

The Enigma of Music, the Voice of Reason: “Music,” “Language,” and Becoming Human

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“Music is an enigma.”

Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works*¹

EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGIST PINKER, musing on *How the Mind Works*, comes to the startling conclusion that “music is an enigma.” What does music mean? Where did it come from? Is it an adaptation, or merely “auditory cheesecake” (534), a wonderful but purely accidental side effect of the adaptation that really matters, language? Pinker concludes that music is not essential to life as we know it; he confidently asserts that “music could vanish from our species and the rest of our lifestyle would be virtually unchanged” (528). Others, such as Geoffrey Miller, find the enigma of music less perplexing, proposing that music arose in the context of sexual selection, and hence evolved as a marker of reproductive fitness, making it among our most “useful” adaptations.²

Whether “useless” or essential to human life, music’s presence in contemporary evolutionary theories signals that it is deeply implicated in Western understandings of human uniqueness and claims to knowledge. Although music is tangential to the larger evolutionary debates, it is often offered as “proof” of the evolutionary continuity and/or discontinuity between humans and other animals, and is likely to be conceptualized as a missing link between animal communication and human language proper. Music’s intermediary status between animal and human is mirrored in its ambiguous status as an adaptation, and hence its ascriptions as alternatively “useful” or “useless.”

Music’s equivocal status is also evident in its association with the emotional, the bodily, and the immediate, as opposed to the rational and cognitive character of language, a position which finds eloquent expression in poststructuralist characterizations of music as the feminine excess which spills beyond the contained masculinity of language. For example, Roland Barthes’s rhapsodies on the “grain of the voice” grant a meaning to music that transcends the referentiality of language.³

Similarly, Kristeva pairs music with the nonsignifying “geno-text,” tying it to the prelinguistic infantile experience of the maternal voice.⁴ Not surprisingly, the tensions between male/female, mind/body, reason/emotion, and human/animal are echoed in the inessential yet essential role of music in contemporary Western culture.

Indeed, and despite explicit claims to the contrary, the “music” invoked in most contemporary evolutionary theories is precisely the music described above, in other words, a music either coincident with or defined in reference to Western classical music dating from roughly 1750–1900, as practiced and understood in largely Euro-American contexts at the turn of the twenty-first century. This music, indeed all music, carries with it an ideology that consists of “[r]epresentations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of [music] and human beings in a social world,”⁵ and therefore likely extends to domains of sociocultural knowledge and practice beyond music *per se*. In particular, it is proposed here that contemporary ideologies of Western classical music are implicated in evolutionary accounts of the emergence of human language. Susan Gal, although writing about language rather than music ideologies, gives a hint as to how this might be the case, noting that “ideologies that appear to be about language [and/or music], when carefully reread, are revealed to be coded stories about political, religious, or scientific conflicts; ideologies that seem to be about, say, religion, political theory, human subjectivity, or science invite reinterpretation as implicit entailments of language [and/or music] ideologies or as the precipitates of widespread linguistic [and/or musical] practices.”⁶ Reformulating Gal’s comments to encompass both music and language, the principal task of this paper is to examine how stories about the relationships between music and language may be understood as “coded stories” about other areas of knowledge, and in addition, how scientific narratives about the emergence of human representational abilities are framed as “implicit entailments” of music/language ideologies. To begin to unravel the music/language knot in these contemporary evolutionary accounts, it is first necessary to examine music’s “enigma” in greater detail.⁷

The Feminization of Music

Perhaps what is most striking about the enigma of music is that it has achieved canonical status throughout the humanistic and scientific disciplines. Although music is not much noticed, its enigma is taken for granted. Despite its contested position as an adaptation, music is

nevertheless understood as transcendent and deeply meaningful, qualities that are difficult to account for, and indeed seem mutually exclusive, within an evolutionary framework. For music to be transcendent it must be useless, beyond mundane reality, a link to a metaphysical reality; yet to be meaningful, to reveal metaphysical truth, it must surely have evolved to fulfill some cognitive or social purpose, and must therefore be ultimately useful.

Music's questionable evolutionary provenance is merely symptomatic of its enigma, which derives more fundamentally from its positioning between metaphorical and empirical understandings of "voice."⁸ The intersection between voice as a sonorous object and voice as a trope of agency, identity, and social power coincides with the intersection between music and language; to "have a voice" is to speak through language, to *be* a voice is quintessentially musical, since "music" is the ontological metaphor of "being" itself.

In other words, music's enigma stems from it being "not language," yet "having a voice." Music seems to be saying something, something so intuitively obvious that it has at times been proclaimed a "universal language" that transcends history and culture. Whereas no natural language has been considered a "universal language," because the nonuniversality of arbitrary, conventional reference is considered to be its defining characteristic, music's presumed unmediated sonic presence is taken as experiential proof of its transcendental, universal nature. The assertion of unmediated sonic presence has upheld not only the existence of an ahistorical transcendent music, but the hegemony of an ahistorical, transcendent language, as evident, for example, in Derrida's Writing—despite his efforts to counter logocentrism, Derrida's invocation of vocal presence is a logocentric tactic—or in the Lacanian primal cry that precedes the Symbolic Order.⁹

Music so construed reveals its metadiscursive, ideological character, a metacommentary that "presents itself as . . . a metapragmatics that stipulates lawlike regularities, independent of epistemological concern with time, place, or other event-bound contingencies of the pragmatic practice that is its object of discursive focus."¹⁰ In other words, "music as a universal language" functions as a metadiscourse on imagined pre-existing structures of human worlds, one that bypasses musical practice *per se*, and as such, has the potential to illuminate how music/language ideologies inform broader domains of understanding.

To restrict our view for the moment to musicological studies of Western art music, voice as the "linguistic construction of social personae"¹¹ has found its counterpoints in ideas such as the composer's voice, the authorial voice, the narrative voice, or the diegetic voice.¹² Yet the

musical construction of “social personae” differs from the construction of such voices in linguistic narrative. In music, the authority of voice as an index of presence, which lends it its naturalizing power, can only be heard through its sensuous materiality, which simultaneously invokes vocal authority and reveals its constructed character. Who is the being, the social essence, the body behind the voice? Indeed, as feminist opera scholars such as Carolyn Abbate have noted, the musical voice, either as emitted from a human throat or the proxy of a musical instrument, indexes an embodied social presence with the uncanny ability to disrupt the authorial voice, to invoke multiple and contradictory voices, or to obliterate the reasoned voices of language altogether.¹³

But more specifically, how do these irruptive voices “speak” and what are they “saying”? This question goes to the heart of debates over musical meaning, the relationship between form and content, and the mind/body dichotomies that underlie competing theoretical discourses. What are the bodily and social conditions of musical representation? Is form merely an empty vehicle for content? Is meaning inherent in form, in content, or in their interrelationship? Do not all of these possibilities ultimately reduce form to a body-like substrate written over with essentialized, cultural content? These kinds of arguments are not unlike those put forth by feminist theorists of the body such as Elizabeth Grosz, who point out that social constructionist theories of subjectivity have traded biological essentialism for cultural essentialism, and merely reinscribe the binaries in their inverted forms.¹⁴ “Embodiment” is the usual remedy for these unacceptable dichotomies, an embodiment conceived of as “all-the-way-down,” where form and content are negotiated in the social arena. Yet even this exemplary embodiment harbors a music that remains a safe haven for the hegemony of language, as long as music is conceptualized as “not language,” and is therefore relegated to an unmediated expression of pure emotion that defies the rationality and referentiality of linguistic meaning.

The feminization of music, and its embeddedness in debates about form and content, finds reinforcement in nineteenth-century understandings of music as a vehicle for transcendent meaning, a Romantic ideology that continues to permeate current discussions. As Mary Ann Smart points out: “This idea of music as a free flow exceeding cognitive grasp turns out to be amazingly resilient, the romantic doctrine of transcendence and spirituality translated with surprising ease to the psychoanalytic notion of music as an outpouring or immersion that recalls union with the mother’s body, of voice as singing ‘from a time before law’” (I 9).

This resilient, feminized music is not easily countered, because the

musical meaning debate continues to be framed within nineteenth-century understandings of music as autonomous structure. Within this framework, the form/content debate translates into debates about *musical* and *extramusical* meaning. Following Leonard Meyer's well-known formulation,¹⁵ musicologists, analyzing the canonical works of Western art music, have generally taken an *absolutist* approach, ascribing inherent meanings to musical structures. From this perspective, music does not refer to anything outside of itself, but rather elicits a psychological response to patterns of tension and release in harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic materials, which are *syntactically* ordered. Ethnomusicologists and anthropologists, working with music outside of the Western art music tradition, generally emphasize an extramusical, or *referentialist* approach, linking meaning to specific sociocultural contexts and scenes of social interaction. This approach considers musical form as inherently neutral, and implies a musical *semantics*.¹⁶

The fields of ethnomusicology and Western musicology intersect at the faultlines of the absolutist/referentialist debate, and at a point where extremely basic questions about the nature of music need to be addressed. Most scholars among the subdisciplines of music acknowledge that meanings embedded in musical structures do not consist entirely of reference to sociocultural contexts, nor are they located solely in the psychological response to structural pattern; however, work produced within disciplinary constraints sometimes belies this obvious truth. As anthropologists Steven Feld and Eric Fox note, "[t]he main positions in the musical meaning debate oversimplify the communicational complexity and interpretive density of real verbal and musical experience. Absolutist positions on musical meaning are typically falsified by the ubiquitous intertwining of music and verbal communication in song texts, by prosodics, or by discourse about music. Another important base for critique is philosophical and anthropological work problematizing the cross-cultural validity of Western models of emotion and strict opposition between cognition and affect that underlies these positions" (ML 28).

Thus, the debate centers not only on *what* music means, but *how* it means, especially how music represents and/or elicits emotion. Both the absolutist and referentialist positions are potentially *expressionist* to the extent that they posit either a syntactical or semantic explanation for the communication and/or elicitation of emotion. From an ethnomusicological perspective, musical style indexes sociocultural concepts of world coherence through emotionally salient expressions of core identity.¹⁷ For example, anthropologist Steven Feld describes women's ritual laments among the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea that are modeled on

“sung/texted/weeping” stylizations of muni bird calls, which in turn are understood as the voices of the ancestors. Kaluli music ideologies are embedded in cultural understandings and responses to death, as filtered through sonic interpretations of a socially organized natural world.¹⁸ Finnish-Karelian ritual laments are likewise sung as a means to link the worlds of the living and the dead. The female lamenter, performing in an ecstatic style that mixes crying, singing, and ritual speech, both represents and enacts the journey to the other world by “crying with words,” as opposed to ordinary crying, or “crying with the eyes.” Her crying not only indexes the presence of spiritual power, but helps to create an ongoing sense of community in the face of overwhelming personal and social upheaval.¹⁹

Ethnomusicological case studies such as the above have been extremely important for relativizing musical concepts, but still leave unexplained the sticky issue of extramusical meaning and the role of emotion in constructing such meaning. Extramusical meaning has often been conceptualized as synonymous with its context, for instance, music accompanying a death ritual “means” a culturally specific understanding of death. Ethnomusicologists have also attempted to tie meaning to similarities between musical form and social structure, suggesting, for example, that call and response patterns in West African musics are structurally analogous to an interactive and collaborative style of social interaction, and hence “mean” an interactive and collaborative mode of sociality.²⁰ Both of these kinds of analysis differ from absolutist approaches, in that they attempt to find extramusical meaning in the links between musical structures and social worlds.

Yet, for the most part, neither musicological nor ethnomusicological approaches give considered attention to the phenomenological experience of embodied vocality, which is the contested point of differentiation between music and language, and hence the underlying basis for music’s enigma. The issue of vocality remains outside the explicit purview of both absolutist and referentialist analytical practices, either silenced as unanalyzable in syntactical explanations, or taken for granted in referentialist explanations, where it is implicitly understood as the sonic glue that binds musical structures to social meanings. For example, in the lament examples cited above, the stylized crying of the lamenter is unproblematically assumed to index the cultural contexts of grief. Although this is undoubtedly the case, stylized crying also has a metadiscursive function that has barely been explored in most ethnomusicological accounts, in that it is a metacommentary on the presentation and representation of emotion and its role in the configuration of sociality itself.²¹

The analysis of vocality has been a stumbling block for musical

scholars because it challenges the autonomous nature of so-called absolute music, while questioning how the role of vocal presence participates in the creation of sociocultural meaning. Vocal presence cannot be uncritically accepted as philosophically naive, nor can it be assumed that its role as a sociocultural construct is transparently obvious. For example, even the exemplary attempts by scholars such as Carolyn Abbate to insert “voice” into the backdrop of a syntactically ordered musical narrative lend at least partial credence to absolutist conceptions of music as autonomous structure, in that such voices merely interrupt the authorial voice as syntactically created.²² These problematic, if inspiring, analytical gestures only underscore the fact that the enigma of music is indeed resilient, firmly anchored to conceptualizations of music and language that reify music as emotional, direct, and unmediated, as opposed to the rational, mediated referentiality of language.²³

To fully address music’s enigma, it would be necessary to inventory music ideologies as they appear throughout broad domains of Western culture, and to place them in sociocultural and historical perspective. This paper has a more limited aim, which is to examine the feminization of music as it appears in evolutionary narratives on intermediary forms between animal communication and human language. In addition, because music works within a culture of presence,²⁴ these narratives will be examined for how they use “music” to assert the truth of nonmusical assertions. Therefore, the task is double: both to uncover ideological assumptions, and to point out when the invocation of “music” is acting as a kind of virtual music. This ritual gesture summons an imaginary “music” which even in its absence functions as if present, and therefore, according to contemporary music/language ideologies, is capable of grounding other epistemological claims.

The Voice of Reason

The enigma of music not only challenges the project of musicology in particular and the humanist preoccupation with the nature of representation more generally, but is also problematic for scientists who wish to place music within their purview. For example, music’s enigma surfaces as a topic of scientific interest on the internet salon *Edge*, a site that bills itself as uniquely placed at “the edge of the world’s knowledge.”²⁵ *Edge* seeks to actualize C. P. Snow’s vision of a Third Culture, a hybrid culture that bridges the worlds of the humanities and sciences, although in fact, the *Edge* community is largely populated by scientists. *Edge* is characterized by interdisciplinary meddling, in the grand tradition of physicist

Roger Penrose on consciousness,²⁶ or entomologist E. O. Wilson on Consilience,²⁷ a meddling that is mostly one way, from Science to the Rest. Perhaps not surprisingly, the music imagined by the Third Culture is similar to that found elsewhere in Western culture, and is thus irresistible bait for inclusion in rational, scientific discourse.

Edge writings proclaim music to be an intractable mystery that is coveted and nonnegotiable in the quest for an updated version of Natural Philosophy. If there is a science/humanities common ground, music must be at its center. On *Edge's* *What is the Most Important Invention in the Last 2000 Years* page, writers propose not only anesthesia, the printing press, and the internet, but also Western classical music and the symphony orchestra. Howard Gardner, professor of Education at Harvard, notes that Western classical music has done more good with less harm than any other human invention, with the ambiguous implication that music is both usefully good and uselessly harmless. Philip Campbell, editor of the premier science journal *Nature*, questions the harmlessness and hence uselessness of classical music, citing Wagner's music and writings as expressions of anti-Semitism, placing useful music in the service of a transcendent morality. Theoretical physicist Julian Barbour sees music as a challenge to come up with a theory of everything that will include the qualia of experience, predicting a future physics in which musical experience will be "as real as electric charge," hinting that music is less than real without this validation. Jaron Lanier, musician and inventor of the term "virtual reality," valorizes acoustic music as a vehicle for the perception of ultimate reality, appealing to the natural laws of vibrating bodies that can be heard in both the material and immaterial worlds, recalling nineteenth-century romantic notions of musical transcendence.²⁸

These kinds of ideas provide the background for the ultimate effort to subsume music into scientific understanding, that is, the invocation of music as the evolutionary missing link between animal communication and human language. Most evolutionary scenarios do not mention music directly, but indirectly invoke a kind of musical protolanguage that evolved prior to language proper. This protolanguage is generally characterized as a rhythmic, emotional, singsong with vague, imprecise reference. Despite its intermediary role as not-yet-language, and despite the fact that we all know how the story ends, on closer inspection protolanguage is revealed to be much closer to "music" than to "language." Indeed, all such intermediary forms are closer to the animal side of the human/animal divide, in that they are all "not language" and would therefore seem to have been summoned more for rhetorical than explanatory reasons. Although most scholars are not careless enough to consider protolanguage as music, implicit elisions between the two often

surface at the points when it is necessary to make distinctions, distinctions between humans and animals, for example, or between intermediary forms and language proper.

The problematics of voice inserts itself into these discussions, because this music-like protolanguage represents a step in the progression from the unity of social persona and material voice to their eventual differentiation, a differentiation which turns out to be troublesome not only for evolutionary scenarios, but for absolutist and referentialist conceptions of musical meaning, as noted above. Within an evolutionary framework, this differentiation results in the invention of the arbitrariness of the sign, and thus the birth of language as separate from music. The tension between unitary and dualistic conceptions of voice in evolutionary accounts resonates with Gary Tomlinson's suggestion that the modern operatic voice is experienced in terms of a similar tension, as a phenomenal object approaching the limit of the noumenal (*MS* 92). The contemporary experience of voice as almost revealing its prior unity suggests that it might not be surprising to find our hominid ancestors imbued with similar transcendent yearnings as they stand at the Symbolic Threshold.

Terrence Deacon, in *The Symbolic Species*, traces the evolution of language, and hence the voice/vocality decoupling, as a move from *iconic* and *indexical* reference (in the Peircean sense of iconic and indexical signs as motivated by similarity and contiguity, respectively) to *symbolic*, conventional reference, which encompasses prior iconic and indexical reference, but breaks with its motivated character, and hence with the materiality of the sign/object relation.²⁹ Given the prior motivation of prelinguistic vocal communication, numerous commentators have claimed that severe obstacles would have militated against the invention of arbitrary reference, and hence language.³⁰ In this formulation, the melding of voice and vocality is an obstacle to be overcome before language, the marker of the truly human, can emerge. Not coincidentally, this obstacle also marks the point beyond which voice as almost transcendent can first be heard.

Before the obstacle can be overcome, however, the unity of voice and vocality must be established. Merlin Donald, in his *Origins of the Modern Mind*, paves the way for vocal unity with his argument that a more general *mimetic* representational ability evolved before language.³¹ Mimesis allowed our prelinguistic precursors to imitate and self model movement, and eventually led to the use of such movement to represent memories displaced from immediate context. Language arose from this general mimetic ability, in tandem with a specialized vocal mimesis. Increasing control over the voice through vocal mimesis eventually allowed for the self-modeled vocal movement necessary to support the

combinatorial, and hence arbitrary, use of sound. Crucial to this scheme is the hypothesis that vocal mimesis was first applied to innate and previously involuntary primate emotion calls, vestiges of which remain in music and linguistic prosody.

Although Donald posits mimesis as prior to but not sufficient for language, mimesis as he describes it should have been enough to put humans over the Symbolic Threshold, provided the assumptions of the transcendental musical voice are put aside. Any intentionally modeled movement understood by another as such carries with it an understanding of movement *qua* movement, and therefore the possibility of the so-called arbitrary use of such movement. In other words, the social basis of mimesis, which presupposes a theory of mind and hence access to another's intentions, is necessarily prior to the arbitrariness of the sign, and furthermore, does not require specifically vocal mimesis (MM 90–91; UM).

To posit the origin of language in mimetically modeled emotion calls is to imply that the previous unity of social essence and primal cry was ruptured not only by the ability to model the voice, but by the concomitant ability to understand the modeled voice as the product of intentional movement. As I have observed elsewhere, “[t]o the possessor of a social mind, the voice could now be interpreted ambiguously as both an intentionally modeled emotion call and as an unintentional index of an internal state; furthermore, a socially aware being would know that others could interpret one's *own* vocal utterances in this way. This double-edged interpretive possibility was not possible before crossing the symbolic threshold, when an indexical sign would have been taken at face value” (MM 91). Thus, the rupture between voice and vocality also represents a rupture between vocality and its indexicality to truth. Indeed, in contemporary evolutionary accounts, the concern with vocal deception as a barrier to reliable communication signals that the rupture between vocality and truth, the heart of music's enigma, is also at the heart of *Becoming Human*.

Becoming Human

Following Darwin, Merlin Donald proposes that protolanguage took the form of “rudimentary song,” whose musical, emotional qualities are in stark opposition to the rationality of language. Donald asserts that “[t]here is a very clear distinction between the social function of spoken language and the function served by rudimentary song; song bonds a congregation and moves emotion in a way that is hard for the verbal side of us to duplicate. . . . The bonding and emotive power of rudimentary

song thus has an archaic, and profound, hold on human nature. The universality and robustness of the link between music and mass emotion speak to its deep roots in the past" (*OM* 40). The elision between "rudimentary song" and contemporary understandings of music is clear; rudimentary song depends upon "language" devoid of its musical elements, as well as a caricature of "music" as pure emotive vocalization. Music's "hold on human nature" harkens back to the presumed truth status of the involuntary emotion calls of animals. Although the putative functional separation between language and music leads Donald to conclude that "the nonsymbolic and nontechnological aspects of music must have evolved separately from language" (*OM* 40), he nevertheless seems to be implying that the transcendental voice that has a "hold on human nature" evolved first, even though, as discussed above, the priority of social and material voices only can be understood as such if voice and vocality are conceptualized as separate.

John F. Locke similarly makes a point to separate language from its music-like precursors, with a similarly muddled appeal to contemporary music/language ideologies.³² He proposes that language evolved from a capacity for "soundmaking," which consisted of the "production of syllabic vocal material in a repetitive and rhythmic fashion" (*SS* 191). "Talking" emerged out of "soundmaking" as a means of creating social bonds, and is "a socially oriented process that has little to do with thoughts, [that] taps no more than the most superficial levels of language. Talking tends to be repetitive and rhythmic" (*SS* 192). In this scenario, both talking and soundmaking have musical attributes, and because of their "repetitive and rhythmic" features, are not a product of thought, which by definition is linguistic. "Speaking" on the other hand, relies upon thought because its function is to convey information, presumably information whose truth value can be assessed (*SS* 191). This limited understanding of information and reference is accommodated to a music/language ideology that characterizes music as emotional, noncognitive, and nonreferential, and which therefore considers the undifferentiated voice/vocality of musical "talking" as an obstacle to move beyond. Locke proposes a saltation over "talking" into the combinatorial use of sound as fueled by the selective pressures for a larger vocabulary (*SS* 197–98). Thus, music, or more accurately, the musicality of "talking" and "soundmaking," did not lay the groundwork for further linguistic development, but was superseded by a superior mode of communication. The magical conjuring of music in Locke's account is not properly an explanation, but rather a rhetorical gesture, an invocation of a virtual, generic "music" whose transcendent voice asserts the truth of a language uncontaminated by it.

The rupture between voice and vocality is perhaps most apparent in

stories that purport to account for the overcoming of the obstacle of vocal deception. Chris Knight, for example, proposes that the social dynamics underlying the evolution of language were defined by “Machiavellian” strategies of self-interest, and that this should have prevented the cooperative use of arbitrary sound, divorced as it is from material conditions, and hence cheap to produce and inherently untrustworthy (RC 65–91). However, when animals have convergent interests, they tend to share reliable information. Knight proposes that language co-evolved with ritual among a female in-group, who pressured men to provision for them by controlling their collective reproductive assets. More specifically, Knight proposes that a sex-strike ritual evolved as a way for women to collectively deceive men, in which they ritually asserted that “We are males!, We are animals!, and Anyway, we are all menstruating!” (RC 80). Although not literally deceived by the message, men were persuaded to accept its larger meaning by the performative force of an “explicit, loud, spectacular . . . costly, multimedia, deceptive display” (RC 80), in other words, by music and dance. The supposedly inarguable power of inherently truthful music and inherently truthful dance enables both collective deception aimed toward an outside group, and the use of arbitrary sound among an in-group that have paid the ritual price of belonging. Music and dance, by their costliness, assert the commitment of the group to communicate reliably with one another, and furthermore, create the collective representations that define the social arena in which language operates (RC 69–70).

Hypothesizing the origin of language in vocal grooming, Camilla Power is similarly concerned with the problem of “cheap signals” that are easy to produce and easy to fake, and hence fail to signal commitment or reliability (OW 115). Following Robin Dunbar, Power suggests that vocal grooming replaced and/or supplemented manual grooming due to the selective pressures of increased group size and hence increased complexity of social relationships. However, vocal grooming with arbitrary sound would not signal commitment unless it conveyed truthful information, although “vocalization of a musical or rhythmic nature could work as a form of grooming in initial stages” (OW 115). In other words, the truth and commitment value of musical grooming can be assessed by its self-evident “musical or rhythmic nature,” whereas language, a language conceptualized as devoid of any musical elements, must convey reliable information to assert truth and commitment. As does Knight, Power suggests that language and ritual co-evolved, in that ritual, with its concomitant music and dance, is a form of “supergrooming” that grounds the arbitrary use of sound (OW 125).

The assertion of musical costliness is just another version of the assertion of vocal truth, a transcendental vocal yearning as evident in the

almost-noumenal voice, and so a ritual invocation of music to explain its ritual role. This subterfuge is necessary because the truth of the musical voice is a social truth, one that is excised by ideologies of absolute music that deny the sociality in music's sonic structures.

These stories of Becoming Human invoke music to assert the hegemony of language as the marker of the truly human, positing intermediary musico-linguistic forms that nevertheless seem almost identical with "music" and rather far from "language." No matter how close to language it gets, music will forever be in an intermediary position. As Derrida points out in his critique of phonocentrism, Rousseau's claims about the origins of music in spontaneous cries of emotion entail a conceptualization of vocal presence as "[n]o longer the animal cry before the birth of language; but not yet the articulated language, already shaped and undermined by absence and death."³³ Therefore, this impossible betweenness can never be found, because there is no music that is not-yet-human, that could bring Becoming Human in line with being Human both before and after the human/animal split.

Although the enigma of music can never be fully illuminated, it can be at least partially demystified when understood as an entailment of the voice/vocality opposition, a polythetic opposition in which the distinctions between social personae and their material voices bleed into one another. Indeed, music's femininity is not pure; it harbors a shadow masculine side. Musical form is identified with abstract structure, imbued with a syntax that authenticates its language-like, rational basis. Language also harbors a shadow, feminine, musical identity, whose prosodic, emotional, and social aspects are ignored in order to reify referentiality as the marker of the uniquely human. Through the din of their ideological constructs, these other "musics" and "languages," although barely audible, can still be heard. The interdependence of social and material voices, and thus the socioemotional guarantee that underlies representation, hints at other ways of Becoming Human.

But that is a story for another day.³⁴

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NOTES

- 1 Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York, 1997), p. 528; hereafter cited in text.
- 2 Geoffrey Miller, "Evolution of Human Music through Sexual Selection," in *The Origins of Music*, ed. Nils Wallin, Bjorn Merker, and Steven Brown (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), pp. 329–60.
- 3 Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," in *Image, Music, Text* (New York, 1977), p. 188.
- 4 Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, tr. Margaret Waller (New York, 1984), pp. 86–89.

- 5 Kathryn Woolard, "Introduction: Language Ideology as a Field of Inquiry," in *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, ed. Bambi Schieffelin, Kathryn Woolard, and Paul Kroskrity (New York, 1998), p. 3. In the original, the passage refers to language.
- 6 Susan Gal, "Multiplicity and Contention Among Language Ideologies," in *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, pp. 321–22.
- 7 See Elizabeth Tolbert, "Untying the Music/Language Knot," in *Music, Sensation and Sensuality*, ed. Linda Austern (New York, 2001); hereafter cited in text as UM. See also Elizabeth Tolbert, "Music and Meaning: An Evolutionary Story," *Psychology of Music*, 29 (2001), 84–94; hereafter cited in text as MM.
- 8 Steven Feld and Aaron Fox discuss the relationship between these two discourses on voice from an ethnomusicological point of view in "Music and Language," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23 (1994), 25–53; hereafter cited in text as ML.
- 9 For an elaboration of this idea, see Tolbert, "Untying the Music/Language Knot."
- 10 Michael Silverstein, "The Uses and Utility of Ideology," in *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, p. 136.
- 11 Webb Keane, "Voice," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 9.1–2 (2000), 271.
- 12 See, for example, Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 1991).
- 13 For an overview of the issues, see Mary Ann Smart, "Introduction," in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton, 2000), pp. 3–16; hereafter cited in text as I.
- 14 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, 1994).
- 15 Leonard Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago, 1956).
- 16 For further discussion, see Steven Feld and Aaron Fox, "Music and Language"; Elizabeth Tolbert, "Theories of Meaning and Music Cognition: An Ethnomusicological Approach," *The World of Music*, 34.3 (1992), 7–21; Elizabeth Tolbert, "Music and Meaning."
- 17 For example, see Steven Feld, "Communication, Music, and Speech about Music," *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 16 (1984), 1–18.
- 18 Steven Feld, "Wept Thoughts: The Voicing of Kaluli Memories," *Oral Tradition*, 5 (1990), 241–66; see also Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Philadelphia, 1982).
- 19 Elizabeth Tolbert, "Women Cry with Words: Symbolization of Affect in the Karelian Lament," *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 22 (1990), 80–105; see also Elizabeth Tolbert, "Magico-Religious Power and Gender in the Karelian Lament," in *Music, Gender, and Culture*, ed. Marcia Herndon and Susanne Ziegler (Wilhelmshaven, 1990), pp. 41–56; and Tolbert, "The Voice of Lament," in *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Cultures*, ed. Leslie Dunn and Nancy A. Jones (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 179–94.
- 20 See, for example, John Chernoff's groundbreaking work *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (Chicago, 1979).
- 21 For an exception to this trend, see Greg Urban, "Discourse, Affect, and Social Order: Ritual Wailing in Amerindian Brazil," *American Anthropologist*, 90 (1988), 385–400. Urban further elaborates on the metadiscursive function of performative ritual in his remarkable *Metaphysical Community: The Interplay of the Senses and the Intellect* (Austin, 1996). I make the related claim that emotionally motivated vocality grounds representation more generally, both from a phenomenological and evolutionary point of view ("Voice, Metaphysics and Community," in *Pain and its Transformations*, ed. Sarah Coakley and Kay Shelemay [Cambridge, Mass., 2001]; see also my "Untying the Music/Language Knot," and "Music and Meaning").
- 22 For a discussion and elaboration of Abbate's analysis in *Unsung Voices*, see Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* (Princeton, 1999), pp. 83–92; hereafter cited in text as MS.

23 For further discussion of such analytical gestures, see Mary Ann Smart, "Introduction" in *Siren Songs*.

24 Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Musikpragmatik—gestrichelte Linie zur Konstitution eines Objektbereichs," in *Oper als Text: Romanistische Beiträge zur Libretto-Forschung*, ed. Albert Gier (Heidelberg, Winter, 1986), pp. 15–24. Gumbrecht conceptualizes a dichotomy between representational, hermeneutic culture and a culture of presence, linking the operatic voice to the latter. Thanks to Carolyn Abbate for alerting me to this source.

25 <http://www.edge.org>

26 Roger Penrose, *Shadows of the Mind: A Search for the Missing Science of Consciousness* (Oxford, 1994).

27 Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York, 1998).

28 <http://www.edge.org/documents/Invention.html>

29 Terrence Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain* (New York, 1997), pp. 69–101.

30 For example, see Chris Knight, "Ritual/Speech Co-Evolution: A Solution to the Problem of Deception," in *Approaches to the Evolution of Language: Social and Cognitive Bases*, ed. James R. Hurford, Michael Studdert-Kennedy, and Chris Knight (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 69–91; hereafter cited in text as RC. See also Camilla Power, "Old Wives' Tales: The Gossip Hypothesis and the Reliability of Cheap Signals," in *Approaches to the Evolution of Language*, pp. 111–29; hereafter cited in text as OW.

31 Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991); hereafter cited in text as *OM*.

32 John F. Locke, "Social Sound-Making as a Precursor to Spoken Language," in *Approaches to the Evolution of Language*, pp. 190–201; hereafter cited in text as *SS*.

33 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore, 1976), p. 247.

34 For attempts along these lines, see my "Music and Meaning"; "Voice, Metaphysics, and Community"; and "Untying the Music/Language Knot."