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AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

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Music and the Performance of Identity II

Vol. 13, n. 2 (2009)

Edited by Serena Guarracino and Marina Vitale

Marina Vitale

Introduction

Anglistica has been online for three years, now. It is possible, therefore, to look back on the first three years of this new life and reflect on the potentialities of its electronic medium, also in connection with the critical stance of the journal.

The interdisciplinary nature of the cultural approach which has shaped *Anglistica* since its first appearance in 1974, and which was further articulated in its 1997 restyling, has always invited us not only to take into account cultural phenomena and traditions belonging to the Anglophone world in a very wide sense, but also to focus on cultural representations which engage with the visual, the cinematic, the aural. Going online with a double issue devoted to *The Other Cinema/The Cinema of the Other* (11.1-2, 2007), we immediately realized we were in a position to publish a number of illustrations which were not just a pleasant addition to the verbal text but a compelling way of speaking 'of' the visual 'through' the visual. Stills from films, reproductions of installations and photos from various media made the 2007 and 2008 issues aesthetically more appealing, but also (we hope) conceptually more convincing. The 12.2 (2008) issue, devoted to *Indiascapes*, made large use of illustrations, in an effort to allow its subject to make its own impact on the readers without overloading it with authorial intrusions by critical voices, and to try not so much "to speak about", as to speak "nearby", following Trinh.T. Minh-ha's celebrated statement from her film *Reassemblage* (1982).[1]

In the last two issues, dedicated to music, visual images have still been quite important in hinting at the material conditions of production of the matters dealt with, including the physical, architectural settings in which the different forms of music came to life – as in the case of the baroque spaces inhabited by the poignantly frenzied visions exemplified by Caravaggio's paintings and Bernini's marbles as well as by Frescobaldi's music analysed by Susan McClary in the previous issue, or of the shabby urban surroundings which were central to the life (musical and otherwise) of working-class Italian-American youths in 1950s Bronx, revisited by Alessandro Buffa. In some cases, however, images provide a (somewhat uncanny) visual correlative to the argument expounded, as happens with the rather dizzying illustrations Wayne Koestenbaum takes from very factual voice manuals and guidebooks, but which become strangely evocative of suppressed sexual discourses, of the deep though negated nexus between the pleasures of music and sexual desire.

[1] The script can be found in *Framer Framed* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).

With our first 2009 issue on *Voicings: Music Across Borders*, however, we also started exploring the new, exciting possibility of including video and audio inserts and exhibiting original materials produced by the authors and artists discussed, alongside examples of music retrievable from the Internet through the links provided in the notes. I hope our readers took the same pleasure as we did in watching and hearing the effect of the sonorous installation discussed by Danilo Capasso and Iain Chambers in their conversation published on the 13.1 (2009) issue as well as listening to the attractive, slightly husky voice of Romaine Moreton who chants the poems discussed by Katherine E. Russo in the same issue – and especially the possibility of listening to it while scrolling down the lines of her poems, just by a click of the mouse.

More opportunities to enjoy a multimedia experience are offered by the present issue, not only thanks to the fascinating musical examples retrievable through the links provided by Freya Jarman-Ivens in her article on vocal identification, but also through the welter of audiovisual examples offered by Vito Campanelli's review of digital musical experiences, the audio clip from the moving performance of *The Woman Who Refused to Dance* composer Shirley Thompson generously permitted us to link to Manuela Coppola's article on music and resistance, as well as the audio cameos from a couple of his performances Ernesto Tomasini authorized Serena Guarracino to publish together with their interview.

Apart from these technical possibilities made available by the new digital form, I would like to comment on some conceptual features of our critical stance which have become more and more evident in the journal, and which have, perhaps, deepened in the last few years. I am referring to the special local-global nexus which characterizes the critical approach of the journal and which mainly depends on the Neapolitan location from which it speaks, from its Southern cultural place of origin. We have come to see more and more clearly the open-ended meaning of our title, *Anglistica*, which has never confined the interests of the journal to the geographical limits of the Anglophone world as an object of enquiry, but has always been alert to the cross-cultural features of its interrogations, to the Southern perspective from which that object was perceived and 'made strange', denaturalized and problematized.

Quite recently, we had the opportunity of discussing this question at length with a group of British scholars with whom we have entertained a long-standing research dialogue – a "story or tale of three cities, Birmingham, Naples and London", as our host, Mark Nash called it in his introduction to a seminar held last December at the Royal College of Art (London). The seminar, entitled *From the South: Italian Cultural and Postcolonial Studies*, was centred on *Anglistica* as a developing platform. Starting from the work of the journal, the seminar discussed the critical

reformulation and reconfiguration of English Studies taking place in Italy, and addressed the significance of cultural and postcolonial studies in the present-day Italian and European context. The main point that emerged from the discussion was not so much the existence of a long established Italian school of Cultural Studies, but its distinctive 'Southern', or 'Mediterranean', character. Which does not simply mean that a group of intellectuals – more or less closely tied to the general theoretical framework of what is usually identified with the Cultural Studies project initiated in Birmingham a few decades ago – set about doing Cultural and more recently Postcolonial Studies in Naples, as if they were spreading 'the word'. This would have been impossible anyway, because concepts and theories do not travel without actively translating themselves in the process. And the cultural hybridising of theories, traditions, languages, and so on, which is becoming more and more rich and complex in the present globalized world, does not necessarily imply that something gets 'lost in translation'. Much more is gained, in fact, in certain instances of cultural naturalization, as the felicitous re-birth of Gramscian theory in India and its translation into such a momentous intellectual movement as the Subaltern Studies clearly show.

As many Italian or Italian-based scholars remarked at the London seminar, it is the Southern and Mediterranean positioning of the journal and of the group 'organically' linked to it, that strengthens a critical and self critical re-elaboration of cultural and postcolonial notions of intercultural relations which – often, if not always – tend to posit the 'Other' outside the West. In her presentation of the recent history of *Anglistica*, Jane Wilkinson touched upon the intersections between the local and the global typical of its interdisciplinary, culturalist and postcolonial focus, which have always been favoured by the Southern location of the journal and by its vicinity with the three-century long tradition of Oriental studies carried out at "L'Orientale" of Naples and by its eighteenth-century precursor, the "Collegio dei Cinesi". This had been founded with the declared intention of providing technical linguistic and cultural tools to the European (commercial and religious) 'civilizing' mission fostered by the short-lived Ostend Company under the auspices of Emperor Charles VI of Austria and Pope Clemente VI. The fraught vicinity with this tradition has often offered us a reminder of the problematic heritage of Orientalism with which Postcolonial Studies must constantly settle its accounts, bringing about a critical crisis, the interruption of a tradition of thought which cannot be simply erased or forgotten.

The need to locate ourselves critically on a cultural-geographical map has become more and more imperative. It had already dictated the title of the first issue of the "New Series" directed by Lidia Curti, which opened in 1997 with a double issue on *Geographies of Knowledge*, and it has been

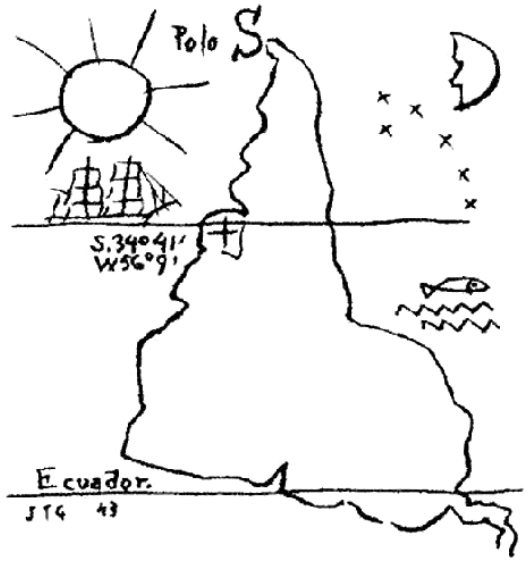

Fig. 1: Joaquín Torres García, *Inverted America*, 1943, drawing, Museo Torres García, Montevideo, Uruguay.

confirmed by the constant effort of the group to problematize its own positioning. This effort has sometimes been conveyed by referring to artistic interrogations of Western geopolitics and of received representations of the world. Rossella Ciocca and Maria Laudando's Introduction to the recent issue of *Anglistica* devoted to *Indiascapes* opened with the reproduction of a print by Neapolitan artist Francesco Clemente, which offers a visionary map of a complex and multi-layered imaginary homeland, an assemblage of geographical and topographical elements suggesting the United States and India, which syncretically surround the Mediterranean, displacing and rearticulating our common sense understanding of the world. In a similar perspective, the illustration chosen to publicize a seminar on *The Challenge of Cultural Studies Today* held at "L'Orientale" last year was Joaquín Torres García's famous 1943 drawing of *Inverted America*, offering a view from the South which inverts the spatial hierarchy between North and South traditionally imposed by Western culture.[2]

The importance of the local-global nexus was also invoked by a number of participants outside the editorial group, like Jean Fisher, former co-editor of *Third Text*, Paola Di Cori from the University of Urbino – who pointed at the centrality of the transnational networking of Cultural and Postcolonial Studies, especially in the present disheartening situation of Italian Universities, calling for an engagement with travelling concepts (without dependence and mimicry) – and Paola Bono, from the University "Roma Tre" – who specifically referred to the urgent necessity that Italian public opinion overcome its blindness to its own colonial past and settle accounts with it. Lidia Curti further motivated the imperative, for a group operating in Naples, to hybridise English and Italian Cultural Studies by paying attention to Italy and its postcoloniality and, as she put it, "coming home while looking elsewhere".

The question of whether there is an Italian School of Cultural and Postcolonial Studies and whether it is its subject of study, its particular theoretical and intellectual imprint, or its cultural location that makes it 'Italian', was posed by Mara De Chiara and various other participants. It

[2] The idea behind this illustration was elaborated in the 1930s and found expression in various prints and drawings by the Uruguayan artist, identified with the so-called "School of the South".

was argued that doing Cultural and Postcolonial Studies in a Southern context, with an awareness of the relations of power implied in the North-South connection, and an undeniable, though critically inherited, tradition of thought which has posited and still posits the South (of Europe as well as of the world) as an object and not as a subject, obliges us to rethink our theoretical framework and make it vulnerable. In doing Cultural and Postcolonial Studies from the South, it is necessary to re-elaborate the critical language, models and frameworks established elsewhere, translating them, as Iain Chambers insisted, and shifting one's own perspective into thinking 'from' and 'with' the South, as a process of cultural, critical and historical appropriation. He spoke of this critical step, or threshold, as a step into "maritime criticism", amounting, as he said, to "taking history, our sense of belonging, our criticism offshore; renegotiating thought from being offshore; setting criticism afloat; rendering critical formations vulnerable to unexpected winds".

This is certainly a formidable, though inescapable, agenda. Looking back over the last few years of activity of *Anglistica*, and in particular to the last two issues that Serena Guarracino and myself have edited, we are not sure we have succeeded in complying with it. But we have certainly tried.

Wayne Koestenbaum

The Queen's Throat: Or, How to Sing*

* Excerpt from Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 2001). Reprinted by permission of Da Capo Press. All images are taken from this volume and reprinted by kind permission of Da Capo Press and Wayne Koestenbaum.

Embarrassment

I started listening to opera because the convulsive vibrato of a trained voice embarrassed me. It filled me with an uncanny discomfort that I now call pleasure. But in those dim days I didn't call it pleasure. I didn't try to imitate Carmen, Don José, or Escamillo. I didn't try to fill the room with magnificent sound. Instead, I wallowed in embarrassment; I cringed; and I silently vowed, "In shame I will find paradise".

Imagining the Interior

I can't sing. If I could sing I would not be writing this. I would not envy the singer's self-possession. Nor would I need to imagine the interior of the singer's body, throat, glottis, resonators, mask. The singer's face is called a mask, as if a voice were never capable of telling the truth.

Singers, be warned: I am not accurately describing your experience. My task is more pedestrian. I am recounting myths and stories, culled from forgotten manuals. The search started at a book barn: I found a rain-warped copy of Millie Ryan's *What Every Singer Should Know,* and though the author warns that "singing is an art which cannot be taught from book or correspondence", I tried to learn it, and have failed, and am secretly glad to have failed, for if I'd succeeded in demystifying voice, I would have no god left.[1]

[1] Millie Ryan, *What Every Singer Should Know* (Omaha: Franklin Publishing Co., 1910), iv.

In Western metaphysics, the spoken or sung word has more authority than the written word. Voice accords presence – a myth that remains compelling, even though we are supposed to know better: we believe that no one can steal a voice, that no two voices are exactly alike, that finding a voice will set a body free, and that anyone can sing. This conviction that having a voice means having an identity is a cultural myth, just as sex is human nature but also a myth.

The physiology of opera singing is a set of metaphors; when we hear an opera, we are listening not only to the libretto and to the music, but to a story about the body, and the story of a journey: the voyage of 'voice', traveling out from hiddenness into the world. This fable, so ingrained we do not remark it, is also the story of sexuality. Just as breath surges out through the voice box into the ambient air, so our unmarked, unformed soul loses its imaginary innocence and becomes branded for life with a gender and a sexuality.

We are unaccustomed to thinking of voice as a discourse located in history. But voice uplifts and degrades us as forcibly as sexuality does. Voice is a system equal to sexuality – as punishing, as pleasure-giving; as elective, as ineluctable.

By operatic singing, I mean the classically trained voice. It is remote from speech; it is dexterous; it strives to be strict in pitch and to obey the letter of the law; it projects; it forbids flaw. I can't give a definition of the operatic voice that will encompass Monteverdi and Wagner, lieder and oratorio, Bach and Berg. But you recognize an operatic voice. Deanna Durbin had it, Tito Gobbi had it, Conchita Supervia had it. The sophomore down the street practicing for a glee-club audition with embarrassingly sterling vocalise wants to have it. The operatic voice pretends to be polite but is secretly stressed, huge, exorbitant: it sings its training: it exclaims, "A price has been paid". You may think the operatic voice sounds like a parrot or a locomotive or a windup toy or good taste or piety or cowardice or obedience: traits we don't appreciate. Or you may agree that the operatic voice is the furious 'I' – affirming blast of a body that refuses dilution or compromise.

This blast, this operatic voice, is the sound of nineteenth-century sexuality. Of all the varieties of sexuality, homosexuality is arguably the most tainted by taxonomy, and is thus the most perverse and the most 'sexual'; homosexuality is one of the few survivors of that fantastic penumbra of perversions that no one takes seriously anymore, such as fetishist, exhibitionist, and nymphomaniac. (Heterosexuality, too, is a category, though we often think it transcends classification.) Theories of how to produce a singing voice obliquely allude to 'homosexuality' – term of travel, exoticism, charnel house, Sodom, Times Square, pathology, cure. Even if you're not queer, you live next door to homosexuality and can't prove that your property-line stops short of HOMO, syllables I sing repeatedly and truculently to exorcise their aura of taint: homohomohomo.

Throat

The throat, for gay men, is a problem and a joy: it is the zone of fellatio. Not everyone chooses fellatio: gayness doesn't depend on oral sex, and straightness includes it. But sexuality, as a symbolic system of checks and balances, measures and countermeasures, has chosen the throat as a place where gay men come into their own.

The opera queen's throat is inactive and silent while he listens; the singer's throat is queen. But the act of intense, grounded listening blows to pieces the myth that we can know precisely where an emotion or an experience begins. I am not a singer, but I have a throat, and I am using it to worship and to eat opera, to ask questions of opera so that opera might eat me.

You listen to an operatic voice or you sing with operatic tone production and thereby your throat participates in that larger, historical throat, the Ur-throat, the queen's throat, the throat-in-the-sky, the throat-in-the-mind, the voice box beneath the voice box. Homosexuality is a way of singing. I can't *be* gay, I can only *sing* it, disperse it. I can't knock on its door and demand entrance because it is not a place or a fixed location. Instead, it is a million intersections – or it is a dividing line, a membrane, like the throat, that separates the body's breathing interior from the chaotic external world.

The singer and the homosexual each appear to be a closed-off cabinet of urges. But the body that sings and the body that calls itself homosexual are not as sealed as we think. Nor are they as free. They are looseleaf rulebooks, filled with scrap-pages of inherited prohibitions: page after page of pain.

Manuals

About voice, I only know what I have read: a few bizarre books, mostly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, written to teach the art of singing. These guidebooks codify and control the voice, and imagine it as friend and as enemy, as soul's ground and as trapdoor into netherworlds.

Like conduct books, voice manuals are full of social history. They intend to spread 'culture', to civilize, and to protect secret skills from vanishing. Do the manuals have musical legitimacy? Lilli Lehmann and Enrico Caruso wrote manuals; so did a renowned castrato, Piero Francesco Tosi, in 1723. And yet I don't trust these texts to recount what actually happens inside a singer.

Like tracts against masturbation, singing manuals dictate how energy and pleasure should move through the body; they are eager to legislate conduct and to condemn mistakes; they help me imagine the voice box as a sorrowing, peculiar human capability that wants to be free and paradoxically seeks its liberation in an art of confinement.

Like many literary texts (novels of sentiment, eroticism, suspense), a voice manual exhorts and shapes the body of its reader. And the voice manual cares most about the nonsinger, the amateur, the onlooker. What gifted singer truly needs to read *How to Sing?* Only the loser turns to textbooks. Voice manuals address the aspirant who will never become a singer, and who requires a field guide to the unobtainable.

Singing vs. Speaking

Opera emphasizes the gap between speaking and singing. Is there a physiological difference? Some manuals say that singing is just intensified speaking; but diva Maria Jeritza warned, "So many girls do not seem to

realize that the speaking voice is actually the enemy of the singing voice".[2] (Jeritza warns only the girls, but I assume that the boys should take note, too.)

If you speak a secret, you lose it; it becomes public. But if you sing the secret, you magically manage to keep it private, for singing is a barricade of codes.

[2] Quoted in Fredrick H. Martens, *The Art of the Prima Donna and Concert Singer* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1923), 195.

Coming Out

Good singing consists in opening the throat's door so the secret goods can come out. Enrico Caruso insists that "the throat is the door through which the voice must pass", and that the door must be left open lest the breath seek other channels – morally dubious detours.[3] Many writers insist that the passageway to the human voice's resonance rooms be left open, as if singing were mostly a matter of sincerity and the willingness to confess. The throat's door must be kept open, but no one is allowed to guess that such a door exists. Know too much about the throat, and you'll fall silent.

[3] Enrico Caruso and Luisa Tetrazzini, *Caruso and Tetrazzini on the Art of Singing* (New York: Dover Publications, [1909] 1975), 52.

Queers have placed trust in coming out, a process of vocalization. Coming out, we define voice as openness, self-knowledge, clarity. And yet mystery does not end when coming out begins.

Bel Canto, the Castrato, and the Laryngoscope

In 1854, singer-teacher Manuel Garcia II (brother to divas Maria Malibran and Pauline Viardot) invented the laryngoscope. Garcia was not utterly a pioneer in this matter. In the eighteenth century, scientist Antoine Ferrein had discovered the *corda vocales* by experimenting on a cadaver's larynx. But intrepid Garcia experimented on himself. Seeking the cause of his cracked voice, he assembled a contraption, involving a dentist's mirror, and peered into his throat to see his glottis.

With my imaginary laryngoscope, with my mirror, I am looking into the queer throat to inspect the damage.

The laryngoscope's influence may have been limited, but its invention coincided with the rise of scientific vocal methods, and the fall of the castrato, who, by 1800, had begun to disappear. (In eighteenth-century Italy, up to four thousand boys a year were castrated.) With the castrato's demise, however, came a vague fear that vocal art was declining. These fears of decadence were given a name: *bel canto*. *Bel canto* means, literally, beautiful singing; and it also implies a foreboding that beauty is in decline.

According to musicologist Philip A. Duey, the term *bel canto* acquired currency only after the era it describes had ended. The phrase itself had

been loosely used for centuries, but it found its present, fixed meaning in the 1860s in Italy, and was taken up by other countries in the 1880s; these significances only entered dictionaries after 1900.

So it appears that *bel canto* (as a discourse of nostalgia and retrospection) emerged in the 1860s. Another term was coined in the 1860s – in 1869, to be exact: 'homosexual'. Imagine for a moment that this is not a coincidence, and consider that *bel canto* and homosexuality might be parallel. Homosexuality and *bel canto* are not the same thing, but they had related contexts: they came wrapped in languages of control and cure. There were voice manuals long before *bel canto* and homosexuality were conceptualized; but the desire to describe the voice scientifically and to cure degeneracies of vocal art grew vehement after 1860, and produced a torrent of advice literature in the 1890s and early 1900s, including Julius Eduard Meyer's *A Treatise on the Origin of a Destructive Element in the Female Voice as Viewed from the Register Standpoint* (1895), Clara Kathleen Rogers's *My Voice and I* (1910), Charles Emerson's *Psycho-vox* (1915), and Nellie Melba's *Melba Method* (1926). Manuals of this period provide the theory and practice of 'voice culture' – training and liberating the natural voice.

Observe voice culture's affinity with psychoanalysis. Both systems believe in expressing hidden material, confessing secrets. And both discourses take castration seriously: voice culture wants to recapture the castrato's scandalous vocal plenitude, while psychoanalysis imagines castration as identity's foundation – star player in the psyche's interminable opera.

Opera culture has always fantasized about a lost golden age of singing; accordingly, a central ambition of the voice manual is to preserve *cantabile* style against degeneration and newfangled vices. Francesco Lamperti in 1864 wrote that "it is a sad but undeniable truth that singing is to be found today in a deplorable state of decadence".[4] (A century before, the castrato Tosi considered opera to be a decline from the "manly" church style into a "theatrical effeminate Manner".)[5] Voice culturists long for lost days of glory, but none dares to say, "I want the castrato back!"

[4] Cit. in Philip A. Duey, *Bel Canto in its Golden Age. A Study of its Teaching Concepts* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1951), 5.

[5] Pier Francesco Tosi, *Observation on the Florid Song*, trans. by John Ernest Galliard (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968), 76.

Looking into the Voice Box

It is difficult to avoid noticing that the spookily genderless voice box has been clothed with a feminine aura. And it is difficult to know what to do with this information.

One major reason voice has been marked as feminine is that the organs of its production are hidden from view. A 1909 manual observes that the male instructor "has to teach an instrument which cannot be seen except by an expert, and cannot be touched at any time".[6]

[6] Sir Charles Santley, *The Art of Singing and Vocal Declamation* (New York: Macmillan, 1908), 11.

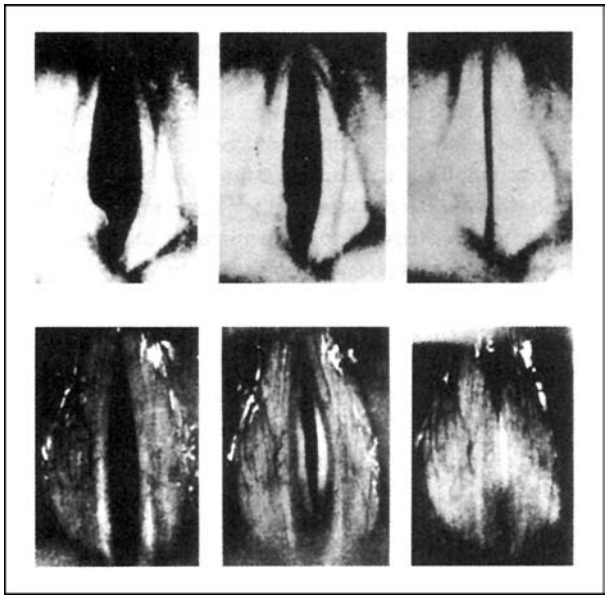

Fig. 1: "If only I could see the glottis!" Vocal fold vibration, photographs by Bell Telephone Laboratories, Inc. and Svend Smith, in D. Ralph Appelman, *The Science of Vocal Pedagogy: Theory and Application* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), courtesy of Wayne Koestenbaum.

"If only I could see the glottis!" Manuel Garcia reportedly exclaimed, on the verge of inventing the laryngoscope.[7] Modern scientific photographs of the singing larynx and glottis show us what Garcia might have seen: a lipped opening. Voice commentators describe the larynx as labial – based on visual analogy, and on the association between women and invisible things.

Jean Blanchet, in 1756, called the glottis "a horizontal cleft terminated by two lips".[8] Robert Lawrence Weer, in 1948, called the vocal cords "two thick membranes", "two lips", "little shutters".[9] But these are descriptions from outside. From inside, how does the voice box feel? Soprano Maria Jeritza compared stressful singing to "a strong rubber band being stretched out full length": divine Jeritza, thank you for precisely describing the approach to orgasm.[10]

Though voice has been described as a duplicate of the vagina, the wily larynx can embody male and female characteristics, or neither. Some voice manuals make the larynx seem a vestige of an extinct, versatile, genderless species. In 1739, Johann Mattheson described the glottis as a "tonguelet" shaped like the "mouth of a little watering can".[11] Other voice manual writers describe the epiglottis as an ivy leaf, or imagine the glottis surrounded by "ring-shield" and "shield-pyramid" muscles that can stretch or slacken, as if the glottis or the epiglottis (who can keep track of the difference?) were elaborate alternatives to our dreary genitals, genitals so slimy with story, so padlocked into history, that they will offer us freedom only if we rewrite them from scratch.[12]

Punishing the Throat

Voice culture loves, protects, and preserves the throat, but also scapegoats the insurgent throat for saying no to genital tyranny.

In the name of art, Greek tragedians slashed the backs of their throats to promote vocal projection.[13] Diva Florence Easton commented in the

[7] Cit. in Robert Rushmore, *The Singing Voice* (London: Hamilton, 1971), 177.

[8] Cit. in Duey, *Bel Canto*, 135.

[9] Robert Lawrence Weer, *Your Voice* (Los Angeles: the author, 1948), 49.

[10] Cit. in Martens, *Art of the Prima Donna*, 202.

[11] Cit. in Sally Allis Sanford, *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Vocal Style and Technique* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1979), 58.

[12] Salvatore Marchesi (1902), cit. in Brent Jeffrey Monahan, *The Art of Singing: A Compendium of Thoughts on Singing Published between 1777 and 1927* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978), 136-137.

[13] See Herbert Witherspoon, *Singing: A Treatise for Teachers and Students* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1925), 1.

1920s that "you cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs" and you cannot make grand opera without "breaking voices".[14] Opera pretends to dislike the broken voice but symbolically depends on it. Research into teaching the mute to speak (tuning-fork tests done on Helen Keller) illuminated the phonation and laryngeal movements of opera singers.[15]

In lieu of injury, the singer's head and throat must vanish. Emmy Destinn said, in the 1920s, "When I sing I feel as if I have no throat".[16] The female singer photographed in Millie Ryan's 1910 treatise, *What Every Singer Should Know,* has learned her lesson, for she has neither throat nor head: the picture stops at the neck, her head crudely cut off – as if the pose were compromising, and decapitation ensured anonymity. Without a head, she seems pure ground, deprived of mind and transcendence. As a cure for nervousness, the vocalist is encouraged to stand before an open window every morning, to take deep breaths, and to fondle her breasts and rib cage: she reminds me of Freud's Dora, a nervous case indeed, a girl whose sexual desires wandered out of control, toward women, toward the throat, and so Freud tried to shove her desires back down to the vagina, for he assumed that the vagina was the location of straightness and that movements away from heterosexuality were movements away from the genitals.

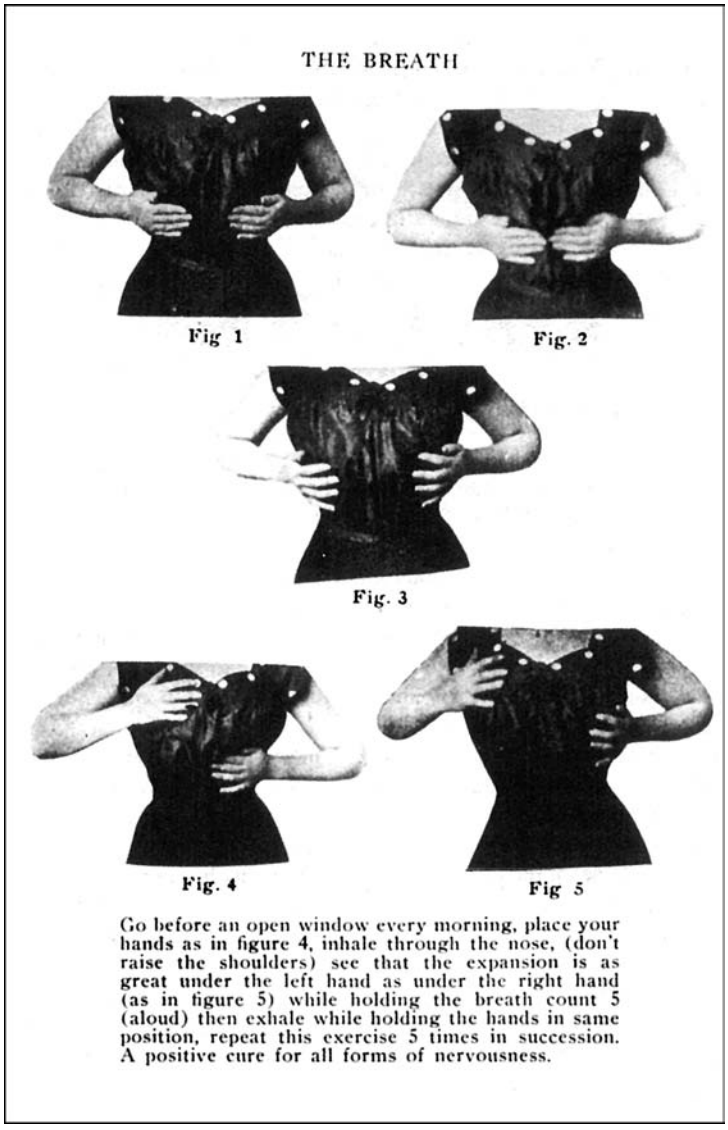

Fig. 2: "Without a head, she seems pure ground, deprived of mind and transcendence". "The Breath", in Millie Rynn, *What Every Singer Should Know* (Omaha: Franklin Publishing Co.,1910), courtesy of Wayne Koestenbaum.

Everyone understands that genitals are mythologized, but no one mentions the doctrines clustered in our throats, in our methods of singing and speaking. We lack a vocabulary for what the throat knows and suffers – perhaps because the throat is loath to speak about itself.

From the manuals, I learn that the singing throat is feminine, that it tends to wander and break, and that it has the mercurial ability to avoid gender. And so, despite my lack of a singing voice, I identify with the throat. I love to call it home, to skip the genitals for an hour and inhabit instead the moist vocal space between my mouth and lungs.

[14] Cit. in Martens, *Art of the Prima Donna*, 69.

[15] See Monahan, *Art of Singing*, 270.

[16] Cit. in ibid, 30.

Mouth

Recently I heard Jessye Norman live in recital. I sat in the front row. I looked into her open mouth and marveled at its self-disclosure, its size, its fearless capacity to open.

In a battered old voice manual, Herbert Witherspoon describes the mouth as a sexual organ, alive with easily excited "erective tissue", an organism containing "almost countless nerves": hence, "there is small wonder that things can go wrong very easily".[17] Singing is *always* going wrong.

It is unnatural to open the mouth? Composer Jules Massenet told soprano Alice Verlet, in a rehearsal of his *Manon,* "You have the ideal singer's mouth; it opens naturally!".[18] But the mouth must not open too wide. Sir Charles Santley says that for the lips to "fulfil their office", the mouth "ought not to open more than sufficient to introduce the tip of a finger" – not even up to the knuckle.[19] What severe regulation! Isaac Nathan in 1823 suggests that the "pretty mouths" of singers should "distend wide enough to admit a friend".[20] The friend is not a penis but a finger: open the mouth wide enough so that "one can comfortably bring the little finger" between the teeth, writes Johann Adam Hiller in 1774.[21] Other instruments – a spoon, a Popsicle stick – can take the finger's place. Lawrence Weer remembers his first lesson on "tongue control";[22] he was instructed to hold his tongue flat with a spoon while singing scales. The singer's open mouth grasps an imaginary object – sucks it, surrounds it. The object the singer sucks is space, air, blankness, hope: the cushioning condition for sound.

Voice has been described as feminine; but it is equally true that voice evades categorization. A singer wanders; a singer deviates. A voice begins in the body's basement, a zone that no one dares to name or authorize: and the singer sends the voice (or the voice sends the singer) to an *elsewhere,* a place outside of our knowledge, a verge I won't sketch or legislate except to say that I want to live there. Singing is a movement that never coalesces long enough for us to hold it. As soon as we can remark the moment of singing, it is gone.

Voice silently avoids the categories we bring to it. Voice is willing to be thrown, to disguise its source, to hurl itself out of sex-and-gender and onto the sands of a neutral, signless shore.

Finding the Falsetto

Falsetto seems profoundly perverse: a freakish sideshow; the place where voice goes wrong. And yet falsetto obeys the paradigm of all voice production. Falsetto is a detour, and singing always imposes detours upon a blank and neutral surge of air.

[17] Witherspoon, *Singing: A Treatise*, 25.

[18] Cit. in Martens, *Art of the Prima Donna*, 286.

[19] Santley, *The Art of Singing*, 56.

[20] Isaac Nathan, *An Essay on the History and Theory of Music; and on the Qualities, Capabilities, and Management of the Human Voice* (London: G. & W.B. Whittaker, 1823), 63.

[21] Cit. in Sanford, *Vocal Style*, 94.

[22] Weer, *Your Voice*, 5.

Sing falsetto, now. (Are you alone as you read this?) Fill the room with a clear feigned sound, and ask yourself what act you have committed. Then produce the sound naturally, from the chest. Which of the two tones, chest or head, do you want your neighbors to overhear?

Singing is a matter of potential embarrassments. And falsetto is among the greatest of singing shames. Using falsetto, you perform an act deemed unnatural. But nobody is unnatural around the clock; a moonlighter, I am unnatural for an hour at night but the rest of the time I am natural. Pretend, for the moment, that homosexuality, like falsetto, is not an identity but a useful pleasure with a bad reputation: pretend it is a technique, a sideline, a way to outwit a taxing vocal situation.

Codified voice production has never been happy with the falsetto: sound of mystery, unnaturalness, absence. Isaac Nathan in 1823 called it the *fourth voice* (fourth dimension, fourth sex): "it is a species of ventriloquism … an inward and suppressed quality of tone, that conveys the illusion of being heard at a distance".[23] Antoine Bailleux, in 1760, warns that a voice must emerge straight from the chest "lest in passing into the head or into the nose it degenerate into falsetto by its muffledness".[24] No one dares to claim the falsetto, to say about that high, fine, exacerbated sound, "This is mine!"

The falsetto is part of the history of effeminacy – a compelling saga yet to be written. Long before anyone knew what a homosexual was, entire cultures knew to mock men who sang unconventionally high. Plutarch disparaged "effeminate musical tattling, mere sound without substance";[25] John of Salisbury discouraged "womanish affectations in the mincing of notes and sentences";[26] St. Raynard insisted that "it becomes men to sing with a masculine voice, and not in a feminine manner, with tinkling, or as is popularly said, with false voices to imitate theatrical wantonness".[27] In the 1880s, after homosexuality's birth, a British physician described falsetto as a technique in which the two vocal cords push against each other "at their hinder part with such force as to stop each other's movement"; while chest tones emerge from the "natural aperture of the larynx", falsetto tones come through "an artificially diminished orifice, the chink becoming gradually smaller until there is nothing left to vibrate".[28] Falsetto, bad news for civilization, is the decline and fall.

Though falsetto was scapegoated, and associated with degeneracy, detour, and artifice, it has long represented a resource: the castrato Tosi speaks of the feigned voice as something "of Use", particularly when it is disguised by art.[29] If a modern voice culturist like Franklin D. Lawson in 1944 saw falsetto as a danger, causing a "white", "blatant", and "effeminate" sound in the adult male, and a "colorless, whistling hoot" in the female,[30] the castrato Tosi considered it a treasure to be discovered by a knowing master: "Many masters put their Scholars to sing the *Contr'Alto*, not knowing how to help them to the *Falsetto,* or to avoid the Trouble of finding it".[31]

[23] Nathan, *Essay*, 47.

[24] Cit. in Duey, *Bel canto*, 108.

[25] Cit. in ibid., 29.

[26] Cit. in ibid., 34.

[27] Cit. in ibid., 41.

[28] Sir Morell Mackenzie, Cit. in Monahan, *Art of Singing*, 149-150.

[29] Tosi, *Observations*, 24.

[30] Franklin D. Lawson, *The Human Voice: A Concise Manual on Training the Speaking and Singing Voice* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944), 46.

[31] Tosi, *Observations*, 23.

A sound at once false and useful, it may bring praise or condemnation to the singer who relies on it.

Falsetto is not a sin; the sin is breaking into it undisguisedly. Consistent falsetto, like expert drag, can give the illusion of truth. In 1782, when one "sopranist" – an uncastrated male who sang falsetto – broke accidentally into his real and robust tenor voice, Johann Samuel Petri observed that "my entire pleasure in his lovely soprano voice was utterly destroyed": a "loathsome harsh" note had interrupted the vocal masquerade, reminding listeners that the singer was a *he*.[32]

I have always feared the falsetto: voice of the bogeyman, voice of the unregenerate fag; voice of horror and loss and castration; floating voice, vanishing voice. With a grimace I remember freak pop singer Tiny Tim tiptoeing through the tulips with his ukelele.

[32] Cit. in Sanford, *Vocal Style*, 43-44.

Puberty

Puberty's onset: does it ruin or secure the voice? Does it destroy your life, or is it the moment your life begins?

Castration freezes the boy's voice before puberty can wreck it. But even for the uncastrated, puberty represents a moment of reckoning. When puberty hit, Caruso almost committed suicide (a headmaster wanted to profit from his prepubescent warblings); but he was rescued by a kindly baritone, who helped him place his voice. In puberty, the *real* erupts: acne, adam's apple, sperm, breasts, blood.

Diva Ernestine Schumann-Heink warns girls to postpone study until after their "physical development"[33] is complete, and Isaac Nathan cautions males not to sing during "mutation".[34] Only after puberty can a singer place the voice, discover where chest voice ends and head voice begins; only then can the singer balance the irreconcilable symbolic values of head and chest. The master must watch out for puberty's arrival in the student's body, and must teach the apprentice how to let the voice 'pass' from one sexually allusive region into another.

[33] Cit. in Martens, *Art of the Prima Donna*, 265-266.

[34] Cit. in Monahan, *Art of Singing*, 21.

Puberty can kill the choirboy's voice; but in most cases, singing begins after puberty, and so puberty casts its gruesome, enchanted shadow over all subsequent vocalizations.

The Registers

Are registers a fact of nature, or a figment of voice culture? (It is not clear whether a register represents a zone of opportunity or of prohibition.) Some manuals say there are five registers, or one, or none. Some say men have two registers, and women three – or that each singable note is its own register.

There seem to be three bodily zones in which resonance occurs: chest, throat, and head. As the pitch ascends, the voice rises from one register to the next. The farther from the chest, the higher and falser the tone becomes, and the more one must take care to sing naturally. According to Domenico Cerone in 1613, "the chest voice is the one that is most proper and natural".[35]

[35] Cit. in Sanford, *Vocal Style*, 34.

The break between registers – fancifully called *il ponticello* (the little bridge) – is the place within one voice where the split between male and female occurs. The failure to disguise this gendered break is fatal to the art of 'natural' voice production. The singer schooled in *bel canto* will avoid eruptions by disguising the register breaks and passing smoothly over them. The register line, like the color line, the gender line, or the hetero/homo line, can be crossed only if the transgressor pretends that no journey has taken place. By coming out, gays provoke seismic shudders in the System-of-the-Line, just as, by revealing the register break, a singer exposes the fault lines inside a body that pretends to be only masculine or only feminine. (Or, by coming out, do we inadvertently reaffirm the divided world?)

Degenerate Singing

Forgetting its dependence on the feigned, voice culture overvalues the 'natural'. Most theorists of voice would agree with William James Henderson, who wrote in 1906 that "singing is nothing more than nature under high cultivation".[36] As long as singing is considered natural, however, some vocal techniques will be deemed degenerate; and 'degeneration' was the rhetoric used in the nineteenth century to create the 'homosexual' as a pathological identity.

[36] Cit. in Monahan, *Art of Singing*, 33.

Homosexual-as-degenerate: I embrace and impersonate the degrading image because there is no way out of stereotype except to absorb it, to critique it by ironically assuming its vestments. I'm already clothed with the mantle of degeneration; I can't refuse it. So I say: Degenerate, c'est moi.

A. A. Pattou's *The Voice as an Instrument* (1878) offers scientific methods to remove "the defects of an unnatural voice".[37] An opponent of slurring, Pattou strives to reform the throat, manage the larynx, and eradicate "all the faults or vices to which the human voice is subject".[38] He even includes his own case history: ignorant of hygiene, he sang wrongly and suffered an inflammation of the throat, leading to "mental depression and general distrust of society and all its belongings".[39] Sir Charles Santley's voice manual, too, ends with a confession: his throat grew inflamed from singing in rooms decked with imported flowers (including the homoerotic hyacinth).

[37] A. A. Pattou, *The Voice as an Instrument* (New York: Edward Schuberth & Co., 1878), 4.

[38] Ibid., 28.

[39] Ibid., 58.

Degeneration discourse in the nineteenth century was also anti-Semitic and racist. Early, I swallowed anti-Semitism: no wonder that embarrassment

flooded me when I first heard operatic plenitudes of sound. I dreaded the cantor's cry; I dreaded the expressivity of Jews, who seemed to open their bodies outward – scapegoats, hysterics, talking and talking. I remember the bad manners of the children in Hebrew school, and my fear of seeming like them. (The teacher told one garrulous, slavering, attractive brat that he had "diarrhea of the mouth".) Did I believe, as a child, that opera was a Jewish art, and that I, enjoying opera, might be coming into my own Jewishness – inherited, incurable, punishable?

Avoid excessive vibrato. Mozart criticizes a singer's vibrato as "contrary to nature".[40] Antivibrato sentiment reached a peak in the nineteenth century (but so did vibrato itself); American laryngologist Holbrook Curtis observed in 1909 that vibrato is popular among the "Latin races", though frowned on by the Anglo-Saxons.[41] I am not Latin but I am Jewish and I love to hear a note wobble out of control, shake and tremble until it seems our days of trim repose are at an end.... The trill, too, has been considered against nature or at least effeminate: voice culturist Francis Charles Maria de Rialp believes that though the trill was "very much in vogue" among nineteenth-century male singers, it should be confined to the female voice.[42] Any affectation in singing is liable to be criticized as a symptom of degeneracy: Isaac Nathan warns in 1823 against lisping, drawling, or mouthing words so that "the singer appears dropping to the earth from the exertion".[43]

Avoid unattractive gestures. According to Lilli Lehmann, "faces that are forever grinning or showing fish mouths are disgusting and wrong".[44] You know the fish mouth. Singers look like freaks unless they control themselves, and this possibility of looking grotesque is immensely appealing if you choose (as I am choosing) to embrace rather than to reject a stereotypical freakishness. Many manuals recommend singing in front of a mirror to ward off fish mouth. Castrati were required to gaze in the mirror for one hour each morning while practicing; Tosi tells the singer that mirror practice will help him avoid convulsive grimacing. The singer staring in the mirror, practicing for a career, occupies a dubious, unsanctioned, pathologized position: the narcissist.

I knew Jewishness from looking in the mirror and from family sayings. I knew homosexuality from signs no mirror could catch. And yet I practiced for homosexuality as I would have practiced for a recital: slowly I memorized the notes. And I remember looking in the bathroom full-length mirror and wondering if my body was an optical illusion.

Some Speculations on Voice as Economy

The categories 'psyche' and 'voice' do not simply record what naturally happens; they persuasively prescribe what *should* happen. The most

[40] Cit. in Rushmore, *Singing Voice*, 190.

[41] Cit. in ibid., 190.

[42] Frances Charles Maria de Rialp, *The Legitimate School of Singing* (New York: the author, 1894), 76.

[43] Nathan, *Essay*, 67.

[44] Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing*, trans. by Richard Aldrich (New York: Macmillan, [1902] 1960), 169.

important assumption about voice is that it moves upward, hydraulically, transcendentally. Like libido, voice wants out.

Voice aims to purify and to transcend; homosexuality is the dirt that singing, a detergent, must scour. In this sense, voice and homosexuality are adversaries: voice is evolutionary, homosexuality is devolutionary; voice is transcendent, homosexuality is grounded.

In its expenditures of breath, the singing body is either frugal or wasteful. Voice passes through a body as a toxin does, purgatively; to judge a voice's quality, we must ask, "Have all the poisons been flushed out?" Because voice is an essence, too fervid for storage, that escapes through whatever doors are open, falsetto is breath that took the wrong exit out of the body.

But we do wrong to place all the blame on falsetto. For there is something inherently suspicious about breath's movement from lungs to larynx to mask, something always digressive and errant about air's urge to exit the body. Though falsetto has the clearest links to homosexuality, all varieties of operatic voice are perverse. Within the logic of singing, air beguiled to a variant destination is as perverse as air that proceeds to the proper gate. Resonation *is* perversion.

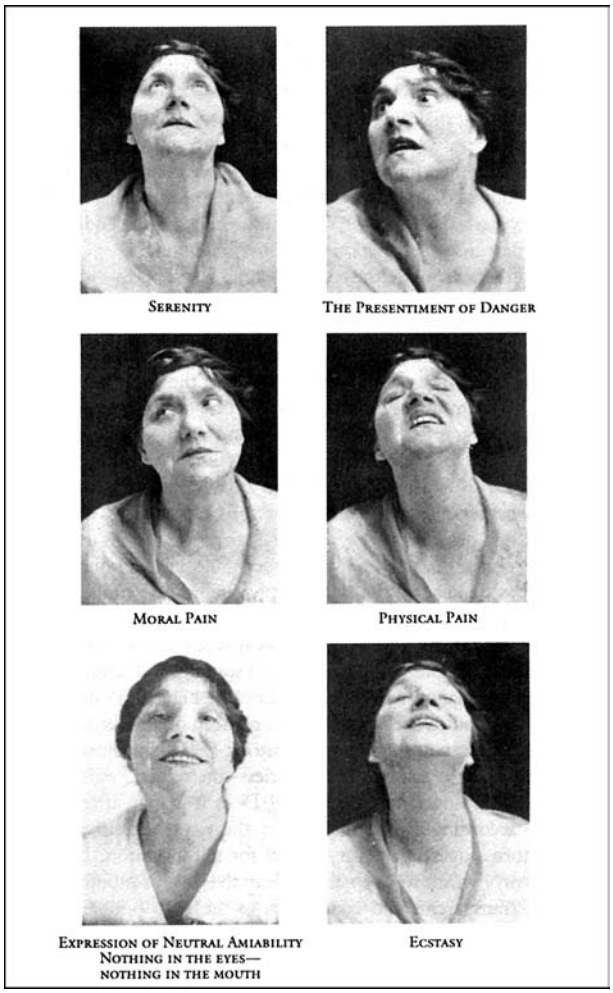

Fig. 3: "If I imitate Guilbert and make my face Serene, Gray, or Neutrally Amiable, will I have introduced new desires, or will I have restaged the old ones?" Yvette Guilbert, photographs by Alice Boughton, in Yvette Guilbert, *How to Sing a Song* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), courtesy of Wayne Koestenbaum.

Like bloodletting, singing is a drastic cure that restores internal equilibrium. John Gothard, in his *Thoughts on Singing; with Hints on the Elements of Effect and the Cultivation of Taste* (1848), opens with a case history of a neurasthenic man, afflicted with "continual sighing", who was cured by befriending young men who indulged in glee-singing.[45] With equal optimism, Millie Ryan attests that "there is no tonic for the *nerves* equal to voice culture".[46] Singing keeps the body, the psyche, and the moral apparatus in shape. Before training, the singer is tense, tight; afterwards, the singer unwinds.

But the unwinding is formulaic; the gestures of a singer are canned, and they are delectable because they are so easily imitated. Yvette Guilbert, in *How to Sing a Song*, offers guidelines for how to strike poses, and she includes photographs of her own face in dramatic, comic, and pathetic attitudes that look like Hugh Welch Diamond's photographs of Victorian madwomen: she labels her various expressions Ecstasy, Neutral Amiability, Moral Pain, Serenity, Gray, Red, Purple, and Vermillion. If I imitate Guilbert and make my face Serene, Gray, or Neutrally Amiable, will I have introduced new desires, or will I have restaged the old ones? Maybe old desires, when

[45] John Gothard, *Thoughts on Singing; with Hints on the Elements of Effect and the Cultivation of Taste* (London: Longman & Co., 1848), iv.

[46] Ryan, *What Every Singer*, 23.

mimicked, become new: maybe there are no new desires, and all we can do is imaginatively and wittily reinhabit the old ones.

The voice manuals hardly encourage self-invention. On the contrary, they staple the singer into family morality: in 1839, H. W. Day writes that "singing has a refining effect on the moral feelings",[47] and Lowell Mason, in 1847, comments that singing produces "social order and happiness in a family".[48] A good voice originates in a childhood environment free from strain, in a family where the "natural voice" is habitually used, and where there is opportunity to hear good music.[49] (I heard good music. But I never learned how to use the natural voice. I wonder if the natural voice is a repressive fiction meant to keep us in line.) When a voice sings sweetly and successfully, it repeats the salutary childhood scenes that fostered it, and when it moves awkwardly between registers, or sings out of tune, it exposes a cloudy, unnatural past.

Like any conduct book, whether for Renaissance courtier or modern teenager, the singing manual instructs how to secure class position, how to "shun low and disreputable company", and how to indicate refinement.[50] Discharging sound, voice turns desire into money. And singing bodies are prized for moving up: up the staff, up the social ladder. High notes are expensive: according to Benedetto Marcello in 1720, the higher a castrato ascends, "the greater is his price and reputation".[51]

For the singer, wealth begins in stinting and in avoiding waste: and so the singer who wants to acquire vocal gold must learn to budget, and must learn, like a thrifty housekeeper or bookkeeper, the "correct management or the mis-management of the vibratory column of air" passing from vocal cords into mouth.[52] The singer, according to Johann Mattheson in 1739, must let out the inhaled air "not at once nor too liberally, but sparingly, little by little, being careful to hold it back and save it".[53] Caruso tells the singer to observe a similar economy over the career's whole length: the singer should limit the voice's output "as he does the expenses of his purse".[54]

Save money, save air: prudences of homosexuality, prudences of voice. Homosexuality and voice are economies of spending, concerned with what might go wrong or what has already gone wrong, eager to manage the flow of vital stuff. The body called 'homosexual' is one place where the sexual system sputters, digresses, leaks; where an error in bookkeeping (a wasted sum) comes to light; where housekeeping fails. Because Freud influentially asserted the connection between paranoia, homosexuality, and anality, we often assume that when homosexuality isn't an erotics of wasteful, promiscuous spending, it is, conversely, an erotics of cautious, retentive budgeting.

In a singer's training, the conduct of the entire body – not merely the voice – is subject to punitive budgeting. Singing requires purity from top

[47] Cit. in Monahan, *Art of Singing*, 17.

[48] Cit. in ibid., 17.

[49] George Antoine Brouillet, *Voice Manual* (Boston: Crescendo Publishing Co., 1974), 42.

[50] Tosi, *Observations*, 144.

[51] Angus Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera* (New York: Da Capo Press, [1956] 1975), 57.

[52] Louis Arthur Russell (1904), cit. in Monahan, *Art of Singing*, 62.

[53] Cit. in Duey, *Bel canto*, 79.

[54] Caruso and Tetrazzini, *Art of Singing*, 58.

to bottom. Pedagogues have long recommended sexual abstinence and dietary moderation: Aristotle's *Problemata* asks, "Why does it spoil the voice to shout after food?"[55] In the twentieth century, Millie Ryan recommends dried prunes for vocal health; Herbert Witherspoon encourages the use of cathartics, and warns that "the mucous membrane of the pharynx and mouth is a 'tell-tale' of no mean value, and will often show clearly the troubles existing below".[56] A voice announces whether the body's waste system is functioning. Of course, voice not only describes the system, but turns the system into sensations and sounds that we imbibe without guile and without analysis.

We quiver as we hear a voice, and what we are hearing and learning to love is a theory of the body. I, who can't carry a tune, am caught within this economy of vocal production as surely as if I were a singer.

"Red lines denote vocal sensations of soprano and tenor singers", writes Lilli Lehmann in *How to Sing*.[57] Look at Lehmann's diagram of the singer: a ghoul, a skeleton, a survivor, shorn of identity's specifics. Without hair, without skin, without history, Lilli Lehmann's anatomy lesson looks like the self before categories – the subject, waiting to be named. (Is this singer male or female? Does it matter, if tenors and sopranos, according to Lehmann, feel the same sensations?) Lehmann's shorn singer is a dreary model for self-invention; but I will take it for my own. A force emanates from the singer's mouth – an 'I' as elastic, transparent, and continuous as the soap bubble that the youth in the Chardin painting has been blowing for centuries, a bubble that no viewer can ever puncture.

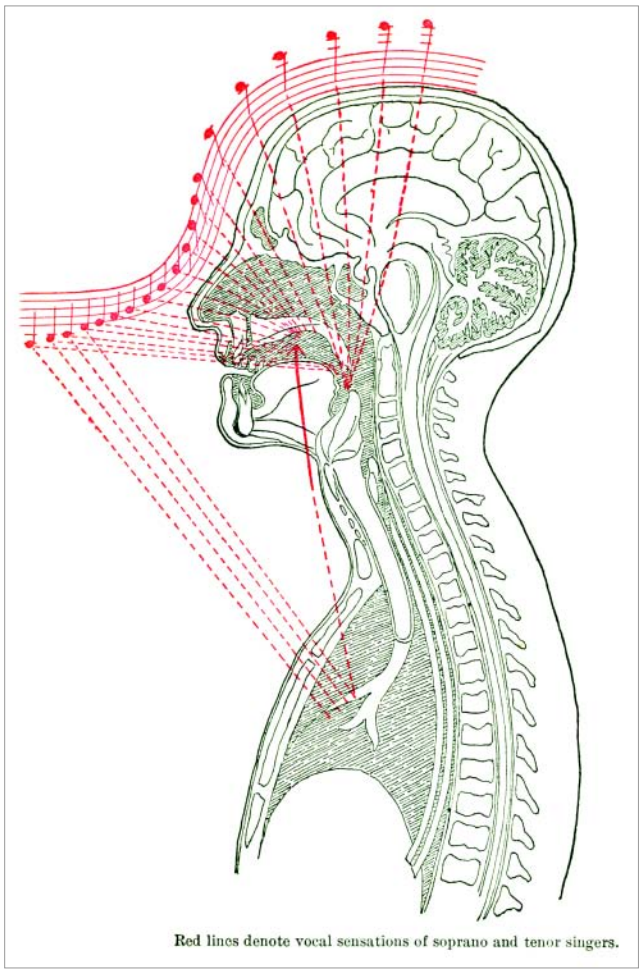

Fig. 4: "I, who can't carry a tune, am caught within this economy of vocal production as surely as if I were a singer". Diagram of vocal sensations of sopranos and tenors, in Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing* (New York: Macmillan, [1902] 1960), courtesy of Wayne Koestenbaum.

Regretful Coda #1

I wanted pleasure to suffuse this chapter. And yet the manuals rarely speak of pleasure. Rapture seems to have no more place in a voice manual than in a guide to auto repair.

It is a pleasure to sing, but it is also a discipline; it is sexy to be homosexual, but it is also a confinement (within an illicit identity). Free expression is a fiction: when I express a self I am pressing it out by force, as in *espresso*. Voice and homosexuality are industries that express what no body, left to its own devices, would care to produce.

[55] Cit. in Duey, *Bel canto*, 19.

[56] Witherspoon, *Singing: A Treatise*, 45.

[57] Lehmann, *How to Sing*, 86-87.

But bodies are never left to their own devices. And so my body produces homosexuality – sings it, expresses it. I don't have any choice. Homosexuality is the specific music my body makes. In retrospect I authorize the grand opera called 'homosexuality', forgive its dissonances and its outdated sentimental conclusions, I let the fantastic arias (The Sodomy Cabaletta, The Degeneration Cavatina, The Oral Scene, The Passive/Active Duet) purl uninhibitedly out of my mouth. Culture has called 'homosexuality' the dirty X. The word we won't say. The word we mark in blood on doors. The sign of excommunication. The no-name of the outsider. In response, in retaliation, in revolt, I embrace the X; I plug my body into X; I ply X like a trade or a faith; I discover the beautiful, hardly audible overtones of X, which the world thought was a nightmare. I am X, I will always be X, the world can't rid me of X, the world can't rip X out of my body, I will write X wherever X has been erased.

Every unauthorized sexuality is an X. Hetero can be an X too, if it tries.

Sexuality, whether homo or hetero, does not arrive only once, in that moment of revelation and proclamation that we call 'coming out'. Our body is always coming out. Every time is the first time. Every performance is a debut. Every arousal is a repetition of the first arousal. Every time you speak, you are coming out. Every time air makes the trip upstairs from lungs to larynx to mask, every time your body plays that old transcendental number, you are coming out. You *are* the OUT into which sexuality comes. Coming out is a way of telling a coherent story about one's sexuality, and it has worked political wonders, and it is a morally and psychologically cleansing process.

But coming out is only one version of the vocalization underlying sexuality itself, I have chosen to be vocal about sexuality (though many parts of sexuality – including my own – remain silent, inexpressible, resistant to category and phrase). And yet even if I didn't choose to be vocal about sexuality, even if I didn't come out, I'd already be vocalizing, for sexuality (as we know it) is always vocal, is ineluctably vocal, is structurally vocal.

Do we sing our sexualities, or do our sexualities sing us? Do we send sex out like tone into the air, or does sex send *us* into the air, propel *us* into repetitions and travesties we call 'desire'?

Breath's excursion through the body to produce a voice is hardly a pleasure trip. These are slow, brutal, ardent processes, so arduous and so similar that I will put their names on separate, parallel lines:

training a voice;
voicing a sexuality.

Regretful Coda #2

I've used obsolete manuals as a pathway into the throat that will never be mine – the singing throat. It is a pointless search. You can't find the

queen's throat in a book. You can't learn how to sing from Lilli Lehmann's *How to Sing* – though if you already know how to sing, her manual might give you valuable tips. I remember trying to learn coitus by reading textbooks on human sexuality and studying diagrams of the four rudimentary positions: man on top, woman on top, man and woman on their sides, rear entry. I tried to learn the rules of football and baseball from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* so I wouldn't make a fool of myself in gym. On a cloudy day in the mid-1960s I looked up "Theaters" in the Yellow Pages and copied the names and phone numbers of cinemas in my first address book, red, pocket-sized, with alphabetical dictionary-style tabs. I copied down the words "Burbank Theater", and the Burbank Theater's phone number (which I would never use), solely because the Burbank Theater had recently shown or would soon thereafter show the silent movie *Wings.* I knew the list of theaters would do me no good. But I wanted to make the list. I had faith, then, in compilations.

I have always pursued magic in dry ways – rulebooks, encyclopedias, directories. Dreaming that love might arise from borrowed incantations, I studied spells from a do-it-yourself witchcraft handbook. But the manuals teach nothing. Singing will not resolve into rules. I have looked for presence in the wrong places.

Wayne Koestenbaum

La gola divina, o, del cantare*

* Traduzione del capitolo 5 ("The Queen's Throat: Or, How to Sing") da Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 2001). Pubblicata per gentile concessione di Da Capo Press e Wayne Koestenbaum. Tutte le immagini sono riprodotte dall'edizione originale del testo, per gentile concessione di Da Capo Press e Wayne Koestenbaum.

Imbarazzo

Ho cominciato ad ascoltare l'opera perché il vibrato impetuoso di una voce impostata mi riempiva di imbarazzo e di un disagio arcano che solo ora chiamo piacere. Ma in quei giorni opachi non lo chiamavo piacere. Non cercavo di imitare Carmen, Don José o Escamillo. Non cercavo di riempire la mia stanza con la magnificenza del suono. Al contrario, mi crogiolavo nell'imbarazzo; mi isolavo; e giuravo a me stesso: "Nella vergogna troverò il paradiso".

Immaginare l'interno

Io non so cantare. Se sapessi cantare, ora non starei qui a scrivere. Non invidierei l'autocontrollo dei cantanti. E neppure avrei bisogno di immaginarmi come è fatto l'interno del corpo di un cantante: gola, glottide, cassa di risonanza, maschera.[1] Il volto di un cantante è chiamato maschera, quasi che una voce non fosse mai capace di dire la verità.

Cantanti, vi avverto: non sto descrivendo oggettivamente la vostra esperienza. Il mio scopo è più banale: riportare storie e miti presi qua e là da manuali dimenticati. La ricerca è cominciata da un banchetto ambulante: là ho trovato una copia rovinata dalla pioggia di *What Every Singer Should Know*, di Millie Ryan, e anche se l'autrice ammonisce che "il canto è un'arte che non si può imparare sui libri o per corrispondenza", ci ho provato lo stesso, senza riuscirci, e mi sono segretamente compiaciuto di questo fallimento, perché se mi fosse riuscito di svelare il mistero della voce, non mi sarebbe rimasto alcun dio.[2]

Nella metafisica occidentale, la parola parlata o cantata ha più autorità di quella scritta. La voce conferisce la presenza, e questo mito continua a dominarci, anche se non dovremmo crederci: e invece crediamo che nessuno possa rubare una voce, che non esistano due voci del tutto identiche, che trovare una voce possa liberare un corpo, e che chiunque sia in grado di cantare. La certezza che avere una voce significhi avere un'identità è un mito culturale, come il sesso, che fa parte della natura umana ma è allo stesso tempo mito.

La fisiologia della voce operistica è un insieme di metafore; ogni volta che ascoltiamo un'opera, non si tratta solo di musica e libretto, ma di una storia che riguarda il corpo, della storia di un viaggio: il viaggio di una 'voce', che, da nascosta che era, si proietta nel mondo. Questa fiaba, così

[1] Qui e oltre si è scelto di tradurre "singer" con "il" cantante, nonostante l'originale inglese mantenga l'ambiguità di genere. Tuttavia, il forte investimento del testo nell'estetica gay mi ha fatto preferire l'uso del maschile, nonostante la caratterizzazione profondamente femminile che "il cantante" assume in determinati passaggi. [N.d.T.]

[2] Millie Ryan, *What Every Singer Should Know* (Omaha: Franklin Publishing Co., 1910), iv. Le traduzioni delle citazioni nel testo, se non diversamente segnalate, sono mie. [N.d.T.]

radicata che non ci facciamo più caso, è anche la storia della sessualità. Come il respiro, che si diffonde nell'aria dopo essere stato emesso dalla laringe, così il nostro spirito, ancora indefinito e privo di forma, perde la sua presunta innocenza, marchiato per sempre da un genere sessuale.

Non siamo abituati a pensare alla voce come a un discorso storicamente definito. Tuttavia la voce ci innalza e ci degrada, con la stessa forza della sessualità. La voce è un sistema equivalente alla sessualità: altrettanto punitivo, altrettanto capace di dare piacere; altrettanto elettivo e ineluttabile.

Con l'espressione 'voce operistica' mi riferisco alla voce classicamente impostata. Infinitamente lontana dal parlato, essa è abile, si sforza di essere rigorosa nel timbro e di rispettare la legge alla lettera. Si leva alta, e non ammette errori. Non sono in grado di dare una definizione di voce operistica che possa spaziare da Monteverdi a Wagner, dal *lieder* all'oratorio, da Bach a Berg. Eppure chiunque la può riconoscere. Ce l'aveva Deanna Durbin; ce l'aveva Tito Gobbi; ce l'aveva Conchita Supervia. Vorrebbe averla lo studente che si esercita, nell'appartamento accanto, per l'audizione per un coro di soli uomini, con i suoi vocalizzi spaventosamente impeccabili. La voce operistica finge di essere naturale, e invece è segretamente oppressa, abnorme, eccessiva: è una voce che canta la propria fatica; che esclama: "Ho pagato un prezzo". Qualcuno può pensare che ricordi un pappagallo o una locomotiva, o un giocattolo a corda, o il buon gusto, la compassione, la codardia o l'obbedienza: prerogative, queste, generalmente poco apprezzate. Oppure qualcuno potrebbe accettare l'idea che la voce operistica sia un 'Io' furente, l'esplosione risoluta di un corpo che respinge ogni mimetizzazione e compromesso.

Questa esplosione, questa voce lirica, è il suono della sessualità ottocentesca. Tra tutte le specie di sessualità, l'omosessualità è forse quella che più ha subito i capricci della tassonomia, e per questo motivo è la più perversa, la più 'sessuale'; l'omosessualità è una delle poche superstiti di quella nebulosa di perversioni sessuali che nessuno ormai prende più sul serio: feticismo, esibizionismo, ninfomania. (Anche l'eterosessualità è una categoria, per quanto si sia spesso portati a credere che essa trascenda ogni classificazione.) Le teorie su come si produce una voce che canta alludono, in maniera obliqua, alla 'omosessualità' – lessico di trasposizioni, esotismi, ossari, Sodoma, Times Square, patologia, cura. Anche chi non è omosessuale si trova sempre vicino all'omosessualità, né può dimostrare che il confine della sua proprietà sia del tutto al riparo dall'OMO, da quelle sillabe che ripetutamente canto, e con ferocia, così da esorcizzare il loro sentore di contagio: omomomo.

Gola

Per gli uomini gay, la gola è una gioia e un'afflizione: è il luogo della *fellatio*. Non che tutti amino la *fellatio*: l'omosessualità non dipende dal

sesso orale, l'eterosessualità l'include. E tuttavia la sessualità, in quanto sistema simbolico di pesi e contrappesi, misure e contromisure, ha scelto la gola come luogo in cui gli uomini gay si trovano ad essere se stessi.

La gola divina del melomane è silenziosa e inattiva mentre lui ascolta; è la voce della cantante a essere divina.[3] E però ogni gesto di ascolto intenso e assorto infrange la leggenda secondo cui sia possibile avere un'esatta cognizione di dove un'emozione o un'esperienza abbiano inizio. Io non sono un cantante, però ho una gola, e la uso per adorare e divorare l'opera, per interrogare l'opera, così che l'opera possa divorare me.

Quando ascoltiamo una voce lirica o cantiamo con un'intonazione lirica, in quello stesso momento la nostra gola diventa parte di una gola più vasta, una gola storica, una Ur-gola, la gola divina, la gola-del-cielo, la gola-del-pensiero, la laringe che sta dietro la laringe. L'omosessualità è una maniera del canto. Io non posso *essere* gay, posso soltanto cantare il mio esserlo, e disperderlo. Non posso bussare alla sua porta e chiedere di entrare perché non si tratta di un luogo o di una collocazione definita. Al contrario, si tratta di milioni di intersezioni – o semplicemente di una linea divisoria, una membrana, come la gola, che separa l'interiorità respirante del corpo dal caos del mondo esterno.

Tanto la cantante quanto l'omosessuale appaiono come nascondigli colmi di bisogni urgenti, ben chiusi all'esterno. Ma il corpo che canta e il corpo che si definisce omosessuale non sono poi così sigillati come crediamo. Né così liberi. Sono codici di leggi non rilegati, pieni di pagine staccate di vecchie proibizioni: una pagina di sofferenze dopo l'altra.

Manuali

Le sole cose che conosco sulla voce sono quelle che ho letto: qualche libro strano, magari scritto tra Otto e Novecento, con l'intento di insegnare l'arte del canto. Questi manuali pretendono di codificare e controllare la voce, immaginandosela come un amico o come un nemico, il fondo dell'anima o una botola verso gli inferi.

Non diversamente dai libri di buone maniere, questi manuali traboccano di storia sociale. Il loro intento è diffondere 'cultura', educare, e impedire che un'arte segreta possa perdersi. Mi chiedo se abbiano qualche valore sul piano musicale. Lilli Lehmann ed Enrico Caruso hanno scritto manuali; così pure un famoso castrato, Piero Francesco Tosi, nel 1723. E tuttavia non riesco a credere che questi testi riportino davvero quello che succede all'interno di chi canta.

Come i trattati contro la masturbazione, questi manuali stabiliscono come il piacere e il vigore si debbano muovere attraverso il corpo; solerti nel dettare regole di condotta e condannare gli errori, mi suggeriscono un'immagine della laringe caratterizzata da una specifica, dolorosa qualità

[3] In originale "the opera queen's throat": la scelta di tradurre 'queen' con 'divina', qui e oltre nel testo, risponde alla necessità di rispettare le diverse sfumature dell'espressione originale. *Opera queen* si riferisce, secondo Mitchell Morris, ad esponenti della comunità gay americana che definisce se stessa attraverso la propria ossessione per l'opera lirica; vedi Mitchell Morris, "Reading as an Opera Queen", in Ruth A. Solie, ed., *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 184. [N.d.T.]

umana: quella di aspirare alla libertà e, paradossalmente, cercarla attraverso l'arte della segregazione.

Come molti testi letterari (romanzi sentimentali, erotici, o gialli), un manuale di canto plasma, muove e trasforma il corpo del suo lettore. E poi un manuale di canto si occupa soprattutto di chi non fa il cantante, dell'appassionato, del curioso. Quale vero cantante leggerebbe mai *How to Sing*? Solo i perdenti falliti prendono in mano i libri di testo. I manuali di canto si rivolgono all'aspirante che non diventerà mai un vero cantante, e che ha bisogno di una mappa dell'impossibile.

Cantare vs. parlare

L'opera mette in luce l'abisso che esiste tra la voce che parla e la voce che canta. C'è forse qualche differenza di tipo fisiologico? Ci sono manuali che dicono che cantare è semplicemente parlare con maggiore intensità. Eppure la diva Maria Jeritza avvertiva, "Troppe ragazze non immaginano neppure che la voce che parla è la più grande nemica della voce che canta".[4] (L'avvertimento di Jeritza riguardava solo le ragazze, ma immagino che ne dovrebbero tener conto anche i ragazzi.)

Se dici un segreto, lo perdi: diventa pubblico. Ma se canti il segreto, allora riesci come per magia a tenerlo riservato, perché il canto è una barricata di codici.

[4] Citato in Fredrick H. Martens, *The Art of the Prima Donna and Concert Singer* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1923), 195.

Uscire allo scoperto

Cantare bene significa aprire la porta della gola così che i tesori nascosti possano uscire allo scoperto. Enrico Caruso insiste che "la gola è la porta attraverso la quale passa la voce";[5] e che la porta va lasciata aperta se si vuole evitare che il respiro prenda altre strade – deviazioni di dubbia moralità. Sono molti gli scrittori che sostengono che è necessario tenere aperto l'accesso ai luoghi di risonanza della voce umana, come se cantare fosse innanzi tutto una questione di sincerità e volontà di svelarsi. La soglia della gola va tenuta aperta, ma a nessuno è concesso di intuirne l'esistenza. Quando saprai troppe cose sulla gola sarai ridotto al silenzio.

Gli omosessuali ripongono grande fiducia nell'uscire allo scoperto, come in un processo di vocalizzazione. Uscendo allo scoperto, riconosciamo la voce come apertura, come consapevolezza di sé, chiarezza. Eppure il mistero non finisce quando la rivelazione comincia.

[5] Enrico Caruso and Luisa Tetrazzini, *Caruso and Tetrazzini on the Art of Singing* (New York: Dover Publications, [1909] 1975), 52.

Il bel canto, il castrato, e il laringoscopio

Nel 1854 il maestro di canto Manuel Garcia II (fratello delle dive Maria Malibran e Pauline Viardot) inventò il laringoscopio. Non che Garcia fosse un pioniere

assoluto nel campo. Nel Settecento lo scienziato Antoine Ferrein aveva scoperto le *cordes vocales*, usando per i suoi esperimenti la laringe di un cadavere. Ma l'intrepido Garcia condusse gli esperimenti su se stesso. Per scoprire perché la sua voce fosse rotta, costruì un apparecchio, utilizzando lo specchietto di un dentista, e sbirciò nella propria gola per osservare la glottide.

Con il mio laringoscopio immaginario, con il mio specchietto, guardo nella gola *queer* cercando di coglierne il danno.

L'influenza del laringoscopio è stata probabilmente limitata, e tuttavia la sua invenzione ha coinciso con l'affermazione dei metodi scientifici applicati alla pratica vocale, e con il tramonto dei castrati, che avevano incominciato a diminuire già prima del 1800. (Nel Settecento, in Italia, venivano castrati fino a quattromila ragazzi ogni anno.) In seguito al tramonto dei castrati subentrò il vago timore che l'arte vocale stesse per scomparire. E a questa paura della fine fu dato un nome: bel canto. 'Bel canto' significa nient'altro che 'cantare bene', e implica il presagio della scomparsa della bellezza.

A quanto sostiene il musicologo Philip A. Duey, l'espressione 'bel canto' divenne popolare solo dopo la fine del periodo al quale si riferisce. Utilizzata in maniera non sistematica nel corso dei secoli, è in Italia, negli anni successivi al 1860, che viene fissato il suo significato attuale, ripreso dopo il 1880 anche in altri paesi; questa accezione è stata accolta dai dizionari solo dopo il 1900.

Pare quindi che il bel canto (in quanto articolazione discorsiva della nostalgia e dell'introspezione) sia emerso dopo il 1860. Anche un'altra parola fu coniata dopo il 1860 – nel 1869, per l'esattezza: la parola "omosessuale". Proviamo per un attimo a immaginare che non si tratti di una coincidenza, e che tra il bel canto e l'omosessualità possa esserci un parallelismo. Omosessualità e bel canto non sono la stessa cosa, ma si muovono in contesti analoghi: entrambi entrano sulla scena avvolti nei linguaggi del controllo e della cura. I manuali di canto esistevano anche prima che il bel canto e l'omosessualità fossero concettualizzati; ma il desiderio di offrire una descrizione scientifica della voce e di curare le degenerazioni delle arti canore divenne impellente dopo il 1860, traducendosi in un profluvio di manuali divulgativi tra la fine degli anni '90 dell'Ottocento e l'inizio del Novecento: tra questi, *A Treatise on the Origin of a Destructive Element in the Female Voice as Viewed from the Register Standpoint* di Julius Edward Meyer (1895), *My Voice and I* di Clara Kathleen Rogers (1910), *Psycho-voice* di Charles Emerson (1915), e il *Melba Method* di Nellie Melba (1926). I manuali pubblicati in questo periodo offrono teoria e pratica dell''educazione vocale', il metodo per educare e liberare la voce naturale.

Si osservi l'affinità tra educazione vocale e psicoanalisi. Entrambi i sistemi credono nella necessità di rivelare una materia nascosta, di confessare

segreti. Ed entrambi i discorsi convergono sulla castrazione: l'educazione vocale si prefigge di recuperare la scandalosa pienezza vocale del castrato, mentre la psicoanalisi concepisce la castrazione come fondamento dell'identità – voce solista nell'infinito melodramma della psiche.

La cultura operistica ha sempre vagheggiato un'età dell'oro del canto, già svanita; di conseguenza l'ambizione principale dei manuali di canto è quella di preservare lo stile cantabile dalle degenerazioni e dalle licenze alla moda. Nel 1864 Francesco Lamperti scriveva che "è verità triste e tuttavia innegabile che il canto versi oggi in un deplorevole stato di decadenza".[6] (Un secolo prima, il castrato Tosi sosteneva che l'opera stesse vivendo il suo declino nel passaggio dal "virile" stile di chiesa alla "maniera femminea dei teatri".)[7] I cultori della voce rimpiangono i tempi di gloria svaniti, ma nessuno si azzarda a dire: "Rivogliamo i castrati!"

Osservare la laringe

È quasi impossibile non notare come la laringe, così spaventosamente priva di ogni genere sessuale, sia stata rivestita di un sembiante femminile. E non è facile capirne il perché.

Tra le ragioni principali per cui la voce è stata identificata come femminile c'è il fatto che gli organi che la producono sono nascosti alla vista. Un manuale del 1909 annota che il maestro di sesso maschile "deve insegnare uno strumento che non può essere visto se non da un esperto, e non può essere toccato".[8]

"Se solo potessi vedere la glottide!", sospirava, a quanto dicono, Manuel Garcia, quando stava per inventare il laringoscopio.[9] Le moderne fotografie scientifiche della laringe e della glottide impegnate nel canto mostrano ciò che Garcia potrebbe aver visto: le labbra di un'apertura. I teorici della voce descrivono la laringe come munita di labbra – basandosi su un'analogia visiva e sull'accostamento tra donne e cose invisibili.

Nel 1756, Jean Blanchet definiva la glottide "una fessura orizzontale terminante con due labbra".[10] Robert Lawrence Weer, nel 1948, definiva le corde vocali "due spesse membrane", "due labbra", "piccoli battenti".[11] Ma si tratta di descrizioni dall'esterno. Che sensazione dà la laringe, dall'interno? La soprano Maria Jeritza paragonava la fatica del canto a "la tensione di una robusta fascia elastica per tutta la sua lunghezza": grazie infinite, divina Jeritza, per una così precisa descrizione dell'istante che precede l'orgasmo.[12]

[6] Cit. in Philip A. Duey, *Bel Canto in its Golden Age. A Study of its Teaching Concepts* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1951), 5.

[7] Pier Francesco Tosi, *Observation on the Florid Son,* trans. by John Ernest Galliard (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968), 76.

[8] Sir Charles Santley, *The Art of Singing and Vocal Declamation* (New York: Macmillan, 1908), 11.

[9] Cit. in Robert Rushmore, *The Singing Voice* (London: Hamilton, 1971), 177.

[10] Cit. in Duey, *Bel Canto*, 135.

[11] Robert Lawrence Weer, *Your Voice* (Los Angeles: the author, 1948), 49.

[12] Cit. in Martens, *Art of the Prima Donna*, 202.

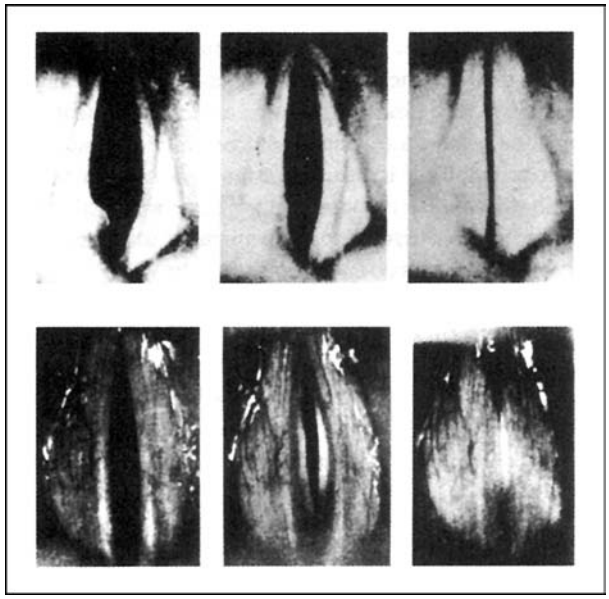

Fig. 1: "If only I could see the glottis!" Vocal fold vibration, photographs by Bell Telephone Laboratories, Inc. and Svend Smith, in D. Ralph Appelman, *The Science of Vocal Pedagogy: Theory and Application* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), courtesy of Wayne Koestenbaum.

Sebbene la voce sia sempre stata descritta come un doppio della vagina, la sfuggente laringe può incarnare tanto le caratteristiche maschili che quelle femminili, o nessuna delle due. Per alcuni manuali la laringe sembra quasi la traccia di una razza estinta, versatile e asessuata. Nel 1739 Johann Mattheson descriveva la glottide come una "linguetta", con la forma della "bocca di un piccolo annaffiatoio".[13] Altri manuali descrivono l'epiglottide come una foglia d'edera, oppure immaginano che la glottide sia circondata da uno "scudo a forma di cerchio" o "a forma di piramide", fasce muscolari che si contraggono e si rilasciano, come se la glottide o l'epiglottide (e chi ha mai capito la differenza?) fossero l'alternativa evoluta dei nostri mesti organi genitali, così usurati dalle storie, e così intrappolati dalla storia, da offrirci come unica libertà la possibilità di riscriverli, a condizione di partire da zero.[14]

Punire la gola

L'educazione vocale ama, protegge e custodisce la gola, ma si rivale sulle gole ribelli, che dicono di no alla tirannia genitale.

In nome dell'arte, gli attori tragici greci si procuravano un'incisione sul retro della gola per valorizzare l'estensione vocale.[15] La diva Florence Easton, negli anni '20, argomentava che "non è possibile fare una frittata senza rompere delle uova", e non è possibile realizzare una grande opera senza "rompere delle voci".[16] L'opera finge di disprezzare la voce rotta, ma dipende simbolicamente da essa. Le ricerche sulla possibilità di insegnare a parlare ai muti (come le prove con il diapason effettuate da Helen Keller) hanno fatto luce sulla fonazione e i movimenti della laringe dei cantanti d'opera.[17]

Piuttosto che ferite, testa e gola del cantante devono scomparire. Emmy Destinn diceva, negli anni '20, "Quando canto è come se non avessi gola".[18] La cantante ritratta nel trattato di Millie Ryan del 1910, *What Every Singer Should Know*, dimostra di avere appreso la lezione poiché è priva sia della gola che della testa: la fotografia si ferma al collo e le taglia via brutalmente la testa – come se la posa assunta fosse compromettente, e solo la decapitazione potesse assicurare l'anonimato. Senza testa, sembra pura materia, priva di ogni spirito e trascendenza. Come cura alle crisi nervose, la cantante è esortata a stare di fronte a una finestra spalancata, ogni mattina, respirare profondamente, e massaggiare il seno e la gabbia toracica: mi pare di vedere la Dora di Freud, un classico caso di nevrosi, una ragazza i cui impulsi sessuali si muovevano incontrollati verso le donne, o verso la gola, così che Freud cercava di ricacciare i suoi desideri nella vagina, ipotizzando che quello fosse il luogo della normalità e che ogni allontanamento dall'eterosessualità corrispondesse a un allontanamento dagli organi genitali.

[13] Cit. in Sally Allis Sanford, *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Vocal Style and Technique* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1979), 58.

[14] Salvatore Marchesi (1902), cit. in Brent Jeffrey Monahan, *The Art of Singing: A Compendium of Thoughts on Singing Published between 1777 and 1927* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978), 136-137.

[15] See Herbert Witherspoon, *Singing: A Treatise for Teachers and Students* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1925), 1.

[16] Cit. in Martens, *Art of the Prima Donna*, 69.

[17] See Monahan, *Art of Singing*, 270.

[18] Cit. in ibid., 30.

Chiunque è in grado di capire quanto i genitali siano mitizzati, ma nessuno menziona le teorie sedimentate nelle nostre gole, nei nostri sistemi per parlare e cantare. Non abbiamo neppure un lessico appropriato per indicare ciò che la gola conosce e patisce – forse perché la gola è restia a parlare di se stessa.

Apprendo dai manuali che la gola che canta è femminile, che ha la tendenza a vagare e infrangersi, e la capacità mercuriale di sfuggire ai generi sessuali. E per questo motivo, pur essendo privo di una voce per cantare, io stesso mi identifico con la gola. Mi piace chiamarla 'casa', fare a meno dei genitali per un'ora, e abitare invece l'umido spazio vocale che sta tra la bocca e i polmoni.

Bocca

Ho ascoltato di recente Jessye Norman dal vivo, in un recital. Ero seduto in prima fila. Guardavo nella sua bocca aperta, meravigliandomi del suo spalancarsi, della sua dimensione, della sua sfrontata capacità di apertura.

In un vecchio e malconcio manuale sulla voce, Herbet Witherspoon descrive la bocca come un organo sessuale, reso vivo dai suoi "tessuti erettili" facilmente stimolabili, un organismo che contiene "un numero imprecisato di terminazioni nervose": e quindi "c'è poco da stupirsi che le cose vengano meno con estrema facilità".[19] Cantare è *sempre* un venir meno.

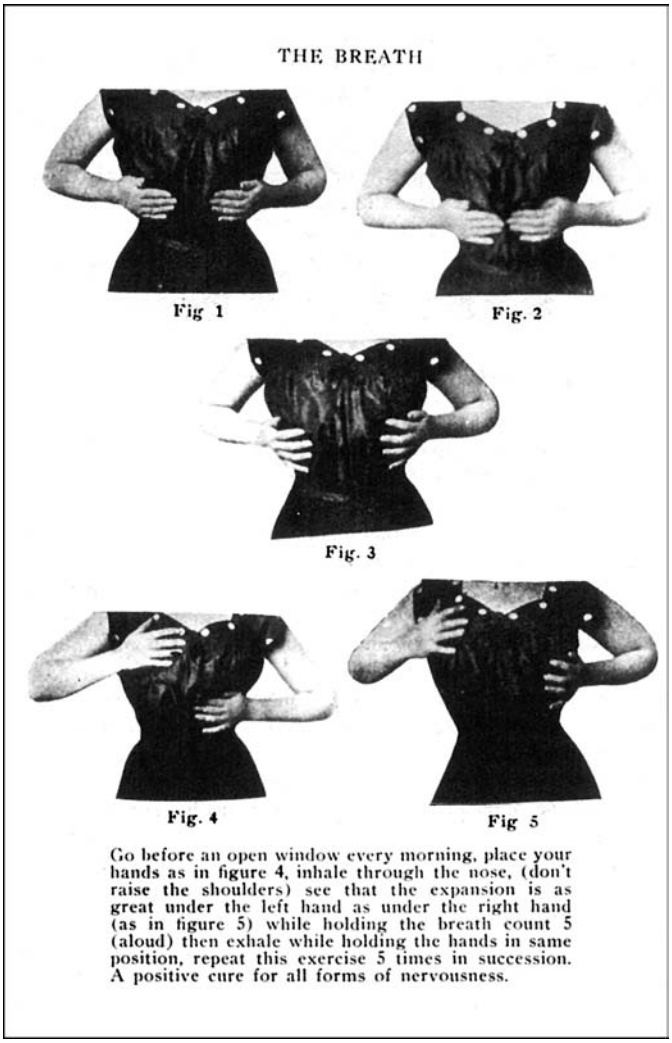

Fig. 2: "Senza testa, sembra pura materia, priva di ogni spirito e trascendenza". "The Breath", in Millie Rynn, *What Every Singer Should Know* (Omaha: Franklin Publishing Co.,1910), riprodotta per gentile concessione di Wayne Koestenbaum.

Aprire la bocca è innaturale? Il compositore Jules Massenet disse ad Alice Verlet, durante una prova della sua *Manon*, "Avete la bocca ideale per una cantante: si apre con naturalezza!"[20] Ma la bocca non deve aprirsi troppo. Dice Sir Charles Santely che perché le labbra "svolgano la loro funzione" la bocca "non deve aprirsi più di quanto basti a infilarci la punta di un dito" – e neppure fino alla nocca.[21] Che prescrizione rigorosa! Nel 1823 Isaac Nathan suggeriva che le "bocche leggiadre" dei cantanti dovrebbero "allargarsi tanto da riuscire a ospitare un amico".[22] E l'amico non è il pene, ma un dito: apri la bocca abbastanza perché "ci si possa infilare tranquillamente il mignolo" tra i denti, scriveva Johann Adam Hiller nel 1774.[23] Altri oggetti – un cucchiaio, lo stecco di un ghiacciolo – possono prendere il posto del dito. Lawrence Weer ricorda la sua prima lezione di

[19] Witherspoon, *Singing: A Treatise*, 25.

[20] Cit. in Martens, *Art of the Prima Donna*, 286.

[21] Santley, *The Art of Singing*, 56.

[22] Isaac Nathan, *An Essay on the History and Theory of Music; and on the Qualities, Capabilities, and Management of the Human Voice* (London: G. & W.B. Whittaker, 1823), 63.

[23] Cit. in Sanford, *Vocal Style*, 94.

[24] Weer, *Your Voice*, 5.

"controllo della lingua";[24] gli fu insegnato a tenere la lingua schiacciata con un cucchiaio mentre cantava le scale. La bocca aperta del cantante sta lì ad afferrare un oggetto immaginario – a succhiarlo, ad avvolgerlo. E l'oggetto succhiato dal cantante è spazio, aria, vuoto, speranza: le condizioni che agevolano il suono.

Della voce è stato detto che sia femminile; ma è altrettanto vero che la voce elude ogni classificazione. Un cantante vaga; un cantante divaga. Una voce parte dalla base del corpo, un'area che nessuno si sognerebbe di nominare o di legittimare; e il cantante manda la voce (o la voce manda il cantante) *altrove*, in un luogo al di fuori della nostra conoscenza, un confine che io non potrei mai rappresentare o definire, se non per dire che è là che voglio avere la mia dimora. Cantare è un movimento che non si solidifica mai al punto che lo si possa afferrare. Appena riusciamo a individuare l'istante del canto, esso è già svanito.

La voce, silenziosamente, sfugge alle categorie a cui cerchiamo di ricondurla. La voce vuole essere gettata, per nascondere la sua origine, lanciarsi al di là dei sessi e dei generi, sulle sabbie di una sponda neutrale, priva di tracce.

Trovare il falsetto

Il falsetto sembra qualcosa di profondamente perverso: una bizzarria da baraccone; il luogo in cui la voce viene meno. Eppure il falsetto rispetta il paradigma stesso della produzione della voce. Il falsetto è una deviazione, e il canto è sempre una deviazione rispetto a una pura e neutra emissione del respiro.

Canta in falsetto, adesso. (Sei da solo mentre stai leggendo?) Riempi lo spazio con un puro suono artefatto, e chiediti che tipo di azione hai commesso. E poi produci il suono con naturalezza, dal petto. Quale dei due suoni, di petto o di testa, vorresti che i tuoi vicini sentissero per caso?

Cantare è una causa di potenziale imbarazzo. E il falsetto è tra le maggiori vergogne canore. Ricorrendo al falsetto, compi un'azione che è considerata innaturale. Ma nessuno è innaturale per tutto il giorno; da buon nottambulo, io sono innaturale un'ora per notte e naturale per tutto il resto del tempo. Ipotizziamo, per un attimo, che l'omosessualità, come il falsetto, non sia un'identità ma un utile piacere che gode di una cattiva fama: ipotizziamo che sia una tecnica, un'attività secondaria, un modo per eludere la rigida fiscalità della voce.

La produzione controllata della voce non ha mai gradito il falsetto: suono del mistero, mancanza di naturalezza, assenza. Nel 1823 Isaac Nathan lo chiamava la *quarta voce* (quarta dimensione, quarto sesso): "è una specie di ventriloquismo … una tipologia di suono nascosto e soffocato,

che produce l'illusione di essere sentito da lontano".[25] Antoine Bailleux, nel 1760, ammonisce che la voce deve provenire direttamente dal petto "per evitare che il passaggio attraverso la testa o il naso possano snaturarlo in un falsetto dal suono attutito".[26] Nessuno si azzarda a rivendicare il falsetto, a dire di quel suono acuto, sottile, esacerbato: "È mio!"

Il falsetto fa parte della storia dell'effeminatezza – una storia irresistibile ancora da scrivere. Molto prima che si sapesse che cosa fosse un omosessuale, intere culture sapevano come schernire gli uomini che cantavano con una voce acuta. Plutarco disprezzava "il femmineo cicaleccio musicale, puro suono senza sostanza";[27] Giovanni di Salisbury scoraggiava "le pose effeminate nell'affettazione delle parole e dei suoni";[28] San Rinaldo insisteva che "agli uomini si addice cantare con una voce maschia, e non in maniera femminea, squillante, o come si dice comunemente, con la voce falsa, in cui riecheggia la dissolutezza dei teatri".[29] Dopo il 1880, dopo la nascita dell'omosessualità, un medico inglese definì il falsetto una tecnica in cui le due corde vocali fanno pressione l'una contro l'altra "nella parte posteriore, con una tale forza da bloccare il reciproco movimento"; se la voce di petto viene fuori da una "naturale apertura della laringe", la voce in falsetto è spinta da "un orifizio artificiosamente rimpicciolito, con l'interstizio che diventa sempre più piccolo fino a che non resta niente in grado di vibrare".[30] Il falsetto, purtroppo per la storia delle civiltà, è rovina e decadenza.

Pur essendo stato bandito, e associato alla degenerazione, alla deviazione, all'artificiosità, il falsetto ha rappresentato a lungo una risorsa: il castrato Tosi parla della voce finta come qualcosa di "utile", soprattutto se rivestita d'arte.[31] Se un moderno cultore della voce come Franklin D. Lawson, nel 1944, vedeva nel falsetto un pericolo, la causa di un suono "infantile", "appariscente" ed "effeminato" nel maschio, e "un verso incolore e gracchiante" nella femmina,[32] il castrato Tosi lo giudicava un tesoro da scoprire con un maestro esperto: "molti maestri fanno cantare ai loro allievi le parti di Contr'Alto, ignorando come possano guidarli verso il Falsetto, o risparmiadosi la briga di trovarlo".[33] Suono al tempo stesso falso e utile, può essere motivo di lode o di disprezzo per il cantante che vi si affida.

Il falsetto non è un peccato; il peccato è irrompervi senza artifizi. Un falsetto rigoroso, come il travestimento esperto, deve dare l'illusione della realtà. Nel 1782, quando a un 'sopranista' – un uomo non castrato che cantava in falsetto – scappò per sbaglio di cantare nella sua vera, robusta voce di tenore, Johann Samuel Petri scrisse che "tutto il piacere per quella meravigliosa voce di soprano andò interamente distrutto": una nota "orribilmente aspra" aveva interrotto la mascherata vocale, ricordando a quanti stavano ascoltando che a cantare fosse un *lui*.[34]

Ho sempre temuto il falsetto: voce da spauracchio, voce da finocchio irredento; voce di orrore e perdita e castrazione; voce che fluttua, voce

[25] Nathan, *Essay*, 47.

[26] Cit. in Duey, *Bel canto*, 108.

[27] Cit. in ibid., 29.

[28] Cit. in ibid., 34.

[29] Cit. in ibid., 41.

[30] Sir Morell Mackenzie, cit. in Monahan, *Art of Singing*, 149-150.

[31] Tosi, *Observations*, 24.

[32] Franklin D. Lawson, *The Human Voice: A Concise Manual on Training the Speaking and Singing Voice* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944), 46.

[33] Tosi, *Observations*, 23.

[34] Cit. in Sanford, *Vocal Style*, 43-44.

che svanisce. Ricordo con una smorfia Tiny Tim, stravagante cantante pop, che camminava in punta di piedi tra i tulipani con il suo ukulele.

Pubertà

L'arrivo della pubertà: qualcosa che distrugge la voce o che la protegge? Qualcosa che distrugge la tua vita, o il momento in cui la tua vita comincia?

La castrazione cristallizza la voce infantile prima che la pubertà possa rovinarla. Ma perfino per coloro che non sono castrati, la pubertà rappresenta il momento in cui si fanno i conti con se stessi. Ai primi segnali di pubertà, Caruso stava quasi per uccidersi (un preside voleva approfittarsi di lui a causa dei suoi gorgheggi prepuberi); ma fu salvato da un baritono di buon cuore, che lo aiutò a ridefinire la sua voce. Durante la pubertà, il *reale* esplode: acne, pomo d'Adamo, sperma, seni, sangue.

La diva Ernestine Schumann-Heink consiglia alle ragazze di rimandare lo studio a quando lo 'sviluppo fisico' sia ultimato,[35] e Isaac Nathan invita i ragazzi a non cantare durante la 'muta'.[36] Solo dopo la pubertà un cantante può definire la propria voce, capire dove finisce la voce di petto e dove inizia quella di testa; solo allora un cantante è in grado di trovare un equilibrio nell'inconciliabilità dei valori simbolici della testa e del petto. Il maestro deve osservare con attenzione il sopraggiungere della pubertà nel corpo dell'allievo, e gli deve insegnare a far 'passare' la voce dall'una all'altra regione dell'allusività sessuale.

La pubertà può distruggere la voce del giovane corista; ma nella maggior parte dei casi il canto inizia dopo la pubertà, cosicché la pubertà stende la sua lugubre, magica ombra su tutte le successive vocalizzazioni.

[35] Cit. in Martens, *Art of the Prima Donna*, 265-266.

[36] Cit. in Monahan, *Art of Singing*, 21.

I registri

I registri sono un prodotto naturale, o la finzione dell'educazione vocale? (Non è molto chiaro se un registro rappresenti un luogo di opportunità o di proibizione.) Ci sono manuali che dicono che esistono cinque registri, oppure uno, oppure nessuno. Alcuni dicono che gli uomini hanno due registri, e le donne tre – o che qualsiasi nota sia possibile cantare è di per sé un registro.

Pare ci siano tre parti del corpo in cui si verifica la risonanza: petto, gola e testa. Procedendo in senso ascendente, la voce sale da un registro a quello superiore. Più ci si allontana dal petto, più il tono della voce diventa alto, e falso, e più è necessario preoccuparsi di cantare in maniera naturale. Nel 1613 Domenico Cerone sosteneva: "la voce di petto è quella più autentica e naturale".[37]

Lo stacco tra i registri – chiamato in maniera fantasiosa 'il ponticello' – è il luogo nel quale si verifica la scissione tra maschile e femminile all'interno

[37] Cit. in Sanford, *Vocal Style*, 34.

di una stessa voce. Non riuscire a nascondere questa frattura di genere sarebbe fatale all'arte di una produzione 'naturale' della voce. Il cantante addestrato nell'arte del bel canto dovrà evitare gli sbalzi, nascondendo gli stacchi tra i registri e scorrendo su di essi in maniera impercettibile. Il confine tra i registri, come il confine tra i colori, il confine tra i sessi, o quello tra etero e omosessualità, può essere attraversato solo se il trasgressore finge che nessun viaggio abbia mai avuto luogo. Uscendo allo scoperto, gli omosessuali provocano scosse sismiche nel sistema-di-confine, così come, rivelando lo stacco tra i registri, un cantante rivela le linee di faglia all'interno di un corpo che pretende di essere solo maschile o solo femminile. (O, al contrario continuiamo a ribadire, senza volerlo, l'esistenza di un mondo diviso?)

Canto degenerato

Dimenticando la propria dipendenza da ciò che è finzione, l'educazione vocale attribuisce un valore superiore al 'naturale'. La maggior parte dei teorici della voce concorda con William James Henderson, che nel 1906 scriveva che "il canto non è altro che natura coltivata al livello più elevato".[38] Ma, finché il canto verrà ritenuto naturale, alcune tecniche vocali saranno bollate come degenerate; quella della 'degenerazione' è stata la retorica usata, nell'Ottocento, per creare l'"omosessuale' come identità patologica.

Omosessuale-come-degenerato: mi approprio di questa immagine degradante e la incarno, perché non c'è modo di uscire da uno stereotipo se non assimilandolo, o di criticarlo se non assumendone, con spirito critico, le vestigia. Sono già rivestito del manto della degenerazione: e non posso rifiutarlo. E per questo dico: il Degenerato, c'est moi.

The Voice as an Instrument (1878) di A. A. Pattou mette a punto un metodo scientifico per rimuovere "i difetti di una voce innaturale".[39] Nemico giurato dell'affettazione, Pattou si sforza di correggere la gola, controllare la laringe, e sradicare "ogni sbaglio o imperfezione a cui la voce umana sia soggetta".[40] Arriva anche a includere la sua stessa esperienza: senza seguire alcuna pratica igienica, Pattou aveva cantato in maniera scorretta, procurandosi un'infiammazione della gola che aveva ingenerato "depressione psichica e sfiducia generale nella società in tutti i suoi aspetti".[41] Anche il manuale sulla voce di Sir Charles Santley termina con una confessione: gli si infiammava la gola quando cantava in camere adorne di fiori di importazione (tra i quali il giacinto, fiore omoerotico).

Il discorso sulla degenerazione nell'Ottocento aveva pure tratti antisemiti e razzisti. In passato, io stesso ho assorbito l'antisemitismo: e non mi stupisco del mio imbarazzo quando per la prima volta sentii la pienezza sonora dell'opera. Ero terrorizzato dal grido del cantore nella sinagoga; temevo l'espressività degli ebrei, che mi pareva aprissero all'esterno i loro

[38] Cit. in Monahan, *Art of Singing*, 33.

[39] A. A. Pattou, *The Voice as an Instrument* (New York: Edward Schuberth & Co., 1878), 4.

[40] Ibid., 28.

[41] Ibid., 58.

corpi – isterici capri espiatori, che non smettevano mai di parlare. Ricordo la pessima condotta dei bambini nella scuola ebraica, e il mio terrore di somigliare a loro. (L'insegnante una volta si rivolse a un marmocchio chiacchierone, sbavante ma attraente, dicendogli che aveva "la diarrea alla bocca".) Forse da bambino credevo che l'opera fosse un'arte ebraica e che, amando io l'opera, potessi recuperare la mia identità ebraica – ereditaria, incurabile, colpevole?

Evitare il vibrato eccessivo. Mozart critica il vibrato di un cantante perché "contro natura".[42] Il sentimento ostile verso il vibrato raggiunse il suo culmine nell'Ottocento (come d'altronde il vibrato stesso); il laringologo americano Holbrook Curtis notava nel 1909 che il vibrato è molto popolare nelle "razze latine", ma disprezzato dagli anglosassoni.[43] Io non sono latino, ma sono ebreo, e amo ascoltare una nota che oscilla, senza controllo, che trema e si scuote tanto che pare che i giorni di quieto riposo siano ormai finiti per sempre. … E così pure il trillo è stato considerato contro natura, o quanto meno effeminato: il maestro Francis Charles Maria de Rialp sostiene che, per quanto sia "tanto in voga" tra i cantanti maschi dell'Ottocento, il trillo dovrebbe essere lasciato alle voci femminili.[44] Ogni affettazione della voce è criticabile perché sintomo di degenerazione: Isaac Nathan, nel 1823, metteva in guardia contro ogni pronuncia blesa, strascicata, o sforzata, per cui "il cantante sembra quasi crollare al suolo dopo lo sforzo".[45]

Evitare gli atteggiamenti sgraziati. Secondo Lilli Lehmann, "sono scorretti e riprovevoli i volti atteggiati in una smorfia perenne o che esibiscono labbra boccheggianti".[46] Immaginate delle labbra boccheggianti! I cantanti possono sembrare ridicoli se non hanno un pieno controllo di se stessi, e questa opportunità di apparire grotteschi è assai intrigante, se uno sceglie (come me) di appropriarsi del ridicolo degli stereotipi, piuttosto che rifiutarlo. Ci sono molti manuali che suggeriscono di cantare davanti a uno specchio così da evitare l'espressione boccheggiante. Ai castrati veniva prescritto di guardarsi allo specchio per un'ora al giorno, durante gli esercizi; Tosi suggerisce ai cantanti che la pratica dello specchio aiuta a evitare le smorfie eccessive. Il cantante che si specchia, che si esercita professionalmente, interpreta un ruolo dubbio, sregolato, patologico: quello del narcisista.

Io ho imparato il mio essere ebraico guardandomi allo specchio, e attraverso i detti di famiglia. Ho appreso l'omosessualità attraverso segni che nessuno specchio potrà mai mettere a fuoco. E tuttavia mi sono esercitato per l'omosessualità esattamente come avrei fatto per un'esibizione: imparandone pazientemente a memoria le note. E ricordo me stesso mentre guardavo la mia figura intera nello specchio del bagno, chiedendomi se il mio corpo non fosse un'illusione ottica.

[42] Cit. in Rushmore, *Singing Voice*, 190.

[43] Cit. in ibid., 190.

[44] Frances Charles Maria de Rialp, *The Legitimate School of Singing* (New York: the author, 1894), 76.

[45] Nathan, *Essay*, 67.

[46] Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing*, trans. by Richard Aldrich (New York: Macmillan, [1902] 1960), 169.

Riflessioni sparse sull'economia della voce

Le categorie 'voce' e 'psiche' non si limitano a registrare quello che succede naturalmente; ma prescrivono in modo suadente cosa *dovrebbe* succedere. La considerazione fondamentale sulla voce è che essa si muove verso l'alto, come un fenomeno idraulico, in maniera trascendente. Come la libido, la voce vuole venir fuori.

La voce aspira a trascendere e purificare; l'omosessualità è lo sporco che il canto deve detergere e debellare. Da questo punto di vista, voce e omosessualità sono contrapposte: la voce è evolutiva, l'omosessualità è devolutiva; la voce è trascendente, l'omosessualità è terrena.

Nel suo dispendio di fiato, il corpo che canta è frugale oppure dissipatore. La voce attraversa il corpo come farebbe una tossina, purgandolo; per giudicare la qualità di una voce dovremmo chiederci: "Sono stati drenati tutti i veleni?" Poiché la voce è un'essenza, troppo fervida per essere conservata, pronta a scappare attraverso qualunque porta aperta, il falsetto è il respiro che ha trovato l'uscita sbagliata del corpo.

Ma faremmo male ad attribuire al falsetto tutte le colpe. Perché c'è qualcosa di intimamente ambiguo nel movimento del respiro dai polmoni alla laringe alla maschera, qualcosa di deviante e di inafferrabile nel bisogno che l'aria ha di uscire dal corpo. Per quanto i nessi più chiari siano tra falsetto e omosessualità, ogni varietà di voce operistica è perversa. Nella logica del canto, l'aria tentata da una destinazione alternativa è altrettanto perversa dell'aria che procede verso l'uscita regolare. La risonanza *è* perversione.

Come il salasso, il canto è una cura drastica che ripristina l'equilibrio interno. John Gothard, nel suo *Thoughts on Singing; with Hints on the Elements of Effect and the Cultivation of Taste* (1848), comincia con il caso di un uomo nevrastenico, afflitto da un "continuo singhiozzo", curato facendo amicizia con alcuni gentili giovanotti membri di un coro.[47] Con pari ottimismo, Millie Ryan sostiene che "per i *nervi* non esiste miglior medicina che la cura della voce".[48] Il canto mantiene in forma il corpo, la psiche, e la struttura morale. Prima di esercitarsi, il cantante è teso, rigido; dopo, si distende.

Ma la distensione segue delle norme; i movimenti di un cantante sono attentamente preparati, e sono così gradevoli perché facilmente imitabili. Yvette Guilbert, nel suo *How to Sing a Song*, dà le esatte prescrizioni su come mettersi in posa, e include le fotografie del proprio viso in espressioni drammatiche, comiche, e patetiche, molto simili alle fotografie delle pazze vittoriane di Hugh Welch Diamond: ogni espressione è opportunamente denominata Estasi, Amabilità Naturale, Patema intimo, Serenità, Grigio,

[47] John Gothard, *Thoughts on Singing; with Hints on the Elements of Effect and the Cultivation of Taste* (London: Longman & Co., 1848), iv.

[48] Ryan, *What Every Singer*, 23.

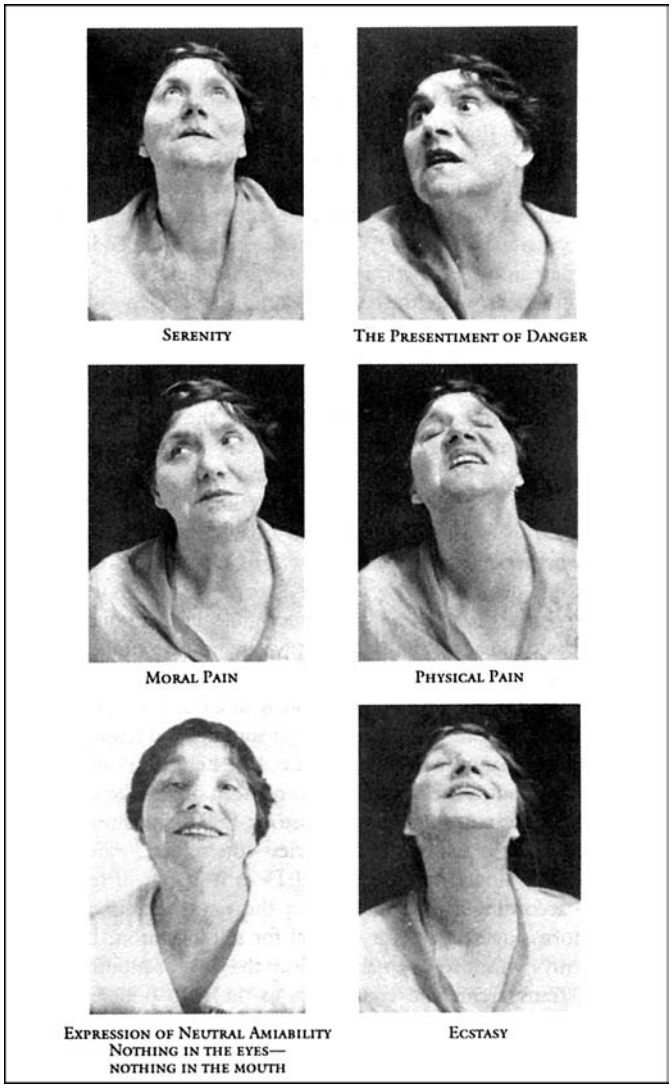

Fig. 3: "Se decido di imitare Guilbert, e atteggiare la mia faccia come Serena, Grigia, o Naturalmente Amabile, produco nuovi desideri oppure ne ripropongo di vecchi?" Yvette Guilbert, foto di Alice Boughton, in Yvette Guilbert, *How to Sing a Song* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), riprodotta per gentile concessione di Wayne Koestenbaum.

Rosso, Viola, Vermiglio. Se decido di imitare Guilbert, e atteggiare la mia faccia come Serena, Grigia, o Naturalmente Amabile, produco nuovi desideri oppure ne ripropongo di vecchi? Forse i vecchi desideri, una volta mimati, diventano nuovi: forse non ci sono affatto nuovi desideri, e tutto ciò che possiamo fare è abitare in modo nuovo quelli vecchi, con spirito e fantasia.

I manuali per la voce incoraggiano poco l'invenzione del sé. Al contrario, inchiodano i cantanti alla morale familiare: nel 1839, H. W. Day scrive che "il canto ha un effetto terapeutico sui sentimenti morali".[49] Lowell Mason, nel 1847, sostiene che il canto produce "ordine sociale e felicità familiare".[50] Una buona voce nasce in un ambiente familiare privo di tensioni, in una famiglia nella quale è comunemente usata la "voce naturale", e in cui c'è la possibilità di ascoltare buona musica.[51] (Io ho ascoltato buona musica. Ma non ho mai imparato a usare una voce naturale. Mi chiedo se la voce naturale non sia una fantasia repressiva, finalizzata a tenerci a bada.) Quando una voce canta con dolcezza, riscontrando il consenso comune, ripropone la sana scena infantile nella quale è stata allevata, e quando si sposta in maniera goffa tra i diversi registri, o canta fuori tono, rivela un passato burrascoso e innaturale.

Come ogni galateo che si rispetti, rivolto ai cortigiani rinascimentali o agli odierni adolescenti, i manuali di canto insegnano a garantirsi una posizione di classe, a "guardarsi dalle compagnie cattive e disdicevoli", e a dare un segnale di distinzione.[52] Emettendo il suono, la voce trasforma il desiderio in denaro. E i corpi che cantano vengono valutati per la loro capacità di muoversi verso l'alto: in alto sul pentagramma, in alto nella scala sociale. Le note alte sono costose: nel 1720 Benedetto Marcello affermò che più alti erano gli acuti di un castrato, "più alto il suo prezzo e la sua fama".[53]

Per un cantante la ricchezza comincia dal sapersi contenere ed evitare gli sprechi: e così il cantante che voglia conquistarsi l'oro della voce deve imparare a regolare le spese, e deve pure imparare, come una brava governante o un contabile, la "corretta organizzazione o dis-organizzazione della colonna d'aria vibrante" che dalle corde vocali passa

[49] Cit. in Monahan, *Art of Singing*, 17.

[50] Cit. in ibid., 17.

[51] George Antoine Brouillet, *Voice Manual* (Boston: Crescendo Publishing Co., 1974), 42.

[52] Tosi, *Observations*, 144.

[53] Angus Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera* (New York: Da Capo Press, [1956] 1975), 57.

alla bocca.[54] Il cantante, secondo quanto scriveva Johann Mattheson nel 1739, deve lasciare che l'aria inspirata fuoriesca "non tutta in una volta né in maniera incontrollata, ma con parsimonia, poco per volta, facendo attenzione a trattenerla e preservarla".[55] Caruso raccomanda al cantante di mantenere un'economia simile nel corso dell'intera carriera: il cantante dovrebbe limitare l'emissione della voce "come controlla gli esborsi del suo portafoglio".[56]

Risparmia denaro, e risparmia aria: prudenza dell'omosessualità, prudenza della voce. L'omosessualità e la voce sono economie di spesa, preoccupate da ciò che potrebbe andare male o da ciò che è già andato male, ansiose di controllare i flussi di materia vitale. Il corpo definito 'omosessuale' è un luogo nel quale il sistema sessuale schizza, tracima, gocciola; dove viene fuori l'errore del contabile (una somma sprecata); l'amministrazione domestica fallisce. Dal momento che Freud ha sostenuto in maniera convincente la connessione tra paranoia, omosessualità, e analità, ci troviamo spesso a concludere che quando l'omosessualità non è un'erotica dello sperpero e del commercio promiscuo, è, invece, un'erotica della cautela, della gestione parsimoniosa.

Nell'educazione del cantante, è la condotta di tutto il corpo – non solo della voce – a essere sottoposta a un'amministrazione penalizzante. Il canto richiede purezza da cima a fondo. I pedagoghi hanno sempre raccomandato l'astinenza sessuale e il controllo dell'alimentazione: nei *Problemata*, Aristotele chiede, "Perché sgolarsi dopo mangiato rovina la voce?"[57] Nel ventesimo secolo, Millie Ryan consiglia di mangiare prugne secche per la salute dell'apparato fonatorio; Herbert Witherspoon suggerisce l'uso di un purgante, e ammonisce che "la membrana mucosa della faringe e della bocca è un 'rivelatore' dal valore non trascurabile, spesso in grado di portare allo scoperto problemi nascosti più in basso".[58] La voce avverte se il sistema di eliminazione dei rifiuti corporei funziona a dovere. Naturalmente, la voce non solo descrive il sistema, ma lo trasforma in sensazioni e suoni di cui ci imbeviamo, senza astuzie e senza calcoli.

Magari tremiamo sentendo una voce, e quel che ascoltiamo e impariamo ad amare è una teoria del corpo. Io, che non sono in grado di tenere una nota, sono catturato da questa economia della produzione vocale non meno che se fossi un cantante.

"Le linee rosse rappresentano le sensazioni vocali delle soprano e dei tenori", scrive Lilli Lehmann in *How to Sing*.[59] Basta osservare la raffigurazione del cantante di Lehmann: vampiro, scheletro, sopravvissuto, spogliato di qualsiasi specificità identitaria. Senza capelli, senza pelle, senza storia, la lezione di anatomia di Lilli Lehmann sembra un 'Io' che precede ogni categoria – è un soggetto che aspetta di essere denominato. (Cantante è maschio o femmina? Conta qualcosa dal momento che soprano e tenore, secondo Lehmann, provano le stesse sensazioni?). Il cantante scarnificato di Lehmann

[54] Louis Arthur Russell (1904), cit. in Monahan, *Art of Singing*, 62.

[55] Cit. in Duey, *Bel canto*, 79.

[56] Caruso and Tetrazzini, *Art of Singing*, 58.

[57] Cit. in Duey, *Bel canto*, 19.

[58] Witherspoon, *Singing: A Treatise*, 45.

[59] Lehmann, *How to Sing*, 86-87.

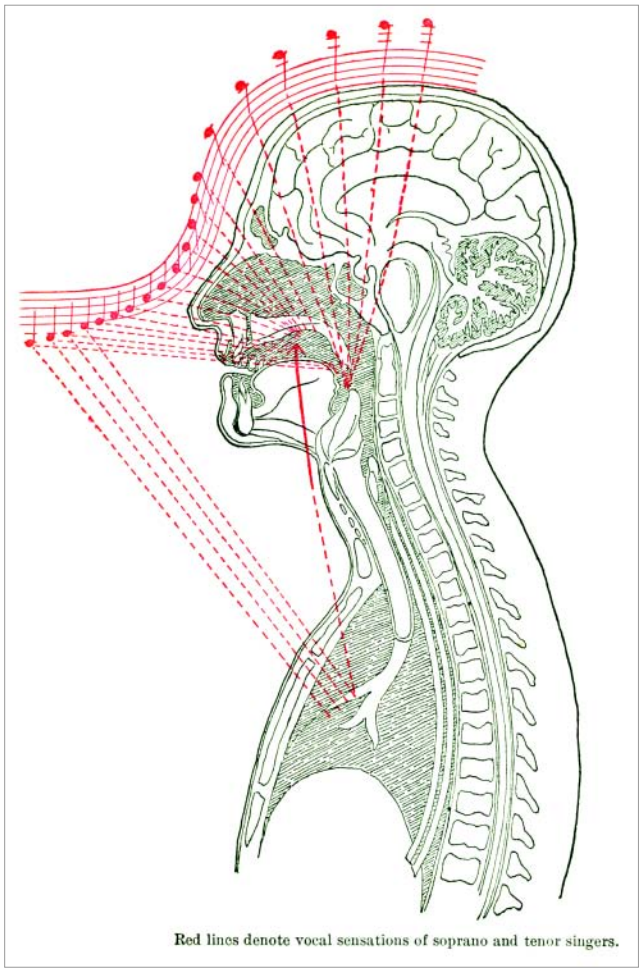

Fig. 4: "Io, che non sono in grado di tenere una nota, sono catturato da questa economia della produzione vocale non meno che se fossi un cantante." Diagramma delle sensazioni vocali delle soprano e dei tenori, in Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing* (New York: Macmillan, [1902] 1960), riprodotta per gentile concessione di Wayne Koestenbaum.

è un cupo modello di invenzione del sé; ma è mia intenzione appropriarmene. Una forza emana dalla bocca del cantante – un 'Io' così elastico, trasparente, intero, come la bolla di sapone che il ragazzo del quadro di Chardin soffia da qualche secolo, una bolla che nessuno spettatore potrà mai forare.

Coda malinconica n. 1

Avrei voluto che questo scritto fosse ricolmo di piacere. E invece i manuali parlano raramente di piacere. All'estasi un manuale di canto non dedica più spazio di quanto non faccia una guida per riparare automobili.

Cantare è un piacere, ma è anche disciplina; essere omosessuali è sexy, ma è pure reclusione (all'interno di un'identità illecita). La libera espressione è una finzione: quando esprimo un 'Io' significa che lo spingo fuori a forza, come in un caffè espresso. La voce e l'omosessualità sono fabbriche che esprimono ciò che nessun corpo, lasciato a se stesso, si preoccuperebbe di produrre. Ma i corpi non sono mai lasciati a se stessi. E allora il mio corpo produce l'omosessualità – la canta, la esprime. Non ho scelta. L'omosessualità è la musica specifica che il mio corpo crea. Retrospettivamente, legittimo il grande melodramma chiamato 'omosessualità', perdono le sue dissonanze e i suoi antiquati finali sentimentali, e lascio che la arie meravigliose (La Cabaletta Sodomita, La Cavatina Degenerata, La Scena Orale, Il Duetto dell'Attivo e del Passivo) sgorghino liberamente dalla mia bocca. La cultura ha definito l'omosessualità la sporca X. La parola che non si può dire. La parola che si scrive con il sangue sulle porte. Segno di scomunica. Il non-nome dell'emarginato. In segno di reazione, di ritorsione, di rivolta, io abbraccio la mia X; incastro il mio corpo nella X; mi dedico a X come a un'attività o a una fede; scopro i meravigliosi, quasi impercettibili armonici di X che il mondo aveva ritenuto un incubo. Io sono X, sempre sarò X, il mondo non potrà liberarmi di X, il mondo non potrà strappare X dal mio corpo, e riscriverò X ogni volta che X sarà cancellata.

Ogni sessualità non legittimata è X. Anche l'eterosessualità può essere X, se solo ci prova.

La sessualità, omo o etero che sia, non si manifesta solo una volta, in quel momento di rivelazione e affermazione che è l'atto di 'uscire allo

scoperto'. Il nostro corpo esce continuamente allo scoperto. Ogni volta è la prima volta. Ogni esibizione è un debutto. Ogni eccitazione è la ripetizione della prima eccitazione. Ogni volta che parli, esci allo scoperto. Ogni volta che l'aria comincia il suo cammino ascendente dai polmoni alla laringe alla maschera, ogni volta che il tuo corpo esegue quello stesso numero trascendentale, esci allo scoperto. Tu *sei* il FUORI nel quale si colloca la sessualità. Uscire allo scoperto è come narrare una storia sensata sulla sessualità di qualcuno; ha compiuto veri e propri miracoli politici, ed è un processo di chiarificazione morale e psichico.

Ma uscire allo scoperto non è l'unica possibile vocalizzazione sottesa alla sessualità. Io ho scelto di prestare la mia voce alla sessualità (anche se ci sono zone della sessualità – tra cui la mia – che restano silenziose, inesprimibili, sfuggenti alle categorie e ai fraseggi). E comunque, anche se non avessi scelto di prestare la mia voce alla sessualità, se pure non fossi mai uscito allo scoperto, starei già vocalizzando, perché la sessualità (per la conoscenza che ne abbiamo) è sempre vocale, ineluttabilmente vocale, strutturalmente vocale.

Siamo noi che cantiamo le nostre sessualità, o sono le nostre sessualità che cantano noi? Siamo noi che emettiamo il sesso come se fosse una nota sospesa nell'aria, oppure è il sesso che emette *noi* nell'aria, che proietta *noi* in quelle ripetizioni e travestimenti che chiamiamo 'desiderio'?

Il tragitto percorso dal respiro attraverso il corpo, fino a produrre una voce, non è precisamente un viaggio di piacere. Si tratta di processi lenti, dolorosi, ardenti, così impervi e così simili tra loro che non posso che scrivere i loro nomi su righi separati e paralleli:

esercitare una voce;
dare voce a una sessualità.

Coda malinconica n. 2

Ho utilizzato manuali antiquati per tracciare un sentiero in una gola che non sarà mai la mia – la gola che canta. È una ricerca senza esiti. Non si può trovare la gola divina in un libro. Non si può imparare a cantare dal libro di Lilli Lehmann *How to Sing* – al massimo quel libro potrebbe dare qualche suggerimento utile a chi è già in grado di cantare. Ricordo i miei tentativi di imparare il coito leggendo manuali sulla sessualità umana e studiando i disegni delle quattro posizioni di base: il maschio sopra, la femmina sopra, maschio e femmina distesi di fianco, da dietro. Ho provato a imparare le regole del calcio e del baseball dall'*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in modo da evitare figure infelici in palestra. In una giornata grigia, verso la metà degli anni '60, ho cercato "Cinema e Teatri" nelle *Pagine Gialle*, e ricopiato nomi e numeri di telefono di ogni sala nella mia prima agenda, rossa, tascabile, con le pagine marcate in ordine alfabetico. Ho ricopiato

le parole “Burbank Theater”, e il numero di telefono del Burbank (che non avrei mai usato), soltanto perché aveva dato da poco, o aveva in programma, il film muto *Wings*. Sapevo che l’elenco delle sale non mi sarebbe servito a niente. Ma volevo farlo. Avevo una certa fiducia, all’epoca, nelle compilazioni.

Ho sempre inseguito la magia attraverso percorsi monotoni – manuali, enciclopedie, guide. Sognando che l’amore potesse nascere da incantesimi presi in prestito, ho studiato gli abracadabra di manuali di stregoneria fai da te. Ma i manuali non insegnano niente. Cantare non si risolve in regole. Ho cercato la presenza nei posti sbagliati.

Traduzione di **Fiorenzo Iuliano**

Freya Jarman-Ivens

"I Feel a Song Coming on": Vocal Identification and Modern Subjectivity*

> What the gramophone listener actually wants to hear is himself, and the artist merely offers him a substitute for the sounding image of his own person, which he would like to safeguard as a possession.
> (Adorno, "The Curves of the Needle")

> My voice comes and goes. For you, it comes from me. For me, it goes out from me. Between this coming from and going towards lie all the problems and astonishments of the dissociated voice.
> (Connor, *Dumbstruck*)

Simon Frith famously asked the question, "Why do songs have words?".[1] We could also phrase the question in reverse: "Why do words have songs?".[2] Whichever way round we approach the marriage of language and music, which has (at the risk of sounding romantic) characterised so many musical texts from so many times and places, it is true that the marriage is intriguing.[3] What I aim to do in this article is to identify the role of the voice – as the carrier of both language and music in song – in drawing the listener in to identification, or to push the listener away and close down the possibility of identification.

Although what I mean by the term 'vocal identification' will emerge over the course of what follows, a tentative definition is worth outlining at this stage. Gerry Moorey goes some way in identifying what this process might be; implying the Althusserian notion of interpellation, he suggests early on that identification with music works when "the listener is inserted, body and soul, into the very fabric of what they hear".[4] He further cites Simon Frith, who writes that "we assign [recorded voices] bodies, we imagine their physical production".[5] Although Moorey considers the voice, with reference to private lip-synching moments and karaoke among other examples, he also explores instrumental examples of the musical identification process, including air-guitar and shadow-conducting. But there is an important distinction between vocal and non-vocal identifications that Moorey does not explicitly address: instrumental playing and conducting are primarily gestural, while the production of the voice has important invisible elements. Of course, lip-movements are visible and when watching a lip-synched performance, the perception of accuracy is highly dependent on a good match between phonemes and mouth movements.[6] I would also argue that there are numerous other subtle bodily movements that may determine the perceived accuracy of lip-

* I owe enormous thanks to Ian Biddle (University of Newcastle) and Anahid Kassabian (University of Liverpool) for their insightful comments and detailed assistance with this article.

[1] Simon Frith, "Why Do Songs Have Words?", *Contemporary Music Review* 5.1 (1989), 77-96.

[2] A paper with precisely this title was presented by Kalina Zahova at the IASPM International Conference, University of Liverpool (UK), 13-17 July 2009.

[3] Wayne Koestenbaum makes some interesting comments on this word, 'marriage', in relation to words and music: see *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire* (London: GMP Publishers, 1993), 176-8.

[4] Gerry Moorey, "Music, Identity and Oblivion", *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network* 1.2 (2007), 2.

[5] Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: on the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 196.

[6] Irene Albrecht et al., "Speech Synchronisation for Physics-based Facial Animation", *Proceedings of the 10th International Conferences in Central Europe on Computer Graphics, Visualization and Computer Vision* (Plzen: UNION Agency, 2002), 5.

synching. Such movements may include those in any direction of the head (which may coincide with changes of pitch), or tensions perceptible in the neck (or rather, movements within the larynx, visible through the neck, and which may coincide not only with pitch but with volume), or movements of the chest that indicate the amount of air held within the lungs and the rate of its expulsion. But even with important facial and bodily movements at work, the production of the voice occurs first *within* the body.

It is, of course, true that every bodily movement originates from within the body. Where, after all, would our bodies be without muscles, bones, ligaments, and tendons? The key feature of the voice, though, is that its production fundamentally disrupts the borders of inside and outside: "My voice comes and goes", writes Connor.[7] Moorey's conclusion is to ask what the function of 'musico-identificatory acts' is: he argues that it is "a species of 'healing', or a reintegration of the individual into his or her surroundings".[8] Moreover, Gilbert Rouget identifies the role of music as that of "reconcil[ing] the torn person with himself".[9]

What I will argue, through particular exploration of vocal identification and the application of psychoanalytic theory, is that reconciliation and healing are not the primary function of vocal identification; rather, such identification serves *both* to assert the subject's being *and* to threaten it simultaneously. It is, I propose, a process in which the listening subject is brought into a moment of ontological crisis, and one that, while arguably postmodern in its manifestation, is a peculiarly modern phenomenon, benefitting as it does from the possibility of recorded music.

[7] Stephen Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.

[8] Moorey, "Music", 13.

[9] Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations Between Music and Possession*, trans. by Brunhilde Biebuyck (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985), 206.

[10] Mladen Dolar, "The Object Voice", in Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek, eds., *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (London and Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 10.

The object voice

The main object of consideration here, then, is the voice. More specifically, I mean to consider both the vocal matter – the materiality of the voice as separate from the words it utters – and the object voice, which is not even vocal matter. As Dolar writes, the object voice "is not a function of the signifier [.... It is] precisely a non-signifying remainder".[10] For Lacan, as we can see in his famous Graph of Desire, the *objet voix* is a remnant, a leftover, a

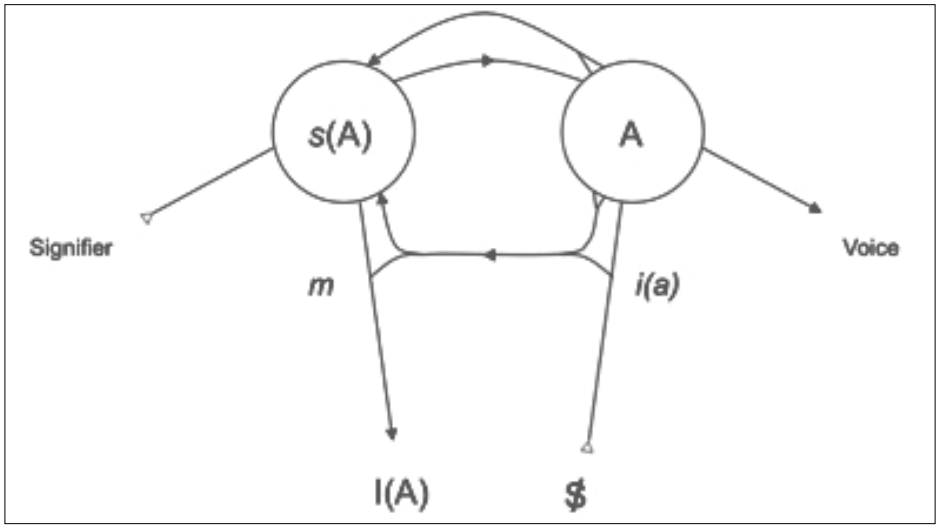

Fig. 1: The first level of Lacan's completed Graph of Desire, in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 339

misfire from the trajectory from barred subjectivity (*$*) to the Symbolic.

This *objet voix* is not, then, a material voice; indeed, it is inaudible, "forever located outside that scene within which voice began to carry meaning".[11] It is an object always-already lost; it is the voice without signifying purpose or function, the possibility of vocal meaninglessness. That it is always-already lost puts in place the very structure of what I am talking about here. The *objet voix* is, for Lacan, a site of loss and mourning, and therefore of desire for completion or retrieval. It is, then, the *objet voix* that facilitates the very process of identification with voices, voices as materialities. In moments of identifying with voices, we are seeking (in Lacanian terms) to relive the moment of loss, to ritualise it. But the path of self-actualisation in Lacan's Graph entails an encounter with language, and as such the place of the materiality of the voice must be accounted for. The voice is an essential part of the subject's self-actualisation, through encounters with Others in the world; in our day-to-day, closest encounters with Others, speech is a central medium through which the encounter is navigated, and this contributes to our continuing formation of ourselves as subjects. Stephen Connor writes:

> If, when I speak, I seem, to you, *and to myself as well*, to be more intimately and uninterruptedly there than at other times, if the voice provides me with acoustic persistence, this is not because I am extruding or depositing myself with my voice in the air, like the vapour trail of an aircraft. It is my voice of my self, as the renewed and persisting action of *producing myself as a vocal agent*, as a producer of signs and sounds, that asserts this continuity and substance. What a voice, any voice, always says, no matter what the particular local import may be of the words it emits, is this: this, here, this voice, is not merely a voice, a particular aggregation of tones and timbres; it is voice, or voicing itself. Listen, says a voice: *some being is giving voice*.[12]

Speech brings the being into being – the speaker is more *here* for speaking, both to the listener and to the speaker. Perhaps that is part of why those of us who live alone can so often be found talking to ourselves at home, but for a more theoretical insight we can turn to Lacan's concept of the mirror stage.[13] Here, the developing subject has to 'see oneself looking' in order to understand himself as Self, rather than Other; it is part of a process of separation, particularly from the Mother. This stage may or may not be identifiable as an historical moment in the subject's development. On the one hand, it is indeed a developmental stage through which infants pass; on the other, the subject re-enacts this self-recognition (indeed, a mis-recognition) on an ongoing basis as part of a constant process of affirming his Self. Cognate to Lacan's mirror stage is Derrida's contention that "the voice is *heard* (understood) – that undoubtedly is what is called conscience".[14] Similarly, Dolar summarises, "*S'entendre parler* – to hear oneself speak – is maybe the minimal definition of consciousness".[15] Thus, we can think of our speech and our own

[11] Richard Middleton, *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 63.

[12] Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 3-4. My emphasis.

[13] The cultural and historical specificity of Lacan's model is not going unconsidered here. The very need to consider the subject *as* separate from the (M)Other is a particular post-Enlightenment phenomenon. Nonetheless, since I am working within this culture, at this time, I shall hold onto Lacan's model, albeit with these (and several other) problems in mind.

[14] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 20. His emphasis.

[15] Dolar, "The Object Voice", 13.

comprehension of it as a central part of the production of our own subjectivity and agency in the world around us.

Another way to account for the place of the sonic reality of the voice in relation to the Lacanian *objet voix* might be to turn to the Barthesian notion of geno-song, which

> forms a signifying play having nothing to do with communication (of feelings), expression; it is that apex (or depth) of production where the melody really works at the language – not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sounds-signifiers, of its letters – where melody explores how the language works and identifies with that work.[16]

[16] Roland Barthes, *Image - Music - Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), 182.

Here, the concern is with everything in the voice which is not the signifying content of what is being said. In song, it also depends on the extraction of the coded content of the music; this is a material voice that is neither language nor music, but that which exceeds and defies them both.

Moreover, the *act of speech* is understood to reveal something of the speaker; speech is considered to be very much *of* the person speaking. We can, for instance, recognise individuals by their voices alone. Indeed, it is perhaps rather important to us that this is true, there being a mild sense of discomfort when the words "It's me" on the end of a phone line do not lead the listener to instant recognition of the speaker. But perhaps the uniqueness of the voice of an individual is more important to us as an idea than it is a thing of fact. It is certainly an idea that has been a recurrent cultural touchstone, and it connects a number of seemingly disparate cultural objects: Edison's proposed use of his phonograph for the making of a 'Family Record'[17]; the plotline of *Charlie's Angels* (McG, 2000) or *Little Voice* (Herman, 1998); and the UK television show *Stars in Their Eyes*, or the Italian *Sei un mito*. The voice and the Self are intimately linked in our cultural imagination. Consequently, if our encounter with an Other is one involving the voice, we not only appreciate the presence and being of the Other because of *his* voice, but we also distinguish that voice from *our own*, and thus we too are brought into being. In hearing, and knowing that it is not we who speak, we make a separation between the Self and the Other that is crucial to the makeup of our own subjectivity. Thus, if the act of speech by an Other is part of a process for us as subjects of self-actualisation, it is precisely because we are not the speaker. That is to say, it is because we *do not* identify with the voice – we identify ourselves *against* it. The listener hears the speaker's very being, or at least he wants to, and the listener's Self becomes alteritously reinforced in that moment.

[17] "A registry of sayings, reminiscences, etc., by members of a family in their own voices, and of the last words of dying persons"; Thomas A. Edison, "The Perfected Phonograph", *The North American Review* 146.379 (June 1888).

Identification with the voice

But what about identification *with* the voice? Do we – and if so *how* do we – identify with the voice of an Other? Indeed, *why* would we, if our

distinction from it is so important for our self-construction? I turn now to my first epigraph, from Adorno's 1927 article "The Curves of the Needle", a piece about the nature of gramophone recordings.[18] The very concept contained within the quote – that the listener "actually wants to hear ... himself", a desire to hear and yet safeguard oneself simultaneously – seems to be the same drive that I am here calling vocal identification.

Wayne Koestenbaum's terminology also comes to mind, as he speaks in terms of desire for the voice. His desire is fierce and desperate, and he positions himself in a clear relationship with the voice: "we want to consume the singer," he writes; "we go to the opera to eat voice".[19] And in response to Maria Callas's 1953 performance of the 'Mad Scene' in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, he writes "Alas, I am separated from a desired voice!".[20] But even in this woeful lamentation, the nature of this desire is unclear. Is it a desire to possess the voice's creator, to consume the Being Giving Voice? Perhaps to *be* the voice, given life by the creator? What does it mean to "eat voice" – to internalise the voice such that it becomes part of one's own fabric? To destroy it and supplant it with one's own voice? Or precisely to make it one's own voice? This last possibility is the place of tension that is, for me, vocal identification. It is the desire to possess the voice being heard, to be that voice's creator, while also necessarily being separated from the voice's production.[21]

What we have here is the listener's identification oscillating between the Self of the listener and the Other of the singer. Adorno proposes that the listener uses the singer to stand in for himself, to whom he would much rather be listening. On the other hand, there is the reality of listening to our own recorded voices. If we consider once again the mirror, it seems obvious enough that what we see in our mirror images is not the same as what others see as they look at us. Indeed, there is a certain repulsion generated in any attempt to force together the two perceptions of what we see of ourselves and what others see. The photograph, for instance, forces a confrontation with a version of oneself very different from one's mental image of oneself, and it lacks the physicality of the mirror. The video image is, perhaps, even closer to what others see of us, and yet – or perhaps *therefore* – is even more repulsive to us. Whereas I have direct control over my mirror image (it moves when I move), the thing on the screen (impostor!) moves without me, and presents an even greater discomfort in this mismatch between movement and physicality.

An equivalent set of processes is at work in the voice, which also contributes to our 'mind's eye' (or, rather, 'mind's ear') version of ourselves. Just as the mirror and the gaze render different faces, what I hear as I speak is different from what another hears (that is, in the sense of geno-song, and of vocal qualities, rather than in the sense of the content or

[18] The piece was reissued in 1965 with a brief caveat by the author about the changes in technology after its original publication, and some edits to the language, and it is this reissue from which I work.

[19] Koestenbaum, *Queen's Throat*, 101.

[20] Ibid., 226.

[21] This possibility is facilitated within Lacan's model of the *objet voix*; the desire for the voice put in place by the *objet voix*'s being always-already lost may be, on the one hand, an eroticised desire, or it may be the desire to take up the subject position that produces the voice.

message being misinterpreted). Since the invention of the phonograph in 1877, the gap between the speaker's and the listener's experience of the same voice has become more readily understandable (and closable?) through the popularisation of recording technologies. The experience of that gap is commonly an uncomfortable one, as Stephen Connor describes: "People who hear their own recorded voices [usually] find them alien – ugly, piping, thin, crude, drawling, barking, or otherwise unattractive".[22] Our mental image of our voices, which (crucially) may persist during the act of speech or song, is thus disrupted by the playback of our recorded voices – dismembered, even, as it is cut from the body.

[22] Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9.

A useful model for unpacking this further can be found in Freud's concept of the ego-ideal. He describes the ego-ideal as something of a replacement for childhood narcissism, a mechanism by which we can maintain the illusion of our own perfection in the face of the reality of the matter:

> He is not willing to forgo the narcissistic perfection of his childhood; and when, as he grows up, he is disturbed by the admonitions of others and by the awakening of his own critical judgement, so that he can no longer retain that perfection, he seeks to recover it in the new form of an ego ideal. What he projects before him as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal.[23]

[23] Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction", in Peter Gay, ed., *The Freud Reader* (London: Vintage, 1995), 558.

Perhaps playing back a recording of ourselves disrupts this ego ideal; we have a mental image of our voices – an idealised one – and that has to be jettisoned when we hear ourselves played back, just as the recognition by the infant of his mirror image is, for Lacan, a *mis*-recognition. Now, although Adorno at first proposes that the listener subject wants to hear himself, he also makes it clear that the listener specifically does *not* want to – he wants to safeguard that as a possession, which is why he requires the substitute of the recorded singer. In the revelation of the ego ideal as an illusion is the disruption of the subject's defence mechanisms, and thus in the act of substitution is *inbuilt* the act of safeguarding.

However, what I am considering here is not a straightforward act of listening to an Other while keeping that Other at a distance. Perhaps 'substitution' here implies identification on some level, but while a simple substitution might forestall the threat to the ego ideal, an act of identification instead brings that threat back into play, insofar as the listening process involves positing the Other's voice as his own. In one sense, this contradiction makes the 'substitution' more complete, but the threat also remains and some continued distance must be maintained for the sake of the ego ideal's stability. If Freud's uncanny is a process in which the familiar is rendered strange, what is happening here is also a process of making the strange (the Other) familiar, incorporating the Other into the

Self. But it is crucial that this is *also* happening; that is to say, once the Other has been absorbed and forced into familiarity, it must immediately be rendered foreign again. Thus, a rapid oscillation is occurring between familiarity and strangeness, between Self and Other.

This relationship between the ears of the listener and the voice of the Other is, at its heart, interactive, as is implied by my second epigraph. To be heard at all, the voice must leave the body and be projected, disconnecting itself from the body that produced it, and it must then penetrate the ears of the listener; both features of the penetration – the leaving and the entering – must occur, and this implies two coinciding characteristics of the voice. On the one hand, the voice has to be set free from the body of its creator. On leaving the body, the voice acquires the power to roam at will and launch itself into another body, forcing itself into the passive, waiting ears, and thereby becomes invader, intruder, contagion. Mladen Dolar writes that the voice is "the paramount source of danger and decay",[24] and that "the core of the danger is the voice that sets itself loose from the word, the voice beyond logos, the lawless voice".[25] Yet, at the same time, the voice takes some part of the body with it; the "body in the voice as it sings" (or speaks) is exactly the 'grain' of the voice of which Roland Barthes writes.[26] Stephen Connor sums up the tension between the two constituent parts of the act of voicing: "Always standing apart from or non-identical with the body from which it issues, the voice is by definition irreducible to or incompatible with that body. And yet the voice is always in and of the body".[27]

This penetrative quality inherent in the voice is, as Serena Guarracino notes, a "relation between two bodies, the voicing body and the body who receives that voice [that] is easily sexualized".[28] She continues: "As a consequence, the listener's body can become a contested space where diverse discourses about gender identity come into play".[29] Specifically, I would argue, the detachment of voice from body renders unstable the signifiers at play here in such a way as to make the voice itself a space highly productive of the queer. So although, as Connor observes, the voice is always '*of* the body' from which it emanates, the incompatibility between voice and body that he also acknowledges means that the voice does not function as a simple signifier of the gendered-ness of its producing body.[30] Guarracino is right when she observes the possibility for gender play in the operatic system with which she is concerned, where the penetrating body – that of the singer – is "in the collective imaginary, mainly female",[31] but the principle can be taken beyond both opera and biology. In fact, the biology of the listener or the singer is something of a red herring; what is important in the ontology of the voice is its capacity always-already to detach the signifier of the vocal wave-form from the signified of the identity of the voice's producer, and in turn to keep open

[24] Dolar, "The Object Voice", 20.

[25] Ibid., 18.

[26] Barthes, *Image*, 188.

[27] Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 208.

[28] Serena Guarracino, "'I Would Like to Disappear into Those Vowels': Gender-troubling Opera", *The Newsletter for the LGBTQ Study Group*, 16.2 (Fall 2006), 3.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 208.

[31] Guarracino, "I Would Like to Disappear into Those Vowels", 3.

the possibility for multiple gender identities, until such time as identity is conferred upon the voice's producer by the listener. Annamarie Jagose identifies the queer as "those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire".[32] And if we adopt this definition, it can in turn be argued that the voice's rupture of the signs at work, in relation to gender identity and desire, and indeed identification, makes it a particularly intense site for the emergence of the queer. Moreover, the object voice is removed from the signifying order, insofar as it is a misfire or remnant of the Lacanian subject's journey into the Symbolic order.

But at the same time, the materiality of the (geno-)voice performs signifying work, in that it is understood as a signifier of the subjectivity and presence of its producer. In this borderline state between signifying and non-signifying, the object voice thus exposes the sign-ness of things, a function also of the queer in particular relation to gender and desire. More broadly, the queer is a subset of the uncanny, in the Freudian sense of that word. The intricacies of the relationship between the categories have been explored by Olu Jenzen in more space and depth than can be afforded here, but Jenzen offers some key connections, two of which will serve as a foundation for the next stages of the present study:

> Firstly, the cultural and epistemological placing of the queer 'on the edge of', 'at the back of', 'in opposition to', and even 'underneath' heterosexuality resembles the relation of the *unheimlich* to the *heimlich*. Secondly, the uncanny effect of making strange and uncomfortable the world as we know it is an element identifiable both in queer theory and what we may want to call a queer aesthetic, drawing on both repetition and the carnivalesque.[33]

Jenzen makes clear here that the estranging of the familiar and the borderline state implicit in being 'on the edge of' are crucial to both the *unheimlich* and the queer. The queer, like the uncanny, is always recognisable enough to be familiar, meaning that some identification is possible by the Self (constructed as it is by default in psychoanalytic discourse as, by definition, not-queer). Yet the queer is also always strange and distant enough to repel that Self. The queer manifests itself in a postmodern play with signs, as the heteronormative sign-system is appropriated, deconstructed, and reconstructed. Signs are taken from multiple sexed and gendered subject positions that appear to be contradictory, and their juxtaposition is what yields the things we call queer. So the queer, in exposing the sign-ness of things, reveals the extent to which normative sexualities are not *natural* but *naturalised*, a product of long-term sedimentation of ideas about behavioural rectitude.

Furthermore, the queer is monstrous, as monsters "refus[e] to participate in the classificatory 'order of things' …: they are disturbing hybrids whose

[32] Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory* 4 (December 1996), <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org>, 30 July 2009. It is essential to note that those relations are only *allegedly* stable, and 'queer' is therefore not the *deconstruction* of those links, but those gestures which *dramatise incoherencies* in an already tenuous set of links. Some voices may perform these dramatised incoherencies more obviously than others, but I would argue that the voice always has the capacity for such dramatisation because of the inherent separation of speaker/singer from listener.

[33] Olu Jenzen, "The Queer Uncanny", *eSharp* 9 (Spring 2007). <http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_41216_en.pdf>, 25 May 2009.

externally coherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration".[34] Like the queer, they are "harbingers of category crisis". The monster "is difference made flesh",[35] incorporating the Outside, the Beyond; the Other can always have its Otherness exaggerated into monstrosity. What is also implicitly entwined in the object voice, then, along with the queer and the uncanny, is the abject; in setting itself loose from the body, from its creator, the voice is like a child breaking free from its mother, a process which, for Julia Kristeva, is one of abjection. This is not to say that the queer or the uncanny is abject *per se*, but that the same qualities that enable the first two categories also enable the third, and in fact, the distancing effect of the uncanny – the estranging process – is only a small step away from the violent rejection implicit in the notion of abjection.

So, the voice demands both identification and anti-identification (rejection, repulsion) in order to facilitate the continuous stability of the subject, but such stability is always precarious.

Moments musicaux

Having established some theoretical ground, I turn now to some musical moments in which I perceive some of the processes I have laid out thus far. To be clear, I am not suggesting that my own experience of these moments would apply to any other listener; what follows is not intended to be an exhaustive list nor even a representative one, and I do not imagine it to be widely shared either. Rather, I want to pursue here a kind of auto-analysis in order to open up some possibilities regarding the relationship between sonic events and theoretical processes. Some of the following moments primarily draw me in, while others primarily push me away, but what I explore below is the ways in which there is no exact distinction between the two processes.

- Allegri, *Miserere* (recorded by the Tallis Scholars, 1980; Alison Stamp singing treble): the highest treble notes, a C6 coming 8-9 bars after each tenor chant section, and the turn on F5 (written out over four quavers) in the next bar leading into a resolution on G5.[36]
- Puccini, *Tosca*, recorded in 1965 by the Théâtre National de l'Opéra with Maria Callas as Tosca: Tosca's line "Ecco un artista!" in the third act, particularly the "Ec-" of "Ecco".
- Verdi, *La traviata*, as recorded in 1994 at the Royal Opera House, with Angela Gheorghiu as Violetta: Violetta's final line, "Oh gioia!".[37]
- Sade, "Smooth Operator": the word "ask" in the line "no need to ask", immediately before the chorus.[38]
- "Mein Herr" in the film *Cabaret* (Fosse, 1972): both occasions of the line "Bye bye, mein lieber Herr", leading into the choruses, and particularly the words "lieber Herr".[39]

[34] J. J. Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 6.

[35] Ibid., 7

[36] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x71jgMx0Mxc>, 8 February 2010.

[37] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dciKVBo0_4>, 8 February 2010.

[38] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ESqcg6jPCA>, 8 February 2010>.

[39] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CX-24Zm0bjk>, 8 February 2010.

- Otis Redding, "I've Been Loving You Too Long": the word "tired" in the line "You are tired and you want to be free" (later, "and your love is growing cold").[40]
- Luz Casal, "Un año de amor": the final word, "amor".[41]
- Martin Grech, "Open Heart Zoo": the second iteration of the line "Fill this full of light", especially the extended word "light"; and in the next line, "and open up", the word "up".[42]
- Diamanda Galás, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" (on *You Must Be Certain Of The Devil*): most of the song, especially the first "sweet", the first "chariot", and the second and third "swing".

What I have not done in the above list is to identify in individual cases whether identification or anti-identification is most at work for me as a listener. On reflection, I find that these moments – and very specific moments they are – place me in a listening position in which the simultaneity of identification and anti-identification is complex to a point where separation of the two is not altogether possible, but the complexities themselves are worth exploration. Perhaps the simplest examples for me are those of Callas (*Tosca*), Gheorghiu (*La traviata*), and Stamp (*Miserere*). In each of the moments I have identified in those recordings, I experience a palpable desire to be part of the voices, to be producing them myself. At the same time, the anticipation in the *Traviata* and *Miserere* moments, due in part to the notes' length, affords me a sense of tension such that, despite the pleasure I find in the notes, I am relieved when they are over. The fleeting nature of the word "Ecco" in the *Tosca* example is less obviously tense, but still the feeling of relief arrives when I no longer feel the desire to produce Callas's sound. I find a similar sense of painful pleasure at work in "Smooth Operator" and to a certain extent in "Mein Herr". What connects these five moments musically – at least in terms of a traditional musical analysis – is not immediately obvious, although the effects are similar for me. Tentatively, I would suggest that each case offers or points directly towards a moment of musical climax – anticlimax, perhaps, in the case of Sade, as her voice seems abandoned by the accompaniment at that moment – and that in so doing, they stand as moments outside of their immediate contexts.

In the remaining examples, apart from Galás, to which I shall return, there is also a sense of climax that contributes to the moment. And each of these cases – Redding, Casal, Grech – is filled with musical tension in ways similar to the cases of Gheorghiu and Stamp, but noticeably more boldly (even crudely) so. How Redding, Casal and Grech resolve their respective tensions is very different in each case, but the establishment of some kind of tension is undeniable. The musical similarities among these three moments are, in many ways, more obvious than those among the previous cases discussed; all three of them are occasions on which one

[40] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqaOp7sIy0w>, 8 February 2010.

[41] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQC8d0NgqLE>, 8 February 2010.

[42] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xja7UXSZmps, 8 February 2010.

note – one syllable of one word – is sustained, almost pushed. In "I've Been Loving You Too Long", after a rising passage in the brass, emphasised by the rhythm section, Redding picks up the penultimate note in the sequence (G#4) on the word "tired" and bends it gradually upwards over four seconds into the final note (to the A). The proximity of these two notes and the length of the bend Redding imposes yield tension enough, such that the resolution on the upper note is welcome relief when it finally occurs. What is even more intriguing about the note, though, is the shift of vocal timbres perceptible in his voice over the course of those four seconds, generated in part by a shift in vocal production from chest voice to falsetto. At the same time as Redding hits the note, the pounding triplets from the accompaniment give way to an arpeggiated piano feature (from the opening of the song), removing much of the volume and gravity from the overall sound; Redding himself mirrors this by way of a reduction in volume over the course of the note, and thus the latter half of the note – once he has come close enough to the upper note for melodic resolution – hangs weightlessly, representing a moment of calm after the great build up into it.

Something similar happens in "Un año de amor", when Luz Casal enters her final note. Here, though, the discrepancy between the initial pitching and the note on which Casal finally resolves is a little less than the full semitone's difference covered by Redding's slide. This acts in combination with a different musical environment – the track ends, and the note with it, in a grand finale – and a much less radical shift in vocal timbre. The pitching, the timbre, and the musical context together make the moment more unsettling for me than the equivalent in "I've Been Loving You". When listening to this final climax in "Un año de amor", I am aware in part of wanting to produce Casal's sound, and simultaneously of a desperate and uncomfortable desire for the 'right' note (that which is finally reached as her vibrato kicks in) to be reached. That desire is also present when listening to Redding – I have suggested that already – but my feeling in response to Redding is of being willing to go along with the note, *into* the note almost, whereas with Casal part of me pushes against the sound; perhaps here, I want to make the sound partly in order to rectify its pitch.

Grech's voice goes even further towards generating a conflict of identification. His shifts of timbre are arguably even more deafening than Redding's, and these timbral shifts are compounded by multiple slides of adjacent notes. Thus, in the word "light", extended over 7 seconds, there is an initial slide up into one pitch before the melody turns around three consecutive notes and lands on the original pitch; but this makes it sound more fixed and notable than it is, because the slides into and out of each note have the ultimate effect of destabilising the sense of pitch altogether. And during all these melodic slips, the timbre of Grech's voice becomes

gradually more (and then less, and then more again) harsh and stretched, almost nasal, and quite unhuman. This unhuman quality is made more real by the uses of studio technologies, variously audible on close listening and always leaving their mark on the overall sound. Similar qualities of unfixed pitch and unhuman vocality are evident in the word "up", coming a few seconds later and occupying a 4 second time-span; here, the technology is distinctly audible and particularly pertinent, as the final moments of this note are blended into a high-pitched synth noise that takes over the melodic line after Grech finishes. In this total of 11 seconds of sound the voice is pushed beyond what I could possibly seek to identify with, because of the uses of technology, and beyond what I find obviously pleasurable in the nature of the sound; this is a mercurial vocality and one that challenges the listener, but for me it says, 'Go on, I dare you to keep listening until I release'.

Perhaps the most striking of the examples I listed is Galás, who is (in)famous for what could briefly be described as a sense of highly controlled chaos in her voice. Operatic in many ways, she is also distinguished by her commitment to pushing the boundaries of vocality, from the perspective of both singer and listener. As such "Swing Low" is not entirely unusual in Galás's discography in the range of screams and squeals, and the way they sit alongside a highly controlled operatic vibrato; but it is an unusual rendition of the song, in that it takes nearly 3 minutes for her to sing four lines, because almost every word is stretched beyond capacity. There are many details to which I could attend, but they would distract from the overall point of this example: that every fibre of me is repulsed by this voice, the indecency of its excesses, and yet one tiny part of me enjoys it in a macabre way – it is rather like staring at a horrific car crash.

But this mix of pleasure and displeasure is, as I have tried to imply, at work in each of the moments I have identified. Indeed, to start to bring the theoretical and the music-analytical together, I would argue that the same mix is at the very heart of any moment of vocal identification. The pleasure and discomfort felt at the surface level of listening in moments of vocal identification are mirrored in the oscillation between the formation of and threat to the core of subjectivity. If at any of these moments I want to produce the sounds I hear, I am in one sense engaging in the 'vicarious performance' of which Cone writes.[43] But much more than this, as Adorno suggests, while I listen to the voice of an Other, what I really want to hear is myself. Or rather, I want that sound to be mine, to be of me; but I want that because of the protection it affords me against the inadequacy of my own state. In the mirror stage, when the developing subject is forced to see the lack of unity he really has with the world around him and the lack of control he really has over his own body, he imposes the ego ideal as a

[43] E. T. Cone, *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (New York: Norton, 1968), 21.

protection against the inadequacy; in the same way, these vocal moments afford me the fantasy that I could hear my own voice (I want to hear myself, I want the voice to be mine) without a threat to my ego ideal. In that fantasy, my ego ideal is protected, and I am not forced to see it for the illusion that it is, as I would be if I actually heard my own voice from the speakers. And it is those speakers that are crucial to the processes that I have been exploring. Just as the technology of the gramophone prompts Adorno's musings, the same technology, with its possibilities for repeatability and privacy, also enables everything of which I have written, as the potential to relive those recorded moments that enable identification allows us to ritualise the moment of loss that Lacan identifies in the *objet voix*. It is also worth pausing to ponder what part the Barthesian geno-song plays here; although my examples may well not be widely shared, the points of interest that I have found in them are, to be sure, geno-moments. I want to propose, then, that certain vocal moments can function as sites of attachment for the listening subject, inviting us to use them as shrines for the ritualised reliving of the originary moment of loss. Thus, although the manifestation of this process takes something of a postmodern form, challenging as it does the position of the signifier, it is also reliant on the technology of modernity; more than this, it relies on the structures of the subjectivity of modernity, constructed as discrete and autonomous, and yet it is also defined by a kind of fusion of subjects. Perhaps, then, part of what vocal identification offers the listening subject – alongside the continued fantasy of the ego, its ideal, and its preservation – is a step into a network of subjectivities.

Raffaella Bianchi and Bezen Balamir Coskun

Opera across Borders: the Construction of Italian and Turkish National Identities*

> The creation of explicitly 'national' musics was a factor in the political nationalism in nineteenth-century Europe, but it was mainly art music that functioned as a kind of weapon in the international culture wars.
> (Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology)*

Opera has travelled across many borders. According to Craigh Calhoun, it is contradictory in geopolitical terms, being an art form with strong national cultural and aesthetic traditions, and, at the same time, a pioneer in globalisation.[1] Our article explores this paradox, considering the different roles played by opera, on the one hand, in the transformation of Italian identity brought about by Italian patriots in pre-unitarian Italy, and, on the other, in the construction of a westernised identity in Turkey.

In this context, opera will be seen as an activity in motion, a nomadic genre in flux. We contend that it is not the ontology of opera that allows this fluidity; on the contrary, what matters is what opera 'does' in any given socio-political context.[2] Therefore the agency of operatic performance will be explored in relation to politics, with a particular focus on the construction of national identity. This perspective challenges a philosophical and academic tradition of thought which is rooted in Western philosophy: the vision of music as detached from politics. This position is still powerful among musicologists, particularly in the field of Western classical music. More recently, however, music has been seen as loaded with ideological intentions. Among others, Alan Merriam separates musical performance from its function within a given socio-political context: while music may be played in many different circumstances, from bands at military parades to background music in supermarkets, only in some cases may it work as part of a given ideological apparatus.[3]

Since the publication of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, historians have increasingly engaged with the deconstruction of the meaning of 'homeland' and its relation with a number of cultural components, namely gender, social realities, and the media.[4] We believe that the challenging enquiry into what music does can be accomplished by bringing together cultural and performative studies with research on the political function of music. This study tries to do so across the cultural and geographical boundaries of two different countries, in two significant moments for the construction of their national identity. It is our contention that although opera was used both in Italy and Turkey for fostering the idea of national identity, in Italy music succeeded in fulfilling this role,

* "Constructing a Community of the Imaginary: the Italian Case" and "The Political Functions of Opera" are by Raffaella Bianchi; "Opera and the Construction of the Turkish as Modern Westerners" is by Bezen Balamir Coskun. Iconographic apparatus by Raffaella Bianchi.

[1] Craig Calhoun, "Foreword", in Victoria Johnson, ed., *Opera and Society from Monteverdi to Bourdieu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), xxv.

[2] For an epistemological distinction between music as a 'work' and music as an activity, see Nicholas Cook, *Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and "Music as Performance", in Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton, eds., *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 204-214.

[3] Alan Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Bloomington: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 209-28.

[4] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

while in Turkey opera was not successfully functional to the westernisation of national identity.

Our investigation does not focus on specific performances. Rather, it addresses the cultural context in which we believe the analysis of performances may be historically grounded. It does so by following the methodology elaborated by ethnomusicology, which enables the study of a performance, voice and body to be grounded in the spatiotemporal contingency of a given culture.

Constructing a Community of the Imaginary: the Italian Case

The debate on the construction of an imagined community in Italian opera has traditionally focused on textuality: scores and libretti are read in order to detect patriotic intentionality, possibly with the support of primary sources, usually letters of composers and librettists, or memoirs. Roger Parker has re-examined the reception of Verdi's patriotic choruses, calling for a re-assessment of their relevance in the nation-building process. According to him, there is no evidence of the importance of Verdi's choruses in fostering the feelings of the patriots who participated in the 1848 uprising as Verdi's music was performed neither in theatres nor on the barricades at the time.[5] Parker sees the construction of Verdi's myth as an operation of propaganda carried out by the new, weak Italian state in its search for powerful identitarian symbols. By contrast, Carlotta Sorba stresses Verdi's intentionality in using patriotic elements as a way of "pleasing the public", who responded positively to patriotic feelings.[6] The issue at stake is not whether or not Verdi can be associated with an emerging Italian identity, but the phases of his association with patriotism, with Verdi himself as the object of investigation.[7] However, in order to study the function of opera in building up the nation, the question should be shifted from the composer to the community of patriots. Was there an articulation of patriotic values or feelings in operatic performances which could drive people to rebel? Which tropes may have been influential in the construction of a patriotic imaginary? Are there evidences this construction has been influential?

Patriotic elements can be detected in Verdi's operas. The theme of the homeland is evident in the libretti of his works, particularly in those authored by Temistocle Solera – just think of the cry of the Scottish exiled in *Macbeth,* or the famous lines from *Attila* "Avrai tu l'universo,/ Resti l'Italia a me" (Take the universe, but leave Italy to me). The most quoted example is the chorus in *Nabucco* known in Italy as "Va' Pensiero", otherwise called the "Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves": "Oh mia Patria, sì bella e perduta" (Oh my homeland, so beautiful and lost). However, what did "Patria" mean in early nineteenth-century Italy?

[5] Roger Parker, "Verdi, Italian Opera and the Risorgimento: The Story So Far", seminar held at Modern Italian History Seminars, Institute of Historical Research University of London (October 17, 2007); see also, by the same author, *"Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati": the Verdian Patriotic Chorus in the 1840s* (Parma: Instituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, 1997), 83-97.

[6] Carlotta Sorba, "To Please the Public: Composers and Audiences in Nineteenth-Century Italy", *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36.4 (2006), 595-614.

[7] George Martin, "Verdi, Politics, and 'Va, Pensiero': the Scholars Squabble", *The Opera Quarterly* 21.1 (2005), 109-132.

Fig. 1: Silver Denarius from the Republican Age, courtesy of the Società Numismatica Italiana.

In the construction of the patriotic imaginary, a central place is given to the gendered definition of Italy. Classically, Italy has always been a woman, the nation in arms. One of its earliest representations is to be found on a silver *denarius* of the Republican age, coined in 90 BC. Italy is depicted as a woman sitting on a pile of shields, with a spear in her right hand; behind her there is another woman, Victory, placing a crown on her head. During the times of Antoninus Pius, Italy was represented on *sesterzium* coins with a sort of crown on her head. The crown, far from being the symbol of monarchy, is a circle of walls, another military attribute: the idea behind *Italia turrita* was that Italy was impregnable.[8] In medieval times, after the fall of the Roman Empire, Italy is still seen as a woman, but she is not accompanied by Victory any longer: from the Nation in arms, she has become a woman in chains, featuring as such in a wide literary tradition which goes back to Dante and Petrarch, but also includes intellectuals like Machiavelli and Campanella.[9] Therefore, the liberation of Italy from her chains during the Risorgimento can be seen as an act of chivalry.

The call to patriots to sacrifice themselves for the creation of the nation-state was deeply embedded and re-presented in opera: since patriots were called to sacrifice their lives to build the nation-state, the operatic imaginary offered heroes ready to sacrifice their lives for their ideals. Gender representation seems to be equally central to the construction of the imaginary community: the operatic stage of this period is populated with virgins sacrificing themselves, women whose purity is either preserved by the hero, or compromised by a foreigner.[10] According to Alberto Banti, the rhetoric of nineteenth-century European nationalism is elaborated around the metaphor of blood and parenthood: fighting for one's country meant fighting to preserve one's own descent from miscegenation.[11]

In Italian operatic culture, love and patriotic duties are intertwined, and the *Duties of Man* win over love.[12] Not only Solera's libretto for Verdi's *The Lombard at the First Crusade* but also Rossini's *Moses* present the opposing demands of personal love and patriotic duty. Gender and nation reinforce one another in the sense that nationalist ideology naturalizes constructions of masculinity and femininity: women reproduce the nation physically, while men protect and avenge it.[13] In this context, fighting to preserve the honour of women means to fight for the honour of the whole community. A good example is offered by *Ernani*, where the "horrid embrace" of an elderly guardian, from which the heroine Elvira cries to be rescued, is equated to Austrian domination: fighting the Habsburgs could be conceptualised as a matter of honour for a male subject. More explicitly,

[8] The authors are indebted to Mario Ferrandi of the Società Numismatica Italiana for this information.

[9] Marco Sciarrini, *"La Italia natione": il sentimento nazionale italiano in età moderna* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004).

[10] Emanuele Senici, *Landscape and Gender in Italian Opera: The Alpine Virgin from Bellini to Puccini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 22-25 and 93.

[11] Alberto M. Banti, *L'onore della nazione: identità sessuali e violenza nel nazionalismo europeo dal XVIII secolo alla grande guerra* (Torino: Einaudi, 2005), 112-198.

[12] *Duties of the Man* is the title of Giuseppe Mazzini's most famous political pamphlet, *Dei doveri dell'uomo* (Genova: Costa & Nolan, 1990).

[13] Julie Mostov, "Sexing the Nation/Desexing the Body: Politics of National Identity in the Former Yugoslavia", in Tamara Mayer, ed., *Gender Ironies of*

Norma, the popular Gaulois heroine in Bellini's eponymous opera, is punished because she has committed the highest betrayal: having intercourse with the enemy (the Roman proconsul Pollione) and procreating with him. Norma sacrifices herself because her love for Pollione has led her to prejudice the purity of her progeny. With *Norma*, operatic culture undergoes a radical change: women are transformed into embodiments of the Nation.

However important tropes might be for the construction of patriotic imagery, the way they were performed and the political context in which they operated were just as important. Significantly, *Norma* was first performed at La Scala in 1831, and the leading role was written for Giuditta Pasta, who was a well-known diva in Milan and clearly part of the community since she was born in nearby Saronno. She was also very active in the Risorgimento movement, so much so that she offered her house to the Provisional Government after the Five Days Uprising, supplied financial support to the patriots in exile, and sang for them in Switzerland on Mazzini's request.[14] One wonders what kind of intentional or unintentional agency her body was communicating through stage performance. According to Susan Rutherford, what distinguished Pasta from other singers was the manner in which she embodied voice with a dignity and grace which distinguished her from the more naturalistic style of her younger rival Maria Malibran.[15]

Pasta's pictures in the role of Norma, wearing a costume with a laurel wreath – or with a crown – are strikingly similar to the representation of Italy on Roman coins. Norma is also a sort of Italian Marianne, an icon Italian patriots recognized because they were familiar with the ideas and images of the French revolution. As an allegory, Marianne is ambivalent: on the one hand her image underlies the maternal qualities of the Nation, on the other, with one uncovered breast, she has a strong erotic appeal. But Giuditta Pasta's Norma did not share such ambivalence. Her dignified performing style, as well as her irreprehensible moral conduct in her social and personal life bear testimony to a radical change in the morality and costumes of women singers. One may speculate whether this had to do with their new

Fig. 2: Giuditta Pasta as Norma, courtesy of Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Bertarelli, Milan.

Nationalism (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 89.

[14] For a biographical account of the life of Giuditta Pasta see Giorgio Appolonia, *Giuditta Pasta, gloria del belcanto* (Turin: EDA, 2000). For a portrait of Giuditta Pasta in the context of the Milanese operatic scene see Giuseppe Barigazzi, *La Scala racconta* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1991).

[15] Susan Rutherford, "La Cantante Delle Passioni: Giuditta Pasta and the Idea of Operatic Performance", *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2.19 (2007), 107-138.

centrality in operatic performance accompanied by new patriotic fervour: embodying the Nation entailed personal responsibilities.[16]

After Pasta, the rising star Maria Malibran took the role of Norma in 1834 and this aroused much debate, reported by local magazines and newspapers, which divided themselves on opposite fronts.[17] This must be seen in the context of a cultural struggle for hegemony between supporters of the Austrian government and the progressive bloc of patriots. Evidence can be found in the *Memoirs* of patriot Massimo D'Azeglio (1867), who wrote that Austrians ruled Milan through La Scala and that he could not help but being fascinated by Malibran, despite her pro-Habsburg political leanings. A soprano embodying the nation was a central theme of opera seria, yet it is evident also in *Il Colonnello* (1835), a comic opera by Ricci and Ferretti, and in the most famous comic opera by Donizetti, *La Fille du Régiment* (1840), which revealed a Francophile political inclination.[18] These operatic performances engaged with the patriotic construction of Italy, and with contemporary political issues such as the alliance with France, re-working old myths to suit the new political climate. The redemptive role attributed to women since Dante's times is extended to music in the following words by Mazzini: "Music (like woman) has in it so much of the sacredness of natural purity, and such promise of the future…. It might be that a higher ministry of human regeneration is reserved for Music (as for woman) than is generally believed".[19] Propaganda through the arts was a self-conscious process, theorised by Mazzini himself: his *Filosofia della Musica* gives music the function of inspiring young generations of patriots. He sees music as the most powerful of the arts thanks to its very strong emotional potential: the utterance of patriotism.[20]

Opera and the Construction of the Turkish as Modern Westerners

The rise of opera at the end of the sixteenth century coincided with an increase of exchanges among peoples and the travel of musical sounds across borders. Opera grew out of the interaction between many different musical practices which reflected the representation of new peoples and new relationships within early modern Europe. The first non-Western sounds in opera coincided with the appearance of Turkish musical elements in Western European music by the end of the 1600s: for Europeans, Turkish music was exotic and Turks were represented as the unquestionably foreign Other. The longevity of the Ottoman Empire and its proximity to Europe resulted in a European fascination with everything Turkish. [21]

Particularly after the Ottomans' second siege of Vienna in 1683, the character of 'the Turk' became popular in European operas where it was fashionable to include the exotic stereotypes of harems, strong coffee, hookahs and onion-shaped hats.

[16] See John Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 68-70.

[17] Rutherford, "La Cantante delle Passioni", 123-136.

[18] Simone Izzo, "Comedy between Two Revolutions: Opera Buffa and the Risorgimento, 1831-1848", *The Journal of Musicology* 21.1 (2004), 121-174.

[19] Giuseppe Mazzini, *Philosophy of Music: Envisioning a Social Opera* (Lewiston and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 2004), 39.

[20] Carlotta Sorba, " 'Comunicare con il populo': Novel, Drama, and Music in Mazzini's Work", in C.A. Bayly and E.F. Biagini, *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism , 1830-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 75-92.

[21] Timothy D. Taylor, "Peopling the Stage: Opera, Otherness and New Musical Representations in the Eighteenth Century", *Cultural Critique* 1 (1997), 55-88.

European composers often wrote operas featuring harems and Turkish armies with strong percussion sections with which they imitated the powerful sound of Ottoman mehter music. One of the earliest known examples of a 'Turkish' opera is *The Happy Captive,* a three-act English comic opera composed by Lewis Theobald and John Ernest Galliard in 1741. This is also one of the earliest examples of exoticism in operas prior to 1750. Nearly thirty operas were written about the life of Suleyman I the Magnificent between 1753 and 1799 alone.[22]

Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* (1782) is perhaps the most famous among Turkish-style operas, in which virtuous women are rescued from a harem and from sinister Turks. The plot of *The Abduction from the Seraglio* revolves around the efforts of two Spanish men to rescue two European women from the clutches of Selim Pasha, a Turkish nobleman, who is the personification of the noble savage. Besides the character of Selim, Mozart introduces another Turkish character, Osmin, who is an object of ridicule for his reluctance to drink wine due to his Muslim faith. According to Taylor, in *The Abduction* Mozart highlighted the triumph of the Enlightenment values of humanity and rationality, which are shown as capable of influencing non-Europeans as evidenced by Selim Pasha, who is rehabilitated in the end.[23] Besides *The Abduction,* there are over a dozen operas centred on the rescue of the European damsel from the clutches of Turks. Turkish characters are often portrayed as noble savages in Western operas, and given the names of Ottoman Sultans like Selim, Osmin and Suleyman. The interest of these operas in things Turkish was more than a fad, but the use of Turkish music was still a way to present the Turks to the public eye as savages and villains.

Fig. 3: Nineteenth-century Turkish costume, courtesy of Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Milan.

If we move to Turkey, we come across a different stereotype of the Turk, who is generally represented as a man who reads the Koran and does not go to the opera.[24] In order to change the image of the Turk as the 'pre-modern' other of 'modern' Western civilization, a modernization (westernization) project was initiated after the second half of the nineteenth century. Especially after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, cultural policies were aimed at constructing a modern cultural identity for the Turkish people, as well as a lifestyle based on Western culture and values. Within this context, the introduction of opera was seen as part and parcel of the westernization program.

The introduction of Western music coincided with the recognition by Ottoman rulers of European superiority in world affairs. Although the Ottoman Empire had been familiar with European culture and music for a long time, the turning point which brought about the adoption of Western

[22] Taylor, "Peopling the Stage", 58; see also Donald Jay Grout, *A Short History of Opera* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2003).

[23] Taylor, "Peopling the Stage", 75.

[24] Zafer Senocak, *Atlas des Tropisschen Deutschlands* (Berlin: Babel Verlag, 1993).

music by Ottomans was the establishment of military bands to replace janissary bands of musicians. In 1831 Giuseppe Donizetti was invited to Istanbul by Sultan Mahmoud II to set up a military band, and to teach in the Imperial School of Music established by the Sultan himself. Donizetti's efforts paved the way for an appreciation of Western classical music among the Ottoman elite. Parallel to this development, opera became a favourite form of theatre in nineteenth-century Istanbul. During this period, Istanbul had become one of a handful of opera capitals in Europe. It is important to note that Verdi's *Il Trovatore* was performed in Istanbul in 1846, i.e. before it was staged in Paris. All these productions were performed by artists from abroad, and most opera-goers in the city were from its Levantine and minority communities.[25] Italian troupes gave public performances not only in Istanbul, but also in Izmir and Thessaloniki, and opera productions and concerts were also held at the palace theatres. Sultan Abdulhamid II was particularly fond of opera and took great pleasure in attending operas at the theatre in Yildiz Palace, where he appointed Italian musician Arturo Stravolo as director of the opera house.

[25] Metin And, "Opera in Turkey", <http://www.turkishculture.org/pages.php?ParentID=8&ID=93>, 20 February 2009.

National opera in Turkey developed only after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk launched far-reaching cultural reforms. Atatürk attached great importance to music – as he did to all the arts – and made considerable investments in classical forms of Western music and opera. He announced the music reform in 1934 during the opening ceremony of the Turkish Parliament: with the slogan "new society, new music", Atatürk underlined his position in favour of Western musical forms, including opera. Following his speech, solo performances of *alla turca* music were banned on the radio, and *alla turca* music was removed from national curricula.[26] A municipal Conservatory of Music was founded in Istanbul, and the Republic founded and financed a state conservatory in Ankara, as well as a National Opera, two symphony orchestras, and a number of smaller schools and groups. Under Atatürk's guidance, talented young people were sent to Europe for professional musical training: opera, in particular, was considered the highest form of music, and the development of opera was prioritised by the state, so much so that Turkish composers were encouraged to work on Turkish operas.

[26] For the following account of the history of Turkish opera see Gőnűl Paçacı, "Cumhuriyetin Sesli Serüveni (The Republic's Musical Adventure)", in Gőnűl Paçacı, ed., *Cumhuriyet'in Sesleri* (*Republic's Voices)*, (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1999), 10-29.

The first Turkish opera, *Özsoy*, composed by Ahmet Adnan Saygun, premiered in 1934, coinciding with the Iranian Shah's visit to Turkey. This visit was particularly important for Atatürk since Shah Reza saw Turkish modernization as an example of his own modernization project for Iran. Not surprisingly, the plot of *Özsoy* was about the common roots of the Iranian and Turkish peoples and consisted of elements of Turkish and Iranian mythologies. Moreover, Atatürk commissioned Munir Hayri Egeli to write libretti on three storylines titled *A Ulku Yolu* (Path of Idealism),

Bayonder (The Leader) and *Taşbebek* (The Doll). These libretti were then given to Turkey's leading composers, Ulvi Cemal Erkin, Necil Kazim Akses and Ahmet Adnan Saygun, to be set to music.

Taşbebek, the second Turkish opera commissioned by Atatürk, was about the creation of a new nation and the merits of the Republican regime. Both *Özsoy* and *Taşbebek* contain references to Turkish identity and nationalism, which was the specific aim of the use of Turkish plots within the general project of using opera as a factor of modernization. Furhermore, both *alla turca* and Western music were performed contextually with the introduction of the Latin alphabet, which was to be one of the most significant indicators of Turkish disconnection from the Arab- and Farsi-speaking world and a move toward westernization. The differences between Eastern and Western music allowed Atatürk to emphasize the differences between Arabian lethargy and Western dynamism: according to him only Western forms of music could reflect the revolutionary dynamics of the new Turkish society.

Ismet Inönü, Turkey's second president, and Hasan Ali Yücel, minister of culture and education, followed Atatürk's path as pioneers of Turkish national opera. German composer Paul Hindemith came to Turkey to found the State Conservatory in 1935, while a German opera and theatre director, Karl Ebert, set up departments of opera and theatre in the Conservatory of Music as well as founding an apprentice theatre where opera and drama students could appear in public performances. The first opera to be performed was Mozart's one-act *Bastien and Bastienne*. This was followed by Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* and *Tosca,* and Beethoven's *Fidelio* in 1940, 1941 and 1942 respectively. With the performance of *Madame Butterfly*, Ankara theatre-goers began to develop an ardent interest in opera. The Exhibition Hall in Ankara was converted into a theatre and opera building in 1947-48. Known as the "Bűyűk Tiyatro", or Great Theatre, it opened on April 2, 1948 with a performance of *Kerem*, an opera by Ahmet Adnan Saygun. A special law, in 1949, sanctioned the opening of the Ankara State Opera and Ballet.[27] Two of Atatürk's great dreams were thus realized.

[27] Elvin Ilyasoğlu, "Yirminci Yüzyılda Evrensel Türk Müziği (Twentieth Century Turkish Music)", in Gönül Paçacı, ed., *Cumhuriyet'in Sesleri* (*Republic's Voices)* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1999), 70-87.

Holding the Community Together

According to Christopher Small, the study of music as an activity must take into account a wide range of elements related to the place where music is performed, including its physical, relational, and social elements.[28] Opera first developed in the mundane context of the Italian Court theatres, and fairly soon became a civic entertainment with the construction of proper buildings devoted to its performance. In 1637 the first public opera house, San Cassiano, opened in Venice. This date marks a watershed in

[28] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meaning of Performing and Listening* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998); see also Massimo Mila, *Breve Storia della Musica* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), 107-130.

the reception of opera: from the restricted environment of courts to the entrepreneurial establishment run by the management of famous impresarios. During the nineteenth century, opera became a popular entertainment open to a wide public across the Peninsula, and was the centre of city life in Italian urban contexts.[29]

As a social activity, music can foster the sense of belonging to a community, albeit an imagined one, like the Italian nation during the Risorgimento. The sense of belonging was highlighted by an aesthetic element: the chorus. Philip Gossett recalls how Mazzini wished for wider use of the chorus in opera, since it suggested the possibility of enhancing the idea of a 'choral' community: a collective individuality. Among the many developments in Italian opera in the first half of the nineteenth century, "when Rossini was hailed the 'Napoleon of music' and the Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed in 1861 … none is so culturally important as the change in the conception of the chorus".[30]

It is significant that the sense of belonging to a community was stressed in the only locus available for the community to elaborate a shared identity. Opera houses were often the only place in a city where people could meet freely. For instance, in Milan under the Austrian domination no public meetings were allowed, and La Scala opera house became the main place for socialising. Indeed, opera houses had an important function as they provided a space where community could be experienced; they were the locus of the public sphere where boundaries among individuals could be overcome. The peculiar cultural institution of the Italian opera house provided a stage for collective meetings and collective demonstrations of the existence of an Italian imagined community. In John Rosselli's opinion, cultural unity in Italy was achieved through cultural practices such as opera going, at a time when Italy was such a diverse conglomeration of peoples and states that Metternich could famously define it as nothing more than a "geographical expression".[31]

Transposed to another time and place, the role of opera in the constitution of national identity works in quite a different way. In twentieth-century Turkey, national opera houses opened in major cities, tickets for performances were subsidised and the Turkish State Radio and Television broadcast daily programs. Yet, in spite of all these efforts to promote it among the public, operatic culture remained a trademark of the Ankara bourgeoisie and it was not internalised by Turkish society as a whole. In a very short time, popular culture superseded opera in the popular imagery. Eventually the state budget allocated for the National Opera and Ballet was reduced year by year, which led to a decrease in the number of performances. As a final stroke, in 2006 the Turkish Parliament passed an Act to demolish the Atatürk Culture Centre in Istanbul in order to build a new cultural centre.

[29] See Fabrizio Dorsi and Giuseppe Rausa, *Storia dell'opera italiana* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori Editore, 2000), 1-31; John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi: the Role of the Impresario*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Luciano Bianconi, *Il Teatro d'Opera in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993), 14-16; and Carlotta Sorba, *Teatri: l'Italia del Melodramma nell'età del Risorgimento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001), 21-33.

[30] Philip Gosset, "Becoming a Citizen: the Chorus in 'Risorgimento' Opera", *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2.1 (1990), 41-64.

[31] Cit. in Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy*, 2; see also Bruno Spaepen, "'Governare per mezzo della Scala': l'Austria e il teatro d'opera a Milano", *Contemporanea* 4.4 (2003), 593-620.

Republican reforms in Turkey aimed at radical changes in legislation, bureaucracy and state structure as well as at less institutional but extremely pervasive innovations like the imposition of a particular kind of music and changes in the daily lives of ordinary Turks. It is understandable that this kind of reform would eventually trigger a period of disagreement and tension. After the transition to multi-party politics in 1946, a struggle for power took place over national cultural values. From the 1950s onwards a wave of migrants poured in from the countryside to settle in squatter towns on the peripheries of the big cities. This experience of urban liminality, accompanied by severe economic problems endured by large sections of the Turkish population, created a peripheral culture identified as the culture of arabesque, which was to assume central importance in the last decade of the century.[32]

After the 1980s a new idea of national culture developed: the so-called Turk Islam Synthesis, in which Islam played a fundamental role. As pointed out by Nilűfer Gőle, this period has marked the resurgence of a culture that is autonomous from the state.[33] This 'other' Turkey made its declaration of independence from the Kemalist state elite and introduced its distinct cultural identity as an alternative to the westernized one that had previously been imposed. A striking illustration of the resurgence of popular culture in Turkey is the rise, after the end of the 1980s, of the formerly repressed arabesque culture, this time with the support of the new ruling elite which identified itself within the context of the Turk Islam Synthesis culture. With a drastic turn, Turkish State Television began to look at arabesque from a less critical angle, and arabesque performances started to reappear on Turkish State Television. During this time, the forms of Western classical music such as opera almost lost their priority place in Turkish television and radio. After the 1980s the Kemalist state elite was no longer considered as the exclusive source of modernity Turkey. In spite of its effort to inject Western culture into Turkish society, the Kemalist elite had remained alienated from the majority of Turkish society.

[32] Martin Stokes, *The Arabesque Debate. Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[33] Nilűfer Gőle, "Liberal Yanılgı (Liberal Complacencies)", *Tűrkiye Gűnlűğű (Turkey Diaries)* 24 (1993).

The Political Functions of Opera

The possibility of identifying with operatic performance has been completely different for Italian and Turkish audiences. Nineteenth century Italian opera presents tropes of patriotic identification, while confirming the traditional presentation of Turks as the Other. According to Bruno Nettl, if music is considered as the expression of an identity it can play a deep political role by negotiating relations between unequals; it may work as a tool either in the hands of a dominant group to reinforce its hegemony, or in those of a dominated population to fight back.[34] In nineteenth-century Italy opera was a site for the utterance of patriotic feelings, and

[34] Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology*, 256.

opera houses had the civic function of creating a public sphere. In Gramscian terms, opera was important for the 'articulation' of national identity in both meanings of the term: as expression (of patriotic feelings) and as joining together (civil society).

The aim of this article has been to demostrate that opera does not retain everywhere the same political function in relation to national identity. The role of opera in the articulation of patriotic feelings has not been transported successfully to Turkey, despite the efforts of the national elites to promote a new identity associated with the West. Its function in relation to national identity did not travel along with scores, composers and singers. This shows not only that musical values change according to time and space, but that political functions are also culturally specific: different positionings affect the ways cultures are articulated and become functional.[35]

[35] Cook, *Music*, 17.

The national symbols of high culture, namely opera houses and international concert halls, remained marks of high status in Turkey and never served the purpose of constructing and disseminating a sense of belonging as happened with the Italian community. According to Anthony Smith, where there is no common set of symbols it is vital to select multiple symbols that encourage diverse groups' allegiances to a national project. He claims that the specificity of ethnic collectivities is to be found in the totality of their symbology; this was the case with the construction of the operatic Italian imaginary, out of a re-working and combination of Hellenic-Roman tropes and Catholic imagery.[36]

[36] Anthony Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1998).

A national cultural hegemony can be achieved if it is able to offer credible points of identification. In spite of efforts by the state elite to promote the appreciation of opera among Turkish society, opera here has remained one of the eccentricities of the bourgeoisie. This image was underlined through popular sitcoms, musical comedies and cartoons in the 1960s and 70s. For example, the most popular Turkish sitcom, *Kaynanalar* (Mothers-in-Law), is based on the story of two families from different cultural backgrounds. Most of the running gags are about the eccentricity of the mother of the bourgeois family, who is a retired opera singer. In comparison with the Italian case, where opera played a role in creating a sense of belonging, in Turkey opera houses served only to highlight the lines dividing the progressive Kemalist elite from other sections of Turkish society.

Therefore, even if a cultural practice is exportable, its political function does not always travel unimpaired across borders, and it probably does not even travel across time, since opera does not play the same function in contemporary Italy as it used to in nineteenth-century pre-unitarian states. Further studies on the political function of performing opera in diverse historical and social contexts will contribute to an understanding

of the cultural history of nation-building, while providing deeper insights into the study of the drives behind operatic performances. More specific functions could be investigated in order to articulate a methodology of enquiry into the cultural history of opera, which should become more interdisciplinary as well as intercultural.

Manuela Coppola

"Soun de Abeng fi Nanny": Music and Resistance in Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry

I want to make words
music
move beyond language
into sound.
(Jean 'Binta' Breeze, "The Garden Path")

By claiming the importance of what he defined "nation language", the language closely connected to the African experience in the Caribbean, Barbadian poet and critic Edward Kamau Brathwaite individuated its peculiarity in its *sound*: "English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English". While he famously affirmed that "the hurricane does not roar in pentameters", Brathwaite stressed the distinct quality of a Caribbean verse which ignores the pentameter of the imposed British colonial tradition so as to give voice to the sounds of its own cultural experience.[1] Although he lamented that the relation between music and language structures went largely unrecognized, recent theoretical elaborations have paid increasing attention to the interconnections of music and poetry.

The Caribbean has been described in musical terms as 'fugal', as a culturally polyphonic society in which the dissonant melodies of loss and exile "are repeated over and over again in different keys and at different intervals".[2] Yet, music is obviously much more than a mere metaphor, providing on the contrary a complex methodological approach to the exploration of Caribbean literary imagination. Following Martinican thinker and writer Edouard Glissant's elaboration of a rhizomatic identity where multiple roots proliferate and intersect, the Caribbean cultural heritage appears as a continuum of languages and histories. In his conceptualization of the Caribbean as an "island which 'repeats' itself", Antonio Benitez-Rojo has associated this unpredictable movement with "the unforeseen relation between a dance movement and the baroque spiral of a colonial railing".[3] However, while the spiral movement suggested by Benitez-Rojo implies the recognition of a moment of origin, the multiple roots of Caribbean culture and identities contradict this assertion by challenging the notion of a supposed authenticity which would produce monolingual and monocultural identities. In this context, far from being the sterile affirmation of sameness, repetition becomes an enriching process following a non linear movement, a *Détour*, to borrow Glissant's terminology. Looking into the possibility of a *Retour*, the Martinican writer suggests that a *Détour* is a productive strategy only if nourished by a *Retour* which, privileging the "rhizomatous thinking" of multiple origins

[1] Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice. The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon, 1984), 13 and 8.

[2] Marlene NourbeSe Philip, "Fugues, Fragments and Fissures – A Work in Progress", *Anthurium* 3.2 (2005), <http://anthurium.miami.edu/volume_3/issue_2/philip-fugues.htm>, 23 July 2009.

[3] Antonio Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 4.

and relations, is "not a return to the longing for origins … but a return to the point of entanglement".[4]

If Glissant theorizes creolization in terms of diffractions and dispersal, rather than as a centring, Benitez Rojo sees the process of cultural interaction in the Caribbean as a "ray of light within a prism", involving "phenomena of inflection, refraction, and decomposition".[5] In such a landscape, the unpredictability of creolization produced what Glissant theorized as 'the logic of the trace', a non-linear process opposed to the false universality of deadly systems of thought.[6] In this respect, what allowed for the creation of a new, syncretic culture, was the power of memory, the power to *trace back* fragments of African culture and combine them with European and Indian elements. Tracing back the fragments, however, does not result in a simple retrieval of harmony and wholeness. As Derek Walcott has brilliantly illustrated, this reassemblage becomes the figure of an endless translation which, through the Antillean fragments of "epic memory", has to be assembled, recomposed and performed again and again.[7]

This cultural process can be conceived as the repetition of the same melody through the centuries, each time in a different key, with infinite possible variations disclosing its creative potential. In musical terms, Caribbean identities are thus conceptualized as fugues, as a contrapuntal combination of elements endlessly repeating, recalling and evoking each other while producing unpredictable variations. As Marlene NourbeSe Philip has argued describing herself as "witness, recorder, griot, poet and teller of tales", her role is "similar to the back up singer, echoing the word, but perhaps glossing it in another way".[8] Although NourbeSe Philip's identification with the back up singer might be a debatable position, the glossing or, more appropriately, the *reverberation* of the word in different tonalities can provide a fitting image to define this peculiar process of repetition. Indeed, by using a number of disparate cultural sources in a sort of cut'n'mix process, Caribbean women poets have *dubbed* those sources in a way which closely resembles dub music's practice of adding words to a musical accompaniment.

Borrowing Dick Hebdige's notion of versioning in dance hall reggae, which involves the creation of endless 'versions' of a musical text, Evelyn O'Callaghan applies this musical practice to women's writing. The dynamic process of reinterpreting an original recording and disseminating a number of different versions clearly undermines and subverts the notion of a single, stable, authoritative text, be it musical or literary: in this "*process* of altering, supplementing, breaking, echoing, mocking and playing with that original", different versions proliferate, creating something which is entirely new despite the persistence of recognizably – albeit modified – 'original' elements. O'Callaghan thus suggests a theoretical approach to Caribbean women's writing which addresses it as

[4] Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. by M. Dash (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 26. In "Des tours de Babel", Jacques Derrida deconstructs the desire for linguistic uniformity by articulating the act of translation as a necessary *détour*, a deviation towards something other; "Des Tours de Babel", in J. F. Graham, ed., *Difference in Translation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 165-248.

[5] Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 21.

[6] Edouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 14.

[7] Derek Walcott, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory", in *What the Twilight Says* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 69.

[8] NourbeSe Philip, "Fugues, Fragments and Fissures", n. p.

> a kind of remix or dub version which utilizes elements of the 'master trope' of Caribbean literary discourse (combining, stretching, modifying them in new ways); announces a gendered perspective; adds individual styles of 'talk over'; enhances or omits tracks depending on desired effect; and generally alters by recontextualization to create a unique literary entity.[9]

Specifically, this approach proves particularly appropriate for a discussion of women poets as diverse as Lorna Goodison, Grace Nichols, NourbeSe Philip and Jean 'Binta' Breeze. As they reworked musical forms from calypso to the quadrille, from mento to European folk songs, these women poets have articulated music as a form of performative collective memory, as the productive site of the transmission and critical revision of their cultural history and identity.

Sounds with a difference

The publication of Kamau Brathwaite's trilogy, *The Arrivants* (1973), marked an important breakthrough in the way Caribbean poetry was conceived. By bringing into his poetry and performances the rhythms of African and West Indian drumming and of jazz, Brathwaite constituted the major inspiration for younger generations who, following the trail of his performative innovations, shared and developed his concern for "getting poetry off the page – not only of realizing it in a reading, but of conceiving poetry as a form of vocal performance, rather than as a form of inscription".[10] Not only did Brathwaite prove that the 'nation language' was as capable of complex and expressive richness and as worthy of publication as Standard English, but he also explored on the page and, most significantly, *on the stage*, the Caribbean rhythmic and formal resources which constituted a vital and unquestionable contribution to poetic forms, by expanding the poetic possibilities of specifically Caribbean musical performances like calypso and steel pan music.[11]

In reclaiming the importance of performativity in the construction of Caribbean poetic identities, the crucial role played by the BBC "Caribbean Voices" radio programme should not be underestimated.[12] Laurence Breiner aptly suggests that "much West Indian poetry during the 1950s was heard rather than seen",[13] tracing to that period the beginning of the exciting new developments of Caribbean poetry stemming from the powerful interplay of voice and print. A fundamental contribution was also given by Jamaican poet Louise Bennett, the first woman to use the sounds and patterns of Caribbean popular music for her poetry performance in the late Forties. Although her use of creole was highly controversial, and despite the fact that she had not been considered a 'proper' poet until the critical recognition of Mervyn Morris in the 1960s, she is now acknowledged for her innovative use of creole.[14] This marks the proximity of Bennett's

[9] Evelyn O'Callaghan, *Woman Version. Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 11.

[10] Laurence Breiner, *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 185. Brathwaite's concern is also testified by the fact that *The Arrivants* was first published and then issued as a set of LPs, leading the way for the audio recordings issued by dub poets.

[11] Calypso and steel pan are African-derived musical forms traditionally associated with Carnival in Trinidad. Calypsos are typically played by steel bands accompanying Carnival street dancing. The origin of calypso can be traced back to West African worksongs; the steel pan originates from the African drumming tradition.

[12] The "Caribbean Voices" programme, broadcast between 1943 and 1958, acted as a launching pad for writers such as Derek Walcott, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul and many others.

[13] Breiner, *An Introduction*, 186.

[14] Mervin Morris, "On Reading Louise Bennett, Seriously" (1963), in Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* (London: Routledge, 1996), 194-97.

poetry to a wide range of oral sources from proverbs to songs which are not simply incorporated in her texts, but constitute the voice through which she speaks and performs her poems. In fact, while she borrows the colloquial tone of social comment and gossip, she powerfully expresses and preserves Caribbean cultural traditions in a way which closely resembles the sharp social and political commentary of calypsonians, as she does in her famous "Colonization in Reverse", for instance, where she ironically address the 'back to Africa' movement. Yet, although she has often been compared to calypsonians like Mighty Sparrow, as De Caires Narain points out, this comparison "elides the difference which gender makes to their use of oral forms, producing very different kinds of poetic/performative identities".[15] In fact, Bennett appropriates the traditionally male-dominated public sphere by introducing a female voice challenging the misogynist attitude of calypso and its often explicit sexual overtones. Moreover, while calypso performances stage an unquestionably male and often nationalist subjectivity, by contrast Bennett's performative style produced powerful female subjectivities, celebrating women's hidden power and resilience.[16]

Nonetheless, calypso provided a productive model for later generations of poets who realized the importance of directly addressing current issues for their audience. The emergence of a new generation of Caribbean poets in the black and feminist activist atmosphere of the 70s and 80s England generated a convergence of the investigation of the oral dimension of poetry with an urge to address political and gender issues. Indeed, by borrowing its style and structure, poets like Breeze, NourbeSe Philip and Nichols, among others, developed a new sense of community recuperating the calypso function as social and political commentary from a gender perspective.

The use of creole, political commitment and, in particular, the increasing use of technology signaled a kind of continuity with the calypso audience even in a diasporic context. The exploration of the new possibilities opened up by the use of technology accompanied and contributed to the widespread adaptation of musical forms. In fact, sound amplification and synthesizers did for poetry what the radio did for calypso in the 1930s and 1940s: since the recourse to electronic media provided a way to negotiate the financial and practical constraints of publication, poets could reach a wider audience and popularize their work through the sound systems. Moreover, technology also allowed the re-creation of a community of listeners: poets could thus express a sense of community by restoring through performance the continuum between audience and performer which establishes what Brathwaite defined as the "total expression" of nation language.[17]

The combination of speech and music was transposed in 'dub poetry', a body of poetry "which is written to be performed to the same kind of musical accompaniment as that used by deejays".[18] However, as it stemmed

[15] Denise de Caires Narain, *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry. Making Style* (London: Routledge, 2002), 75.

[16] See for example "Jamaica Oman" "Jamaica oman, cunny, sah!/ Is how them jinnal so ?/ Look how long dem liberated/ An de man dem never know!" [Jamaican women are so clever!/ How is it that they are so cunning?/ Just think how long they've been liberated/ And the men didn't even know!]. Louise Bennett, *Selected Poems* (Kingston: Sangster's, 1982), 21. Here and afterwards, the working versions in Standard English are mine.

[17] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, 18.

[18] Carolyn Cooper and Hubert Devonish, "A Tale of Two States: Language, Lit/orature and the Two Jamaicas", in Stewart Brown, ed., *The Pressures of the Text. Orality, Texts and the Telling of Tales* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1995), 70.

from a male musical tradition where both the calypsonian and the deejay performed respectively the role of political commentator and of sound manipulator, dub was essentially a male-dominated field. It is significant that Breeze, the first female dub poet, soon distanced herself from dub, publicly exposing the limits and constraints of its male chauvinism and gender stereotypes. In the outline of what she defined as "women's domestic dub", Breeze combined political commitment and the denunciation of women's social and economic marginalization.[19] While in "Aid Travels with the Bomb" she denounces the ongoing effects of colonialism and sharply contests the economic and cultural aspects of neocolonialism, in "Riddym Ravings" she stages the alienation of a woman who hears the radio "eena her head":

> an de D.J. fly up eena mi head
> mi hear im a play seh
>
> *Eh, Eh,*
> *no feel no way*
> *town is a play dat ah really kean stay*
> *dem kudda – ribbit mi han*
> *eh – ribbit mi toe*
> *mi waan go a country go look mango.*[20]
>
> [And the DJ flew up into my head/ I heard him play, say:/ *Eh, Eh/ No feel no way/ town is a place that I really can't stay/ they cut up – bind up my hand/ Eh, bind up my toe/ I want to go to the country, go look at the mango*]

Through a powerful performance conveyed by figurative language, repetitions and skillful paralinguistic features revealing the poet's dramatic skills, the song trapped in the woman's head, sung in a reggae rhythm, punctuates the poem like a refrain. In some recordings the refrain is accompanied by a reggae backing, while the final lines ("Murther/ Pull up Missa Operator") are emphasized by the use of electronic sounds suggesting the electronic shock treatment the woman undergoes. Claiming a different space for women, Breeze reconfigures the public space of poetic performance in a gendered perspective through the empowering tools of technology and language.

In keeping with the Carnival tradition of the reversal of power structures and hierarchies, calypsonians as well as female poets adopted double entendre, punning, word play and code-switching, testifying to the subversive potentialities of language. While Nichols used creole to produce powerful female subjectivities, from Caribbean women warriors to diasporic "fat black women" reclaiming their bodies, NourbeSe Philip has equally advocated for a radical reconfiguration and re-possession of female bodies in order to resist the gaps and erasures in their representation.[21] Although she exposes the limiting misogynist assumptions of traditional calypso, NourbeSe Philip strategically appropriates the genre transforming it into

[19] Jean 'Binta' Breeze, "Can a Dub Poet Be a Woman?", in Donnell and Lawson Welsh, eds., *The Routledge Reader*. For the notion of "domestic dub" see Jenny Sharpe, "Dub and Difference: A Conversation with Jean 'Binta' Breeze", *Callaloo* 26.3 (2003), 612.

[20] Jean 'Binta' Breeze, "Riddym Ravings (The Madwoman's Poem)", *Spring Cleaning* (London: Virago, 1992), 19.

[21] See for instance Grace Nichols, *i is a long memoried woman* (London: Karnak House, 1983) and *The Fat Black Women's Poems* (London: Virago, 1984). In her discussion of the famous calypso "Jean and Dinah", NourbeSe Philip suggests that Mighty Sparrow reasserts his power against the Yankees at the expense of women's bodies.

an empowering space of female intervention. Celebrated for its capacity to resist amnesia and forgetting, calypso becomes one of the many rhythms by which Caribbean women poets remember.

'Versioning' history: music and spirit possessions

The Africans arrived with nothing but their bodies in a space where violent contact between cultures subsequently turned into a creative and unpredictable flux of relation, exchange, and transformation. While the European colonizers had the comfort and arrogance of their weapons, their languages, their cultural identities, the African slaves could not rely on such luxuries. Deprived of anything which could provide a sense of cultural heritage and preserve a sense of identity, the 'naked migrant', as Glissant terms it, had lost his/her culture and language on the slaveship. As NourbeSe Philip has powerfully suggested:

> Unlike all other arrivals before or since, when the African comes to the New World, she comes with nothing. But the body. Her body. *The* body – repository and source of everything needed to survive in any but the barest sense. Body memory bodymemory. The African body.[22]

If the African arrived in the New World with her body as her only resource, that body becomes the most powerful site of confrontation, the expression of a culture, and the assertion of resistance. The initial condition of absolute deprivation thus turns into a means of radical resistance. While runaway slaves took their bodies completely outside the reach of the white European by hiding on the mountains, the slaves on the plantation used dance to resist and remember:

> Finally, when the memory becomes susceptible to time, distance and the imagination, music is one of the 'sign-posts' that allows us to reconstruct our past out of the splintered collections in the recesses of our *minds and bodies*. Because, like the mind, the body also remembers through movement and dance.[23]

By contrast, while dance as a syncretic practice combining African and European elements often expressed forms of struggle through the creation of new cultural and musical forms, refusal to dance could similarly mark resistance. Inspired by Isaac Cruikshank's 1792 etching representing the brutal punishment on a slaveship of a young African slave who refused the captain's order to dance, composer Shirley Thompson combines different musical languages to give voice to the woman's resistance. A composition for soprano, spoken word artist, solo cello and orchestra, "The Woman who Refused to Dance" thus articulates the woman's struggle for her right to remain still, claiming the full possession of her body.[24]

[22] Marlene NourbeSe Philip, *A Genealogy of Resistance and Other Essays* (Toronto: The Mercury Press, 1997), 91.

[23] Patricia J. Saunders, "Introduction. Mapping the Roots/Routes of Calypso in Caribbean Literary and Cultural Traditions", in Sandra Pouchet Paquet, Patricia J. Saunders and Stephen Stuempfle, eds., *Music, Memory, Resistance. Calypso and the Caribbean Literary Imagination* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2007), xx. Emphasis added.

[24] Shirley Thompson, "The Woman Who Refused to Dance", *Moving Worlds* 7.2 (2007); an audio file of this piece can be found in the **Multimedia** section. See also <http://slavetrade.parliament.uk/slavetrade>, 8 February 2010.

Fig 1: Isaac Cruikshank, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade*, etching, 1792.

For the slaves music constituted a means of communication and ineffable resistance. The traces of that musical revolt are still visible or, as Gilroy argues, *audible* today: "The irrepressible rhythms of the once forbidden drum are often still audible in their work. Its characteristic syncopations still animate the basic desires – to be free and to be oneself – that are revealed in this counterculture's unique conjunction of body and music".[25] Music thus constitutes the productive site of the transmission of knowledge and history while, at the same time, performing a critical revision of Caribbean cultural history. As Saunders has argued, as part of the institutional memory of the Caribbean "music is an invaluable medium for maintaining a critical perspective on society by keeping contributions and controversies alive for future generations to learn from, borrow, and ultimately, even revise".[26] What contemporary women poets suggest is that although colonial education and Western historiography have tried to erase and write anew the pre-colonial cultures of the Caribbean, spirits keep coming back through storytelling and music, in a sort of spirit possession where ghosts are revived through voice, rhythm, and dance, remembering and re-inventing history at every performance.[27]

A significant example of this 'versioning' is that of Nanny, the legendary spiritual, cultural and military leader of the Jamaican Maroons, whose story has been mainly transmitted through oral accounts. Her inspirational figure as brave woman warrior has been haunting the writings of a number of writers, reverberating with every repetition. In the performance of "Soun de Abeng fi Nanny", for instance, Breeze uses a celebratory tone to represent Nanny as a leader and warrior at one with the environment. The syncopated performance of the poem to the rhythm of mento, the first music created on Jamaican soil, is used here to convey the sense of urgency and, at the same time, to celebrate the legendary figure of Nanny of the Maroons.[28]

[25] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 76.

[26] Saunders, "Mapping the Roots/Routes of Calypso", xx.

[27] Dance was one of the few activities slaves were permitted. In seventeenth-century Jamaica dances like the quadrille were associated with healing rites; as its rhythms were intensified and 'africanized', it helped individuals to be possessed and deliver the messages of the spirits, becoming "part of the mechanism for possession"; John Szwed, *Crossovers: Essays on Race, Music and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 153.

[28] A local development of the quadrille, the mento was a looser form with elements of European and local folk tunes: see Szwed, *Crossovers*, 156. The cultural implications of this syncretic practice are also explored by Breeze in *The Fifth Figure*, discussed below.

Moreover, as Nanny is said to be able to catch the British bullets with her buttocks, her body becomes an instrument of resistance. The past thus comes to be *embodied* in the musical performance in a sort of spirit possession in which the rhythm of mento, the voice of the poet, and the movements of the performance powerfully enact the re-memory of the past, disclosing the subversive potentialities of the combined use of body, word and music.[29]

Fig. 2: Nanny of the Maroons as national icon (the Jamaican 500 dollar bill), 2002.

Breeze also imagines Nanny following and decoding the sounds of nature in order to hide from her enemies and take them by surprise:

> an er yeye roam crass
> ebery mountain pass
> an er yeas well tune to de win'
> an de cricket an de treefrog
> crackle telegram
> an she wet er battam lip fi decode[30]
> [Her eyes roam across/ every mountain pass/ and her ears are well tuned to the wind./ She wets her bottom lip to decode/ the cricket and the treefrog/ crackling telegram.].

The use of sounds as a strategy for resistance and revolt is evident in the very structure of the poem, where every line celebrates the warlike qualities of the cunning warrior, finally urging the audience with the final incitation: "so mek wi soun de abeng/ fi Nanny" [so let's sound the abeng/ for Nanny]. Quite significantly, the abeng evoked in the poem is an ambiguous musical instrument re-signified by the maroons: although the abeng was the conch shell or animal horn used by slaveholders to call the slaves to the plantation, its blowing also called to revolt, since the instrument had been strategically appropriated by runaway slaves to communicate and organize rebellions.

Through a strategy of resistance where body and sound are inextricably linked, in "Nanny" the Jamaican poet Lorna Goodison revives the woman warrior whose body "ran equal/ to the rhythms of the forest".[31] By re-telling the story Goodison performs her role as *griotte*, celebrating the collective past and foregrounding a similar path of resistance for future generations: "When your sorrow obscures the skies/ Other women like me will rise". Goodison lets Nanny speak for herself outlining the figure of a woman warrior who, according to Breiner, appropriates a "boasting style which in the West Indies is traditionally a male prerogative".[32] As she prefigures a genealogy of women warriors like Nanny in the final lines of the poem, Goodison also suggests a reverberation of her poems, since

[29] Body and resistance are associated in a number of poems evoking the condition of slave women in the plantations. See for instance "Skin Teeth" by Nichols, underscoring the subversive potential of a smile, and "Inna Calabash" by Goodison, where the calabash – a household utensil and musical instrument – was also used to deceive the overseer of the plantation and simulate pregnancy.

[30] Jean 'Binta' Breeze, *Riddym Ravings and Other Poems* (London: Race Today, 1988), 45.

[31] Lorna Goodison, "Nanny", in *I Am Becoming My Mother* (London: New Beacon, 1995 [1986]), 44.

[32] Breiner, *Introduction*, 212.

Nanny's voice resonates again as the inspiring figure of "We are the women". Similarly, Nichols also celebrates "the Ashanti princess/ and giver of charms" in "Nanny", while the final lines of the poem – "is that you, Nanny?" – echo another poem devoted to Nanny, "The return," reverberating through the sound of her abeng:

> Is that you Nanny
> Is that you Black Priestess
> Is that your Abeng voice
> echoing its warcry through the valleys?[33]

[33] Nichols, "The Return", in *i is a long memoried woman*, 65.

The constant dialogue between musical forms and poetry thus discloses the possibility to re-create a forgotten past contrapuntally. While reassembling different oral/musical sources, women poets engaging with history, mythology and memory contribute to the retrieval of collective memory through the performance of a shared past. Nichols brilliantly achieves this performance in her poem "Sunris", a journey where the transformative and subversive spirit of carnival provides the framework for the protagonist's encounter with historical, religious and mythological figures. Inspired by the "wit, wordplay, bravado and gusto" of calypso, Nichols introduces her poem thus:

> In my 'sunris' poem, a woman makes a journey towards self-discovery and self-naming, through carnival …. In this act of reclaiming herself and the various strands of her heritage she engages with history and mythology and like the calypsonian sometimes resorts to verbal self-inflation to make her voice heard, 'I think this time I go make history'.[34]

[34] Grace Nichols, *Sunris* (London: Virago, 1996), 18; 8.

The pattern of the poem, punctuated by repetitions, steel pan rhythms and satirical comments, conveys a sense of movement deeply informed by calypso and carnival. It is precisely through the subversive rhythms of carnival and calypso that in a journey across Amerindian myths, Caribbean deities and historical figures, the past can be evoked and celebrated in its polyphony. The interconnections of music, body and word are extremely relevant in this context and constitute the possibility to re/assemble the fragments in order to re/member.

Celebrating the potentialities of calypso, NourbeSe Philip has claimed that it forces us to confront reality and calls for a re-collection and re-membering of the fragments: challenging the 'fugue' and its impulse towards forgetting and erasure, the rite of the calypso represents a "call to the ancestors", an exercise in collective memory which defies cultural erasure and amnesia.[35] For this reason, the process of re-memory includes improvisation and masquerade, following the sounds and rhythms of carnival and of calypso: like the calypsonian who improvises on the fragments of his/her memory, "weaving from a fragment a whole", the

[35] NourbeSe Philip, "Fugues, Fragments and Fissures".

poet fills in the gaps in memory with her own fictions "masquerading as truth dress up as lies playing ole marse with we minds" [playing old master with our minds].[36]

[36]Ibid.

Crossover identities

The production of Caribbean women poets is deeply informed by the multiple sounds and rhythms of Caribbean cultural, literary and linguistic migrations through the centuries on both shores of the Atlantic. In colonial regions knowledge and history have effectively been transmitted and imposed through an educational system focusing on the superiority of the written word and the celebration of the institutional places where colonial knowledge was preserved and transmitted. Yet, while the western archive of knowledge was securely locked into institutional spaces such as schools and libraries, alternative forms of knowledge continued to circulate from mouth to mouth, through proverbs and stories, calypsos and poems, implicitly challenging the Western association of place and archive.[37]

Drawing from sources ranging from the Bible to popular proverbs, from English literature to calypso songs, Caribbean women poets have radically questioned the superiority of traditional (written) cultural forms suggesting a creative interplay of literacy and oral tradition, critically exposing the library as a space of continuing colonial oppression and cultural erasure. In the creative negotiation of their multiple cultural heritage, they create a sort of a poetic counter-archive, where empowering, alternative sources – both written and oral, European and African – intersect and displace the western division between 'high' and 'low' cultural forms. Considering music as a form of performative collective memory, what emerges from this "cultural performance" is what Benitez-Rojo has described as a "polyrhythmic ensemble", a critical reconfiguration of elements which, far from erasing difference, on the contrary allows for the coexistence of various sounds.[38]

Mento and calypso rhythms are thus assimilated and reworked into contemporary women's poetry in order to provide a sense of continuity and of dialogue with the past. However, rather than consisting in a mere textual citation of songs, the reference to musical forms reveals a more complex literary project, articulating music both as textual reference and methodological approach. In fact, by incorporating lines from popular Caribbean and/or European songs, women poets consciously locate their poems within a distinctive tradition which critically exposes and challenges cultural or literary hierarchies. The multiplicity of poetic approaches, styles and cultural sources can be accommodated in what has been defined as a 'theorizing practice' informing African American and African Caribbean women's writing and questioning a separation between theoretical elaborations and creative writing.[39]

[37] Jacques Derrida in his *Mal d'archive* has focused on the *place* as constitutive of the archive, thus articulating it as the locus where memory is "consigned": unified, identified, and classified. *Archive Fever* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3.

[38] Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 28.

[39] It is in this perspective that Joan Anim-Addo invokes the African Caribbean woman poet also as a theorist "upon whom we might draw". *Touching the Body. History, Language and African Caribbean Women's Writing* (London: Mango Publishing, 2007), 25.

In "She Sings on the Train and Sings Inside", for instance, Merle Collins describes the extreme loneliness experienced by a Caribbean migrant on the London tube while she journeys across the city, singing snippets of remembered songs to keep her company. Significantly, the poem opens with the reassuring lines of a song testifying to the woman's need for a familiar cultural landscape:

> She sings on the train and sings inside
>
> Las abété mwen, Naporinden
> Las abété mwen
> Las abété mwen, Naporinden…[40]

[40] Merle Collins, "She Sits on the Train and Sings Inside", *Rotten Pomerack* (London: Virago, 1992), 26.

Moreover, by introducing the fragment of the well-known calypso "Jamaica Farewell" ("sad to say I'm on my way"), the poet draws on music as a nostalgic while at the same time comforting element. As she leaves the song unfinished, Collins prompts the reader to finish the line, establishing a communication with her audience and retrieving a sense of community through popular music. Calypso thus functions as an "aide mémoire", as NourbeSe Philip states in relation to "Congo Man" by Mighty Sparrow, a shard of memory that triggers the recollection of a diasporic cultural identity.[41] However, the evocation of a calypso in the poem is not a simple dislocation of popular musical forms into a literary genre. Accounting for the transcultural experience of migration, this practice also foregrounds a critical reconfiguration of cultural forms: as de Caires Narain suggests, the poet replaces the "familiar narrative of a man leaving behind a loved woman" of popular calypso with the story of a mother leaving her daughter, evoking the equally familiar condition – though not often recorded in calypso – of contemporary migration to England.[42] While the displacement of popular songs re-signifies them by providing new meanings, calypso lyrics are woven into the poetic lines as a strategy of de-familiarization and subversion, suggesting alternative practices of memory and resistance.

[41] NourbeSe Philip, "Fugues, Fragments and Fissures".

[42] de Caires Narain, *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry*, 131.

Shifting from the chronotope of the road to that of the crossroads to account for "the circulation and mutation of music across the Black Atlantic", Gilroy provides a useful metaphor for describing the complex transcultural and syncretic evolutions performed by Caribbean women's poetry in their use of musical forms.[43] In a rich web of intercultural relations informing their cultural heritage, women poets often challenge the binary structure that opposes Africa's authenticity and purity to the uprootedness of the New World by introducing a further element in their musical appropriations. In fact, not only are Caribbean songs incorporated into poems, but European musical traditions are also re-used and re-signified. If dubbing "refers to adding or dubbing words to accompany an instrumental rendering of a

[43] Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 199.

popular song",[44] in a combination of speech and music that will also be used in dub poetry, this musical practice also characterizes the work of several women poets.

In "The Arrival of Brighteye", written to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Windrush, Breeze has reworked the Scottish folk song "My Bonnie" in order to convey a little girl's loneliness because of her mother's departure for England. As the poet appropriates the refrain of "My Bonnie" to voice the experience of Caribbean migration, the song is critically displaced by a language which is inhabited by the sounds and memory of a different crossing:

> My mommie gone over de ocean
> My mommie gone over the sea
> she gawn dere to work for some money
> an den she gawn sen back for me
>
> One year
> Two year
> Three year gawn
>
> Four year
> Five year
> Six year come.[45]

Similarly, in "The Crossover Griot", Goodison explores the crossover aspects of music in order to foreground the experience of creolization. The offspring of a new generation born to a "Guinea girl" and an "Irish sailor", "the first mulatta child" becomes a poet testifying to the creative potentialities that have sprung from the crossing. In the poem, the Irish sailor croons "I am O'Rahilly" – presumably from "Egan O'Reilly", by Gaelic poet James Stephens (1677-1726) – while the Guinea girl hums an old calypso ("since them/ carry me from Guinea/ me can't go home"). However, even if they both sing of their roots/homes in different continents, their daughter becomes a griot who chants a different story, one of crossings and new beginnings:

> Of crossover griot
> they want to ask
> how all this come out?
> To no known answer
>
> Still they ask her
> why you chant so?
> And why she turn poet
> not even she know.[46]

In the celebration of the powerful figure of the crossover griot, the Caribbean poet occupies an outsider/insider position which allows her to

[44] Edward Chamberlin, *Come Back to Me My Language. Poetry and the West Indies* (Urbana and Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1993), 234-5.

[45] Jean 'Binta' Breeze, "The Arrival of Brighteye", in *The Arrival of Brighteye and Other Poems* (London: Bloodaxe, 2000), 54.

[46] Lorna Goodison, "Crossover Griot", in *Travelling Mercies* (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 2001), 74.

produce knowledge and memory in the intersection of cultures: as she inhabits an interstitial space where no stable, fixed, or divine power can claim its authority, with her *crossover* abilities the poet straddles two worlds and reworks her double cultural heritage.

A further example of Goodison's crossover use of sources can be found in her conscious "manipulation", as she terms it, of British culture.[47] It is precisely through this crafty manipulation that the poet succeeds in interrupting and disturbing the linear narrative of Western culture, stimulating a dialogue in response to centuries of univocal monologues. An illuminating example can be found in her poem "O Africans", inspired by William Butler Yeats's tribute to Irish oral tradition, "Down by the Salley Gardens", included in *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems* (1889). As Yeats explained, "This is an attempt to reconstruct an old song from three lines imperfectly remembered by an old peasant woman in the village of Ballysodare, who often sings them to herself".[48] While Yeats's poem is constructed through a fragment of a song the poet strives to recall, Goodison works out her poem in the mento style of Jamaica, evoking the rhythm of the quadrille which creatively dialogues with the Irish folk style.

> O Africans at quadrille
> cutting stately figures
> to the lilt of the fiddle
> of the fiddle and the bow.
>
> To the melodies of Europe
> roll rhythms of the Congo
> O Africans imposing bright colors
> over the muted tones of Europeans.
>
> Take it all
> and turn it around
> Slim and Sam for the Salley Gardens
> W. B. Yeats for the park downtown.
>
> Add the robust fifth figure
> to the stately quadrille
> a marriage mixed
> but a marriage still.
>
> Sing Africans in white dresses
> Cantata Africana
> O dark suits sonata, Mento.
> Come so now then go so.[49]

In what she calls "a marriage mixed, a marriage still", the poet engages with a weaving of rich intertextual references disturbing the supposedly monolithic poetic voice and opening up the possibility for a critical reconfiguration of her cultural roots.

[47] Lowell Fiet, "Interview with Lorna Goodison", *Sargasso*, special issue *Concerning Lorna Goodison* (2001), 11.

[48] William Butler Yeats, *Yeats's Poetry, Drama, and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism* (London and New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 496. The poem was initially titled "An Old Song Re-sung" and its verses were subsequently set to music in 1909.

[49] Lorna Goodison, "O Africans", in *To Us, All Flowers Are Roses* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 63.

As an unsuspected fruitful relation of the intersections of Caribbean and European musical traditions, the quadrille is also explored by Breeze in *The Fifth Figure*, a long poem mixing poetry and prose. In a peculiar reworking of the quadrille through the mento tradition, *The Fifth Figure* foregrounds the practice of strategic appropriation of cultural forms imposed by the colonizers while producing a rich and powerful narration following the rhythm of an oral account. Significantly, the 'fifth figure' of the title refers to the creolized version of the quadrille, a dance in four figures imported by the Europeans and restyled in Jamaica to the rhythm of mento by adding a fifth figure and creating a new music for it using bamboos and sticks.

The poem stages the syncretic evolutions of Caribbean dances as a dynamic and creative process producing hybrid subjectivities: as the narration weaves the stories of five generations of women, music and dance signal the acquisition of a new consciousness:

> ... I was tempted
> by the music playing outside
> I couldn't resist mento yard
> ...
> So Sunday was Christian
> And white as the snow
> Friday and Saturday were sin.[50]

The divided consciousness of the fifth protagonist will finally resolve into the awareness of a freely moving and migrating creolized identity, following the beats of music and yet firmly rooted in Jamaican culture. In striking contrast to her ancestors, the last protagonist eventually comes to terms with her complex identities through the acceptance of her multiple roots.

Borrowing Walcott's image of "the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars",[51] Jamaican women's poetry seems to weave together patches of different musical forms deliberately revealing the fractures and the stitches, just as the different 'versions' of a musical track preserve audible traces of the crossover. Like Walcott's white scars, not only do the stitches constitute an interrogation, an interruption of linear history, a reminder of the complex history of the region, but they also suggest a contrapuntal approach disclosing new possibilities for poetic freedom.

[50] Jean 'Binta' Breeze, *The Fifth Figure* (London: Bloodaxe, 2006), 65.
[51] Walcott, "Fragments of Epic Memory", 69.

Patrizia Calefato

Across the Borders of Fashion and Music

The clothed body and the senses

The "clothed body" is a semiotic category which epitomizes the ways in which the subject establishes its being in the world through the style of its appearance.[1] Clothing is a non-verbal language: it is a device for modelling the world, a form of projection and simulation, valid for both the individual and society. As a transformation of the body dictated by an ideal image of the self, the semiotics of the clothed body emphasises, in various forms, the relation between signs and the senses. Through clothing, the body 'feels' the surrounding world.

The body's relation with the world can be conceived in terms of Lévi-Strauss's notion of bricolage.[2] In anthropological terms, bricolage is the art of linking together objects and signs seemingly devoid of any reciprocal connection. Nonetheless their sequence, or collection, constitutes a system, which is felt as homologous to the so-called natural world. This sense-producing art gives rise to what we might define as a network – a system of correlations among different levels of signifying realities, each provided with its own specific relevance to the senses. The clothed body articulates what the world still doesn't know, feel or possess, or what it already feels in a more exciting, tense and – to use musical jargon – 'hip' form. This 'world' is pervaded by aesthesia, a form of sensorial receptivity, which is above all synaesthesia: the ability of the senses to interact, combine with, or even substitute one another.[3]

Within the context of the ritual function of clothing in 'traditional' societies, dressing, masquerading, tattooing, adorning, in other words 'covering' the body, are ritual activities regulated by a socio-cultural syntax that we call 'costume'. In the context of modern society, and even more so in our age of mass reproduction, it is fashion which constitutes this socio-cultural system. Since fashion is not solemn, institutional, reassuring or elitist, but felt, lived, 'beaten out' within everyday contexts permeated by aesthetic tension, fashion anticipates moments of transition and marks transformations in taste. Today, fashion is a system of signs that fully manifests itself as a form of mass communication, an everyday activity, a form of popular culture, of worldliness and "mass fashion" that constantly reinvents and reproduces itself by interacting with other languages as well.[4] Among these, the language of music plays a fundamental role, as it articulates, through sound and rhythm, how human beings perceive and experience the world as time, space and corporeality. What the language

[1] Patrizia Calefato, *The Clothed Body* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

[2] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1967).

[3] We are referring here to the notion of 'world' in the anthropological sense of 'surrounding' or 'self-centered' world: the *Umwelt*.

[4] This expression derives from a pun based on the relation between "mass media" and the Italian word "moda" (fashion). See Patrizia Calefato, *Mass moda* (Rome: Meltemi, 2007).

of the clothed body and the language of music have in common is first and foremost a sensory element: dress and music are forms through which the body feels the surrounding world as both whole and amplified.

Dressing, feeling

In the introduction to his 1994 essay collection *L'aria si fa tesa*, the Italian philosopher Mario Perniola borrows his title from a song by the American pop group Primus, *The Air Is Getting Slippery*, taking it as both illustrative and symptomatic of our contemporary state of feeling, which is represented in music, the visual arts and the mass-media as tense, slippery, ambiguous and unstable.[5] Some languages – above all fashion and music, but also cinema, design and the visual arts – take on board this tension, this adventure of the senses, which has such an impact on social life today, especially because the grand narratives, and particularly political narratives, seem to be over and done with. Through their way of dressing as well as dancing, listening to, and performing music, human beings develop forms of feeling with their bodies and ways of constructing their identities well before such activities crystallise into ideologies or great social projects. This phenomenon is certainly not new; it does not belong to the last few decades, nor (by any means) to the postmodern age. The novelty lies, perhaps, in the fact that today there is a widespread perception and awareness of the plurality of available languages, registers and signs, and also of the need to 'listen' to sensorial experience.

[5] Mario Perniola, *L'aria si fa tesa* (Genova: Costa & Nolan, 1994), 5.

Fashion and music are two intimately connected forms of worldliness, two social practices that go hand in hand, sustaining each other in the context of mass communication and drawing on a common sensibility which translates into taste. This aspect is immediately recognizable in the careful choice of clothes, hairstyles, settings and gestures which characterises every public performance, video clip or record cover in the music business. How can taste be generated and conveyed through musical experience as both worldly and non-conformist? How is the relation between taste and style established within fashion and music? How is one sensibility grafted onto the other?

Let's turn to the spaces which have shaped image and sound experiences in the last decades, above all for the younger generations. The rock concert was a place of bodily 'pluri-presences', a place which helped expanding relational and sensory experience, as the momentous gatherings of the 1960s and 1970s testify. This can still be said of the mega-concerts organised by music corporations, and especially of humanitarian or politically inspired music events, such as Live Aid. The raves of the early 1990s (which were above all bodily, rather than – or only incidentally – musical performances) were the heretical, technological descendants of the early rock concerts

and punk happenings. Both were places where conflict and rebellion found their expressive channel in 'feeling the beat' and were performed by means of signs on the body. Indeed, these two types of public event celebrate presence, bodily experience and physical contiguity. Dancing, pogoing, taking drugs, having sex, constructing one's own style – through hair and dress, piercing, tattooing – may be read in the light of the grotesque. Lack of diversification (the dance), annihilation in the crowd (the pogo), writing on and incising one's skin, the loss or amplification of one's own sensorial perception, a mutual swallowing of bodies, as in the Tarot image of the Wheel of Fortune, are all experiences in which space and time are always in flux.

A whole series of social discourses from film to music, new media and advertising, are the places where fashion becomes a syncretic, intertextual system, a network of references among the signs of the clothed body. In other words fashion is a constant process of construction and deconstruction of the subjects who negotiate, interpret or receive its meaning. Dick Hebdige's 1979 analysis of subcultures fits in with this perfectly.[6] Moving away from the classic positions of British cultural studies, Hebdige defines style as a form of aesthetic and ethical group membership in a mass society characterized by emerging in-crowd cultures (the influence of Gramsci is fundamental here) made up of fixed combinations including ways of dressing, music, literature, film and everyday habits – a pop universe expressed in 'street styles' ranging from rock to punk, which Hebdige reads as a form of opposition to fashion as one of the "prominent forms of discourse".[7] He believes that punk, in particular, was a strategy for denaturalising style, rather like surrealism, which had the effect of reading paradoxical meanings into objects. For example a safety pin stuck into the skin, or hair dyed in unnatural colours, transgressively reveal the constructed character of any discourse.

[6] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

[7] Ibid., 104.

Mediascapes

Fashion and music are languages that construct spaces and identities. In our age, dominated by the use of electronic synthesis and other technical simulacra for the creation, reproduction and execution of the musical trace, fashion and music have become new media. Not only in the strictly technical sense that musical production, stylistic creation, photography, and so on, *happen*, but above all in the sense that both fashion and music have become imbued with the social practices through which discourses and identities are produced by the new media. Both like and unlike bodily experiences lived in the flesh, today's digital computer and mass media cultures offer spaces and forms for the transmission and reproduction of musical and sartorial experiences that are no longer limited to the live

performance or to its record copy. The use of electronics, which in rock music goes back to the 1960s, of video clips, CDs or DVDs, Internet sites, or a TV channel like MTV which allows viewers from all over the world to experience the latest sounds and dress styles, the possibility of listening to and 'feeling' music through mp3 players: all this shows to what extent the production and enjoyment of music is 'wired', hooked up to a machine, which is part of an interface that uses the human body as an adjunct to a wider nervous system, made up of cables, optical fibres, satellites, micro chips, digital files. The function of the media is that of producing sense, establishing norms of communicative exchange and creating typologies of spectators, or of social subjects. Today we are facing a radical change in the epistemological paradigm: representation has been substituted by simulation. The binary relation between a thing and the sign that represents it – for example, between a musical score and the live performance or analogous recording – has been substituted by the synthesized reconstruction of the thing, the serial reproduction of the event, or its direct creation through the impulses and infinitesimal units of digital information. Yet simulation still has to do with the body, and it has not become immaterial only because of the *virtual* nature of today's communication. Rather, it is made up of the semiotic material populating social imagery and taste.

Three strategies

We may consider the construction of simulacra as a contemporary myth-making, which deprives the sign of its direct representational quality and substitutes it with serial interchangeability. At the same time, simulacra leave room for sensory forms, especially in fashion and music, geared toward excessive modes, which can be created and reproduced serially. Three of these modes are particularly interesting: postcolonial identity, 'surfing styles', and revival.

Style is a particularly interesting element in the construction of postcolonial identity. A decentred gaze constructs the clothed postcolonial body as an open, grotesque body, exhibiting colours, signs, jewels and hairstyles of diverse origins. Postcolonial fashion brings the 'surreal' into everyday life; it exaggerates, juxtaposes unpredictably, and 'quotes', self-consciously and deliberately, from 'the world'.

The expression "surfing styles" used by Ted Polhemus, together with the terms "sampling" and "mixing" taken from DJ jargon, are effective metaphors in relation to contemporary dress culture.[8] They indicate the overthrow of stylistic and subcultural specificity, in a kind of surfing that recalls the homonynous hypertextual and intertextual 'sport' performed on computer networks. For example, everyday street styles recall the

[8] Ted Polhemus, "Sampling and Mixing", in Giuliana Ceriani and Roberto Grandi, eds., *Moda: Regole e Rappresentazioni* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1995), 109.

'bastardised' languages of hip-hop and rap in their rhythmic construction of what we may think of as a bricolage identity.

The case of revival is particularly interesting. Fashion and music have always used quotations, experiences, influences and suggestions from the past. In the second half of the twentieth century, fashion steadily accelerated the rhythm at which one looks at the past. In this continual spiral, it has constructed forms of feeling which, though actually focused on the present, review and retrace the past, not so much through 'historical memory' as through a conscious *mélange* of time fragments and quasi-syncopated images, as in a jazz performance. The wear-and-tear of signs, or even their annihilation, gives as much pleasure as their creation, not only because such wear-and-tear sets up the expectation of new forms, where tension and desire will be generated, but also because 'consuming' something by wearing it, or using second-hand, already worn-out clothes, is itself a sensorial experience. Vintage items and second-hand clothes, which are today well within the sphere of institutionalised fashion, reveal a pleasure in wearing clothes which allow us to live and relive, as our own, the memories and emotions of others. Here we find an inversion of the traditional mechanisms of fashion: semiotic wear-and-tear becomes more important than physical wear-and-tear and beats the rhythms to which fashion consumption moves.

Fashion and music in the African-American experience

bell hooks maintains that, in African-American culture, dress and music have always played an important role in self-representation and have always had a political function, especially amongst women, who use style to express resistance or, conversely, conformity.[9] hooks particularly criticises the exploitation of the image of the 'black beauty' through media figures such as Tina Turner, Iman and Naomi Campbell. Nevertheless, this is an ambivalent process, since the values at stake in the construction of aesthetic commonplaces are not merely prescriptive and objectifying. For example, black models, pop stars and athletes idealised by young whites have made it possible to construct cultural spaces for an interaction between bodies which excludes common stereotypes of the black body and sexuality. This is especially the case in the most independent modes of representation and communication of images of black culture, like jazz and blues.

In jazz, the relation between dress and music is particularly significant, since jazz represents much more than just a musical genre; it is a veritable universe where style *counts*. In the 1930s the zootie style included long, wide jackets, broad-brimmed hats and garish colours – all elements based on hyperbolic exaggeration. In the 1950s, on the other hand, the hipster style, created by musicians like Thelonius Monk, Charlie Parker and Dizzy

[9] bell hooks, *Yearning. Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 217.

Gillespie, was more sober and essential. The clothing of female jazz singers, like Billie Holiday, was also crucially meaningful, as it alluded to typical dress styles of the Deep South: soft fabrics, sensual models, and floral designs.

Music has always acted as a bridge between black styles and their wider social reception and circulation, even in hybrid forms. Along with jazz, reggae has also played an important role in this connection; its icon, Bob Marley, chose Rastafarian culture as his style, marked by long dreadlocks and parti-coloured clothes. In North American black urban communities hip hop proposes open and irreverent forms in a 'street-and-sports' style. Just as anyone can make hip hop and rap music, so can anybody play basketball, climb walls or bungee jump. Amateur sports imagery, especially that of extreme sports, has invaded the world of fashion with trainers, baggy tracksuits and hooded sweatshirts in the style of black rappers. Black *haute couture* fashion, on the other hand, was successfully launched in the 1990s by African and African American designers.

Grotesque bodies

According to Lotman, fashion introduces the dynamic principle into seemingly inert spheres of the everyday.[10] In a world dominated by a constant tension between the tendency towards stability and the impulse towards novelty and extravagance, 'traditional' dress tends to maintain such spheres unchanged, while fashion endows them with qualities which are the very antithesis of the everyday: capriciousness, volubility, quaintness, and arbitrariness. Fashion, therefore, helps to create the image of a 'topsy-turvy' and unstable world, that reflects the constant tension between the tendency towards the stability of everyday life on the one hand and the impulse towards novelty and extravagance on the other.

[10] JSee urij Lotman, *La cultura e l'esplosione* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1993), 103.

The unexpected potential of fashion and music to overturn received meaning is directly linked to their collocation within what Lotman calls the "sphere of the unpredictable".[11] As a system of images, fashion is transmitted through series and stereotypes, filters which have grown to be so clogged that the image has become totally pervasive and has absorbed the body into the repetition of stereotypes. Conversely, in a musical perspective, fashion can be perceived as an 'imperfect' system, where imperfection is semiotically conceived as the unexpected, that which does not necessarily lead to pleasure, nor indeed to harmony, and which, in causing a rupture with the everyday, transforms and reshapes its subject. Imperfection concerns that element which does not stay in place, according to the paradoxical, disconcerting imperative "If a thing works, throw it away", or to the punk sentence, "If the cap doesn't fit, wear it".

[11] Ibid.

This logic of imperfection has governed many generations in their experience of rock music and dress style – a cultural *koine* of 'mutiny',

where each generation consciously lives anew the state of perceptual and sensory doubt and displacement of the previous one. An ideal time graph would start with the origins of rock, considered as a hymn of rebellion, of political, cultural and aesthetic subversion. This would be followed by punk and hip-hop, the former trend seeking to demonstrate the death of the concept of subculture and the anthropological-semiotic mutation of the idea of style; the latter open to listening and reproducing various languages (musical and verbal) coming from the world, the street and technology, by means of a constant use of sampling and mixing.

The notion of the clothed body as grotesque is the focal point for an inverted and disconcerting aesthetic search for imperfection, expressed through a polyphony of bodies. An example of such polyphony is recognizable in Michael Jackson's now classic *Thriller* video clip (1982) that has become the emblem of an age and constitutes a defining moment in the history of this mode of music and fashion: directed by John Landis and featuring a still dark-skinned Michael Jackson, the clip famously shows horribly ugly and deformed bodies. In a carnivalesque inversion of 'modern' and 'primitive', ugly and beautiful, funny and frightening, the screams and dance moves generate a kind of fashion that is above all confusion and inversion of sense, the call of the street at night as a place where the haphazard is transformed into excess.

Conclusions

Fashion is a complex and contradictory phenomenon. It conveys stories, constitutes spaces, produces myths, and expresses meanings and conflicts. It is a semiotic field which belongs to the composite scenario of the contemporary world, with which the different styles of clothing enter into dialogue and to which they offer a translation. The street is the physical and metaphorical place which allows for the emergence of styles, tastes and habits linking fashions in a diffuse, popular in-crowd culture. Music as a great store and origin of social imagination, acts in extremely close synergy with fashion. Nowadays, new communication techniques are altering the very definitions of corporeality in the social context, and there is a new theoretical awareness of what it means to read clothing as a 'disguise' which allows people to abandon social or sexual stereotypes, break the rules with deliberate ambiguity, and produce performances that give pleasure.

Vito Campanelli

Journeying Through Sound: A Survey of Digital Music Art

With this essay I would like to offer a picture of some current experimentations in digital art and music, which play with the proliferation of digital communication tools and the ensuing reconfiguration of social and cultural relationships.[1] Among the selected artworks, there is a clear (perhaps inevitable) predominance of experimentations carried out in Anglophone cultural circles. The concentration of the most significant experiences in this linguistic area does not depend on a matter of 'cultural climate'. On the contrary, it is due to the larger support (in economic and logistic terms) that some countries have been able to offer to young artists and researchers in the field. Nevertheless, if we take into account the passports of the artists discussed in this survey, it becomes evident that the map of their geographical origins extends well beyond the usual U.S.-Northern Europe axis. This situation reflects the global interest that such issues are generating and – at the same time – the irrelevance of national borders in relation to artistic urgency.

The artworks analyzed here have all been developed in the last few years. In a free paraphrase of Arjun Appadurai's terminology, I have grouped them under the categories of *Dailyscape*, *Naturalscape*, *Machinescape*, *Urbanscape* and *Mythscape*. I am indebted not only to Appadurai's summary of contemporary major global cultural flows through categories such as "ethnoscapes", "technoscapes", "mediascapes", "finanscapes" and "ideoscapes", but also to the Canadian writer and composer Raymond Murray Schafer, who sheds light on the specificity of the contemporary soundscape in his discussion of the transition from rural to urban soundscape in terms of *hi-fi* and *lo-fi*. According to Schafer, the *hi-fi* system is characterized by a low level of environmental noise: it is therefore possible to hear the individual sounds clearly. The *lo-fi* soundscape, created by the Industrial Revolution and later intensified by the 'electric revolution', is characterized by the congestion of sounds.[2]

Here, *Dailyscape* includes objects, acts and intentions that produce our daily routines in a world dominated by the media. *Naturalscape* represents an attempt to rediscover the relationship with natural elements and with the environment, without escaping the mediation of technological tools. *Machinescape* includes artworks which put the machine at the very centre of their research, focusing on the analysis of dynamics that seem autonomous from human control. With *Urbanscape* I have tried to analyse a few works based on the concept of 'urban location' and its implications. Finally, *Mythscape* groups together artworks that deal with the concept of

[1] Former versions of most of the following reviews have been published previously in the magazine *Neural* <http://www.neural.it, 19 December 2009>. I would like to thank Alessandro Ludovico, editor in chief of *Neural*, for his kind support.

[2] See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); and Raymond Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World: The Soundscape* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

myth in a literal sense, but also with beliefs and habits that have a mythological connotation, due to their continuous repetition.

This categorization may seem arbitrary, but it is meant as a device for analysing some of the trends emerging from the field of artistic musical experimentations related to digital media. I aim neither setting up a taxonomy of approaches, nor offering a complete and exhaustive picture of the trends in current research. Connections will be dictated, instead, by arbitrary associations and aesthetic affinities. However, I believe that the resulting picture may help stimulate a wider reflection on the state of the art in recent musical and digital media.

In particular, it may be possible to speak of a common ground for the artists included in this survey, namely the adoption of a realistic approach. I am using the term 'realistic' in the sense suggested by Umberto Eco's seminal criticism of both "apocalyptic" and "integrated" critical attitudes towards new mass-media and technological advancements. All the artists discussed here avoid both the temptation of idolatrizing technology as a value in itself (as an integrated intellectual would), and that of panicking over the cultural ruin and barbarity to which the technological drift may lead humankind (as an apocalyptic intellectual would).[3] A realistic approach, instead, would open up windows on the reality we are living in, by focusing, in particular, on the condition of cohabitation with technology that characterizes our presence in real spaces as well as (and even more so than) in virtual ones.

From this point of view, the work by this generation of media artists is presented here as a further attempt to represent the 'electronic society', a representation electronic music has always engaged with (from the earliest futurist experimentations by Luigi Russolo to Kraftwerk, techno music and all the way to the last decade of the twentieth century). Nowadays, under the pressure of constant technological change, a 'digital society' is taking shape: in the following pages, I will attempt to sketch out how these artworks offer an array of perspectives on technology, witnessing processes that are taking place before our very eyes.

[3] Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati. Comunicazioni di massa e teorie delta cultura di massa* (Milan: Bompiani, 1964).

Dailyscape

BeatBox

New Zealander artist Karl D.D. Willis, known for his collaboration with the Japanese label "Progressive Form" and the *Sonasphere* (2004) project with Nao Tokui, has also been appreciated for his innovative prototypes, including *BeatBox* (2007).[4] As the name itself suggests, the installation consists in a small box created to give voice to the sound universe of our desktops: usually, when we are sitting at our (home or work) desk, we are too busy to notice the amount of small sounds we produce when

[4] See <http://www.darcy.co.nz/highlights/sonasphere>, 19 December 2009; and <http://www.darcy.co.nz/research/boxbeat>, 19 December 2009.

typing on the keyboard, madly moving the mouse, drawing, flipping a book or simply nervously pattering with our fingers.

Willis focuses on this aural background, creating a tool able to transform these small noises into musical beats. *BeatBox* uses some contact microphones to record sound vibrations produced on a flat surface, while a quite simple software transforms them into audio samples that are subsequently played back by small loud speakers. This tool may help us enjoy the rhythms produced by our work stations, which, the impersonal relationship we have with them notwithstanding, provide the soundscape of our average working day.

Uokand (Tapelake)

Audiotapes, a medium which offered millions of people endless possibilities to recombine sounds and emotions and introduced the concept of self-produced compilation, have nowadays become a distant memory. The MP3 generation, used to processing huge quantities of digital data with a few simple clicks, can only smile condescendingly at the limits of such a technology. Not surprisingly, Currys, one of the biggest electronic retail chains in England (with over 500 stores), has announced that it won't sell any more audiotapes when the current stock is exhausted.[5] This can be read as an epitaph; however – as often happens – a commercially dead object can live a new life by becoming raw material for artistic productions.

As a matter of fact, audiotapes, while disappearing from store shelves, are becoming the staple of many installations and performances all over the world. Particularly interesting is a 2006 installation by US DJ Dan Perrone, consisting in a lunar landscape wrapped in the tape of many cassettes. A radio-controlled model car with the reading head of a walkman attached at the bottom runs across the surface, producing strange sounds. These sounds, associated with the visual aspect of the installation, generate an interactive perceptive environment into which the viewer is invited to plunge. *Uokand (Tapelake)*, as the installation is called, is a way to recover an obsolete technology that can testify to how our world tends to be defined by the way we perceive it.[6]

Stationsraum fur assimilativen Zahlwitz

This is the title of an audio installation created in 2004 by Thomas Kubli with the support of the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne.[7]

Ten jelly cubes are placed in a room, parallel to the walls. Each cube contains a voice coil that sends audio signals into the gelatinous body. Entering the room, the viewer feels immersed inside an acoustically animated environment. This effect is obtained by hanging some loudspeakers on the external wall surfaces; this way, the vibrations are sent into the surrounding space while the sound source is hidden, and the

[5] Amit Roy, "MP3 generation ejects audio tape", *The Telegraph* (8 May 2007) <http://www.telegraphindia.com/1070508/asp/frontpage/story_7748884.asp>, 19 December 2009.

[6] See <http://www.danperrone.com>, 19 December 2009.

[7] See <http://www.khm.de/~kubli/Assets/pdfs/stationsraum_engl.pdf>, 19 December 2009.

viewer instinctively concentrates her/his attention on the cubes. Each cube emanates a sort of mantra, as it reads a number series which changes continuously. The gelatinous objects can be touched, and this takes the experience onto a physical, tactile plane. The viewer has the impression she/he is touching the numerical sequences and surrenders to the alternation between virtual and material, physical and psychic space, body and mind.

Kubli's installation can therefore be interpreted as the attempt to push the dialectical tension between the elements of human perception to its limit, by aesthetically reinterpreting a typical contemporary environment, that is, a space where interaction is mediated by technology. Moreover, Kubli's ironic use of jelly is particularly interesting, as collagen (or jelly) is the basal membrane that is the most abundant protein in mammals and is associated with the function of communication, in a way not dissimilar from the cosmetic industry.

Save the Waves

What is the sound of electricity? One of the possible answers to this question is *Save the Waves* (2004), a giant installation built by Canadian artist Jean-Pierre Aubé at the Darling Foundry in Ottawa. The foundry is placed near a Hydro-Quebec transformer (one of the major players in the North America electric energy market), producing a continuous buzz at 60Hz, the wavelength that, according to Aubé, is the soundtrack of our domestic lives.

The installation is constituted by four VLF (Very Long Frequency) antennas, placed in the old foundry in order to intercept the disturbances generated by the many electric elements in the area.[8] The signal is sent to a first computer, controlled by a second one that acts as a tuner, triggering the oscillation and the circulation of sounds through a specific software based on a simple mathematical formula (a sine curve).

In order to amplify the signal as much as possible, Aubé has also built an octophonic sound system, constituted by 24 loud speakers. This system is placed in the middle of the foundry and broadcasts in every direction the sounds created by the magnetic fields. These are modulated by a software based on its own induced wavelength variations.

The intention of the artist is to reproduce an amplified version of daily life conditions. These conditions are unavoidably marked by the frequencies of household appliances, such as, for example, refrigerators. We are surrounded by electromagnetic energy, with which we coexist – often unconsciously.

[8] Very low frequency or VLF refers to radio frequencies (RF) in the range of 3 kHz to 30 kHz. Since there is not much bandwidth in this band of the radio spectrum, only the simplest signals are used, such as those employed for radio navigation. Also known as the myriameter band or myriameter wave, as its wavelengths range from ten to one myriameters (an obsolete metric unit equal to 10 kilometers); see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VLF>, 19 December 2009.

Naturalscape

IIE - Interactive Infrasonic Installation

IIE (2009) is an interactive sound installation in which Reinhard Gupfinger

investigates infrasonic sounds, i.e. sounds which lie below the threshold of human audibility, having a frequency of less than 20/16 Hertz (20/16 cycles per second).[9]

Though the ear is insensitive to these sounds, the human body is nonetheless able to perceive them as vibrations: the Austrian artist explores the phenomenon by exposing the audience to this kind of perception. Infrasound is in fact very common in the natural environment, as it is produced by atmospheric phenomena such as thunder and wind, as well as by some animals (whales, elephants, etc.), which use them to communicate. However, even road traffic or industrial facilities may produce infrasounds under certain circumstances.

The amount of low frequencies in the environment is so great as to stimulate a reflection on their role in contemporary culture. The *IIE* project is an attempt to free human perception from the monopoly of noise, in order to open it to those sounds which although inaudible are no less important in determining our daily soundscape. Gupfinger has created an installation which brings together disparate elements, such as a 250 inches long organ pipe, a wind generator and a video-tracking interface for multi-user interaction. This installation allows the public not only to perceive infrasounds generated during the performance but also to interact with them: for example, the wind generator which blows into the organ pipe is set in motion (thanks to the video-tracking interface) by the users' movements in the space surrounding the installation. This produces a change in both the volume and speed of frequencies. In other words the users, with their movements, produce variations in the sound and this helps them to increase their *acoustic awareness* of the infrasound phenomenon.

[9] See <http://www.gupfinger.net/projects/iie.htm>, 19 December 2009.

Akousmaflore

The digital art world has recently seen the birth of many nature-themed interactive audio-installations. A common inspiration can be found here, starting with *Green Music*, created by John Lifton in the late Sixties, followed by *Pieces for Plants* by Masaoka,[10] and including *Akousmaflore* (2007) by French group Scenocosme (Grégory Lasserre and Anaïs met den Ancxt).[11]

What connects the abovementioned projects is the desire to represent the sound dimension that invisibly permeates any context inhabited by plants. The hybridization of plants and digital technologies can therefore be read as an attempt to show the interactions between the electric field surrounding us (our aura) and all natural environments. This is undoubtedly the basis for Scenocosme's latest installation: a garden of interactive plants and flowers which by reacting to the visitors' movements turns into an orchestra.

By inserting tiny sensors in the leaves, the French artists turn plants into musical instruments, but at the same time stress another characteristic

[10] See <http://www.miyamasaoka.com/interdisciplinary/brainwaves_plants/pieces_for_plants.html>, 19 December 2009.

[11] See <http://www.scenocosme.com/akousmaflore_en.htm>, 19 December 2009.

of plants: their ability to act as living elements, sensitive to changes in their environment. The fact that the sound vibrations produced in *Akousmaflore* are the output of digital technology (a sound flow is just another form of data flow) also allows the natural environment to be viewed as a place where biological elements and their digital representations can interact.

Fig. 1: *Akousmaflore*, 2007, courtesy of Scenocosme.

Auditory Seismology

Auditory Seismology (2004) is a project developed by Florian Dombois, director of the Institute for Transdisciplinarity at Bern University of the Arts.[12] His starting point is the observation that the frequency spectrum of a seismic wave is below 1 Hz, while the human audio spectrum is circa 20 Hz. In order to make the inaudible audible, Dombois has compressed a seismograph time data, up to 2000 times its usual power, and then sent the calculated signals to amplified speakers. The stunning result is nothing less than the sound produced by an earth tremor.

The experiment has a double edge: on the one hand it makes audible a phenomenon usually analyzed only visually, offering the opportunity of taking into account new aspects of the seismic process; on the other, it offers the opportunity to hear an amazing representation of what could be called *the sound of the Earth*, the noise produced by its countless underground layers in their ceaseless, very slow, movement.

The importance of the experiment must not be underestimated. Dumbois has accomplished a great feat. His installations have brought about an important linguistic shift – a shift which lies at the very heart of contemporary art – and have given us the opportunity to listen to phenomena usually represented only through visual curves, graphs and 3D models, so that we are induced to abandon one sensorial domain (sight) to enter another (sound).

[12] See <http://www.auditory-seismology.org/version2004>, 19 December 2009.

Machinescape

Harddisko

Harddisko (2004) is an installation created by Valentina Vuksic, a former Media Art student at the Zurich University of Design and Arts.[13] It focuses on what is really at the core of any computer music discourse, the raw sounds produced by the heart of any PC: its hard disk.

The project starts with actually finding flawed hard disks in the area where the installation is built. The hard disks must be obtained for free, even by

[13] <See http://www.harddisko.ch>, 19 December 2009.

Fig. 2: *Harddisko,* 2004, courtesy of Valentina Vuksic.

digging into electronic waste, and must be produced by different producers and with different characteristics.

Then the cases of the hard disks are removed, a special pickup is mounted on the head of the drive and connected to a sound mixer. As soon as the hard disks are plugged in, the head starts to generate sounds due to the movements required by basic start up procedure.

The fact that every hard disk is noticeably different from the others (different producers, models, firmware versions, etc.) guarantees a surprising diversity of sounds. It is a diversity that naturally fascinates: each with its own peculiar sound, each with its own story to tell.

The conductor of this futuristic orchestra holds a switch (instead of the classic stick) with which she/he plugs or unplugs each disk, embodying the On/Off logic present in any computer process.

[14] See <http://qotile.net/dotmatrix.html, 19 December 2009>.

[15] See <http://www.seseyann.com/plinkjet>, 19 December 2009.

Plink Jet

One of the most common practices in the media art field has always been the emphatic exhibition of everyday tools, like the countless devices that expand our own computer potential. In recent years, a specific trend has been developed, which uses different kinds of printers with a pure performative approach. After the paradigmatic *Dot Matrix Synth* (an in-progress project started by Paul Slocum in 2004) there has been a long creative series of installations and (more or less fortunate) attempts at rethinking these output devices for different purposes.[14] The latest at the time of writing is *Plink Jet* (2007), a robotic musical instrument created by Lesley Flanigan and Andrew Doro, former students from the Tisch School of Arts at New York University.[15]

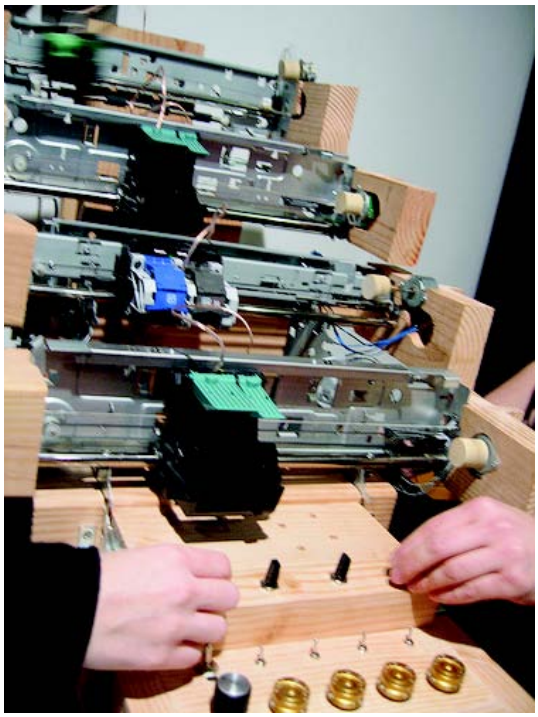

Fig. 3: *Plink Jet*, 2007, courtesy of Lesley Flanigan and Andrew Doro.

Four inkjet printers have been transformed each into a musical instrument: the result is an unusual ensemble which can be 'played'; yet it can also produce sounds autonomously, and even work combining these two modes. The user can choose among several levels of manual control, all easily accessible, each corresponding to a different degree of man/machine interaction.

The result of these collaborative performances is unpredictable, while the quality of the sounds produced,

quite obviously, depends on the sensitivity and expertise of the individual user interacting with the machine.

SoleNoid fs

Tap-dance rhythmic lines are the protagonists in *SoleNoid fs* (2009) by Peter William Holden. Eight glossy tap-dance shoes, placed symmetrically in a circle, are animated by a computer connected with circuits controlling electromechanical valves (solenoid valves) and compressed air hydraulic pistons.[16] The *living shoes* move in a multiplicity of directions beating the time of a Marko Wild composition on special circular platforms. Inserts on the soles, typical of tip-tap footwear, amplify the continuous movement of the tip-toe-toe-tip that occurs sometimes in sync and sometimes in different backbeats. The resulting effect is a concert of many different tones, in which the audience becomes the spectator in a theatre of machinic movements, orchestrated by a synthetic brain. In fact these clothing accessories, now rid of their human controllers, embody the deconstruction of the binary division between the tangibility of what is perceived through the senses and the virtuality of the corps de ballet.

[16] See <http://www.peter-william-holden.com/installations/solenoid/solenoid.html>, 19 December 2009.

Bufferrrbreakkkdownnn Arkestra

Singapore musician Marcos Destructos (aka Marc Chia, aka One Man Nation) has completed a compelling investigation of data transmission over computer networks with his *Bufferrrbreakkkdownnn Arkestra* (2008).[17]

Destructos's goal has been to highlight the role that the delay in data transmission (which depends on the amount of data traffic on each network) has in artistic performances involving streaming processes. To test this, eight audio sine wave files were sent to eight different points of a single streaming server operating system. If the networks work at the same speed, this should result in a single sound formed by the eight original sinusoidal tones. Actually, what happens is that uploading and downloading speeds vary considerably. This causes a breakdown of any ideal unique sound into different rhythms determined solely by the different operating speeds of the networks involved.

The imperfections of the medium become a constituent element of the One Man Nation performance: through a reversal of perspective, the delay that continues to characterize computer network transmissions (rightly deprecated by all good performers) is 'redeemed' and turned into a specifically aesthetic feature.

[17] See <http://onemannation.com/content/new-media/the-idea-i-thought-of-to-be-so-wonderful>, 19 December 2009.

Fig 4: *Bufferrrbreakkkdownnn Arkestra,* 2008, courtesy of Marcos Destructos.

The Continuator

The Continuator (2002-2007) is a research project directed by François Pachet (Sony Computer Science Laboratory in Paris).[18] It is an experiment focused on real time interaction with a system that can distinguish and memorize different music styles. The characteristics singled out enable a dialogue to take place between the musician and *The Continuator*. The system can produce musical phrases which can perfectly reproduce the style of a musician chosen by the user. Therefore such phrases are a sort of continuation of the stored sound incipit.

Another important characteristic of this project is the capacity to accumulate meaningful data after each session. The dialogue becomes more and more interesting as the system learns the musician's style. These learning skills mark the difference between *The Continuator* and other interactive music systems developed in recent years.

From an architectural point of view, we can identify two modules: the first (dedicated to analysis) receives its input from the MIDI interface; the second (dedicated to the generation of sounds) can work either in a "continuous" mode (producing sounds unceasingly after the input) or in a "question and answer" mode (every input generates only one output).

So far, *The Continuator* has mostly been used by avant-garde musicians (Bernard Lubat, Claude Barthélémy, György Kurtag, etc.) and very young children; as regards the latter, the system has been extraordinarily successful in improving preschool children's listening abilities, which are still in an early stage of development.

[18] See <http://www.csl.sony.fr/items/2002/the-continuator>, 19 December 2009.

Urbanscape

Street Radio

The public installation *Street Radio* (2008) was developed by Austrian Armin Medosch at the central railway station in Southampton.[19] Medosch has realized a radio network drawing on Hivenetworks technology and with the help of Alexei Blinov, a Raylabs artist who has already contributed to countless media artworks. The network is constituted by ten public nodes, broadcasting stories selected from the Southampton Oral History Archive and adapted to match the characteristics of each site where the nodes were implemented.

Street Radio uses a set of technologies that have become available – even outside the scientific research *sancta sanctorum* – thanks to the virtuous circle put into operation by the free software movement. Now they lend themselves to various DIY approaches, like that of *Street Radio*.

Every installation node is made up of a small weather resistant box (weather in this port city is far from mild); the inside hardware/software combination, developed by Hivenetworks, enables the loop playing of

[19] See <http://www.thenextlayer.org/node/378>, 19 December 2009.

audio files through FM radio waves (89.0 MHz). The boxes are supplied with a small USB charger; they can spread the audio waves up to 30 meters away and are also able to register the presence of a Bluetooth enabled mobile. Remote connections are used only for the maintenance of the devices, which are definitely not access points.

One of the most interesting aspects of this experiment is its involvement of the newest forms of communication and technical innovation with oral tradition, thereby making room for a new, emergent form of orality. The *Street Radio* project can then be interpreted as the nth disproof of the short-sighted forecast stating that oral tradition would be wiped out by the computer society.

Yesnation

One of the most fascinating challenges posed by the gathering of huge amounts of digital data is to find effective ways of visualising them. Current software mapping features are so advanced that early technology – such as the green letters displayed on the black background of the first terminals – seems almost to belong to a distant geological age.

Amongst the most popular experiments are those which try to establish a relationship between the source and its geographical position. It seems that we are lost in the universe of digital (or digitalized) information and so we feel the need to recontextualize ourselves in the real world.

This need lies behind *Yesnation* (2006), a Flash application developed by Yes.net.[20] On the background of a U.S. map (with the borders of the states outlined), the titles of the tunes broadcast by the vast network of U.S. radio stations pop up in real time. Each title appears and is related to the particular place where the radio station is placed by a red dot appearing on the map, and then it suddenly disappears without a trace.

It could seem banal to underline that in California there are lots of titles in Spanish, while in Montana multi-culturalism is still a utopia. But in the end the most interesting element of *Yesnation* is to give us a snapshot of the U.S. radio universe: an ephemeral snapshot, indeed, because it is intended to disappear at once, making space for a new one.

34s56w.org

Brian Mackern (director of *Artefactos virtuales* and creator of *Netart_latino*) is a Uruguayan artist of the Net generation.[21] His research is to be located within a tradition of creative experimentation – going back to the 1900 avant-garde movements – which linked audio and visual objects. In the Web it has finally found an ideal ground in which to achieve depth and visibility.

Thanks to the opportunities introduced by new digital tools, the dialectic tension between sounds and images has become the object of endless

[20] See <http://yes.com/yes-nation>, 19 December 2009.

[21] See <http://www.internet.com.uy/vibri>, 19 December 2009; and http://netart.org.uy/latino, 19 December 2009.

thinking and investigations, all connected to the spreading of new cultural paradigms. Among them – above all – the self-consciousness and self-sufficient life of digital objects.

Within this frame, Mackern offers his personal answer to the need to find new modes of mediation between sounds and images, an answer characterized by a sense of rootedness and of belonging to a specific culture. In this sense, the artist's reinterpretation of the so-called "Tormenta de Santa Rosa" in his *34s56w.org* project, is of central importance.[22] Isabel Flores de Oliva (1586-1617), beatified with the name of Santa Rosa of Lima, patron of the Catholic Church in Latin America and the Philippines, is celebrated on August 30. In 1615, a great storm prevented an enemy from landing on the coast and believers attributed the storm to Rosa's prayers. The worship of Santa Rosa in the Rio de la Plata is celebrated at the end of August, when frequent floods, rains and electrical activity hit the area. These natural phenomena are associated, in popular belief, to the presence of the Saint and are known as the "Storm of Santa Rosa".[23]

Since 2002, between the end of August and the beginning of September Mackern has carried out several recordings of electrical interferences on radiofrequencies caused by the proximity of the storm in Montevideo. Recorded sounds were afterwards associated to fragmented images distributed on the map of Montevideo (34s56w are Montevideo's geographical coordinates). This way, the installation outlines a psychogeography where noise becomes a religious element that is deemed to reveal the presence of the Saint.

[22] See <www.meteorologia.com.uy>, 19 December 2009.

[23] See http://34s56w.org, 19 December 2009.

Mythscape

Ex Pharao

Ex Pharao (2006) is a re-elaboration of *Moses und Aaron* by Arnold Schönberg.[24] André and Michel Décosterd, a musician and an architect working together under the name of Cod.Act, have attempted to visualize Schönberg's work in an installation where the viewer is an actor who turns into a conductor. By moving within the installation and interacting with it, she/he can change the intensity of the orchestra and the choir, replying to the statements of the prophets and eventually coming to embody the people of Israel.

This installation elaborates the scene where Moses and Aaron try to convince the sceptical people of Israel. The Décosterd brothers have rewritten the score according to a serial logic, so as to adapt it perfectly to the sound manipulation software. As a result of this effort, in *Ex Pharao* the sound alterations triggered in real time by the interaction of the visitors never produce any significant variation with respect to Schönberg's original work.

[24] A video of this installation may be found in the **Multimedia** section. See also <http://www.codact.ch/gb/pharaogb.html>, 19 December 2009.

The installation is a corridor delimited by two sets of ropes which represent the physical context of Schönberg's work. The cables control the rotation of two levers with a loudspeaker at each end. These two loudspeakers, according to the authors, represent Moses and Aaron.

When a visitor enters the corridor, she/he literally stands in front of the prophets and, by pulling the cables, she/he can tweak the sound parameters, changing the expressiveness of the orchestra and choir. Proceeding through the corridor, the visitor is then reached by the prophets' voices. She/he is part of the drama with all her/his senses.

Fig 5: *Ex Pharao*, 2006, courtesy of André and Michel Décosterd.

This is a unique occasion to live a truly multisensorial experience whose interactive nature creates the context for a profound relationship with Schönberg's work, and at the same time to absorb the power of the myth and feel the destiny of the 'chosen people' as one's own.

Sonic Wargame

Club Transmediale (the venue that traditionally hosts musical and audio-visual performances during the *Transmediale* festival in Berlin) was transformed in 2007 into an arena where valiant performers fight with one another using such weapons as scratches, samples and effects.[25]

The battlefield was offered by *Sonic Wargame* (2007), a quadriphonic installation created by the Dutch musician Xavier Van Wersch, which allows four single players (or two teams of two players each) to compete under the supervision of a referee and with the participation of the audience. The players, positioned at the corners of this installation, are able to use a console and a loudspeaker and vote for the other players through a switch.[26] Each time one of the players gets two or three preferences, the system begins playing that player's sounds.

The transition between the sounds of one player and the next is very fast, but some coloured light bulbs tell, by lighting up, who is voting for whom and whose sounds are being played at that moment. At the same time, a video signal projected on a wall will give the audience additional information (such as each player's score).

One of the most interesting aspects of this installation is that the players are interconnected so that they receive the other players' sounds and can interact with them. The result is a continuously regenerating quadriphonic sound mix.

[25] *Transmediale* is a leading international annual festival of art and digital culture, presenting experiments in digital art that reflect the socio-cultural impact of new technologies. The program includes a conference, an exhibition, live performances, film and video programs and a variety of partner events throughout Berlin. See <www.transmediale.de>, 19 December 2009.

[26] See <http://www.sonic-wargame.net>, 19 December 2009.

Fig. 6: *Sonic Wargame*, 2007, courtesy of Xavier Van Wersch.

Sonic Wargame is a new way of experiencing collective audio performances where the border between collaboration and competition is blurred, and the cross-voting element determines a situation of continuous passage from absolute control of sound to anarchic drifts where sound defies any pretension to ownership. In the background is the myth of the elections, almost a metaphor of modern democratic systems and of the huge lotteries that sanction their legitimacy.

At the end of this journey through sound in digital art music, what emerges – and is worth noting in these conclusive remarks – is that despite the plurality of approaches, the heterogeneity of the media employed, the specificity of individual backgrounds and the different aesthetic forms of these artworks, what binds these artistic experimentations is the common attempt at interpreting the rapid changes that have overwhelmed society, culture, and landscape in the wake of the 'digital society'. As McLuhan already guessed, "the artist picks up the message of cultural and technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs".[27] As a consequence, these works may help identifying possible viewpoints on a contemporaneity in which society has been projected by technology all too rapidly. We do not have the tools to decode the reality that surrounds us (yet): the aesthetic elaboration of what it means to live in a state of 'cohabitation with technology' can offer us such an array of tools.

[27] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964) 65.

Of Castrati, Angels and Simians

Ernesto Tomasini interviewed by Serena Guarracino

I first saw Ernesto Tomasini on stage in 2003 in his show *True or Falsetto? A Secret History of the Castrati*. I was immediately taken by his imposing stage presence (heightened by the small venue of the Drill Hall, London) and by the famed four octaves extension of his voice. He treated the subject of opera with a mixture of lightness and commitment that was completely foreign to me as an Italian as well as a would-be scholar of the contested relationship between opera and gender politics. Six years later, I finally managed to ask him some of the questions that have riddled me over the years.

SG: You define yourself – you actually have been defined – as "a voice in drag". What does this mean to you?

ET: Yes, *Time Out* said that, and I used to use it as a joke… But now it's not accurate any more. A voice in drag would be the falsetto voice: that's a voice that sounds female but is male; the vocal correspondent of a drag queen. But today I use all of my range, so it's not really a voice in drag; if you want it's like a quick-change artist of a voice, the Arturo Brachetti of voices!

SG: Still, I do believe your performances embody what Judith Butler wrote about drag, as something that makes the performance of gender identity conspicuous in any case. For her, the drag queen works only as a starting point for a complete rewriting of gender politics and performance.[1] Maybe in this sense the word 'drag' would apply to your work? Because I feel you play with different registers…

ET: Yes, not strictly as traditional drag… but yes. In a way, when I employ the high voice, the falsetto, I don't really – especially these days as my voice is darkening – I don't really play the 'female essence' any more. The disguises are much more subtle. So Butler is probably right, although... I actually find my falsetto is becoming very, very male…

SG: What is a male falsetto?

ET: You know, there are falsettos that are very bright, very clear in sound – which I can reproduce. These are experienced as very female sounding, more mezzosoprano. Then there are darker falsettos, which are perceived as male, and many countertenors tend to agree, although I'm not a countertenor…

SG: Why do you say you're not a countertenor?

ET: I'm not, because I haven't got the training of a countertenor, I haven't got the interest in music that a countertenor has, I don't dedicate

[1] In Butler's words, "I would suggest that drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity". Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 174.[Notes by SG]

my life to my voice the way a countertenor does. A countertenor lives in a cotton wool world, he avoids this and that, and really his art is his life. I love going out, I love drinking, trashing myself… My body is not a temple; hence, I'm not a countertenor. Anyway, besides that, I think there are specific techniques to produce the countertenor voice, which I don't employ. I'm more of a falsettist, quite shrill, quite forward, so to speak. Countertenors tend to have a purer sound. I mean, it's debatable: there are books this thick on what a countertenor is, and after you read them you are even more confused. Michael Chance, one of the world's leading countertenors, was interested in working with a voice like mine and gave me lessons. Still, I am more of a punk-rock countertenor… I'd say that: I'm the Johnny Rotten of countertenors! And Chance was interested: I suppose in his perspective I was a countertenor after all. But, at the end of the day, I don't sing countertenor material in countertenor venues.

SG: So the point is not the techniques but it's the venues, the canon, the repertoire?

ET: It's just about everything. It's the repertoire, the technique, the circuit. I mean, I can impersonate the countertenor sound for effect, and I have, here and there. But what comes natural to me is a crazier voice. I do believe I'm damaging it in many ways, because of my lifestyle and because of where I take it to and how I take it to it. I'm not worried about that, I don't care, and if I stop singing high when I'm fifty I still don't care, I can use my other voices or, failing those, I'll write children's books – but at least I have lived. I don't feel like I am in custody of this amazing instrument that is talking to the gods. Although, in reviews, I am frequently described as Maria Callas combined with someone else, I feel more like Amy Winehouse (*he laughs*).

SG: Countertenors are now gaining public recognition as never before, they have entered the musical canon and grabbed everything they could…

ET: Yes, this is very true generally but not so much in Italy where I see a lot of resistance. In England it has been easier as they have a long tradition here and they survived in the church before being rediscovered by Britten. In Italy, where I guess they still remind the Vatican of the castrati 'incident', they have been swept under the carpet of history. Finally the vibrations of the revival in Northern Europe and the US are hitting even Italy, but on such religious/macho soil this is not easy.

SG: When I first heard you performing I thought, why didn't he become an opera singer?

ET: Well, because I come from the wrong side of the tracks, I was never trained and it's not my milieu. I love the repertoire and I enjoy it as an audience member – I go to the opera, but I just don't see myself in it.

SG: I remember reading in an interview that you don't like characters that have not been shaped for you, characters you can't interact with. I

believe it was about you playing Mary Sunshine in the West End production of *Chicago*.[2]

ET: When you create a role, that's interesting, because, with certain limitations, you put all of yourself in it and you shape it up; but if you have to recreate a standard role then that's not fun. In the West End that's what they mostly do: twenty-five years ago someone created *Phantom*, and all the following Phantoms must stick to the work of the first one and they are asked (forced, in my case) to reproduce the reproduction of a reproduction of a reproduction… Some performers seem to be programmed to do that, I need more freedom.

SG: Your activity has moved through characters that have all been created by you or that you have contributed to in quite a decisive way. *True or Falsetto?*, for example, was written by Lucy Powell but from an idea that was actually yours.[3]

ET: Apart from two exceptions I have always played characters that I originated. With *True or Falsetto?* I started writing it as a collection of cabaret sketches (which was what I knew, where I came from) but I soon realized that this could be a play and that I really needed a talented playwright to write it. So I called Lucy (whose previous work I had admired) and she wrote a layered, very strong comedy, obviously inspired and informed by me but ultimately her own play. When I took the show on the road I injected so many gags and jokes in it that it ended up lasting an extra twenty minutes. It was a huge winner with audiences and has paved the way for my own first play. That's why I enjoy the freedom.

SG: Still the castrato played a central role in your career before that – I remember one of your early works called *The Electro Castrato*, back in the 90s.[4] Now there is such a huge investment in the castrato repertoire in the opera world – I mean, Cecilia Bartoli has been doing it… Do you feel any empathy with the use of the castrato in operatic repertoires today?

ET: Well, no, I think it's two very different things. The whole repertoire has been neglected for a long time because of the difficulty of putting on these operas. Now they are restoring them to the stage (*he unthinkingly shifts to Italian, his Sicilian accent becoming quite apparent*), *hence there is a commercial interest in widening the opera repertoire, which has been mostly limited to the nineteenth century. Moreover, in the baroque repertoire castrato roles have been traditionally played by women, who I believe cannot convey the gender ambiguity performed by a castrato or a countertenor* –

Fig. 1: Castrato in the snow, portrait of Ernesto Tomasini by Charles Severne, photograph, 2003.

[2] In the theatrical staging of *Chicago* (as against the film version by Rob Marshall, 2002) Miss Sunshine is a travesty role, i.e. a woman character played by a male actor. Tomasini played it in a West End production at the Adelphi Theatre in 2004-2005.

[3] For a trailer of the show see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAdTU6E0hug>, 19 January 2010.

[4] See Ernesto Tomasini interviewed on *The Electro Castrato* (from the Wild Iris documentary *The Amazing Tomasini*), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Q6N7fWAr7U, 19 January 2010.

either in male or female clothes. I really do not relate with this, because I don't think this is what the castrato is about…

SG: *What is 'it', then?*

ET: *Well, plenty of things… I'm not driven by either commercial or purely 'musical' motives. I try to tackle more intimate and diverse needs* (*he goes back to English*). One is surely the most represented aspect, the Extraordinary presented on stage: "come and see the monster". Some of them used to be these extraordinarily tall people who would plant themselves on stage and roar this stereophonic sound… This is something no countertenor today could ever represent and I did it in the *Electro Castrato* by adding to the equation a disembowelled stripper, a sow and a computer (don't ask!). But what for me is even more interesting is the opposite of this, which is something that I think has not been explored and I tried to dig deep into it in *True or Falsetto?* with the character of Moreschi, in other words the *normality* of an extraordinary condition.[5] The regular guy underneath the unbelievable performer. Once the make up comes off and the razz-ma-tazz is switched off, we are left with a real person – singing machine no more. Farinelli's letters to Metastasio are a wonderful example of this and you read many stories about the way the castrati were revered…

SG: ... and also demonized…

ET: Yes, by detractors at some point, but you also read a lot about other stuff… I mean, in Italy they were called *musico* instead of, say, 'weirdo', and this says a lot. Then there is also the sexual ambiguity of this figure which is deeply anarchic, which fractures our given perception of gender and sexuality, a vision which of course is more metaphysical than real… And, I would add, the ambiguity of the sound is not so much female/male but more boy/grown up man, a twisted angel kind of creature. As you may know, in those days, the sex of the singer didn't really matter in many cases, the range of the score was more important. Many women were employed in male roles even at the time of castrati… There were practical reasons. I actually think it was not a very arty-farty world in those days, early on especially; it was all very practical. A company had to produce an opera and there are all sorts of technical details which are not written on the manuscripts … There must have been a lot of ugly stuff underneath all that beauty.

SG: What has always fascinated me about the castrati, when you re-stage or recreate an opera that was written

[5] Alessandro Moreschi (1858-1922) was the last castrato to perform at the Sistine Chapel. His voice was recorded on wax cylinders by Fred and Will Gaisberg in 1902 and by W. Sinkler Darby in 1904; these are to date the only (rather faded) testimony of the tradition of the castrati singers: see *Alessandro Moreschi. The Last Castrato. Complete Vatican Recordings*, Opal, 1984, vinyl; and 1997, compact disc.

Fig. 2: Ernesto Tomasini in *True or Falsetto? A Secret History of the Castrati*, Drill Hall, second London run, 2003, photo by Charles Severne.

for a castrato, is how you translate the idea of castration after Freud, after the castrati disappeared and castration assumed the role it has in psychoanalysis, in a context where gender is assumed to be either masculine or feminine. What would be the impact of thinking back to the castrato today in these terms?

ET: Today he's more of a … well, there is a lot of investment in the idea, of course. I mean, there was an online forum I used to go on, called "Castrato History" or something, and there was a minority of people there who actually wanted to bring back the practice! Many endocrinological castrati used to participate in the forum and when I went to Mexico I met the wonderful Javier Medina Avila, who is an endocrinological castrato.[6] I am not sure about the medical details here, and probably Javier and others wouldn't like the definition, but these people keep the soprano voice, speaking and singing. When I talked to Javier over the phone for the first time I believed it was his mother! Anyway, he's a wonderful singer but – well, this is a bit of a gossip but I'll tell you anyway – he went to Germany to meet a very famous countertenor, to study with him, get some advice. The guy made him sing and at the end of it he threw him out of his office, calling him a weirdo, a freak, and he's disgusting and revolting and all this stuff. Now, my reading of it is because he thinks 'oh my God, here there is this guy who can sing the repertoire I am popularizing and he's the real item – I mean, he sings extraordinarily, he does need some training but … So what am I going to do? Am I going to embrace him and give him a career? No, I throw him out and call him a freak'. And as a result, Javier being a very sensitive guy, never sang again for about seven years. He has begun again recently and has been in a beautiful show called "Angels and Monsters", if I'm not wrong. So… I forgot your question now!

SG: Well, you are actually answering it... What I am wondering about now, from *The Electro Castrato* to what you do today, with Fabrizio Modenese Palumbo or with Othon Mataragas, is what has remained of the castrato in these later experiments of yours.

ET: I think *The Electro Castrato* was me *trying hard*; now I feel like I have somehow become the electro castrato, not trying at all but just being. In this new phase of my life, both words – "electro" and "castrato" – have sort of lost their original meaning; or rather they have acquired others. As I said before, I use all the range – I actually have very deep, low tones, (*his voice goes down quite a bit*) I can sing bass (*goes middle range again*) and this is more of a castrato in modern monster mode, as when I go ahhhhhh (*he vocalizes from a deep bass range to a shrill falsetto*)…

SG: I was listening to "Anhedonia" by Andrew Liles, where you do the vocals, and there is a line there: "these are no angels, these are…"

ET: …"hovering flies".[7]

SG: Yes! And in the context of your other works of the last few years, I

[6] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8XXF52ToXw> (Javier Medina Avila sings "L'ideale" by Francesco Tosi), 15 January 2010.

[7] Opening track from the album *Black Sea* (Betalactam Ring Records, 2007), the sixth in a series of seven called *The Vortex Vault.*

feel maybe there is an 'angel' imagery that cuts across all your different projects – something you bring with you. I mean, *Digital Angel* is the title of a three-parted song (although maybe I would call it a miniature symphony or opera) by Othon Mataragas, where you feature as singer; and you have also created a performance – part soundtrack, part theatre – for Derek Jarman's *Angelic Conversation*.[8] Would you say the castrato actually reverberates in this sexual, or a-sexual, ambiguity of angels – angels who are quite different from the ones we were taught of in the Catholic church?

ET: One of the first pieces I sang for Othon was in Enochian so there you are, one more element.[9] I think it's all in what I have just explained, this concept of the modern castrato as monster-asexual/pansexual angel-normal guy (and more), because whatever I do, in all these different projects, I remain myself; these are all parts of myself, hence the ambiguity is stretched and multiplied. In the songs that I sing (those by Othon or co-authored with Fabrizio and others), right now, I am following two main

Fig. 3: Othon Mataragas and Ernesto Tomasini on stage, 2007, Art House Ekvasisa, Athens, photo by Mr. XIII.

formats. In one I play one character throughout one song, in spite of using many different voices. It's a dramatization of inner turmoils. In Othon's pieces, for example, all the different colours of the voice, which we are not afraid to take to extremes, exasperate the moods of the same character and warp them with vehemence and schizophrenia. In the other format I play different 'characters' within the same song and the layers are of a different nature. For example in a piece I created over original music by Fabrizio, "Trattato sulla natura delle stelle per voce ed harmonium", there is an introduction that is spoken by one character, a scientist, and then you hear the sound of breathing that takes a man away from earth; he

[8] For Tomasini's work (in collaboration with Peter "Sleazy" Christopherson, Othon Mataragas and David Tibet) on Derek Jarman's *The Angelic Conversation* see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aA3ccnrdVOo> (part I); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYmv8V9rkwM> (part II); and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pH3FR-Z0tXs> (part III), 19 January 2010.

[9] Enochian, or "angelic" language, was created in the late 16th century by John Dee and Edward Kelley, who claimed that it had been revealed to them by angels: the track can be found in the **Multimedia** section of *Anglistica*.

goes off in space and meets planets and constellations and they say their names, the planets tend to talk in deeper tones and the stars are more soprano.[10] So, you see, there is the attempt to give voice to various characters, most of which are not human in this case. They sing their own Latin names, which is a very human thing – astrology, naming stars to give them a human identity, attributing powers to them that can affect humans – and after that there's a sort of sound loop that goes (*sings*), and then the voices get distorted, and that's when we lose the human element and we go beyond it: human words and concepts lose meaning to finally disappear altogether.

SG: Is this where the title of the album, *Canes Venatici*, comes from?

ET: Yes, it is a constellation…

SG: But also an animal.

ET: Yes, it means *cani da caccia*, hunting dogs. I have often dealt with the human reading of things that are incomprehensible. The universe – from whichever school of thought you look at it – is not based around the human but all we have is our own local, sense-generated experience of it, hence we give names to stars and give them powers relevant to us, but they do not *have* names and, in all honesty, I do hope that they are there for more vital purposes than to determine whether some hairdresser from Essex will be full of positive energy between March and May! *(he pulls a funny face)* As Carmelo Bene used to say (albeit in a different context): "What does life know about life?". There's an extra-human perspective, which for me is not super-natural in any way; on the contrary, it's very natural... but I digress. I don't know if this answers your question and I have no better way to explain it than to invite you to listen to that track and get your own emotions out of it.

As for the gender thing: I started from it, and it was extremely important to me when I started as a person and as an artist: gender for me was *it*, and the use of the voice was all about gender, about redefining, or mocking, or misplacing sexuality, just about that. Now, being a little bit older (*laughs*), I tend to be interested in more than just gender.

SG: It sounds to me as if you were actually broadening the scope of the 'gender issue' here; it does not have to do just with sexuality anymore, but also with different aspects of life, with religion, the body, performance, and eventually with politics.

ET: I think you cannot get away from gender. I mean, I've just spoken about the gender of stars and planets! So, try as I may, I can't; but I really want to try other avenues and even get away from the human if you want. My next projects might expose the 'non-human' on stage, who knows? I do enjoy the human element, though, and that is why I bring flesh and blood to my concerts, I'm always over the top (*starts to mark and modulate vowels*), always enjoying the flesh of my body moving as I am communicating.

[10] "Trattato sulla natura delle stelle per voce ed harmonium" is the opening track of the album *Canes Venatici* (Blossoming Noise, 2008): the track can be found as above in the **Multimedia** section.

SG: What do you mean by "the human element"?

ET: Well, for example the human incarnation in "Trattato" is a scientist, the heir of Enlightenment thinking, from which humanism springs next to the equation human-rational, inherited from Aristotle: so he is the portrayal of man 'the rational animal'. Yet, later in the piece this 'human' dissolves in another idea of human, which infers an element that is physical in a radical way – and ultimately biopolitical. This kind of human is finally able to get lost in a human-less region and condition. On the other hand, when I talk about 'non-human' I mean a variety of different things strongly influenced by Artaud and other authors, which interest me right now.

SG: Moving to another topic, we talked about electronic music, rock'n'roll, opera … I've read many reviews of your work and your work is defined as either "experimental music" or – well, the weirdest one was "modern classical music". Do you endorse any of these?

ET: Well, there's also "classicadelic", and Othon and myself have endorsed that, it makes us laugh. I deal with the different genres that come my way and that I choose to embrace. I guess they all fall under the umbrella of 'experimental' music – in one case 'post-rock' – but I'm not really interested in categories or genres, I experiment first of all with myself. You know, interviewers always assume that I come from this milieu of music, which I don't! I mean, I spent my childhood and teens secluded in another kind of music completely – even the Beatles were too outrageously modern for me! I was locked up in everything old. I was really resisting it, consciously; I never wanted to listen to 'modern' music.

SG: What did you listen to?

ET: Well, classical, easy listening, soundtracks all of that, everything that was old-fashioned, show tunes, opera, early recordings… The singer who opened the door to modern stuff for me was Marc Almond, because a friend of mine made me hear his music, and there was a *chansonnier* quality in him that I could relate to. Through Almond I got out of my cocoon and was excited to discover so many wonderful different genres but even today I'm not a pop music expert. When years later Almond told me how much he liked my voice I was ultra-chuffed! It all came full circle for me.

SG: Experimentation seems to me central to all your works, as I noticed in your recent show in Naples with Ron Athey.[11] I mean, the Neapolitan theatre audience is generally very bourgeois, and the "Napoli Teatro Festival" is no different. And I do remember the house was full, and all these people looked so horrified, I mean, I don't know if you could see their faces…

ET: I could and I couldn't as we, the performers, were behind a curtain of beads most of the time but then I bet that that's what the organizers

[11] Ron Athey has become (in)famous in the early 90s with his "Torture Trilogy". His shows, which explore the relations between the performing body, pain, and the cultural politics of HIV/AIDS, include public scarification and other self-harming practices: queer theorist Beatriz Preciado dedicates one chapter of her *Contra-sexual Manifesto* to Athey's work. The show mentioned here, *History of Ecstasy*, opened the Napoli Teatro Festival in 2009.

Fig. 4: Ron Athey and Ernesto Tomasini in *History of Ecstasy*, Museo MADRE, Naples, 2009, photo Museo MADRE, courtesy of Ernesto Tomasini.

wanted: to open the festival with a shocker, something that was going to make people talk. It actually worked, the entire programme was sold out but I don't think it was one of Ron's more extreme shows because he's not interested in shock value. What he does is deep, intense and personal; I see it as poetry in action. Making ladies squeal in their fur coats is most definitely not on his agenda. Eugenio Viola, the programmer at the Museo Madre who wanted the show for all the good reasons, is a young man with vision and I cannot but cringe at the thought of all the obstacles and difficulties he must be confronted with on a daily basis. That's one of the reasons why I left Italy.

SG: I must say I was surprised that they decided to have the show in Naples.

ET: Actually somebody said that this was such an important show for Naples, to open up the scene or something…

SG: Although they has been doing this stuff for twenty years or something now.

ET: Ron? Maybe more and he has pushed the boundaries, forever changing the idea of performance art, taking it to a totally different level.

SG: One last question: it has been coming up in my head all the time, I keep thinking of the word 'queer', in the terms I am acquainted to coming from gender and cultural studies, and I was wondering if you would say it applies to you and your work.

ET: I would have been extremely proud and keen for it to apply to me some twenty years ago, when I was very, very oriented towards the gay movement, that was the time when gender switching was central. Then it kind of faded away from me, because I just think the whole MCA queer community has betrayed anything that was queer, and I lost interest. I see organized groups, but even queer people, everyday people, craving for conformity. To me 'queer' was important because it was radical, it was a bomb in the middle of people's prejudices and boring lives, it was a chance for some human beings who were given some kind of difference from the norm to show alternatives. Instead no – now they want to get married and have children, be legal with it, and what's the point? If anything, you should fight for the right of straight people to get rid of that. I would actually want a campaign to prevent straight people from getting married, so that they can choose their own individual life and have the political right to live together (if they really must) without any ritual, contract or

bond. I think that is the campaign, not to fight to get the opportunity to be caged in the same mistake that has been made for two thousand years. Because of that, I kind of dissociate myself from 'queer' as a political entity – again, 'political' can be something you take in your hand and use, or an ambition that is beyond you. I guess that somehow I might for some fall into the 'queer' category. Whatever, I'm not bothered!

SG: I thought that as a performer you wouldn't be bothered…

ET: Not any more, but as I was saying I used to, because of course it had to do with… I mean, for me to be accepted as myself (as gay, I used to say) in my family, in my everything, was so important, as a fourteen-fifteen years old. I began performing very early, so my early shows were all about queer, *ante litteram*…

SG: I remember that episode, your being kicked out of the church choir at about ten, because of the way you sang…[12]

ET: Yes, of course, that was really *ante litteram*! It was all in there: the "boy singing like a girl" issue; again, gender, sexuality, what is legitimate and what is not, with the church above it all. I think that anecdote covers it all. But then when I became a cabaret artiste the queer element was ninety percent in it, all my shows were all about gender and sexuality… It was also the early-mid eighties, so it was really difficult and even dangerous at the time. I think I was the only one, in my milieu, tackling these issues, certainly in Italy. There was no queer Italian artist in those days – mainstream or underground – maybe Leopoldo Mastelloni.

SG: There were some artists that sort of *were* there, but one didn't know it, they didn't say it.

ET: Apart from Ivan Cattaneo (he was out, wasn't he?) and a couple of other pop stars, who were closeted anyway, I would say the two queer celebrities of yore in Italy were Mastelloni and Paolo Poli, who were not saying 'we are gay', but obviously, I mean, Paolo Poli and his "Santa Rita"… Actually I've seen some contemporary interviews and we seem to agree on many things, he doesn't want to go off to Gay Pride, this thing about the right of being gay – what does this mean? "Being gay is natural, it's not a right", Poli says.[13] Contrary to Poli I *would* go to Pride but certainly not to give any cheek a pat. The problem is, all of this *could* happen because it was born under the shadow of consumerism. The whole thing had a chance of becoming 'almost' legitimate because of economic reasons, because of investments, because of money, the 'pink pound' as they called it in the 90s. So that triggered some kind of liberation, but I don't think the process has also been political, on the contrary resistance for the human and political aspects is still very strong, but because these people are an economic asset then there has been some kind of opening.

SG: But only when they conform?

[12] See Tomasini's interview for the documentary *Film Fever: Julie Andrews Changed My Life*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0cOm44v-Zc>, 8 February 2010.

[13] See "Paolo Poli: 80 anni da regina", interview for the Italian TV show "Magazine sul 2" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXK0azrr-W0>, 19 January 2010.

ET: Yes, only when they can become like their mama and papa, when they are a caricature of…

SG: Didn't we want to get rid of that?

ET: I don't know, people should do what they want to do and, when all is said and done, uniformity is better than the unconditional hatred of the old days. Yet, I don't want to have anything to do with that, I don't want to succumb to external pressures. I've always deluded expectations, I'm used to doing that: people have always told me 'one day this is going to happen to you' – it's never happened! I do believe humans come from primates, individual simians who were organized in clans, not in families, so I believe in the clan of whatever nature and the freedom of individuals within it, not in the family. I believe that the family as we imagine it – especially in Italy – is a strong imposition from the outside which is unnatural. Italians in particular have a drive for uniformity, they need it, they want to belong, they are terrified the moment they are alone, or different.

SG: Montanelli once said Italians are fascists at heart, they want a leader, they want to be part of a crowd…

ET: Yes, it is very true. But in the end it doesn't really matter, we'll all go to the devil anyway.

Serena Guarracino

Interpreting Music, Interpreting Identity
Coda

> [I]t is culture in general, and music in particular, that provide an alternative model for the conflict of identities.
> (Edward W. Said, *The Ramallah Concert*)

In a recent work co-authored with Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler mentions the singing of the US anthem in Spanish by illegal residents in California as posing a question of property (as well as propriety): "to whom does this anthem belong?".[1] While the Bush administration claimed that the anthem could only be sung in English, its 'mother-tongue', the migrants' gesture claimed the national tune as their own. At the same time, it made the anthem itself sound foreign, different from the sound singers and listeners have been used to hum and sing along to. The migrants' performance (for such it may be termed) works to create and express a community, one however that has no recognition in public, national discourse: the very possibility to sing the national anthem in an-other language opens up national identity to a plurality of voices. As Butler writes, "the 'we' to sing and to be asserted in Spanish surely does something to our notions of the nation and to our notions of equality. It's not just that many people sang together … but also that singing is a plural act, an articulation of plurality".[2]

[1] Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (London, New York and Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007), 58.

[2] Ibid., 59.

The episode quoted by Butler may easily be put alongside the many performances included in both *Voicings: Music across Borders* and *Music and the Performance of Identity*. On the one hand, illegal residents who have crossed the border between the US and Mexico sing the national anthem in Spanish, thus performing it, as it were, *across the border* between the US tune and the Spanish language. On the other, by bringing together the language of their country of origin and the national tune of their adopted, would-be homeland, the singers *perform an identity* that is neither the one nor the other, but calls for a miscegenation, an identity that is not unitary but plural, and in this plurality finds its foundation. In both these aspects, the suppleness of musical performance – which allows the tune to be recognizable and at the same time foreign because of the language in which it is sung – comes to the fore as a privileged *locus* of utterance for the very "articulation of plurality" Butler vindicates.

The question Butler and Spivak pose in their discussion of contemporary forms of citizenship and the nation-state is whether this subversive act of appropriation of one of the most charged national signifiers – the anthem

– may point to a different elaboration of identity, which comes about neither as a psychoanalytic process nor as a consequence of the power networks in which each human being is always and inevitably entangled.[3] On the contrary, the subject that "sings the nation-state", as the title of the book goes, is in every way a performative subject, whose gesture of appropriation, of repetition-with-variation of the US national anthem marks her/his location as a migrant subject, a subject (quite literally) across borders. Butler calls this a "speech act", and pairs it with other similar acts – such as the migrants' slogan "*somos equales*", we are equal; yet, I would like to focus on the fact that the Butler-Spivak subject here does not speak, but *sings* the nation-state. The use of a musical performance, although not expanded on by the authors, highlights many of the concerns shared by music and cultural studies, from the idea of performance as continuous appropriation to the question of a 'musical subject'. These questions find an echo in the two issues of *Anglistica* on music that are now drawing to a close, and I would like to return to them here, offering them as alternative routes of fruition of the volumes themselves, as well as starting points to further musical journeys.

One of the privileged paths for this further journey, as I have already suggested in the Introduction to *Voicings*, is the work of Edward Said. In his acceptance speech for the Prince of Asturias Prize for Understanding between the Peoples, in June 2002, he declared that "it is culture in general, and music in particular, that provide an alternative model for the conflict of identities";[4] a statement that could have easily worked as *exergo* for any of the essays included in these issues. From Susan McClary's Magdalene, weaving together Catholicism and Sufism across the rough waters of the Mediterranean, to Wayne Koestenbaum's closeted homosexual finding a voice in operatic performance – just to mention the articles which open the first and second issue respectively – all the contributions form a contrapuntal ensemble featuring different voices working in consort despite their apparent foreignness to one another. Each and every essay offers music as an alternative model for the elaboration of identity and as a critical tool to question accepted notions of gender and cultural identity in the West.

Said was granted the Prince of Asturias Prize for his work, together with Daniel Barenboim, on the West-Eastern Divan project: an orchestra made up of young musicians from Israel and other Middle-Eastern countries – including Jordan, Lebanon, Iran, and the Occupied Territories – whose effort to act as ambassadors for the peace process in the Middle East continues to this day. The West-Eastern Divan, a "microcosm of a society that has never existed and may well never exist" as Elena Cheah defines it in her book on the subject, was founded in Weimar in 1999, as an effort to bring together performers of classical music from different countries in

[3] Here Butler in particular rejects (as already elsewhere) Agamben's notion of "bare life", asserting that "no one is ever returned to bare life … because there are a set of powers that produce and maintain this situation of destitution, dispossession, and displacement" (ibid., 10). See also Judith Butler, *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 67.

[4] Said's acceptance speech is included in the DVD dedicated to the West-Eastern Divan, *The Ramallah Concert / Knowledge Is the Beginning* (Warner Classics, 2006).

the Middle East and make them play together in a regular Western orchestra ensemble.[5] The orchestra, originally started as a one-week workshop, has recently celebrated its 10th anniversary, playing in the most renowned locations in Europe and the US as well as Ramallah, where a memorial concert for Edward Said was held in 2005.

[5] Elena Cheah, *An Orchestra Beyond Borders. Voices of the West-Eastern Divan* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 1.

Although the orchestra sticks to a strictly Western classical repertoire of composers such as Beethoven or Mozart, its performances nevertheless do not rely on the tradition of classical music as hegemonic discourse on the cultural superiority of the West. On the contrary, in a vein reminiscent of Said's own use of counterpoint in *Culture and Imperialism*, Barenboim writes:

> Edward Said and I believed in letting opposing voices be heard at the same time …. We based this principle on musical counterpoint, where a subversive accompanimental voice can enhance a melody rather than detract from it. To this day, we do not try to diminish or soften our differences in the orchestra: we do the opposite. By confronting our differences, we attempt to understand the logic behind the opposite position.[6]

[6] Ibid., viii.

To Said, counterpoint is a critical instrument that made it possible to confront the formation of cultural identities "understood not as essentializations … but as contrapuntal ensembles, for it is the case that no identity can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions".[7] The West-Eastern Divan puts Said's predicament into musical practice by performing the Western classical archive against its grain, opening up previously secluded spaces such as the concert hall to the silenced voices of history.

[7] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 52.

Experiences such as this not only prove music to be a plural, performative mode of identity construction; they also identify music – whatever its kind or genre – as a potential counter-discursive experience. Butler asks whether the US anthem sung in Spanish is just the expression of "a suspect nationalism, or [whether it] actually fracture[s] the 'we' in such a way that no single nationalism could take hold on the basis of that fracture".[8] All the contributions to these two issues of *Anglistica* explore the fractures and shadow lines musical experience creates in the 'we' who perform as well as in the 'we' who listen. Hence even the mainstream musical culture explored (in different ways) by Patrizia Calefato and Pierpaolo Martino can emerge as a site of difference, as performances across the borders showing the fissures and fractures of cultural hegemony, alongside more 'canonical' counterdiscursive performances such as Romaine Moreton's and Shirley Thompson's as interpreted by Katherine E. Russo and Manuela Coppola.

[8] Butler and Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, 61.

These articles are to be read as part of a fruitful dialogue among different scholarships. Marina Vitale's and my own effort, in putting together the two issues as they are now presented to our readers, has been to devise

them in order to make apparent the many connections that can be woven among the different essays. The criteria shaping the different sections have not striven to achieve conformity of genre, historical period, or disciplinary affiliation. We have tried to highlight 'themes' such as musical resistance, queer theory, or the relationship between music and media; necessarily, some keys have overshadowed others. Yet – thanks also to the flexibility of the online format – other connections among the essays can easily be spotted. Postcolonial musical experiences are at the heart of both Coppola and Russo's articles, as well as of McClary's reading of the Mediterranean as postcolonial sea in colonial times. Vito Campanelli's survey of contemporary musical experimentations in digital arts traces a parallel route to Iain Chambers's conversation with Danilo Capasso about his musical practices; while the queerness of operatic imagery explored by Koestenbaum (both in the interview that closes *Voicings* and in the chapter from his work included here) finds an embodiment in Ernesto Tomasini's art.

Yet there may also be other, less explicit, themes: a constant engagement with the construction of 'Italianness' through musical practices, informed again by postcolonial and cultural studies, may be found both in the foreign voices introduced by Raffaella Bianchi and Bezen Balamir Coskun in the national imagery elaborated through opera in Italy and Turkey, as well as in Alessandro Buffa's article about other, less expected, Italian musical expressions such as doo-wop. Buffa identifies a category of musical 'users' and agents, youngsters, who are at the centre too of Calefato's article, which also confronts dynamics of appropriations – such as "surfin' stiles" – that recall Richard Dyer's reflections on plagiarism and pastiche. Calefato's work also highlights dynamics of identification between music performers and their public, expanded upon by Freya Jarman-Ives' analysis of the role of vocal identification in the elaboration of modern subjectivities; while Tomasini's engagement with 'angels' may even be said to look back to the counter-discursive forms of Catholicism described by McClary.

These are only a few of the routes the reader can trace across *Voicings: Music across Borders* and *Music and the Performance of Identity*. Others can be taken by accessing the issues via the Multimedia sections of the website, where, together with illustrations from the essays, videos and audio files can be found: and we here thank Danilo Capasso, André and Michel Décosterd (via Vito Campanelli), Romaine Moreton, Shirley Thompson, and Ernesto Tomasini (with Othon Mataragas and Fabrizio Modenese Palumbo), who have offered their work to be published on the website. We also thank Wayne Koestenbaum and Da Capo Press for permitting us to publish and translate chapter 5 from *The Queen's Throat*, thereby enabling us to offer the work of this magnificent writer and critic for the first time in Italian; as well as all those who have made this effort

possible. In this very difficult time for Italian universities and research, approaching the closure of a project like this one feels like a feat in itself; it also summons a vague reverberation of hope for future work and fertile dialogues to come.

Marina Vitale

Changing Vocabularies in Cultural and Postcolonial Studies

Raymond Williams, *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976), 349 pp.

Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris, eds., *New Keywords. A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Malden, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell, 2005), 427 pp.

Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris, eds., *Nuove parole chiave. Dizionario di cultura e società*, Italian edition by Carlo Pagetti and Oriana Palusci, with an Introduction by Carlo Pagetti, Italian translation by Massimo Vizzaccaro (Milano: il Saggiatore, 2008), 596 pp.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 275 pp.

In his 1949 distopia, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell deplored the traumatic metastasis suffered by language when obliged to perform abrupt semantic changes. Among the most sinister achievements of Big Brother's totalitarian power was the imposition of brand-new political meanings upon deeply rooted, slowly evolving linguistic traditions. A significant aspect of the totalitarian nightmare lived through by the protagonist in the novel is the double-edged nature of the "newspeak", the linguistic system imposed by decree in that distopic society, and its disquieting capacity of erasing commonly shared structures of meaning to accommodate sudden and ideologically manipulated semantic shifts. Such a drastic and abrupt disruption was, of course, a fictional expedient. Deep transformations do take place, however, in the linguistic habits of a community over time, at a pace which accelerates in times of crisis.

In his Introduction to *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society,* Raymond Williams recalls the sense of bewilderment he experienced when, in 1945, he resumed his university life in Cambridge, after serving for four and a half years in the war. What disconcerted him most was that people "just [didn't] speak the same language" any longer. An accelerated metamorphosis of the cultural use of language had inevitably happened alongside and in connection with the trauma of war. It was then, he tells us, that he started to elaborate the seminal cluster of ideas, which developed into his groundbreaking *Culture and Society.* [1]

[1] *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958).

Anglistica 13. 2 (2009), 125-132 ISSN: 2035-8504

This important book, first published in 1958, and soon to become one of the cornerstones of the disciplinary field of Cultural Studies then in the making, draws its main intellectual force from a deep interrogation of the cultural meaning – or, rather, the semantic transformation over time – of five keywords: industry, democracy, class, art and culture. Through his arresting exercise in historical semantics he retraced the transformations which had taken place in both material and spiritual life alongside linguistic – and indeed lexical – evolution over a span of time he considered crucial for the formation of twentieth-century society. As a matter of fact these five keywords – which loom large in capital letters on the cover of the Penguin edition – are the nodal points of a richer and more complex network of meanings, potentially liable to widen up to cover the entire map of cultural existence. If one looks at the index of *Culture and Society*, one finds it is divided into two sections: "A. Works and Authors" and "B. Words, Themes, and Persons" – though the persons included in the latter list are just a handful, while the great majority is constituted by words or themes which are keywords in their own right, and none of which may be thought *per se*. Not only are such fundamental notions as "culture" and "civilization" shown in a process of vital reciprocal confrontation (consisting in an incessant practice of mutual chasing, mutual substitution, and mutual hybridization), but also the whole constellation of other notions – he mentions 48 in the Introduction – are caught up in an endless movement of discursive transformation in relation with all the others.

Many years later, in 1976, he prefaced his *Keywords* with the reconstruction of the genesis of the book from that original list of words, or notions he had intended to publish in *Culture and Society* as an appendix, but had been obliged to cut out for reasons of space:

> But the file of the appendix stayed on my shelf. For over twenty years I have been adding to it: collecting more examples, finding new points of analysis, including other words. I began to feel that this might make a book of its own. I went through the whole file again, rewrote all the notes and short essays, excluded some words and again added others. The present volume is the result. (14-15)

Predictably, the process of development of this book could not stop here, because Williams's list of words represented the "elements of an active vocabulary – a way of recording, investigating and presenting problems of meaning in the area in which the meanings of *culture* and *society* have formed." (15) In the following years, in the course of researches which gave rise to a dozen or so seminal books in the field of English Cultural Studies, Williams became involved in many other problematic areas of meaning, and felt the need further to modify his list or edit his "notes and short essays". I am repeating his own wording from the above quotation,

because it is important to remember that he never referred to his entries as definitions. As he insisted in his Introduction, the book

> is not a dictionary or glossary of a particular academic subject. It is not a series of footnotes to dictionary histories or definitions of a number of words. It is, rather, the record of an inquiry into a *vocabulary*: a shared body of words and meanings in our most general discussions, in English, of the practices and institutions which we group as *culture* and *society*. (15)

It is perfectly in line with the spirit of his project that he introduced twenty-one new entries in the 1983 edition, and expanded and edited the original ones.

It is this spirit that was recalled by Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris when, in 2005, they edited an updating of Williams's work (*New Keywords. A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*). It is equally in line with the same spirit that Carlo Pagetti and Oriana Palusci, the editors of the 2008 Italian translation of this updating (*Nuove parole chiave. Dizionario di cultura e società*), felt it necessary to add their own comments to 26 out of the 142 entries dealt with in *New Keywords*.

Both works are the expression of a deep appreciation of the contribution of Williams to the area of Cultural Studies, of which all the editors are well-established practitioners and supporters. It is also worth noting that both are part of a revived interest for this very innovative and influential thinker; an interest witnessed by some recent publications devoted to him. I would have liked to refer to at least two among them which, for different reasons, would have been worth discussing.[2] But limits of space make it impossible.

As Pagetti remarks in his Introduction to the Italian edition (26), Williams's *Keywords* was not translated into Italian when it came out (unlike the rest of his production, which is widely available in Italian). The translation of this updating might be taken therefore as a sort of making amends for that overlooking, and a tribute to the original strength of the initial publication. Pagetti never spells out this implication. It can be inferred, however, from his determination to publish the book in spite of the faults he himself finds with the selection of keywords operated by Bennett, Grossberg and Morris. Among these he mentions the lack of such concepts as "translation", "myth" (and/or "mythology") and "anthropology", which are no doubt essential to any understanding of cultural theory. I should also add to Pagetti's observation (24) that the word "myth", actually present in *Keywords*, was eliminated by the editors of *New Keywords*.

Unfortunately the very fact that Pagetti is perfectly right in lamenting the lack of these crucial words – and, even more important, that many other terms might be pointed out as unduly overlooked – opens up serious doubts about the credibility of Bennett, Grossberg and Morris's operation.

[2] Monika Seidle, Roman Horak and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *About Raymond Williams* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), contains some brilliant essays, like John Higging's "'Even the Dead Will not Be Safe': on Dis(re)membering Williams", 116-128. The other is a very interesting full-length study by Mauro Pala (*The Social Text. Letteratura e prassi culturale in Raymond Williams*, Cagliari: CUEC, 2005).

Once the hunt for missing words is opened, quite a few crop up: some of which quite pivotal, like "agency" or, even more crucially, "hegemony". This last omission is frankly surprising if one thinks of the importance of Gramsci's philosophy in the present configuration of Cultural Studies and also in the development of Williams's critical theory, especially in its most mature phases. Suffice it to think that Williams devoted an entire and fascinating chapter of *Marxism and Literature* to this notion.[3] This omission becomes even more surprising when one realizes that Williams had in fact included the word in his second edition of *Keywords* and that it was Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris who eliminated it from their updating.

[3] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

Still, the real problem – with both the selection and the book – is probably not the omission of this or that term, but rather the theoretical justification implicitly at the basis of this publishing enterprise; a justification thoroughly different from Williams's methodological urge to investigate his subjects of study – always conceived as produced – through the full understanding of the very terms (and the notions behind them) which constituted the cultural phenomena and processes he was studying. He felt that in order to understand cultural change – be it the transformation of the structures of feeling of a certain social group at the time of the Industrial Revolution, or the impact of TV on some other social group in urban England in the 1970s – he had to reconstruct the discursive processes through which that change had come about, starting from the terms which had been used to fight for and against it, which had contributed to defining it, and acquired, in the process, new meanings that would stick to them, albeit in attenuated or contradictory forms. The thick aura surrounding these terms – or keywords, as he called them – preserved contrasting meanings and even almost (but never completely) discarded overtones. Grasping these meanings and overtones was essential to him if he wanted to accomplish any cultural analysis, and reconstruct the cultural history of the phenomena he wanted to study, since he conceived them as parts of a cultural field "structured in dominance", as the cultural critics of his generation would have put it (following Gramsci). This is why his reconstructions of the complex, almost palimpsestical nature of some of his terms were never an end in themselves, and he did not offer them as mere (though sophisticated) lexical weapons to be exchanged in academic discussions. Although his *Keywords* was a book in its own right, and he spent more years writing and updating this book than any other in his wide and inspiring bibliography, it was inextricably intertwined with the rest of his production, and offered itself as a useful tool for a better understanding of the critical idiom which was in the making during the early stages of the life of Cultural Studies as a field of research that he himself had powerfully contributed to shape and enhance.

Though always maintaining its interdisciplinary and potentially intercultural character, the critical movement of Cultural Studies also began very soon to develop into different strands, privileging one or another of the critical theories contributing to its general framework: feminist and gender studies, media studies, postcolonial studies. The compact, almost idiosyncratic, corpus of critical notions elaborated and made available by Williams, testifies to the initial phase of construction of both a critical theory and a critical idiom at a time when the very notion of 'theory' was felt as a form of violent trespassing into the native pragmatism of the 'English' frame of mind. Suffice it to mention the very authoritative (and very theoretically inspired) attacks on theory launched by E.P. Thompson in such forcefully polemical essays as *The Peculiarities of the English* (1965) and *The Poverty of Theory* (1978).

In the following decades the full-fledged development of Cultural Studies as an interdisciplinary field and the planetary reach of its travelling created such a rich and variegated vocabulary that it could not easily be contained in any general glossary. On the other hand, the lexicon used in critical discourse has achieved such a specificity and complexity that sometimes it is quite difficult to dominate it unless one is a specialist. Invaluable help is offered by a few handbooks devoted to defining the terminology of the various strands of Cultural and Postcolonial Studies that have been published in the last few years.[4] I will only mention Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*, which has the great merit, I think, of supplying well documented definitions of an enormous number of terms which have been invented or appropriated by contemporary thinkers in an effort to elaborate very new concepts which could not be accommodated in any available lexicon. However strange it might seem (sitting down to browse a Dictionary might normally appear a rather crazy activity), I personally find reading this book a fascinating intellectual experience for reasons I will try to explain, seeking, at the same time, to trace the fundamental difference between this kind of handbook and both Williams's *Keywords* and its updating proposed by Bennett, Grossberg and Morris.

Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts is very concentrated in focus: it offers a vast number of entries strictly related to notions associated with Postcolonial Studies, a field ridden with heated debates and controversies which have loaded, in recent years, the terms used in contemporary scholarly activity with such a weight of stratified meanings comparable to that of the words "culture" and "civilization" in the heat of the Romantics vs. Utilitarians controversy, so magisterially reconstructed by Williams. As the editors write in their short introduction,

> Post-colonial analysis draws upon a wide variety of theoretical positions and their associated strategies and techniques. Moreover, the field seeks to develop

[4] In Italy alone, two such enterprises have been undertaken in the last decade: a group of scholars in the field of non-European literatures written in European languages (what came to be defined Homeoglottal Literatures) produced an *Abbecedario Postcoloniale* (ed. by Silvia Albertazzi and Roberto Vecchi, Macerta: Quodlibet, 2004, 2 voll.) including twenty basic terms, while Michele Cometa supervised as general editor a monumental and very useful *Dizionario degli studi culturali* (ed. by Roberta Coglitore and Federica Mazzara, Roma: Meltemi, 2004) which dedicates fifty-nine essays (571 pages) to the different branches of Cultural and Postcolonial Studies.

> adequate and appropriate approaches to material that is itself diverse, hybrid, diasporic. Its terminology, then, functions in a highly charged and contestatory atmosphere of intellectual exchange and cultural negotiation. (1)

Putting together their book in 2000, more than half a century since the inception of Cultural Studies, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin were in a position to take the currency of some of its basic vocabulary as generally accepted in the field. That is why one does not find a specific entry for "culture" as such in their book, though one finds this notion in association with twenty-one other terms, from the "cultural cringe" evoked in discussions of the difficult process of decolonisation in some settler colonies, to "transculturation" and "world systems theory". On the other hand, they felt the necessity to provide the reader (the common reader as well as the educated one, and even perhaps the specialist in cultural and postcolonial studies) with information not only about the meaning of certain terms but also about their use in specific instances and connections and about the 'familiarity' which is unmistakably stamped on them, revealing which school of thought originally introduced them. Some of these words, like "mimicry", or "diaspora", have become universally authoritative. Still, it is quite important to be able to locate their origin and be aware of the history of their use in postcolonial criticism and literatures. Some other terms, though evoking notions that are quite important in the construction of critical thought, remain very idiosyncratic and characteristic of the critical idiolect of specific thinkers. This is the case for example of a notion like "catachresis", which has an unambiguous meaning of 'misuse' in philosophical language, but came to denote 'appropriation' following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's discussion of certain processes of adoption and adaptation of traditionally Western notions and institutions by non-Western cultures and societies. This is also the case of such a term as "palimpsest" which has migrated from palaeographical lexicon to postcolonial discourse thanks to Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987), to be picked up by subsequent critics, who share Carter's awareness of the "'layering' effect of history" which creates the "'text' of culture, giving it its particular density and character", and endorse his idea that,

> 'empty' uncolonized space becomes place through the process of textuality. Mapping, naming, fictional and non-fictional narratives create multiple and sometimes conflicting accretions which become the dense text that constitutes place. Place itself, in the experience of the post-colonial subject, is a palimpsest of a process in language: the naming by which imperial discourse brings the colonized space 'into being', the subsequent rewritings and overwritings, the imaging of the place in the consciousness of its occupants, all of which constitute the contemporary place observed by the subject and contested among them. (174-5)

In spite of the very specific postcolonial context of this reasoning, I think that it resonates with the same belief in the discursive nature of

cultural processes that animated Williams's insights and descriptions of cultural processes taking place in nineteenth or twentieth century Great Britain, as the prosecution of the argument further proves:

> The most challenging aspect of this thesis is that the ordinary social subject, when looking at the surrounding environment, does not simply take in what is there as purely visual data, but is located with that place in a cultural horizon, that is, the simply observed place is a cultural palimpsest built up over centuries and retaining the traces of previous engagements and inscriptions. (175)

This also resonates, I think, with Williams's genial intuition of the process of formation and transformation of what he called "structures of feeling", though he is never mentioned in the book. Which, I think, is ungenerous, in spite of Williams's undeniable deafness to, or silence about, discourses connected with the construction of colonialism and Empire.

This deafness, by the way, is highlighted also by the editors of *New Keywords* who integrate their vocabulary with a few terms like "colonialism", "diaspora", "multiculturalism", "Orientalism", "other", "postcolonialism", which had been completely overlooked by Williams. They also edit and specialise terms that Williams had included, like "ethnic" (which becomes "ethnicity"), and "Western" (which becomes "the West"), while, surprisingly, they cancel such words as "imperialism" and "native", which, though rather superficial in presentation, represented at least a signal of a new start in the development of Williams's cultural theory, which had been, so far, almost totally engrossed with problems of cultural struggle at home, with the social and geographical barriers besieging British society from the inside, more than addressing the larger issues of the so called "white man's burden" and his planetary "civilizing mission". Rightly enough, in his Introduction to *Nuove Parole Chiave,* Pagetti discusses Williams's failure to move from the local to the global, connecting it to the general inward-lookingness of British culture – even in its left-wing and culturalist quarters – still too preoccupied, at the time, with deciphering and solving its home problems and still shaped by too parochial a workerism to be able to elaborate a wider conception of planetary cultural processes. (15 ff)

However true this certainly is, and however right the unwritten rule applied by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin not to include among their sources those authors who have never shown preoccupations or sensitivity as to the responsibility of Western cultural and literary traditions in the construction of the colonialist frame of mind, I think there is also some, more academic and ideological, reason behind this exclusion, since it is not limited to Raymond Williams – whose position can easily be aligned with a two-century long tradition of "culture and society" criticism which has largely contributed to the establishment of the notion of "Englishness" as a pointer of civilization. Some other exclusions (like those of Paul Gilroy and Iain

Chambers, just to mention the names of two very influential thinkers in the international field of Postcolonial Studies) or the very cursory mention of Stuart Hall – whose work was certainly enormously significant not only in the affirmation of Cultural Studies but, more specifically, of Postcolonial Studies – can only be interpreted as a decision to seek an interruption with Western traditions of criticism, to think and write 'anew' more than to think and write 'back' (as suggested by the title of a very powerful book, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, written in 1989 by this formidable trio).[5] In this perspective it may have seemed a necessary step to avoid the influence of a School like the one which originated in Birmingham, as yet another European school of thought, albeit under the powerful aegis of a non-European founding figure like the Jamaican British thinker Stuart Hall. Still, it seems a loss to renounce for this reason so crucial a notion as Paul Gilroy's dense conception of the Black Atlantic, just to mention one omission that I consider a blemish in an otherwise fascinating and indispensable text.

I would like to finish on a personal, even partisan, note. The three recent books I have reviewed (*New Keywords*, *Nuove Parole Chiave*, and *Key Concepts*) can boast very extensive bibliographies: for all their occasional omissions, they all list hundreds of titles, while Williams's *Keywords* is based on a very selective list of only twenty references – including dictionaries – and thirty-five articles and books. Looking at this scanty bibliography, I am deeply impressed by the presence of an essay by the late Fernando Ferrara, former director of the first series of *Anglistica*.[6] Although I could not trace exactly the title he mentions on the "Anglistica" section of *Annali*, I do remember the inspiring discussions which took place at the University "L'Orientale" (Naples), with both students and staff, on the occasion of the few momentous visits Williams paid to Naples in the years most crucial for the definition of his cultural theory. He himself mentions the importance of these contacts in the acknowledgements to various works of his, including *Marxism and Literature*: a book where Williams shows at his best his capacity of creatively appropriating the most vital elements of Gramscian cultural theory. Looking back on the half-century long story of Cultural Studies as a rich and expanding field of research – of which the subsequent editions, updatings, or re-incarnations, of *Keywords* are milestones – I cannot but recall the process of active translation that critical vocabularies undergo when they travel through time and place, reacting to the specific interpretations of the different locations of culture and short-circuiting into existence specific critical crises. I cannot but be proud that Naples, "L'Orientale" and the people working with its *Anglistica* journal have been part of this planetary travel.

[5] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[6] In his bibliography Williams reports it as Fernando Ferrara, "The Origin and Decline of the Concept of 'Literature'", in *Annali* (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1973), but he was probably referring to a draft of one of Ferrara's works which he must have read.

Jon Stratton, *Australian Rock. Essays on Popular Music* (Perth, WA: API Network Books, 2007), 243 pp.

Reviewed by **Renata Summo-O'Connell**

Although *Australian Rock* is a book about a seemingly local phenomenon, it is poignant not only for an Australian-based person, as I have been for twenty years, but also for non-Australian based readers, as I have become recently. The constant ability of Stratton's writing not just to sound relevant but to be so, and to involve its readers as if they were reading a piece of fiction, probably has something to do with the author's starting point: "The inspiration for the essays here has been my attempt to make sense of the sounds that confronted me when I got off the plane from England in 1981" (2). For those who know Stratton's authorial 'voice', this refreshing positioning will not come as a surprise. The clearly located perspective Stratton manages to take at every turn of this rigorous study, which also makes an extremely enjoyable read, represents a striking feature of his study around post-1950s Australian rock. Moving away from the flatness of essay writing, the book presses on in an energizing and at times overwhelming journey across Australian music and society. By the time the reader reaches the last pages of *Australian Rock*, s/he realizes that the energy propelling it coincides with the author's ability to conjure a revealing encounter with Australian culture and society in a journey that makes sense even if one does not know much about Australia.

This is perhaps because Stratton chooses to face questions about the specificity of Australian music, and for that matter of American or British music, moved by the desire to "make sense of the sounds". As he says: "Australian music has evolved its own particular sound as a consequence of the particularity of the Australian culture of which it is an element"(2). It is clear from the start that, for Stratton, Australian society has to contend with race as a dominant category, a category with which no philosophical position, nor any social theory, can fail to measure itself. The profound awareness that "cultural anxieties about race continue to permeate Australian society" and that music in Australia "has remained white for a long time" (2) establishes that rock is a genre dominated by whites. In 2006, Stratton recalls, an ABC poll found that the first non-white artist ranked sixty-first in listeners' preferences.

However, this analysis goes well beyond what could be a rehearsed analysis of race in Australian society. Rather Stratton treats race as an ever-evolving construction, making the dynamics of race in Australian society actually deal with what I would call the biased epistemology of Australian society. Indeed the mythical narrative surrounding Australian post-1950s

rock is profoundly affected by one Australian-specific aspect of the narrative of race, which is dominated by omissions and exclusions. Reading this book one wonders if Stratton should not extend his study, obviously in a different context, by working on the conventional understanding of Australian general history and its exclusionary and 'forgetful' practices.

The author's statement that his book "starts from the importance of the local" (4) reminds the reader that popular music is actually created within a local context and culture, besides being addressed to them. Stratton's important contribution to the study of popular music in general is his ability to move away from the easy adherence to 'schools of thought' by constantly focusing on its specificity and the impact this has in indigenising theory itself. Stratton introduces readers to his notion of 'musical sensibility', which, despite his references to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's "sound sensibilities" and Raymond Williams' "changing structures of feeling", works out as an alternative notion of this concept. Through this important concept the author intends to refer to the collective assumptions of Australians as to what makes popular music Australian, what genres are considered part of it, what criteria form their aesthetics, and how this reflects shared notions and beliefs:

> Australian music sensibility refers to the repertoire of shared assumptions through which Australians experience and evaluate the music they make and to which they listen. This sensibility can, in practice, be inflected in different ways. The dominant musical understanding refers to that understanding most prevalent, and most taken-for-granted, in the national culture. This shared understanding overdetermines both the production and consumption of music in, in this case, Australian culture. (6)

Later, through his discussion in the first chapter of the Beat Boom bands in Australia and his investigation into why Australian bands did not find a role outside the country, we begin to understand that the author sees popular music as the product of many influences and as an always unfinished process.

The role of "global counter-flows" is a notion that allows Stratton to explain the unpredictable dynamics of cultural exchange and change. He does this especially in the fifth chapter, where the interesting case of the Scientists group, which may have influenced the Seattle elaboration of grunge, is used to propose a new theory of grunge. Here Stratton uses Appadurai's work on global flows but he recognises its shortcomings in dealing with the music industry and its dynamics, as well as identifying unexpected exchanges between places and musics in the context of a 'free', grassroots-driven, uncontrollable "cassette technology".

Discussing at one point Brabazon's analysis of the Perth music scene, and the peculiarity of phenomena such as the emergence of the beat movement from Liverpool rather than London, of 90s dance music from

Manchester instead of London, or the development of grunge in Seattle versus New York, Stratton establishes a finer point in the understanding of the texture of Australian sensibility. One aspect is the self-granted hegemonic role in shaping Australian culture embodied by Sydney and Melbourne. But although he embraces Brabazon's theory of "second tier cities" (as she calls Manchester, Brisbane, Perth and Seattle, attributing their superior innovative energy to their relative freedom from the creative, institutional and economic pressures experienced by cities like London, New York, or Sydney), he widens the scope of the discussion to consider the much argued continuity between the past White Australia Policy and the post-1970s multiculturalism policy. Stratton's analysis of the role in Australia of Anglo-Celtic culture, which is at a powerful distance from the multicultural periphery, points to the mechanisms by which this core leaves room for the acknowledgment and appreciation of 'ethnic' cultures but always from a *relative* position, measured by the principles and practices of the core. Proof of this, according to the author, is the streaming or barring of what is deemed different by the hegemonic music culture whereby ethnic music is confined to its enclaves, thus allowing a parallel, separate coexistence of Australian popular music and "those other Australian *musics*" (9). One issue Stratton tackles is the fact that the fusions or heavy reciprocal influences that shaped other genres, like rock 'n' roll in the United States or *Tejano* music, have not occurred in Australia. Not only that, but if ethnic musicians "get creative", as in the case of Susheela Raman, then they *fall out* of the music scene altogether, guilty of not being ethnic any more, as 'failed ethnic', not only not part of the dominant genre but also unrecognizing of the "privilege of the former". As Stratton points out, after her experience in Australia, Raman moved to Britain, where the diasporic music she succeeded in producing with Sawhey and Singh was considered just another facet of English popular music and her *Salt Rain* in 2001 was nominated for the popular Mercury Music Prize Award.

Stratton's extensive knowledge of Australian popular music history makes this book an indispensable reference for anyone interested in Australian popular culture and music. It shows how various musical movements and phenomena, presented with a profusion of detailed historic information, often prove to be completely different from the assumptions approved by the 'received story' of Australian rock, such as the myth of the white and male character of Australian rock. Stratton exposes this as a fallacy, but he also depicts the underlying worldviews that have reinforced such myths.

Audiences themselves are the main characters in this book as in no other study about Australian music I have read, and their relevance in the process of music-making is evident. Influenced as they are by broader cultural – not only musical – factors, the choices of the audience 'instate

the local'. For Stratton the local – whose definition is fundamental to the whole of his discussion – is a very complex notion, unlike globalisation I may add. So the main suggestion here is to rethink popular music from the point of view of the local.

One of the huge merits of this book is also to focus on the 'colonial construction' represented by Perth, and to suggest – and this is my comment – that the historic tension towards fulfilling a White Australia design has claimed the dramatic cost not just of distancing those involved from indigenous and ethnic sensibilities, but of developing an epistemology that has difficulties in valuing and recognizing the local. And it is the local now – with digitalisation and the internet – that is once again central to the production of music: they have indeed "returned music to the local". And like all studies that really have something to say, Stratton's book prompts the reader to study Australian popular music, accepting the author's final challenge that "whatever happens, Australian popular music will remain distinctive" (202).

Brenda Jo Brueggemann, *Deaf Subjects. Between Identities and Places* (London and New York: New York University Press, 2009), 203 pp.

Reviewed by **Elena Intorcia**

The field of Deaf Studies has recently been receiving growing attention in the academic realm, as is witnessed by the number of debates and conventions and the proliferation of events and projects funded both by universities and local deaf organizations.

Deaf Subjects. Between Identities and Places by Brenda Jo Brueggemann, Professor of English and Disability Studies at the Ohio State University, offers its readers a compelling insight into Deaf Studies and skillfully faces deafness-related issues aimed at fostering greater and deeper awareness (in hearing and deaf audiences alike) of what it means to be deaf. In it the author, hard-of-hearing herself, knowingly explores not only the world of deafness, but the very nature of identity, tying it to fields as diverse as gender studies and rhetoric.

In keeping with her fascination for what she terms a theory of "betweenity" (9), the author applies it to "the modern deaf subject" (3), and persuasively creates and displays connections among Deaf culture, identity and language throughout the seven chapters that make up her text. Deafness itself occupies a position of "betweenity" in relation to disability identity. This issue is examined through a comprehensive exploration of four main points related to deaf people's identities: the efforts of Deaf activists and communities to separate "deaf" and "disabled" and to distinguish between "deaf" (lower case), for those who see their deafness as an impairment, and "Deaf" (upper case) for those who see themselves as a cultural and linguistic minority, efforts and definitions that Brueggemann suggests might now be left behind; the figure of the "new deaf cyborg" – an expression borrowed from Donna Haraway's image of the cyborg as a "hybrid of machine and organism" – resulting from the spread of cochlear implants among deaf people, which creates a further "between" space (between past and present as well as between present and future) and plays a crucial role in refiguring the "Deaf gaze", as implants can altogether change deaf people's status as "people of the eyes" (18); the (changing) nature of ASL (American Sign Language), heading towards processes of standardization; the relationship between writing and deafness. The place and potentialities of ASL in the academy are also explored at length, as well as the possible problems inherent in the production and reception of deaf 'literature'.

A key issue in *Deaf Subjects* is the point Brueggemann makes about the 'performativity' of sign language and its relationship to writing meant as

'performance'. An interesting field of investigation is therefore the exploration of what writing – as performance – and sign language – which is performative – have in common. At this point the author wonders "How can language change your hearing?" (22) and goes on by asking to what extent the study of Deaf culture can enhance a better understanding of how language shapes, controls, and alters the perception of the world.

American Sign Language (or any Sign Language) possesses a "unique nature" because of "its performance and passage as a non-print, non-written, visual and embodied language" (34). However, its history has been quite troublesome, as its official recognition as a language of its own has required much conflict and debate. Until 1997 it was listed in the *MLA International Bibliography* under "invented languages" and even today, despite considerable linguistic research, scholars of ASL literature, literacy and linguistics still have to struggle to find a proper location for ASL within academic organizations.

A whole chapter in *Deaf Subjects* is devoted to ASL literature and to the need felt by the author to face it both rhetorically and digitally. A "rhetorical and digital approach" can indeed impact on literature, film, rhetorical and language studies, thus leading to a new awareness of key concepts such as "vision", "embodied language", "voice", "the gaze", "presence", "utterance", "identity", "space", "frame", "visual literacy" (40). Here Brueggemann draws on her previous work *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness* (Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1999) to support her stance. A rhetorical approach to the study of ASL at large is deemed fundamental for many reasons, first of all to supplant the purely linguistic study of ASL; although this has undoubtedly done much for the advancement of both national and global Deaf culture, it "often overtakes other ways to study and obscures other frames and lenses for looking at the richness of language, community, tradition, history and *literature* related to sign language" (39). The rhetorical approach is also important because of the possibility it offers – associated with performance, poetic and philosophy – to help place ASL literature within the long-standing philosophical and poetic Western tradition. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity to focus on the persuasive potential of this literature and on the role of the audience in its production.

One more problematic aspect to consider when studying ASL literature is indeed that of its interpretation and fruition by the audience. A challenging question arises here: which audience are we referring to? Who does the Deaf author write for? In fact, contemporary ASL literature appeals to a double audience: to both hearing and deaf audiences, a fact that brings about the problem of fixing and controlling it. Some deaf author-performers have tried to find ways to animate on stage the gap and interface between sign and speech. A well-known example is the duo of performers, *Flying*

Words Project (made up of Peter Cook, signing, and Kenny Lerner, hearing), who try to integrate sign and voice, ASL and spoken English, in their performances.

A further challenge ASL literature is called to face is the role – and, possibly, the interference – of 'translation' (from ASL, a visual language, into a written and oral language such as English). The body and act of translation and interpretation thus becomes "a body that matters" (58), an expression echoing feminist writer Judith Butler's work *Bodies that matter*. The new media technologies can help archive, fix, preserve and analyze ASL literature, but this also brings about a certain loss of authorial control over literary production for the ASL author.

First of all, ASL literature challenges the very etymology of the word 'literature', deriving from the Latin "in letter", taking us back to the earliest forms of literature, which were oral and linked to the body. ASL literature (and, in fact, any Sign Language literature) can be seen as not only a visual and spatial but also an 'embodied literature'; perhaps, Brueggemann provocatively suggests, literature itself might be reinvented as *sign-ature*. Seen from this angle, the deaf space becomes a visual, performative space.

As it is true of any language, a problem connected with ASL is that of the inherent attempt of any language to standardise, categorise and resist what it comes in contact with. Brueggemann's reflection about the use of the English language by Deaf authors is particularly interesting. For them, this represents a language which is not their 'own', since they consider their first language to be Sign Language. This bears resemblance to the experience of post-colonial writers from non-European countries who use English as a means of communication which, although not fully capable of expressing their own world, still enables them to reach a larger audience.

Deaf autobiographies, in particular, and narrating Deaf lives in general, are seen as a way of exploring identity politics and the relation between the self and the other, the writer and the audience. Through the help of new technologies like digital media, video and film documentary, it is now possible to diversely and innovatively express deaf narratives, whose ultimate task is simply to get people – both deaf and hearing – "to see deaf lives" (40). Focusing on some examples of "modern deaf identity" (5), Brueggemann intersects deafness and gender through the portrayal of the Allen Sisters and their photography – which she beautifully and forcefully paints by intersecting historical data and pieces of her own creative writing - and through reference to other famous deaf women at the turn of the twentieth century, such as Mabel Hubbard Bell, Alexander Graham Bell's wife. When dealing with deaf biographies, the author highlights the need to portray people's deafness "in relation to their own lives and their location in time, gender, and geographical space" (6), bearing in mind the importance of representing deaf lives "in all the between

contexts, relationships, and frames possible" (97), also to bring them out of the loneliness and isolation by which such narratives are very often confined and trapped.

An additional intersection the author creates is that of Deaf Studies and feminist theory; a compelling question she asks is: "Do feminist theories about 'writing the body' – Cixous, for example – apply to and invigorate, or further erase, deaf people and their way of performing literacy?" (22). The answer, of course, is not given, and this adds to the involving dialogic and investigative nature of the book itself.

The final chapter of *Deaf Subjects* deals with the Nazi T-4 program, illustrating how the Nazis came to the resolution to kill some 240,000 people with disabilities, through the "potent sociopolitical, medical, and rhetorical forces of economics, euthanasia, and eugenics" (141). Here the borders between disability and deafness collapse under the powerful Nazi economics of the *Erbkranke* (genetically unhealthy), which made all people with disabilities alike an economic burden too heavy for the state to bear, envisaging the erasure of lives 'not worth living' as the only possible solution.

The great contribution of Brueggemann's text to Deaf Studies lies not only in what is clearly and overtly expressed and portrayed in it, but also and foremost in what is left unsaid – still not 'unheard' – among the 'between' cracks and borders scattered everywhere on the pages, which allows the reader considerable space for reflection.

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