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Fifth Elements: A Research Program in Italian Sound

Hillel Schwartz

In 1819, as *The Vampyre* arose from the inked pages of an English physician of Italian descent named Polidori, came a begrudging bride to the wedding chamber of her groom. Behold, screams! Retainers rushed to find the Laird of Bucklaw stabbed, young Lucy Ashton bloodied and grasping a blade. Sixteen years later, Gaetano Donizetti transformed Walter Scott's fiction into *Lucia di Lammermoor*, whose mad-scene aria would be sung in 1997 by a stunningly blue, twelve-tubed diva, Plavalaguna, in Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element*. One of the best-known arias of nineteenth-century Italian opera resounds at the center of a turn-of-the-millennium science fiction film about a twenty-third-century future trafficked by forces monastic, military, mercenary, media-blitzed, and multi-specied. "*Il dolce suono mi colpì di sua voce!*" strikes at the very heart (*Ah, quella voce m'è qui nel cor discesa!*) of *The Fifth Element*, literally and figuratively. Literally: for all action in this hectic *opera buffa* of a film leads up to, and comes to a momentary halt with, an aria that transfixes the poly-planetary audience aboard a space cruiseship, *Fhloston Paradise*—among them our heroic taxi-driver played by Bruce Willis, at a loss for wisecrack or patter once Plavalaguna starts in on "the sweet sound." Figuratively: for the performance ends with her assassination and dying gestures that direct Willis to retrieve from her sinuous abdominal cavity four elemental shapes that are key to saving Earth from obliteration.

Coro: Madre di Dio!

So much of ultimate consequence is at stake, evidently, in any approach to "Italian sound." Is opera the truly universal language, and Italian its avatar, though Plavalaguna is inhabited by Maïwenn Le Besco, a French actress who lip-syncs *Il dolce suono* as sung off-green-screen by an Albanian soprano, Inva Mula? What's going on when a director with a penchant for the mythic implies that a particular aria—a mere 4 minutes 39 seconds of jostled molecules of "air"—may be universally affective? Does such (e)motive power stem from the lyrical Italian of Salvatore Cammarano's text? Or from its exalted articulation by non-native singers Plavalaguna/Inva Mula? Or from the pattern of Donizetti's notes, scarcely different (in the galactic scheme of things) from the universal musical language at the xylophone heart of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)? Or from the gestural dramatics intrinsic to most Italian conversation, informal or operatic, as amplified by Plavalaguna's/Maïwenn's long blue arms and long blue fingers? Or from some fifth element, perhaps a composite of them all, perhaps *l'amore*? After all, "In Napoli where love is king" (quoth Jack Brooks and Salvatore Guaragna AKA Harry Warren, *via* Dino Paul Crocetti AKA Dean Martin), love insists upon a conjunction with celestial spheres:

When the moon hits your eye
Like a big pizza pie, that's *amore*.
When the world seems to shine
Like you've had too much wine, that's *amore*...

fermata

But *Lucia di Lammermoor* was no knockabout *opera buffa*. As at Plavalaguna's performance, the rapturous audience in the Teatro San Carlo in Napoli at the premiere in September 1835 listened to every piece "in religious silence," each aria, duet, or sextet "honored with spontaneous *vivas*." So wrote a breathless Donizetti, who had completed the tragedy in less than six weeks. If decades later *Lucia* would be given the cold shoulder by English and German companies as a "sham tragedy" and "obsolete prima donna opera," its music and passion flared at the emotional pivots of two of the century's most enduring novels, *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina*. Next century *Lucia* would flame up again in the prima donna voice of a non-native soprano, Anna Maria Sofia Cecilia Kalogeropoulou, AKA Maria Callas, and in the prima donna dreams of Mrs. Hayes in A. R. Gurney's *Scenes of American Life*.¹

Not that Donizetti was averse to *opera buffa*: his *L'Elisir d'amore* of 1832 went boffo as a romantic *opera buffa* and today ranks twelfth in the Operabase standings of the most performed operas. In fact, between 1823 and 1837 he wrote twenty-seven operas, many of them *semiseria*, most of them popular, in and for Naples, the birthplace of *opera buffa*—a cultural invention of a piece with the reputation of Neapolitans, notorious since the sixteenth century for their noisiness and boorishness. Some attributed the loudness and rudeness to Aragonese incivility, others to a ragù of Spanish hot blood, Mediterranean high spirits, and fishwife vocal cords, others to the volcanic nature of the place, the incendiary Neapolitan character shaped by "all these fires, these smokes, these subterranean noises, these boiling waters and these sulfurous stench." ²

¹ The criticisms are quoted by E. Irenaeus Stevenson, who defends the opera as having "constant throbs of true dramatic feeling" in his prefatory essay to the Schirmer printing of the score (New York: G. Schirmer, 1898, v-vi). Herbert Weinstock (*Donizetti and the World of Opera in Italy, Paris, and Vienna in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, New York: Pantheon, 1963, 110-12) quotes from Donizetti's letter describing the reception of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, then identifies passages in *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina* in which listening to the opera is key to a transfer of affections—for more on which consider Graham Daniels, "Emma Bovary's Opera – Flaubert, Scott, and Donizetti," *French Studies* 32 (1978): 285-303 and Cormac Newark, *Opera in the Novel from Balzac to Proust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 92-108. In Act II of Gurney (New York: Samuel French, 1969/1970/1991), a woman in her fifties, Mrs. Hayes, confesses to a pianist that she has always wanted to play Lucia, "a young girl, with long blond hair, and I've made a terrible mistake. I've done just what my family wanted me to do and married the wrong man and now I'm going mad and I'm singing my heart out!" (51).

² John Black, "Donizetti and His Contemporaries in Naples, 1822-1848 – A Study in Relative Popularity," *The Donizetti Society Journal* 6 (1988): 11-28 finds that Donizetti's operas enjoyed 2,686 complete performances between 1822 and 1848, while Rossini's had 1,878 and Bellini's 1,122. On the volcanic nature of Naples and Neapolitans, see Robert Casillo, *The Empire of Stereotypes: Germaine de Staël and the Idea of Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 196-223, who tracks this association from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries and quotes Jean-Jacques Bouchard in the 1830s (212). Here I must thank John Marino for sharing with me his intimate knowledge of the history, and northern stereotyping, of noisy Naples.

attacca

This was derision from the North and inland, from Milan and Florence and Paris, but it was also a complaint of visitors from greater distances, outraged by “people bawling and roaring at each other in all directions.” So noted an English “invalid,” Henry Matthews, in 1818, who found that “The noise of Naples is enough to drive a nervous man mad.”³ A less crabby foreigner, such as William Dean Howells, American man of letters, might be amused in 1908 by the harbor serenaders, cackling chickens, clattering taxis, and bombastic crowds as metonymic of an admirable Italian liberty, but the bawling and roaring were no less obtrusive:

Nothing lasts long in Naples except the joyful noise, which is incessant and perpetual, and which seems the expression of the universal temperament in both man and beast [. . .] In other lands the peculiar note of the donkey is not thought very melodious, but in Naples before it can fade away it is caught up in the general orchestration and ceases in music. The cabmen at our corner [. . .] quarrelled rhythmically with one another; the mendicants, lying everywhere in wait for charity, murmured a modulated appeal; if you heard shouts or yells afar off they died upon your ear in a strain of melody at the moment when they were lifted highest. I am aware of seeming to burlesque the operatic fact which every one must have noticed in Naples; and I will not say that the neglected or affronted babe, or the trodden dog, is as tuneful as the midnight cat there, but only that they approach it in the prevailing tendency of all the local discords to soften and lose themselves in the general unison [. . .] Above the manifold noises gayly springing to the sky spreads and swims the clangor of the churchbells and holds the terrestrial uproar in immeasurable solution [. . .] Then there is the expansive temperament, which if it were shut up would probably be much more explosive than it is now. As it is, it vents itself in volleyed detonations and scattered shots which language can give no sense of.

Howells was referring to the expansive *Italian* temperament, for the “true sense” of which

you must go to Naples, and then you will never lose the sense of it. I had not been there since 1864, but when I woke up the morning after my arrival, and heard the chickens cackling in the Castel dell’Ovo, and the donkeys braying, and the cabdrivers quarrelling, and the cries of the street vendors, and the dogs barking, and the children wailing, and their mothers scolding, and the clatter of wheels and hoops and feet, and all that mighty harmony of the joyful Neapolitan

³ Henry Matthews, *The Diary of an Invalid* (London: John Murray, 1908), 179.

noises, it seemed to me that it was the first morning after my first arrival, and I was still only twentyseven years old.”⁴

decrescendo

Back to the mighty harmonies of Donizetti, forty years old. All three of his children fated to die at birth or a few days after, and his parents and wife dead within two years of the premiere of *Lucia*, Donizetti left Naples for Paris, where he continued to labor over an *oeuvre* that would amount to seventy-five operas, sixteen symphonies, three oratorios, and twenty-eight cantatas, under the grip of an increasingly severe syphilis whose first symptom—wrecking headaches—had plagued him while he wrote *Lucia*. His final years (1846-48) were themselves a series of mad scenes, of fits of laughter and weeping.⁵

lugubre

None of this biographical drama would be apt to the cochlear tale unfolding before us were it not that it all fits so neatly the evolving outlander sonotyping of all Italians, southern and northern, as voluble, indeed histrionic; as inclined toward the dynamics of melodrama; as passionate to the point of madness, whether of laughter⁶ or weeping, orgasm or syphilitic screaming; as fertile but fated, hence prone to the mutterings of conspiracy and the sudden muteness of plots imploded, hopes exploded. Consider, for example, one American woman’s account of the funeral procession in Rome for Umberto I, assassinated by the anarchist Gaetano Bresci in 1900. The “crowd in the streets was extraordinarily quiet” amid “the tramp, tramp of the soldiers’ feet” and “the muffled drums of the dead march” when of a sudden “the silence—which till then really had been remarkable—was broken by a sound like the buzzing of thousands of insects.” What could this be? “The lawyers are coming,” said her friend Patty, and come they did, chatting

⁴ William Dean Howells, *Roman Holidays, and Others* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1908), 38-39. For current Neapolitan soundways, we await publication of Olivier Féraud’s doctoral thesis, *Voix publiques: Environnements sonores, représentations et usages d’habitation dans un quartier populaire de Naples* (Laboratoire d’Anthropologie et d’Histoire des Institutions Culturelles, CNRS/EHESS). Meanwhile there is Féraud’s “Une anthropologie sonore des pétards et des feux d’artifices à Naples” (2009), on the increasing use of fireworks in Naples (see www.ethnographiques.org/2009/Feraud, accessed July 26th, 2013).

⁵ See Weinstock, *Donizetti*, 1963, and also John S. Allitt, *Donizetti in the Light of Romanticism and the Teaching of Johann Simon Mayr* (Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element, 1983). Allitt reminds us that while composing operas tragic and *buffe*, Donizetti was also leading a movement to restore quality music to the Catholic liturgy and produced scads of sacred music as well as the first Italian vernacular hymnal in 1830.

⁶ But consider Hartmut Rothgänger *et al.*, “Analysis of Laughter and Speech Sounds in Italian and German Students” (*Naturwissenschaften* 85 (1998): 394-402) on barely discernible differences, currently, between French and German laughers, male or female.

injudiciously above the clank of their ceremonial gold chains. Then someone knocked over a chair and the crowd panicked, shouting “Anarchists! A bomb!”⁷

spiritoso

At the turn of that century, the Italian national anthem was the *Marcia Reale* (or *Fanfara Reale*), anthem of that northern House of Savoy invited to rule over an Italy finally united in 1861. This marching-band bombast of a tune, with nary a bar audibly Italian except perhaps for its brass fanfare echoing ancient *trionfi*, would be played at the coronation of Umberto’s only son, Victor Emmanuel III, later claimant also to the thrones of Ethiopia and Albania, thus allowing us (in the same dubious spirit as imperial geopolitics) to annex the soprano Inva Mula as an Italian voice.⁸

impetuoso

By now the musical strains, and my straining after Italian sounds, must be patent. In an academic era whistling and hooting at essentialism, bristling with infratonal subfields, and hissing at undercomplicated “nations” and “ethnicities,” how dare one identify, let alone justify, any sound as uniquely or characteristically Italian? Isn’t that to endorse those romantic-volkisch mentalities and proto-corporate nationalisms whose deadly earworm logics we are trying our damndest to shake off?

inquieto

Granted the mid-nineteenth-century tenor of the phrase “Italian sound,” allow me to set aside for the nonce any postmodernities and listen from the perspective of that mid-century, when Italian would seem to have at once the weakest and strongest claims to a set of unique, distinctive, or at least metonymic sounds. Weakest: as the site of two thousand years of conquests, reconquests, borrowings, retrofittings, and exchanges religious, cultural, political, artistic, legal, and mercantile, what was Italy anyway but a land of ancient ruins and flash-frozen (Pompeian) relics with a Papal core still somewhat resplendent, a gallimaufry of territories each with its own classics and folk semblances, a waystation for great painters, poets, anatomists, and physicians who rose above their native-bornness, all enfolded by Garibaldi in a cloak of patriotic visibility

⁷ Maud Howe Elliott, *Roma Beata: Letters from the Eternal City* (Boston: Little, Brown 1904), 347-50.

⁸ Listen in at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Il_Canto_degli_Italiani, accessed July 26th, 2013. Cf. Philip V. Bohlman, *The Music of European Nationalism: Cultural Identity and Modern History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004) and David Lowenthal, “From Harmony of the Spheres to National Anthem: Reflections on Musical Heritage,” *GeoJournal* 65 (2006): 3-15.

but lacking a single voice, tonality, or vocabulary? Could any sounds in the Italian language and dialects, as they grew weedly out of Latin among diverse ethnic stocks, be held either apostolic or representative?⁹ What sounds in the Italian peninsular environment—deforested, overgrazed, flooded, quaked, inundated by lava, and repopulated by non-native species of birds—could be heard as either enduring or emblematic?¹⁰ What human sounds arising from the bellies, throats, and lungs of the young, the mature, and the aged could be certified as grounded in the land (as wine in the *terroir*) or in an unchanging way of life, when diets for most were erratic and nutritional levels precarious, when forms and machines of labor kept shifting, when internal migrations were frequent, and when infectious diseases swept through cities and countryside in unpredictable waves? Since the fall of Rome, what had Italy been but a congeries of hilltop fortresses, power-hungry bishoprics, feuding city-states, bickering guild and merchant confederations, a pulsating Papal enclave, and xenophobic peasant villages, so where was the *there* (aside perhaps from a few, somewhat isolated regions in the extreme north and south) to which one might confidently attribute any steady sound whatsoever? For national sound-certitudes, one would do far better to listen in on isolated Iceland and its unadulterated language (medieval Norse), its creaking-pure glaciers, its hissing-pure hot springs, its homogeneous population making do with a narrowly nutritious diet, and a landscape marked at each stone outcropping by verses from sagas, songs by local poets. One could with assurance identify Icelandic sounds, Icelandic musics, Icelandic noises.¹¹ But Italy?

patetico

Yet Italy had some of the strongest claims to its own sounds, if one could trust to mid-nineteenth-century historical ears. Italy was inarguably the font of Latin, which was inarguably the font of all Romance languages and of many loan-words in Teutonic, Anglo-Saxon, and North African languages, so surely there were Italian sounds rooted in the rhythms, syllabary, and syntax of Latin, as were the names of our body parts and of the families, genres, and species of all other animals, fish, insects, and plants. Italy was also inarguably the foundation of the Western (Roman Catholic) Church, which had been inarguably the chief sponsor of chant and pipe organs, of the songs of miracle plays and the ringing of bells, then of elaborate masses, cantatas, madrigals, and motets, so surely there were devoutly Italian sounds to be heard

⁹ On the gradual and late (twentieth-century) consolidation of a “spoken national language” in Italy and its colonies, consider Gianrenzo P. Clivio and Marcel Danesi, *The Sounds, Forms, and Uses of Italian: An Introduction to Italian Linguistics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) and Giulio Lepschy, *Mother Tongues and Other Reflections on the Italian Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Even the same species of fish (male and female goby, whether Panzarolo, Common, or Arno) make different sounds in the streams of different parts of Italy: Marco Lugli *et al.*, “Sound Production During Courtship and Spawning among Freshwater Gobiids (Pisces, Gobiidae),” *Marine and Freshwater Behaviour and Physiology* 29 (1997): 109-26.

¹¹ For Icelandic stereotypes and sonotypes, see Richard F. Burton, *Ultima Thule; or, A Summer in Iceland* (London: Nimmo, 1875); Magnus Magnusson, *Icelandic Saga* (London: Bodley Head, 1987); Katharine Scherman, *Daughter of Fire: A Portrait of Iceland* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976).

embedded in all musics that drew upon the chords and motifs of European musical history as well as in the liturgies of Anglican, Gallican, Roman, and other Catholic establishments while great bells swung overhead in cathedrals, churches, chapels. Even apart from the Church, the vocal, textual, and instrumental expressiveness of compositions influenced by Monteverdi's *seconda pratica*, by Corelli's violins and brass, and by the eighteenth-century "diaspora" of Italian musicians were still audible in those swoops of strings, sweeps of voice, and whoops of horns echoing through ever-larger nineteenth-century concert halls.¹²

And if one listened more subtly, one might well hear in the swish of cloth and swash of capes, in the slide of slippers and stomp of leather boots, centuries of Italian near-domination of fabric and fashion (competing with Burgundy, later with Paris), these too Italian sounds that Shakespeare would play up in his comedies and in *Othello*. That Italian ethos of craftsmanship also resonated in the chambers of musical instruments, especially lutes, viols, and violins from Cremona, such that whatever the melody, whoever the virtuoso, the instruments of the Amatis, the Guarneris, and the Stradivari sustained "Italian" purities of tone and contributed markedly "Italian" overtones, undertones. More subtly still, one might hear in the thousands of masterpieces of painting, woodwork, and stone sculpture financed over seven hundred years by the Church and by Italian merchant-princes, the angel at Mary's ear for the Annunciation, the flutter of the wings of seraphs, the trumpets of jubilee, the uprush of the Second Coming, and conversely, the screeching of the souls of the damned as they passed through the gaping Mouth of Hell, their own mouths open in torment to everlasting fire—Italian sounds all, which Dante in 1300 heard no more clearly in Scripture and the *Aeneid* than in Last Judgment sculptures over the portals of churches and in the new-found ferocity of the Inquisition, given license to torture heretics by Innocent IV in his Bull *Ad extirpanda* of 1252.¹³

tenuto

Grim or grand, inglorious or *magnifico*, Italy had to have its own sounds, just as each nation had its own music, wrote Karl Engel, a German pianist and musicologist. And Italy especially:

¹² For Monteverdi in general, see Geoffrey Chew. "The Perfections of Modern Music: Consecutive Fifths and Tonal Coherence in Monteverdi" (*Music Analysis* 8, no. 3 [1989]: 247-73) and Massimo Ossi, *Divining the Oracles: Monteverdi's Seconda Pratica* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). For Monteverdian echoes in literature and in the sounding body itself: Jonathan Naumann, "Herbert and Monteverdi: Sacred Echo and the Italian Baroque" (*George Herbert Journal* 30, nos. 1-2 [2006]: 96-108); Päivi Järviö, "Music Moves in Me: The Singing Body as Interior Movement" (Proceedings, SIBA Conference on *The Embodiment of Authority: Perspectives on Performances*, 2010. Online at www.siba.fi/fi/web/embodimentofauthority/proceedings/jarvio, accessed July 26th, 2013). On the diaspora: Reinhard Strohm, ed., *The Eighteenth-Century Diaspora of Italian Music and Musicians* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001). For the gendered and aesthetic entailments of Monteverdi's music and music theory: Suzanne G. Cusick, "Gendering Modern Music: Thoughts on the Monteverdi-Artusi Controversy," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 46, no. 1 (1993): 1-25; Allan Beever, "The Arousal Theory Again?" *British Journal of Aesthetics* 38, no. 1 (1998): 85.

¹³ Consider Hillel Schwartz, *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang and Beyond* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2011), 69-84 on Dante's soundings and much else in this paragraph, but of course the references here could be endlessly amplified.

Western composers, didn't they all use Italian markings on their staves and bars? However, as Engel cautioned at the beginning of *An Introduction to the Study of National Music* (1866),

In civilized countries, where the art of music is scientifically cultivated, and where it has attained a high degree of development, we find, as might be expected, the characteristic peculiarities of the National music most strictly preserved among the less educated class,—much as we find the peculiar manners, customs, and prejudices of a nation more strictly adhered to by the common people than by the higher classes, whose education is more in accordance with that of the educated classes of the other civilized nations.

He continued in this volkisch, primitivist vein: “In most European countries it is therefore among the working class, the artisans, the field labourers, and the country people in general, that we must look out for genuine specimens of National music.”¹⁴

subito

Ecco! there it was, down low, in the heel and toe of the boot since the thirteenth century, a genuine Italian sound: the tarantella. Ethnomusicologists may find 6/8 rhythms and similar chord progressions elsewhere, but to the ears of Italians, other Europeans, some North Africans, and later North Americans, the tarantella has sounded more absolutely Italian than the polka was ever Polish or the waltz Viennese. Not simply because the putative culprit of tarantism, the slow-moving, shy *Latrodectus tarantula* (with its neuroactive venom) and the larger, more aggressive *Lycosa tarantula* (lacking such venom) seem unable to produce insomniac manias of jigs and whirling when exported to bite anywhere outside southern Italy, but also because the summer dancers and their curative tarantella (in Salento, their *pizzica scherma*) have been secured for so long within such a tight socio-medico-religious matrix that it would be cruel to decertify or globalize such an historically branded soundsystem. Even if Domenico Cirillo was right, that cynical Neapolitan professor of natural history who argued in 1770 that episodes of tarantism were fabricated by musicians who made their summer livings as thaumaturges, isn't the tarantella a sonotypically Italian charade?¹⁵

¹⁴ Karl Engel, *An Introduction to the Study of National Music* (London: Longmans, Green, Reade, and Dyer, 1866), 6; but he was also sometimes credited with calling England “the land without music.”

¹⁵ For the quotation, see Domenico Cirillo, “A letter to Dr. William Watson, F.R.S., giving some account of the manna tree and the tarantula,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* 60 (1770): 233-38. Tarantism, and its associated music, has had a recent revival in both popular practice and analytic studies. Listen to Robert E. Bartholomew, “Tarantism, Dancing Mania, and Demonopathy: The Anthro-political Aspects of ‘Mass Psychogenic Illness’,” *Psychological Medicine* 24 (1994): 281-306; Jerri Daboo, *Ritual, Rapture, and Remorse: A Study of Tarantism and Pizzica in Salento* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010); David Gentilcore, “Ritualized Illness and Must Therapy: Views of Tarantism in the Kingdom of Naples” in *Music as Medicine: The History of Music Therapy since*

grazioso

Or southern Italian, rural southern Italian? And should Italians themselves, north and south, urban and rural, readily accept the Italianness of the tarantella; aren't we and they buying into a nineteenth-century romance of the primitive as the authentic, the isolated as the unvarnished, and the unsophisticated as the unmitigated truth? Northern Italians meanwhile had elaborated a model of personal and corporate sonic identity indebted rather to swerve and indirection than boldness and bluntness, to dark slick varnish and inlaid facade than bright straightfaced honesty. Should not that "casual elegance" for which Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* was praised by one English admirer in 1898 be heard equally indelibly as an Italian sound, despite its origins among the elite, for it hearkens back to that *sprezzatura* for which Renaissance nobility and their hangers-on hoped to be known internationally? As coined by Castiglione in *Il Cortegiano* (written ca. 1508-18), *sprezzatura* was at once a way of comporting oneself, a way of speaking, and a way of making one's circuit through the world—neither silently nor brazenly nor stupidly nor loudly but with soft-spoken brilliance and an unassuming flair. It was part of a larger sound system of dancing wit, echoing diminuendo, and well-timed repartee within the sense-surround of princely courts, a system that has weathered the ages as a gracile "Italian school" of musicianship, of choreography, and of paintings (of, often, musicians, singers, orators, dancers), comparable stylistically to the quiet flourishes of Italian leatherwork, of shoes smooth as soap.¹⁶

lusingando

Two quite opposite Italian soundsystems, then, each with substantial historical footing. I can hear both at work in the mad-scene aria, which Donizetti meant to be accompanied by the thin, high, wavering, piercing sounds of a glass harmonica. Lucia has just danced through a murder in a trance akin to that of a *tarantata*, and

Antiquity, ed. Peregrine Horden (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 255-72; Karen Lüdtkke, *Dances with Spiders: Crisis, Celebrity, and Celebration in Southern Italy* (New York: Bergahn, 2009); and Giovanni Pizza, "Tarantism and the Politics of Tradition in Contemporary Salento" in *Memory, Politics and Religion: The Past Meets the Present in Europe*, ed. Frances Pine et al. (Münster: Lit, 2004), 199-223. On the neurotoxic venom of the European black widow spider as a culprit, see "The Tarantula: Poison Spider or a Case of Mistaken Identity?" *Adverse Drug Reactions and Toxicology Reviews* 15 (1996): 199-202, and contrast P. Escoubas and L. Rash, "Tarantulas: Eight-Legged Pharmacists and Combinatorial Chemists," *Toxicon* 43 (2004): 555-74. Large tarantulas can make a hissing or whistling noise by rubbing their leg bristles.

¹⁶ On *sprezzatura*, consider, among many others, Harry Berger, Jr., *The Absence of Grace: Sprezzatura and Suspicion in Two Renaissance Courtesy Books* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Douglas Biow, "Castiglione and the Art of Being Inconspicuously Conspicuous," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38, no. 1 (2008): 35-55; Maria Teresa Ricci, "La 'Grâce' et la 'sprezzatura' chez Baldassare Castiglione," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 65, no. 2 (2003): 233-48; Eduardo Saccone, "Grazia, Sprezzatura, Affettazione in the Courtier," in *Castiglione: The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture*, eds. Robert Hanning and David Rosand (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 45-67.

*Trema ogni fibra!
Vacilla il piè!*

But she is struggling for grace, for *sprezzatura*, in the embrace of Donizetti's oddly calm, fluent, cosmopolitan music,

Un'armonia celeste, di', non ascolti?

Sit by me, she tells her true love Edgardo, and

*Del ciel clemente un riso
la vita a noi sarà...*¹⁷

precipitando

I can also hear the contrasting Italian sonotypes in the *sprezzatura* of Futurist art and the tarantellas of their *intonarumori*. No critic may have described the work of Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà and friends in terms of *sprezzatura*, but if you ignore their rhetoric and listen instead to their paintings, which reflect not only arcs of light but concerted vibrations of gases, liquids, solids (a physicist's definition of "organized" sound¹⁸), they are

¹⁷ Cf. Mary Ann Smart, "The Silencing of Lucia" (*Cambridge Opera Journal* 4, no. 2 (1992): 119-41), who examines both pathetic and positive evaluations of the role of the madwoman, and madwomen's arias, in nineteenth- and twentieth-century opera.

¹⁸ All definitions of sound, however, appear now to be up in the air, as contemporary philosophers tackle the discrepancies between what we claim to hear and how sounds appear: see Matthew Nudds and Casey O'Callaghan, eds., *Sounds and Perception: New Philosophical Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Roberto Casati and Jerome Dokic, "Sounds," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2011 Edition, online at <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/sounds>, accessed July 26th, 2013). Psychophysical experiments suggest that "the human capacity to discriminate musical pitch differences is more fine-grained than the human ability to identify or label pitch intervals," which leads to the observation that "Normal listeners can distinguish about 1200 gradations of the audio-frequency range but categorize only about 80," and thus to the implication that an "Italian" sound may be much easier "phenomenologically" to discriminate from other simultaneous sounds than to describe or maintain as an independent, isolated entity: see David Roden, "Nature's Dark Domain: An Argument for a Naturalized Phenomenology" (*PhilPapers: Online Research in Philosophy*, 2012, online at <http://philpapers.org/rec/RODNDD>, accessed July 26th, 2013), using Diana Raffman, "On the Persistence of Phenomenology" in *Conscious Experience*, ed. Thomas Metzinger (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 1995), 293-308, who uses E. M. Burns and W. D. Ward, "Categorical Perception – Phenomenon or Ephiphenomenon: Evidence from Experiments in the Perception of Music Intervals," *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 63 (1977): 465-68 and Carl Seashore, *The Psychology of Music* (New York: Dover, 1919/1938). These should be supplemented by

surprisingly graceful framings of the impetuously mechanical and the acoustically urban as tempered by *leggiadria*, that poetry in motion and speech that was companion to *sprezzatura*. In Balla's *Velocità astratta + rumore* (1913-14) and Luigi de Giudici's *La bella sconosciuta* (1916), speed impresses itself upon the canvas but does not overwhelm; rather, it makes itself heard, intelligibly audible. In Boccioni's *Visioni simultanee* (1911-12) you can actually see ears unfolding like towers from the city center and mouths breathing down vowels into the plazas; in his *La strada entra nella casa* (1911), you can hear what is often translated as "The Noise of the Street" entering the spectating self rather to enliven than shatter it.¹⁹ Such paintings were consistent with the exaltation of onomatopoeia by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who wrote in 1914, "Our increasing love towards matter, the will to penetrate it, and to know its vibrations, and the physical sympathy that binds us to engines, incite us to use onomatopoeia," whether the *dum-dum-dum-dum* of "the rotative noise of the African sun and the orange color of the sky" or *ran-ran-ran*, "the noise and unconscious expression of the most complex and mysterious movements of our sensibility." From this resonant Futurism to tarantism was but a few *Sbuffi*, *Scricchiolii*, and *Tuoni*, for just as tarantella musicians tried out different melodies and rhythms until they noticed a response (a tarantata's hand or foot moving in time with their music) and then played in tandem with the whirling dancer until both reached the crescendo that was the cure, so Futurists on stage with Luigi Russolo's *intonarumori* played always toward crescendo in order to shock audiences and concert halls, "these hospitals for anaemic sounds," back to life. Noise was not merely intemperate sound; it was the (Italian?) art of motion and prime expression of the "fantastic juxtapositions" by which life was revived, whirling, spinning, buzzing, braying, and redeemed.²⁰

newer work, e.g. Aniruddh D. Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁹ Contrast Greg Goodale, *Sonic Persuasion: Reading Sound in the Recorded Age* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 58-60, who hears both "fragmentation" and "sound envelopes" in Futurist art.

²⁰ On *leggiadria*: Sharon Fermor, "Poetry in Motion: Beauty in Movement and the Renaissance Concept of *Leggiadria*," in *Concepts and Beauty in Renaissance Art*, eds. Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998), 127-28. On Futurism: Schwartz, *Making Noise*, 575-76, 595-98, 604, drawing upon G. Franco Maffina, *Luigi Russolo e l'arte dei rumori: con tutti gli scritti musicali* (Tornio: Martano, 1978) and Umbro Apollonio, ed., *Futurist Manifestos* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2001) as well as Mark A. Radice, "Futurismo: Its Origins, Context, Repertory, and Influence," *Musical Quarterly* 73 (1989): 1-17 and Rodney J. Payton, "The Music of Futurism: Concerts and Polemics," *Musical Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (1976): 25-45. Most recently, listen to Luciano Chessa, *Luigi Russolo, Futurist: Noise, Visual Arts, and the Occult*, Part II (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). On onomatopoeia: F. T. Marinetti, "Abstract Onomatopoeia and Numeric Sensibility," trans. Arundel del Ré, *The New Age* 15 (16 July 1914): 255 and Lawrence Rainey, "Shock Effects: Marinetti, Pathology, and Italian Avant-Garde Poetics" in *The Mind of Modernism: Medicine, Psychology, and the Cultural Arts in Europe and America, 1880-1940*, ed. Mark S. Micale (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 197-215. On the centrality of vibration in Futurism: Gino Cantarelli, "[Graph of] Luci-Rumori-Odori-Colori," *L'Italia futurista* 2 (July 10, 1917): 3. On Futurist sound-painting: Jane Sharp, "Sounds, Noises, and Smells: Sensory Experience in Futurist Art" in *The Futurist Imagination*, ed. Anne Coffin Hanson (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1983), 16-29, and Mirella Bentivoglia, ed., *Ascoltare l'immagine: l'esperienza del suono negli artisti della visualità* (Florence: Maschietto & Musolino, 1996).

obbligato

Of course, there must be more than two distinctively Italian sound systems, and Futurism in its brief historical moment was hardly self-consistent, or even admirable. The binaries of structuralism sound now as passé as the two sides of a 45, and the oppositionalism of north/south as passé as two-speaker stereos. We are primed these days for Fibonacci ratios and infinite series, such that there must be as many distinctive Italian sounds/systems as there are Italians. Each of us imparts to our own sounding a stylistic uniqueness derived somewhat involuntarily from our physical toning, the tuning of our dentition, the volume of our chest cavities, the amplifying strength of our diaphragms, the density of our mastoid processes, the heft of our bones and bellies, and more voluntarily from our inclinations toward certain levels of loudness and lengths of silences, our disposition toward steadiness in breathing and posture, our assertion of an individual rhythm of engagement with others at home or abroad.

agitato

Academies for training in theatrical speech and whole-body performance (in Italy, notably that of Sergei Ostrenko at the A.B.I.T.) claim to have a coherent approach to the confluence of these sonic qualities, but we have no clear idea, just now, exactly how the sum of these qualities yields an identifiable, enduring, personal profile of soundmaking, hearing, and listening. Touring Italy in 1818, Mary Shelley curtailed her stay in Pisa because she “could never walk in the streets except in misery,” for everywhere she heard the clanking of the chains of convicts looking “sallow and dreadfully wretched” and condemned to work publicly in the streets while “heavily ironed in pairs.”²¹ But how did Pisans hear the streets of their town, and what did their ears make of the clanking? How and when do certain sounds—spoken, or embodied, or imagined, or manufactured by orchestras or car designers, by toymakers or bomb-builders²²—become national (or ethnic) markers, rather than idiosyncratic rasps, class blasts, or familial hullabalos?

²¹ Mary W. Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Volume I: A Part of the Elect*, ed. Betty T. Bennett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 67. Immediately after her notes on Pisa, Shelley also remarks on the noisiness of Italian operagoers, the murmur of whose voices while eating and playing cards in their boxes “rises far above the efforts of the singers.” Then contrast her friend Byron, who wrote that same year in *Beppo*, stanza 44:

I love the language, that soft bastard Latin,
Which melts like kisses from a female mouth,
And sounds as if it should be writ on satin,
With syllables which breathe of the sweet South,
And gentle liquids gliding all so pat in,
That not a single accent seems uncouth,
Like our harsh northern whistling, grunting guttural,
Which we're obliged to hiss, and spit, and sputter all.

²² Cf. Goodale, *Sonic Persuasion*, 116-18 on differences in the sound when listening to a bomb fall from above (the

ostinato

Take, for example, organ-grinding. During the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in northwestern Europe and North America, itinerant organ-grinders and their organ-grinding were sonotypically Italian, whether or not the tunes they ground out were composed by Italians, their portable boxes built by Italians, or their native tongue Italian. Reformers in London, Paris, and New York sought to rescue street-singing children from “white slavery,” their Capuchin monkeys from fates worse than zoos. Should we accept as an “Italian sound” a sonotype that results from a racial-national stereotype, essentially (listen to that word) a *slur* on a group of people putatively from the same place?²³

facile

Or take Henry James’s idealization of Firenze as a city of grace and tenderness, a “divine little city” in *contrapposto* to Manhattan’s unrelenting attack on the senses. While in Florence at any season a man could be a contented *flaneur*, a gentle lover of art and music, in Manhattan the winter was no relief from assault and battery, given “the character of the traffic [. . .] the unadapted state of the place to almost *any* dense movement, and beyond everything, [. . .] that pitch of all the noises which acted on your nerves as so much wanton provocation, so much conscious cynicism. The fury of sound took the form of derision of the rest of your woe, and thus it *might*, I admit, have struck as brazen that the horrible place should, in such confessed collapse, still be swaggering and shouting,” while Florence had achieved a properly quiet compunction, and “in one’s impression of old Florence the abiding felicity, the sense of saving sanity, of something sound and human, predominates, offering you a medium still conceivable for life.” Should we accept as an Italian soundscape a sonotype that results from unfavorable comparison by an Anglo-American aesthete as cosmopolitan as he was always a little sad?²⁴

estinto . . . feroce

perspective of a bomber) or from below (the perspective of those being bombed).

²³ For organ-grinders and street musicians, see John E. Zucchi, *The Little Slaves of the Harp: Italian Child Street Musicians in Nineteenth-Century Paris, London, and New York* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998); Schwartz, *Making Noise*, 243 *et passim*.

²⁴ Robin P. Hoople, “The ‘Divine Little City’ and the ‘Terrible Town’: Henry James on Florence and New York” in *City Limits: Perspectives on the Historical European City*, ed. Glenn Clark *et al.* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 159-80, relying especially upon “Autumn in Florence” (1873) in Henry James, *Collected Travel Writings: The Continent* (New York: Viking / Library of America, 1993), 533-42.

What of a sonotype more neutral, such as the “silent” Etruscans whom we know best from impressively calm funerary sculpture—but who prayed to Veiovis, deity of lightning and thunder, and who trained *fulguratores* in the scrying thereof? Does each national or ethnic sonotype come entrained with an oppositional twin, *e.g.* Futurist rampage abutting the *Pittura metafisica* of the “art of silence” of Giorgio Morandi, or the silent (stoic, erotic, or politically conniving) Italian monk up against the classically loud Italian mob, capable of acclamation so stunning, wrote Plutarch, that the shock of their applause causes birds to fall from the sky?²⁵

rigoroso

Upon what criteria, then, should we admit a sound, a sound system, or the 1972 Echostop *pannelli acustici* of Audiotecnica, or even a pair of Vektr headphones designed by the Italian fashion label Diesel, into some Italian pantheon? Must it have a long, enduring association, through others and/or Italian themselves, with Italy—oh, say, the National Anthem? But which? *Il Canto degli Italiani* (The Song of the Italians), also known as *Inno di Mameli* (Mameli's Hymn), which was made the official anthem only on November 17, 2005, though its words had been composed in 1847 in Genoa by a twenty-year-old student, Goffredo Mameli, and set to music in Turin by another Genoese, Michele Novaro, to become widely popular throughout the Risorgimento? Or the anthem that was official for the longest time, eighty-five years: the *Marcia Reale*, the Royal March (or *Fanfara Reale*), hymn of the royal house of Savoy and national anthem from 1861 through the Fascist era until Italy became a republic in 1946? Or (say it is not so) the far less martial *Giovinezza* (Youth), composed in 1909 by a lawyer, Giuseppe Blanc, and first used as a Turin University graduation song? It was the *Giovinezza*, and not Blanc's *The Eagles of Rome: Imperial Hymn*, that (with new lyrics) would be adopted as the official hymn of the Italian National Fascist Party and serve as the unofficial national anthem between 1924 and 1943.²⁶

mosso

Could it simply be a sound so undetachable that an Italian person, persona, process, or product would be unrecognizable without it, such as Nino Rota's circus-sad melody for *La Strada*, which became as much a signature sound for the oeuvre of Federico Fellini as Rota's waltz for *The*

²⁵ Janet Abramowicz, *Giorgio Morandi: The Art of Silence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), especially Chapter 4; *Plutarch's Lives* 10.6-7, “Life of Titus Quinctius Flaminius” in *Parallel Lives*. Consider also George Gregory, *A New and Complete Dictionary of Arts and Sciences, Volume I* (New York: Collins, 1819) on “acclamation.”

²⁶ For further consideration of national musics: Bohlman, *Music of European Nationalism*; Lowenthal, “From Harmony of the Spheres to National Anthem”; Ann Ostendorf, *Sounds American: National Identity and the Music Cultures of the Lower Mississippi River Valley, 1800-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); and Stanley Waterman and Stanley D. Brunn, eds., “Geography and Music,” *GeoJournal* 65, nos. 1-2 (2006): 1-135.

Godfather became its manifest destiny? Or Bill Conti's *Gonna Fly Now*, scored for the Italian Stallion, Sylvester Stallone, in *Rocky*? Or the unique *shhploosh*, since 1905, of the La Pavoni espresso machine? Or the high-pitched whine—and narrow waist—for which the Vespa scooter was named in 1946, though the waspy sound kept shifting with changes in design of engines, brakes, and mufflers? Then again, it was Doris Day (née Kappelhoff, no Italian) who sang the famously Italianesque *Que Será Será*, in Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956). And if the personal fork spread throughout Europe and the Americas courtesy of the table manners and sixteenth-century etiquette books of Italians, who invented neither the two- nor three-pronged versions but endorsed and embossed them, should the metallic prink and fligit of subsequent Western forks be heard as essentially Italian sounds?

scherzo

Could it be a sound closely associated with an archetypal Italian product or figure, by virtue of the success of an advertising campaign, cartoon, or sound-logo, such as the Rice-A-Roni slogan (based on the 1923 song “Barney Google—With the GooGooGoogly Eyes,” by Billy Rose and Con Conrad, which built upon Billy DeBeck's popular comic strip that started in 1919) and the Rice-A-Roni cable-car bell-ringing contests sponsored by the local Italian-American Golden Grain Company? Or the electronic swansong that plays whenever Mario dies in the old Super Mario Brothers video game? ²⁷ If not, why not?²⁸

sostenuto

It could, true, be a soundmark, as defined by R. Murray Schafer in his seminal book, *The Tuning of the World* (1977): “a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by the people in that community,” and usually marking a clear-cut place or time, such as the bells of a local church, the tunes of a regional festival, or the cries of the *gondolieri* in Venezia.²⁹ There would seem to be little to put in question here—except the degree to which such soundmarks are in fact “traditional” or have been manufactured / reinvented / reintroduced to sound traditional, in order to lend a place some panache or to confirm a revered if tenuous link with the past. Designers of soundtracks for historical romances,

²⁷ For Rice-A-Roni, listen to the Kitchen Sisters (July 15, 2011) at <http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=93067862&m=93066762>, accessed July 26th, 2013.

²⁸ For Rice-A-Roni, listen to the Kitchen Sisters (July 15, 2011) at <http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=93067862&m=93066762>, accessed July 26th, 2013.

²⁹ R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977), glossary, and *Five Village Soundscapes* (Vancouver: A.R.C., 1977). Cf. Barry Truax, *Acoustic Communication* (Norwood: Ablex, 1984), 59-61, and 26 on the “romance that builds up around the ‘disappearing sound’ from the past.”

such as those directed by Bernardo Bertolucci and Luchino Visconti, know much about this. But how was it that Sergio Leoni, an Italian who did not speak English and had never set foot in America until 1967, could in effect establish—while “recreating”—the soundmarks of the gunslinger West and its harmonica-playing hero in *Once Upon a Time in the West*?³⁰

volti subito

All of which brings me to propose that rather than hoping to establish unshakeable criteria for Italian sounds, it would be far more revealing to track how a certain sound or sound system or “sound atmosphere” comes to be heard and broadcast as Italian, by countrymen and countrywomen, by the Italian diaspora, by outlanders.³¹ Or how a certain sound comes to be rejected as Italian, despite having been created or adumbrated by Italians.³² Or whether the “koaxpf” soundry of the archaeopteryx as heard by Italo Calvino’s primeval narrator, Qfwfq, in *The Origin of the Birds* is a sound that would only be imagined by an Italian of a certain era, class, or bent.³³ Equally revealing would be studies dedicated to the context in which sounds once heard to be uniquely Italian lose their national or ethnic specificity—as, for example, the *shloop* and *fwoop* of eating spaghetti, or the whistle-shrill that was once the soundmark of Italian peanut vendors. Or cries of *bravo! brava! ancora!* which in the Seicento and Settecento were meant to elicit instant repeat performances of a favorite Italian scene or aria and now are shouted

³⁰ All the more surprising, since *Once Upon a Time in the West*, dir. Leoni and written with Sergio Donati (Paramount, 1968) was based upon a story by Bernardo Bertolucci and Dario Argento. One could however argue that it was the Italian cinematic tradition of shooting without sound and laying in a soundtrack afterward, with all dialogue dubbed, that gave Leoni the expertise to establish such a remarkable acoustic environment for the film, especially in its long wordless opening scene.

³¹ On sound atmospheres: Gabor Csepregi, “On Sound Atmospheres” in *Aural Cultures*, ed. Jim Drobnick (Toronto: YYZ, 2004), 169-77. This is not to say that there won’t be tough methodological issues to resolve. Consider the problems faced by contemporaries trying to situate—by race, nationality, or ethnicity—the soundlines of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912), a classically-trained composer (sometimes called “the African Mahler”), born in England to African-British parents, whose most successful work was a *Hiawatha* trilogy, itself grounded in harmonic and melodic language typical of Slav and Bohemian sources: see George Revill, “Samuel Taylor-Coleridge’s Geography of Disappointment: Hybridity, Identity, and Networks of Musical Meaning” in *The Place of Music*, eds. Andrew Leyson *et al.* (New York: Guilford, 1998), 129-59. Consider also the greater attentiveness of Europeans in the Australian outback to the sounds of birds and animals than of Aborigines, as tracked by Alan Atkinson (*The Europeans in Australia, Volume 2: Democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³² E.g. the voices of *castrati*, on which consider Sherry Simon, “Accidental Voices: The Return of the Countertenor” in *Aural Cultures*, ed. Drobnick, 110-19. A somewhat less sexy example would be the electromechanical sounds (and involuntary moans, squeals, shouts) of electroshock, originally produced, reported, and studied by Volta, Galvani, and Aldini, yet almost always detached from the Italian context when carried forward as electrotherapy. Cf. André Parent, “Giovanni Aldini: From Animal Electricity to Human Brain Stimulation,” *Canadian Journal of Neurological Science* 31 (2004): 576-84.

³³ Italo Calvino, *t zero*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt, Brace, World, 1969), 15; and cf. his description in *Soft Moon* of a lunar meteorite falling to the earth with “a very loud ‘splat!’ a deafening noise and at the same time, a disgustingly spongy one,”¹¹.

at performers of all ilks with the hope of soliciting something else, something more, something short but just as good.

rinforzando

In a 1998 essay on *Locating Listening*, Jody Berland asked of her fellow Canadians, who were per capita (after the Dutch) the second-highest world consumers of recorded music, whether there was such a thing as “Canadian music,” given that “In Canada, we occupy two dreams simultaneously, that we are American, and that we are not.” Her answer was that the goal of musical authenticity could no longer refer (if ever it did) to some national point of origin; it must refer instead to “a site of reflexivity in action.” I propose that reflexivity be established as a time signature for all inquiry into Italian sounds, with a coda at the end by way of Adriana Cavarero, to remind us that sounds are relational, that the tale of our soundmaking is always reciprocal, and that we give voice to ourselves only to the extent that we are listening in on, and hearing from, others.³⁴

And that should be that—but both reviewers of this essay asked for a more rousing conclusion (*ancora!*). Consider then a particularly hilarious, hip-rolling performance by Adriano Celentano, Italy’s most successful pop-rock artist of the late Fifties and early Sixties and for decades thereafter a celebrated singer, composer, musician, comedian, television emcee and, according to Wikipedia, “king of the Italian box office in low budget movies.” With forty albums to his name, Celentano has had four enormous musical hits: *Il ragazzo della via Gluck* (1966, and yes, he was born on Via Gluck in Milano, though this song would be covered with new lyrics by North American, Swedish, and French singers born on less operatic streets); *La coppia più bella del mondo* (1967, which sold over a million copies); *Azzurro*, (1968); and *Prisencolinensinainciusol* (1972). This last is what I have in mind for a slambang finale. The title is gibberish, Italian gibberish, as is the rest of the song, which from start to finish was meant to sound like his idol Elvis (Presley—not Costello, not Stojko). In 1974 he performed this song in the manner of The King for the television show *Milleluci*, a performance now online in many versions on YouTube, so we can all hear for ourselves the sounds that a Milanese pop singer in 1972 believed his fellow Italians would hear as the (Mississippi and Memphis) English of a rock-and-rolling para-Elvis. Celentano’s gibberish was distinct from the scatting of jazz singers, even of such Italian-Americans as Louis Prima, Johnny Frigo, or Frank Sinatra; distinct too from the Italianate babble of Danny Kaye on the silver screen, and from Kaye’s omnilocutric antecedents in vaudeville. While Celentano’s performance of *Prisecolinensinainciusol* expertly translocated Elvis the Pelvis’s kinaesthetics into an Italian arena, his lyrics gyrated away from what could

³⁴ Jody Berland, “Locating Listening: Technological Space, Popular Music, and Canadian Mediations” in *The Place of Music*, ed. Leyson *et al.*, 129-59. Berland addresses in particular the case of sound and music in Canadian radio broadcasting. Sticking with Italians, I would add to Adriana Cavarero (*Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. Paul A. Kottman [New York: Routledge, 2000], and *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005]) Agamben’s prologue to an unwritten work on the human voice (*Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron, New York: Verso, 1993).

have been a merely comical mistransliteration of actual American English words toward something far more curious: a take on the jumble of sounds that Italians hear (and do not hear) in dialectal American song-speech. Song-speech in a specific genre. With a specific rhythm.

So *Prisencolinensinainciusol* raises a number of intriguing questions about sound and identity, each of which leads in a different direction. As it has been my intention throughout to signal the many avenues of sound studies still un(der)populated rather than to trumpet a favorite methodology down a well-trafficked boulevard, Celentano's *marachella* (or *gherminella*?) serves well.

Primo, What is the essence or essential experience of hearing "foreign" sounds? In the Italian context, this is a question of historical weight, given that Greeks and Romans since the age of the Mycenaeans heard outlanders (Persians, then Turks, then Germans, Celts, Iberians) as stammerers or as noisy speakers, calling them "barbarians" (< Greek *βαρβαρος* and <Arabic "barbar," to talk noisily or confusedly, and ultimately < Sanskrit [*barbara*], which can also mean foolish talk or the noise of weapons). Contemporary Italians who speak fluent English may still consider native English-speakers "mumblers," as Darla Bruno discovered recently when being tutored in Italian by an Italian-American for a stint in Rome.³⁵ So the rock-and-roll gibberish of *Prisencolinensinainciusol* enshrined a long-standing auditory construct of foreigners. Further research in this direction would do well to follow the hints of Paul Carter, who has listened to how Aborigines and Europeans tried to hear each other through the static of encroachment and resistance across Australian centuries, and contrast this with the history of military uses of one's own sounds or music to terrify opposing forces or as media of torture.³⁶

Secondo, how does a sound or sequence of sounds become so persuasive, or so definitive and memorable, as to cross borders and remain identifiable with an original terrain, event, person, or social constellation, as for example the sirens of the *Gestapo*, the cartoon signature of Woody the Woodpecker, or the sonics of Elvis? Here one would be wise to follow the work of audio designers who develop audicons or sound branding techniques and those psychologists and advertisers who study "earworms," sounds that people cannot seem to shake.³⁷

³⁵ Darla Bruno, "My Native Mumble," *The American / InItalia* (January 12, 2013), online at www.theamericanmag.com/article.php?article=1766, accessed July 26th, 2013.

³⁶ Paul Carter, *The Sound In-Between: Voice, Space, Performance* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1992) and "Ambiguous Traces, Mishearing and Auditory Space" in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*, ed. Veit Erlmann (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 43-64; Suzanne G. Cusick and Branden W. Joseph, "Across an Invisible Line: A Conversation about Music and Torture," *Grey Room* 42 (Winter 2011): 6-21; Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010); Jonathan Pieslak, *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

³⁷ On sound design, see Enrico Ascoli, "Five Sound Questions to Enrico Ascoli" (interview of 2 June 2010) in *Everyday Listening: Sonic Inspiration*, online at <http://www.everydaylistening.com/articles/2010/6/2/five-sound-questions-to-enrico-ascoli.html> (accessed July 26th, 2013), and his own website, www.enricoascoli.com, (accessed July 26th, 2013); Eefje Cleophas and Karin Bijsterveld, "Selling Sound: Testing, Designing, and Marketing Sound in the European Car Industry" in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, ed. Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 102-24; Bernard Delage, "On Sound Design" in *Stockholm, Hey Listen! From Awareness to Action*, ed. Henrik Karlsson (Stockholm: World Federation of Acoustic Ecology, 1999), 67-73; Marcus Hermann, *Psychoakustik und Sound-Engineering: Der neue Stellenwert des Hörens in der Corporate Identity* (Munich: Grin Verlag, 2009); Max Schneider, "Kontextsensitives Sounddesign" in *Funktionale Klänge: Hörbare Daten, klingende Geräte und gestaltete Hörerfahrungen*, ed. Georg Spehr (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009). For earworms and memorability: Goodale, *Sonic Persuasion*; Goodman, *Sonic Warfare* on audio virology; I. E. Hyman,

Shake. Which brings us, *terzo*, to the rarely-addressed question of how a society's — or a generation's—kinaesthetics affect how its members hear the sonic environment. Not just the music in the air (and whistling, and humming) but the repertoire of dance and gesture as well as cultural habits of proprioception and isolation must surely contribute to socio-cultural postures toward, and interventions in, the sounding world. One might return to the tarantella with new ears after listening, perhaps, to the political sociology of the tango and the neuroscience of dance.³⁸

Infine, and most importantly, in the context of this issue on “Italian sound,” how closely bound up with one's sense of self, or a group's sense of itself as a coherent group, is the sound-surround? Much has already been done in this regard by ethnographers, sound/music historians, and acoustic ecologists,³⁹ but I am thinking about the bravura interplay of language and music, of rhythmic sense and lyrical nonsense, of *Prisencolinensinainciusol*. It does not quite carry off that macaronic form used for centuries by poets who have been equally comfortable in two or more language communities, and it is not yet a creole, a language mix with its own, independent rules. It is meant to appeal to a community of native Italian speakers who recognize themselves in their collective mis-hearings—as if, in sonic terms, we might come to know ourselves most acutely by listening for what we cannot quite make out.

Jr. *et al.*, “Going Gaga: Investigating, creating, and manipulating the song stuck in my head” (*Applied Cognitive Psychology*, published online 13 December 2012); Peter Szendy, *Hits: Philosophy in the Jukebox*, trans. William Bishop (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

³⁸ Steven Brown and Lawrence M. Parsons, “The Neuroscience of Dance,” *Scientific American* 299 (2008): 78-83; Donald S. Castro, *The Argentine Tango as Social History, 1880-1955: The Soul of the People* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1991); Morgan James Luker, “Tango Renovación: On the Uses of Music History in Post-Crisis Argentina,” *Latin American Music Review* 28, no. 1 (2007): 68-93.

³⁹ For ethnographies: Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*, 3rd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islajic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Janis B. Nuckolls, *Sounds Like Life: Sound-Symbolic Grammar, Performance, and Cognition in Pastaza Quechua* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Anthony Seeger, *Why Suyá Sing: A Musical Anthropology of an Amazonian People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For acoustic ecology and sound history: Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside*, trans. Martin Thom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Schafer, *Tuning of the World and Five Village Soundscapes*; Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and all issues of *Soundscape: The Journal of Acoustic Ecology*. Meanwhile, new soundscape research in the biological sciences has been stimulated by the concept of “eco-fields” as adumbrated by two Italian ecobiologists, Almo Farina and Andrea Belgrano (see “The Eco-Field: A New Paradigm for Landscape Ecology,” *Ecological Research* 19 (2004): 107-10). Consider, *e.g.*, Bryan C. Pijanowski *et al.*, “Soundscape Ecology: The Science of Sound in the Landscape,” *BioScience* 61, no. 3 (2011): 203-16.

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