

Orality, Invisibility, and Laughter: Traces of Milan in Bruno Maderna and Virginio Puecher's *Hyperion* (1964)

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UNEXPECTED VOICES

Unexpected sounds from behind a curtain, heard amid the hushed semidarkness of a theater auditorium: this is what audiences experienced at the opening moments of the premiere of *Hyperion*, a one-act opera created by Bruno Maderna and Milanese scenographer and stage director Virginio Puecher, which was first performed at the Venice Biennale on September 6, 1964.¹ First comes the clamor of male voices yelling at each other in Venetian dialect. Only then does the curtain part, in a slow, exaggeratedly haphazard way. The stage comes into view, but there is no one there, only an empty set. The backdrop is slightly crooked, hanging from the ceiling in midair without touching the stage floor. Only the obviously artificial rays of sunlight hitting the backdrop (it is 9 p.m., long after sunset) offer any clue that the offstage voices are part of the show.² The voices grow louder and closer until a group of machinists (played, unbeknownst to the audience, by actors) arrives onstage; then comes the tearing screech of an offstage mechanical saw. One of the men walks to the front of the stage. The audience begins to clap tentatively, then stops. Stage notes tell us that the man “behaves as though he were alone: he whistles, taps, approaches the proscenium, recites in Venetian dialect a few classic excerpts, tries out the reverb of the room. Maybe he utters a few swear words: shit, bollocks. If anyone answers from the audience, he replies ‘the phantoms of the opera.’”³

This technician eventually returns backstage, as the shouting and noises from the workers begin to die down. A musician in tails walks pompously onstage, accompanied by an assistant carrying four flute cases and a table, and another machinist with a large music stand and some sheets of music. The musician is none other than flutist Severino Gazzelloni, a rising television personality in 1960s Italy and probably recognizable to some of the audience; others would have known him as a distinguished classical performer, one of Maderna's closest collaborators. Gazzelloni wanders around the stage, obviously puzzled as his helpers go about

setting up; his flutes are placed on the table, the music stand is positioned. The flutist's behavior is odd, at times theatrically clumsy (stage notes instruct him to be "grotesque, even slightly ridiculous").⁴ The audience giggles. He finally chooses a flute, approaches the music stand, and readies himself to play. But before he makes a sound, odd metallic noises issuing from an invisible source—an excerpt from Maderna's tape composition *Le rire* (1962)—ring out from the empty space around him.

Le rire began to play nearly six minutes into the 1964 premiere of *Hyperion*, and it is at this point that scholarly accounts of Maderna and Puecher's work usually begin: only Maderna's music—an extended flute piece, mixed into some forty minutes of electronic and orchestral music—is considered part of the text. This concentration on the musical score is, in the case of *Hyperion*, a consequence of the work's extreme fragmentation, which has prompted scholars to establish a common textual basis for analysis.⁵ The creators left no libretto or complete published score. Every performance (there were five between 1964 and 1977) came with substantial additions and alterations; each was a discrete textual variant. But those noises, the paratextual or extratextual noises that were scripted via stage directions into the 1964 performance, are as much a meaningful part of the work as Maderna's musical contributions, and indeed both provide a window into *Hyperion's* linguistic and political conditions of possibility as a visual, sonic, and spatial event.

This article focuses on *Hyperion's* first performance, which I will refer to as *Hyperion '64*. My description of the work's opening moments is archival: it is only by digging through unpublished materials that one can recover this otherwise hidden seam of sonic traces. Such traces include, for example, the unofficial tape recording of the premiere and various unpublished scene synopses and stage notes. The dearth of published materials concerning *Hyperion's* performances was the direct result of its creators' intention: to preserve it from the fixity of printed text, to secure for it an oral tradition, unhinged from the external visual support of text and inseparable from the singularity of utterance, the unrepeatability of event. As I will be arguing, it is far from coincidental that the first moments of the opera are dominated by a cleaving of sound from sight, gesturing toward an aural rather than visual mode of engagement. Even more striking is how the vocal altercation, construction noises, and audience chuckles work to turn our ears away from the stage—the site of scripted performance—and toward the irreverently resonant offstage.

The occlusion of sight and insistence on hearing are not immediately traceable to the literary source of *Hyperion '64*: Friedrich Hölderlin's homonymous novel, written between 1797 and 1799. We may, however, begin to make sense of the connection between Hölderlin and Maderna, and between both of them and Puecher's unorthodox dramaturgy, by considering the novel's underlying theme: the impossibility of direct oral communication. This is an aspect that Maderna and Puecher's

insistence on the secret sonorities of the theater's invisible spaces brings into play. Hölderlin's hero is a youth who travels through Greece in search of the ancient roots of the European Enlightenment, particularly its ideal of transparent human communion—a creed progressively undermined by warmongering, indifference, and ultimately complete abandonment by everyone the youth knows, including his idyllic young lover, Diotima.⁶ Maderna and Puecher, for their part, transfigure Hölderlin's sorrows into a theatrical concert work that takes as its theme the inability to speak and the impossibility of making oneself understood. The protagonist is an unnamed flutist—an implicit musical version of Hyperion—who plays his instrument as a substitute for speaking or singing. The plot unfolds in a single act, over the course of slightly less than an hour. It comprises eight scenes of variable length (the first two scenes take up roughly six minutes, the seventh nearly fifteen)⁷ and a recurring narrative structure: the flutist repeatedly attempts (largely in vain) to engage with the audience, the orchestra, and even with an enormous mechanical contraption operated by robotic mimes. As his attempts increase in number, the violence of the reaction to his entreaties grows more violent. Disheartened at last, he summons up a ghostly woman—possibly a remote reference to the character of Diotima—who sings an extended, forlorn soprano aria, accompanied by the orchestra, before disappearing, leaving the flutist to exit as he plays a muted final solo.

It has been convincingly argued that the scattered, fragmentary form of Hölderlin's novel appealed to the expressionist strain of Maderna's poetics; indeed, one could frame the same thesis in more linguistic terms: it is specifically the tension between the literary and oral medium that haunts the structure of both Hölderlin's novel and Maderna's *Hyperion* '64.⁸ Hölderlin was writing during the rise of the German publishing industry, and he deliberately subverted that industry by scattering manuscript fragments among multiple publications, as if to lend his writing something of the elusiveness and ephemerality of vocal confessions. The same anxiety about putting things into plain words plagues the novel's protagonist, a lyrical soul whose passionate impulses are not verbalized but rather traced with seismographic accuracy by his own writing hand and then dispatched as missives to a distant friend. Much as Hölderlin's Hyperion articulates his pain only through writing, Maderna and Puecher's flutist is plagued by the impossibility of immediate verbal expression. Both characters, then, mirrored their authors' own ambitions in a desire to transform ordinary means of expression into an originary orality: the linguistic vanishing point of the speaking mouth. It is this same impulse that haunts the strange publishing history of Hölderlin's *Hyperion* and that reverberates through Maderna and Puecher's sparse notation of their opera.

The lack of a comprehensive text for *Hyperion* '64 (and for any of its subsequent variants) is, of course, commonplace in the context of the 1960s' international avant-garde. Indeed, *Hyperion* has often been associated with Umberto Eco's concept of the open work: it is a work whose lack of textual fixity allows for constant

reinterpretation, as well as open-ended interactions between producer and consumer.⁹ Yet what makes *Hyperion* singular is the extent to which concerns about orality are reflected not only in the authors' decisions regarding its mode of circulation as a text, but also in the dramaturgical use of spoken language as a way both of animating the theatrical space and of framing Maderna's composed score. Because of this aspect, *Hyperion '64* presents us with an idiosyncratic mapping of midcentury ideologies of linguistic communication in the era of electrified media. In writings such as Lévi-Strauss's morphological analysis of myth telling in *La pensée sauvage* (1962) or McLuhan's celebration of the return to the "resonant oral word" in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), orality came to be considered a positive and pervasive aesthetic, a political and even philosophical marker of the times. As has been widely pointed out since, the idealization of "orality"—and of the act of hearkening to speech—is loaded with unsavory binaries, theological constructs, and unacknowledged reliance on acts of "entextualization" (recording, production, transcription) that show the return to a preliterate state to be a conservative political ideal.¹⁰ Such unease about the ideological implications of orality are not, however, only something to be spelled out in hindsight. They were already to be found in the cultural production of sites—such as the northern Italy of the early 1960s—that lay at the near periphery of this ideology's breeding ground. My argument here is that *Hyperion '64* not only inhabits but also actively represents, in theatrical form, this conceptual periphery and the particular sensorial history that pertains to it.

How can we hear *Hyperion's* opening against this historical and ideological canvas? By placing the emergent politics of aurality and orality of Italy in the 1960s against the insights as well as the intellectual soft spots of thinkers who—in the same years—placed a high premium on the communicative, even political power of the speaking voice. Yet also by locating these ideologies of orality, and the work itself, within a broader historical context. And finally by asking questions about our own received music-theoretical and music-philosophical thinking about voice and sound, and what happens at the borders where words become tones, or music becomes noise, or instrumental sound morphs into the synthetic.

OUR OLD FRIEND, THE ACOUSMATIC

By having the workers' noises and voices come from beyond an abandoned stage, Puecher turned the site of spectacle into an opaque partition: the voices clamoring behind become "acousmatic."¹¹ The idea of acousmatic listening first entered musical discourse thanks to the father of *musique concrète*, Pierre Schaeffer, who conceived it as a heightened mode of listening induced by sound whose sources are not only invisible but also impossible to locate and sometimes even unimaginable. Schaeffer did not conceive of the acousmatic as a property of sound but rather as a consequence of phenomenological engagement with it. The most popular

contemporary account of the acousmatic is Michel Chion's, which abjures the phenomenological slant of Schaeffer's formulation and instead discusses the acousmatic property of voices, and particularly cinematic voices, whose visual source is hidden and untraceable within the diegetic space.¹² He or she who speaks offscreen and outside of the diegesis becomes, in Chion's terms, an *acousmètre*, an omnipresent entity whose powers are unknowable and potentially boundless. In Chion's account, it is paradigmatic that the unseen voice has superior authority—invisible voices, after all, are aligned in religion and myth with the divine.

Chion's concept of the *acousmètre* is a recognizable historical product of standard midcentury conceits about orality and its overwhelming political potentialities. An obvious symptom of this is a linguistic quality, the fact that Chion's *acousmètres* are always perfectly intelligible, devoid of regional inflection: a triumph of orthophony.¹³ But the *acousmètres* from *Hyperion '64*'s opening are not like Chion's "universal" ideal: they speak in dialect, their voices overlapping into a semantically unintelligible babble. Their invisibility does not, as it might in a film, make their provenience unimaginable: they are bound to their audience by the common space of the theater, in which the audience can suppose that they are somewhere nearby. They must draw their semiotic foreignness, and with this, in theory, a potential power, from an altogether more complex dynamic of hearing and speaking. The partition that renders their voice acousmatic is not so much a physical one as a political one: their place in the spatial economy of theater is set apart from the stage at the time and place of the evening's performance. As Giorgio Agamben would put it, within the political microcosm of the theater, they are included by dint of their exclusion from the evening's performance; their job is to be undetectable while the show is ongoing.

What interests me is the sensorial correlation of such a distribution of space, what Jacques Rancière terms "the partition of the sensible," a politics that revolves "around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time."¹⁴ To paraphrase in more concrete terms: it is not just that the workers in *Hyperion '64* should not be onstage at the opening of a theater performance. Rather, the political division of space is such that even when they are, their voices, their bodies, their actions make no sense to the attending audience; they are suspected to be the result of a mistake, a malfunction, and heard (and seen) as a disturbance.

It is the semiotics of this mapping of space that renders the workers' voices acousmatic. They are perceived—even when they become visible onstage—across a political partition manifested at the level of the senses, and particularly at the level of listening. The workers' nonbelonging to the stage is already manifested in the characteristics of their speech: their overlapping voices and nontheatrical diction make the content of their speech often indecipherable. The thick Venetian dialect they use would not necessarily have been intelligible to the nationwide audience of

a Biennale performance, and they are heard, in the beginning, from the muffled acoustics offstage. But these same characteristics also mark them as bodies whose language is, in this context, not to be minded as meaningful. Maderna and Puecher emphasize the social and political gap between the backstage voices and the listening audience not only spatially but also on a temporal level. The artificial afternoon light coming in from the stage windows suggests that the workers' voices and bodies are broadcast from a time of day different from that of the performance. Within five minutes of the show's beginning, the stage is transformed into a complex mediatic node through which voices (and, to a lesser extent, images) from socially, geographically, and temporally discrete dimensions are captured and bound together into an inscrutable common space.

The workers' voices from backstage, as well as the laughter elicited by the flutist's clumsy movements, are far from an isolated gesture: they set up a particular kind of theatrical sound matter. Both sounds will subsequently be echoed in the distorted phonemes and laughter of *Dimensioni II*, Maderna's tape work from 1960 that is reused in the central section of *Hyperion '64*. The workers' voices simultaneously establish the impairment of those who hear them—but cannot parse them into semantics units—and the undecipherable linguistic abilities of their sources. One of the chief aural corollaries of the stage's mediatic quality—and a crucial aspect of the use of theatrical space in *Hyperion '64*—is this particular mode of attending to speech in which semantics are, at least in part, tuned out in favor of sonority. Yet this elimination of sense is not the means to an abstraction of language into a musical vocality, a case of *logos* being chased out of the house by *melos*. The trappings of linguistic signification are never quite shed in *Hyperion '64*—the opera sets up a complex scenario in which semantics may no longer be a worthwhile sacrifice to the altar of the musical voice.

The slide from symbolic language to sound is one of the aspects implicit but unexplored in acousmatic listening at least since Schaeffer's time. Taking acousmatic listening as a sort of phenomenological reduction, Schaeffer framed acousmatic sounds as those that have lost semiotic anchoring to their source. Yet what is the consequence of applying such a reduction to *speech* rather than to the human voice at large? What mode of listening is engaged when semantic content is misunderstood, misheard, or even undetected, as with the words shouted by the workers at the opening of *Hyperion '64*? To answer that, we need to delve into a previously unexplored linguistic aspect of acousmatic listening, one that points toward 1960s ideologies of orality and the media in the fraught northern Italian context of *Hyperion '64*'s production. This particular take on the acousmatic, of the relation of sound, sight, and sense—as something related to a particular experience of Italian orality—is the vantage point through which we can map the roots of *Hyperion '64* in an urban, social, and linguistic enclave, the enclave in which its two authors imagined and produced many of its sounds: the city of Milan.

MILAN, IN A FOG

It may seem strange to locate in Milan the poetic coordinates of a theater piece that opens with Venetian dialect, features music by a Venetian composer (Maderna), and whose premiere took place in Venice. However, a closer look at the dramaturgical aspects of *Hyperion '64* reveals many traces of the Milanese experiences of Maderna and Puecher at the time. For one, the insistence on the artifice of theater is redolent of Puecher's Brechtian training at Giorgio Strehler's Piccolo Teatro, founded in 1946 in Milan.¹⁵ Puecher worked as an assistant director for Strehler, and Maderna was often hired by the Piccolo as a music director and conductor: indeed, one of his first meetings with Puecher might have been when they collaborated for the Italian premiere of Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* in 1950.¹⁶ There are aspects of Brechtian *Verfremdung* in *Hyperion '64*'s opening: the exposure of the workers' voices coming from backstage, as well as the suggestion that the stage represents a time prior to the moment of performance, breaks the illusion of "liveness," fostering an awareness of the stage as a technological medium.¹⁷ The reference to media technology also speaks of a Milanese background: Maderna himself spearheaded, along with Luciano Berio, the Italian postwar radiophonic avant-garde. The two composers founded, in 1955, the Studio di Fonologia, Italy's first electronic music studio at the RAI (Radiotelevisione italiana) studios in Milan's Corso Sempione. The studio's initial project had much to do with recording, analyzing, and making music from speech fragments. It was from Maderna and Berio's studio that the electronic tape materials in *Hyperion '64* (which add up to nearly a third of its duration) were drawn. Yet these circumstantial ties between Milan, Maderna, and Puecher are merely the surface of a larger set of connections between the city and *Hyperion '64*'s dramaturgy. There is a close relation between the scenic space and a particular kind of perception of Milan in the late 1950s and early 1960s—years of steep economic and industrial development—as a transitional, unintelligible space in its visual, sonic, and linguistic aspects.

We can connect this Milanese substrate to *Hyperion '64* at the very moment the flutist starts to try to play his instrument, when he is first interrupted by metallic sounds at the beginning of scene 3. The source of those sounds is invisible, commanding immediate silence from the flutist; but besides having no visible source, the sounds are difficult to trace to any recognizable human source. They are, in fact, synthesized pitches: percussive, rich in metallic overtones, unfolding slowly like an arrhythmic death knell, approaching the timbre of bells. In *Hyperion '64*, the ghostly bell peals are coordinated with the descent of steel-colored partitions that gradually render the stage invisible to the flutist, who can only look on helplessly as he is being dispossessed of his own dwelling ground. The sounds are like an incarnation of steel blinders; indeed, both the scene synopsis and audio recording of the premiere reveal the noise of the dropping partitions to be a counterpoint to the

electronic bell toll.¹⁸ It is the audiovisual dyad that blocks the protagonist's view of the space. *Sound*—the death knell—is thus implicated in the occlusion of *sight*.

These bell-like sounds are in fact mapped from a specific external source, and some audience members might have recognized them as a striking evocation of the music that accompanies the opening credits of one of the most iconic films made about Milan in the early 1960s, Michelangelo Antonioni's *La notte*, first shown in 1961. Although the credits' music in *La notte* is not identical to that in Maderna's *Le rire*, it was written by an active participant at the Studio di Fonologia, the Milanese composer Giorgio Gaslini. What is more, the similarity in timbre suggests a common technical provenance in the studio's then cutting-edge nine oscillators.¹⁹ Of key importance is the two musical segments' semiotic kinship: in Antonioni the music accompanies a panoramic view of Milan—the film is in black and white—from a glass elevator soaring above the city. Although the city is ostensibly displayed below the camera on the elevator, in full daylight, the music signals the view as something unfamiliar and disquieting. We see none of Milan's landmarks—the Duomo, the Castello Sforzesco, Parco Sempione—but instead a vast industrial complex under construction, shot from its urban periphery. The great city as we know it is no more visible than any space engulfed in darkness. As the elevator rises inexorably, the quietly ominous music continues; on the screen appears the movie's title, as if to label the state of mind evoked by the scene—"La notte" (The Night).

Through a common sonority, both *La notte* and *Hyperion '64* evoke the sense of a space—a stage, a city—that has become unavailable to the sight of its inhabitants. And this concealment of once visible space allegorizes one of modernism's most well-documented perceptual defense mechanisms: the way in which urban sensorial overload forces the individual to block or occlude the senses to cope with being assaulted by hectic sights and nerve-racking sounds. This is a recurring trope in accounts of cities in the throes of industrialization, but is particularly pointed in the case of Milan during this period. Unlike Paris, London, or Berlin, Milan was a late-comer, overtaken by an unprecedented, vertiginous urbanization between 1958 and 1963. For John Foot, echoing a widespread critical consensus among historians, the Milanese economic miracle represents "one of the most intense and concentrated periods of economic development the world has ever seen."²⁰ Indeed, the favorable commercial treaty granted Italy by the U.S. Marshall Plan brought much profit to Milan in the late 1950s. Its automotive and appliance industries became internationally competitive thanks to the cheap labor that poured in from rural areas of the peninsula, giving rise to what Paul Ginsborg terms an "anthropological shuffling of the country's population unprecedented in its history."²¹ As incoming migrants demanded new housing, and burgeoning industries required new images of their status, the physiognomy of the city was transformed: skyscrapers such as the Pirelli or Velasca towers appeared, while the periphery sprawled into the countryside.

Meanwhile, television sets became a standard household installation. In other words, the specific, dimmed sense of the public space displayed by *La notte* and *Hyperion '64* has little to do with the crowded arcades of Walter Benjamin's Paris, or the electrified contraption that is Fritz Lang's Berlin metropolis. No, the audiovisual allegory is specific to midcentury Milan, an urban space apprehended through a distorting interface: a city approached by way of its burgeoning, ugly periphery—a stage blocked off by partitions.

There is another domain in which Milan and *Hyperion '64* merged, and this domain involves the symbolic significance of the city's prevailing meteorological conditions: its fog, the by-product of the Po valley's damp and cold.²² For Italians, the Milanese fog is legendary; its cinematic and literary history is particularly rich between the late 1950s and the early 1960s. In 1956 the famous Neapolitan actor Totò starred in a hugely successful comedy—entitled *Totò, Peppino e la malafemmina*—about two elderly, near-illiterate small southern landowners who travel to Milan to save their young nephew from the clutches of a shrewd Milanese sou-brette. In preparation for the great trip north, Antonio (“Totò”) Caponi (played by Totò) and his brother Peppino consult one of their friends, Mezzacapa, who used to live in the big city. Misunderstandings arise when it comes to the topic of Milan's fog:

- MEZZACAPA: And fog! . . . Ah fog, lots of fog!
 TOTÒ: Ah, see, that scares me! I can deal with anything, but not the fog!
 MEZZACAPA: When there's fog in Milan, you can't see a thing.
 TOTÒ: Oh dear! Who sees it then? . . .
 MEZZACAPA: No one can see it.
 TOTÒ: But then if the Milanese, in Milan, can see nothing when there's fog, how can they see that the fog is there?
 MEZZACAPA: No, you don't get it, it's not something you can touch!
 TOTÒ: You can't touch it . . . You can't touch it!
 PEPPINO: . . . I'll be sure not to touch it!²³

Poised between faltering senses and natural or manmade boundaries, for a southerner traveling to the northern metropolis, the fog generates a particular kind of unease. Unlike other aspects of the northern weather (wind, snow, the cold), the fog frightens Totò. His unease is signified by the punning on the verb “can” in the sentence “you can't touch it,” which Peppino then takes as a warning, an interdiction. Not merely a meteorological phenomenon, the Milanese fog becomes the incarnation of the doubt of those who behold the city at the midcentury: a doubt about the political distribution of space.

This doubt, put in ideological terms, is a doubt about the significance and distribution of Milan's new and old urban spaces. Fog per se has long had a near-mythic dimension as the intangible manifestation of the furious pace and

unintelligible production processes of the industrialized capital.²⁴ Yet the symbolism of Milanese fog of the late 1950s and early 1960s corresponds to a specific social and cultural aspect of the city that haunts the poetics of *Hyperion '64*: the manner in which the phenomenon of mass urbanization occurred simultaneously with the ascent and development of mass media. Unlike most other European and North American metropolises, which saw the emergence of these media well after an earlier industrial urbanization of public space, in Milan the two processes developed at nearly the same time.²⁵ I write “nearly” because Milan’s primacy as a site of mass media had already begun to fade during the early 1960s. The city’s role as the fulcrum of Italian television had played out in the mid-1950s, when broadcasting began; by the late 1950s, Roman studios began taking over more and more aspects of production. At the height of its postwar prosperity, the city was no longer the national center of televisual transmission.²⁶

Even in its televisual heyday, however, Milan was a city whose new visual media fogged and occluded its actual appearance. Views of the city’s great bustle rarely made it onscreen. Instead the city was represented by a constellation of variously potent symbols of well-being. Quiz shows, the magically accessible prizes they promised, and the advertising of luxury commodities represented, to those who watched television outside Milan, the Milanese way of life, without any need for an establishing shot of the city itself. Architectural physiognomy was not Milan’s dominant televisual asset. In the imagery of the Milanese miracle, architecture was often invisible, replaced by neon signs, electric signifiers of the pleasure-seeking middle class, whose bright lights could be as blinding as the vapors of the Po valley. The invisibility of the city of Milan during the miracle—the feeling associated with the miracle’s fog—was the consequence of the ideology of its televisual representation, which veiled the cityscape in a variety of commercial simulacra.

The regressive and ideological aspects of such an occluded urban reality did not escape the imaginations of intellectual elites: writers and artists who, having come of age in the antifascist postwar, under the influence of the Partito comunista italiano, viewed with suspicion the launch of their city as a capitalist metropolis, doubting their own role within a reconfigured society. For these intellectuals, fog—or the particular sense of phenomenological incapacity that fog represents—clung stubbornly to the exploited working class, which artists idealistically viewed as the mirror image of their own sense of nonbelonging in the face of the rising Milanese middle class. For example, Luchino Visconti’s migrant workers in *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (1960) walk around the industrial suburb of Lambrate enshrouded in a fog that seems to emanate directly from a Marxist base structure, an invisible political ground designed around them and against them. In midcentury imagery of Milan, fog took on this role of hostile political demarcation as it mixed with the steam of engines that greeted migrants stepping off the trains; it gave one “the feeling of being in another country, or even another planet.”²⁷

THE OCCLUDED VOICE

But fog can also be an acoustic phenomenon, and it is here that the byways branch from the political and cinematic allegories about Milanese fog and blindness, back to *Hyperion* '64 and its ideological soundings. Contemporary accounts suggest that the thick curtain of fog that hid the ferment of Milan's miracle had an especially sinister effect on the relation of bodies to voices, effects that bring us back to the question of acousmatic speech. One of the most powerful literary accounts comes from Luciano Bianciardi, an activist and reluctant member of Milan's literary intelligentsia. Outraged by the deaths caused by the working conditions of miners near his home, Bianciardi left his hometown in 1953 in order to plant a bomb at the headquarters of the chemical enterprise Montecatini in Milan, but was instead waylaid and absorbed within the city's literary bustle. For the city's fog he would reserve his most bitter venom in his 1962 autobiographical novel, *La vita agra*, which would be adapted into a feature film by Carlo Lizzani in the year of *Hyperion*'s premiere, 1964:

They call it fog, they cherish it. They show it to you, they glory in it being a local product. And it is a local product. Only it is not fog. It is fuming rage, a flatulence of men, of chimneys; it is sweat, it is the smell of feet, the dust raised by the clicking heels of secretaries, whores, clerks, graphic designers, PRs, the tapping of typewriters; it is the bad breath of rotted teeth, stomach ulcers, blocked intestines, constipated sphincters, it is the smell of deodorant on armpits, of vacant fannies and unused cocks.²⁸

Bianciardi's fog functions as the insipid glue that binds together an alienated crowd; it produces, and is in turn produced by, bodies that have undergone mutilation. In this fog everybody exists from the waist down, and the graphic references to genital and anal orifices direct us away from the ear and eye, the bodily openings associated with the senses that attend to dialogue, to linguistic exchange. Although we are faced with overwhelming olfactory, sonic, and physiological detail about these moving bodies, we are missing the one sound that would console us in the absence of faces, heads, arms, and torsos: that of the human voice. The fog triggers the disquieting sense of acousmatic hearing: we expect to apprehend the animated human body by its most distinctive sound—the voice—but hear only clicks and taps. Yet in Bianciardi's imagination, the fog is also the product of the body's seemingly lost ability to express itself vocally; it is, quite literally, made of the air that passes through these bodies, by mouths that are no more able to speak than other orifices. The puffs of breath that emanate from Bianciardi's Milanese crowd are, in the end, the pallid specters of muted speech.

Of course, the idea that the citizenry is at its most defeated when denied a "voice" is a familiar cliché in political discourse. But there is much more at stake in this grotesque vision, much more than simple imposed muteness. The cleaving of voice and body—signaled either through the curtaining off of the speaking body or the inability of a listener to recognize speech or even voice—is indeed the aural

equivalent of the fog, an acousmaticity that is semiotic and, crucially, linguistic. For example, Totò's discussion of the fog, comic as it is meant to be, ends in linguistic confusion: assured by his friend that he will be able to track down a certain local showgirl thanks to the neon signs all over town, he tells Peppino "Did you hear that? In Milan, when there is fog, they put up signs everywhere." Again, the joke signals a deeper truth about southern perceptions of the city: Totò and Peppino are barely literate; they are awed by the image of a city silently pervaded by the written letter, inaccessible through speech alone. In 1956—the year in which this parody of southern migration was released—a comedy about Italian linguistic difference hinged on the stereotypical difference between literate and oral culture. Yet over the ensuing five years, the division of north and south, along the dichotomy of urban and rural (even literate and oral) would shatter into a forest of competing oral cultures, linguistic ciphers of the chaotic demographics caused by Milan's economic miracle. The sense of linguistic alienation would grow and spread into the nooks and crannies of the building sites of the expanding city. In 1961 the sounds of a construction site for the underground train system—which would open in 1964—would be heard as an acousmatic, dialectal Tower of Babel: "from the excavations and tunnels of the Metropolitana," wrote one commentator, "rose up the babble of all the dialects of Italy: *barbe alpine, massacani, garzoni siciliani*."²⁹

This is precisely the experience that is recalled and repeated in the opening moments of *Hyperion '64*, in those confused layers of voices yelling offstage in Venetian dialect. From the depths of a "city's" (the stage's) new underground sinews, hidden from sight, comes speech misheard as mere mouthed sound: the nonsignifying sound matter of the labor force behind a partitioning of public space. But this critical spotlight could also be turned on the audience sitting in the theater. For what the opening of *Hyperion '64* tells the spectator is that at the moment in which the nation's multitudinous dialectal idioms were folded into the northern city, the doubt concerning the provenience and meaning of speech became something of an existential condition. The bourgeois ear that tuned out dialect as insignificant sound would grow estranged from its own voice. In *La notte*, one character speaks her true feelings only once, through a tape recording of her voice that she plays back to her interlocutor; moments later the lead character, a writer who is considering selling his talents to an industry magnate, listens to his estranged wife read him a love letter from long ago. His own ardent declarations are sounded forth—probably for the first and last time—in a Milanese park swallowed up by fog at dawn. When she has finished reading, he merely asks, "Who wrote that?"

THE UNMAGICAL FLUTE

I have already observed that, throughout *Hyperion '64*, the protagonist-flutist never sings or speaks; he does nothing with his breath other than play the flute. This

gesture to the externalization of the voice through wind instruments has a prestigious lineage stemming from the post-Enlightenment period. We need only think of the eponymous instrument, as well as Papageno's charmed bells, in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* to discern a long line of voices channeled and rationalized by instrumental means.³⁰ For Maderna, the idea of the instrumentally purified voice—especially by way of the flute, given his close collaboration with Gazzelloni—was a recurrent poetic idea. Indeed, it was an obsession, most prominent in theatrical works in which the abdication of sung or spoken words became something of a moral marker. In his radio opera *Don Perlimplin* (1962), the tragic hero of the opera's literary source—García Lorca's play of the same title—is portrayed by a flutist unable to articulate his love for his beautiful new wife, a querulous soprano. The same gender split between mellifluous women and muted men gathered further allegorical charge in 1963, when Maderna collaborated briefly with Pier Paolo Pasolini on a ballet entitled *Vivo e Coscienza* about a mute peasant, Vivo (who would therefore have been “voiced” by instrumental music in the pit), whose muteness protects him from the wiles of a soprano impersonating the rigors of Italian Marxist ideology, *Coscienza* ([Class] Consciousness).³¹

Hyperion '64's lead character belongs to this genealogy of speechless heroes. He resorts to his flute as a substitute for voice, as though to reclaim the sonic space around him—reclaim it, that is, from the hostile forces that seem imperceptibly to encroach upon it. Yet his is an impossible battle, as he constantly struggles to communicate through an instrument that prevents him from singing and speaking.³² What becomes obvious in the *Hyperion* cycle at large is the extent to which the abstraction from articulated speech granted by instrumental voice is a double-edged sword. It works simultaneously as a nod toward and a reversal of the German Romantic ideal of instrumental melody as a voice above and beyond the strictures of speech—an ideal that was, significantly, very much a product of the place and time in which Hölderlin's *Hyperion* was drafted. While the abdication of semantics may lend Don Perlimplin, the flutist in *Hyperion*, and Vivo a degree of moral superiority, these characters are also scored in ominous ways by Maderna. Their mute purity is ultimately sterile—they are good men undone by their inability to speak their minds.³³

LAUGHTER, AND SPEECH UNDONE

But *Hyperion* '64 is not just homage to mythology, or to the long history of flutes as displacements of voices, or to the noble and poetic state of speechlessness. The cultural dynamics of its time, its Milanese burdens as we might call them, are always copresences. The vagaries of instrumental vocality are unfolded, across the arch of the opera's performance, alongside far more contemporary anxieties with regard to oral communication and the political distribution of space.

The disquieting resonances between these two conceptions of the voice—one grounded in instrumental melody, the other in contemporary linguistic and political concerns—reaches a climax in the last third of the opera, from the fifth to the seventh scene (the eighth scene consists only of a brief piccolo postlude played by the protagonist). Recall the third scene, where the flutist first tries to play and is interrupted by the electronic bell sounds and the descending cascade of steel partitions that occlude his sight both through sound and with visible walls. At this point the orchestra kicks in, waging its own sonorous onslaught against him. As the orchestra becomes more frenzied, the physical space surrounding the flutist changes: the metallic partitions are lit with blue and pink light; the light steadily grows in intensity, ultimately blinding the hapless musician, who is dwarfed by the giant shadows of orchestral musicians appearing against the luminous backdrop.³⁴ But as scene 4 draws to an end, there is an acoustic triumph for the flutist as he regains control of the space through a single sound, a high note he plays as though he were extracting it from the orchestral flutes and grafting it onto his own sonorous body: “As soon as he has extracted that sound from the orchestra, he physically transports it into the place where he set up the music stands. The orchestra stops playing. On that one, almost stolen sound, the soloist structures his concert. It’s a brief piece, heart-rending and sweet.”³⁵ We do not know the lighting or staging details at the moment of the flutist’s solo in 1964. In a subsequent production on film over a decade later, the stage darkens and a spotlight narrows around him, establishing his body as the pivotal point.³⁶ The long-held tone that opens the solo—placed in the flute’s most resonant register—has a distinctly vocal quality. An incantatory monody ensues, lilting between slow, arched phrases within human vocal range and high, spasmodic birdsong. But it is not to last: by the beginning of scene 5, as the flutist reaches his lyrical climax, “a brief laugh fills the whole stage.”³⁷

This laugh is, however, utterly unlike the spontaneous audience giggles that are heard when the flutist’s scripted maladroitness causes merriment five minutes into the performance. Back then, the flutist continued unfazed—the real audience cannot disturb him. Now, however, he slips in his tracks.

This laugh is not the first time the flutist is interrupted by off-stage sounds; it is the first time, however, that he is genuinely hampered by a human voice. This laugh’s provenance—that is, both its visual source and its semiotic connotations—is untraceable. We cannot see the laughing body. Indeed, its invisibility is carefully staged both visually and aurally: a loose, handwritten page by Maderna—which refers to a staging of *Hyperion* that might well be that of 1964—specifies that it was to be projected exclusively on four speakers mounted behind the audience’s seats (distributed as two left speakers plus two right speakers), slowly moving back and forth along the back wall of the auditorium.³⁸ But more than this, the laughter is unmotivated, lacking any comical prompt for its hilarity. Why does the acousmètre

laugh? Does it know something we don't, with that special omniscience typical of voices issuing from behind veils and partitions?³⁹

Yet this particular act of laughter also suggests a body altogether *less* powerful, a speaking mouth and throat convulsed without will or purpose.⁴⁰ Indeed, the timbre of this laughter tells us that a recorded voice was tampered with to produce the sound; it is mutedly shrill, lacking in resonance, much like the sound of voice on sped-up tape. The voice that interrupts the flutist's solo midflight derives its power from a laughter that suspends it between boundless phatic power and aphasia, spontaneity and machination, intellectual superiority and mindless vocal shudder.

This moment of laughter and the elusive laughing body's many possible effects and potential interpretations are *Hyperion '64's* great coup de théâtre. It is the turning point at which the opera's ahistorical mythologizing and its concrete time-and-place ideological underpinnings come together in an explosion. Indeed, such is its power that the stage moves along with the laughing acousmatic voice:

The metallic back wall of the stage opens slowly to reveal the presence of an enormous structure made of tinfoil. The structure begins eventually to approach the front of the stage, while the soloist draws a few sounds of protest from his flute. The structure stops at the margins of the proscenium; its walls begin to open as darkness enfolds the stage. The taped sounds grow in intensity. Intermittent colored lights appear in the darkness, then the sudden blaze of a blowtorch reveals the backlit contours of a huge metallic machine constituted by large self-moving arms and four large moving wheels.⁴¹

As with the metallic bell sounds and the steel partitions, acousmatic sound is intimately tied to the physical, unfathomable sliding of spatial boundaries. The movement now unfolds the body of the acousmètre in a game of Russian dolls—a machine hiding within a machine.

Maderna and Puecher may have borrowed this gesture from a fabled earlier source: Fritz Lang's *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933), a film frequently referenced by Michel Chion for its astonishing sound design. In the film, the source of Dr. Mabuse's commanding voice is revealed to be nothing but recorded speech issuing from a gramophone behind a curtain.⁴² But whereas the voice of Lang's Mabuse speaks flawless German, the garish machine in *Hyperion '64* does not utter a single intelligible word. Throughout this scene, its laughter slowly morphs into snarled aggregates of phonemes, delivered like a series of inchoate commands. Within the dramatic arch of *Hyperion '64*, the vocal sounds produced by this machine are strangely familiar: after all, this is a performance that has begun with yelling backstage workers and an audience giggling at a flutist. Let's not forget that the staging of the giggles from *Dimensioni II* might have placed the laughter behind the audience, as an unsettling dorsal extension of the public in attendance.

Both the workers' yelling (unintelligible because dialectal and because traditionally foreign to the sonic space of the stage proper) and the audience's giggles (prompted by the script and yet "unheard" across the fourth wall) were acousmatic because of their distribution within the political microcosm of the theater. They were sounds that belonged to the theater by dint of being banned from the stage, voices not meant to be minded as meaningful utterances. Yet, half an hour after the opening, they reappeared as the voice of a strange body—one apparently hostile to the protagonist—who seemed wired with the mechanical workings of the stage's partitions, lights, and sound system.

THE POETICS OF THE POLITICIZED VOICE

It would be easy to read the workings of the stage, tape compositions, and opening vociferations as a setting up of the lead character as the tragic bearer of a beleaguered musical High Art. Yet I wish to delve into the work's subterranean network of vocal sounds as a way of sketching out another subtler, far more disquieting, poetics and politics of the voice in *Hyperion '64*. Within this network, laughter plays a pivotal symbolic role, and the fact that the vocal acousmètre in scene 5 laughs—rather than utter any other kind of nonsemantic sound—is thus a detail of great importance, as is the fact that this laughter degrades into snarls and oral aggression. Unlike other vocal sounds that can be said to belong to the sphere of vocality before language—crying, sighing, groaning—laughter has an irreducible relation to language (only those who can speak can laugh). As an exclusively human phenomenon, laughter precedes the ability to speak and could thus be classified within the sphere of the prelinguistic babble that fascinated linguist Roman Jakobson some twenty years prior to *Hyperion '64*. "A child, during his babbling period," wrote Jakobson, "can accumulate articulations which are never found within a single language or even a group of languages: consonants of any points of articulation, palatalized and rounded consonants, sibilants, affricates, clicks, complex vowels, diphthongs, etc."⁴³

As Daniel Heller-Roazen has recently suggested, what Jakobson was evoking (filtered through the jargon of structural phonology) is something of a linguistic originary state of grace, an infinite potentiality for all speech.⁴⁴ It is as the key to this realm of radical invention that laughter would be evoked by Michel Foucault only two years after *Hyperion '64*, in the famous opening of *The Order of Things*: "This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought—our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography—breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things."⁴⁵ Following a tradition of thought that had started with Georges Bataille, Foucault hears laughter—especially his own laughter—as a

temporary, reversible regression to the carnality of the speaking mouth in which language and thought are born anew. He has no doubt that he will immediately find his way back to articulated language after laughter subsides.

These are consoling ideas, almost cheerful in their view of laughter. But what *Hyperion '64* shows is that such accounts of laughter as a kind of vacation spot—a spot outside responsibility, or the laboriousness of everyday life—risk discounting history and culture: they verge on the apolitical.⁴⁶ Maderna and Puecher staged a dystopian counterpart to Foucault's noble-savage laughter, one in which laughter is heard as a powerful disabler of articulated speech, a convulsion capable of irrevocably overpowering the physiological ability to speak into a peal of vocalized breath. The bleak understanding of language necessary to devise the laughter in *Dimensioni II* is, in Maderna's case, an inescapable historically and geographically specific attitude. It is not a coincidence that both of the preexisting tape pieces used in *Hyperion '64—Dimensioni II* and *Le rire*—are the sections of *Hyperion '64* that bear the closest relation to the city of Milan. Indeed, the Studio di Fonologia where Maderna composed these two works between 1960 and 1962 was hosted by and affiliated with the Milan headquarters of RAI, the crucible of state-run linguistic reform from the mid-1950s into the early 1960s. These operations, which involved the underrepresentation of local dialect in favor of a standardized official Italian promoted through national entertainment, were viewed with bemusement and even suspicion by left-wing men of letters such as Maderna's friend Umberto Eco and his erstwhile collaborator Pier Paolo Pasolini, to name but a few. These thinkers saw in the promotion of a new spoken tongue the diffusion of an airborne state ideology that engendered consumerism and mindless political consent at an almost carnal level of language: the speaking mouth.

With respect to this perceived linguistic homologation, the aural image of laughter takes on unusual resonances: it becomes the blueprint of the mindless acquisition of a state-controlled orality. As the involuntary reflex proper to speaking bodies, laughter was the proper sound of the fabricated political compliance induced by the new language. Writing about the host of a popular TV show, Eco would wryly observe, “[he] has no sense of humor; he laughs because he is happy with reality, not because he is able to affect reality.”⁴⁷ While laugh tracks would not enter Italian television until the import of American sitcoms in the 1970s, the regulation and eliciting of laughter in live audience was certainly part of the sound design of the Milanese TV shows of the 1950s, creating the aural sense of an attending public in the studio that was rarely seen on camera. Years later, in 1985, Federico Fellini would comment on the mind-numbing, quasi-automated consent already fostered in Italian TV in terms strikingly germane to the dark undertones of Maderna's composed laughter: “The spectator becomes habituated to a hiccupping, stuttering language, to the suspension of mental activity. . . the upending of any articulated syntax has the result only of creating an endless audience of illiterate people ready

to laugh and get excited and applaud anything that is fast, meaningless and repetitive.”⁴⁸ Fellini’s abhorrent TV audience, just like the laughing acousmètre in *Hyperion ’64*, does not laugh because it is amused. Instead laughter erupts because the spectacle is “fast, meaningless, repetitive,” mimetically calling forth the spasmodic voice of laughter as a senseless reflex. Laughter is its proper utterance, a surrogate for linguistic intentionality. Mechanized by the artificial new orality of its common tongue, the TV audience has lost the physiological ability to speak its mind.⁴⁹

The laughter that opens *Dimensioni II* was composed only a few floors away from the cackling audiences that were to so repulse Fellini, and indeed, a closer consideration of it reveals a similarly grim outlook on language. According to the program note for the tape materials in *Hyperion ’64*, the materials for *Dimensioni II* consisted of vocal phonemes selected and notated for Maderna by the poet Hans G. Helms using International Phonetic Alphabet symbols, and then recorded as discrete units by Cathy Berberian. This means that, in all likelihood, what the audience heard in *Hyperion ’64* was not a distorted recording of laughter but rather a manufactured laughter, assembled from an array of vocal phonemes. Helms describes his selection and ordering of the phonemes for Maderna as if he were the assistant mixing the colors for a painter:

As the means to the work I have used 35 consonants, one semi-vowel, and fifteen vowels, phonemes that recur in a similar fashion in Arabic, Danish, German, English, French, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Spanish, Czech and Welsh. Only two sounds of a non-phonemic nature are used: a) a cough; b) an inhaled aspiration. The frequency of each of the phonemes between number 1 and number 18 is established according to a plan that is nearly serial.⁵⁰

Helms’s laundry list of vocal sounds is, in itself, not especially interesting: the serial use of recorded phonemes was common in early 1960s European and American electronic music. Yet Maderna’s use of these phonemes—judging from the opening laughter of *Dimensioni II*—was something of an oddity: it amounted not just to assembling the phonemes according to pitch organization, but also in sequencing them into the aural impression of laughter, the very unhinged orality that Helms’s preparatory classification of phonemes had dismantled. It is telling that Helms did not include vocalized nonphonemic sounds in his materials: beyond coughing and breathing, all vocal sounds slotted into his linguistic autopsy of the voice. Far from a spontaneous outburst, then, the laughter in *Hyperion ’64* became indicative of a speech wrenched from functionality and quartered into phonemic fragments: the undoing of language as meaningful utterance.

Maderna was not, alas, a prolific writer or public speaker on his own (or indeed anyone else’s) music, and thus interpretations of his approach to laughter are necessarily the product of speculation. Yet a precious detail with regard to his attitude

toward laughter as a vocal phenomenon can be extrapolated from the other tape composition used in *Hyperion '64: Le rire*. The origin of the title—a reference to Henri Bergson's essay by the same title—would be recounted years later by Maderna's friend, the musicologist Luigi Rognoni:

I remember how *Le rire* was born, in 1962, the last of Bruno's compositions of that period. He had recorded the voice of Marino Zuccheri [the chief technician at the Studio di Fonologia in those years] and then elaborated it with sinusoidal sounds, filtering and superimposition. When I heard it, I said to him that it seemed to me a demonstration of the definition Bergson gave of laughter: 'Something mechanical encrusted on the living.' So, he said, we shall call it *Le rire*.⁵¹

Rognoni's anecdote contains an essential—but, to the best of my knowledge, thus far undetected—misreading of Bergson's essay, which concerns the nature of the comic but not the phenomenon of laughter itself. To define the act of laughing as a mechanical excrescence—one that Rognoni understands as corresponding to the electronic distortions and manipulations of Zuccheri's voice—is to highlight its aspect as a negative force, an in-built malfunction or distortion of the speaking voice. Another detail of the anecdote is also telling: unlike *Dimensioni II*, *Le rire* does not contain—with the exception of two very brief moments—laughing sounds. It is thus possible that Rognoni thought not only, or even primarily, of the sound of laughter as the product of musical composition. Instead, laughter could here be working as a metaphor for the very way in which the recorded voice had been manipulated by Maderna. Accepted readily as the title for a lengthy composition mostly devoid of laughter, the overwhelming—indeed, mechanical—spasms of the speaking voice are likened to the process by which—in Maderna's case—music is made.

Puecher and Maderna's decision to pit these laughs against the flutist's playing in *Hyperion '64* is, therefore, a subtle dramaturgical premise. Not only is the speaking voice shown—through laughter—in its infinite potential for misunderstanding and malfunction, but these disruptions resonate with the self-defeating virtuosity of the flutist himself. For all his prowess and all his lyricism, he is still unable to speak. Laughter and instrumental monody share, then, the same melancholy senselessness, they are both produced by means of an "asportation" of semantics from language, and a patterning of the remains into melody. The acoustic laughter that breaks out during the flutist's solo commands his silence, but not because it is a form of mockery or social repression.⁵² What silences the flutist is the grim kinship he detects between his rhapsody and the sound of mechanized laughter: if we listen closely, we will detect a striking similarity between the contour and register of his melody and the laughter it elicits, a similarity that reveals his pure melody to amount, even at the height of its lyrical intensity, to a nefarious undoing of meaningful speech.⁵³ The protagonist of *Hyperion '64*, whose speech is

hindered by the flute that is also its only means of communication, may attempt to soar above linguistic trappings through pure melody, but his voice is never going to amount to more than a linguistic malfunction.

UNEXPECTED VOICES (II): *ARIA*

After the babbling machine arrives onstage in scene 5, the opera reaches a rather violent climax with the following scene: the machine opens (yet another Russian doll effect) to reveal a group of mimes who move in sinister unison to the raucous warbles of the acousmètre. The mimes silently simulate the motions of robots, men at war, and a group of fanatic religious worshippers.⁵⁴ The outburst eventually subsides; the acousmètre murmurs a few more incomprehensible words, this time pensively, before the metallic partitions close in on the prostrated mimes. We have reached the seventh and final scene of the opera. The flutist is, again, alone onstage and immediately begins to do what he does best: he plays an impassioned, forlorn solo. This time, the musical incantation seems to work—nothing and no one interrupts him for nearly two minutes, a stretch of time that by now feels remarkably long. Eventually he is interrupted by the orchestra, but very gently: they carpet the lower registers beneath him with a hushed thudding of strings, harps, and timpani.⁵⁵ The familiar narrative scheme we have witnessed throughout the opera (flute solo—interruption—movement of stage machinery and lighting) is iterated one last time; the metallic partitions slide open to the sound of the orchestra's clicks and taps, but this time a lone woman (the soprano Catherine Gayer) emerges from behind them and proceeds to do the—by now—truly unexpected: she begins to sing.

What follows is a lengthy aria for soprano and orchestra, to this day the most celebrated part of *Hyperion* '64, which is to say the one that has had something closest to a traditional textual afterlife: it has been published and recorded as a discrete composition entitled *Aria*. The reason behind the textual fixity afforded to *Aria*—permeated by arched phrases and a soft, Bergian atonality—was, paradoxically, its reception as a delayed uncovering of the human voice. The commentator in the audio recording of the premiere even notes the soprano's arrival onstage by announcing that she will sing “the final words of freedom and true life.” The noted Italian music critic Massimo Mila would similarly comment—in more academic terms—on its “expressionistic pathos,” singling out *Aria* as the most poignant and musically accomplished part of the opera.⁵⁶ It will serve us, by way of conclusion, to frame this celebrated piece by sketching out the ways in which it belongs to—rather than escapes from—the network of senses and politics that constitutes *Hyperion* '64.

Aria is staged as something resembling a concert performance: the soprano appears from behind partitions sliding open like curtains and delivers her song in stillness, likely facing the audience throughout. The concert aria setup seems far

from a casual choice in an opera whose entire plot consists of a flutist's botched attempts at a performance. But if, within *Hyperion* '64, *Aria* provides closure by virtue of resembling a successful concert performance, the performance is also riddled with the same issue of linguistic alienation that has haunted the stage thus far. The text is an excerpt from Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, sung in the original German and thus—because of the difficulty of deciphering sung text, the foreignness of the language, and the convolutions typical of late eighteenth-century literary German—probably unintelligible to most of the audience.⁵⁷ The text's incomprehensibility would be negligible within a concert performance or within even a traditional—that is, sung—operatic work. In a more conventional setting, that is, the incomprehensibility of the text in *Aria* might have been absorbed by the peculiar operatic trust that, though one does not understand what is being sung, it is both meaningful and dramatically pregnant. Yet all such trust has been destroyed by the time *Aria* is performed in *Hyperion* '64. The song falls upon an audience that has been steadily dispossessed of meaningful linguistic utterances over the course of nearly forty minutes; it is delivered by an unidentified female singer from a stage that has thus far been inhabited by bodies that have not seemed to belong to it: the workers, the laughing, babbling machine. Although *Aria* reinstates the convention of the lyrical voice in the theater, it does so within a space in which that very convention has been rendered unfamiliar.

The text for *Aria* is an individual, loose fragment from Hölderlin's novel, known as the "Thalia" fragment. Like the rest of Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, it consists of a missive written in the first person by the title character. We know that in *Hyperion* '64 Hölderlin's hero never treads the stage as a full-fledged *dramatis persona*; instead he is evoked only implicitly in the character of the flutist, who remains unnamed and vocally impaired. By setting Hyperion's letter to music, then, Maderna seems to wish to "lend voice" to the elusive youth who gives his name to the opera, finally allowing Hyperion to speak—or rather, sing—his mind. Indeed, so self-conscious is this late arrival of the human voice that the text of *Aria* features a mention—quite rare in Hölderlin's novel—of the sound of Hyperion's voice. Yet the voice that has been granted Hyperion in the opera is no more than a loan. It is the voice of an unnamed female figure who, like a hired musician showing up for a gig, arrives onstage, sings, and then exits as soon as she is done. Worse still, the voice featured in *Aria*'s text is no lyrical exhalation, no searing last confession: it is—once again—a laughing voice. The opening of the Thalia fragment reads:

The past lay before me like an immense, frightening desert, and with fierce stubbornness I tore and destroyed every trace of that which once soothed and ennobled my heart. Then I rose up again with a fierce laughter directed at myself and at everything; I listened with joy to its frightful echo, and the howling of jackals, who crept up on me from every side across the night, did much good to my ravaged soul.⁵⁸

Maderna sets the melancholy first sentence as a gentle lyrical arch, starting the vocal part with half-voiced stepwise motion animated briefly by the rumble of low strings, then soaring softly in whole-tone steps on the words “und erhoben” (and ennobled) and coming to rest on a soft minor-seventh chord on the final syllable. Then, as she sings of Hyperion’s joyless laughter, the soprano drops the singing register in favor of a whispered *Sprechgesang*, while the orchestra stops playing altogether. Note that she does not mimic or render laughter in any way—at this moment of ultimate vocal disclosure, her voice and Hyperion’s voice stay separate. Hyperion laughs, but his laughter is heard mostly as a lack, as privation: the drying and hushing of sound. At the height of *Aria*’s lyricism, vocal utterance is shown up, again, as the receding end point of several layers of mediation. Of course, for audience members unfamiliar with German, the *Sprechgesang* might have sounded most like the nonsense syllables of Hyperion’s archenemy, the gigantic machine; but for those able to understand the German text (and the switch to *Sprechgesang* would have made it easier to parse), the same section would have brought to the fore the contrived nonpresence of Hyperion’s voice, its strange host body, and its mirthless, silent laughter.

In Hölderlin’s novel, of course, this burst of laughter signifies the moment of the hero’s spiritual loss, the vocal death knell of his long-time Enlightenment dream of human communion. A century and a half on, *Hyperion* ’64 sustains these same themes, whose sonic markers—laughter, failed communication, literary and vocal expression—found their home in mid-twentieth-century Milan. In 1943, Milanese artist and writer Alberto Savinio would open one of his typically surreal essays on Milan with these words:

The ideas that, in my opinion, go along with the name of Milan are: Enlightened Justice, Lack of Hatred, Ignorance of Cruelty. As soon as I finish writing the word “cruelty,” in the part of the sheet of paper still left blank laughter bursts out, so cutting that it tears the page from side to side. I take another sheet of paper, but this one blackens between my hands, although not so far as to prevent me from spotting the outline of five small theaters in a row. . . . The first theater’s curtain opens, and Milan’s park appears.⁵⁹

Behind Savinio’s sinister apparition lie the same Milanese anxieties about language I have traced in the sonic architecture of *Hyperion* ’64. Savinio—whose politics verged on the reactionary—was all too proud of the literary culture of his home city, a culture that he contrasted with unmistakable contempt to the degradation of speech culture in the peninsula, which was mostly dialectal even in his day.⁶⁰ Yet doubt occasionally beset him. The unwritable, cutting sneer that tears the page he writes on—whose sound even seems to mimic the sound of tearing paper—undermines the act of the writing hand, issuing forth as the repressed orality of an absent laughing body. This is a laughter that destroys but also makes: the agon of letter

and voice uncovers a material substratum—a black, burnt page—that morphs into a particular kind of site: a theater stage showing the city. It is sobering to think that shortly before the manuscript of this essay was due for publication—in August 1943—the Milan evoked by Savinio would be wiped out by bombs. Writing in the aftermath of the bombing, by way of an updated appendix, the writer enthused, “I feel that from these ruins a new, stronger, more beautiful city will rise”—one, perhaps, in which the noble written letter would be unsullied by the vulgarity of peeling laughter.⁶¹ We know now that Savinio’s hopes for a new city were to be dashed; instead, his odd alchemy of ink, paper, and laughter proved a more lasting parable with regard to Milan. The northern metropolis’s miraculous rise from the ashes in the years of the miracle reproduced linguistic and political inequalities within a vaster, even more thickly webbed network, ever haunted by the opaque utterances of invisible bodies.

We might also take Savinio’s torn, burning page as a final cipher of our musings on *Hyperion*. To listen to *Hyperion* ’64 amid this network of Milanese acousmètres is no mere matter of suturing text and context: this is rather an opposition that dissolves before our eyes and ears as we survey the scattered traces left by the cycle as a whole. What emerges instead from the resonances we have thus far uncovered is something of a halting poetics of the voice. Here—alongside notorious coeval accounts of the communicative power of the oral utterance—is a voice unmagical, tethered by language to the ruins of history. Binaries of vocality and orality cannot guide us through *Hyperion* ’64—for there is no voice in it that overcomes the vagaries of language. Instead the opera seems to ask, what is produced by the failure of oral communication? From the flutist’s broken monodies, the babble of theater workers, and the laughter that bounces from audience, to tape, to the soprano’s strange song, *Hyperion* ’64 emerges as an archive of broken linguistic encounters—a reservoir of nonsemantic traces disseminated across the sprawl of Milan’s soaring modernity.

NOTES

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1. All details of the dramaturgy of the 1964 premiere of *Hyperion* have resulted from an

interpretive and comparative study of three main sources: an audio recording of the premiere with live commentary from an uncredited male speaker; seven numbered typescript pages with a scene-by-scene synopsis of the opera, bearing the following header: “N.B. La presente stesura dello schema narrative di *Hyperion* ripete fedelmente i dettagli dello spettacolo rappresentato a Venezia nel settembre 1963 [sic] in occasione del Festival Internazionale di musica contemporanea. Regia di Virginio Puecher e Rosita Lupi”; and fourteen pages (numbered 1–13 with the addition of an appendix to the sixth page, here referred to as 6a) of detailed stage notes whose author was likely Puecher. This set provides detailed cues for tape materials, lights, and onstage movements starting from scene 3, which is when the music begins. Both the typescript and the manuscript stage notes are copies rather than originals, and were consulted in the Archivio Bruno Maderna in Bologna, sec. GIII. I have not been able to locate the originals for either text. The original tape of the audio recording is in Bologna, and it (and the digital transfer) is filed as Tape A4. All materials quoted in the article have been kindly authorized by the Archivio Maderna, Paul Sacher Stiftung, and the Maderna family.

2. See manuscript stage notes, Archivio Bruno Maderna, Bologna, sec. GIII, 1: “Il sipario si apre lentamente. Si arresta, torna a scorrere; si arresta ancora a lungo per poi aprirsi definitivamente con uno strappo. Sul palcoscenico, luce di pomeriggio che entra dalle finestre. Raggi di sole. Qualche oggetto sparso: una sedia, un baule, un mezzo di cantinelle, piccole cose a rendere ancora più vuoto lo spazio. Sul fondo, soltanto, un grande fondale. È un po’ storto, un po’ staccato da terra, come se il lavoro fosse stato lasciato a metà. Una sega elettrica invisibile spacca il silenzio ad intervalli. Nessuno in scena.” All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

3. Manuscript stage notes, 1. “Si comporta come se fosse solo: fischia, picchietta, si avvicina al proscenio, recita ‘in veneto’ qualche brano classico, prova la eco della sala: forse dice delle parolacce: merda, coglione. Se qualcuno dovesse rispondere dalla sala commenta: ‘i fantasmi dell’opera.’” This scene is slightly different in all three sources; grounding myself on the recording, I have found the manuscript stage notes to come closest to a description of what is going on onstage; but it is difficult to know with certainty, because this part of the recording is overwhelmed with the sounds of the mechanical saw and the workers’ yells, and the speaker’s commentary provides no details as to the exact movements of the workers onstage. Both the manuscript stage

notes and typescript scene synopsis mention the detail of an individual machinist approaching the proscenium; it is thus likely that this was an important detail of the performance.

4. *Ibid.*, 2: “Posa la sedia, si china per prendere l’astuccio di uno strumento. Lo posa in grembo. Apre un piccolo leggio, si china per prendere della musica, urta il leggio che cade. Rialza il leggio, gli cade la musica. Si alza per raccogliarla. Cade la sedia. È indeciso se raccogliere prima la musica o la sedia. Decide per la musica. Si mette carponi, non riesce a trovare i numeri corrispondenti, mescola i fogli di musica come grandi carte pescandole dal ventaglio da lui davanti. Il tutto è un po’ grottesco, leggermente ridicolo.”

5. Perhaps the most obvious symptom of scholarly anxiety about fixing the text of *Hyperion* can be detected in writing about thematic unity in the opera’s text across its various versions. Different perspectives on the thematic unity are provided by Nicola Verzina, *Bruno Maderna: Étude historique critique* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2003), esp. 157–80, and Gianmario Borio and Veniero Rizzardi, “L’unità musicale de *Hyperion*,” in *À Bruno Maderna*, vol. 1, ed. Geneviève Mathon, Laurent Feneuyrou, and Giordano Ferrari (Paris: Basalte Éditeur, 2007), 123–61. Much work has been also devoted to identifying the work’s unifying poetic and literary traits. A recent exhaustive account of the general poetic and dramaturgical traits is in Giordano Ferrari, “*Hyperion*: Les chemins du poète,” in *À Bruno Maderna*, vol. 1, 89–123. No account of the dramaturgical details of a specific performance of *Hyperion* has been produced to this day.

6. The ideal of linguistic transparency and human communion as unfulfilled potentialities of Enlightenment thought is a recurring aspect of Jürgen Habermas’s concept of the “ideal speech situation,” a communication mode based on simple, effective rules and the basis for genuine democratic governance. This is an idea examined in several texts, but its most concise statement is found in Jürgen Habermas, “Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification,” in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhart and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 86–88.

7. The division into scenes is found in the typescript synopsis. The manuscript stage notes are not divided into scenes but are instead organized in relation to measure numbers; the reference musical score for these annotations is, to the best of my knowledge, lost.

8. Brett Wetters, “Bruno Maderna’s Adaptation of Friederich Hölderlin’s *Hyperion*,” *19th-Century*

Music 36, no. 2 (2012): 172–90.

9. Umberto Eco did in fact begin *Opera aperta* (1962) with a list of postwar composers—including Luciano Berio, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Henri Pousseur—who had introduced aspects of nonfixity and improvisation into their music. See Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cicognini (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), esp. 3–13.

10. The theological charge of some of the work of the Toronto School of media studies has been explored in Jonathan Sterne, “The Theology of Sound: A Critique of Orality,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 36, no. 2 (2011): 207–25. On the politics of entextualization in the appropriation and marketing of oral cultures, see Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier, “Sonic Transculturation, Epistemologies of Purification and the Aural Public Sphere in Latin America,” *Social Identities* 12, no. 6 (2006): 803–25.

11. Schaeffer’s use of the term “acousmatic” dates back to his *Traité des objets musicaux* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966). Chion’s formulation was first expressed in *La voix au cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1982).

12. The tendency to bypass the problem of language is not specific to Chion and would require a lengthier and broader reflection. Schaeffer himself, in his long line of thought about the phenomenology of electronically reproduced sound, had a strange relationship with the question of language. This is something that is indirectly pointed out in Brian Kane’s recent critique of Schaeffer in “*L’objet sonore maintenant: Pierre Schaeffer, Sound Objects and the Phenomenological Reduction*,” *Organised Sound* 12, no. 1 (2007): 15–24. Kane critiques Schaeffer for assuming an essential, ahistorical core to sound to be retrieved via an *epoché* (phenomenological reduction). This aspect is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the question of the phenomenological reduction of speech. In Schaeffer’s complex account of the modes of listening—which are meant to lead progressively to a full reduction of the sound object to its essential qualities—language plays a peripheral role.

13. I use this rather obscure term because it evokes the political associations of elocution manuals and speech-writing machines in relation to emerging technologies of sound recording and the study of oral cultures. This is partly explored in Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), esp. 215–86.

14. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum

Press, 2004), 13. The reference to Giorgio Agamben is drawn from *Homo sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), esp. 11–12. The “inclusive exclusion” is key to the definition of exception as that which belongs to the political order by virtue of being banned from it. It is important to note that for Agamben, the dynamic of exclusion and inclusion is articulated through the voice, which may be represented as *phoné* (nonsemantic, bare life) or *logos* (human language), according to its political function within the state.

15. For overviews of Milanese theatrical life in the 1960s, see Irene Piazzoni, “Lo spettacolo a Milano negli anni sessanta,” in *Milano: Anni sessanta*, ed. Carlo G. Lacaïta and Maurizio Punzo (Manduria: Piero Lacaïta Editore, 2008), 663–701. For an overview of directorial styles for opera in postwar Milan, see Luigi Pestalozza, “Regia e opera,” *Sipario* 19, no. 224 (1964): 5–13.

16. Puecher cut his teeth as a director of contemporary opera on La Scala’s two stages (the main stage and La Piccola Scala) with works such as Ferruccio Busoni’s *Turandot* (La Scala, 1960), Guido Turchi’s *Il soldato Svejk* (La Scala, 1960), Luciano Berio’s *Passaggio* (La Piccola Scala, 1963), and Giacomo Manzoni’s *Atomtod* (La Scala, 1965). For a detailed chronicle of Puecher’s work as an opera director, see Virginio Puecher, “Diario di un’esperienza,” *Sipario* 19, no. 224 (1964): 20–21 and 44–46.

17. My use of the words “mediatic” and “liveness” is borrowed from Philip Auslander’s *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

18. See typescript scene synopsis, 3: “Ora il palcoscenico è invaso da una serie di cupi rimbombi. L’uomo si avvia incuriosito verso l’interno del palcoscenico. Non ha fatto tre passi che dall’alto della soffitta, accompagnato da un sibilo metallico, scende come una saracinesca una grande parete di lamiera.” (Now the stage is invaded by a series of dark thuds. The man approaches the center of the stage, curious about the sounds. He has barely made three steps when a great metallic wall descends like a cage from the ceiling, accompanied by a metallic whistling sound).

19. The use of electronic music for the opening credits of *La notte* is mentioned by Maurizio Corbella, “*Musica elettroacustica e cinema in Italia negli anni sessanta*” (PhD thesis, Università degli Studi di Milano, 2008–9), 141. Corbella lists the electronic excerpt in *La notte* as one among others used in 1960s Italian films to signify a state of physical or psychological “transition.”

20. John Foot, *Milan since the Miracle: City, Culture and Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 19.

21. Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943–1988* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 218.

22. See Foot, *Milan since the Miracle*, 80: “It would be interesting to delve deeper into the psyche of a city whose identity seems to be defined, physically, by *not being able to see it*—by its very meteorological invisibility.”

23. MEZZACAPA: Acqua, vento . . . e nebbia! Eh . . . nebbia, nebbia! / TOTÒ: Ah, questo m’impressiona! Tutto, ma la nebbia . . . / MEZZACAPA: A Milano, quando c’è la nebbia non si vede. / TOTÒ: Perbacco . . . e chi la vede? . . . MEZZACAPA: Nessuno. / TOTÒ: Ma, dico, se i milanesi, a Milano, quando c’è la nebbia, non vedono, come si fa a vedere che c’è la nebbia a Milano? / MEZZACAPA: No, ma per carità, ma quella non è una cosa che si può toccare. / TOTÒ: Non si tocca . . . non si tocca. / Peppino: . . . Io non la tocco, per carità.

24. Milan, of course, was not the first city to be enshrouded by fog. While there is no monograph on the literary and cinematic significance of fog across different urban and historical spheres, a few recent essays and anthologies offer stimulating starting points. Although only in small part about the meteorological phenomenon, Franco Moretti’s recent essay “Fog,” *New Left Review* 81 (2013): 59–92, explores romantic images of “veiling” as connected to the rise of capitalist ideology in the mid-nineteenth century. Also important is the anthology *Nebbia*, ed. Umberto Eco and Remo Ceserani (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 2009). The anthology catalogues literary references to fog according to historical period, theme, and location; the section entitled “Milan, Turin and the Po Valley,” 133–85, is especially relevant. On the topic of the relationship between opera and fog, Gundula Kreuzer has recently examined fog as the symbolic incarnation of operatic music’s transition from the operatic stage into urban surroundings. See Gundula Kreuzer, “Wagner-Dampf: Steam in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and Operatic Production,” *Opera Quarterly* 27, no. 2–3 (2012): 179–218.

25. Foot, *Milan since the Miracle*, 106: “Television made and re-invented the city, and its spread coincided not with suburbanization—as in the US or the UK, but with urbanization and industrialization.” Foot in turn references David Forgacs, “Spettacolo: Teatro e cinema,” in *Guida all’Italia contemporanea, 1861–1997*, vol. 4, ed. Nicola Tranfaglia and Pier Giorgio Zunino (Milan: Garzanti, 1998), 203–94.

26. The brief but intense sojourn of RAI’s major

headquarters in Milan is covered in Ada Ferrari’s *Milano e la RAI: Un incontro mancato? Luci e ombre di una capitale di transizione: 1945–1977* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2002).

27. Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy*, 222.

28. Luciano Bianciardi, *La vita agra* (1962; repr., Milan: Bompiani, 1995), 167: “La chiamano nebbia, se la coccolano, te la mostrano, se ne gloriano come di un prodotto locale. E prodotto locale è. Solo non è nebbia. . . è semmai una fumigazione rabbiosa, una flatulenza di uomini, di camini, è sudore, è puzzo di piedi, polverone sollevato dal taccheggiare delle segretarie, delle puttane, dei rappresentanti, dei grafici, dei PR, delle stenodattilo; è fiato di denti guasti, di stomaci ulcerati, di budella intasate, di sfinteri stitici, è fetore di ascelle deodorate, di sorche sfitte, di bischeri disoccupati.”

29. The excerpt is from a field interview in the anthropological study *Milano, Corea: Inchiesta sugli immigrati*, ed. Franco Alasia and Danilo Montaldi (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1960), 14; it is here reported as quoted in Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy*, 223.

30. The discussion of the odd, incapacitating link between the bells and the physiology of Papageno’s speech organs, as well as a fascinating connection between the bells and the sound of laughter, is found in Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 77–80.

31. Pasolini and Maderna never realized their project for *Vivo e Coscienza*, but their exchange is documented in “Il progetto di un ‘balletto cantato’ con libretto di P. P. Pasolini: *Vivo e Coscienza*,” in *Bruno Maderna: Studi e testimonianze*, ed. Rossana Dalmonte and Marco Russo (Lucca: Libreria musicale italiana, 2004), 285–94. Pasolini would use a similar idea in his film *Uccellacci e uccellini* (1966), in which two simple-minded friars are instructed to spread the word of God to the animal kingdom by learning the animals’ language.

32. See Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, 79: “flute and pipes, played with the mouth, entail an absolute suppression of the voice. They are wind instruments that substitute for singing, with melody but no words.”

33. The theme of a male lead undone by an inability to express himself is a trope of twentieth-century musical stage works, and it often works as an allegory for social disenfranchisement. It is, for instance, the premise of Stravinsky’s *L’histoire du soldat* (1918), a work that had a rich performance history in postwar Milan, starting with the production by Giorgio Strehler’s Piccolo Teatro in 1953. A similar

significance can be attributed to the dry *Sprechgesang* that distinguishes the impoverished soldier Wozzeck from his singing fellow characters in Berg's *Wozzeck* (1925). In Britten's *Billy Budd* (1951), a young sailor helplessly stutters his way toward his tragic demise. Maderna's premise is, in a way, similar to that of Stravinsky's *Histoire* (a violin substituting for speech), but without the Brechtian irony that characterizes Stravinsky's work. Hyperion's flute is unalienable, almost built into the character's body; also, Maderna scores the flute part as a fully lyrical melodic display, a far cry from the stylized, balletic music of Stravinsky's soldier.

34. Manuscript stage notes, 5: "Intorno a lui si *modifica la luce*. Ora le strutture di fondo si precisano in tutta la loro ampiezza. Mutano colore—da acciaio si fanno rosa-azzurre. Anche l'orchestra si illumina a giorno, il riverbero acceca Gazzelloni sulle pareti di fondo ombre gigantesche di orchestrali che suonano si alternano alle luci—Gazzelloni è piccolissimo al loro confronto."

35. Typescript scene synopsis, Archivio Bruno Maderna, Bologna, sec. GIII, 4: "Come ha estratto dall'orchestra quel suono se lo trasporta fisicamente nel luogo dove ha sistemato i leggi; l'orchestra smette di suonare. Su quell'unico suono quasi rubato il solista organizza ora il suo concerto. È un breve pezzo di lacerante dolcezza."

36. The spotlight is a detail from the only video recording available for *Hyperion* (filed as V2) at the Archivio Bruno Maderna in Bologna; this is a recording of a performance in Venice on December 14, 1977, which was directed by Puecher and meant to be a revival of the original *Hyperion* of 1964; however, a comparison between the typescript synopsis, manuscript stage notes, and audio recording reveal that many details of the 1977 performance diverge noticeably from the version of 1964.

37. Typescript scene synopsis, 4: "Quando il concerto per flauto è arrivato al massimo del suo concentrato lirismo una breve risata riempie tutto il palcoscenico."

38. This is the only indication of the possible use of speakers in the theater that I have been able to find; it is found in an undated, unsigned manuscript sheet of paper (the handwriting is Bruno Maderna's) at the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Sammlung Bruno Maderna, sec. S730, M10. The leaf includes a drawing of the distribution of the speakers in the theaters, as well as the following commentary on the layout: "La stereofonia dovrà agire solo nella parte posteriore del teatro, seguendo una lenta alternanza fra gruppi di sinistra e destra" (The stereophony should operate

only in the back of the theater, alternating slowly between the groups of speakers on the left and those on the right).

39. This resonates with what John Morreall terms the "superiority theory" of humor, which holds that laughing signals the fact that the laughter deems herself superior to another (usually human) being. This theory is most famously offered by Aristotle in his distinction between tragedy and comedy in the *Poetics*, and is common in theories of humor up to the eighteenth century. See John Morreall, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 4–5.

40. The association of laughter with uncontrolled bodily movement—or even bodily failure—is something that Anca Parvulescu identifies as a key aspect of twentieth-century philosophical theory, an aspect that dates to pre-Enlightenment accounts of the passions. She identifies laughter as a state suspended not so much between orality and vocality as between orality and "buccality." See Anca Parvulescu, *Laughter: Notes on a Passion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 9–10: "It is as if the opening of the mouth in laughter comes to remind us that the mouth has two Latin names: *os* and *bucca*. There is a mouth of orality and a mouth of buccality. *Os/oris* is . . . the mouth, whether open or closed, connected to the voice and speaking. . . . As for *bucca*, it is the more 'primitive' mouth of breathing, sucking, eating."

41. Typescript scene synopsis, 4–5: "La parete di metallo che chiudeva il fondo del palcoscenico si apre lentamente e rivela la presenza di una enorme costruzione in lamiera metallica. La costruzione comincia poi lentamente ad avanzare verso la ribalta mentre il solista strappa dal suo flauto qualche suono di protesta. La costruzione arresta la sua corsa ai margini del boccascena; le sue pareti cominciano a scorrere aprendosi mentre il buio invade la scena. I suoni provenienti dal nastro magnetico aumentano di intensità. Nel buio appaiono ora delle luci colorate intermittenti, poi scoppia la luce di una fiamma ossidrica che rivela in controluce la struttura di una enorme macchina metallica costituita da grandi bracci semoventi e da quattro grandi ruote mobili."

42. Michel Chion, *The Voice in the Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 33–35.

43. Roman Jakobson, *Child Language, Aphasia, and Phonological Universals*, trans. Allan R. Keiler (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), 21.

44. Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language* (New York: Zone Books, 2005).

45. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), xv. Indeed, this understanding of laughter as the generative moment of language is also an intensely twentieth-century philosophical trend. Parvulescu associates it—in a line of thought not dissimilar from Heller-Roazen’s discourse on echolalia—with a shattering of language that allows for “remotivation”: the constitution of new meanings resulting from the renewed attention to the nonsemantic dimension of language. See Parvulescu, *Laughter*, 11.

46. By “apolitical” I mean not unconcerned with issues of community, belonging, and exclusion, but rather unmoored from the specific politics of language at a particular time and place. It is this “unmooring” that grants the concept of laughter its positive connotation, the generative connotations of the burst or explosion of laughter. Georges Bataille’s account of laughter is overtly tied to the idea of the origin or dismantling of community, and the liberating explosion of a particular philosophical language (that of Hegel). Following Bataille’s lead, laughter would take on similarly generative qualities in the thought of Foucault, Jean-Luc Nancy, and, more recently, feminist and gender theory such as Julia Kristeva’s and Judith Butler’s. On the peculiar inapplicability of laughter’s joyous outburst to a concrete political realm, see Parvulescu, *Laughter*, 11: “it is important to emphasize, as Nancy does, that there is no ‘sublime truth’ of laughter, withdrawn from ‘art.’ It is in fact only from within language, or rather at its limit, a limit exposed by the artifices of art, that we can hope to listen to echoes of laughter.”

47. Umberto Eco, “Fenomenologia di Mike Bongiorno,” in *Diario minimo* (Milan: Bompiani Editore, 1963), 33: “Mike Bongiorno è privo di senso dell’umorismo. Ride perché è contento della realtà, non perché sia capace di deformare la realtà.” The essay was originally published in *La settimana radio tv*, November 12, 1961.

48. Federico Fellini, quoted in Aldo Grasso, *Radio e televisione: Teorie, analisi, storie, esercizi* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 2000), 131: “Lo stravolgimento di qualsiasi sintassi articolata ha come unico risultato quello di creare una sterminata platea di analfabeti pronti a ridere, e a esaltarsi, ad applaudire tutto quello che è veloce, privo di senso e ripetitivo.”

49. Such views may seem antiquated now, of course. This apocalyptic state of mind, so widespread among intellectuals in the 1960s, has been thoroughly criticized in recent histories of the Italian media, that of Milan in particular.

According to this more recent view, the aversion toward the linguistic changes brought by mass media can be understood historically: they belonged first and foremost to the literary intelligentsia, who believed themselves usurped by the reconfigured language and forms of sociality within the newly mediatic city. See, for instance, Pier Paolo Pasolini, “9 Dicembre 1973: Acculturazione e acculturazione,” in *Scritti corsari* (Milan: Garzanti, 1975), 34: “Un giornale fascista e le scritte sui cascinali di slogans mussoliniani fanno ridere: come (con dolore) l’aratro rispetto a un trattore. Il fascismo, voglio ripeterlo, non è stato sostanzialmente in grado nemmeno di scalfire l’anima del popolo italiano; il nuovo fascismo, attraverso i nuovi mezzi di comunicazione e di informazione (specie, appunto la televisione), non solo l’ha scalfita, ma l’ha lacerata, violata bruttata per sempre.” (Fascist newspapers and the Mussolini slogans written on the walls of farm houses are laughable, the same way a horse-drawn cart is [painfully] laughable when compared to a truck. I repeat: fascism was never really able to make a dent in the soul of the Italian people; the new fascism, spread through the new communication and information media [for instance, television], has not only made a dent in that soul, but has torn it, violated it, and defaced it forever).

50. Hans Helms, program note for *Dimensioni II*, reproduced in the program notes for *Hyperion’s* premiere (Venice: Venice Biennale, 1964), 20.

51. Luigi Rognoni, “Memoria di Bruno Maderna negli anni Cinquanta,” in *Bruno Maderna: Documenti*, ed. Rossana Dalmonte and Mario Baroni (Milan: Suvini Zerboni, 1985), 150: “Ricordo come nacque *Le rire*, nel 1962, l’ultima composizione di Bruno di quel periodo. Aveva registrato la voce di Marino Zuccheri e poi l’aveva elaborata con suoni sinusoidali, filtri e sovrapposizioni. Quando l’ascoltai, gli dissi che mi sembrava una dimostrazione che Bergson aveva dato del riso: ‘quelque chose de mécanique plaquée sur du vivant.’ Ebbene, mi disse, lo intollereremo *Le rire*.”

52. See Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay of the Meaning of the Comic* (New York: Macmillan, 1917).

53. Manuscript stage notes, 6a: “Risate: . . . alta e bassa . . . rima suoni . . . risate e parodia suoni e trillo . . . risata vocalizzo” (Laughter: . . . high and low . . . rhyming sounds . . . laughter and parody sounds and trills . . . vocalized laughter). “Parodia suoni e trillo” seems to imply a parody of the sounds and trills of the flutist’s part.

54. Typescript scene synopsis, 5–6: “Al posto della macchina da luna park c’è ora a terra un

gruppo di forme indistinte buttate le une sulle altre, come un residuo lasciato dalla macchina. Obbedendo agli ordini assurdi del nastro magnetico la massa informe si scinde dopo alcuni lenti conati in tante particelle che rotolano qua e là per il palcoscenico. [. . .] Le figure si tendono poi in una serie di gesti che alludono a una sorta di solidarietà; ma una volta allacciatesi le une alle altre un ordine trasforma il blocco così formatosi in una specie di macchina impegnata in un lavoro meccanico; Al culmine del ritmo la luce si spegne di colpo per riaccendersi brevemente su alcune brevissime scene di violenza in cui sono impregnate le figure; una lotta, un'imboscata, una fucilazione, un'aggressione, una strage. [. . .] Un ultimo buio, poi tutte le figure appaiono in ginocchio di spalle al pubblico: si trascinano in una grottesca processione verso il fondale metallico sul quale nel frattempo è apparso un enorme simbolo luminoso che allude ad una condizione religiosa. Le pareti della costruzione si richiudono su quest'ultima immagine."

55. The sonority that opens *Aria* is created by using the strings, harp, and timpani in such a way as to minimize resonance while keeping the attacks highly audible: *col legno* strings, *presso sulla tavola* harps, and timpani played with brushes. All textual references to *Aria* are made with regard to the published score: Bruno Maderna, *Aria per soprano, flauto solista e orchestra su testo di F. Höderlin [sic]* (Milan: Edizioni Suvini Zerboni, 1965).

56. Massimo Mila, *Maderna musicista europeo* (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 1976), 56: "*Hyperion* è forse un torso incompiuto, un'opera problematica o piuttosto una proposta di opera gettata all'iniziativa d'un regista creativo. Ma ben compiuto e perfetto è l'a solo di soprano che la chiude—o almeno a Venezia la chiudeva—con suoni ultraterreni." (*Hyperion* may be an unfinished torso, a problematic opera, or rather the proposal for an opera left to the initiative of a creative director. But the soprano solo that closes it with unearthly sounds—or at least that closed it in Venice—is fully finished and perfect).

57. Mila makes a note of the possible language barrier, despite asserting *Aria's* place in the universal canon of art song. See Mila, *Maderna musicista europeo*, 57: "Accostiamoci dunque a questa grande pagina vocale, nella quale purtroppo è requisito indispensabile la percezione del testo tedesco, poiché la parola—significato e suono—e l'immagine musicale si fondono inestricabilmente secondo la più alta tradizione del canto espressivo di tutti i tempi" (Let us now approach this great vocal piece; it is unfortunately indispensable to have an ear for the German

language, because the word—sound and meaning—is inextricably welded to the musical imagery, according to the highest tradition of expressive singing).

58. Text for *Aria*, quoted in the program notes of *Hyperion's* premiere (Venice: Venice Biennale, 1964), 21–22: "Wie eine lange entsetzliche Wüste lag die Vergangenheit da vor mir, und mit höllischem Grimme vertilgt ich jeden Rest von dem, was einst mein Herz gelobt hatte und erhoben. Dann fuhr ich wieder auf mit wütendem Hohngelächter über mich und alles, lauschte mit Lust dem gräßlichen Widerhall, und das Geheul der Tschakale, das durch die Nacht her von allen Seiten gegen mich drang, tat meiner zerrütteten Seele wirklich wohl." It is worth noting that in the program notes this text is reproduced (along with an Italian translation) without any indication as to its use in the opera, thus making it even harder for audience members to discern the meaning of the text in *Aria*. Lastly, this particular fragment of *Hyperion* is—perhaps significantly—known as the "Thalia" fragment, named after the ancient Greek muse of comedy and thus, at least in part, of laughter.

59. Alberto Savinio, "I cinque teatrini della crudeltà," in *Ascolto il tuo cuore, città* (Milan: Adelphi, 2009), 193: "Le idee che a sentimento mio accompagnano il nome di Milano, sono: Giustizia Illuminata, Mancanza di Odio, Ignoranza della Crudeltà. Non appena ho finito di scrivere la parola crudeltà, scoppia nella parte ancora bianca del foglio una risata così tagliente, che lacera la pagina da parte a parte. Prendo un altro foglio, ma questo mi si annegra tra le mani, non tanto però da non lasciarmi intravedere sul foglio stesso il contorno di cinque teatrini in fila. . . . Si apre il siparietto del primo teatrino a sinistra, e appare il parco di Milano." The title of Savinio's essay—which translates as "Five Little Theaters of Cruelty"—makes a reference to Antonin Artaud's famous "theater of cruelty," which was another of the inspirations behind Puecher and Maderna's *Hyperion* cycle.

60. Savinio, "El Vanièr," in *Ascolto il tuo cuore*, 11: "Il dialetto restringe la vita, la rimpicciolisce, la puerizza. . . . Il dialetto è una delle espressioni più dirette dell'egoismo familiare, di quel 'familiismo' che è origine di tutto il male" (Dialect constricts life, makes it smaller, infantile. . . . Dialect is one of the most direct expressions of familial selfishness, of that "familiarism" that is the origin of all evil).

61. Savinio, "Note di taccuino," *Ascolto il tuo cuore*, 396: "Giro tra le rovine di Milano. Perché questa esaltazione in me? Dovrei essere triste, e

invece sono formicolante di gioia. Dovrei mulinare pensieri di morte, e invece pensieri di vita mi battono in fronte, come il soffio del più puro e radioso mattino. Perché? Sento che da questa morte nascerà nuova vita. Sento che da queste rovine sorgerà una città più forte, più ricca, più bella.” (I wander among the ruins of

Milan. Why do I feel so excited? I should be sad, but I am tingling with joy. I should be brooding over thoughts of death, and instead thoughts of life brace me like the air of the purest and brightest morning. Why? I feel that from these ruins a city stronger, brighter, more beautiful will rise).