is the overall organizing framework, in Féral’s words, the “specific symbolic structure” that “inscribes the subject in the law and in theatrical codes” (297). Performance, on the other hand, refers to particular characteristics of a staging developed largely in the avant-garde theater of the twentieth-century that bear affinity to the theater of Artaud.¹⁵ Here, performance indicates “a theater of cruelty and violence, of the body and its drives,” a theater of “displacement and ‘disruption,’” that is both non-narrative and non-representational (289).

Féral identifies three primary characteristics of performance that help to specify the difference between performance and theatricality and thus provides a solid starting point for my analysis. First is the manipulation of an actor’s body in ways that underscore its explicit corporeality: “Performance rejects all illusion, in particular theatrical illusion originating in the repression of the body’s ‘baser’ elements, and attempts instead to call attention to certain aspects of the body--the face, gestural mimicry, and the voice--that would normally escape notice” (290). Performance makes the body, the “actor’s canvas,” somehow “conspicuous.” Repressions are “brought to

Davis, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2003); Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham UP 2004).

¹⁵ See Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*. Trans. Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Press, 1958.

light, objectified, and represented [. . .] frozen under the gaze of the spectator, who appropriates them as a form of knowledge” (290-291). Second is the manipulation of space in ways that call attention to it, “play[ing] with performance space as if it were an object” (291). Like the performing body, “space becomes existential to the point of ceasing to exist as a setting and place. It no longer surrounds and encloses the performance, but like the body, becomes part of the performance to such an extent that it cannot be distinguished from it (291-292). Within this space, “time stretches out and dissolves,” creating a “continuous present” where meaning disappears and “nothing is left but a kinesics of gesture” (292). Here, meaning is made through “the absence of meaning”. Performance “conscripts [the] subject both as a constituted subject and as a social subject in order to dislocate and demystify it” (292).

The third aspect of performance that Féral pinpoints is the artist’s relation to his own performance, in which “the performer no more plays himself that he represents himself. Instead, he is a source of production and displacement” (293). This aspect of performance “means nothing and aims for no single, specific meaning, but attempts instead to reveal places of passage,” attempting “to wake the body--the performer’s and the spectator’s--from the threatening anesthesia haunting it” (293).

For Féral, theatricality is not simply the counterpart to performance. Rather, it is the product that “arises from the play between these two realities” (297). Theatricality provides a structure all the while that performance destabilizes that very structure: “Performance, therefore, appears as a primary process lacking teleology and unaccompanied by any secondary process, since performance has nothing to represent for anyone. As a result, performance indicates the theater’s *margin* [. . .], theater’s fringes, something which is never said, but which, although hidden, is necessarily present” (297). Féral’s analysis is relevant not only to the literal theater, but also to the

play in the psychoanalytic scene between the speech of the analysand and her body. The performing presence of the explicit body undermines her (theatrical) speech indicating that all is not well. Indeed, it seems to me that the very rupture Féral describes is a rupture first identified not by Artaud, but by Freud.¹⁶

While an innovative dramaturgy might underscore the tension between the theatrical and the performing in a performance of opera, as I stated, it seems to me that the most enthralling operatic moments come precisely when the operatic voice pulls itself away from the body of the singer, defying space and time through an explicit corporeality, and taking on a resonant life of its own beyond the body of the singer. Key here is resonance, the unequivocal sound of the singer's instrument. Unlike Féral, I call the overall structure that contains the play between the theatrical realm and the performing realm operatic. Replacing theatricality with the operatic demands that the space of opera, indeed, the sum of theatricality and performance in any type of theatrical space, be conceived of as a resonant sphere. Sound must be considered as an integral part of performance.

Since I first began this study, the emergence of sound studies--yet another interdisciplinary field--comes largely as a result of innovations in media studies that trace the role of sound technology and reproduction, especially in radio and film, but

¹⁶ A number of formidable scholars have leveled criticism at Freud's model of theatrical representation, an important topic given my interests here that I revisit in Chapter three. See Jacques Derrida, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation," and "Freud and the Scene of Writing," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1978); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Theatrum Analyticum," *Mimesis, Masochism, & Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*, ed. Timothy Murray (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1997) 175-196; and Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Unconscious as Mise-en-Scène" in Murray (163-174) and "Beyond Representation," trans. Jonathan Culler, *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

also in other technologies such as the gramophone, the telephone, the Walkman, the synthesizer, and soon likely any other sounding technology excluded from that list. An increasing cooperation between the humanities and the sciences has driven much of this research, as has the development of sound and performance art, which interrogates the boundaries of the sensory experience. Historical interest in sound as an organizing principle of society and culture, and in listening as an act of subject formation have added to this scholarship, and helped to re-conceptualize the formation of (sonic) culture in the past and in the present.

As a performing medium, opera raises the question (or the problem) of listening. Rather than focus on the act of listening, however, my study here attempts to avow texts that are non-verbal while struggling to conceptualize the historical and theoretical impact of *not* listening. I strive to locate meaning both in the space of listening and in the act of not listening in order to shine light upon the relationship between aurality and the construction of modernity. In the case of fin-de-Siècle Vienna, one can understand neither aesthetics nor politics without listening to the discourses around music and opera, and the ways that both are bound up in debates regarding the “scandals” of an *operatic* theatricality.

Tending to performance also directs my focus toward the performative aspect of texts and the rhetorical power of the voices revealed in them. Like performative language, performative texts do something by saying something, though this action may actually disrupt meaning, or point toward meaning other than what is directly suggested by a text. This disruption or dissolution, what I refer to, after Shoshana Felman, as a “scandal,” is brought about by the linguistic efficacy of the performative utterance, and constitutes bodies (as well as the body politic). As I argue in Chapters

one and three, scandal undoes both the absolute sovereignty of language and the absolute intentionality of the speaking, singing (and writing) subject.

While reading Freud post-structurally grants agency to multiple registers of meaning in the text, *listening* for Freud considers the body of the subject, and thus grants agency to a performance space created by the text (in the broadest meaning of the term). An emphasis upon listening directs attention toward an *operatic* space, a space where the text acts on both a theatrical and a performing level, creating potentially multiple registers of meaning. Naming this resonant space “operatic” runs the risk of inviting potentially negative associations, given that opera is sometimes viewed as bombastic and over-the-top, a spectacle in the least favorable meaning of the term. But as I explain below, “operatic” as I use it here is meant to open up the theatrical space in order to avow sounds and bodies, gestures as well as the corporeality of the speaker and the spectator. A theatrical space that is operatic both acknowledges “scandal” and reads it as an undoing that is both inevitable and constitutive.

Despite the fact that as a model, “theatricality” has productively opened up numerous modes of analysis, historically, the term invites predominantly negative connotations. In fact, anti-theatricality, described by Jonas Barish as “a prejudice against the theater that goes as far back in European history as the theater itself can be traced” (1) has enjoyed significantly more scholarly influence than theatricality. As I discuss in Chapter three, the origins of this anti-theatrical prejudice begin with Plato, in whose work one finds, “a haunting acknowledgement of the potency of the theater leading to an all the more stinging repudiation of it” (Barish 5). Such repudiation arises from the mimetic illusion, or the doubleness between what is originary or “real” and the artist’s rendering, which can only ever be an inferior copy that is several times removed from the “truth” of the original.

In the Austrian and German context, ideas about theatricality emerge in the nineteenth-century, most notably in Marx and Nietzsche (Weber 2).¹⁷ In Marx, theatricality becomes a helpful model for describing social and cultural formations, and in Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie* tragedy is claimed to be the ultimate art, though, of course, Nietzsche later "abandon[s] the theater only to denounce it" (Barish 400). By the time Nietzsche writes *Der Fall Wagner* (1888) and *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (1889), he "stretches out a hand to the puritanical Plato of the *Republic*" to charge Wagner with "degrad[ing] into mimicry" (Barish 405) and "stand[ing] for everything cheap and specious in musical declamation" (Barish 406). German historiography regarding the early twentieth century has adopted this overwhelmingly negative view of theatricality, to a large extent because of Theodor Adorno's reading of Wagner in *Versuch über Wagner*.¹⁸ In the context of Vienna, theatricality is generally linked to the baroque and the theater of the absolute, which is to say, fascism. My intention here is not to become an apologist for the strains of Wagnerian or the baroque theatricality found in Fascism,

¹⁷ Samuel Weber, whose *Theatricality as Medium* offers, in my view, the most rigorous examination of theatricality as a philosophical concept, states that in German thought, theatricality "emerges perhaps most significantly in the early part of the nineteenth century, in what might be called the 'aftermath' of the Hegelian philosophical system and the culmination of thought it entails [. . .] and it continues to mark the work of many of the most radical writer-thinkers of that century, such as Marx and Nietzsche, to name just the most obvious and influential" (2).

¹⁸ The history of Adorno's influence upon readings of Wagner is a fascinating subject. As the scholarship on the aesthetics *and* the politics of Richard Wagner continues to drive important intellectual debates—as seen, most recently in Slavoj Žižek's foreword to Theodor Adorno's recently republished *In Search of Wagner*, "Why is Opera Worth Saving?" and Alain Badiou's *Five Lessons on Wagner*, for which Žižek penned the afterword, "Wagner, Anti-Semitism and 'German Ideology,'"—it is evident that the full impact of the political and libidinal economies of Wagner remain a central question. See Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (NY: Vergo, 2010) and Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (NY: Vergo, 2010).

but to differentiate constellations of theatricality in order to see it as a potentially constitutive sphere. Freudian theatricality, in other words, is radically different from Wagnerian theatricality.

Despite Nietzsche's profound ambivalence toward Richard Wagner, by the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, Wagner's dramatic reforms had made it impossible for modernist thinkers to avoid thinking about theatricality (Puchner 32).¹⁹ Whether artists loved or loathed Wagner, his innovations made attention to theater and theatricality a fundamental question of modernist work. In Viennese cultural aesthetics, Wagner's influence cannot be overstated. After Wagner, composers emphatically sought new models of both harmonic and theatrical innovation. The beginning of "Operatic Modernism," which Michael Steinberg dates to directly after Wagner's death, "seeks emancipation from the hold of Wagner, Wagnerism, and its nationalist mythology" (Steinberg 2006 631). Operatic modernism is post-national, "European, international, and emancipatory," in response to the "historical and political referents [that, for Wagner, were] German, nationalistic, and hegemonic" (Steinberg 2006 632). What makes German and other European opera post-Wagnerian, specifically, is how it comes to terms with Wagnerian theatricality.

¹⁹ In *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama*, comparatist Martin Puchner convincingly argues that Wagner's reforms make theatricality a central concern for modernism writ large. He states, "Wagner's pivotal role with respect to modernism was transforming the concept of theatricality from a description of the theater as an art form--defining what happens onstage--into a value that must be either rejected or embraced. With slight exaggeration one could claim that after Wagner it was no longer possible to take a neutral position with respect to the theater; after Wagner one had to declare one's allegiance to the theater or come forward with a critique of its value. Thus Wagner can be said to have polarized the cultural field of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe, and even outside Europe, around theatricality (32)."

As I stated at the outset, this study is divided into two sections. Chapters one and two discuss methodological considerations for thinking about voice in opera and sound in literature. The second half discusses Freud's relationship to music and his views on representation in the theater. Chapter one addresses the materiality of voice in opera production, proposing a shift away from methodological models that posit voice as silent and disembodied towards one in which the body figures central. I explain how in most theoretical models, voice inhabits the space of either excess or lack, and thus resides along side various forms of alterity at the margins of philosophy. Comparing the voice in opera with the voice of the performative utterance, I assess the relevance of performativity to opera studies, distinguishing between Derrida's critique, after Heidegger, of the "metaphysics of presence" and the presence of performance. This leads to a discussion of the "force" of the vocal utterance and its relationship to the real via Shoshana Felman's *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*. My central argument is that voice upsets the model of distanced reason upon which enlightened subjectivity depends.

Although media studies has been a driving force behind much recent scholarship in the area of sound studies, in chapter two, I revisit the issue of sound and textuality vis-à-vis a critique of an expedition led by Friedrich Kittler to the coast of Italy to acoustically "verify" a sonic trace of Homer's Sirens. My critique of post-structuralism's over-attachment to the text takes a different turn here, in that I explore how sound can be present in a (silent) literary text; my intervention is thus a recuperation of textuality and the sonic remains therein. Part of this intervention is a commentary on the fondness of media theory to fetishize technology, as though the text (or the song) itself is not a technological medium. The other part of this intervention has to do with the sexual politics of media theory, which, at least in this case, lapses into

an unreflective masculine discourse in which “knowledge” emanates from the domain of the (male) theorist rather than the text.

My discussion of the Sirens episode in Homer’s *Odyssey* explores what a close reading of the text reveals about the textual status of sonic phenomena in general, and considers the temptation to embellish the absence of (live) resonance with a fiercely exaggerated iconography written after the fact. Taking up Horkheimer and Adorno’s reading of the Sirens in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, this chapter attempts to articulate and to bridge the untenable divide between nature and culture. Turning to Kafka’s *Das Schweigen die Sirenen*, I suggest that the tension between listening and reasoning is driven less by the silence in a text than in the politics of power and possession.

In chapter three, I turn to Freud’s “problem” with music, and to the text in which Freud states that he is “almost incapable” of enjoying music, “The Moses of Michelangelo.” I argue that Freud’s problem with music is far more a problem with cultural anxieties around theatricality, and that Freud intentionally depicts himself as an ideal Platonic subject who, like Michaelangelo’s Moses, distances himself from the scandal of theatricality in order to demonstrate discipline and self-restraint. By contextualizing Freud’s disavowal of music in the context of fin-de-Siècle Vienna, this chapter contends that the stakes of Freud’s self-representation as a textual thinker signals his distance from noise, sound, and music, which are coded as “dangerous,” “noisy,” and “Jewish.” Freud’s self-fashioning as a rational scientist thus distances him from a line of thinking that Gregory Moore calls “chains of associations linking hysteria, histrionics and the Jew” in which both “modern music” and “theatricality” are highly loaded anti-Semitic signifiers. That these particular chains of association are articulated in Nietzsche’s *Der Fall Wagner* is no coincidence, I argue, as Wagner’s theatricality is both the source and the consternation of Freud’s larger cultural concern.

Chapter four directly addresses first Wagnerian and then Freudian theatricality, examining Freud's relationship to the Wagnerian Cultural Politics of his Vienna, especially during his university years. The first important intervention of this chapter has to do with Freud's views on theatrical representation, which I examine through his work together with Max Graf; the second is the importance Freud attaches to the role of identification in the theatrical process. I propose that Freud's "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage" is written for Graf with not only opera, but in particular, Wagnerian opera in mind in an attempt to articulate a holistic representational model that is pointedly anti-Wagnerian. Indeed, Freud's introduction of identification into the theatrical process radically distances him from Wagnerism and the theatricality of what in 1906, Graf calls "*Massenherrschaft*": "*Der Dramatiker [Wagner] kennt nur ein Ziel: [die] Menge unter seinen Willen zu zwingen*" (110). At stake for Freud is thus the relationship between theatrical representation and the building of community. Freud's own "theater of the future" should be read less as a statement about the aesthetics of the theater than as an aesthetics related to the crisis of modernity.

CHAPTER 1
THE OPERATIC SCANDAL OF THE SINGING BODY:
VOICE, PRESENCE, PERFORMATIVITY

Vocal Impasse: The “Ventriloquist’s Dummy”

In her book *Unsung Voices*, arguably the strongest musicological consideration of voice in opera, Carolyn Abbate has shown that in Rousseau’s *Essay on the Origin of Languages* and Paul de Man’s critique thereof, “both writers revert to music at a moment of crisis in the argument, a moment when proof fails and the discussion becomes a performance (18). “Music” becomes a refuge for theoretical arguments that have reached a logical impasse. In a “linguistic universe,” Abbate states, music is turned into a “ventriloquist’s dummy, who can be made to speak any interpretation.” In other words, discourse molds music to serve a particular purpose dictated not by the attributes of music, but by the structural necessity of theory. Abbate’s work points towards the cleft not only between language and music, but also between language and the non-linguistic, those entities that can be heard but that “cannot speak for [themselves] in language.”²⁰ In this context, Rousseau and de Man are only symptoms of a larger

²⁰ Abbate states that music ‘ possesses a meaning that is notoriously indefinable’, a position that gestures towards Vladimir Jankélévitch’s description of music as ‘ the ineffable’. I think of this somewhat differently, for the task, it seems, is not to provide a definition of what music is or what it ‘ represents’, but to investigate both what it does and how it produces meanings on multiple registers. In terms of what music does, I am thinking specifically along the lines of performativity, and as regards meaning production, of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s description of the “phenomena contributing to the constitution of meaning without being meaning themselves”. See Gumbrecht, “A Farewell to Interpretation,” in

intellectual problem in which the logic of the text is both pervasive and constitutive. Textuality so permeates the language of modernity—and at its core the ideology of European Enlightenment—that a methodological analysis of non-textual modes of knowledge and perception is both a conceptual and linguistic challenge.

While the “literary turn” directed the attention of opera studies toward libretti and toward other elements of opera productions that can be read—“for example,” says David Levin, “the music, the stage directions, and the preparation, presentation, and reception of the work, in short, texts”(4-5)—in this chapter I propose that opera calls for a negotiation of discursive systems that fall outside the realm of textuality. This proposal could hardly be called a critique of reading, for it is precisely the act of reading opera’s texts closely that has exposed this art form’s “competing modes of complicated referentiality” and their attendant difficulties (Levin 10). What I am after here, rather, is something that a preoccupation with reading as the legitimate mode of analysis and the resulting metaphysics of the text largely overlook because they forget to listen: how a resonant voice acts and how it participates in the creation, disruption or dissolution of registers of meaning independent of linguistic signification. In a philosophical world that brackets opera as a special form of artistic production—and voice its infamous peculiarity—it is precisely this peculiarity that scandalizes the metaphysics of the text. I do not wish to denigrate analyses of referentiality or to advocate an abandonment of

Materialities of Communication, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Stanford, 1994), 398. See also Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003).

interpretation, but to examine how attending to a resonant voice further complicates those already very difficult tasks.

Of course, voice has long been a topic of philosophical concern, though like “music” in Rousseau and de Man, the term often stands in as a place-marker for something unarticulated or inarticulable, taking on a rhetorical task in the service of a theoretical argument and thus performing rather than meaning. In recent years scholarship outside of opera studies has become increasingly aware of the discrepancy between the “metaphorization of the voice” and “its material articulation and audibility,” especially as media theory has granted agency to forms of media other than the scriptural and the technological.²¹ As the human voice emerges as a philosophical problem at the very core of modernity, I want to remove the parentheses from opera in order to allow the operatic voice to speak to (or to sing to) the theoretical problem I have described.

In the context of opera studies, however, this move is complicated by problematic interpretive traditions. For one, opera studies is deeply invested in theories of vocal disembodiment. Furthermore, in methods of analysis that have been key to many post-structural readings of opera, voice, and operatic *mise-en-scène*, especially (though sometimes only implicitly) Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derridean deconstruction, voice is less a “ventriloquist’s dummy” than a marker of the impasses within these theories. Both Lacan and Derrida rely on a vacillation between the extremes of either excess and lack or presence and absence to create a foundational tension between subjects and objects, and it is precisely at the hazy

²¹ See Cornelia Epping-Jäger and Erika Linz, “Einleitung,” *Medien/Stimmen*, ed. Epping-Jäger and Linz (Cologne, 2003). 7–15.

limits of these extremes that “voice” comes into play. As such, the term marks a seemingly always inadmissible value at the cost of becoming devoid of content and paradoxically silent. Like the material body, historically laden with gendered and racial attributes, voice slips surreptitiously into a position of silent alterity, strangely disenfranchised from corporeality and unable to resound.

While fields outside of musicology have begun to take a keen interest in the materiality and audibility of voice, opera studies has given the idea scant attention, as though voice were only a minor feature of the art form. Despite the central role of the singer’s body in the production of opera and the production of voice, opera studies persists in thinking of voice as extra-corporeal. Carnal voices are either lacking or absent, marked by what they do not do, operative through failure or negativity, or envisioned as supra-objects that are off the scale, excessively loud (and thus impossible to register or to be perceived as material) and potentially “violent.” As for the body of the singer, opera studies has tended to ignore it altogether unless it possesses currency as the object of desire or of a fetish. And when this happens, both the body and voice of the singer become secondary to the affect or erotic desire of the spectator.

The conviction that the operatic voice operates primarily on the registers of excess and lack and that it is both immaterial and disembodied, so widespread in opera studies, stems largely from the role assigned to voice in Lacanian psychoanalysis.²² In this chapter I take a decided step back from the Lacanian

²² Space constraints preclude an exegesis here of the function of the voice in either Lacanian psychoanalysis or in those musicological texts that draw on Lacan and his readers. In general, however, I would advocate a more critical use of the

tradition, turning instead towards voice as it appears in theories of performativity and in deconstruction's critique of performativity. I make this move not because psychoanalysis is uninteresting or irrelevant to an interpretation of opera; on the contrary. But it is worth remembering that what interests Lacan is the role of the voice in the constitution of the subject's unconscious, a function to which the (material) aesthetics of the operatic voice should certainly not be reduced or limited.²³ Indeed, it is remarkable that in Lacanian theory, voice is both a metaphorical and literal "gap." In a noteworthy symbolic gesture, Dylan Evans omits an entry for the term in his *Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, signaling that he grants it no agency significant enough to warrant an acknowledgement by name. At the same time, Evans defines "gap" as a "fundamental rupture between man and nature," explaining that in French, gap

idea of vocal "disembodiment" in opera studies. Kaja Silverman's *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1988) has been widely influential, and although Silverman was one of the first scholars to acknowledge the importance of voice in Lacanian psychoanalysis, it would be productive to revisit both Lacan and Silverman's reading of him taking into account the correctives of later readers such as Joan Copjec and Ellie Ragland. See Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (Cambridge and London, 1994); and Ragland, "The Relation Between the Voice and the Gaze", in *Reading Seminar XI. Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink and Maire Jaanus (Albany, 1995), 187–203.

²³ What is it about voice that lends itself to the particular dynamics of excess and lack? Because voice is both abstract and material, it conveniently accommodates a task that is both elusive and concrete. Voice is like water, a material that can be held in hand, but never held fast. In its magical fluidity, voice is inextricably bound up with the condition of language, and yet is something more than language that is impossible to pin down or to control. Lacanian theory acts out the unconscious wish to bind the body to language while at the same time performing the impossibility of controlling voice through either language or theory. Somehow voice and its body always elude capture.

(*béance*), “is an antiquated literary term that means a “large hole or opening,”” but that it “is also a scientific term used in medicine to denote the opening of the larynx” (Evans 71). Given that the larynx is the upper part of the trachea containing the vocal chords, Evans (after Lacan) slips, in effect, from gap (*béance*), to large hole, to vocal anatomy—a slip that for Lacan can be no accident. When Ellie Ragland states that the voice operates “at the level of real impasses, functioning as a nodal point (or a knot of meanings) unassimilated in knowledge as such,” (187) her claim is broadly applicable, an important point to which I shall return.

Whether drawing from the psychoanalytic or deconstructive tradition, the difficult task when examining opera performance is to find a productive method with which to grapple with the operatic “real”: “real” voice, “real” music, “real” body, all those elements to which one might less problematically refer as opera’s material. Abbate has consistently called for such a focus, suggesting already over a decade ago that voice be “embodied within the live performance of a work” (*Unsung* X). From the perspective of performance studies, however, it seems contradictory to call for vocal embodiment and then to call voices “unsung.” Where are the spoken voices, the sung voices, the emanating voices that can be heard? In her more recent book *In Search of Opera*, Abbate reiterates that performance is fundamental to the operatic making of music, but then constructs voice as either a “dead object” that resonates with the “master voice” of the composer or as an excessive force that she refers to as a “violent physical resonance” (*Search* 5-6). While Abbate has advocated for a bridge between the musical “work” and the materiality of performance for some time, her theoretical

strategies tend to relegate voice to conceptual extremes in order to avoid grappling with vocal material.²⁴ The bridge between a “work” and the materiality of performance could well become what the field of opera studies is best poised to articulate, however, because opera performance calls for a critical engagement that both reads and listens, analyses and experiences. The impetus for this chapter comes, then, from the promise of opera. Although opera scholars have been ambitious in engaging with the theoretical interventions of post-structuralism, critical theory’s predominant focus on visuality and textuality has created some assumptions about voice and body that opera’s potential (theoretical) critique might both contest and undo.

The problem with the construction of voice as at once substantively absent and violently present is that it unintentionally adopts a logic parallel to the European Enlightenment’s construction of the “noble savage,” who is marked by timelessness, mysteriousness, femininity, barbarism, and an inevitable violence that must be contained, “mitigated through control of a superior culture” (Antliff and Leighton 179). Thinking of voice as possessed by the “master’s voice” takes away the performer’s agency to participate in the creative and interpretative process and neglects its material effects in anything but their most destructive manifestation. Of course, the suspicion that sound somehow disrupts reason is far older than the Enlightenment: Abbate finds it in Orpheus, whose decapitated but still singing head she calls a “master symbol for performance,” a “dead object” that “is a musical instrument, an object given life as long as a master plays it” (Abbate,

²⁴ Abbate, “Music–Drastic or Gnostic?” *Critical Inquiry*, 30 (Spring 2004), 505–536.

In Search of Opera, 5–6). Underlying vocal resonance in opera is thus a seemingly always primary violence, a “savage” dismemberment and decapitation by unreason that is then mitigated by reason: classical music or the “master voice” of the composer.²⁵ Musical resonance and especially the singing voice remain potentially “violent,” but are either domesticated by music or placed in a theatrical cage to guarantee “safe” exhibition by the distanced spectator.

Abbate cannot be taken to task for naming an unsavory cultural fantasy, and her discussions of literary, filmic and operatic instances in which voice becomes a “dead object” are compelling. But rather than see these examples as evidence of a cultural fascination with the powers and problems of voice, she conflates cultural fascination with reality, assuming that artistic portrayals of voice as a “dead object” render it a “dead object” in live performance:

One must not forget the obverse, the persistent vision of performers as dead matter, subject to mortification and reanimation. This vision is not just an outrageous fantasy, in which anxieties about performers’ real power have given rise to unpleasant falsifications. Certain realities of performance lend credence to its assumptions about deadness and artificial life. (Abbate, *In Search of Opera* 9)

We are left wondering precisely which “realities of performance” reinforce this idea of operatic deadness, or why a “persistent vision of performers as dead matter” in fictional works should be equated with the voice and operatic

²⁵ Confounding these problems in Abbate’s most recent work is the fact that she frames her analysis as grounded in a discourse of ethics, guided specifically by the moral philosophy of Jankélévitch. See Abbate, “Music–Drastic or Gnostic?” and Carolyn Abbate, “Jankélévitch’s Singularity.”

performance. In a roundabout way Abbate seems to gesture towards the complex web of consciousness, the experience and ontology of being that is teased out by voice, music, and operatic performance—a very important move, to be sure—but stops short of conceiving of voice as a constitutive force in this web or of opera as an art form that can enliven debates about the ontology of being, both in and out of live performance.

Turning toward operatic performance is surely the right impulse for exploring ways to think about material voices that resound, though simply turning does not necessarily help us out of the textual conundrum I have described. Interpretations that set a particular operatic *mise-en-scène* in relief against the work “itself” have become a common strategy for teasing out manifest and latent contents of a work and its performance. But rather than asking what a work and a performance are, or how a specific staging illuminates or comments on aspects of a work’s meaning, we might examine what a performance does; that is, how a performance generates or disrupts levels of meaning by doing. The two approaches are not mutually exclusive, although hermeneutic readings of opera have tended to overlook issues of performativity because they search for an ultimate truth that can be either represented or somehow excavated through a live staging. Being attentive to performativity means looking for ways that performance may expose “truth” by disruption as well as complementarity.

It is perhaps performativity’s avowal of disruption that has caused the term to be so over-used, the notion of “performativity” incorrectly used to stand in for performances and interpretations in which “anything goes.” Abbate is thus skeptical about the relevance of performativity to musical performance, calling it a

“catchword” and noting that it generally yields insights having to do with textuality, and thus “misses a mark not so easy to define (Abbate, “Music–Drastic or Gnostic?” 507–8.) She proposes attending to live performance, assuming that this provides direct access to the operative “real,” as though liveness were the condition that creates the possibility for direct access, and as if the ontology of the “real” musical object were conceptually self-evident. This is an awkward stance, and not only because performativity is so central to discussions of liveness in performance studies. Abbate relies on multiply repeated phrases such as “actual live,” “actual performance,” “real performance,” “the event itself,” and especially “real music,” without once calling the status of the “real” into question. This circumvents several of the most prominent and unresolved philosophical debates of the twentieth century, including the notorious problem of the “metaphysics of presence.” Alive to the danger, Abbate attempts to pre-empt objections by warning that adopting a deconstructive apparatus and scoffing at presence like a man can truly seem perverse when real music is at issue. Unlike another aural phenomena—language or literature in oral form—real music does not propose a “simultaneity of sound and sense” that in thus positing a signifier and signified can itself be “convincingly deconstruct[ed].” Real music is a temporal event with material presence that can be held by no hand. So why assume that musical sound made in time by the labor of performance is well served by recourse to a philosophical tradition that indeed deconstructs presence, but does so easily because it traffics exclusively in metaphysical objects? (Abbate, ‘ Music–Drastic or

Gnostic?' 531)²⁶ However, it is worth recalling that deconstruction's critique is of presence less than of "the metaphysics of presence." And while "presence" may have a very different valence in studies of music, music's difference does not make it immune to a nuanced and differentiated post-structuralist critique. Rather than reject post-structuralism out of hand, it seems more productive not to yet again bracket music and especially opera as "special cases," but to allow their differences to speak to the problems of post-structuralism: to lend an ear, so to speak, to those who have been less adept at listening. For the problems that listening exposes offer a critique that is as relevant and urgent to the materiality of language as it is to music. Abbate isolates music from post-structuralism because "phenomena that are events may not be particularly susceptible to a philosophical tradition in which the metaphysics of the subject or insights of Saussurean linguistics are basic sustenance" (Abbate on Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Jean-Luc Nancy, in ' Music-Drastic or Gnostic?' 531). But "phenomena that are events" are precisely what performance studies addresses without rejecting post-structuralism or cordoning itself off from theoretical affinities not designed with "events" in mind. Opera studies might gain by following this lead rather than embracing "performance" on the one hand while ignoring the scholarship of performance studies on the other. The questions that emerge are what is to be done with "the real" and what is the status of performance's "material" if it is not to become reductively subjective or empirically deterministic.

²⁶ The passages quoted by Abbate are from Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1989).

Voice and Performative Utterance

The concept of performative utterance, formulated almost half a century ago by J. L. Austin, describes an utterance “in which to *say* something is to *do* something; or in which *by saying* or *in saying* something we are doing something” (12). But Austin was lamentably silent on the role of the voice. How is the voice that resounds related to Austin’s notion of utterance, and how does it function for those who take up Austin’s questions about performativity? If it is possible to do something by saying something, then it must be possible to do something by singing something; but how does the status of the utterance change according to the register of resonance? And what exactly does the vocal utterance *do* if this doing is not a linguistic act?

The category of performativity opens up a space in which to interrogate acts of utterance as material events and to investigate the effects of those events. Simply put, a performative orientation potentially redirects the term “utter” from its use as an adjective meaning “extreme, absolute, complete, entire, total” to a verb that denotes, in *The Oxford English Dictionary’s* first definition, “to put . . . forth or upon the market.” The conceptual shift from adjective to verb is crucial. As a verb, “to utter” indicates an agency to act, to put something of substance into circulation. Hence, “to utter” must happen in tandem with a medium—bodily or otherwise—that undertakes the action of the verb, for the act requires an actor. Of course, the medium that utters could be a technological apparatus used to reproduce, replay, amplify, simulate or even distort the mode of utterance. The medium at work in

opera performance, however, is the carnal body, the *Urmedium* of the live speech act.²⁷

The means by which this *Urmedium* brings forth the live speech act is the human voice. Although the term “voice” is generally employed without explanation or modification, its meanings within theoretical discourse are neither apparent nor stable. In theoretical language, “voice” appears to operate in three registers: first and most common is the first-person singular voice of the subject that often substitutes for identity and subjectivity. This category includes the individual voice, the narrative voice, and the authorial voice that reveals interiority and carves out distinctions between individual and collective bodies. Second is the voice that emanates from outside the subject, the voice that calls the subject into being. This appears as the voice of God, the Althusserian hail, “hey, you there!” that names the individual as a subject of ideology, or the voice of the Other in Lacan that calls the subject into law.²⁸ For both Lacan and Althusser, voice is associated with a performative act fundamentally tied to the voice of ideology or law. Mladen Dolar likens it to the sounding of the shofar at religious ritual, proclaiming that, “there is no Law without the voice” (27).

Most important for my purposes is a third type of voice, a multiplicitous voice that emanates as force. The force of a performative utterance has been

²⁷ Bernhard Waldenfels calls voice an “Urmedium” in his “Stimme als Leitfaden des Leibes” in Epping-Jäger and Linz.

²⁸ According to Althusser, voice names the subject and calls him into being, though he is interpellated into ideology specularly. See Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, ed. Ben Brewster (New York, 1971), 127–86.

interpreted as causing effect or injury according to the impact of its meaning and has thus been linked to power and to violence. Force, or what one might refer to as simply “linguistic efficacy,” is seen as dependent on some kind of context—either social or linguistic—because meaning is not absolute. For Austin the force of a performative utterance is reliant on social context, for Pierre Bourdieu on social power and vested authority, and for Derrida on a break from linguistic structure.²⁹ But the nature of that vocal force is surely altered when the performative act is non-linguistic. Force thus concerns not only linguistic efficacy, but also matter and energy. The third type of voice can thus be heard as having two separate aspects: the voice that is constituted by matter and the voice that engenders material effect. Derrida refers to the first of these as “sonorous substance,” “the physical voice,” the “body of speech in the world” (16). The second is the voice that is implicated by the bodily force of performative utterance in the theories of Shoshana Felman and Judith Butler, and, in particular, in what Felman refers to as the “scandal of the speaking body” (5)

The bodily force of performative utterance needs to be distinguished from the trope of “violent force” found in post-structuralist critiques of language that

²⁹ In addition to Austin, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1977), and Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, 1991); Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” in *Limited INC*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston 1988), 1–23. This essay first appeared in English translation in *Glyph I* (1977). It also appears, translated by Alan Bass, in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago, 1982). For a discussion of “force” as it relates to performative utterance, see Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London, 1997).

collapse the categories of power, force and violence.³⁰ While a number of scholars have taken an interest in the potential of language to inflict violence on the body, all too often the “violence” associated with vocal resonance (as distinct from the linguistic force of “speech”) is constructed as a destructive force laden with “primitivist” undertones that can be traced at least to the Enlightenment, and specifically to the “ideological construct of colonial conquest and exploitation” (Antliff and Leighton 170).³¹ If the voice in operatic performance produces a material effect of the body on the body—and here I mean body in the broadest sense, from the body on the stage to the body politic—it remains to be seen to what extent this effect can be thought of as a constitutive force in the artistic process. Indeed, if the force of vocal resonance does violence to anything, it is to the absolute sovereignty of language and thus the absolute intentionality of the speaking subject. The undoing of absolute sovereignty is not a violently destructive act, an act that inflicts pain or injury, but an act that *undoes* pain and injury. It is a constructive—even *revolutionary*—act that hinders absolutism, an act constitutive of the subject coming into being. Rather than put “philosophy out of commission,” what opera does, ultimately, is to present philosophy with a fundamental *scandal* by calling into question the very sovereignty of reason.

³⁰ For an outline of the matrix power–force–violence, see Beatrice Hanssen, “The Violence of Language,” in *Critique of Violence: Between Poststructuralism and Critical Theory* (London and New York, 2000), 158–85.

³¹ For works on the violent potential of language, see Butler, *Excitable Speech*; Mari J. Matsuda, et al., eds., *Words that Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment* (Boulder, 1993); Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, 1985).

The brilliance of Austin's philosophy of language lies in his distinction between constative utterance and performative utterance. For Austin, the context of enunciation is what allows for the felicity of performative utterances; utterances can be felicitous only inasmuch as they fulfill the socially recognized conditions that determine their success. This is the point around which Derrida begins what Stanley Cavell refers to as his "virulently influential" () reading of Austin in "Signature Event Context," the springboard for the famously contentious debate between Derrida and John Searle, as well as the point Bourdieu takes up in his development of the concept of bodily "*habitus*." Ultimately, Austin's project is explicitly concerned with linguistic effect, not vocal effect: he suggests the possibility of acting with *words*, not *voice*. Nevertheless, voice must be wrapped up in achieving linguistic effect, even if Austin fails to account for its participation in the act of utterance. As a condition of enunciation, the manner in which an utterance is spoken—whether whispered, snarled, screamed, murmured, hissed or mumbled—must surely enter into the equation of its variability, for manner is ultimately part and parcel of what makes an utterance felicitous or infelicitous. Whereas in deconstruction and psychoanalysis the voice does not need to raise itself—it can remain an internal or even unconscious monologue, never needing to "utter" or to expose itself—in Austin it cannot stay quiet. It must say something in order to act.

Shoshana Felman's reading of Austin in *The Literary Speech Act* comes much closer to implicating the agency of voice in the performative act inasmuch as she

emphasizes that a speech act is a bodily act.³² For her, in fact, the speech act cannot be an act without the body. Because her understanding of performativity comes as much from the philosophy of language as from psychoanalysis, Felman recognizes that the body participates in every human act, speech or otherwise, to reveal something other than what is revealed intentionally by the ego through language. In her study of Austin and the figure of Don Juan, the crux of the matter is the infelicitous relationship between language and body, which constantly conspire against each other:

If the problem of the human act thus consists in the relation between language and body, it is because the act is conceived—by performative analysis as well as by psychoanalysis—as that which problematizes at one and the same time the separation and the opposition between the two. The act, an enigmatic and problematic production of the *speaking body*, destroys from its inception the metaphysical dichotomy between the domain of the “mental” and the domain of the “physical,” breaks down the opposition between body and spirit, between matter and language. (65)

Thus for Felman performative language is less a speech act than an “encounter . . . between act and language” (66). She calls this encounter “scandalous” because the body always and inevitably undermines intentional language. That is, the unconscious inserts itself through the body’s physical

³² Felman’s emphasis on the body has a noteworthy history given the recent reissue of her book in English under the literally translated title of the French, *Le Scandale du corp parlant*, rather than the title under which first English edition was published: *The Literary Speech Act*. Having “lost the body in its initial translation,” Felman’s book, according to Judith Butler, “regains its body with this publication, which is just, since the body is crucial.” See Butler, “Afterword,” (113–23).

comportment to do and to undo language. As Judith Butler puts it, “the speech act says more, or says differently, than it means to say”(10). This is absolutely crucial, partly because it is precisely the point that Derrida gets wrong in his critique of Austin.

When Austin defines conditions for the success of a performative utterance, Derrida accuses him of discovering “an exhaustively definable context, of a free consciousness present to the totality of the operation, and of absolutely meaningful speech [*vouloir-dire*] master of itself: the teleological jurisdiction of an entire field whose organizing center remains intention” (Derrida Signature 15). Derrida’s larger charge here, of course, is that Austin’s felicitous performatives smack of the “metaphysics of presence” that Derrida has struggled so hard to undo. In other words, Derrida thinks that Austin’s felicitous speech act is felicitous in that it purports to know exactly what it does and thus relies on a facetiously absolute foundation that makes the speaker the “master” of his aims.

In fact, Felman demonstrates that Austin’s discovery achieves precisely the opposite. Felman generously (and only indirectly) attributes Derrida’s mistake to a problem in translation, a “missed encounter—between English and French,” although she also remarks that those missing each other articulate these encounters “in their Donjuanian fashion” and characterizes the exchange between British and “continental” philosophers as a “dialogue of the deaf.” Reading Austin, Felman and Derrida back to back, one gets the sense that Derrida also acts with his language, though his is an act in the sense of “acting out.” The aggressivity with which he responds to Austin and the fact that this aggressive stance has for many years dominated the reception of Austin’s theory makes one wonder just what

unconscious truth lies deeply buried in Austin's text. What is it in Austin that Derrida (and many of his followers) feel unconsciously compelled to repress?

Though they approach similar problems in markedly different ways, both Derrida and Austin are invested in unseating absolute philosophical foundations. The major difference between the two, however, is the disruption of knowledge through the status of the *body*. Felman proposes that in Austin the scandal consists in the fact that the act cannot *know what it is doing*, that the act (of language) subverts both consciousness and knowledge (of language). The "unconscious" is the discovery, not only of the radical divorce or breach between act and knowledge, between constative and performative, but also (and in this lies the scandal of Austin's ultimate discovery) of their undecidability and their constant interference (67). Here the speech act is not only tied to the body; the body imposes its own agency on the linguistic act. An utterance may be guided by knowledge, meaning and intent, but the body constantly interferes with those registers, inserting its own "knowledge," "meaning" and "intent," and thus tempering and tampering with the speech act. Butler explains it this way: "Insofar as a speech act knows not what it does, the claim is a kind of performative, a form of doing, that is clearly not the product of the sovereign 'I', a doing at odds with an intending, in persistent divergence from itself" (Afterword 120-121). In Felman's reading of Austin, that which causes interference, that disrupts the "sovereign I," is corporeality. Derrida's difficulty, it would seem, is not with Austin's philosophy, but with his insistence that what disrupts philosophy is not of the mind at all. It is

corporeality out of control, awkward bodies that disrupt the priority of thought, and oftentimes when we least expect it.³³

If in many ways Felman pulls out all the stops in her reading of Austin, Butler is much more tentative. For Butler, the scandal produced by the body in the speech act is what produces “the excess in speech that must be read along with, and often against, the propositional content of what is said” (Butler 152). Herein, then, lies a crucial difference between Felman and Butler. While Butler acknowledges that the speech act communicates on the bodily level, for her the “excess” of the speech act is inevitably something non-corporeal: either desire or meaning. In Butler, the body remains crucial inasmuch as it participates in (the disruption of) signification. Thus, the body (and the voice) ultimately remain locked in service of the metaphysical, veering cautiously away from substance and immediacy. Given her concern for the subject’s negotiation of social and political space, it is striking that Butler avoids the very means by which the subject’s body negotiates these boundaries.

Felman, on the other hand, avows both bodily matter and the materiality of bodily effects, although for her, as for Butler, voice remains unattached to the body. Felman is right to call the body the “instrument” of speech, but what is the agency

³³ Julia A. Walker has argued that Derrida’s anti-performative bias is partly due to the negative influence of Antonin Artaud’s “Theatre of Cruelty,” which Derrida believed promoted an immediate form of (bodily) representation marked by the “metaphysics of presence.” Walker points out that Derrida fails to account for the differences between speech and writing, and argues, as I do, that both “vocal” and “pantomimic signification” can create, augment, and/or reverse the presumed meaning of words by calling upon bodily comportment, gesture, and affect.” See her “Why Performance? Why Now? Textuality and the Rearticulation of Human Presence,” *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 16/1 (2003), 149–75

of voice as part of this instrument? What are the effects of voice, as contained within or opposed to the effects of the generic category “body,” and how are these effects measurable? How, for example, are tone, pitch and intonation in their own way “scandalous”? How does the voice act performatively, apart from merely being the (silent) vehicle for the utterance? As anyone who has ever heard opera knows, the singing voice has moments where it tears language apart, or tears itself apart from language. Certainly the voice as well as and in addition to the body, says more, or says differently, than it means to say.

Voice, Presence and the “Metaphysics of Presence”

Although orthodox Derridaeans might dismiss my frustrations as guided by an impossible quest for a voice tainted by the “metaphysics of presence,” a careful reading of Derrida is required in order to ascertain to what extent this criticism might be valid. For Derrida, as for Lacan, the status of the voice has to do with the relationship between subject and object. This relationship is explored in *Speech and Phenomena*, in which Derrida criticizes Husserl’s reliance on voice as a transcendent category in the establishment of a theory of signs.³⁴ In Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, the crux of the matter is how language produces meaning through the “indicative” and the “expressive,” or, the status of the subject in relation to the object. Derrida’s critique centers on Husserl’s insistence on “the unity of thought and voice in logos” (74) a.k.a. “logocentrism.” Derrida counters Husserl’s claim by positing that “the prerogative of being cannot withstand the deconstruction of the

³⁴ Coincidentally, a literal translation of Derrida’s title in the original French, *La Voix et le phénomène*, would read: *Voice and Phenomena*.

word," an act that exposes "an unfailing complicity . . . between idealization and speech [*voix*]" (74).

According to Derrida, Husserl's theory of signs presupposes the following illusion: "Phonic signs ('acoustical images' in Saussure's sense, or the phenomenological voice) are heard [*entendus* = 'heard' plus ' 'understood'] by the subject who proffers them in the absolute proximity of their present" (76). David Allison usefully characterizes the "phenomenological voice" as "the silent speech [that] stands as a pure phenomenon," not to be confused with "the actually uttered sound complex itself" (x1). The "complicity" between "voice and ideality" to which Derrida takes exception stems from the idea that "[w]hen I speak, it belongs to the phenomenological essence of this operation that *I hear myself* [*je m'entende*] at the same time that I speak. The signifier, animated by my breath and by the meaning-intention . . . is in absolute proximity to me" (77). This sense of proximity produces the illusion of "auto-affection," or, in other words, Husserl's fallacy that "the unity of sound and voice . . . is the sole case to escape the distinction between what is worldly and what is transcendental" (79). To counter this fallacy, Derrida proposes that the "theme of a pure inwardness of speech," or of the "hearing oneself speak," "is radically contradicted by 'time itself'" (86). "Time," Derrida states, "cannot be an 'absolute subjectivity' precisely because it cannot be conceived on the basis of a present and the self-presence of a present being" (86). "*Difference*," the name Derrida gives for "the operation of differing which at one and the same time both fissures and retards presence," shatters Husserl's illusion of the "metaphysics of presence."

It would be difficult to contradict Derrida's critique of the "metaphysics of presence," but, indeed, it is not necessary to do so in order to negotiate the immense hurdle that it places before a potential critique of what one might call "the logic of absence" that has emerged in its place. What Derrida critiques is the founding of metaphysics on the illusion of presence—that is, what Leonard Lawlor calls the "valorization of presence" or "presence as a foundation"—not necessarily the ontology of presence, a category that must be further interrogated. Lawlor points out that the metaphysics of presence "has decided that the meaning of being is presence either as subject or of object or as their unity," but that Derrida "never contests the founding validity of presence: there can be no foundation without presence" (2-3). Although Derrida convincingly makes the case that the subject's experience of an absolute presence in speech is an illusion, Derrida does not claim that experience is a fallacy. To claim that time is ruptured and that an event does not happen in an immediately present time does not deny that an event happens in time; one cannot throw out the concept of temporality altogether. One must differentiate between a "metaphysics of presence" and a philosophical analysis of material events, even as we acknowledge that there is no experience of material events in a present time that is fundamentally absolute.

The material event—the materiality of voice—seems to be where Derrida is headed when he states near the final words of his essay: "It remains, then, for us to *speak*, to make our voices *resonate* throughout the corridors in order to make up for [*suppléer*] the breakup of presence" (104). Although Derrida's position on the voice has been reduced to the very theory he critiques, a careful reading of his work reveals a difference between Derrida and the "Derrida effect," or even

deconstruction at large, which haphazardly dismisses voice in exchange for the primacy of literature.³⁵ (Derrida himself at times also falls prey to such euphoria.) The question becomes: if absolute presence is ruptured, how do we define the temporality and the presence that take its place?

It is important to state once again that this critique of voice revolves around a quiet, unspoken voice directly tied to consciously intended *meaning*. Derrida states very clearly that “it is not in the sonorous substance or in the physical voice, in the body of speech in the world, that [Husserl] will recognize an original affinity with the logos in general” (16). We have also seen that there is another resonant voice, a discursive voice that underscores or undermines meaning; a voice, in Derrida’s words, “that makes up for the break up of presence.” This (resonant) voice is directly related to presence, but perhaps in its non-metaphysical variety, if this type of presence is conceivable. It can be both silent and resonant, it can act in concert with language and independent of language, it can be both physical and metaphysical. Nor can it be split into simple dualities because it can operate on numerous registers simultaneously: as part of language and yet apart from or against language, in the service of metaphysics and yet apart from or against metaphysics. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Derrida calls the voice “richly and profoundly enigmatic” (15). Voice’s enigma, quite simply, is that it is always potentially and profoundly multiplicitious.

³⁵ For example, in his influential essay on voice, “The Object Voice,” Mladen Dolar has Derrida stand in for Husserl. Dolar states: “Derrida’s deconstructive turn deprives the voice of its ineradicable ambiguity by reducing it to the ground of the illusory presence, while the Lacanian account tries to disentangle from its core the object as an interior obstacle to self-presence” (16).

If voice appears as excessive in cultural fantasies, it is likely because of this multiplicity, this tendency to suggest excess over and above meaning, a slippage to something other or something more than what is at first evident, a potential scandal waiting to unfold. Voice's "more than" or "other than" is perhaps what inspires Doris Kolesch to identify voice as a carrier of an other, or a fundamental alterity, always itself and potentially something else. As such, cultural conceptions about identity and cultural projections about that which constitutes self and other easily stick to it. This is why "finding one's voice" is always the first move in identity politics: a first step of the culturally disenfranchised towards identifying and empowering the self by distinguishing or redrawing the boundaries between self and other. The cultural mappings of identity and alterity, however, should not be confused with voice's ontological alterity. An ontological excess or otherness is by no means the same as a cultural projection of otherness or excessiveness.

It is perhaps because of voice's ontological alterity that we see gestures towards vocal remnants or remains, traces of vocal resonance, in rare moments of even the most stubborn readers of texts, Derrida included. In *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht provides another unexpected example: that of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who late in his life asked the possible non-semantic function of poetry:

[. . .] can we really assume that the reading of such texts is a reading exclusively concentrated on meaning? Do we not sing these texts [*Ist es nicht ein Singen*]? Should the process in which a poem speaks only be carried by a meaning intention? Is there not, at the same time, a truth that lies in its performance [*eine Vollzugswahrheit*]. (53)

What is fascinating about Gadamer's unexpected revelation is that the truth revealed in the poem's performance comes not simply from its performativity, but from its performative singing. While for Gumbrecht what is key in Gadamer's admission is that a text avails something beyond hermeneutics, this "beyond" (what Gumbrecht refers to as "presence effects") is an effect that comes from the "force" of vocalization. If there is a certain "truth" revealed about a text through its performance, a "truth" revealed through the act of singing, then in opera this "truth" is revealed through the performance of the voice, a performative "force" beyond both music and libretto, beyond the hermeneutics of performance. Indeed, although he does not develop the idea in his book on presence, elsewhere Gumbrecht specifies that in opera, presence is "more obviously visible" than in any other art form. Opera's particular aesthetics, he claims, demand that they be "experienced and analyzed" beyond the "dimension of meaning production and meaning identification" (63).³⁶

For Gumbrecht, presence is movement "in front of us, in reach of and tangible for our bodies," propulsive rather than static. Whatever the substance of presence effects is, it must be extrapolated from what it does. Although admittedly from a very different genre than opera, *The Story of the Weeping Camel*, a very sweet "narrative documentary" film by Byambasuren Davaa and Luigi

³⁶ Gumbrecht states: "In der Oper wird diese Konvergenz von Sinnproduktion und Präsenzproduktion zwar deutlicher sichtbar als in anderen Kunstformen, aber trotzdem ist sie mitnichten ein struktureller oder medialer Sonderfall'; and ' Die Oper ist eine von jenen Formen der Kunst und einer von jenen Bezugsgegenständen der ästhetischen Erfahrung, denen man nicht gerecht wird, solange sie ausschließlich in Dimensionen der Sinnproduktion oder der Sinnidentifikation– interpretatorisch oder hermeneutisch also–erfahren und analysiert werden'."

Falorni, clearly depicts one instance of a singing voice that evokes remarkable physical effects in ways that I am trying to describe. And while my reader may wonder why at this juncture I choose to discuss a film about camels rather than the performance of a live opera, I do so in order to demonstrate how simple it is to accept the profound force of vocal resonance when discussing camels and nomadic shepherds and how difficult when discussing “enlightened” subjects who attend an opera performance in the developed world. How do we account for the numerous theoretical hurdles that make this move so difficult?

The film in question tells the story of a family of nomadic shepherds in the Gobi Desert, South Mongolia, and their troubles with a mother camel who shuns her calf after a long and difficult birth. Exhausted and fed-up with the birthing experience, the mother will have nothing to do with her calf and refuses to let it suckle. She eventually wanders off and leaves the calf alone, which causes him to “weep” incessantly from hunger and loneliness. Despite repeated coaxing from the shepherds, the mother camel remains unswayed. When all options seem to have been exhausted and the calf has reached a critical state, the shepherds enlist the help of a local musician to enact a healing ritual. Accompanied by the musician on a horse-head violin, one of the shepherd women sings to the mother camel, repeating a simple melody while stroking the mother’s belly. At first, the mother protests, but after a while, the sounds of the shepherd’s voice and the violin pacify her. Eventually, the calf is led to her and she miraculously acquiesces, nuzzling her calf fondly and allowing him at last to drink.

The film’s screenwriter and co-director Davaa explains that the “musical ritual that is being used doesn’t have lyrics, just four letters. In our case, the four

letters are 'HOOS'. . . . The word doesn't have any meaning, just an effect. It doesn't have a melody or any musical structure. Every body [sic] does it the way he wants or feels." Since the syllable "'HOOS'" has no linguistic or musical significance for the mother camel, this ritual hinges on the performativity of voice: its effect rather than its meaning. What is sung is neither representational nor a process tied to cognition as we generally understand it, but a tangible physical effect. The mother camel is touched, literally; she is moved by the sound of voice.

We notice here that voice has an agency to touch, to act, to do something: this much is clear. But how do we explain what takes place between the voice and the camel? How can we move in our analytical capacities beyond even the broadest of musical and linguistic signification and meaning? One option would be to explain what happens in terms of affect and desire, but this option seems limited because in the end it always seems to lead to a discussion of individual subjectivity. It seems ridiculous to think about the mother camel in this way: does she coalesce to nurturing her foal because she "feels the love"? Because she is "moved to tears"? In fact, in the film, the mother camel does tear up, as many of us do when we hear the sound of music. Given all that we have discovered about voice thus far, however, I wonder whether we might think of "tearing" as a physiological reaction to the propulsion of voice rather than merely an expression of emotion or affect. This seems more in line with the philosophical tradition of both Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derridean deconstruction, in which "voice" is bound up in creating a foundational tension between subjects and objects—although admittedly these traditions seem rather far afield from the interpretation of healing rituals for camels. At the same time, it is indeed interesting that we can

clearly understand this kind of force when we see it happening to camels in Mongolia, but not when we imagine people in the developed world going to the opera. What happens to an understanding about the relationship between subject and object once we acknowledge that voice is a resonant operation with physical effects not just for camels in Mongolia?

In the history of metaphysics that Gumbrecht presents in order to explain how meaning culture comes to dominate (and to repress) “presence culture,” he identifies a shift from medieval thought, in which “spirit and matter were believed to be inseparable” to modern thought, in which the two are bifurcated. This split between spirit and matter “is the origin of an epistemological structure on which Western philosophy would from [the Enlightenment] on rely as the ‘subject/object paradigm’” (25). A resonant force with physical effects has been an inconceivable aspect of European art forms because it shatters the dualism between subject and object that has governed perception and on which the logic of enlightened reason depends, the model that posits “recipient on the one side and art work on the other” (264).³⁷ Voice emits a “knowledge” inaccessible or inadmissible to the kind of knowledge legitimized by meaning culture. The sense of sight and its coupling

³⁷ Kolesch argues for the ‘development of new descriptive and analytical models’ to replace the binary oppositions developed by the dominance of visual understanding. She states: “Die koprärente Hervorbringung und Wahrnehmung von Stimmen vergegenwärtigt, dass die theatrale Situation ein komplexes Kräfteverhältnis darstellt, dass sie aus fragilen Wechselwirkungen und Interaktionen zwischen Wahrnehmendem und Wahrgenommenem besteht. Dafür müssen neue Beschriegungs- und Analysemodelle entwickelt werden, die die Logik binärer Oppositionen prozessual ausser Kraft setzen. Denn nicht zuletzt als Folge der eingangs erwähnten Dominanz visueller Erklärungsmuster sind ästhetische Überlegungen noch immer stark geprägt von Dualismen wie Subjekt versus Objekt, Rezipient auf der einen und Kunstwerk auf der anderen Seite.” See Kolesch, “Aesthetik der Präsenz,” (264). Translation is mine.

with a detached subject has been complicit in this split; in the “metaphysical worldview,” vision rises to the status of “sovereign nobility,” “supremely modern and Western,” one with reason, “[w]ith its clear-eyed pursuit of detached observation, imperial sweep, and visual instrumentation” (Schmidt 15-16).

The facetious dualism between spirit and matter is partly why it is easy for scholars in the developed world to imagine that voice is a resonant force with physical effects on camels in Mongolia but not on the bodies of opera-goers. Opera is pegged as an (“enlightened”) art form with metaphysical properties that transcend the body, whereas ritual is a bodily (and thus “uncivilized”) cultural practice. The other piece of camel trouble has to do the “alterity” in which “reasoned” scholars are indoctrinated, the “alterity” constructed by the “mythology of modern Western visuality” which takes as its other the “‘ear culture’ of tribal, nonliterate peoples” (20). By default, oral cultures (such as nomadic Mongolian shepherds) comprise the “other” implied by deconstruction’s critique of Western thinking about language. While deconstruction in its Derridean manifestation is a critical practice, its practice in the American academy has turned into an (oftentimes unspoken) dogma that makes it very difficult to continue deconstruction’s work, i.e., to read deconstruction against the grain. As Paul Gilroy has pointed out, “[u]rged on by the post- structuralist critiques of the metaphysics of presence, contemporary debates have moved beyond citing language as the fundamental analogy for comprehending all signifying practices to a position where textuality (especially when wrenched open through the concept of difference) expands and merges with totality” (77). What gets blocked by this

move, of course, is what Gilroy refers to as “aspects of embodied subjectivity that are not reducible to the cognitive and the ethical” (76).³⁸

An avowal of material voice requires no less than an epistemic shift, a leaving behind of the distanced, all-knowing subject who analyses a “dead” vocal object, and finding in its stead a subject who can be both subject and the object of vocal force. This position requires us to open both mind and body to the wonder of resonance and to postpone analysis: to postpone translating voice into the pre-determined cognitive categories the mind has at its disposal and to simply wait and listen, to experience what voice does. This is not to say that analysis should be discarded. Very simply, this type of analysis asks the subject to take leave of his absolute sovereignty and to acknowledge that he is both subject and object in the world, subject to material forces over which the mind and body do not have control. It requires the listener to become a mother camel: to put an end to the protests of the ego, to let one’s belly be stroked, and to avail oneself to the sound of voice.

Thinking of opera as a form of public spectacle might help to lead opera studies away from the clear-cut dichotomy between recipient (subject)/ art work (object), because such an emphasis would muddle any clear distinction between who or what is the subject and who or what is the object. Of course, a spectacle is an object intended to be seen, but it is also a dramatic event, a theatrical mise-en-

³⁸ The particular block to which Gilroy’s study refers is the musical expression of the African diaspora: “Music, the grudging gift that supposedly compensated slaves not only for their exile from the ambiguous legacies of practical reason but for their complete exclusion from modern political society, has been refined and developed so that it provides an enhanced mode of communication beyond the petty power of words—spoken or written.” (Gilroy 76).

scène that demands an audience. Opera's precondition is an engaged subject to behold opera's wonder, to receive its spectacular touch and thus become subject to the performative event. And though opera possesses neither individual cognition nor will, it is an artistic production that is phantasmagorically endowed with agency by those who are employed to create, to prepare and to execute it—to transform it into a (performative) event that acts. An operatic performance becomes a "subject" through the specific social relations that bring it into being, that give it the agency to do something. In this way, operatic spectacle disrupts the scopic distance of the "enlightened" observer. The observer must resign himself to the conditions of the production, which is exactly why some radical stagings are so provocative: not only do they present interpretations that unsettle the expectations of the beholder, they also unseat the "imperial sweep" of the scopic subject by acting on or unto him, making him at once both subject and object and thus drawing him into a dialogical relationship with the work. A vituperative reaction to a radical staging is then at least always in part an attempt by the spectator to reassert his domination over the things of the world, to rise again to the status of "sovereign nobility."

If in theory, "voice" marks an impasse at the extremes of presence and absence, excess and lack, this is because in its silent manifestation, voice is a remainder, a sign indicating the impasse that is caused by an untenable subject/object split. Thinking back to Ragland's remark that in Lacan the voice operates "at the level of real impasses, functioning as a nodal point (or a knot of meanings) unassimilated in knowledge as such," () one can imagine that in Lacanian psychoanalysis,

“voice” is a sign that indicates both an untenable impasse and a fundamental problem with epistemology. This is not a new proposition; it is the very “scandal” revealed by psychoanalysis that led Felman, and Butler after her, to propose that the speech act undoes meaning, that it disrupts intentional knowledge through a bodily act.

Of course, the problem of how to get at the operative “real” without being reductively materialistic remains. If the presence of the “real” can be held in hand but never held fast, if it cannot be known directly and absolutely, what methodology do we employ to tease it out? Although Gumbrecht grounds his reading of presence in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, beginning with Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Henri Bergson’s essay of the same name directly addresses the matter of temporality and its relationship to an epistemological shift that complements the one I have proposed.

Bergson argues that philosophers “agree in distinguishing two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing”: one by means of “analysis,” the other by means of “intuition” (21). Whereas analysis is “the operation which reduces the object to elements already known,” a method of translation that ascribes symbols to objects according to an always preconceived “knowledge,” intuition, in the words of Gilles Deleuze, “is neither a feeling, an inspiration, nor a disorderly sympathy, but a fully developed method, one of the most fully developed methods in philosophy” (13). At the heart of this method is Bergson’s concept of duration, something that he calls multiplicitous (Deleuze: heterogeneous), and in a state of “perpetually becoming” (). For Bergson time is not a static event, but “continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances,”

a concept of duration that holds for both a subject and an object's movement through time (Creative Evolution 7).

Bergson's conception of time revises Zeno's paradox, which conventionally holds that a flying arrow actually does not move: "For at each instant of its flight it occupies one and only one point of space. This means that at each instant the arrow must be at rest, since otherwise it would not occupy a given point at that instant. But its whole course is composed of such points. Therefore the arrow does not actually move at all (Gouge 13). Bergson takes issue with this proposal by asserting that the moving arrow never actually stops in any of the points through which it passes. According to Bergson, movement and immobility are logically incompatible. The points through which a moving object passes, "are not in the movement" but "projected" by our understanding of the movement's path, points that would be where the arrow "would be if it were to stop". These stopping points, he states, are not "positions, but 'suppositions,' aspects, or points of view of the mind" (Bergson Metaphysics). Bergson concludes "not that motion is impossible, but rather that it is impossible for the intellect to comprehend [. . .] Both time and motion have to be apprehended intuitively" (Gouge 13).

Like voice, Bergson's intuition "involves a plurality of meanings and irreducible multiple aspects" (Deleuze 14). The openness to multiplicity is how Bergson gets at a concept of immediacy that gives up the illusion of a singular and unified knowledge. Rather than striving for one "truth," intuition poses questions in order to problematize, differentiate and temporalise (Deleuze 35). In this way, Bergson challenges what he considers to be the limit of Kantian reason, which 'ends in establishing that Platonism . . . is . . . the common basis alike of thought and

of nature.” *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Bergson argues, “rests on this postulate, that our intellect is incapable of anything but Platonizing – that is, of pouring all possible experience into pre-existing molds” (Metaphysics 58-59):

If scientific knowledge is indeed what Kant supposed, then there is one simple science, preformed and even preformulated in nature, as Aristotle believed; great discoveries, then, serve only to illuminate, point by point, the already drawn line of this logic, immanent in things, just as on the night of a fête we light up one by one the rows of gas-jets which already outline the shape of some building. And if metaphysical knowledge is really what Kant supposed, it is reduced to a *choice* between two attitudes of the mind before all the great problems, both equally possible; its manifestations are so many arbitrary and always ephemeral choices between two solutions, virtually formulated from all eternity: it lives and dies by antinomies. *But the truth is that modern science does not present this unilinear simplicity, nor does modern metaphysics these irreducible oppositions* (Metaphysics 58-59).³⁹

For Bergson, then, intuition is a process that allows one to near the inconceivable (which cannot be known—at least not known absolutely) without a compulsion to master or to contain it, to break it down into linear antinomies, to reduce the irreducible into directly conceivable units.

Like Bergson, Felman reaches beyond simple and reductive science—

³⁹ Emphasis is mine.

reductive materialism—towards a body comprised by matter, a body which, “in modern physics . . . no longer has absolute existence, but only a relative existence within an interaction of matter/energy relations” (109). She recognizes that “for Austin, as for Einstein, matter itself has ceased, above all, to be a ‘thing’: matter itself is an event” (109-110). The voice that emanates from this body is one that carries remnants of the body with it, remnants that gain, through propulsion, a weight of their own. Felman calls it “the matter of language (little bits of sentences, phrases, signifiers, atoms of the speaking body) and energy or (illocutionary)” “force,” that space of undecidability between matter and energy, between ‘things and ‘events’” (109). For our purposes, we might call this propulsionary force the matter of voice. Felman recognizes the significance of this move: “We are dealing, in the Austinian discovery (as, moreover, in the Freudian discovery), with the intuition of nothing less than a new type of materialism” (109):

Contemporary physics, atomic and relativist, has in fact demonstrated that the unity of “matter in itself” is from now on an outdated concept, that matter exists not in itself but as a relation to energy, all loss of matter forming, but that very token, an enormous recrudescence of energy. Matter, in modern physics, thus no longer has absolute existence, but only a relative existence within an interaction of *matter/energy relations* (109). Presence is fluidly material, made available through the questioning of a more complex rendering of space, temporality, and the body’s very being in the world.

As it appears in (the antinomies of) contemporary discourse (or precisely disappears), voice is thought of as fleeting ephemera: in one ear and out the other, or so the saying goes. It skirts around like a ghost without a body, a mystery that is

present and then simply gone. This rhapsody of specular logic asserts that the aural (like the “real”) is perpetually unknowable, for as such it sustains a hope in the transcendent. But voice does not simply appear on stage and then disappear. Voice puts matter into circulation, matter that is more or other than language, more or other than even performative utterance. Voice inserts itself without regard for cognition and will, perforating the metaphysical by weaving in and out of bodies. Again, I mean body in the broadest sense: the body on stage and in the theatre and throughout the body politic. But occlusion of the aural never quite succeeds because voice leaves material remainders. Aural spectacle echoes from beyond the beyond as opera’s specter, a specter that haunts with vocal residue. Thus, José Muñoz might call the aurality of operatic spectacle “ephemeral evidence”; Rebecca Schneider might call it “performance remains.” Performance remains traverse temporality. They remain in the fabric of the body/body politic like a corporeal unconscious. Voice’s elusiveness, its ineffability as invisible remains does not negate its presence. Aural spectacle brings forth material ephemera that continue to act in and on the body long after they disappear.

In specular logic, aural contradicts spectacle, positioning itself as a paradoxical other. In the logic of theatricality, however, the scandalous aural becomes an integral part of spectacle’s display. Thus, aural spectacle is and is not an oxymoron. But there is something more important to notice here that returns us to what we have discerned about voice. Rather than being merely present or past, the vocal resonance of aural spectacle sounds in time and then sticks, upsetting the logic of succession. Vocal resonance seeps through porous bodies, remaining as haunting memories, haunting melodies.

The promise of opera

When one searches for the presence of a resonant voice, what one discovers is not one scandal, but a series of scandals. One sees this even in Felman, who, in her own scandalous turn, both does and does not do what she says she will. At the very beginning of her analysis of Austin, she calls the act of promising “a fundamental contradiction which is precisely the contradiction of the human” and describes her text as “a meditation on promising” (4–5). For Felman “[t]he scandal of seduction seems to be fundamentally tied to the scandal of the broken promise. Don Juan is the myth of scandal precisely to the extent that it is the myth of violation: the violation not of women but of promises made to them” (4). Felman makes a promise of her own to refer to “two principal references to the Don Juan myth,” Molière’s *Don Juan* and Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, but then breaks this promise, staging her own revenge at Don Juan and her own “fundamental contradiction” (125 n.3). In fact, although Felman refers to Molière frequently, she takes up Da Ponte’s libretto for Mozart only twice, both times in passing. She discusses neither Mozart’s music, nor any aspects of the opera, nor even the fact that *Don Giovanni* is an opera, except in the brief footnote that names the work as a “principal reference.” This omission seems strangely apropos in light of Felman’s assertions that “every promise promises the completion of incompleteness; every promise is above all the promise of consciousness, insofar as it postulates a noninterruption, continuity between intention and act” and that, as “the very subversion of consciousness,” the Don Juan myth is “the myth of the promise of consciousness falling flat on its face” (34). What is subverted in Felman’s discussion, what falls on its face, is the promise of opera. But perhaps Felman’s promise of opera is, like the

promises of Don Juan, a promise of consciousness, and at the same time, a “promise that cannot be kept,” a “scandal . . . insofar as what [she] promises is precisely the untenable’ (5). Perhaps, that is, Felman’s treatment of opera is not to be found in what she says, but in what she does, in her “slip” or “misfire”: “The act of failing thus opens up the space of referentiality—or of impossible reality—not because something is missing, but because something else is done, or because something else is said” (57). In other words, Felman addresses opera in the space between her promise and her failure. Opera in general and *Don Giovanni* in particular are not absent, but present in the scandal of the performative, “between speaking bodies, between languages, between knowledge and pleasure” (5). If there is a methodology that proceeds by intuition to grapple with immediacy, it is a methodology that finds the operatic “real” in space(s) and time(s) beyond the referent, in the confusion between meaning and reference, and in the promise that falls short. Felman’s misfire is neither a “failure” in the colloquial sense nor an analytical shortcoming.

If there is an opera production that comes to mind that plays out the slipperiness of reference and the mobile temporality of presence I describe here, it is Ruth Berghaus’s brilliant 1991 production of Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Berlin Staatsoper unter den Linden under the direction of Michael Gielen. Berghaus (1927–96)—best known in the theatre world for her work at the Berliner Ensemble, where she learned from Berthold Brecht and eventually served as artistic director after the death of Helene Weigel, and, later, in the opera world from productions in Berlin to Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Zürich—trained originally as a dancer and choreographer at the Palucca School in Dresden. Accordingly, the

bodies on stage are the core of this (now retired) production, physical bodies that less act and sing than embody the material fluidity of Debussy's lush score and the taut contradiction of human emotion found in Maeterlinck's drama. The most captivating innovation of Berghaus's production is the matter of linguistic reference, which Berghaus stages non-mimetically. Although the production maintains a level of linguistic reference, what remains is a correspondence that is minimal, indirect, and drawn out and deferred. Although such reference could be thought of as appropriately Symbolist, the elongation and deferral of reference has another effect in that it draws the spectator's attention away from meaning per se and towards the presence of sonorous bodies—vocal and orchestral—and thus underscores their performative force. Deferral of reference also disrupts the continuity of the "real" both in terms of meaning stability and the spectator's hold on "real time."

Because linguistic reference is deferred, gesture and bodily comportment take on additional weight. Through gestures that cut through and sweep above and over time, the bodies of these singers merge with the fabric of the orchestra; in slow, crescent-shaped rocking, arms and backs become vessels that float among sonic waves, swelling like the belly of a ship, waxing and waning like the half-moon at sea, ebbing and flowing like the bodies of lovers and Mélisande's rounded womb—a roundness that is redoubled by Hartmut Meyer's sets and costumes.

The voices of these singers are no less gestural, no less material than their bodies. Crying forth as though asleep with the weight of truth and the inconsequential and obscure clarity of a dream-world (from sometimes blind-folded singers, singers who come and go, inhabit and embody these same roles and

then move on, wear these very garments and repeat these very gestures even after Berghaus is no longer), these voices end as they begin: with a sonic lingering, a lingering near me, a lingering still. Though I no longer hear them in the present, I hear them in their presence: I (think I) feel them, feel moved by them, feel how they have transported me as surely as they have got under my skin and inhabited the space and time of my carnality.

Mélisande's hair, that sign, the sign (of Mélisande, of Mélisande's sexuality, of feminine sexuality), that particular referent is in this case a nondescript wig (lifted, perhaps from a little old lady as she chose the cauliflower for her evening supper). Mélisande takes it off in the fourth act and wrings it unthinkingly beneath her fingers until finally dropping it as one would any other item of no importance whatsoever. It was at that moment that I briefly emerged from this particular (aural) spectacle and wondered what to make of Mèlisande's baldness, of this singing- woman-figure who simply leaves her referent behind. I do not remember what came of the wig, what came of Mélisande's misfire, for as strangely as I emerged out of the music, I was swept back up into it, taken to a place where I left any semblance of my own referent and my own reference behind. Even still, even now, she carries me with her, as I her with me: the shape of her comportment, her sonorous soma that creeps up and down my spine and winds around my limbs, her resignation (and mine) to that which comes and that which is. Her promise. My promise. The promise of opera.

CHAPTER 2

SOUND REMAINS: OF SIRENS, SONGS, AND SOMA

They were [Proserpina's] dear companions,
The Sirens, skilled in singing...
And the gods were kind, and gave them golden plumage,
But let them keep the lovely singing voices,
So dear to the ears of men, the human features,
The human voice, the dower of song forever.⁴⁰

In April of 2004, Friedrich Kittler led an expedition to the Gulf of Salerno to acoustically verify a sonic trace of the infamous Sirens found in the text of Homer's *Odyssey*. Equipped with a yacht and a group of media theorists from the Humboldt University in Berlin and the Center for Art and Media technology in Karlsruhe⁴¹—dubbed by Kittler the “Schliemänner der Messtechnik”⁴²—the group set off to Italy to conduct an archaeological experiment in “medial philology” (Ernst “Resonance” 1). The point of this excursion was to recreate and to authenticate through sonic feedback the sound of Homer's Sirens in the assumed context of its origin, among island cliffs off the Amalfi Coast. Guided by clues in Norman Douglas' *Siren Land*⁴³ and Ernle Bradford's *Ulysses Found*⁴⁴ as well as local

⁴⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Trans. Rolfe Humphries. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983.

⁴¹ The media theorists included Wolfgang Ernst, Martin Carlé, Tania Hron, and Peter Weibel.

⁴² Literally, “the Schlie-men of measurement technology,” a pun on the German the name Heinrich Schliemann, the famous nineteenth-century German archaeologist.

⁴³ Norman Douglas, *Siren Land*. London: M. Secker, 1923.

⁴⁴ Ernle Bradford, *Ulysses Found*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964.

lore, which had called the Li Galli islands “Le Sirenusae,” and had inspired “a series of small antique Siren-sanctuaries along the coast from Naples to Salerno” (Ernst “Resonance” 2), the expedition set sail to test its hypothesis that among the islands’ cliffs was the potential for “a real acoustic phenomenon” (Ernst *Lokaltermin* 259) rather than “a mere cultural-poetical invention by the bard” (Ernst “Resonance” 1). Like Schliemann, whose hunch that Homer’s *Iliad* was more than merely fable led him to successfully excavate the remains of Mycenae and Troy, Kittler and his media archaeologists believed that both local cultural memory and the Sirens episode in Homer’s *Odyssey* contained clues pointing toward early acoustic material, “pure song” (Seminar 1).

At the heart of this expedition lies the desire to affirm a fundamental materiality in the Sirens’ song, though rather than probe for this material hermeneutically—to read it in Homer’s text—Kittler and his cohorts attempt to “prove” it through a series of acoustic experiments at a physical point of origin. This is a curious move that demonstrates a pervasive technophilic desire to base medial science upon a positivist real rather than on an always ambiguous referent that preserves and provokes structural tensions between issues as complicated as subject and object, nature and culture, truth and fiction. Significantly, however, Kittler’s expedition omits its positivist findings in its subsequent sirenology, turning instead to a broad and rigorous philological archaeology based upon a hermeneutics of the classics and early Greek linguistics, as if to say that in the end positivism is a futile means with which to engage the mysteries of a text. This is especially paradoxical given that the medial shifts for which Kittler’s expedition argues in its post-expedition philology are, as I will demonstrate, largely legible in

the text of the *Odyssey*. As such, the Sirens episode in Homer provokes rich questions about the status of sonic materiality in a supposedly silent literary text. In this chapter, I contend that what matters is not a fundamental ontology about the Sirens and their song, that is, whether or not they (or their sound) are (or were) verifiably *real*, but what the text of Homer's *Odyssey* reveals about the status of their sonic materiality. After discussing the Kittler expedition and its findings, I will turn directly to the text of the *Odyssey*, the *Ur*-repository of their sonic remains. Aside from questions regarding the status of the medial in Homer's text, questions that revolve around the materiality of the Sirens' song, I am interested in what a close reading of the *Odyssey* reveals about the textual status of sonic phenomena in general, and for this reason briefly take up Franz Kafka's interpretation of the Sirens' narrative in "Das Schwiegen der Sirenen," translated into English as "The Silence of the Sirens," in the final section of this chapter.

Sexual and Textual Politics: Sirens and The Real

Central to Kittler's expedition to Italy is the assumption that what matters is the Sirens' signal rather than their message. In a line of thinking that can be traced back to the information theory of Claude Shannon and Marshall McLuhan, Kittler's experiment prioritized "the technology of message transmission over interpretation of its content" (Gane 27). In other words, what the Sirens sang per se was secondary to the fact that they sang. Kittler's expedition went looking for clues that in the Sirens episode Homer recorded a sonic event that *happened*, and that through re-enactment the conditions of that materiality could be documented as *present*. Of course, not knowing the source of sonic material—or, in plain

English, precisely who or what the Sirens were, and if found, whether they could be called upon to sing once more—it was necessary for the expedition to come equipped with a team of sonic transmitters and receivers. The expedition covered all of its bases here, bringing along two female singers⁴⁵ and samplings of “seagull clamor, waves, and wind, as well as sound beams from previously recorded technical signals, animal voices, and synthetic siren howls” (Ernst *Lokaltermin* 260). Karl-Heinz Frommolt, curator of the Animal Voice Archives at The Museum of Natural History, Berlin, came along for good measure.

According to Wolfgang Ernst, Professor of Media Theory at the Humboldt University Berlin and Kittler’s right hand man on the expedition, what they found was as follows: “when the sounds of Gallo Lungo are emitted they do not just break at the opposite rocky islands as an echo but are thrown back and forth among each other. This results in an amplifier effect, a kind of acoustic *différance*, that confuses the sense of what is close and what far of a sailing navigator...”. Specifically, the geographical location of three small islands off the coast alter an “acoustic signal,” by amplifying it and changing its “timbre.” For Ernst, these technologically verifiable changes are the results that he needs to draw the conclusion: “We can be sure that there is a trace of the real in the myth of the song of the Sirens” (Ernst “Resonance” 3).

According to Ernst, then, the landscape of Gallo Lungo amplifies and distorts noises that disorient the sailor, making him unsure of his location. He

⁴⁵ Rumor has it that Kittler requested that the (female) singers, Louise Schumacher and Katie Mullins, sing the music of Richard Wagner, though I have been unable to substantiate this claim.

hears loudening voices bouncing off cliffs but does not know what direction from which they come, where he is in relation to them, nor who or what the source of this sound might be. The implication of these findings is that disorienting sound waves acoustically assault the senses of the sailor, propelling him into a state without foundational knowledge of his place in the world. This is a state that mimics psychosis; Odysseus suffers auditory hallucinations, unable to know whether the sounds that he hears are physiological or pathological, unable to know whether they come from beast or man—or rather, woman. And yet, in the case of Odysseus, he desires to endure the sound, to drift precariously into a realm where certain types of knowledge become unnecessary or even impossible, and at the same time, to know the source of this un-knowledge by taking possession over it. Through the willful act of hearing, Odysseus discovers the space of both not knowing and yet knowing. By listening, he masters his desire and achieves the mechanism of repression.

Indeed, Kittler, Ernst, and Carlé, the third theorist of this crew, link Odysseus to a type of knowledge that is coupled with consciousness and is only implicitly sexual. Linking the Sirens' Song to the invention of the Greek alphabet via the work of classicist Barry Powell, Kittler et al. mark the Sirens episode as the beginning of the "vocal alphabet": "the moment the Sirens address themselves to Ulysses in explicitly Greek word, with no Homeric interpolation of onomatopoetic elements or non-semantic phonetic utterances, this is a media-reflection of the sound element in speech (poetry) itself" (Ernst "Resonance" 6). For Kittler, the

Sirens are the origin of both music and mathematics.⁴⁶ For Carlé, the Sirens episode marks the onset of the bicameral mind, the moment at which writing began to archive and organize verbal utterance. In Carlé's words: "sound politics in Homer's time meant gaining control over authoritarian verbal hallucinations via the adoption of writing as a soundtechnology [sic] driven by reproducible vowels. As cultural techniques, acoustic writing and sound reading of the sonosphere of language mediated by an alphanumeric code were remodeling our bicameral mind so that it became conscious" (Ernst "Resonance" 1). For both Kittler and Carlé, the Sirens are neither nymphs, nor muses; they are a veritable motherlode.⁴⁷

Given that these theorists neglect any specific data interpretation when drawing their conclusions about the Sirens, one might wonder what motivates this desire to "prove," to "know," to locate a trace, to authenticate a positivist real and then resort to philology rather than data interpretation to make their case. In trying to listen to the Sirens' song *itself*, they place themselves in the position of a collective, contemporary Odysseus and a contemporary Homer at the same time, attempting to hear, to interpret, and to medially record the sounds that they hear. They come away from the expedition not necessarily "knowing" the Sirens *per se*—"it remains still under question who was the emitter of the song" (Ernst "Resonance" 3)—but asserting themselves as having become privy to their "knowledge," like Odysseus, without falling prey.

⁴⁶ See Frierich Kittler, *Musik und Mathematik*, Band I: Hellas, Teil I: Aphrodite. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006 and „Honig Der Sirenen: Logos Der Musik,“ <http://www.aesthetik.huberlin.de/medien/texte/honig.php>

Like Odysseus, and Bradford after him, Kittler, Ernst, and Carlé hear something, though the simple fact that they hear and that they capture this sound through a recording device is far more important than the sound itself. In fact, the best trace of material sound that presents itself to this (male) constellation of listeners waiting for a sonic sign is not the data they recorded, but rather a telephone call “from the island” that arrives as they drink on the coast at a “cocktail bar of Praiano” (Ernst *Lokaltermin* 264). Although Ernst intends this to be a tongue-in-cheek story, it is noteworthy that the sounds that the expedition set off to hear are either neither reproduced nor described in any literary reports on the expedition that I have been able to locate. The only reference to the acoustic data that the group collects comes from Ernst when he vaguely states that, “the digital video and audio tapes that account for the scientific crop of the expedition in April 2004 have the better memory [than those men on the expedition...]. From now on the tapes from Li Galli will speak” (Ernst “Resonance” 3). Just what the tapes “speak,” what “knowledge” they impart, however, remains profoundly uncertain. If the tapes “speak,” then what do they “say,” and why can’t this be made public and publishable knowledge?

The geographical phenomenon indicated by the expedition’s sonic experiments suggests that the Sirens’ sound is able to become a subject that acts upon an (male) object, disorienting him and “leav[ing] traces in [his] bodily memory” (Ernst “Resonance” 6). So despite its insistence to the contrary, it seems that this expedition is primarily about the subject position of its explorers who aim to capture a “primitive” sonic object that is omitted by female creatures, strange animals, or some freaky natural phenomenon. According to Ernst, quoting

Bradford, women do not or cannot hear the Sirens because the Sirens “desire nothing from their own sex,” (Ernst *Lokaltermin* 265) a remark that seems strikingly apropos. The (heterosexual) men at the bar in Praiano, believe themselves entitled to hearing because they desire the desire of women. This desire enables the theorists “to decode these acoustic memory grooves: the media-archaeological gramophone, i.e., an archaeology of sound” (Ernst “Resonance” 6). We readers are left to take them their word.

Employing their own self-definition, then, this set of ears claims to “know” an elusive and esoteric sound of the Sirens, or at least to obtain a “real trace” of its one-time existence. The etymological ambivalence of “knowing,” i.e., of having sexual intercourse with, is certainly relevant to this attitude of male entitlement and possession. Sound leaves “grooves” upon the male body like scratches on the back, vestiges of a “dangerously” erotic, heterosexual fantasy, making these men the both the possessors and the inheritors of “knowledge.” Indeed, “[this] sound,” according to Ernst, “can attack the body (politic) in ways which are both seductive and dangerous. This is why the ‘Siren Sound’ has been ambiguously coded that way from the beginning” (Ernst “Resonance” 6). Ernst’s admission here reveals that it is precisely sound’s ability to take away man’s exclusive subject position that makes it both “seductive” and “dangerous.” Sound’s potential power over man is its “danger;” this “danger” seduces man by giving him the thrill of the hunt.

Beyond the sexual politics of the Kittler expedition, the desire to chase after a material trace of the real brings to the fore an implicit tension between truth and fiction, and ultimately undermines the status of textual interpretation. The one I just described serves only to exaggerate the gap between the acoustic and the aural,

or, in other words, between constructions of “truth” or a material “real” located in nature and a textual “fiction” that belongs to the realm of culture. Literature is not about truth, however, but about possibility. In his *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present*, Eric Havelock asks, “can a text speak?” (44) because when a verse on the level of primary orality is written down “it ceases to be what it originally was,” (Havelock 66) that is, oral. What is interesting in the case of the Sirens, however, is not the extent to which the *Odyssey* “sings” as an oral text, but precisely that it “sings” as a piece of literature.

Of Sirens, Songs, and Soma

The mythological figures of the Sirens, who first appear in Homer’s *Odyssey*, are perhaps the oldest and most famous Western trope for acoustic allure and violence.⁴⁸ This figure lends its name to the sound generator developed during the early 19th century now used as a means of urgent public address: an audible warning of immediate peril, a penetrating and resonant signal that action is

⁴⁸ Homer and Hesiod are the early mythological sources; thereafter, literary references to the sirens appear in texts by authors as diverse as Apollonios Rhodos, Ariosto, Augustine, Cicero, Clement of Alexandria, Boccacio, Boiardo, Camoes, Dante, Diotimos, Euripides, Eustathius, Heraclitus, Horace, Hieronymus, Hippolyti, Isidore of Seville, Isaiah, Lycophron of Chalcis, Ovid, Plato, Pliny, Plutarch, Posanias,, Sachs,, Seneca, Shakespeare, Sophocles, Spenser, Tasso, and Virgil. Modern sources of the sirens include Blanchot, Horkheimer and Adorno, Joyce, Kafka, and Rilke. This list is not exhaustive. For an overview, see Eva Hofstetter, *Sirenen im archaischen und klassischen Griechenland*, (Konrad Triltsch Verlag, 1990). See also Sabine Wedner, *Tradition und Wandel im allegorischen Verständnis des Sirenenmythos*, (Peter Lang 1995), and Siegfried de Rachewiltz, *De Sirenibus: An Inquiry into Sirens from Homer to Shakespeare*, (PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 1983).

necessary because violence is imminent.⁴⁹ As Renata Salecl has observed, the Sirens' message conveys "'Danger!' or maybe even, 'Death!'" (1). As a technological device, the siren operates on two levels: phenomenologically, it inflicts a barely tolerable acoustic force that demands action or attention; representationally, it signals warning of an impending emergency. As a literary figure, one might assume that the Sirens' singing operates primarily on the level of representation: domesticated by the literary text, their image is woven into the fabric of Odysseus' verbal narrative. The success, or rather failure, of this domestication illustrates how the Sirens' song—their sonic body—troubles not only the conventional notion that there can be an utterly silent and purely imagistic text, but also and even more importantly the idea that the text is a neutral and distanced space in which sound does not circulate.

In most cultural representations of the mythological Sirens, the allure and potential threat of violence appears under the guise of a feminine seduction so riveting that the Sirens' auditory genealogy often disappears from the seduction scene. Sound is drained, and all that remains is femininity with an open mouth. At the same time, one could say that in representation, sound is so difficult to sublimate that when it is crafted as representationally inaudible its vibrations seem to funnel into a supernatural or sexually excessive representational imagination.

⁴⁹ Various forms of the siren were invented by Charles Caignard de la Tour (1827), Félix Savart (1830), Friedrich Opelt (1834), Heinrich Wilhelm Dove (1851), and Hermann Helmholtz (1856). See Ernst Robel, *Die Sirenen: Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Akustik, Teil 2: Die Arbeiten deutscher Physiker über die Sirene im Zeitraume von 1830-1856*, Berlin: Gaertner, 1894, and Stephen Vogel, "Sensation of Tone, Perception of Sound, and Empiricism: Helmholtz's Physiological Acoustics," *Hermann von Helmholtz and the Foundations of Nineteenth-Century Science*, Ed. David Cahan. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1993. 259-287.

One sees this in the vast literary and iconographical trajectory in the Western European tradition since the *Odyssey*, in which the Sirens are endowed with a myriad of corporeal attributes and fantastic abilities depending upon the allegorical purpose they are designed to serve. Under various sacred and secular guises, they are depicted as birds with women's heads, winged women with feathered legs and clawed feet, musical species of the underworld, magical singers who guide souls of the dead, Christian angels, and fish-tailed women or mermaids. The Sirens' supernatural haunting and sexualized excess has entered the English vernacular, in which sirens are defined as "one of several fabulous monsters, part woman, part bird, who were supposed to lure sailors to destruction by their enchanting singing," "one who, or that which sings sweetly, charms, allures, or deceives, like the Sirens," (*Oxford English Dictionary*) or simply "a temptingly beautiful woman or one who sings seductively" (Bell 400). The Sirens have become a ubiquitous cultural presence, though their sound has dissolved into a mere metaphor for seduction.

In the *Odyssey*, the story of the Sirens is embedded in an extended first-person narrative that Odysseus tells to the Phaeacian King Alcinous and his court. So the Sirens episode is part of a hero's eyewitness testimony of his adventures at sea. Odysseus is, in the words of Clayton Koelb, "the single mortal authority on the Sirens," (302) a point that cannot be overemphasized; for under the circumstances in which Odysseus finds himself, this story is both a valuable commodity and a powerful vehicle for the task of self-invention. In the gift economy that "governs all dealings between guest and host in the *Odyssey*," Odysseus's tales are all that he has to exchange for the objects and the hospitality

he stands to gain from his wealthy host (De Rachewiltz 31). Thus, the fantastic encounter plays a key dramatic role in Odysseus' tale, which is crafted for a live, and captive audience. In this respect, it is especially notable that the narrative of the Sirens' song is the only place in the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus is addressed as the "great war-glory of the Achaeans" (12:184) (Segal 101). Pietro Pucci has demonstrated, in fact, that on the level of diction, formulaic expression, and grammatical construction, the Sirens' song is meant to "reproduce" the text of the *Iliad*. Although Pucci argues that it is the Sirens who construct Odysseus to be the hero of the *Iliad*, Pucci comes to this conclusion because he takes Odysseus *at his word*. But we should keep in mind that because the *Odyssey* presents the episode as a story within a story, the *Odyssey* emphasizes Odysseus as the *narrator* of this song. This emphasis invites the possibility that what Odysseus says when he cites his past is guided by the motivation to recreate himself through the retelling of his historical narrative. Odysseus has every reason to portray himself as the great hero of Troy, and to utilize his encounter with the Sirens for this purpose. As a guest-turned-entertainer, Odysseus narrates his own epic and inscribes himself as hero.

Because the Siren scene has been subject to countless transformations since Homer, a careful look at what the *Odyssey* text does and does not say is fruitful in teasing out the nature of the Sirens' song and Odysseus's status as its narrator. The Siren scene appears in two sections: the first in which Circe predicts Odysseus' encounter with the creatures, the second in which Odysseus remembers the event. In the passage that follows, Odysseus impersonates Circe, who one might call a siren for the Sirens, as she provides Odysseus with advance warning of the Sirens'

danger and specific directives as to how to pass by the enchanting songstresses unharmed:

You will come first of all to the Sirens, who are enchanters of all mankind and whoever comes their way; and that man who unsuspecting approaches them, and listens to the Sirens singing, has no prospect of coming home and delighting his wife and little children as they stand about him in greeting, but the Sirens by the melody of their singing enchant him. They sit in their meadow, but the beach before it is piled with bone heaps of men now rotted away, and the skins shrivel upon them. You must drive straight on past, but melt down sweet wax of honey and with it stop your companions' ears, so none can listen; the rest, that is, but if you yourself are wanting to hear them, then have them tie you hand and foot on the fast ship, standing upright against the mast with the ropes' ends lashed around it, so that you can have joy in hearing the song of the Sirens: but if you supplicate your men and implore them to set you free, then they must tie you fast with even more lashings. (12:37-54)
(186)

The first thing to notice about Odysseus' retelling of Circe's description is that Sirens act solely by singing. They enchant and entice through singing, but other than that, they merely sit. Although the reference to "boneheaps" of rotting men with shriveling skin suggests a relationship between the Sirens' enchantment and the death of men, it is not at all clear that the Sirens play any active role in bringing about this death. In fact, it would appear that this death occurs without any direct

corporeal contact between those who die and the Sirens bar the somatic properties of the Siren's song. This song seems to mesmerize, to entrance, and to assert a magnetic force upon those who chance to encounter it, but the Sirens themselves commit no "deadly" act except to sing.

After Circe warns Odysseus about the Sirens, Odysseus says that she warns him of several more dangers awaiting him on his journey back to Ithaca. Odysseus takes Circe's leave, then passes along her instructions to his crew:

First of all she tells us to keep away from the magical Sirens and their singing and their flowery meadow, but only I, she said, was to listen to them, but you must tie me hard in hurtful bonds, to hold me fast in position upright against the mast, with the ropes' ends fastened around it; but if I supplicate you and implore you to set me free, then you must tie me fast with even more lashings. (12:158-164) (189)

Though it is briefer, Odysseus' description of the Sirens here is largely similar to Circe's. Again, he describes them as magical singers, but does not tell his crew the danger that their song poses to its listeners. Notably, Odysseus reiterates and embellishes the relationship between the Sirens and their "meadow," an interesting move that sexualizes them. According to Jean-Pierre Vernant, "meadow", *leimon*, "is one of the words used to designate female genitalia" (104). Vernant believes that the poet has crafted the Sirens to be "in all their irresistibility unequivocally in the realm of sexual attraction or erotic appeal," but it seems a more precise characterization to say that the poet has crafted this crafting to take place by Odysseus through his narrative. Circe has offered him the privilege of a choice: either he can stop up his ears along with those of his crew or he can "have joy in

hearing the song of the Sirens.” Odysseus’ preference for pleasure is revealed by his choice, but it is precisely this choice coupled with his own desire that sexualizes the Sirens’ song. Odysseus is allured not by song, but by the power he holds to let himself be tempted.

As Odysseus’ narrative of his encounters with the Sirens continues, he tells his audience that as he gave his men Circe’s instructions, his ship approached the Sirens’ island. He states:

So as I was telling all the details to my companions,
meanwhile the well-made ship was coming rapidly closer
to the Sirens’ isle, for the harmless wind was driving her onward; but
immediately then the breeze dropped, and a windless calm fell there,
and some divinity stilled the tossing waters. My companions stood
up, and took the sails down, and stowed them away in the hollow
hull, and took their places for rowing, and with their planed
oarblades whitened the water. Then I, taking a great wheel of wax,
with the sharp bronze cut a little piece off, and rubbed it together in
my heavy hands, and soon the wax grew softer, under the powerful
stress of the sun, and the heat and light of Hyperion’s lordling.
One after another, I stopped the ears of all my companions,
and they then bound me hand and foot in the fast ship, standing
upright against the mast with the ropes’ ends lashed around it,
and sitting then to row they dashed their oars in the gray sea.
But when we were as far from the land as a voice shouting
carries, lightly plying, the swift ship as it drew nearer

was seen by the Sirens, and they directed their sweet song toward us.
(189-90).

As we can see from this passage, the most startling disparity between Odysseus' description of the Sirens and their subsequent literary and iconographical representation is that, in fact, Odysseus never sees them. He reveals that the Sirens catch sight of him and his ship, but the sign that marks his ship's proximity to the Sirens is not a vision, but a change in the wind. So although the Sirens have become a trope for wild, beastly, and feminine sexual abandon—mythological enchantresses who must be resisted lest they entice men into their deadly clutches—these excesses have been written onto the Sirens' physical body by intervening history extracted from a fairly innocuous literary image. Moreover, the disparity between the embellishment of the Sirens' physical appearance after Homer and the absence of any visual description of them in the *Odyssey* presents an interesting interpretive problem. For in the *Odyssey* the Sirens are entities or agents who *act* through sound and yet their *sound* is neither directly present in the text in real time—we cannot physically hear it emanating from the page—nor *represented* by the text. What counts within the overall narrative is whether the Sirens' sound acts or fails to act upon Odysseus. If the song *acts* it deters him from his voyage back to Ithaca; if it *fails to act* it does not deter him and he sails on. By binding himself to the mast and allowing himself to hear the Sirens' song but withstand the force of its action, Odysseus disrupts the potential of the vocal

performative.⁵⁰ In this way, he inserts himself as master of a representational space swirling with desire between the voice's promise and its misfire.⁵¹

At the same time that Odysseus' disruption of the vocal performative is successful in opening up a space of representation—that is, Odysseus is able to listen but disarm the power of the Sirens to determine his course—the narrative is unsuccessful in domesticating the Sirens' song—that is, in absorbing acoustic presence into textual narrative and thus morphing it (and thereby obliterating it) into representation. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that “the bonds with which [Odysseus] has irredeemably tied himself to practice, also keep the Sirens away from practice: their temptation is neutralized and becomes a mere object of contemplation—becomes art” (Horkheimer and Adorno 34).⁵² But the presence of sound, the presence of the Sirens' song *does not operate according to expectations of a representational economy*. Indeed, in the *Odyssey*, the Sirens' song is always associated with an active touch that remains, remains in a sense *present* in the text

⁵⁰ I use the phrase “vocal performative” to refer specifically to the resonant force of the live speech act as opposed to the “performative utterance,” as I flesh out in chapter 1.

⁵¹ I am referring here, of course, to the speech act theory of J.L. Austin. See Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* 2nd edition, (Harvard University Press: 1975).

⁵² In Carlé's words, Horkheimer and Adorno's reading of the Sirens episode in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* “absurdly take[s] the legend of sirens as a metaphorical translation for the loss of nature by logical force and technology” (3). The imperial sweep with which Kittler et al colonize the real, i.e., “nature” “by logical force and technology” is no less effacing of the siren's song. In both cases, whether the Sirens *actually* sang--the *sound* of their *song*--gets lost in the tadoo over what their song and its subvention into either culture or the body of a narrative means in a subsequent analysis, be it intellectual historical or philological.

even once the singing is disarmed.⁵³ Presence is not domesticated, not dominated, not swallowed up by representation; presence is and simply remains, remains of a presence that had been present.

Bound securely to the mast and supported by his crew ready with wax-stopped ears, Odysseus says he hears the following:

Come this way, honored Odysseus, great glory of the Achaians, and stay your ship, so that you can listen here to our singing; for no one else has ever sailed past this place in his blackship until he has listened to the honey-sweet voice that issues from our lips; then goes on, well pleased, knowing more than ever he did; for we know everything that the Argives and Trojans did and suffered in wide Troy through the gods' despise. Over all the generous earth we know everything that happens. (12:184-191)

The text of the Sirens' song is brief compared to Circe's warning and to Odysseus' elaborate preparations in order for him to be able to listen. More unusual about this song, however, is that indeed, it seems much more like a narration, a narrative *text*, than like a song. Although as oral poetry the text of the *Odyssey* could be called a song, both Circe and Odysseus repeatedly emphasize the Sirens' *song*, their singing *act*, and Odysseus's act of listening. This emphasis indicates a fundamental difference between the song of the Sirens and the song of Odysseus; or, in other words, a fundamental difference between the presentational song and the

⁵³ As discussed in Chapter 1, I borrow the idea of "performance remains" from Rebecca Schneider. See her "Archives: Performance Remains", *Performance Research* 6(2) 2001, 100-108.

representational word. The text reveals that the Sirens' song is markedly acoustic rather than literary and somatic rather than transcendent.

In English translations, the Sirens are referred to as creatures who "beguile" or, in the Lattimore edition, "enchant": a word from the Latin *incantre*, in-upon, against + *cantre* (to sing), and related to chant and incantation; possibly also related to the Latin *catena*, chain, fetter, bond. The magic they practice is achieved through the act of singing because it forges a material bond. "Enchant" and "beguile" are English translations for *thelgousin*, from *thelgô*, "to stroke or touch with magic power." So indeed, here singing is primarily an acoustic act; a tactile merger of soma, a resonant touching of bodies. This is why, as Charles Segal notes, Odysseus's hearing is characterized as *akouein*, a word that indicates hearing that is "entirely material" (Segal 105). Unlike Odysseus, the Sirens cannot narrate. "Their power," Segal states, "depends emphatically on hearing," (100) which is to say that their song imparts a resonance that resides beyond the representational power of language. In narrative terms, their song can only sing, can only *do by singing*. This is what Todorov means when he says: "[t]he Sirens say only one thing: that they are singing!" (58). In Odysseus' narrative, their song is material remains, material that remains, material that sticks to representation even though it eludes the condition of language. Underneath the representational excesses mapped onto the Sirens' *figure* are acoustic and material remains of their *song* that stick to the representational narrative.

In his retelling of the Sirens' song, Odysseus cannot replicate its resonant touch, for he can only narrate. Faced by the impossibility of representing the "magic power" of the Sirens' song in his performance, Odysseus invents a textual

equivalent. But like all half-truths, Odysseus' tall tale eventually crumbles. Although we can only take this narrator *for his word*, once again we cannot take him precisely *at his word* because of a problem that reveals itself in the final passage of relevant verse. After relaying the song's narrative, Odysseus ends the story of the Sirens as follows:

So they sang, in sweet utterance, and the heart within me
desired to listen, and I signaled my companions to set me free,
nodding with my brows, but they leaned on and rowed hard,
and Perimedes and Eurylochos, rising up, straightway
fastened me with even more lashings and squeezed me tighter.
But when they had rowed on past the Sirens, and we could no
longer hear their voices and lost the sound of their singing,
presently my eager companions took away from their ears the
beeswax with which I had stopped them: Then they set me free
from my lashings. (12:192-200)

This passage is puzzling, for if Perimedes and Eurylochos fasten Odysseus tighter whenever he signals to them and if Odysseus's crew cannot hear the Sirens because of the wax in their ears, how can they know when it has become safe to obey Odysseus's signals to set him free because the Sirens have stopped singing? If he gestures, he is tied more tightly; but if the crew is actually able to hear the Sirens, then the entire story is merely a fantastic fabrication. Blanchot insists that "a somewhat mean tendency to discredit the Sirens has always prevailed," (60) and although I do not wish to simply turn the tables against Odysseus, it appears that in fact it is his telling of the Sirens that cannot end felicitously. This is not a

discrediting of the Sirens, however, but a discrediting of that which came after, Odysseus' song, and Homer's setting of it into a written text.

Admittedly, it is impossible to say with certainty whether Odysseus actually heard something—in medial terms whether he actually detected sound, or something that I refer to as voice, the irrefutable materiality of sound, atmospheric vibrations with consequential material effects. But whether he heard it or not, a trace of the Sirens voice already exists in the body of the text, is present even if it does not literally *sound* when we open up the pages of the book. Although we cannot literally hear the medial voice, we know from this reading that their remains *remain*, even if these remains are only indirectly detectable. They remain not in spite of the ambiguous manner in which they are rendered, but all the more so because of it, a point that I will elaborate further below. The space of Odysseus' infelicity suggests the possibility that the Sirens "sang" something, that they voiced sound or sounds that cannot be directly conveyed by words, pure voice, the "*Urmedium*" (Waldenfels 19) of the live speech act. Somewhere later along the line, the story of the Sirens is woven into a song that recounts Odysseus' travels home and his encounter with them, a "song" that marks a second medial shift, regardless of who actually "sang" the Odyssey. Odysseus or "Odysseus" was a bard who sang, and Homer's text an artifact, a "storage container" of that material. This transformation from song in the literal sense to a poem set into text by a poet or poets referred to as Homer marks a third medial shift.

Although evidence of medial shifts create a difficulty for the interpreter, the task is to flesh out the sense in which they remain; that is, since medial shifts do not completely obliterate the previous form, it is necessary for the interpreter to "read"

for the signs that indicate other medial presence. Havelock states that when primary orality is written down, what I am referring to here as the third medial shift, “it ceases to be what it originally was” (66). By this, he does not mean that primary orality never existed, but rather that there are challenges in devising a way to detect it:

Aside from the paradox by which language has to be used to understand language, that is, to understand itself, we face a comparable dilemma when we undertake to understand orality. For the chief source material provided for inspection is textual. How can a knowledge of orality be derived from its opposite? And even supposing texts can supply some sort of image of orality, how can that image be adequately verbalized in a textual description of it, which presumably employs a vocabulary and syntax proper to textualization, not orality? (Havelock 44)

Once the content shifts medial form, the content may be what Havelock, after G. S. Kirk, calls “compromised and corrupted,” (53) but this does not efface all traces of the prior form, as Milman Parry demonstrates in his extensive work on what he calls the “Homeric Problem” (Havelock 52). In the same way, neither the “song” nor the text cancel out voice, even if it makes that voice inaudible, “employing a vocabulary and syntax” proper to a subsequent form (Havelock 44). The great difficulty with hearing voice, of course, is that it could never—can never—be rendered through language absolutely because it does not consist of linguistic properties. And by the time it has morphed into text, it has gone through at least two phases of “compromise and corruption. “

It is fascinating that despite their sexual and textual politics, the Berlin media theorists intuit the first medial shift that I describe, even if they are reluctant to publicly recognize it as such before attempting to make it data on tape. The reluctance to avow phenomena that cannot be seen is symptomatic of a larger cultural problem in which phenomena that are not immediately perceptible are doubted and dismissed. It is important to remember, however, that the material effects of sound may be even acutely present yet not immediately perceptible. The danger in listening, I would guess, comes from a fear of performing not only flimsy, but possibly even pathological scholarship. If we “hear voices,” we are more likely to be aligned with Daniel Paul Schreber, Freud’s famous psychotic patient, than other figures who heard voices such as Pythagoras, Socrates, St. Augustine, or Hildegard von Bingen.⁵⁴ Of course, I am not advocating that we actually place our ear to the written page, but rather, that we read keeping in mind the possibility that traces of sound are somehow present—looking and reading for them, even, or perhaps especially, in places where the text seems “compromised and corrupted.” These moments—perhaps we might call them aporias—where the narrative reaches a breaking point, may well be the place where traces of voice are trying to be heard.

Carlé suggests that in addition to signaling the beginning of the “vocal alphabet,” the Sirens episode marks the beginning of what Julian Jaynes calls, in his book by the same name “the origin of consciousness and the breakdown of the bicameral mind”. Although I am not prepared to unreservedly subscribe to Carlé

⁵⁴ See Ivan Leudar and Philip Thomas, *Voices of Reason, Voices of Insanity: Studies of Verbal Hallucinations*. London and Philadelphia: Routledge, 2000.

or Jaynes, I find it compelling that in a literary text, sound is the register that, like the unconscious, must be inferred through markers or symptoms because it cannot be known directly. It must be teased out and deciphered, perhaps because it has been “compromised and corrupted,” or, in Freudian terms, “condensed and displaced.” If the Sirens episode marks the beginnings of Odysseus’ consciousness, then perhaps the Sirens are a literary figure or trope for the unconscious, hence their association with animal instincts, uncivilized urges, danger, and desire. Here, then, the only place in my analysis where voice gets linked to subjectivity in the first person, though it is not the voice of the ego, but of the id.⁵⁵

Strangely, Kittler’s crew has difficulties with readings of the Sirens that do not correspond with their own, as though their medial innovation can cancel out alternate interpretations that perhaps rely upon other medial phases. About Horkheimer and Adorno’s reading of the Sirens in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, for instance, Carlé argues that Horkheimer and Adorno “looked at the *Odyssey* as if it was somewhat like the first ‘novel’ in ‘literature’ so that their only ‘left’ perspective could absurdly take the legend of sirens as a metaphorical translation for the loss of natur[al] biological force and technology” (Carlé *Psychoacoustics* 3). What strikes me, however, is that Horkheimer and Adorno’s reading is compatible with an interpretation of a shift from the first to the third medial phases that I describe, in which the “force” of the vocal utterance is subsumed by a cultural object. That they do not account for the second medial shift may have only to do with the

⁵⁵ In medial terms, the unconscious itself might be viewed as a “storage container”.

metaphorical lens with which they viewed Homer. I do not feel that culture can erase all forms of natural force—on this point I disagree with Horkheimer and Adorno—but in the context of their study I can logically follow why they would make this claim. One cannot fault them for finding metaphorical value in a potent cultural myth, and for their disinterest in deciphering medial code. Just as Adorno’s reading of Wagner has less to do with Wagner’s music specifically than with the dangerous aesthetics of Nazi politics, Horkheimer and Adorno are less concerned with the status of nature than with the dangers of man under the condition of enlightenment.⁵⁶ Bringing them into dialogue with the medial shifts I have described, I would probe Horkheimer and Adorno for a reflection upon an untenable nature/culture split. Though culture has come to dominate nature, it surely has not obliterated nature. Nature “remains” in the fabric of culture—indeed, it constitutes culture—although culture repeatedly strives to assert and reassert its domination.

Undermining Sonic Ontology

As well known as the Horkheimer/Adorno and Blanchot texts regarding the Sirens is Franz Kafka’s short piece, “Das Schweigen der Sirenen” [“The Silence of the Sirens”]. Similar to his dismissal of those previous other readings, Wolfgang Ernst is so determined to prove an originary act of resonance that Kafka too must be somehow mistaken to suggest that the Sirens did not sing (“Resonance” 3). In his fable, which I will quote below at length, Kafka portrays the Sirens as pure

⁵⁶ See Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone. London and New York: Verso, 2005.

sound, capable of deadly sonic affliction, and Odysseus as a man who listens but does not or perhaps cannot reason: *“Der Sang der Sirenen durchdrang alles, und die Leidenschaft der Verführten hätte mehr als Ketten und Mast gesprengt.”* *Daran aber dachte Odysseus nicht, obwohl er davon vielleicht gehört hatte”* (305).⁵⁷ According to Kafka, those who hear the Sirens long so unmistakably, that they forsake all else to hear them; no earthly restraint could hinder that desire. In the case of Odysseus, however, the Sirens did not sing: *“Und tatsächlich sangen, als Odysseus kam, die gewaltigen Sängerinnen nicht, sei es, daß sie glaubten, diesem Gegner könne nur noch das Schweigen beikommen, sei es, daß der Anblick der Glückseligkeit im Gesicht des Odysseus, der an nichts anderes als an Wachs und Ketten dachte, sie allen Gesang vergessen ließ”* (305).⁵⁸ Had Odysseus actually heard the Sirens, he would not live to tell about it. In Kafka’s version, song does not obliterate Odysseus, but only because the Sirens do not sing. Either the sight of Odysseus or the Siren’s forgetfulness allows Odysseus to catch a glimpse—a glimpse that signals the Siren’s failure rather than Odysseus’s cunning. Odysseus sees the Sirens and the Sirens see him, lines of site that supercede, indeed—nullify—sound. Odysseus is not a hero, but a bearer of good fortune.

⁵⁷ “The song of the sirens could pierce through everything, and the longing of those they seduced would have broken far stronger bonds than chains and masts. But [Odysseus] did not think of that, although he probably heard of it (248).”

⁵⁸ “When [Odysseus] approached them the potent songstresses actually did not sing, whether because they thought that this enemy could be vanquished only by their silence, or because the look of bliss on the face of [Odysseus], who was thinking of nothing but his wax and his chains, made them forget their singing” (249).

According to Kafka, Odysseus, the egotistical man, was so captured by the sight of the Sirens that he did not hear their silence. Caught up in his own gaze, he thought they were singing and the he alone did not hear them: *“Odysseus aber, um es so auszudrücken, hörte ihr Schweigen nicht, er glaubte, sie sängen, und nur er sei behütet, es zu hören. Flüchtig sah er zuerst die Wengungen ihrer Hälse, das tiefe Atmen, die tränenvollen Augen, den halb geöffneten Mund, glaubte aber, dies gehöre zu den Arien, die ungehört um ihn verklangen“* (305).⁵⁹ At the same time, the sight of Odysseus captures the Sirens’ gaze, and makes them forget everything. It makes them unable to act, which, in their case, is both to sing and to engage in the economy of desire. In Kafka’s words, *“Sie aber — schöner als jemals — streckten und drehten sich, ließen das schaurige Haar offen im Winde wehen und spannten die Krallen frei auf den Felsen. Sie wollten nicht mehr verführen, nur noch den Abglanz vom großen Augenpaar des Odysseus wollten sie so lange als möglich erhaschen“* (305).⁶⁰ In that moment in which their eyes were transfixed upon Odysseus, Kafka tells us, “they would have been annihilated” had they “possessed consciousness” (250): *“Hätten die Sirenen Bewußtsein, sie wären damals vernichtet worden. So aber blieben sie, nur Odysseus ist ihnen entgangen“* (305). Aurality is thus mistakenly integrated into narrative, while man, his sight, and the failure of his other senses create a split subject in which failed “knowledge” becomes the condition of consciousness.

⁵⁹ “Caught up in his own gaze, he thought they were singing and that he alone did not hear them. For a fleeting moment he saw their throats rising and falling, their breasts lifting, their eyes filled with tears, their lips half-parted, but believed that these were accompaniments to the airs which died unheard around him” (249).

⁶⁰ They had no longer any desire to allure; all that they wanted was to hold as long as they could the radiance that fell from [Odysseus’s] great eyes” (250).

The astuteness of Kafka's reading of the Sirens lies in his tacit recognition that the Siren's sound is compromised and corrupted in Odysseus's story, that in fact, Odysseus is foolish to think that he can "know" a knowledge uncorrupted by his own desire. This is what I meant when I said that the presence of the Sirens' voice is not domesticated, not dominated, not swallowed up by linguistic representation. Odysseus may think that he captures the Sirens' "knowledge," but their "knowledge" is of a completely different nature altogether. Odysseus becomes the master of representational space, swirling with desire, but not master of the Siren's song. Kafka, for his part, detects sound remains even when they are silent, by finding points at which human technologies of "knowing" fail.

Although Kafka's text portrays a missed event, a "failure" on the level of reading, it succeeds in getting so much right about the Sirens and their legacy, for what it signals is precisely the rhetoric of failure that surround the song of the Sirens. This failure has to do with the schism between seeing and hearing, between reading and listening, between song and narration, gaps whose presence take away the possibility of Odysseus's and Homer's narrative to ever end felicitously. Again and again, this seems to be sound's legacy—its indication that ephemera is, after all, evidence; evidence that sound remains. But that it should remain in a quiet medium tells us something about both the practice of reading and the divide between nature and culture. In terms of the former, reading is ultimately not about truth, but about the possibility to interpret every possible reading borne out of the text and for all of these interpretations to be, if not equally, than at least simultaneously plausible. As for the latter, it seems almost trite to say that man's desire to "know" oftentimes distorts the clarity of the enigma directly before him.

Ultimately, the gap between seeing and hearing is not so much about the privileged development of one sensory apparatus over another, but about a certain need that makes man hungry to possess. Disappearing sound, also known as becoming quiet, may not be “failure,” but ingenious subterfuge.

CHAPTER 3

FREUD'S SCRIPTURAL RHETORIC

As the developer of the art of the “talking cure,” Freud is clearly one of the most adept listeners in modern history. Why, then, does he disavow his ability to listen when the sounds that he hears are musical? What trouble does Freud associate with music? As many scholars have examined at length, Freud was a master of the art of close reading, an extraordinarily rigorous and creative interpreter of human behavior whose insight one could only hope to emulate. In much of his work, however, the “text” that he “reads,” his “object” of psychoanalysis, is both the body and the speech of the patient. He is a close reader, but in the most general sense of the term.

If psychoanalysis is a science of interpretation, the procedure that “brings out the latent meaning in what the subject says and does” (Laplanche and Pontalis 227), careful listening is the technique that makes interpretation of the analysand’s speech possible. Indeed, “The central condition of Freud’s therapy is, of course, his insistence on the spoken word, which is saturated with meaning for him” (Bruzelius 195). In the psychoanalytic setting, the spoken word would be mute without close reading *and* careful listening operating in tandem. Since Freud forever changed the way that we listen, then what do we hear when we listen carefully for Freud?

In the analytic setting, “the ‘instrument’ that the therapist needs is the talk, the voice of the patient himself, who will display for the therapist the underlying conflicts that give birth to his symptoms” (Bruzelius 194). What interests me,

however, is not Freud's "talk," but rather his rhetoric, the language he chooses to employ in his writing in order to persuade his readers. I am not placing Freud on the couch, not inviting him to talk in order assist in the relief of a set of symptoms; my goal here is not the "talking cure." Rather, my goal is to carefully listen to Freud in the context of his culture and history. I am in search of Freud's language and behavior that is saturated with meaning, Freud's voice as it is bound up in the rhetoric of his writing.

My example for this kind of interpretation comes in part from Freud, who in much of his work, considers his object the vast domain of Western culture. As Louis Rose states, for Freud and his followers, "their calling belonged as much to culture as to psychology, and not only because that early circle included writers and critics, as well as medical practitioners. From the founding of the [Vienna Psychoanalytic] Society at the turn of the century to its forced disintegration under the *Anschluss* in 1938, Freud and his followers defined the comprehensive exploration of culture as one of their fundamental pursuits (Rose 11). For Freud, culture is fascinating not because it is ill (though some of his contemporaries certainly thought that) but because it is a tangled web of curious discourses that have meaning.

In my work here, I want to listen carefully to Freud as a cultural analyst. Here, I am invoking the practice coined by Mieke Bal, who states that cultural analysis is a rigorous interdisciplinary practice that "problematizes history's silent assumptions in order to come to an understanding of the past that is different "(1). This is entirely similar to Freud's methodology. By listening carefully to the past, Freud excavates meaning hidden in the silent assumptions that have formed our

understanding of the world. My intention is to listen, paying close attention to what is said and what is not said, to listen while questioning the process of listening.⁶¹ My practice attends to reading while attempting to become cognizant of what lies beyond the text. What voices, what truths might be silently lurking in Freud's rhetoric?

In the same way that "reading" has been constructed as a sober and rational method of examination that makes the interpretive operation scientifically credible, the act of listening is oftentimes constructed as an infinitely subjective exercise that threatens the subject who listens to become the object of scrutiny, especially when the topic involves psychoanalysis. As I show below, this political insight is more relevant to the project at hand than I had at first realized.

In an essay on Freud reading, Sander Gilman explains that the threat of "subject" becoming "object," was especially tangible for Jewish physicians (like Freud) since the Enlightenment, who "saw science as the path of the escape from the darkness of the ghetto into the bright light of modern culture" (Gilman 152). "For the late nineteenth-century Jewish scientist," Gilman continues, "especially those in the biological sciences, the path of social and cultural acceptance [...] entailed, more than in any other arena of endeavor, the acceptance of the contradiction between being 'subject' and 'object,' as one of the basic premises of nineteenth-century biological science was the primacy of racial difference" (152). Freud was acutely aware of this dilemma and, according to Gilman, attempted to

⁶¹ For a philosophy of listening, see Peter Szendy's *Listen: A History of our Ears*, Trans. Charlotte Mandell, New York: Fordham UP, 2008, and Jean-Luc Nancy's *Listening*, Trans. Charlotte Mandell. New York: Fordham UP, 2007.

resolve it through rhetorical means. Because Jewish physicians could not meet “the demands of ‘scientific objectivity,’” placed upon them by the non-Jewish academic culture, Gilman argues, they “were forced to undertake complex psychological strategies to provide themselves with an ‘objective’ observing voice” (153). In the chapter that follows, I pursue the argument that Freud’s trouble with music has less to do with aesthetic properties of the musical art form than with cultural anxieties about the reception of “scientific objectivity,” anxieties directly related to discourses about race, gender, and sexuality at the *fin-de-Siècle*.

Freud Listening (To Music)

Although psychoanalysis has been employed as a hermeneutic tool with which to interpret the representational content of an operatic work, the influence of operatic culture upon Freud and the development of psychoanalysis is a topic that has been virtually unexplored. An historical and cultural analysis of psychoanalysis and opera as mutually constitutive has yet to be written. This is due partly to the fact that for many years, the study of opera has belonged to the academic discipline of musicology. Until roughly the past two decades, most musicological scholarship considered opera to be an essentially musical rather than dramatic art form, and thus drew fairly superficial conclusions about Freud’s relationship to it based upon the albeit contradictory evidence of his seemingly fraught relationship to music.

Given Freud’s fascination with classical drama, however, his appeal for opera should come as no surprise. Freud scholars have generally accepted the assumption that because of Freud’s troubled relationship to music, opera could not have played much of a role in Freudian thought, except in those who mention

Freud's particular operatic taste or biographical details such as how many times he visited this or that opera—rather confusing bits of information, since he is not generally believed to have cared about it. Exceptions to the generally prevailing attitude about Freud and opera come from a small number of biographers and critics who point out that despite his seemingly troubled relationship to music in general, Freud appears to have been particularly interested in and drawn to opera. Richard Sterba, who had been a member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society from 1928-1938, distrusts Freud's alleged disinterest in music and the general acceptance of this disinterest in biographical sources, and draws attention to Freud's knowledge of and captivation for Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *Le Nozze di Figaro*, as well as Bizet's *Carmen*, concluding it "doubtful whether music was so foreign to the founder of psychoanalysis" (Sterba 96). Kurt Eissler reaches the same conclusion precisely because of Freud's relationship to opera, calling Freud a "deeply musical man" (97). And André Haynal states: "contrary to the prevailing image of him, Freud was a lover of music, especially opera" (xxi). In addition to Mozart and Bizet, Freud was well versed with Wagner's operas, as Cora Díaz de Chumaceiro has painstakingly documented (De Chumaceiro 1993).

In the literature that addresses Freud's relationship to music, two related issues arise: first, Freud's musicality (or lack thereof), and second, Freud's hypersensitivity to sounding phenomena. Freud's contemporaries confirm that he did not have the constitution of a musician and that he had difficulty grasping the internal structure of the art form. Max Graf said that Freud was "a man of great artistic sensibilities, but to his great regret...quite unmusical," (1942 474) and Eduard Hitschmann, that "music did not interest him, because he regarded it as an

unintelligible language” (qtd. In Roazen 270). Hence, Ernst Jones’s influential assessment that “Freud’s aversion to music was one of his well known characteristics.” But Jones misunderstands the composition of musicality, conflating an inability to create music and to intuit its structural design with an inability to sympathetically listen to the art form. Jones grossly exaggerates Freud’s ambiguity toward music, a position many have been inexplicably eager to confirm. Even nephew Harry reported that uncle Freud “despised music and considered it solely as an intrusion,” (Jones; Ruitenbeek 313) a rather polemical assessment of someone who involuntarily hummed Mozart and off-handedly cited Wagner.

Misunderstandings about music and musicality mark much of the early biographical literature about Freud that later examinations attempt to undo. For example, although Freud admits that he is unable to carry a tune, there is no substantiation for Peter Gay’s report that Freud “virtually boasted about his tone deafness”(168).⁶² As de Chumaceiro points out, the inability to carry a tune is a marker neither for tone deafness nor for musical ability (1990). Even accomplished instrumentalists can be hopeless singers. What seems clear is that Freud admitted and sometimes even exaggerated his lack for musical talent, and at the same time demonstrated a profound sensitivity toward listening.

⁶² Gay draws his conclusion from Freud’s remarks about his dream that is referred to as “Revolutionary Dream of Count Tune,” which Freud analyzes in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud states: “I had been humming a tune to myself which I recognized as Figaro’s aria from *Le Nozze di Figaro*.” Freud goes on, “It is a little doubtful whether anyone else would have recognized the tune,” presumably because Freud could not carry a tune. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In other words, Freud heard the tune in his head, but was apparently unable to reproduce it in a manner in which it might be recognized by someone else.

Indeed, if Freud demonstrates a vexed and complicated relationship to music, it is likely because of this same sensitivity. One finds this conclusion in most literature that has given careful thought to Freud's relationship to music. For instance, André Michel argues that Freud's behavior indicates an acute sensitivity rather than disinclination (Leader 90). And Neil M. Cheshire believes that in addition to a "powerful auditory *memory*" Freud demonstrated a "pervasively auditory 'cognitive style' such as Charcot had identified as a distinct personality characteristic marking off the temperamental *auditifs* from the contrasted *visuels* and 'motorics'" (1128). Psychoanalyst David Abrams speculates that Freud's sensitivity to sound may be a sign of "some auditory-related trauma in [his] early life," but I am unaware of evidence to support this claim (Abrams 281).

Some critics have sensationalized the intolerance Freud displayed towards the sound of his sisters—and later his own children—repeating their etudes on the piano. Freud's elder sister Anna recalls:

When I was eight years old, my mother, who was very musical, wanted me to study the piano, and I began practicing by the hour. Though Sigmund's room was not near the piano, the sound disturbed him. He appealed to my mother to remove the piano if she did not wish him to leave the house altogether. The piano disappeared and with it all opportunities for his sisters to become musicians. Nor did any of [Sigmund's] children ever receive musical instruction where he would have to hear it. (Abrams 281)

This story is a wonderful anecdote, to be sure, but what it confirms is Freud's extraordinary responsiveness to music, his hypersensitivity. Of course, it also

illustrates the will with which Freud realized his own needs and desires, and his family's capitulation to them, but that is not the topic of this study.

Freud's own words demonstrate a clear ambivalence toward music.

Although in his personal correspondence Freud reports to Marie Bonaparte that he finds music "foreign, incomprehensible and inaccessible," (Ernst Freud 430) and to Deszo Mosonzi that he is "a completely unmusical person" (Michel 52)⁶³ in an early letter to Wilhelm Fliess, he insightfully praises a performance of Wagner's *Meistersinger*: "*Die 'Morgentraumdeutweise' hat mich sympathisch berührt, zum Paradies und Parnas hätte ich gerne die 'Parnosse' hinzugefügt. Es sind übrigens wie in keiner Oper sonst wirkliche Gedanken in Musik gesetzt, die dem Nachsinnen anhaftenden Gefühlstöne.*"⁶⁴ Such a statement hardly creates the impression that Freud was an unsympathetic audience. Not only does it shed doubt upon the validity of his later statements to the contrary, it also suggests that for some reason Freud was motivated to distance himself from an early musical affinity, or perhaps that his later dismissive statements seek to conceal another underlying conflict.

Freud's Gesture toward Plato

Freud characterizes his relationship to music as one that he approaches with distance and reserve. His most famous statement on the matter comes from his 1914 essay, *The Moses of Michelangelo*, in which he confesses:

⁶³ For a discussion these two letters, see Leader, "Freud, Music, and Working Through," *Freud's Footnotes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 88-119.

⁶⁴ Letter 151, 12. December 1897. *Sigmund Freud. Briefe an Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904*. Ed. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1985.

Aber Kunstwerke üben eine starke Wirkung auf mich aus, insbesondere Dichtungen und Werke der Plastik, seltener Malereien. Ich bin so veranlaßt worden, bei den entsprechenden Gelegenheiten lange vor ihnen zu verweilen, und wollte sie auf meine Weise erfassen, d. h. mir begreiflich machen, wodurch sie wirken. Wo ich das nicht kann, z. B. in der Musik, bin ich fast genußunfähig. Eine rationalistische oder vielleicht analytische Anlage sträubt sich in mir dagegen, daß ich ergriffen sein und dabei nicht wissen solle, warum ich es bin, und was mich ergreift. (1914 172)⁶⁵

Although it is tempting to take Freud at the level of his literal word, surely Freud himself would press the meaning of the ambivalent phrase “fast

⁶⁵ Freud’s statement is possibly an allusion to Heinrich Heine’s essay on Paul Delaroch: “Zu meinem Thema zurückkehrend, hätte ich hier noch manche wackere Maler zu rühmen; aber trotz des besten Willens ist es mir dennoch unmöglich, ihre stillen Verdienste ruhig auseinanderzusetzen, denn da draußen stürmt es wirklich zu laut, und es ist unmöglich, die Gedanken zusammenzufassen, wenn solche Stürme in der Seele widerhallen. Ist es doch in Paris sogar an sogenannten ruhigen Tagen sehr schwer, das eigene Gemüt von den Erscheinungen der Straße abzuwenden und Privatträumen nachzuhängen. Wenn die Kunst auch in Paris mehr als anderswo blüht, so werden wir doch in ihrem Genusse jeden Augenblick gestört durch das rohe Geräusch des Lebens; die süßesten Töne der Pasta und Malibran werden uns verleidet durch den Notschrei der erbitterten Armut, und das trunkene Herz, das eben Roberts Farbenlust eingeschlürft, wird schnell wieder ernüchtert durch den Anblick des öffentlichen Elends. Es gehört fast ein Goethescher Egoismus dazu, um hier zu einem ungetrübten Kunstgenuß zu gelangen, und wie sehr einem gar die Kunstkritik erschwert wird, das fühle ich eben in diesem Augenblick. Ich vermochte gestern dennoch an diesem Berichte weiterzuschreiben, nachdem ich einmal unterdessen nach den Boulevards gegangen war, wo ich einen todblassen Menschen vor Hunger und Elend niederfallen sah. Aber wenn auf einmal ein ganzes Volk niederfällt an den Boulevards von Europa - dann ist es unmöglich, ruhig weiterzuschreiben. Wenn die Augen des Kritikers von Tränen getrübt werden, ist auch sein Urteil wenig mehr wert.” See Heine, *Französische Maler*.

genußsunfähig" [almost incapable] and propose that its utterer is far more influenced by music than he wants to admit or is capable of consciously recognizing, hence the statement that he is *almost* incapable of its enjoyment. This is the position taken by Theodor Reik, a member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society from 1911-1933: "It is likely that [Freud's] turning away...was the more energetic and violent, the more the emotional effects of music appeared undesirable to him. He became more and more convinced that he had to keep his reason unclouded and his emotions in abeyance. He developed an increasing reluctance to surrendering to the dark power of music." Reik believes that Freud's posturing toward music is act of "self-defense" that suggests a relationship loaded with affect rather than devoid of it. Clinging to reason rather than affect, Freud distanced himself from music on purely cerebral grounds, reluctant to admit and to avail himself to the effect music has upon him.⁶⁶

Surely Freud knew that by distancing himself from representation and clinging to reason, he makes a grand gesture toward the philosophy of Plato, for whom both artist and poet are "by nature third from the king and the truth" (Plato 268) due to the corrupting influence of mimesis. Because of what Plato interprets to be the dangerous gulf between imitation and the truth, he states that the moral subject should resist imitation. Mimesis, Plato insists, "consorts with a part of us that is far from reason" (274). Freud seems aware of this danger, which is why he lingers long before a work, attempting to discover a rational and rigorous truth.

⁶⁶ Such behavior is not uncommon for musical individuals who are overly sensitive to sound and to noise. See Michel.

Plato insists that perception cannot be trusted because the senses are inevitably flawed by the human condition. He states:

Something looked at from close at hand doesn't seem to be the same size as it does when it is looked at from a distance [...] And something looks crooked when seen in water and straight when seen out of it, while something else looks both concave and convex because our eyes are deceived by its colors, and every other similar sort of confusion is clearly present in our soul. And it is because they exploit this weakness in our nature that *trompe l'oeil* painting, conjuring, and other forms of trickery have powers that are little short of magical. (273)

While perception is susceptible to corruption, the critical faculties of the rational mind are significantly more trustworthy: “don't measuring, counting, and weighing give us most welcome assistance in these cases, so that we aren't ruled by something's looking bigger, smaller, more numerous, or heavier, but by calculation, measurement, or weighing?” (273). Whereas the errant senses play tricks on the mind, rational assessment cuts through the fuzziness of perception, offering reliable means of accounting—mathematics rather than subjective estimation. Like the jar on the dime store counter filled with multi-colored gum balls, guessing the number those sweet little candies by merely eyeballing it can be only speculative. But if one dumps out the contents of the jar and actually counts them piece by piece, or weighs their total content, one can make an accurate assessment aided by the rational faculties. Beware of the information gleaned through the senses because it will always be untrustworthy, Plato insists. Rely

instead upon “calculating, measuring, and weighing,” for these tasks “are the work of the rational part of the soul (273).

Plato believes that artists are guided primarily by passion, which is precisely why they are so dangerous. In Jonas Barish’s reading of Plato, “instead of helping us master our passions [artists] inflame them. They pour fuel on the most combustible part of our nature” (9). So not only do artists lead one astray, their representational objects are treacherous, “For they aim not to discover the truth but only to please” (9). And as weak and susceptible creatures, “ nothing is easier than to follow the line of least resistance, to imitate the passions, which lend themselves to vivid mimetic enactment, and which seduce by their very variety and variability” (9). Freud seems acutely aware of this danger, which is why his reading is so careful. He takes great pains to establish scientific method and to read thoroughly and carefully.

There is a certain irony here, however, for no matter how closely and carefully he “reads,” Freud’s (scientific) method is almost entirely about interpretation rather than measurement. While the troubled patient can be observed for symptoms, and those symptoms can be evaluated, the mathematical dimensions of, say, psychosis, can be hardly quantified. Contemplating a text or a painting gives one time to unscramble unintentional or unconscious meaning embedded in that object. By placing that object in context, by providing it with a history, one might read latent meanings that exceed the literal surface dimensions. After Freud, we have learned to decipher significance that lies beyond the concrete, beyond the mathematical, beyond the purely physical dimensions of a work. So

although Freud gestures to Plato, he also distances himself from Plato, for he recognizes the significance of interpretive meaning latent in a work.

In the passage cited from the *Moses* essay above, Freud says that he achieves pleasure from works of art when he is able to contemplate them at length, when he can “spend a long time before them trying to apprehend them in my own way” (“*bei den entsprechenden Gelegenheiten lange vor ihnen zu verweilen*”). Through lengthy contemplation, this act of “*verweilen*,” (literally “stay,” “rest,” “dwell on”), he strives to discover aesthetic properties that stir him. He does not let his passions get carried away because they are always under the watchful eye of the intellect. Interestingly, when Freud says, “Wherever I cannot do this,” (“*Wo ich das nicht kann*”), his referent is *verweilen*, the act of dwelling on the artwork, not the act of being moved. Freud is able to be moved, it seems, but unwilling to allow himself to quietly dwell upon the musical object. His resistance, his “*sträuben*,” is an intellectual act that preemptively rejects the act of contemplation. But what is Freud’s motivation for this rejection?

Whereas the information gleaned through the sense of sight is untrustworthy, information gleaned through listening is even more suspect, for it involves capturing an abstract object. How should that object be calculated, measured, or weighed? With a text or a piece of visual art, one can dwell quietly in front of it, but with sounding music this is impossible; the aural object itself is ephemeral. If rational contemplation is untrustworthy, Freud fears (or feigns the fear, perhaps) that music poses a greater threat to those rational faculties upon which he staunchly depends—his learned, knowledgeable, and rational position—hence his “increasing reluctance to surrendering to the dark power of music.”

Not surprisingly, Plato feels that as an art even more abstract than poetry, music poses the most significant threat to the passions. For that reason, it should be banished from the city entirely except for those musical forms that are most simplistic and utilitarian (Plato 74-75). Barish explains,

[...] only those rhythms and harmonies are to be permitted which foster resolution and temperance, not those expressive of conviviality or grief which might enervate the soul. "Corrupting" harmonies and rhythms must be purified. Flutes three-cornered lyres, and complex scales are to be banned; only the simple lyre and harp are to be allowed for urban use and the shepherd's pipe for the country, along with the basic scales. (25)

By capitulating to Plato's injunction against music, Freud demonstrates his preference for the less corruptible. His psychoanalytic method might operate beyond representation, which is all the more reason to keep his passions in check. Perhaps music poses too great a possible threat to a scientist already prone to criticism for straying from the purely quantifiable. His choice of words is no accident, and his position no coincidence.

But more than signal the disciplined control of his rational faculties, Freud's statement about music indicates his allegiance toward something far more important, namely, his allegiance to texts (including visual texts) that can be studied in private. In the context of the *Moses* essay, this gesture is noteworthy not only because it indicates Freud's proclivity, but precisely because it indicates his distrust of the theatrical. For in addition to possessing the ability to inflame the passions, the simplistic and utilitarian music espoused by Plato is decisively

solitary. It is safe because it can be controlled and contained, unlike its counterpart, which can potentially “corrupt” the masses. Freud’s nod to Plato is thus a very decisive nod toward anti-theatricality. For Freud, maintaining affectual self-control and resisting the theatrical are complementary gestures.

Indeed, Freud’s gesture toward Plato is all the more reason to pick up this clue about anti-theatricality, for Plato was, according to Martin Puchner “the founder of anti-theatricalism” (14). According to Jonas Barish, Plato first articulated what Barish calls the “antitheatrical prejudice,” (18), “vestiges of a prejudice against the theater that goes back as far in European history as the theater itself can be traced” (Barish 1). Whether Freud enjoyed the theater itself is irrelevant; anti-theatricalism, following both Barish and Puchner, is the very resistance to the theatrical. Resistance here is a remarkable word, since it precisely describes Freud’s own statement that he resists music, being *almost* incapable of its enjoyment. As I demonstrate in the following section, Freud’s resistance is less to music than to theatricality.

Freud and Michelangelo’s *Moses*

Whether Freud actually enjoys music or not, one of the things that is interesting about his statement about music in his *Moses* essay is why, particularly in this essay, Freud does not wish to be perceived as someone who might let go of his critical faculties and succumb to musical seduction/theatricality. Why does Freud go to the trouble to fashion himself as unable to quietly contemplate music in the preface to his discussion of Michelangelo’s *Moses*? What is the relationship between his confession and his interpretation of the sculpture?

Other than in the passage cited above, Freud does not discuss music in this text, but it is striking that his interpretation of *Moses* is contingent upon a disturbance caused by the noise of those singing and dancing around the golden calf, the “*Lärm des Volkes und den Anblick des goldenen Kalbes*” (188). According to Freud, Michelangelo renders Moses at the moment that he is interrupted contemplating the word of God: “*Er hört Lärm, das Geschrei von gesungenen Tanzreigen weckt ihn aus dem Träume*” (Fritz Knapp, qtd. by Freud, 181). This interruption is imperative to Freud’s interpretation because it is the circumstance that causes the awkward, upside-down position of the stone tablets at Moses’ side that nearly slip from his grasp when he hears the ritual frenzy, as well as the placement of Moses’ hand upon his beard. In Freud’s interpretation of the sculpture, the movement indicated by these two elements captures “the moment in which the quiet is disturbed by noise” (“*der Moment, in dem die Ruhe durch das Geräusch gestört wurde*”) (190). Freud’s identification with Moses is well documented (McGrath 1986 50-52 and fn 26), and is a matter that continues to provoke contemplation and debate by contemporary scholarship.⁶⁷ What interests

⁶⁷ Freud’s last completed work, *Moses and Monotheism*, has been taken up in a number of recent studies. See Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997). Richard J. Bernstein, *Freud and the Legacy of Moses* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, *Freuds Moses-Studie als Tagtraum: Ein biographischer Essay* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1994), Eric Santner, “Freud’s Moses and the Ethics of Nomotropic Desire,” *October* 88 (Spring 1999) 3-41, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud’s Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). For a reading of Freud’s *The Moses of Michelangelo*, see

me here specifically, however, is the link between Freud's issues with music and his identification with Michelangelo's representation of the Moses who, according to Freud, does not drop the tablets. Able to come to his senses as the tablets begin to slip, Michelangelo's Moses "*gedachte seiner Mission und verzichtete für sie auf die Befriedigung seines Affekts*" (194). In other words, Moses demonstrates precisely that same level-headedness at the roar of the delirious crowd that Freud demonstrates through his reluctance to listen to music, keeping his "reasons unclouded and his emotions in abeyance". Rather than become distracted by listening, Moses remains contemplative of the written word of God—an ideal Platonic subject.

Indeed, like the ideal Platonic subject, Freud's turn from sensuality is strikingly similar to the Moses Freud discusses in *Moses and Monotheism* whose discipline stems from the self-restraint brought on by the *Bilderverbot*. Freud states:

Wir vermuten, daß Moses [...] die Strenge der Atonreligion überboten hat [...] sein Gott hatte dann weder einen Namen noch ein Angesicht, vielleicht war es eine neue Vorkehrung gegen magische Mißbräuche. Aber wenn man dieses Verbot annahm, mußte es eine tiefgreifende Wirkung ausüben. Denn es bedeutete eine Zurücksetzung der sinnlichen Wahrnehmung gegen eine abstrakt zu nennende Vorstellung, einen Triumph der Geistigkeit über die Sinnlichkeit, strenggenommen einen Triebverzicht mit seinen psychologisch notwendigen Folgen. [...] Es war gewiß eine der wichtigsten Etappen auf dem Wege der Menschwerdung. ()

Jean-Joseph Goux, *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud*, trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

Moses (and Freud after him) resists sensuality in favor of spirituality, by reigning in his affect, his drive, his corporeal desire. In the context of the Viennese *fin-de-Siècle*, Freud's identification marks him as an "Enlightened" Jew, a rational scientist in bourgeois civil society.

Furthermore, that Freud, as a Jewish scientist, should want to distance himself from the discourse of music in the context of the Viennese *fin-de-Siècle* is also not surprising given the changing and important role of music in Viennese culture. According to Leon Botstein, "in the era of Metternich in the period of reaction after 1815, coincident with the gradual withdrawal of the aristocracy as primary patrons, music assumed a potent wider role as a force of civic discourse for Vienna" (Social History 54). This discourse, Botstein explains, is constituted by a musical language infused with hidden political messages:

Precisely because of its privileged status in the context of political authoritarianism, music assumed a new role as a secret civic language capable of sustaining a forbidden discourse. It dominated the shared culture of the city alongside popular satirical and farcical comic theater (which in turn had a musical component). Music, like humor, appeared at once overtly harmless and largely personal; the *Vormärz* utilized this veneer and with the rhetorical gestures of Romanticism, music became internally coded, possessed of more dangerous meanings. (Social History 54).

Freud's theories were grounds enough to mark him as "dangerous" even if he weren't a Jewish scientist. It seems reasonable that he would not want to further

mark himself as a participant in the “internally coded” and “dangerous” discourse of music.

Moreover, as Botstein argues, by the turn-of-the-century, discourses regarding racial and cultural identity were intertwined with music and musicality in complicated ways; music itself, especially music involving themes and practices perceived to be especially “noisy,” i.e., modernist, became a trope for “Jewishness.”⁶⁸ By then, music itself, whether “noisy” or not, had become a signifier for Jewishness itself. Moreover, “noisyness,” was a racist stereotype attached to both Jews and “Jewish” music. As Ruth HaCohen indicates, “Christians regarded the synagogue as a locus of noise and nausea, fearing that their harmonious music—especially the new genres of hymns and polyphony—would be coveted by Jews or, God forbid, that they, the Christians, would be influenced by noise, Jewish music” (262). According to Richard Wagner, the Jew was the “man that hath no music in himself,” a stereotype largely based upon Shakespeare’s Shylock “and, together with him, other real and potential Jews—that is, Christians who behave ‘Jewishly’” (HaCohen 252). In turn-of-the-century Vienna, the music that was most “Jewish” was the music that most upset bourgeois subjectivity by disrupting the audibly perceptible stability of tonality—Western music’s “*Heimat*,”—namely modern music.⁶⁹ Thus, Freud’s trouble with music, as I

⁶⁸ There is no question that in modernity, the ever increasing noise of the crowd and the roar of the industry in the metropolis became the dangerous other to the sanctimonious art of both *volkisch* and classical music.

⁶⁹ For an elaboration on this point, see my “Music and Memory: Schoenberg’s Second Chamber Symphony and History.” *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Center* 4:2001. (173-181)

have stated, has less to do with properties of the musical art form than with cultural anxieties that transformed music into a “noisy,” “dangerous” and ostensibly “Jewish” cultural form.

In his *Moses* essay, Freud—like Moses—channels the energy of his contemplation into the written word. Although Freud off-handedly remarks that he is not sufficiently well-read to gauge the uniqueness of his aesthetic claims, “*Ich bin nicht belesen genug, um zu wissen, ob dies schon bemerkt worden ist [. . .]*” (173) he goes on to display that he is more than well read on the subject of the statue, and that his interpretation is grounded squarely in the close reading of textual material. In fact, Freud draws his first example from Shakespeare, and follows this with an exegesis of over twenty specialized commentators who have discussed Michelangelo’s sculpture.⁷⁰ Thus, his interpretation is by no means merely casually informed, but painstakingly scholarly. Freud goes so far as to justify his interpretation based upon an exegesis of the Luther translation of the “*heiligen Schrift*,” (195) arguing “*unter dem Einfluß der modernen Bibelkritik*,” that the Biblical passage that is the source of Michelangelo’s *Moses* is blended from multiple source materials that engender a degree of textual ambiguity. According to Freud, in fact, this textual ambiguity is what justifies Michelangelo’s divergence from the Biblical script, in which Moses drops the tablets. In this precise manner of philological reasoning, Freud justifies Michelangelo’s rendering: by not smashing the tablets

⁷⁰ In the course of his exegesis, Freud refers to the following: Camillo Boito, Jakob Burkhardt, Ascanio Condivi, Dupathy, Herman (Friedrich) Grimm, Guillaume, Carl (Nicolaus Heinrich) Justi, Knackfuß, Fritz Knapp, Ivan Lermolieff, W. Watkins Lloyd, Wilhelm Lübke, Ludwig Münz, Max Sauerlandt, Anton (Heinrich) Springer, Ernst Steinmann, Henry Thode, Heath Wilson, Heinrich Wölfflin, and to “an editorial in the *Quarterly Review*.”

but exhibiting affectual self-control, Michelangelo's Moses stays faithful to the (ambiguous) script, if not to the Biblical narrative.

That Freud and Freudian psychoanalysis display a particular affinity toward the textual is nothing new; it is a matter that has played a pivotal role in the theories of post-structuralism, most prominently in the work of Jacques Lacan and his readers. But that Freud's orientation around the textual is in some cases less a structural tenet of psychoanalytic theory than a conscious self-fashioning meant to avoid the chain of negative association linked with theatricality harkening back to Plato has been too little recognized, especially in post-structuralist theory, which to no small extent has constructed itself upon Freud's explicit orientation around textuality—in some cases more accurately than in others.

Whereas Foucault plausibly argues that "Freud more than anyone else brought the knowledge of man closest to its philological and linguistic model," (361) and Derrida that Freud's "Mystic Writing Pad" is a dramatic *mise-en-Scène*—a "Scene of Writing"—in his essay, "Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," Lacan posits: "how could we forget that to the end of his days Freud constantly maintained that [a literary] training was the prime requisite in the formation of analysts, and that he designated the external *universitas literarum* as the ideal place for its institution" (147). According to his footnotes, Lacan comes to this conclusion based upon the following passage in Freud's *Die Frage der Laienanalyse* in which Freud states:

Wenn man, was heute noch phantastisch klingen mag, eine psychoanalytische Hochschule zu gründen hätte, so müßte an dieser vieles gelehrt werden, was auch die medizinische Fakultät lehrt: neben der

Tiefenpsychologie, die immer das Hauptstück bleiben würde, eine Einführung in die Biologie, in möglichst großem Umfang die Kunde vom Sexualleben, eine Bekanntheit mit den Krankheitsbildern der Psychiatrie. Andererseits würde der analytische Unterricht auch Fächer umfassen, die dem Arzt ferne liegen und mit denen er in seiner Tätigkeit nicht zusammenkommt: Kulturgeschichte, Mythologie, Religionspsychologie und Literaturwissenschaft. (XIV: 281-283)

As we see from this passage, however, contrary to Lacan's claim, Freud does *not* identify literary studies as the privileged domain for psychoanalytic training. Rather, Freud proposes that literary studies, or what one might more accurately refer to in this context as philology and the humanities at large should be taken up in tandem with a larger medical training. Indeed, this is precisely the move that Freud made in the founding of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, which I discuss in the following chapter.

The innovation of developing a method based upon an interdisciplinary discourse between the sciences and the humanities was certainly not unique to Freud. As John Forrester has argued, while in the 19th century, "biological or organic terms came to dominate many of the theories of society, of language, of psychology—either as guiding metaphors or as working models," "it is less widely recognized that the sciences of language—philology, exegetical sciences, comparative linguistics, historical linguistics, call them what we will—played a parallel and sometimes opposed role in the development of the human sciences" (167). In Freud's case, the philological sciences "acted as a source and inspiration for Freud's and psychoanalysis' preoccupation with language," (167-168)

influencing the analytic method that Sandor Ferenczi would later call “the method of the tedious philologist” (qtd. in Forrester 198). What is important for this discussion is to think about *why* philology was important to Freud, and to keep in mind that a possible degree of distortion of Freud’s work has been brought about by its filtering through the highly influential lens of literary criticism, which has also ignored or misunderstood Freud’s relationship to art forms other than the literary.

Grounding his psychoanalytic writings in the science of philology seems to have been an attempt to lend Freud’s work academic legitimacy and thus to make Freud less vulnerable to the dismissive charges of his critics. According to Forrester, Freud was motivated to take up the methodology of philology precisely because it “offered [Freud] a support in external reality to which he could turn when plagued with doubt as to the value of the discoveries he was making in mental reality” (168): Forrester explains: “it seems that Freud was half-afraid [...] that this ‘childish play with words’ [...] was too ‘crazy’ [...] to be valuable as a scientific finding: it evoked the fear, perhaps, of being accused of putting words into other people’s mouths—or worse places” (196). Indeed, at the turn of the century, Freud was infamous for his revolutionary theories and at the same time ridiculed. In his 1956 interview with Kurt Eisler, Max Graf states that Freud was,

[...] eine Figur, über die man gelacht hat, ohne dass man seine Theorien genauer gekannt hat. Aber man hat gewusst, dass diese Theorien auch mit der Bedeutung von der Erotik zu tun haben und man hat etwas von den erotischen Symbolen gewußt und das hat zur Folge gehabt, dass wenn man

*in einer Gesellschaft den Namen Freud genannt hat, haben die Leute
gelegentlich Witze gemacht, und die jungen Mädchen sind rot geworden.* (4)

Of course, Freud was motivated by more than an unfounded fear of rejection, for in addition to the moral charges leveled at Freud for his unconventional views, what his critics saw as the “confessional” nature of Freud’s analysis caused many to dismiss his findings as “unscientific” (Mack 4). These motivations seem a particularly plausible explanation for Freud’s turn to the textual in his essay on Michelangelo’s *Moses* and to a philological rhetoric more generally. Although Freud first published the essay in 1914, it was during 1901 that Freud took his first trip to Rome and saw the statue in question, and, according to a postcard to his wife, Martha, “suddenly understood” it. Of course, this was only a year after Freud published his *Interpretation of Dreams*, in which he publicly outlined his theory of the unconscious aided by interpretations of highly personal and often intimate dream material of both his patients and himself.

Moreover, as I have suggested, couching his analysis in the sciences around the textual helped to buffer Freud’s work from a larger charge that Forrester only hints at, namely that of “degeneracy,” or what Gregory Moore calls “chain of associations linking hysteria, histrionics and the Jew,” in which both “modern music” and “theatricality” were highly loaded anti-Semitic signifiers. Although Wagner’s *Das Judentum in der Musik* played no small role in cultivating this chain of association, it was Wagner himself who, urged on by the vitriolic attacks of Eduard Hanslick and Friedrich Nietzsche, came “to be regarded as the century’s ultimate

‘Nervenkünstler’” (249).⁷¹ Vis-à-vis *Der Fall Wagner* in particular, Nietzsche co-opted Wagner’s discourse of degeneracy to encode Wagner himself as both “hysterical” and “Jewish” and his music as having “deteriorated into mere theatricality” through an “invocation of an allusive language of race and disease” (248). Though of course Freud was not directly involved in the modernist music circles of Vienna, by overtly repudiating music and retreating into the textual, Freud removed himself from an anti-Semitic chain of association that linked “Jewishness,” “theatrics,” and “modern music”. Instead, Freud constructed himself as late-Nietzsche’s Wagner’s opposite, a Moses figure who deplores the “*Lärm des Volkes und den Anblick des goldenen Kalbes*,” i.e., Wagnerism, in a discourse removed from anti-Semitic association.

Although much has been made of Freud’s struggle to achieve professional success relative to the brilliance of his achievements in anti-Semitic Vienna, the extent to which this struggle influenced Freud’s self-fashioning as a contemplative, learned, and particularly textual figure in the manner of Michelangelo’s *Moses* deserves more serious attention. Given Freud’s swing from musically receptive to musically distant if not abhorrent, it is plausible to assume that the relationship between the two most salient features of *fin-de-Siècle* opera, musicality and theatricality, and a potent and explosive anti-Semitic Viennese discourse influenced Freud’s self-fashioning as unmusical and anti-operatic. Like Michelangelo’s rendering of Moses, Freud maintains affectual self-control through

⁷¹ See Eduard Hanslick, and Friedrich Nietzsche *Der Fall Wagner*.

reverence of the textual all the while that, awash in Wagnerian cultural politics,
“die Ruhe durch das Geräusch gestört wurde.

CHAPTER 4

FREUD CONTRA WAGNER

Die ersten Töne, die an unser Ohr schlugen, waren die der Musik Wagners. Augen und Ohren haben jene Welt aufgesogen, unser ganzes Wesen war von ihr bestimmt. Sie wuchs uns an, wie Hände und Füße, wie der Athem und der Herzschlag.

Max Graf

In an essay on theatrical representation in the Freudian unconscious, Jean-Francois Lyotard states that upon seeing a performance of Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Der Rosenkavalier* at the Paris Opera, Lyotard suddenly apprehended "*a contrario* just how much the Freudian conception of the unconscious and even desire depends upon a particular aesthetic, that of official late-nineteenth-century Viennese theater and opera" (171). According to Lyotard, *Der Rosenkavalier* illustrates how occasionally Freud gets "carried away by [a] vertigo of representation" that influences his understanding of representation in the unconscious (169). The theatricality of opera—or at least this particular opera—is, for Lyotard, paradigmatic of a Freudian shortcoming.

Lyotard states: "If I have taken my example from the operas of Richard Strauss, it is only to remain in the cultural context which was Freud's," (164) as if this choice were culturally and historically obvious. Lamentably, however, Lyotard's successive analysis neglects any cultural or historical factors that might explain how this particular opera and its aesthetics are relevant to Freud's work. Although the offering of operas from this time period is both plentiful and diverse, Lyotard offers no explanation as to why or how representation in Freud is particularly operatic or Viennese, nor any hints as to why or how *Der Rosenkavalier*

(which premiered in 1911, the early twentieth-century) is representative of the “particular aesthetic” of the nineteenth-century. Which “particular” aesthetic might that be? Without any indication why Lyotard chooses a work by Hofmannsthal and Strauss, and why, of all the collaborative projects between that creative duo, Lyotard chooses *Der Rosenkavalier*, one is left feeling that Lyotard plucked this example from a seemingly random visit to the Paris opera.

Except, of course, that in musical and theatrical terms, *Der Rosenkavalier* could be thought of as both neo-classical and neo-baroque. Though Strauß’s orchestration is lush, musically the opera strives to be a twentieth-century tribute to Mozart. And as the composer “fancied a lusty Renaissance scenario,” Hofmannsthal delivered a libretto derived from Louvet de Vouvray’s *Les amours du chevalier de Faublas* of 1787, and Molière’s *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* of 1669, in which he “confabulated a marvelous, untranslatable lingo out of Viennese and provincial dialects, frenchified gentility and earthy idioms, antique formal address and pure linguistic fantasy” (David Murray). For Lyotard, one can assume that the metaphor he intends works this way: Freud comes up with his model of the unconscious because he unwittingly internalizes Viennese opera aesthetics, strangely caught up in the totality (the “vertigo of representation”) and naiveté of Viennese theatricality. *Der Rosenkavalier* becomes a sign for fin-de-Siècle opera and a trope for excessive theatricality; Freud’s model of representation in the unconscious becomes faulty by association.

Although Lyotard only vaguely hints at the underlying recrimination, his selection of *Der Rosenkavalier* gestures toward a discourse that evokes a fundamental prejudice about opera as an art form, namely, that it is on all counts

“excessive,” or, in the vernacular of the history of the Viennese fin-de-Siècle, “baroque.”⁷² In cultural and historical context, Lyotard’s critique of Freud’s (unconscious) relationship to both Vienna and theatricality is confusing at best, given that historians have aligned early-twentieth-century Austrian theatricality with political aestheticism—which is to say, fascism—rather than the complicated fragmentation of subjectivity espoused by Freud. If, in the Austrian context, “theatricality serves power,” how can the “theatrical” strains of Freud’s work be reconciled with “the common denominator between the baroque [theatrical ideology] and the fascist [theatrical ideology]” (Steinberg x)? Although the subsuming of “theatricality” in the Austrian historical context as a signifier for the aestheticization of politics, i.e., fascism, might seem to be largely a semantic issue, I would argue that its effects make it enormously difficult to bracket the concept so that it can be examined without the baggage of National Socialism. This is not to argue against the devastation of the aestheticization of politics, but to argue for a conceptualization of theatricality in the historical context that is not beleaguered by the weight of fascism. The paradoxical problem in the Viennese context is that theatricality is profoundly bound up in Viennese (and subsequent) modernism(s), even if it has been explicitly repudiated by those same modernisms on the grounds that the merger of aesthetics and theatricality tread dangerously close to the precipice of fascism. Although modernist innovators in Vienna such as Adolf Loos damned excessive theatricality, as seen both in his essay “Ornament and Crime,”

⁷² If anything, a Strauss and Hofmannsthal collaboration in at least one instance illustrates a negative aesthetic model for the holistic type of theatrical representation that Freud promotes in his *Psychopathic Characters on the Stage*, a matter I take up below.

and in his Viennese architecture, many left-leaning and avant-garde strands of Viennese modernism subscribed to explicitly theatrical innovations, while at the same time repudiating theatrical ideology. Even Arnold Schoenberg was broadly interested in the aesthetics of both theater and theatricality, as his Expressionist work and intellectual collaboration with Wassily Kandinsky demonstrates. Given the validity of “theatrical ideology” in the context of *fin-de-Siècle*, then, how does one detach the theatricality of the modernist avant-garde from the theatricality of the conservative neo-baroque? And where does Freud’s theatricality (or anti-theatricality) fit given the contours of this problem?

Although various aspects of the theatricality of psychoanalysis have been examined by a number of key thinkers of this century, crucial questions about the nature of this theatricality remain unsolved: first, what is the theatrical nature of the psychoanalytic scene, and to what extent is Freud influenced by theatrical models in his careful construction of that scene? Second, and more important to my work here, how did the increasingly theatrical nature of the public sphere associated with modernity influence Freud’s articulation of psychoanalysis as a cultural science? How can the theatricality of psychoanalysis be contextualized within the history of German and Austrian drama including opera and in the cultural context of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna—both for which the theatrical innovation of Richard Wagner plays a key role?

While comments upon the obvious strains of the theatrical in Freud’s work are generally treated as exempt from the political problems that theatricality poses to Austrian historians, representational issues cannot be exempt from political and historical implications, as the work of Austrian historians has made abundantly

clear. Freud's relationship to opera aesthetics is thus a historical problem as much as it is a representational issue.

Of course, one obvious explanation for the huge disciplinary gulf in how theatricality enters into competing discourses (representational, psychoanalytic, theatrical, and historical) is that, like voice, theatricality is a slippery term that indicates multi-dimensional spheres with several disparate meanings: on the one hand, the term may indicate a dangerous aesthetic display that has the power to seduce throngs of irrational spectators, i.e., fascism. It may, on the other hand, indicate a broad and intrinsic value having to do with both theater and the formation of identity. Even within theater and performance studies, the term has multiple valences that are beleaguered by competing historical and cultural strains that make the concept particularly difficult to employ, compounded by what scholars such as Jonas Barish and Martin Puchner have called the "anti-theatrical prejudice" in modern Western culture. While the constitutive role of theatricality, i.e., theatrical structures central to the formation of both subjectivity and cultural identity have been central concerns in the critical thought of many key twentieth-century thinkers, within European history and cultural studies, theatricality remains a concept, that, like "sound," has become aligned with the dangers of totality and excess. Thus, in the intellectual history of Central Europe, the historical reference points for theatricality remain the baroque and the Fascist. In the context of twentieth-century Viennese history, these references resound more treacherously than in any other.

I would contend that in order to contextualize Freudian theatricality, one should look—first—to neither Hugo von Hofmannsthal nor Richard Strauss, but to

Richard Wagner, for it was Wagner rather than Strauss or any of his early twentieth-century contemporaries whose dramatic reforms sparked a “Theater of the Future” literally and figuratively, inspiring nothing less than a cultural revolution by demanding an engagement with theatricality both on the stage and in the staging of a body politic and a rapidly emerging mass culture—even as Wagnerian ideology and Wagnerian aesthetics were being revised and even rejected. Nowhere were Wagner’s reforms and cultural reactions to them more salient than in Freud’s Vienna, where Wagnerism and post-Wagnerism infiltrated not only the literal theater, but also the theater of the culture and body politic. Strangely, or possibly aptly, there is perhaps no opera more self-consciously steeped in opera historicism than *Der Rosenkavalier*, in which Hofmannsthal and Strauss sought to enliven the drama of Mozart through revisions of Wagnerian theatrical innovation (Borchmeyer). If, as Lyotard states, Freud’s conception of the unconscious “depends” upon the aesthetics of *Der Rosenkavalier*, it is in the sense that like Hofmannsthal and Strauss, Freud engaged the unavoidably rich theatricality of Wagnerian aesthetics and then attempted to reorient his own *mise-en-scene* toward a project of the future while placing Wagner firmly into the past. Lyotard’s suggestion is thus richly provocative, even if his subsequent analysis seems to miss the very brilliance of his claim: Freud’s development of psychoanalysis coincided with the pinnacle of operatic culture in modernist Vienna. This was no mere coincidence, for strains of a psychoanalytic discourse around a complex rendering of theatricality that gestures to the dramatic reforms in opera during the nineteenth-century are prominent in Freud’s work especially during the first decade of the twentieth-century, up through to the publication of

Totem and Taboo in 1913 and “The Moses of Michelangelo” in 1914. It was during this time period that Freud and his circle occupied themselves with psychoanalytic scenes in a number of configurations, conceiving of these scenes around a complex apprehension of theatricality—devising, as it were, their own “Theater(s) of the Future”. This is not to say that Freud was a Wagnerian, for he clearly distanced himself from both music and Wagner. Freud was a post-Wagnerian contra Wagner: someone who engaged the theatricality inconceivable before Wagner while largely repudiating both music and opera. For what follows in this chapter, I proceed with the assumption that Wagner’s dramatic reforms are imprinted upon Freud’s understanding of the unconscious, though my task here is largely to explain why both music and Wagner became taboo themes in Freud’s work. My primary goal is to re-think Freud’s (operatic) *mise-en-scène* in the context of the “Wagnerian cultural politics” (McGrath) that permeated *fin-de-Siecle* Vienna. This is a project that is relevant to both the history of psychoanalysis and to the history of modernity, for Wagnerism has been as influential to the development of conceptions of modernity as Wagner’s aesthetic innovation has been to the history of representation. For this reason, I wish to scrutinize an ambiguous tension that arises in Freud’s (explicit) anti-musical and (implicit) anti-Wagnerian ideology, further identifying several motivations for Freud’s self-fashioning as a primarily scriptural thinker that augment my discussion in the last chapter.

When read in context of *fin-de-Siecle* Vienna, Freud’s invocation of the “rational” in his protest that I discuss in chapter 3—not of music, we should note, but of the *effects music has upon him*—is an appeal against the Wagnerian emotionalism that took Vienna by storm during the late nineteenth century.

Although Freud's friend and colleague, Max Graf, resorts to hyperbole in explaining the pervasive influence of Wagner on his generation as seen in the epigraph above, this rhetorical declaration demonstrates the degree to which Wagner's influence cannot be underestimated in Freud's Vienna. Regardless of how well he was familiar with Wagner's work—and there is no doubt that he was, as I discuss below—it would have been impossible for him to have not encountered Wagner's opera and the Wagnerian fervor that swept through late-nineteenth-century Vienna. One can safely say that at the very latest, Freud was directly exposed to Wagnerism in his activity in the *Leseverein der deutschen Studenten Wiens* during his early university years. As William McGrath explains, the *Leseverein*, an organization of University students from 1871-1878, which “had as its central purpose the stimulation of a strong sense of German nationalism,” (Discovery 97) took up the aesthetic theory of Wagner and early Nietzsche as a philosophical alternative to the economic, social, and political shortcomings of liberalism and its rationalist foundations. Its early members included individuals who later formed what McGrath has called the “Pernerstorfer Circle,” a group including Victor Adler, later founder of the Austrian Social Democrats, that went on to implement broad social and cultural changes in early twentieth century Vienna. Indeed, it was Wagner's ideology of an aesthetically-driven revolution in particular that informed the direction of Adler's Socialism, which, according to Wolfgang Maderthaner, “aimed for an intuitive and emotional bond of the working masses to a firmly outlined, ritualized canon of ceremonies and celebrations, grounded in the practical realization of the Wagnerian ideology of a radically-democratic, pan-German and largely Jewish leadership” (773).

Though it is difficult to pinpoint the extent to which Freud subscribed to the particular ideologies in circulation among the members of the *Leseverein* during his University days, there is no question that he must have been at least very well familiar with them. According to McGrath, Freud joined the *Leseverein* in 1873, his first year at the University of Vienna, and stayed a member for five years until the organization was dissolved by the Austrian parliament, which felt threatened by the *Leseverein's* increasingly blatant political character (McGrath *Discovery* 97 and *Wagnerianism* 84). Records indicate that Freud was very active in this group at least during his first year of membership, and that he enjoyed important personal relationships with several individuals who had central ties to *Leseverein* and to the Pernerstorfer Circle both then and long thereafter: Freud's boyhood friend, Heinrich Braun, joined the *Leseverein* together with Freud and later entered into the echelons of the Pernerstorfer Circle, becoming close to Viktor Adler and eventually his brother-in-law; Freud's esteemed professor Theodor Meynert, named an honorary member of the *Leseverein*, inspired the organization with teachings on the philosophy of Schopenhauer; Siegfried Lipiner, who overlapped with Freud at the *Schottengymnasium* and later became a University friend, was a leader of both the *Leseverein* and the Pernerstorfer Circle, and enjoyed significant currency in these groups for the direct personal ties he cultivated to Wagner, Nietzsche, and Mahler; and the medical student Joseph Paneth, who studied with Brentano together with Freud, and who also became personally acquainted with both Nietzsche and his philosophy.⁷³

⁷³ Lipiner was also the librettist for two operas by the Hungarian composer

Most historians agree that Freud must have come into contact with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's ideas through his activity in the *Leseverein* and his personal relationships to the aforementioned individuals whether or not he made a close study of their work, and even if he later insisted that his own ideas were utterly autonomous from Nietzsche's influence (Gödde 464). By now an accumulating body of literature has thoroughly examined specific points of conjunction between Freud, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer. Although Freud denied any particular familiarity with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, in Frank Sulloway's words, "It is simply inconceivable that Freud...was as totally uninfluenced by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as he liked to think" (468). Interestingly, however, within these discussions, the possibility that Freud may have been acquainted with or somehow influenced by the aesthetic theory of Richard Wagner receives barely a word. In fact, throughout this literature, the Wagnerian pole of the Schopenhauer-Nietzsche-Wagner constellation curiously vanishes, as though Wagner is merely a nineteenth-century sideshow to the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. While Wagner's talent clearly resided in the realm of the artistic rather than the philosophical (not to mention the fact that his forays into that realm are both unconvincing and politically abhorrent), it is a mistake to allow him to disappear from the larger cultural movement for which he alone was predominantly responsible. McGrath's omission of Wagner in his appendix "Possible Influences in Freud" to his dissertation *Wagnerianism in Austria* is especially striking. That Nietzsche's tragedy is born out of the spirit of music must not be forgotten. That

Karl Goldmark (also known as Károly Goldmark as well as Carl Goldmark): *Die Königin von Saba* (1875) (in English, *The Queen of Sheeba*), and *Merlin* (1886).

Wagnerian dramatic and musical reforms belong to the culture—not *cult*—of Wagnerism also must not be forgotten, though it appears much easier to marginalize Wagner from intellectual history and to polemicize his influence upon twentieth-century culture and politics than to address his complicated, contradictory, and indeed pervasive influence. Wagner’s cultural legacy has been especially difficult to address, first, because it cannot be contained within the academic discipline of musicology to which the composer Wagner has been historically assigned, and second, because of the service Wagner’s mythology and ideology has paid to right-wing German nationalist and anti-Semitic causes. Work on Wagner from outside the discipline of musicology has been especially strong in its analysis of the latter. As pertinent and necessary such studies have been, however, one should be careful not to assume a teleology between Wagner, racial anti-Semitism, and National Socialism, as a number of prevailing cultural critics have been prone to do. Furthermore, one should not overlook the importance of Wagnerian dramatic reforms—indeed, the importance of operatic reforms in general—in the trajectory of German dramatic and literary theory from the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century onward.

As Louis Rose makes clear in his book, *The Freudian Calling: Early Viennese Psychoanalysis and the Pursuit of Cultural Science*, which Rose dedicated to his teacher Carl Schorske, Freud and his early followers explicitly understood psychoanalysis to be a science of culture as much as a science of psychology. During the first decade of the twentieth century, these thinkers examined not only the individual, but also the collective in its social, cultural, and historical configurations in order to develop an understanding of the “universal drama of

community” (Rose 14). Roses’ conceptualization of the non-medical aspect of psychoanalysis as a general science of culture is extremely useful in that it captures the larger focus and framework of early psychoanalysis in the theatrical culture of early twentieth century Vienna. Freud and in his early circle certainly did not grant music and or music drama a privileged status in the “universal drama,” i.e., did not propose as had Nietzsche that this drama originated out of the spirit of (Wagnerian) music, but they clearly considered music and opera to be every bit as relevant to their examination of culture as were literature and the visual arts, even if Freud himself viewed music with the reserve of Michelangelo’s *Moses*. To be sure, a number of esteemed musical figures counted as some of the very first figures that Freud convened during the first years of psychoanalysis to probe the origins of creativity and to develop this “cultural science.” Most important among them were Max Graf and David Josef Bach, two notable personalities who exercised considerable cultural influence in early-twentieth-century Vienna and who were early members of the Wednesday Society, a small group that began meeting weekly at Freud’s home in 1902, and that in 1908 became known as the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society.

For the purposes of this study, I am particularly interested in Freud’s relationship to Max Graf, professor of musicology, music aesthetics, and music history at the Wiener Musikakademie from 1902-1938, and a well known a music critic frequently published in Viennese Press. Outside of musical circles, Max Graf is best known today not as a musicologist, but as the father who, under the guidance of Freud, undertook a psychoanalytic treatment of his son, Herbert Graf, to whom Freud famously referred as his patient “Little Hans.” This case, which he

published in his path-breaking analysis, “Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy” was pivotal for Freud’s understanding of sexual development. Of course, Freud kept “Little Hans”’ true identity confidential, as did Max Graf, who, in his “Reminiscences,” states that “Freud took the warmest part in all family events in my house,” but does not mention Freud’s psychoanalytic treatment of either Herbert or Herbert’s mother, Olga Hoenig, who was also an early patient of Freud’s (Graf Reminiscences 474).

Herbert Graf outed himself to the world as “Little Hans” in a 1972 interview with Francis Rizzo published in *Opera News*, for in a coincidence of Freudian proportions, he eventually became a highly successful stage director of opera, collaborating with Bruno Walter at the New York Metropolitan Opera and Arturo Toscanini at the Salzburg Festival, and later becoming general manager of the opera house in Zurich. Inspired by Max Reinhardt’s influence on Berlin theater, Herbert Graf studied stage design with Alfred Roller at the School of Arts and Crafts, music under his father and Joseph Marx at the Vienna Academy of Music, and Guido Adler at the University of Vienna. His dissertation, *Richard Wagner als Regisseur* (1925), based in part upon his father’s work on Wagner, was dedicated to Siegfried Wagner, who congratulated Graf by inviting him to be his guest at the Bayreuth Festival. There, Graf saw the *Ring* from the Wagner family box.

As I have stated, Max Graf became acquainted with Freud already in 1900, the year that Freud published his landmark study *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Their meeting came about through Hoenig, who was in psychoanalytic treatment with Freud at the time. 1900 was also the year that Graf published *Wagnerprobleme und andere Studien*, a book he dedicated to Gustav Mahler, whom Graf greatly

admired (Rizzo; Graf Reminiscences 1132). Herbert Graf has claimed that Mahler was his Godfather, but this is unlikely given that he was not born until 1903 when, according to his father, Max Graf and Mahler were already estranged. The correspondence between Mahler and Max Graf over the dedication of Graf's book in 1900 seems to be the source of this confusion. Graf reports this exchange in his "Recollections of Gustav Mahler," which states that in Mahler's reply to Graf's request to bear the book's dedication, Mahler mentions having the honor "of being invited to stand as sponsor to one of your children." But Mahler means this metaphorically, as Graf makes clear: "Mahler...repeated his wish to be the book's godfather."

Interestingly, it was this same book that was the catalyst for Graf and Mahler's estrangement. In it, Graf had discussed the conducting of both Mahler and Hans Richter, who had become rival public figures spurred on by the political nature of their roles as successive chief conductors at the *Hofoper* and the incendiary racist stoking of the differences between the two men by the anti-Semitic press. According to Graf, "it was not my intention to play off Mahler against Richter, or Richter against Mahler, as was customary in Vienna," but rather, "to portray the individual quality of both great men, so at one in their humble service to art, but in character so opposed". But Graf's "recognition of Richter's virtues affected Mahler as a red cloth does a bull," and thereafter, their "personal relations soon ceased to be friendly," a turn of events that was "shattering...for a young and idealistic admirer of genius". After that time, Graf spoke to Mahler again only once, in 1907, upon the death of Mahler's daughter. Cheshire states that while "the little boy [Herbert Graf] was being treated 'at arm's

length' by Freud, he was being watched over by his godfather, Gustav Mahler himself . . ." but there is no evidence that supports this claim. Given Max Graf's own account, it is quite possible that Herbert Graf and Mahler never met. In fact, Freud seems to have played a much more significant role in Herbert Graf's early upbringing. As the family's resident analyst and friend, Freud advised Max Graf against raising his son Catholic, telling him, "If you do not let your son grow up as a Jew . . . you will deprive him of those sources of energy which cannot be replaced by anything else. He will have to struggle as a Jew, and you ought to develop in him all the energy he will need for that struggle. Do not deprive him of that advantage" (Graf Menorah 473). And at some point in Herbert Graf's early youth, Freud presented him with a curious gift given the famous problem the boy developed around that same age or shortly thereafter: a neurotic fear of horses. According to Max Graf, "Freud brought him a rocking horse which he himself carried up the four flights of steps leading to my house" (Reminiscences 474). Freud's treatment of Little Hans' mother made Freud startlingly intimate with the entire family. It would be a diversion to extensively speculate here about Hoenig's role in her son's neurosis and treatment, but it is interesting to note that Freud and Graf forego all but very vague discussions of her in their case notes of Little Hans, mentions of her neurosis notwithstanding.

According to a recently derestricted 1952 interview with Max Graf conducted by Kurt Eissler, the then Director of the Freud Archive at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., Hoenig's Viennese family was both highly creative—one sister an actress at the Volkstheater, and another a concert pianist—and also deeply troubled. Hoenig's two eldest brothers commit suicide, and at

least one sister suffered a suicide attempt. According to the Eisler Interview, suicide was also the cause of Herbert's sister's death as a young woman living in the United States. Graf states that his first wife was "*zweifellos eine Hysterikerin*," which he, as a young man, found "*anziehend und interresant*" (19).⁷⁴ Graf suggests that Hoenig's illness affected the entire family: she suffered sexual difficulties, rejected her baby daughter at a young age, and suffered from agoraphobia. Whether Hoenig appears in any of Freud's case studies under a different name is unknown.

Besides being the conduit between Freud and his son, reporting Little Hans' behavior and discussing it in detail, Max Graf participated in an impressive intellectual exchange with Freud regarding psychoanalysis, creativity, and theatricality. Graf participated in the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society from 1904-1913 (Mühlleitner 119), and appears to have been especially active during the years that he conversed with Freud about Herbert's troubles, 1906-1908. Beyond their work together on the case of "Little Hans," their intellectual exchange during this period is documented in a number of essays that bear striking similarities in both theme and content, addressing the relationship between artist psychology and creativity, the psychology of dramatic representation, and the relationship between

⁷⁴ Graf states: "*Nicht wahr, meine erste Frau war ein sehr, oder ist eine sehr interessante, sehr geistvolle und sehr schöne Frau. Sie war zweifellos eine Hysterikerin, nicht wahr, was ich als junger Mensch ja gar nicht beurteilen konnte; für mich war sie auch in den hysterischen Momenten, die sicher hysterisch waren, anziehend und interessant*" (19). "You know, my first wife was a very, or is a very interesting, very brilliant and very beautiful woman. She was undoubtedly a hysteric, you know, which I, as a young person, could not judge; for me, she was also attractive and interesting in the hysterical moments—which were certainly hysterical." (Translation mine)

fantasy and the structure of the unconscious. These essays are Graf's "*Richard Wagner und das dramatische Schaffens*," (1906) "*Probleme des dramatischen Schaffens*," (1907) and "*Methodik der Dichterpsychologie*" (1907), and Freud's "*Psychopathische Personen auf der Bühne*" (late 1905 or 1906) and "*Der Dichter und Phantasieren*" (1907). The intellectual overlap between these essays seems to have gotten lost, in part, because of problems with translation. Apart from the translation of Graf's "*Methodik der Dichterpsychologie*" in the English edition of the *Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society*, most of Graf's works before 1912 do not appear in English, including the other two essays mentioned above. This is one reason, perhaps, that readings of the Freud essays to which they closely correspond generally ignore them. Furthermore, the translation of Freud's "*Dichter*" into English as "creative writer" or "poet" camouflages the topical similarities between these essays by creating the false impression that Freud is particularly concerned with a writerly act.

As the *Grimms Deutsches Wörterbuch* makes clear, however, *dichten* denotes, in its first definition: "*eine geistige tätigkeit ausüben wie abfassen, erfinden, reflektieren, erstreben, entscheiden, fingieren, ersinnen*," ("to execute an intellectual activity such as to formulate, to invent, to reflect, to strive after, to decide, to fabricate, to devise"). A *Dichter* is thus primarily an, "*erfinder, verursacher, urheber von etwas*" (inventor, originator, author of something), someone who engages in a practice that might include but is in no way limited to a literary act. In English, translating "*Dichter*" as "poet" is preferable to "creative writer," though "creative artist" more accurately captures the broad sense of the word, and directs attention toward the creative act (Graf: "*dramatisches Schaffens*,") that is the object of Freud's study. *The*

Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society document the range of *dichten*, or “intellectual activities,” that interest Freud and his colleagues. As Rose indicates, in Graf’s 1906 and 1907 articles he “declared psychoanalysis to be the first science of creativity” and “identified the study of culture with the study of artists and their work” (Rose 67). In fact, the study of artistic creativity and the relationship between art and culture is one of the most prominent areas of focus of The Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in its first decade. This organization’s discussions demonstrate a fascinating development in the understanding of the relationship between art and culture, beginning with an analysis of the creative process in the individual artist via representational content, and progressing to an analysis of representation in culture and community, up through and including Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* (1913). This trajectory in itself is indicative of an increasingly theatrical methodology of psychoanalytic inquiry, a methodology advocated especially by Graf and Freud.

Sparked by disagreements that arose from Isidor Sadger’s December 4, 1907 presentation to the Wednesday Society on the Swiss writer, Konrad Ferdinand Meyer, Graf retorted one week later with “*Methodik der Dichterpsychologie*,” which, for the sake of clarity I translate as “Methodology of the Psychology of the Creative Artist” rather than “Methodology of the Psychology of Poets.” In his presentation, Graf names as examples of *dichten* the literary work of Shakespeare, Schiller, and Goethe, the creations of Raphael and Michelangelo, and the musical compositions of Mozart, Beethoven, and Wagner. In direct response to Graf’s presentation, Freud puts forth another example, Wilhelm Jensen’s *Gradiva*, which becomes the subject of Freud’s study, “*Der Wahn und die Träume in W. Jensens Gradiva*.” Hence,

the methodology proposed by Graf and Freud, the “methodology of creator psychology,” to borrow Graf’s phrase, becomes the methodology of applied psychology, and Freud’s subsequent article on Jensen’s *Gradiva*, the first issue of the *Schriften zur angewandten Seelenkunde*, the *Papers on Applied Psychology*. Graf’s *Richard Wagner im “Fliegenden Holländer”*: *Ein Beitrag zur Psychologie künstlerischen Schaffens* followed as part of this same series in 1911.

Apart from the interlocking conceptual issues in Freud and Graf that have been blurred because of problems in translation, the overlap between them has also been overlooked because the cultural and political motivations that drove this early circle too often are divorced from the methodological concerns of applied psychoanalysis. Such a split is perhaps encouraged by the example of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society itself, which under Freud’s leadership diffused the highly charged political character of its work by focusing primarily on structural issues. One sees this in their discussions on the relationship between art, creativity, and psychology, in which Freud and Graf decisively reject pathologizing art and artistry. In contrast to another school of thought—to which Isador Sadger’s presentation belonged—that sought to characterize / pathologize an individual artist’s personality, Freud and Graf represent the more holistic approach that artists “could best be known through their works” (Rose 69). Sadger’s method, on the other hand, had its roots in both nineteenth-century psychiatry and German Romanticism, both of which adhered to the idea that genius is coupled with madness, and later, that genius tends toward the pathological. Freud and Graf were opposed to this assumption and the reductive thinking to which it led, as their reaction to Sadger’s aforementioned presentation indicates.

In his response to Sadger, Graf takes pains to distance Freud's psychoanalytic method from Sadger's pathography. Freud agrees: "*Es sei jedoch gar keine Nötigung, solche Pathographien zu schreiben. Die Theorien können nur Schaden leiden, und für den Gegenstand schaut dabei nichts heraus*" (Minutes 242).⁷⁵ Neither Freud nor Graf state explicitly what damage such an approach might inflict and how, but it is not difficult to discern the larger problematic implicit to this discussion. For Sadger's methodology relies on the same assumptions that drove a contemporary discourse linking the modern with cultural degeneracy and hysteria, a discourse fueled most notably by Max Nordau's *Entartung*, published in 1892 and dedicated to the Italian psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso. In fact, in his rejection of Sadger's methodology, Graf unflatteringly mentions both Lombroso as well as the "French school of psychology":

Sie wissen, daß es modern geworden ist, Psychologie der Künstler zu treiben. Neuere Forschungen haben hierzu ein bequemes Handwerkszeug geliefert. Lombroso hat, wenn auch verzerrt und dilettantisch, auf die pathologischen Grundlagen des dichterischen Schaffens hingewiesen. Die französische Psychologenschule hat einige Modebegriffe geprägt, wie z. B. dégénéré superieur, die auf einige Künstler anwendbar gewesen sind. Man hat also begonnen, Dichteranaysen auf Grund pathologischer Erfahrungen zu verfassen. (Minutes 245)

Graf points out, in other words, that Freud's approach differs radically from both the French school and Lombroso because it runs against the grain of the discourse

⁷⁵ "There is no need to write such pathographies. The theories can only cause harm, and bring to light nothing regarding the subject" (Minutes 242).

that suggests a fundamental relationship between creativity, genius and degeneracy, hysteria. Fundamentally, Freud is not interested in the representation of pathology in cultural objects, but in the investigation of pathology in cultural objects as a means to understanding its origin and its cure. For Freud, the latter is the purpose of healthy psychology. As Graf puts it:

“was Freud von den Kranken gelernt hat, hat ihm erst das Verständnis der Gesunden ermöglicht . . . Lombroso betrachtet Dichter so, wie er einen besonders interessanten Verbrechertypus betrachtet; die französischen Psychologen sehen im Dichter ausschließlich Neurotiker; Professor Freud interessiert die Menschenseele, der psychische Organismus.”⁷⁶

In contrast to Sadger, Graf proposes that a psychology of the creative artist must examine the structure of an artist’s personality by comparing an artist’s life and his creative production rather than reducing certain personality or artistic traits to pre-formulated pathological categories. In Graf’s view, the psychologist must turn toward what Graf refers to as the “work,” and the goal of applied psychoanalysis should be the development of a methodology for an analyses of this “work,” a project that Freud fully supports and expands upon both directly and indirectly in his essays *“Der Dichter und Phantasieren”* and *“Der Wahn und die Träume in W. Jensens Gradiva”*.

What is striking is that the methodology proposed by Graf develops along the lines of an expressly theatrical conception of representation. Similar to the

⁷⁶ “What Freud learned from the ill made possible his understanding of the healthy. . . Lombroso considers the poet as though he were considering an especially interesting criminal type; the French psychologists see the poet as exclusively neurotic; Professor Freud is interested in the human soul, the psychic organism.” (Minutes 245).

concept of representation that Freud develops already in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the act of psychoanalytic interpretation that revolves around the “work” is less an act of “reading” than of observing / inferring the motivations that pulse through the creative process as it is revealed in the interaction between (the life of an) artist and his creative output. Thus, what Graf and Freud refer to as “work” in this context is less like “text,” than with something more akin to *praxis*, for it indicates a turn away from a categorization of the analogically legible details of either an artist’s personality (or in Sadger’s case, away from character pathography), and toward the multiplicitious dimensions of an artist’s and his work’s history, action, and practice. In this sense, “work” seems strikingly similar to what Aristotle refers to in the *Poetics* as *prattontes*.

As Samuel Weber explains in his article entitled “Psychoanalysis and Theatricality,” in which he links Freud’s representational aesthetics to those of Aristotle on Greek tragedy, he argues that Aristotle’s use of *prattontes*, which is *praxis* in its substantive form, indicates not only the “representation of a single, complete and meaningful action on the stage,” but also “actors, or, as Aristotle says, rendered literally, *actants*, and even more literally, *acting*” (34). But these *actings*, Weber clarifies, “need not refer to a person or thing at all”: “Persons are doubtless involved, but *qua* individuals they need not be the principle of whatever unity may be attributed to the representation. . . . What distinguishes [Aristotle’s] conception of tragedy from that which has become familiar to us over the past 400 years is precisely Aristotle’s refusal to place character at the center or fundament of tragedy”.

Instead, what is at the center of Aristotle's concept of tragedy is, to quote Aristotle directly, "a representation of an *action* which is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude" (Halliwell 89). As evidenced here, the laws of representation outlined by Aristotle on tragedy and those espoused by Graf and Freud as fundamental to the practice of applied psychology, which emphasizes the action revealed in the "work," the *praxis* of both the artist and the artistic object, bear a striking similarity; the laws of representation outlined by Aristotle on tragedy are mirrored by the laws of imitation espoused by Graf and Freud as fundamental to the practice of applied psychology. By taking up Aristotle, Weber opposes Freud's concept of theatricality to that of many contemporary critics, as exemplified for Weber by Joyce McDougal. Weber turns to Aristotle's *Poetics*, "not because either Freud or McDougall explicitly refer to this text, but because the very different and indeed conflicting conceptions of theatricality to which they respectively appeal are forcefully articulated in Aristotle's treatment of the subject" (Weber 31). Freud does refer explicitly to Aristotle, however, and not coincidentally in the first lines of his aforementioned essay, "*Psychopathische Personen auf der Bühne:*"

Wenn der Zweck des Schauspiels dahin geht, "Furcht und Mitleid" zuerwecken, eine "Reinigung der Affekte" herbeizuführen, wie seit Aristoteles angenommen wird, so kann man dieselbe Absicht etwas ausführlicher beschreiben, indem man sagt, es handle sich um die Eröffnung von Lust- oder Genußquellen aus unserem Affektleben [geradeso] wie beim Komischen, Witz usw. aus unserer Intelligenzarbeit, durch welche [sonst] viele solcher Quellen unzugänglich gemacht worden sind. (Freud 656)

Of interest to Freud here is neither theatrical representation in general, nor even the theatricality of the unconscious, but rather the representation of *psychopathic characters* that are crafted by the playwright to represent pathology / psychosis.

That is, Freud takes the same stand as Graf in Graf's discussion of Sadger a year or two later, that the identification of pathology (or its depiction on the stage) is not psychoanalytically interesting unless it has a holistic function for the audience.

Freud states:

[...] das psychologische Drama wird zum psychopathologischen, wenn nicht mehr der Konflikt zweier annähernd gleich bewußten Regungen, sondern der zwischen einer bewußten und einer verdrängten Quelle des Leidens ist, an dem wir teilnehmen und aus dem wir Lust ziehen sollen. Bedingung des Genusses ist hier, daß der Zuschauer auch ein Neurotiker sei. Denn nur ihm wird die Freilegung und gewissermaßen bewußte Anerkennung der verdrängten Regung Lust bereiten können anstatt bloß Abneigung; beim Nichtneurotiker wird solche bloß auf Abneigung stoßen und die Bereitschaft hervorrufen, den Akt der Verdrängung zu wiederholen, denn diese ist hier gelungen — der verdrängten Regung ist durch den einmaligen Verdrängungsaufwand voll das Gleichgewicht gehalten. Beim Neurotiker ist die Verdrängung im Mißlingen begriffen, labil und bedarf beständig neuen Aufwandes, der durch die Anerkennung erspart wird. Nur bei ihm besteht ein solcher Kampf, der Gegenstand des Dramas sein kann, aber auch bei ihm wird der Dichter nicht bloß Befreiungsgenuß, sondern auch Widerstand erzeugen. (Freud 659-660)

On the manifest level, Freud states that his discussion of psychopathic characters is a discussion about modern theater. By modern, he does not mean *Moderne*, as he makes clear from his first example, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Freud 660). The theatricality of the *Moderne* is a likely subtext, however, insofar as Freud takes pains to spell out the type of representation of psychological illness that is aesthetically effective along the lines of classical theater, and to frown upon the mere theatricalization of psychological illness for gratuitous dramatic ends. Freud makes this argument at least once more in 1909 during a discussion at the Wednesday meetings concerning representation in Hofmannthal and Strauß' *Elektra* after its first Viennese performance, which Freud views with critical disregard:

Die Kunst des Dichters bestehe nicht darin (wie Bach vor wenigen Tagen in einem Feuilleton [. . .] sehr richtig bemerkte), Probleme zu finden und zu behandeln. Das soll er den Psychologen überlassen. Sondern seine Kunst besteht darin, dichterische Wirkungen aus solchen Problemen zu gewinnen, und die Erfahrung zeigt, daß diese Probleme, wenn sie solche Wirkungen hervorbringen sollen, verkleidet sein müssen und daß die Wirkung nicht darunter leidet, wenn man die Probleme nur bloß ahnt und sich keiner der Leser oder Hörer darüber klar werden kann, worin die Wirkung besteht. Die Kunst des Dichters besteht also wesentlich in der Verhüllung. [. . .] Wir haben wohl das Recht, ein Dichterwerk zu analysieren, aber es ist vom Dichter nicht recht, unsere Analysen zu poetisieren.

When Freud and his followers focus their attention on the relationship between psychoanalysis and artistic representation, they begin to develop an understanding

of representation as a process that is both theatrical and performative, a process constitutive of subjectivity in both culture and community. Freud's "Psychopathic Characters" is momentous in that it documents this shift in thought.

In a highly unusual measure, Freud gave his manuscript of "Psychopathic Characters" to Graf, who eventually published it in 1942 in the *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* along with his "Reminiscences of Professor Sigmund Freud". In his "Reminiscences," Graf states that "Psychopathic Characters" was written in 1904, but because in it Freud refers to Hermann Bahr's play *Die Andere*, which first premiered in Vienna in November 1905, it is more likely to have been written in late 1905 or 1906. The the historical footsteps of this manuscript are significant, for they suggest that Freud wrote the essay during conversations between Freud and Graf preceding Graf's 1906 article on Wagner. As such, one can read "Psychopathic Characters" as an essay that situates Freud's thoughts on theatricality to the drama of Wagnerian opera in particular; that is, to the theatricality of the community as it is conceived in the Wagnerian "Theater of the Future". This may well be one of the reasons that Freud curiously "forgot" about it.

Admittedly, conceiving of Freud as concerned with Wagnerian opera requires an orientational shift on a number of levels. On the most basic level, it seems important to realize that Freud provides no indication that his remarks in "Psychopathic Characters" are limited to the *Schau-spiel* or speaking theater rather than the *Sing-spiel* or opera. But because in the German tradition opera is understood as primarily a dramatic rather than strictly musical art form, there is no reason to suggest that Freud was thinking specifically about spoken theater when

he wrote it. In fact, Freud reveals that he considers opera to be a dramatic art form indistinct from speaking theater when, in his discussion of dramatic plots in this very text, he mentions the “struggle between ‘love and duty,’” a theme, he states, that is “famous from the opera,” which “provides a point of departure for an almost infinite variety of conflict situations” (659). If from the outset we do not exclude the possibility that Freud’s “Psychopathic Characters” essay addresses the theatricality of opera, it becomes difficult to ignore this possibility at the very latest when he discusses the role of tragedy in modernity. Already in his collection of essays, *Wagnerprobleme und andere Studien* from 1900, Max Graf had addressed the psychological forces behind Wagner’s *Musikdrama* and Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, the fraught relationship between Nietzsche and Wagner, and the role of Wagner in modern culture. It is impossible to know how well Freud knew Graf’s earliest book, but given that their subsequent collaboration relates to many of the same topics that arise in Graf’s earlier study, it is difficult to imagine that he could not have known Graf’s views on these subjects.

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s comparison of Freud’s “Psychopathic Characters” to Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* in his essay “This Scene is Primal” is a strong indication that my proposal is not far-fetched. For Lacoue-Labarthe, placing the two side by side is “not an entirely random comparison,” because, “in fact, the question raised by Nietzsche concerning tragedy...is exactly the same as the one Freud, by way of Aristotle, poses in the very two paragraphs of ‘Psychopathic Characters’”: “how is it that the spectacle of suffering, of annihilation and death, can lead to pleasure [*jouissance*]—and a pleasure superior to that aroused by any other spectacle?” In Freud’s words, “*Alle Arten von Leiden sind also das Thema des*

Dramas, aus denen es dem Zuhörer Lust zu verschaffen verspricht, und daraus ergibt sich als erste Kunstformbedingung, daß es das erregte Mitleiden durch die dabei möglichen Befriedigungen zu kompensieren verstehe . . ." (658). Two lines earlier, Freud states that "*masochistische Befriedigung*" arises out of the "*Prometheus-stimmung des Menschen,*" choosing a mythological example that also likely gestures toward Nietzsche vis-à-vis Siegfried Lipiner's *Der Entfesselte Prometheus*, a poetic version of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* enormously popular not only with Nietzsche himself, but also among the members of the *Leseverein*. Lacoue-Labarthe finds Freud's essay especially intriguing not only because Freud "relinquished" it, but also because it is Freud's most important text on theater, which poses "the decisive question (on which is focused a whole contemporary critique of Freud) of the relationship of psychoanalysis to theatricality, or more generally, to *representation*". Lacoue-Labarthe does not indicate *why* Freud may have parted with the essay, but the curious fact that the "whole contemporary critique of Freud" including that of Lacoue-Labarthe has relinquished Freud's motivation for writing (and parting with) the essay (as well as Graf's subsequent essay on Wagner) reveals that the repressive mechanism may be alive and well not only in Freud, but also in contemporary criticism.

As I have suggested, whether Wagner and Wagnerism were revered, reviled, or rejected, his dramatic reforms demanded an engagement with theatricality both on the stage and in the staging of the body politic, an engagement with theatrical forms of political, social, and anthropological dimensions of culture. In the genealogy of Freudian thought, one sees such engagement very clearly, despite the obvious fact that Freud's material is radically different from Wagner's

on many counts. Whereas Lacoue-Labarthe generalizes Freud's concept of theatricality and turns his attention primarily to the role of the spectator's desire in the role of representation, I prefer to stress the fundamental theatrical problem that frames Freud's argument, namely, the boundary between psychological representation and *psychopathic* representation. For when this essay is read in the context of Wagnerian theater reform and Wagnerian cultural politics, it becomes immediately evident that what is at stake is not only the question of the role of individual desire in the function of theatrical representation, but also the relationship between theatrical representation and the building of community—and in particular, the relationship between representation and the conditions for the enjoyment of the psychopathic. In other words, by thinking about which representational aesthetics are healthy and which are psychopathic, Freud addresses an issue central to intense contemporary debates not only regarding the aesthetics of the theater, but—on an even more urgent level—regarding the aesthetics of modernity. Thus, Freud's cursory little essay operates on a highly charged political level. Lacoue-Labarthe suggests this when he states that for Freud, modern dramaturgy "presupposed the cultural or social establishment of neurosis:" "A quarter of a century later (which is to say fairly late), ruminating once again the same hypothesis, Freud asks himself exactly to what extent, and above all how, one can speak of a neurotic society or civilization" (113). Here, Lacoue-Labarthe is referring to Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, written in 1929 and published in 1930. Lacoue-Labarthe notes, "it is not too hard to imagine what such a text might have meant in 1930" (113). Clearly, however, the potential

neurosis of society or civilization was a problem that Freud was forced to contemplate well before that time.

Already in 1900, Max Graf identified what he viewed to be a generational shift in the reception of Wagner. Unlike the older generation, which idealized both the man and his work, the younger generation, according to Graf, approached it with a critical distance in which “the image of the ideal shifted”:

The force which Wagner attempted to place his work at the core of German cultural life, as home to all spiritual forces of this time --musical, philosophical, religious—is a monster [...] it is precisely this force which proves that the art work of Richard Wagner does not stand, like Greek tragedy, at the beginning of an age, a civilization, a people, but at the end, as a grandiose *resumé*. . . . It rests on the ruins of an old culture and attempts to dissolve its highest conscious forces once again into unconscious forces. (Graf 21).

Similarly, the work that resulted from the collaboration between Graf and Freud illustrates a self-conscious striving in the opposite direction, a labor toward a “Theater of the Future” that picks up the pieces of an old culture in an endeavor to draw out from it the forces of the unconscious. By the turn-of-the-century, Wagner was no longer “the singer of heroic feeling, but rather the great musical sorcerer of all wounds and spiritual suffering” (Graf).

This is a theme Graf takes up once more in “*Wagner und das dramatische Schaffen*,” though this time with Freud’s notes on hand. Employing the methodology of psychoanalytical *praxis*, Graf pinpoints a startling “inner agitation” alive in the composer:

Diese innere Erregung läßt ihn in keinem Momente ruhen, sie gibt der Natur des Künstlers das Expansive, die nach außen drängende Kraft, das Agitatorische. Das Theater will lebendige Wirkung, will Massenheerrschaft. Der Dramatiker rechnet nicht, wie der Lyriker oder Epiker mit der Bewunderung des einzelnen Lesers; er braucht die unruhige neugierige, innerlich so verschiedenartige Menge, die er zu einer Masse zusammenschweißt. Er kennt nur ein Ziel: Diese Menge unter seinen Willen zu zwingen. Ein Stück von einem Eroberer steckt in jedem Dramatiker und dieser Eroberungsdrang erfüllt Richard Wagner mit mächtigster Energie. (Graf 1906 110).

In 1906, surely neither Freud nor Graf could have imagined the “*Massenherrschaft*” of National Socialism with which Wagner’s opera and Wagner’s anti-Semitism would later come to be affiliated. It is fascinating, however, that here Graf forcefully links theatrical representation with the formation of community, and with the potential political domination of the masses.

For Graf, all tragedy, including that of Wagner, “*entsteht an einer Weltenwende, in jenen Zeiten, wo die Menschen gleich stark von den Leidenschaften und Kräften einer alten Zeit und den Empfindungen einer neuen Zeit im tiefsten bewegt werden*” (114). For both Freud and Graf, the “world-turn” indicated by Wagnerian tragedy marks the beginnings of a new, psychoanalytical Theater of the Future that strives to unlock the ancient mysteries of the unconscious, that returns to classical forms in order to discover what has been left hidden. In operatic terms, I would say that this would be less like reflecting of the aesthetics one finds in an opera such as *Rosenkavalier*, as Lyotard suggests, and rather like returning to an older,

classical form to take a fresh look. Indeed, before the relationship between Freud and Graf dissolved sometime around 1911 as a result of the strife caused by Freud's split with Adler, Freud encouraged Graf to write a psychological study of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, which Freud believed to be the "greatest opera there is," a task that Graf did not execute.

Although I will not offer a psychoanalytic analysis of Mozart and Da Ponte's *Don Giovanni* as an addendum to this chapter, it is worth remarking if only in closing why the opera likely would have appealed to Freud's sensibilities. For one thing, (similar to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*) the plot of the opera begins with a scene of patricide and ends with a revenging ghost of the father-turned-statue; for another, it is predominantly erotic forces that drive the dramatic action of our hero. But more than that, *Don Giovanni* embodies the forms of both comedy and tragedy, and as such beholds the dynamics that shaped Freud's universe. In his forceful break with (paternal) tradition and authority, Freud believed that his science would both grasp the enigmatic structure of the mind and reduce human suffering. At the same time, faced with the menace of a number of potentially revengeful ghosts, Freud constantly developed strategies to ward them off. Becoming as disaffected as a statue himself—that is, inventing himself as the double of Michelangelo's stone was one of them.

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