

**Urban Opera:
Navigating Modernity through the Oeuvre of Strauss and Hofmannsthal**

by

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Introduction: Urban Opera

Jarred rudely awake, the protagonist of Musil's "Der Erweckte" pulls back the curtains of his apartment window and regards the city below. He must be living on the third or fourth floor, as he can make out rooftops, chimneys, street canyons, and electric cables. As he gazes at the cityscape, he describes what he sees as weird, disordered, and confusing.¹ The decorative facade of a building, for instance, is here "completely inexplicable" (*völlig unerklärlich*).² As the reader learns, his visual perception is clouded by darkness and shadows.

The sudden awakening suggested by the title takes place not now, in the middle of the night, but instead long after the protagonist has arisen. Footsteps, moving down a street, trigger an instant feeling of relief:

Endlich kommen zwei Beine durch die Nacht. Der Schritt zweier Frauenbeine und das Ohr: Nicht schauen will ich. Mein Ohr steht auf der Straße wie ein Eingang. Niemals werde ich mit einer Frau so vereint sein wie mit dieser unbekanntem, deren Schritte jetzt immer tiefer in meinem Ohr verschwinden.

At last two legs come through the night. The step of two woman's legs and the ear: I don't want to look. My ear stands like a gateway on the street. Never will I be so at one with a woman as with this unknown figure whose steps disappear ever deeper in my ear.³

The sound of the footsteps prompts a shift from the ambiguity that he felt while looking at the city. He instantly feels connected to this walking woman, whom he only knows through the sound of her feet. His ear becomes, in his own words, an entryway into the

¹ Musil, 23-4 (English, 18).

² *Ibid.*, 24 (English, 18).

³ *Ibid.*, 24 (my translation).

self, a bridge between the audible (epiphenomenal) and the essential, which associates the external perception with the internal reality. For the first time since waking, the eerie distance between himself and his surroundings disappears. The urban stranger, who exists only as sound, walks down the street and directly into the narrator's ear. The protagonist now embarks on further aural excursions and discovers two more women, all while remaining in his garret. Again, their sound becomes his sole means of gathering information: "Dann zwei Frauen. Die eine filzig schleichend, die andere stapfend mit der Rücksichtslosigkeit des Alters. Ich sehe hinab. Schwarz." (Then two women. The one sordidly slinking along, the other stamping with the disregard of age. I look down. Black.)⁴ Hearing only their footsteps, the narrator deduces age, personality, and eventually even their destination (church). Sight, on the other hand, serves only to disorient and confuse him.

The protagonist of *Der Erweckte* is only one of many early twentieth-century German speakers who encountered his rapidly modernizing environment by listening to it. Writer Thomas Mann, painter Paul Klee, and architect August Endell all dissected the sounds in- and outside their apartments and houses.⁵ Arthur Schnitzler and Rainer Maria Rilke discussed their encounters with the phonograph; their fascination was matched by Walter Benjamin's vivid childhood memories of the telephone.⁶ And Franz Kafka, Hugo

⁴ *Ibid.*, 24 (English, 18).

⁵ For Thomas Mann see *Herr und Hund*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Bücherei, 1955; for Paul Klee see R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape*. Rochester: Destiny Books, 1977: 6; for August Endell see "Die Schönheit der großen Stadt." *Der Antirüpel* 2 (1908): 26.

⁶ For Rainer Maria Rilke see "Urgeräusch" In *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 6. Frankfurt am Main: Insel-Verlag, 1966: 1087; for Arthur Schnitzler see Heinz Hiebler, *Medienkultur*. Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen und Neumann, 2003: 396; for Walter Benjamin see "The Telephone" in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006: 48.

von Hofmannsthal, and Alfred Fried lived in despair over urban noise.⁷ They were joined by a legion of fictional residents who were sharply discerning of their acoustic environment. Hans Castorp, Hans Haller, Franz Biberkopf, and Ulrich are among a crowd of nameless protagonists that were consumed by a conglomeration of new and old sounds in their lives.

All these thinkers exhibited not a clairvoyance, but rather a clairaudience: a change in sensory capacity catalyzed by a changing acoustic and aural culture in German and Austrian urban life. Between 1890 and the late 1920s, decades which marked a radical transformation of the urban soundscape, many turned toward their acoustic environment, with some appropriating it (like the feminists), others trying to suppress it (like the anti-noise league). Yet others used it as an aesthetic inspiration to critically engage questions of perception, identity, and (sexual) politics. This dissertation argues that urban culture was marked by the emergence of a distinct sonic sensibility, a sensitivity not only to the world of sound itself, but also the cultural and political transformations that novel sounds represented.⁸

The operas of composer Richard Strauss and poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal are representative examples of this new sonic sensibility. They thematized new sounds and the modes of hearing associated with them. While the *oeuvre* of Strauss and are not generally considered representative of modernism, and indeed tend to be seen as

⁷ For Franz Kafka see *Briefe*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2005: 126; for Hugo von Hofmannsthal see “Antilärmiten.” *Der Antirüpel (Antirowdy)* 4, no. 1 (1909): 53; for Alfred Fried see “Zwei Briefe.” *Der Antirüpel (Antirowdy)* 5, no.1 (1909): 82-83.

⁸ My usage of sonic (versus acoustic) stems from Holger Schulze’s definition of sonic by which he means “a very specific and contextual, historical concept of sound that is defined by the culture that developed it.” (“Über Klänge sprechen. Eine Einführung.” In *Sound Studies - Traditionen - Methoden – Desiderate*, edited by Holger Schulze. Vol 1, 9-18. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2008: 21). Salome Voegelin uses the same term in her book *Listening to Noise and Silence* albeit in a different context (New York: Continuum, 2010). She pursues a philosophy of sound art. With “sonic sensibility” she means the philosophical approach that relies on “listening as an actual practice and as a conceptual sensibility” (xiii).

regressive after *Elektra*, this dissertation claims that their works index new sounds and aural conditions and register these phenomena at the levels of both content and form. Highly sensitive to the psychological, cognitive, and political dimensions of modernity's acoustic landscape, they used their collaboration to develop an operatic universe within which the sound of modernity resonated.

The study of the Strauss/Hofmannsthal oeuvre proves particularly rewarding, as they work with sound and aurality on a phenomenological and critical level. They reproduce, through music and text, acoustic features that stood out in the soundscape of the three cities they had close ties to, Berlin, Vienna, and Munich. This includes the synthetic background sound in the city, urban noise, the woman's new acoustic presence, and the disembodied telephone-voice. They then test these sounds for their socio-political implications, aesthetic adequacy, and sensory effect on the listener. They create uncommon aural conditions for their characters and their audiences alike, exposing both to acoustic situations that demand new modes of hearing and listening.

This focus on sound and listening may seem counterintuitive in light of a growing body of established scholarship that has focused on the impact and representations of visual culture in early twentieth-century modernist art and critical thought. Hessel's flâneur, Baudelaire's painter of modern life, and Kracauer's Tiller Girls are among the well-known city dwellers for whom seeing and being seen was paramount. Contemporary scholars, among them Anke Gleber, Harald Neumeyer, and Janet Ward, have seized on these figures and have asked how the visual experience of modernity shaped artistic practices and critical discourses.⁹ Literary scholars, including Sara Danius,

⁹ Anke Gleber, *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flanerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999; Harald Neumeyer, *Der Flaneur: Konzeptionen der Moderne*. Würzburg:

Karen Jacob, and Andreas Huyssen, have also attended primarily to the question of how the visual experience of modern culture informed modernist texts.¹⁰ On an even broader scale, not only the study of urban life, but of Western culture and modernity has been predominantly ocular-centric, or focused primarily on vision and seeing. David Levin, Martin Jay, and Jonathan Crary are among the many who have investigated the centrality of the visual paradigm in Western culture and modernity.¹¹

While this scholarly work has brought to light a significant aspect of modernity and modernism, it neglects the interest in sound and listening patently exhibited by German and Austrian writers, painters, musicians, and critics. This is not to argue that the aural experience of modernity was somehow more prominent, relevant, or revealing than experience rendered by the eye. Jonathan Sterne, for one, has warned that “render[ing] the history of the senses as a zero-sum game, where the dominance of one sense by necessity leads to the decline of another sense.”¹² Sound and listening need not, in other words, necessarily be construed as having been in opposition to, or in competition with, the visible and visuality. The goal is thus to provide a necessary addendum to, but not a replacement of, ocular-centric accounts of Austro-German culture around the turn of the century. The recuperation of sonic histories provides, as Marc Smith has put it, a “new

Königshausen und Neumann, 1999; and Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

¹⁰ See Karen Jacob, *The Eyes' Mind. Literary Modernism and Visual Culture*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001; Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002; and Andreas Huyssen, “Modernist Miniatures: Literary Snapshots of Urban Spaces.” *PMLA* 122, no. 1 (Jan., 2007): pp. 27-42.

¹¹ Martin Jay’s *Downcast Eyes* examines how vision underwent serious scrutiny in the twentieth century being increasingly considered inadequate both as philosophical trope and bodily function (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Jonathan Crary has shown how medical and technological advances in the nineteenth century replaced the Cartesian non-corporeal, transcendent meaning of “vision” with notions of subjective vision and physiological optics (*Techniques of the Observer*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992: 16); and contributions to David Levin’s *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* have investigated Western culture as being dominated by a “vision-generated, vision-centered interpretation of knowledge, truth, and reality” (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993: 2).

¹² Sterne, 16.

storyline” and thus grants new depth and texture to an area already studied.¹³ A goal of this work is to understand how the aural experience of modern life shaped aesthetic practices in early twentieth-century German-speaking Europe. A related aim is to uncover “sound’s imbrication in other modes of cultural appreciation and in alternative forms of knowledge making.”¹⁴

Focusing on urban life, as opposed to life in the countryside, should not be taken to imply that only city dwellers were exposed and attentive to changes in their acoustic environments. However, the city was the epicenter of novel sounds, and the place where new ideas relating to acoustics, aurality, and the human ear were developed and contested by artists, inventors, and scientists. It was in the city where everyone was all ears: even in fashion, the bob, smaller hats, shaved beards, and larger earrings all drew attention to the auricular organ.¹⁵

Urbanization and its concentration of industry, transport, commerce, and population in the city dramatically reshaped the everyday soundscape. This was particularly the case in Vienna, Berlin, and Munich, three cities that featured prominently in Strauss and Hofmannsthal’s professional biographies. Between 1880 and 1910, Vienna tripled in size, both in terms of its population and geographical scope. The same is true of Munich, while Berlin counted 2 million people in 1910 versus 1.1 million just thirty years earlier. With these sharp rises in population, construction noise was ever present as new buildings were erected, old ones renovated, new roads paved, old ones repaired and increasingly furnished with cobble stones. By the turn of the century, eighty percent of Vienna’s inner city streets would be cobbled, while Munich spent a record sum on the

¹³ Smith, 266.

¹⁴ Agnew, 2.

¹⁵ Schwartz, 490.

same project.¹⁶ While road construction was itself loud, the paving of roads also aggravated traffic noise, which rebounded off the walls of the increasingly taller buildings.¹⁷ Tracks for electric streetcars, tripled in Munich and expanded equally quickly in Vienna in the final decades of the century.¹⁸ The spatial expansion of the city and the geographical separation of working and living quarters, of shopping facilities, service industries, and cultural institutions, necessitated a higher degree of mobility and consequently new modes of transportation and increased traffic density. With its 26 streetcar lines and 5 bus routes, Berlin's Potsdamer Platz was the most congested square in Europe in the 1920s. The city was now home to an assortment of vehicles that contributed to what one writer called "the many-voiced chorus of street sounds." This included horse-drawn carriages, steam-powered and electric streetcars, automobiles, omnibuses, motorcycles, and tens of thousands of bikes.¹⁹ Each vehicle had its own acoustic signal, transforming the street into a cacophony of honking cars, yelling coachmen, jingling streetcar and bicycle bells, and the rat-a-tat of the newest fad: the bike tambourine, a sort of rattling drum that was meant to replace the bell.

The acoustic pandemonium was made even more prominent by residential overcrowding. The enormous population influx since the mid nineteenth century forced a vast majority of citizens of all classes to live in apartments, rather than houses, exposing them not only to the sounds of the streets but also to the racket of their immediate neighbors. Despite the building frenzy in those years, Vienna, in particular, suffered from an acute housing shortage. Only around one percent of Viennese resided in single-family

¹⁶ Kronegg, 286; Payer, "Age of Noise," 775.

¹⁷ Payer, 775.

¹⁸ Kronegg, 286; Payer, 775.

¹⁹ Payer, 777.

dwellings leaving the vast majority of its population in shared apartment buildings.²⁰ In Berlin, the majority of citizens rented poorly-insulated apartments.²¹ In old boarding houses and new apartment buildings alike, walls and ceilings were so porous that the sound of one's neighbor's life was muffled at best. Berliners complained about the poor insulation of their apartment buildings and the variety of sounds imposed on them by their tenement neighbors.²² Residents were inundated with the banging of doors and beating of rugs, practicing pianists and blaring phonographs, barking dogs, playing children, crying babies, footsteps, rolling wheels of baby cribs, and inescapably and everywhere yelling, gossiping, singing, and talking voices. Notwithstanding various civic ordinances regulating noise in Germany, a social movement emerged whose sole aim was to battle the tyranny of noise in everyday life. By 1910, Berlin, Munich, and Vienna, lacking anti-noise ordinances, had formed one or more commissions and associations to protest and counter the problem.

Striking, novel sounds were also heard in concert halls, opera houses, and cafés as music underwent its own reconfigurations in the early twentieth century. The music of the European tonal system saw major revisions as composers, most notoriously in Germany and Austria, steadily worked their way toward dissonance by eliminating traditional demarcations between music, sound, and noise. A musical avant-garde established itself, demanding that music be altogether “composed of sounds and noises,

²⁰ Janik/Toulmin, 49.

²¹ Lees, 159.

²² Complaints were plentiful in both Vienna and Berlin. See, for example, Alfred Fried, “Zwei Briefe.” *Recht auf Stille. Der Antirüpel* 1, no. 5 (1909): 83; Ludwig Fulda, “Antilärm-Enquete.” *Recht auf Stille. Der Antirüpel* 1, no. 3 (1909): 35; Grete Meisel-Heß, “Antilärm-Enquete.” *Recht auf Stille. Der Antirüpel* 1, no. 3 (1909): 37; Rudolph Fürst, “Antilärmiten.” *Recht auf Stille. Der Antirüpel* 1, no.4 (1909): 55-56; and Martin Havenstein, “Ueber die Notwendigkeit des Antilärmvereins.” *Der Antirüpel* 2, no. 4 (1910): 22.

rather than tones.”²³ Fundamental and defining features of classical music were abrogated, one after the next, leaving few familiar points of reference for the listener. This means that music listening became challenging in its own way. New audio technologies aggravated this further. Mark Katz stresses the emergence of new forms of listening in the early twentieth century which are customary today, but which raised both skepticism and awe in the years they evolved. The phonograph, for example, introduced the possibility of solitary music listening and the possibility of repeatedly listening to the same work.²⁴ Sophie Maisonneuve states that listening was “radicalized” once phonograph and radio became prominent, it became exclusively aural once the performer could no longer be seen.²⁵

By the turn of the century, the sounds of novelty, diversity, and density were permeating every corner of modern life. In addition to the changes of urban and musical sounds, scientists, doctors, inventors, and designers had been drawing further attention to the ear, developing neuro-physiological, anatomical, and cultural reassessments of human hearing and the physical structure of the ear, of hearing and of listening.²⁶ Sound engineers had made major advances in the invention of sound (re)production technologies having produced a long list of patents for audio devices since the mid nineteenth century. This included Leon Scott’s phonautograph (1857), Charles Croc’s paleophone (1877), Thomas Edison’s phonograph (1877), Emil Berliner’s gramophone (1887), and Valdemar Poulsen’s telegraphone (1898), all devices that made it possible to record and/or reproduce sound. Johann Reis and Graham Bell conducted experiments that

²³ Kursell, “Introductory Remarks,” 3.

²⁴ Katz, 8-47.

²⁵ Maisonneuve, 99.

²⁶ Schwartz, 487-492.

would lead to the development of various forms of microphones before and after the turn of the century (including those by Erwin Gerlach and Walter Schottky, Werner von Siemens, and Jacques and Pierre Curie). By the early twentieth century, almost all of these inventions were distributed in public and domestic places, making the phonograph's voice, the ringing telephone, and microphone-amplified performances and speeches an everyday experience.

Not surprisingly, the study of listening itself underwent major advances during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Scientists established that the ear was “no mere passive receptacle,” but a transducer and amplifier of sound.²⁷ This, as Hillel Schwartz put it, located the ear “within a crowd of assertive verbs rather than among a series of architectonic nouns.”²⁸ Neurologists, ear specialists, and engineers began studying the physiology of the human ear, the nervous system encompassing the ear, and its listening capabilities, including the residual and immediate impact of noise.²⁹ In 1863, the German physician Herrmann von Helmholtz published *Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen als physiologische Grundlage für die Theorie der Musik* (On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music), a study which sought to gain a better understanding of music by conducting a physiological study of sound and physiological and anatomical research on the ear. By understanding, for example, how the various qualities of tone are distinguished by the ear, he deduced the origin of the laws of harmony and tonality, thus bringing closer together what he called the acoustic process (*akustischer Vorgang*), on the one hand, and its “sound effect” (*Klangwirkung*) on the other. Helmholtz's work linked physiology, physics, music reception, and music

²⁷ Schwartz, 488.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 488.

²⁹ Krömer and Röpke quoted by Payer in “The Age of Noise”, 779.

aesthetics and theory. It marks the starting point of psychoacoustics, a field which drew active interests from numerous specialists after the turn of the century (among them psychologists Carl Stumpf and Wolfgang Köhler, and physicist Erich Schumann). In 1900, Erich von Hornbostel founded the phonogram archive in Berlin collecting sound documents (*Klangdokumente*) from all over the world, a project that embraced the revolutionary possibilities of sound capture wholeheartedly.

As a result of these scientific and technological discoveries, listening was also reassessed. Helmholtz had broken new ground by conceptualizing listening not merely in philosophical and aesthetic terms, but in terms of the physiology of the ear.³⁰ With his studies, he refuted the notion that hearing related the subject to the world in a subjective way.³¹ Highlighting the objectiveness of the ear, Helmholtz's research led to a break with the earlier concept of hearing as a matter of psychology.³² By the 1890s, Sigmund Freud had further problematized the function of hearing by developing the talking cure, a psychoanalytic treatment predicated on the doctor's ability to properly listen. Describing it as "free-floating attention" (*freischwebende Aufmerksamkeit*), he suggested an aural practice that would hover above everything that was said, neither favoring nor missing specific details uttered by the patient.³³ Freud's work engaged with various functions of the ear as they had been conceptualized in the late nineteenth century, contributing to the notion that hearing was at least partially dependent upon the mental faculty of listening.³⁴

Faced with uncommon sounds, new aural conditions, and an engagement with the acoustic world in so many aspects of modern life (e.g. the sciences, medicine, and

³⁰ Schulze, 9.

³¹ Kursell, "Sound Objects," 31.

³² *Ibid.*, 31.

³³ Freud, 357.

³⁴ Schwartz, 488.

fashion), many commented on their aural experiences and began to theorize sound. We can find them in literary texts (most prominently in Expressionist poetry and in *Arbeiterdichtung*), in journalistic writing, in critical essays on aesthetics and sociology, and in memoirs, diaries, and letters.³⁵ Many such examples will make an appearance in this dissertation, even as the main focus will be on the operas of Strauss and Hofmannsthal. Among the many critical commentaries and artistic representations of sound and listening that were produced in those years, their *oeuvre* offers a particularly promising, expansive, and in-depth account of the fin-de-siècle experience with the sounds of modern life.

For one thing, both collaborators were highly sensitive to their acoustic environments. Each man struggled with the urban cacophony, and chose to live outside the hustle and bustle of the city (Hofmannsthal in Rodaun, Strauss in Garmisch, small, bucolic towns with populations numbering fewer than ten thousand).³⁶ Hofmannsthal had explicitly moved to the country to find peace.³⁷ Once there, he imposed hours of silence on his family while he worked, and in his summer house in Altsausee, he went as far as installing double-paned doors to protect himself from acoustic disturbances.³⁸ His collaborator Strauss felt the same about disturbances, often writing to his wife Pauline how much he missed the quiet of his house in rural Garmisch amidst the urban racket, be

³⁵ For representations of the urban soundscape in the poetry of citizens from the working-class (*Arbeiterdichtung*) see, for example, Alfons Petzold's "Sehnsucht nach Stille," "Häuser am Abend," and "Großstadt"; and Gerrit Engelke's collection of poems *Dampforgel und Singstimme. Rhythmen. and Rhythmus des neuen Europa* (e.g. "Der Töneschichter" and "Der Ewige Herzklang").

³⁶ It has to be mentioned, however, that Garmisch more than doubled in size between 1900 and 1925 which must have created an increase of construction noise unusual for a town this size (from 4500 to more than 10,000).

³⁷ Hofmannsthal, "Antilärmiten," 53.

³⁸ Grieser, 188; Payer, "Herr von Hofmannsthal," 2.

it the din of Rome, the nightly racket at St. Vincent's port, or a honking-concert outside his hotel in Greece.³⁹

Their operas are also rich because of the timeframe and length of their collaboration. Hofmannsthal contacted Strauss for the first time in 1900, hoping to win the famous composer's aid in arranging music for a ballet he had written. Strauss politely declined. However, five years later he saw a performance of the poet's drama *Elektra*. Wanting to turn the drama into an opera, he took Hofmannsthal up on his offer of half a decade prior. They would work together until Hofmannsthal's death in 1929 (although Strauss continued working on their last opera, *Arabella*, until 1932). Their partnership spanned the three decades that transformed the acoustic and aural culture of everyday life. Furthermore, their collected works give us a massive amount of material to work with. Instead of having to rely on one or two collaborative products, we can draw on six full-length operas, as well as four hundred pages of correspondence. This gives a cultural historian the chance to identify which kinds of acoustic phenomena they registered textually, and how their representation or critique of them changed over time.

What gives further weight to working with this *oeuvre* is its sheer popularity at that time. This is not to say that the operas did not attract criticism. They did, and more than enough. But thousands of people wanted to attend performances, and the papers featuring critical debates about them circulated widely. Further, the operas not only drew in music specialists and a handful of well-off bourgeois music lovers, but attracted a vast audience from a broad social spectrum which suggests that their works spoke to the

³⁹ Strauss, "Briefe," 49; Strauss, "Strom der Töne," 252 and 300.

general population in important ways.⁴⁰ For the premier of *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), extra chartered trains rolled into Dresden. In that city alone, the opera boasted fifty performances in less than a year, drawing approximately 100,000 visitors.⁴¹ In short order, productions were mounted in other European cities: Nuremberg, Munich, Basel, Hamburg, Milan, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, and Amsterdam. It would be tenuous at best to trace striking changes of the acoustic culture in a set of works that had little or no followership to speak of. Part of my argument is that Strauss and Hofmannsthal recapitulated sounds and acoustic situations that were vividly present in the cultural imagination of their time. Audience members apprehended these representations and attended the operas faithfully, showing that these operas were encountered and appreciated as resolutely modern.

Finally, and most importantly, working with the operas of Strauss and Hofmannsthal offers a particularly promising vantage point. No other performance genre is suited better to the exploration of the acoustic and aural culture of that specific time. Opera boasts a soundscape made up by voices, words, bodies, and instruments. It has a diegetic and non-diegetic aspect that turns both audience and characters into listeners, creating an elaborate web of acoustic situations and aural responses.⁴² Furthermore, it has a dramatic element, allowing the staging of situations in which characters are exposed and react to their acoustic environments. In sum, opera has the means both to acoustically reconstruct modern sound phenomena (doing so through an eclectic set of sound

⁴⁰ Comparing the numbers of opera visitors with that of Dresden's population, Philipp Ther has calculated that, increased ticket prices notwithstanding, the majority of Dresden's 300,000 citizens must have seen Strauss's *Salome* and *Elektra* (Ther, 172).

⁴¹ Ther, 174.

⁴² I borrow the definition of diegetic versus non-diegetic sounds from screen art where the former denotes the sound world as it is perceived by the characters, while the latter refers to those sounds that are heard by the audience (e.g. the soundtrack).

producers), and to place these new sounds and aural situations within a dramatic setting, where their effect on the listener could be tested. In the Strauss/Hofmannsthal operas, the sounds of modern life became thematic material for a complex multimedial presentation.

Naturally, opera's blessing is also its curse. It leaves the scholar with the daunting task of having to attend to musical, dramatic, and poetic material as well as dramaturgical directions and details of performances. Each interpretative example in this dissertation embraces the many signifying layers of opera by providing strenuously inter-medial analyses. The libretto is examined for metaphoric innuendos, rhetorical devices, idiomatic allusions, and literary cross-references, while note is also taken of stage directions, dramatic development, as well as character outline and development. The score is analyzed for its harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic ideas, its dynamic structures, instrumentation, vocal representations, and timbres.

For the musical analyses in particular, the idea was to attend to these operas with the ear of the contemporary audience, and to get a sense of what they might have "heard" in these operas given their cognitive and social contexts.⁴³ Helpful here was Naomi André's concept of the "period ear," which describes the necessity and promise of this type of listening. Adapting Michael Baxandall's conceptualization of the "period eye," André stresses that the intended audience for an artwork "shared some of the same 'mental equipment' – methods for interpretation – that was culturally specific to that community."⁴⁴ Opera, like other artistic media, has embedded "understood codes" and they come alive when we "begin to appreciate how they originally fit into the everyday

⁴³ André, 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

experiences of their first intended audience.”⁴⁵ Like André, I want to listen to the associations that might have been evoked by specific sounds. Rather than venturing too deeply into Strauss’s abstruse harmonic constructs, I pay attention to the overall sound, or material outcome, of his and his collaborator’s techniques. Hofmannsthal himself suggested as much when he downplayed the music specialist’s tendency to only dissect compositional intricacies of the score, as opposed to simply “hearing.” Describing the importance of “sensing what matters in music,” he wrote: “Certain people who possess a great deal of musical knowledge, say, Korngold, must, on the other hand, lack this sense completely, for otherwise he would not misjudge these things so dismally on first hearing; for me it is just the first hearing that counts.”⁴⁶ By listening to these operas with the “period ear,” I look to recognize the kinds of sounds that permeated the city’s soundscape and make an appearance in these operas, and to pin down how audiences might have responded. The notoriously dubious Omniscient Shell in *Die Ägyptische Helena* turns into a telephone; the orchestral sound blending in *Ariadne auf Naxos* into the synthetic lo-fi buzz of the modern city; the predominance of the angry soprano in *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* into the feminists’ call for liberation; and the racket surrounding the Countess in *Der Rosenkavalier* into the noise of modern life.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁶ Correspondence, 417. “Dieser Sinn muß wieder so musikalisch gebildeten Individuen wie einem Korngold vollständig fehlen, sonst würde er nicht den Wert der Sachen beim ersten Hören so verkennen; bei mir ist das erste Hören entscheidend.” (Briefwechsel, 480); Luckily for Hofmannsthal, only a small group of their audience was able to conduct complex musical analyses. Particularly during post-premiere performances, their audience consisted of a broad social spectrum that included music savants and novices alike. To give only one example, five out of six Strauss/Hofmannsthal world premieres took place in Dresden, a city that was particularly dedicated to making opera accessible to everyone by offering, for example, “performances for the people” (*Volksvorstellungen*) on a weekly basis with tickets as cheap as ten cents (the price of a gallon of milk). Also, as Philip Ther has shown, the amount, detail, and quality of opera reviews in Dresden’s newspaper for the working class (*Arbeiterzeitung*) leaves no doubt about the fact that lower social classes were exposed to and familiar with these operas. This means that for many of them musical knowledge could not stand in the way of the more immediate, sensual type of hearing that Hofmannsthal had in mind (Ther 172).

In addition to analyzing the operas themselves, material is drawn from the correspondence between Strauss and Hofmannsthal, from the modernist literary canon (including works by Thomas Mann, Rainer Maria Rilke, Georg Heym, Gottfried Benn, and others) of the contemporaneous period in the history of literature, and from the incidental commentary provided by political activists, music critics, journalists, and ordinary residents of Vienna, Munich, and Berlin. By including the latter, we can reconstruct from this commentary particularly prominent sound phenomena and the social, political, and economic power relations in which they are imbricated.

This dissertation is an important contribution to three scholarly fields, German Studies, Musicology, and the relatively young area of sound studies. Sound historians have argued for research that traces past sounds and, through studying them, gains a fuller understanding of their social, cultural, and political contexts. This dissertation cuts across various important studies while supplementing them in significant ways. Like Alex Ross in *The Rest is Noise* (2007), I conduct a cultural history of the twentieth century by analyzing its music. Ross listens to the melodies, rhythms, and tonal structures of musical pieces, and hears in them personal, cultural, and political stories that underlie these works. While Ross provides an overview of modern sound across the European continent and the twentieth century, this dissertation zooms in on a specific time and place where music (and literature) engaged with the story of sound and listening itself. This specificity is also what distinguishes this study from Steven Connor's article "The Modern Auditory I" in which he argues that the sense of hearing has a "defining importance in modernity and beyond." As Connor moves relatively freely across national

borders and historical times, his essay gives a brief purview of a phenomenon that this dissertation seeks to study closer.

Other works have been influential, as well. Douglas Kahn's *Noise Water Meat* (2001), a history and theory of sound in the arts that covers major trends of acoustic experimentations in twentieth-century art while theorizing sound, noise, silence, and audio technology. In trying to locate "emphatic and exceptional sounds" of twentieth-century modernism (such as in the works of Jack Kerouac, the Futurists, John Cage, and George Antheil), Kahn studies modernist and postmodernist artworks that very evidently invested in sound. While Strauss and Hofmannsthal's sound explorations were less transgressive in terms of traditional aesthetics, and thus less evident, they represent an early stage of a critical reflection on sound in art and in everyday life. More importantly, they fulfill both aesthetic directions in which Kahn is interested: their works are "soundful in themselves," but also "contingent on ideas of sound, voice, and aurality."⁴⁷

This dissertation is related in content to Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past* (2003). Sterne shows how social and cultural conditions in Germany's long nineteenth century gave rise to a fundamental reform of the nature of sound, the faculty of hearing, and the practices of listening. It ultimately, so he argues, lay the groundwork for the conception and invention of modern audio technologies. At the core of his, and my own, study is the claim that "sound, hearing, and listening are central to the cultural life of modernity (...) and foundational to modern modes of knowledge, culture, and social organization."⁴⁸ Yet, my focus is on the response to audio technologies (rather than the starting position) as well as on additional acoustic and aural situations that shaped

⁴⁷ Kahn, 3.

⁴⁸ Sterne, 2.

modern culture. The spotlight of this dissertation lies not on technology but on the development in the German and Austrian context.

The past ten years have seen a sharp rise in studies of the history of sound in German-speaking countries. Particularly important for this dissertation was *Die Moderne Hören* (2008) by Hansjakob Ziemer, who contends that change and the notion of crisis in early the twentieth century took place by way of hearing. Reconstructing concert life in Frankfurt in the first third of the twentieth century, he shows how the concert hall became an urban forum for the engagement with and communication about modernity. The history of this institution mirrors the history of the cultural, political, and social contexts in which it is embedded. In his focus on the role of listening within concert performances, Ziemer refers little to the aural conditions (and their reevaluations) outside the music hall which, one might claim, were instrumental in the establishment of the kind of aural *commitment* that Ziemer identifies in concert culture. Finally, the anthology *Sound Matters* (2005) hones in on sound production and reception in the nineteenth and twentieth century in an effort to investigate the role of sound in the “articulation of meanings, identities, pleasures, and communities in modern Germany.”⁴⁹ Noting the underappreciated role of sound in the making and representation of German culture, the anthology does not cover the first three decades of the twentieth century, thus ignoring the timeframe that this dissertation argues was particularly important for the popular development of an awareness of sound’s extra-acoustic functions.

Beside these cultural-historical insights, this dissertation also makes an important, and long overdue, contribution to scholarship on Hofmannsthal. Despite the vast body of existing research on the poet, his operatic works remain on the margin of critical

⁴⁹ Koepnick, 9.

purviews.⁵⁰ Literary scholars and cultural historians have shied away from his libretti. One reason might as well be that the opera libretto suffers from a low reputation in terms of its poetic promises. Another is certainly the issue of the libretto being part of opera, a genre that is to many, as David Levin has put it, daunting, tacky, dated, bulky, and too bombastic.⁵¹ As a result, the extant scholarship on Hofmannsthal's operas consists of monographs that are more often than not ahistorical in their approach, while being treated, if at all, as isolated narratives disjoined from their operatic context.

Taking on the poet's operatic creations allows me to uncover aesthetic concepts that are pivotal in the understanding of his extra-operatic body of work, yet which have gone unnoticed within the scholarship of his work. This is for example the case with his theory of tone (tone as sound as well as intonation of the voice (*Ton* and *Tonfall*)) which is a central puzzle piece in the poet's constant search for an aesthetic mode of expression that goes beyond language. The problem of the insufficiency of language he and his contemporaries thematized as a *Sprachkrise* turns out to be inconspicuously solved by way of sound. In providing this new insight into Hofmannsthal's aesthetic, this study also makes a case for the validity of further inquiries into the twentieth-century libretto in general. Hofmannsthal is only one of many literary writers who turned to the genre of opera after the turn of the century. In the German and Austrian context, these include Kurt Weill, Stefan Zweig, Hans Adler, Marie Pappenheim, Gottfried Benn, Oskar

⁵⁰ To name only a few recent and important studies on Hofmannsthal: Benjamin Bennett, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; Adrian DelCaro, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Poets and the Language of Life*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993; and Jacques LeRider, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Historismus und Moderne in der Literatur der Jahrhundertwende*, edited by Leopold Federmaier. Wien: Böhlau, 1997;

⁵¹ Levin, 1.

Kokoschka, Ingeborg Bachmann and many more. As was the case with his libretti, theirs largely suffered the same marginalization within literary scholarship.

Finally, this dissertation makes an important contribution to musicology, both in terms of the scholarship on Richard Strauss and in recent revisions of musical modernism. Strauss's operas have long suffered from a poor reputation, with critics holding that the composer had regressed, both aesthetically and critically, after *Salome* and *Elektra*. With *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), his second collaboration with Hofmannsthal, Strauss was often accused of having abandoned the promising road toward a radically new kind of music that might dispense with obsolete musical forms. One of the fiercest critics of the composer was Theodor Adorno, who famously condemned what he considered an aesthetic and artistic populism on Strauss's part.⁵² Many joined him in considering Strauss's post-*Elektra* operas to be removed from and uncritical of contemporary social, cultural and political developments. By reconceptualizing Strauss's operas as a type of historical recording device, the fallacy of these assessments could be revealed: rather than being indifferent to historical change, the operas are deeply embedded within the techno-scientific and socio-political changes of his time, and preserve these for contemplation and critique. The composer's continuous creation of novel sound effects, his music of noise, and his (collaborative) re-design of the female figure are only some of the manifestations of his continuous engagement with contemporary issues.

Ultimately this *oeuvre* must be firmly positioned within the modernist canon. This called not only for a new approach to reading these operas, but also for a revision of the

⁵² See his treatise "Richard Strauss: Zum 60.Geburtstage: 11. Juni 1924." In *Schriften*. Vol 18, 254-262. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Tiedemann 1976.

musicological concept of modernism itself. Throughout the twentieth century, musical modernism was primarily defined in terms of dissonance, which was ultimately a sign of a critical and progressive endeavor on part of the composer. Increasingly, the term modernism became associated with skepticism, even antagonism, towards traditional form(s), and consequently with musical dissonance. In recent years, researchers have revisited this definition. As Daniel Albright put it, “a composer can be original in dimensions other than harmonic novelty.”⁵³ The emphasis has shifted away from novelty and progression toward the plurality of styles and originality.

This paradigmatic change in the definition of modernism has boosted the study of the works of Richard Strauss, undoing some of the shortcomings mentioned above. Scholars including Bryan Gilliam, Charles Youmans, and Alex Ross have reexamined the scores of Strauss finding that the composer has a multifaceted and “idiosyncratic approach to tonality, form, and aesthetics.”⁵⁴ Bryan Gilliam has argued that the composer “confronted the problem of modernity head on.”⁵⁵ According to Gilliam, he recognized “a remarkable disunity in his contemporary world” which comes out in his music that is precisely diverse, maybe even fragmented, in its styles.⁵⁶ Daniel Albright includes specifically Strauss’s operas with Hofmannsthal in his anthology on modernism seeing in them the “strong thrust toward the verges of aesthetic experience” so typical for

⁵³ Albright, 11. Similar revisions have been taking place for literary modernism. The collection of essays edited by Lynne Hapgood and Nancy Paxton (*Outside Modernism. In Pursuit of the English Novel, 1900-30*. New York: St.Martin’s Press, 2000), for example, attempts to overturn longstanding boundaries that have been made in literary criticism between an experimental modernism that relies on new forms and a putatively outdated critical realism. The essays in their collection highlight how, in one and the same modernist work, both techniques interact and co-exist in the same text. Other examples of this revision include the two volume collection of essays on modernism by Eysteinnsson and Liska (*Modernism*. Philadelphia : J. Benjamins Pub., 2007) as well as Michael Whitworth edited volume *Modernism* (Malden, MA : Blackwell Pub., 2007).

⁵⁴ Ross, 196.

⁵⁵ Gilliam, *The Life of Richard Strauss*, 3.

⁵⁶ Gilliam, *New Perspectives*, ix.

modernist music.⁵⁷ The limits of aesthetic experience are tested through the tension they carry by striving for both models “opera as seizure of reality and (...) opera as fun.”⁵⁸ *Ariadne auf Naxos*, for example, is both profoundly philosophical and “good humored entertainment.”⁵⁹ Unfortunately, despite this new definition and Strauss’s rehabilitation in musicological scholarship, many studies continue to stay on safe terrain either by continuing to strictly conduct musical analyses, or by upholding the long-standing pre- and post-*Elektra* caesura.⁶⁰ For example, most studies that have explored Strauss’s investment in modernity continue to focus on and conclude with *Elektra*. This includes Lawrence Kramer’s *Opera and Modern Culture*; Richard Taruskin’s *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*; and Alex Ross’s *The Rest is Noise*.

Another issue is the schism between musical and literary definitions of modernism, the latter having the strong component of wanting to look at the historical backdrop in them. The idea is that the modernist literary and cultural practices are embedded in (and not, or not only reactionary to) the radical social, political, and cultural changes of modernity.⁶¹ In the recent expansion of the definition of modernism in music, this aspect has not been given the weight that it deserves. Alex Ross, for example, who considers Strauss a modernist, finds that the composer is a difficult case for scholars because of his “various stylistic orientations” and the lack of a “clearly demarcated body of technique.”⁶² These characteristics make Strauss a model for modernist composers. Yet, few scholars take into consideration the cultural-historical context of his work. As a

⁵⁷ Albright, 11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁶⁰ See, for example, the majority of the contributions in *New Perspectives* edited by Bryan Gilliam.

⁶¹ Danius, pp.10.

⁶² Ross, 197.

result, the Strauss/Hofmannsthal operas have not been inspected for their contemporary critical content, nor have they been used as a medium to interrogate modern culture.

Daniel Albright, who makes a distinction between modernism in music as opposed to opera, also proposes that the latter, i.e. opera embedded within the changes of modernity, can take on certain defining (yet not restrictive) features of its period.⁶³ Meta-opera, *Zeitoper*, Greek tragedy revisited, opera as fun versus opera as seizure of reality (and the tension between both) are among his examples. Each one of these specific forms underlies a self-conscious, critical, intellectual, and often cerebral engagement with modernity. In this dissertation, Strauss's operas are positioned within these outlines of operatic modernism. Taking on the shape of a revisited Greek tragedy, a meta-opera, or *Zeitoper*, all of their operas seize aspects of the (contemporary) reality they faced, whether in the form of philosophical interrogations, psychoanalytic references, or political critique. Individuality, morality, marriage, sex, gender, and political power are thematized and worked through in these works. Sound and aurality, on the other hand, are the aesthetic and conceptual tools in the reflection, mediation, conveyance, and critique of these topics. Sound colors, noises, angry or bodiless voices become manifestations of an artwork that is reflective of the contemporary moment. By examining the Strauss/Hofmannsthal *oeuvre* as a holistic project, attending to opera's multiple signifying layers, and illuminating their acoustic and aural explorations as a mediation of modernity, I am able to position these operas within the modernist canon of Austro-German literature and music.

Following this introduction are four chapters. Each one is tuning in to one or two specific modern sounds, acoustic situations, and aural practices. The first chapter exposes

⁶³ Albright, pp.103.

how the composer and the librettist venture into the realm of sound, both as a medium and as a concept, finding new and in their eyes (ears) more meaningful modes of representation. Strauss builds on the tone-coloring techniques of his predecessors (most notably Richard Wagner) to create an orchestral sound blend that bears a striking resemblance to the stratified and homogenous background noise that modern technologies had brought into the city. In assigning this type of sound blend a distinct dramatic function within the opera, Strauss not only makes sound *qua* the medium or the material presence of tones an essential carrier of musical and dramatic meaning. His partner Hofmannsthal also finds in sound a mode of expression which is apart from language but can also supplement it. He does so through his conceptualization of the tone: each dramatic scene (and each opera as a whole) is to carry its own tone, that is to say a mood or atmosphere. In addition to that, he envisions his singer-actors as striking a specific tone of voice (as they sing) making, like Strauss, dimensions of characters and plots accessible only to those audience members who apply their own “sonic sensibility.”

Chapter two works with the urban noise which had become so incessant and loud after the century’s turn that, for the first time in history, a social movement emerged that was solely dedicated to fighting the acoustic disturbance. This chapter shows how the Strauss/Hofmannsthal operas participate in both noise-making as well as the critical discourse surrounding it. Through musical and poetic means, they reproduce urban noise, that is to say they recreate what its constitutive features were widely held to be. In their aesthetic noise-making, they joined avant-garde performers who sought to bring the din of modern life into the concert hall. Unlike the avant-garde, Strauss and Hofmannsthal were not interested in duplicating single sounds, but strove to recreate the acoustic

physiognomy of city noise (including its eclecticism, polyphony, and asymmetric rhythms). Unlike the avant-garde, they did not argue for noise to be music (as in “desired” and “aesthetically pleasing”), but tried to create the former with the latter, thereby foregrounding the structural affinity between both. And unlike them, they did not glorify noise, and instead expounded on its negative effects: characters exposed to it struggle with spatial disorientation, nervous excitement, and cognitive inertia. These distinctions are important to draw out, because Strauss and Hofmannsthal’s operatic noise represents common attitudes about the urban racket, both in its form and its impact.

The third chapter listens to the predominant and dominating female characters of their *oeuvre*, and analyzes them against the backdrop of women’s growing acoustic presence in public life, and with respect to the then-emerging women’s movement in Germany and Austria. It is argued that the operas are home to a female acoustic: through a newly-found vocal audacity and aural acuity, women protagonists demarcate a space for themselves (the phonic space) that is self-governed. In doing so, they turn the acoustic realm into a battlefield, a space where they can counter and renegotiate traditional and normative gender roles. Elektra, Sophie (*Der Rosenkavalier*), and the Woman (*Die Frau Ohne Schatten*) turn into representatives of contemporary women who relied on the voice and ear as a conceptual and rhetorical tool, as well as an acoustic weapon in their fight against political and sexual suppression. Listening to these operas, I argue, always also involves listening to the politics of sound at play in the feminist’s fight for emancipation and equality after the turn of the century.

Chapter four draws attention to technologies that had become part of everyday life and generated new and curious aural conditions. The amplifying horn of the phonograph,

for example, left the singer invisible. In their staging of unique settings, such as a telephone conversation on the opera stage, or an opera-turned-silent film (*Der Rosenkavalier*), Strauss and Hofmannsthal explore a perceptual mode that mitigates the lack of visual or aural information imposed by new technologies. As scholars have highlighted the dissociation of the senses in discursive and artistic practices since the late nineteenth century, Strauss and Hofmannsthal built operatic (or cinematographic) situations in which the technological separation of the senses is superseded by an aesthetics of synesthesia. Repeatedly, we can find in their works a mode of representation whereby one sense compensates for another's shortcoming. In the telephonic scenes in *Die Ägyptische Helena*, the visible world is made accessible through listening. In their silent film *Der Rosenkavalier*, sounds and acts of hearing are mediated visually.⁶⁴ By including other examples of synaesthesia in contemporary art and thought (e.g. Rilke's essay "Ur-Geräusch"), I stress that experiences with modern technologies, as well as artistic representations thereof, were heterogeneous and diverging.

In these operas, sound surfaces in all shapes. It appears as phenomenon and concept; as muse and disturbance; as political tool and distracting device; and in the end, even as a visual entity. The ear is tested accordingly, being variously over-burdened and under-stimulated. Its responsibility is vast, alleviating or aggregating a sense of disorientation. In this dissertation, I listen to these operas the same way that Musil's *Erweckte* listens to the city at night. From the mere sound of footsteps, he is able to deduce sex, age, mood, and destiny of the walker. The same can be done with this operatic *oeuvre* which resonates in so many layers, and forms the experience of modern

⁶⁴ Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Richard Strauss reworked their opera *Der Rosenkavalier* into a silent film in the mid 1920s.

life in early twentieth-century Germany and Austria. Time and again, the acoustic realm is presented as an important arena where struggles of power, meaning, and identity are played out. Listening to the operas means listening to a past, which, as tautological as it might seem, was encountered largely by the ear. The advice by the nurse in *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*, their fourth opera, comes to its full unfolding, when she says: “Hören ist verstehen.” (Hearing is understanding.)⁶⁵ By listening to these operas, we not only begin to hear bits and pieces of past sounds, but also, and more importantly, witness the gradual understanding of the role that sound and aurality plays in social organization. Seen in this way, the operas of Strauss and Hofmannsthal document a realization that began to take root in the early twentieth century and which has become the core of today’s sound studies, namely that sound is more than just a technical-physical emanation or musical-aesthetical imagination. It is a tangible and rich artifact of our sentiments, emotions, and thoughts, and thus instrumental in the configuration of society and culture.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ *Die Frau Ohne Schatten. Libretto*, 34 (English, 17).

⁶⁶ Schulze, 11.

Chapter 1: Operatic Sound Effects

In October 1912, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, the third finished opera of Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, premiered in the Hoftheater in Stuttgart. Four months later, it was performed in Basel, where the reviewer of the *Basler Zeitung* somewhat unexpectedly writes:

Eine unbezahlbare Persiflage der Klänge, wie sie einem etwa entgegenschmettern, wenn man nächtlicherweise vom Kohlenberg nach dem Barfüßerplatz um die Ecke biegt oder an den Wirtschaften des Markplatzes vorbeigeht.

(An invaluable persiflage of the sounds that dash toward you, when you walk around the corner at night coming from the Kohlenberg and walking toward the Barfüßerplatz, or when passing the pubs on the market place.⁶⁷)

This is not necessarily the kind of association one would expect a contemporary listener to draw from *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Of the many things that the opera is known for, sounding like the downtown of an early twentieth-century city is not one of them. The opera has instead become known for its beautiful music, Zerbinetta's ear-splitting aria, or the union of spoken theatrical performance with sung opera.⁶⁸ Yet, as this review suggests, the ears of the critic recognized something distinctly familiar in *Ariadne*, an instrumental and vocal blend that evoked the humming and buzzing of the city at night. The reviewer's comment points us toward a key ingredient in the operatic aesthetic of

⁶⁷ K.N., *Basler Nachrichten*, 1913.

⁶⁸ This was the case in the first (1912) version of the opera where only the second part was opera (the first part being Hofmannsthal's adaptation of Molière's play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. The second (1916) and later versions were set to music throughout.

Strauss and Hofmannsthal. They were drawn to sound, both as a medium and as conceptual tool.

Strauss's music draws the listener's attention toward the sound of the work, to what Michael Polth described as the "material reality" of tones.⁶⁹ In doing so, it builds on techniques employed by his predecessors, most notably, but not exclusively, Wagner. Strauss's work inaugurates a musical moment in which *sound* stopped being merely a fortuitous side-effect of *music*; rather, music was constructed such that new and extraordinary sounds and tone colors could be created.

In making sound a constitutive and constructive element of music composition, Strauss tapped into this new compositional resource to create a music whose elements seemingly had the same acoustic consistency of the soundscape of the city. He did that by mastering the art of sound blending (*Mischklang*), an exercise in tone coloring that resulted in the synthetic and homogenous sound cloud so characteristic of the modern city. Transcending its role as mere medium, sound is ultimately even assigned a dramatic function in these operas. In an analysis of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, I show how sound is assigned a dramatic function: Bacchus, who is accompanied by an intense orchestral sound blend, represents a fresh start for the exiled Ariadne whom he takes from the island as his bride. Here, blends of sound turn into an acoustic symbol of change, newness, and innovation; they resound whenever characters face a turning point in their lives (*peripeteia*).

Strauss was not alone in his exploration of sound in art. He collaborated with a poet whose critical, literary, and operatic work was marked by a distinct sense of auditory imagery. Whereas Strauss's compositions explored the material and dramatic dimensions

⁶⁹ Polth, 332.

of sound, Hofmannsthal's libretti refined a *tonal poetics*. While scholars have given much attention to the role of visuality in his writing, Hofmannsthal's work with the literal and idiomatic meaning of tone has been oddly overlooked, and this despite the fact that he had grappled with tonality as an element of poetic expression since at least the 1890s.⁷⁰ Hofmannsthal considered it essential for a poet to engage all levels of tone to enhance the expressivity of a literary piece. This included the sound of a word or a lyrical line (*Ton, Klang*); the tone of the voice (*Tonfall*); and the tone (or atmosphere) of a poem, dramatic scene, or entire opera (*Ton*).

Keeping *Ton* in mind, Hofmannsthal composed libretti which revealed dimensions of characters and actions with means other than language. On the one hand, he sought, as he had done in his poetry for many years, to impart his operas (and each respective scene) with a specific mood or atmosphere by creating a specific tone, or undertone. On the other, he made the singer-actor strike a specific vocal tone (*Tonfall*) with his or her voice. In his libretti, exhaustive instructions strove to regulate the tone of singer-actors' voices (in addition, or despite, the fact that they had to sing), thus giving the audience an additional opportunity to identify personality traits, implicit motives, secret desires and subconscious fears of the characters. One among many modernist writers who regarded language with deep skepticism (*Sprachskepsis*), Hofmannsthal

⁷⁰ Herrmann Broch's book *Hofmannsthal und Seine Zeit* (1955) is an early example of a study that emphasizes Hofmannsthal's work to be defined and framed by his visual memory. Current studies that examine the role of visuality and of the image in Hofmannsthal's writing include Sarah S. Painitz, "Visualizing Hofmannsthal's 'Das Märchen der 672. Nacht.'" *Journal of Austrian Studies*, 46, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 103-123; Margaret Olin, "From One Dark Shore to the Other. The Epiphany of the Image in Hugo von Hofmannsthal and W.G. Sebald ." In *Touching Photographs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012; Friedmar Apel, *Das Auge liest mit. Zur Visualität der Literatur*. München: Hanser, 2010; Sabine Schneider, *Die Verheißung der Bilder. Das andere Medium in der Literatur um 1900*. Tübingen: Max Niemeier Verlag, 2006. Andreas Huyssen, "Modernist Miniatures: Literary Snapshots of Urban Spaces." *PMLA*, 122, no. 1 (Jan., 2007): pp. 27-42 and "The Disturbance of Vision in Vienna Modernism." *Modernism/Modernity*, 5, no. 3 (September 1998): 33-47; and Mihaela Bancila's dissertation *The Writer's Eye. On Vision in Hoffmann, Hofmannsthal and Musil*. University of Virginia, 2002.

appropriates an acoustic concept as a means to circumvent speech's shortcoming. Sound, as both medium and concept, becomes an essential theoretical component of Strauss-Hofmannsthal's aesthetic process. As a result, their operas boast a sound system that is as complex and intricate as never before; hearing these operas, then, was for contemporary listeners an exercise in the refinement of listening proficiency. Like the urban citizen, operagoers are exposed to, and must make sense of, acoustic novelties and are encouraged to always listen carefully and critically.

The premiere of a new opera by Strauss and Hofmannsthal was eagerly anticipated by critics and opera lovers who were curious about the latest artistic turns the composer and his librettist had taken. In contemporary newspaper reviews, critics rarely agreed on whether the current opus was a success or not; one critic often praised an artistic decision that another condemned. Yet all agreed on one point: the Strauss/Hofmannsthal operas had a unique and never-heard-before sound. The composers thus earned the nicknames *Klanghexer*, *Klangklingsor*, and *Klangtechniker* (sound-magician, sound-warlock, sound technician).⁷¹ *Elektra* was applauded for its sound magic (*Klangzauber*), its intoxicating sonority (*berauschende Klangwelt*), and the extraordinary fullness of its sound (*Klangfülle*; *Flut an Lauten*).⁷² Strauss, the critics suggested, not only worked with music, but in fact with sounds (*Ton-, Klang-, und Geräuschfluten*), as well.⁷³ *Der Rosenkavalier* was praised for its "tone jewelry" (*Tönegeschmeid*), as for its dramatic and novel combinations of sound, which the composer was said to have created

⁷¹ Kastner, *Berliner Morgenpost*, 1928; Schmitz, *Dresdner Nachrichten*, 1928.

⁷² R.B., *Fremden-Blatt*, 1909; Schmid, *Kunstwart*, 1909; O.S., *Dresdner Journal*, 1913.

⁷³ O.S., *Dresdner Journal*, 1913; Prinzhorn, *Fremden-Blatt*, 1909.

through his “kaleidoscopic play with tones”.⁷⁴ The same observation was made for their third opera, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, where one critic proposed that audience members were struck by the “sonic allure” (*Klangreiz*) and the subtlety and heterogeneity of the opera’s instrumentation.⁷⁵ *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* was admired for the supreme evolvement of sound resulting in acoustic effects (or “sound marvels”) that once again were felt to have never been heard before.⁷⁶ Reviewers of *Die Ägyptische Helena* also highlighted the wizardry and “hocus-pocus of vocal and instrumental sound” and commended the composer for having devised “captivating sounds of Protean mutability.”⁷⁷ In reviews of their last opera, *Arabella*, Strauss was once again lauded for being gifted with a fastidious auditory imagination.⁷⁸ In the many reviews that followed each premiere (and later, each performance), the operas’ sound stood in the spotlight of attention. While other musical, dramatic, and poetic decisions earned contradictory responses, critics were unanimous in their admiration for the acoustic surprises that welcomed them each time they attended a new Strauss/Hofmannsthal opera.

These reviewers identified an aspect of music composition that Strauss started exploring in unprecedented ways during his collaboration with Hofmannsthal, an aspect that is known to be difficult to describe. Tobias Janz, an expert on the uses of sound and tone color in Wagner’s Ring cycle, stresses the difficulty of studying the sound of a work given the lack of precise and established terminologies, a language with which to describe and analyze this aspect of music compositions. Janz defines sound as the

⁷⁴ W.B., *Neue Badener Landeszeitung*, 1914; Hellmers, *Weser-Zeitung*, 1911; Hildebrand, *Mülhauser Tagblatt*, 1911; Author Unknown, *Mainzer Anzeiger*, 1911.

⁷⁵ K.N., *Basler Nachrichten*, 1913; Günther, *Vogtländischer Anzeiger*, 1927; LeBeau, *Karlsruher Badeblatt*, 1913.

⁷⁶ Schmidt, *Berliner Tageblatt*, 1919; Krebs, *Chemnitzer Neueste Nachricht*, 1919.

⁷⁷ Korngold, *Neue Freie Presse*, 1928; Kastner, *Berliner Morgenpost*, 1928; Aber, *Leipziger Neuesten Nachrichten*, 1928; Bienenfeld, *Neue Wiener Journal*, 1928; Pisling-Boas, *Nationalzeitung*, 1928.

⁷⁸ Schmitz, *Dresdner Nachrichten*, 1933.

“sensual and qualitative dimension of music” (he also describes it as the “sensual presence of music”).⁷⁹ With this definition, he underscores that sound is not only an “objectively measurable characteristic of music,” but is also fundamentally tied to the “perspective given by the experience,” and thus a matter of (subjective) perception.⁸⁰ This is also the case with timbre, or tone color: that which Schoenberg has dubbed “the second dimension of tone.”⁸¹ The timbre of a sound is often thought of as the “the audible difference,” or, as the Grove Music Dictionary defines it, “that which distinguishes the quality of tone or voice of one instrument or singer from another.”⁸² Timbre is the reason why sounds that share pitch and volume still differ: “[A] tuba and a trumpet playing the same note at the same volume differ audibly. Two people singing that same note sound different from each other and from both the tuba and trumpet.”⁸³ Strauss’s work exemplifies both conceptions: he continuously reshaped the sound of his orchestra, and he did so in large parts by experimenting with timbre. Given the difficulty of critically discussing this awkwardly subjective component of music, there exist only a handful of studies that explore how and why Strauss engaged with sound and timbre, and did so specifically in the operas that he created with Hofmannsthal. And this is the case despite his lasting fame as “sound magician” and his own explicit discussion of the topic.

One only has to turn to his introduction to Hector Berlioz’s *Instrumentationslehre* (1904) to glimpse Strauss’s own fascination with composers who exhibited what he calls “an extraordinary sense for sound” (*Klangsin*n).⁸⁴ In this introduction to the theory of

⁷⁹ Janz, 7.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸¹ Lewinski, 357; Schoenberg, 419.

⁸² O’Callaghan, 88.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁸⁴ Strauss, *Instrumentationslehre*, ii, iv.

instrumentation written for students of composition and conducting, he highlights the compositional advances in the nineteenth century that have resulted in a richer, denser, and more colorful orchestral sound. Weber, Berlioz, Liszt, and particularly Wagner are identified as having broken new ground by subtly refining and differentiating sound (*Klangdifferenzierungen*), and by discovering new tone-color possibilities (*koloristische Möglichkeiten*).⁸⁵ Repeatedly, Strauss turns his admiration toward Wagner who, building on Berlioz's achievements, succeeded in creating an "unerhörte Klangpoesie."⁸⁶ By making a handful of technical changes, Strauss claims, Wagner opened the door for unprecedented "sound miracles" to take shape.⁸⁷

As Strauss turns toward the nineteenth century in his discussion of sound-sensitive composers, he points to a moment in the history of Western classical music which Adorno would later dub "the emancipation of sound" ("die Verselbstständigung des klanglichen Elements").⁸⁸ Though sound had long been considered a more or less incidental byproduct of music, around 1800 composers started to actively engage the sound, that is to say the medium, of their music compositions. One of the main ways of doing that was by addressing the timbre of instruments and the orchestra as a whole. While sound and tone-color had been an "unconscious after-effect," composers now tried to give "the materiality (*dem Stofflichen*) of a tone an individual form."⁸⁹ To put it simply, they deliberately "composed" timbre, just as they had always done with melody, harmony, or rhythm. The sound of a musical piece, or more specifically its component

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, iii.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, iii.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, iii.

⁸⁸ Adorno, *Résumés*, 499.

⁸⁹ Lewinski, 357; Polth, 333.

timbres, were no longer an incidental byproduct, or, as Adorno has put it dryly, “an accident.”⁹⁰

Strauss, evidently fascinated by this development, participated in this experimental process. Looking particularly to Berlioz and Wagner, he applied some of their most direct methods of broadening the variety of tone colors: the use of novel instruments, the expansion of instrumental families, and the development of unique styles of playing. For instance, Berlioz had his musicians play *col legno*, a technique where the strings hit the wooden part of the bow. And Wagner expanded drastically the wood wind section, an instrumental family that houses the most diverse and individual timbres. Having never been shy to explore the orchestra’s ability to (re)produce novel and often uncannily realistic sounds during his years as a tone poet, Strauss continued to add to his repertoire of acoustic novelties in his Hofmannsthal operas. *Elektra* and *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*, for instance, boast some of the largest orchestrations in music history: the former demands one hundred and ten players while the latter requires one hundred and sixty instruments. In those two and the remaining four works, the orchestra pit repeatedly housed new instruments, or those atypical for this genre, including piano, celesta, harmonium, basset horn (alto clarinet), and the heckelphone (a type of oboe). The orchestras also featured types of instruments that a contemporary described as “sound producers” (*Geräuscherzeuger*), such as the tamtam, the ratchet, sleigh bells, and the whip (*die Rute*).⁹¹

Yet, working with instruments could only add so many new sounds and timbres, and if one reads the introduction to *Instrumentationslehre* carefully, it becomes clear that

⁹⁰ Adorno, *Résumés*, 499.

⁹¹ Schmidt, *Kunstwart*, 1909.

Strauss was out for something more, something that Richard Wagner pioneered and that would serve as a model for Strauss's own "unmistakably Straussian" sound.⁹² Wagner's exploration of sound and timbre was groundbreaking, in that he extended his methods to include dimensions of the compositional text (*Tonsatz*).⁹³ Thus starting with *Lohengrin*, Wagner shaped the harmonic, melodic, dynamic, and instrumental structures of his operas such that a specific orchestral sound could be produced. In so doing, he was able to create the kind of sound blend (*Mischklang*) that became the new foundation for the orchestral sound.⁹⁴ Building on techniques developed by Wagner, Strauss made sound blending his pet project. This allowed him to cover his orchestra with the kind of synthetic sound blanket that the reviewer of the *Basler Zeitung* associated with the city at night.

A *Mischklang* is achieved by intertwining instruments in a way that make it impossible to make out the separate sound producers that are involved.⁹⁵ Janz offers a list of Wagner's techniques which includes the doubling of wind instruments; the blending of timbres of wind and brass instruments; the envelopment of a melodic phrase or harmony with the so-called *Rauscheffekte* of cymbals, timpani, and the tamtam; *Kopplung* or coupling, through which instruments from the same family play triads or octaves of the same horizontal line; and, finally, cross-fading or elision, where instruments hold a tone so it carries into the next set of tones (*Überblendung*, *Pedalisierung*).⁹⁶

⁹² Maehder, 149.

⁹³ Janz, 109; Polth, 331.

⁹⁴ Michael Polth describes in more detail how the string section used to provide this neutral foundation (338).

⁹⁵ Polth, 331 and 338.

⁹⁶ Janz, 107-20.

One other technique, which Janz does not mention, but which Strauss admired the most in Wagner's writing, rested on the idea of ultimate polyphony: instruments which traditionally played an ancillary role for the melodic line of a piece (second violins, second winds, violas, celli, bass instruments), became essential contributors to it. In his introduction Strauss writes:

And only truly meaningful polyphony can disclose the loftiest tone-miracles [*Klangwunder*] of the orchestra. A score with awkward or just indifferent midrange and bass tones [*Mittel- und Unterstimmen*] will rarely lack a certain harshness; it will never have the brilliant sonority of a piece in which the second wind instruments, the second violins, violas, violoncelli and basses also take part in the soulful enunciation of beautifully curved melodic lines.⁹⁷

Instruments that used to have a filler position (*Füllstimmen*) were now given a role where they became speaking individuals within the orchestral choir.⁹⁸ Unlike before, a melody was now a compound of many instrumental performers, so intricately intertwined that each contributing instrument was no longer identifiable by ear. What was heard was a dramatic melting of instrumental sounds (*Klangverschmelzung*). Taking the path that Wagner had mapped out, Strauss became so adept at sound blending that he was able to produce seemingly pitch-less chords that could no longer be recognized as being a chord in the first place.⁹⁹

Significantly, Strauss incorporated sound blends for the first time in the score of *Salome*, which he began to compose in 1902, not only simultaneously with the introduction to *Instrumentationslehre* but notably after the turn of the century.¹⁰⁰ They became a standard feature in his collaborative operas with Hofmannsthal. This meant that sound blends made it into his scores in the same years in which modernization had

⁹⁷ Strauss, *Treatise on Instrumentation*, ii.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, ii.

⁹⁹ Maehder, 155-6.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

covered the city with a corresponding acoustic amalgam. The opera orchestra and the soundscape of the city had a striking resemblance to each other. R. Murray-Schafer, who coined the term “soundscape”, has emphasized how industrialized and mechanized modern societies were marked by a constant ambient or background noise (*Grundrauschen*).¹⁰¹ He calls this synthetic sound cloud “lo-fi” and compares it to the “hi-fi” sound of pre-modern lives, where one could still hear and single out the individual sounds produced by a community. Large cities, on the other hand, were home to a homogenous buzzing, wherein single sounds were blurred. It was produced by countless cyclical machines, such as cars, trains, electric transformers, and generators, and by the many people whose voices, steps, and activities mingled with the latter. The city was constructed of hard materials, such as steel, brick, mortar, pavement, and cement, all of which made sounds echo instead of being swallowed up. Having nowhere to go in between these city structures, sounds travelled farther, blending with those coming from other directions. The city had become a place where many (but certainly not all) sounds coalesced as one acoustic cloud impervious to disambiguation. Strauss’s twentieth-century orchestra recreates this perpetual white noise of the city, making individual instruments disappear in a homogenous sound blend, thereby bringing the exterior urban environment into the interior performance space of the opera house.

One work where this type of sound blend plays a particularly important role is *Ariadne auf Naxos*, the third Strauss-Hofmannsthal opera. Surprisingly, *Ariadne auf Naxos* does not work with the enormous orchestra prescribed for other Strauss operas.

¹⁰¹ Murray Schafer, pp.78.

Instead, it requires a small chamber orchestra of about thirty-five instrumentalists.¹⁰² It might be precisely this fact, musicologist Hans Krauss suggests, why this opera is home to intensive moments of sound blending, as the very lack of instruments necessitated a particularly careful treatment of instrumentation that would allow for a full sound to be created.¹⁰³

The correspondence between Strauss and his librettist is indicative of the composer's excitement about the way his opera sounded and his concern that an inadequate performance of the opera will dilute its effect. In a letter to his wife, Strauss noted enthusiastically after a rehearsal of the work: "It sounds more sublime than anything else I have ever created before. An entirely new style and new sound clouds."¹⁰⁴ After the opera's premier in Berlin, he noted: "The acoustics in the Schauspielhaus were ideal."¹⁰⁵ Finally, referring to the operatic second act being performed on a second, smaller stage, he urgently reminds his collaborator: "*Ariadne* is the *raison d'être* of the whole thing; nothing, therefore, will be allowed to cramp her, either in sound or acting. This must be the paramount consideration..."¹⁰⁶ Working with an unusually small orchestra in this opera, Strauss was adamant about having nothing drown out the sound that he had so carefully crafted.

One reason why Strauss wanted to protect the sound of this opera was the fact that it had a dramatic function. Just as the urban acoustic represented the arrival of modernity (the era of industrialization, mechanization, and urbanization), an orchestral equivalent

¹⁰² Maehder (quoting Egon Wellesz), 161; Other contemporary works whose instrumentation is equally large are Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, Mahler's *Eighth Symphony*, and Hindemith's *Op.24, I* (Krauss, 505).

¹⁰³ Krauss, 505.

¹⁰⁴ Strauss, *Der Strom der Töne*, 198 (my translation).

¹⁰⁵ *Correspondence*, 157 (*Briefwechsel*, 185).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 159 (*Briefwechsel*, 133).

can be heard when Ariadne is faced with a dramatic reversal of her destiny. Strauss creates the most intense moments of sound blend upon the arrival of Bacchus, a character who takes her away from the island. In giving sound a dramatic function, Strauss once again follows in the footsteps of Wagner who was a pioneer in making sound and tone-color bear dramatic meaning (*Klang(farben)dramaturgie*).¹⁰⁷

In *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Strauss and Hofmannsthal bring this aesthetic tool to a new level, when they make their characters perceive moments of intense sound blending as diegetic elements and actively deduce from those sounds that a new time has come. Ariadne has been abandoned on Naxos by her former lover, Theseus, making the island (and her sadness) a prison from which she cannot escape. Heartbroken and rejected, she convinces herself that the ship that landed on the shores of Naxos carries Hermes, who will conduct her into the afterlife. However, the new arrival is Bacchus, who will free Ariadne from the island and thereby also from her suicidal melancholia. The unique sound blending that surrounds Bacchus is not only perceptible to the audience, but to the characters as well. Upon hearing him, Ariadne, who has been deaf to any other sound, song, or word to this point, seems to wake up from her dreamlike state. Several others, including three nymphs and half a dozen commedia dell'arte characters, have tried to no avail to distract her, cheer her up, and make her aware of the many beauties in her life. Each time, it was as if she couldn't or simply didn't want to hear them. The nymphs wondered twice whether Ariadne can hear them at all because the princess does not react to their calls. The buffo characters had tried their luck with a simple and cheerful song ("Versucht es mit Musik! ... Ach, so versucht doch ein kleines Lied!") (Try music's healing pow'r ... Ah, from her sorrow woo her with a song.)), but again with no

¹⁰⁷ Lewinsky, 358; Mikorey, 12.

success.¹⁰⁸ Even the virtuosic coloratura aria by Zerbinetta, the head of the harlequin group, had fallen on “deaf ears” (“Hübsch gepredigt! Aber tauben Ohren!” (Pretty sermon! But you preach to deaf ears.)),¹⁰⁹ and this despite the fact that her aria requires superlative skill. Surprised, Zerbinetta states indignantly: “Sie wollen mich nicht hören – ... Prinzessin, hören Sie mich an.” (Will you not deign to hear me – ... Most noble lady, lend an ear.)¹¹⁰ Again, with no result. Ariadne’s heart is broken and neither words nor music have had the capacity to suspend the melancholia which keeps her from perceiving any chance of a new (meaning different) life, a life without Theseus.

All of this is to change when Bacchus arrives accompanied by the Straussian sound blend. Clarinets, oboes, horns, and trumpets create an impermeable sound blending while a pairing of flutes, a celesta, and harps add a tender and glittering acoustic brilliance to the unique sonority. The harps play harmonics and the strings, which are muffled, triadic tremolos. All combined, the sound is airy, dreamy, and regal.

Ariadne is strangely drawn to what she hears. While the nymphs’ melodic calls, the harlequins’ cheerful folk song, and Zerbinetta’s virtuosic aria had left her untouched, she reacts instantly to the sound that surrounds the god:

Bacchus’ Stimme wird hörbar. Im gleichen Augenblick, wie von Magie hervorgezogen, tritt Ariadne lauschend aus der Höhle. Die drei Nymphen, lauschend, treten seit- und rückwärts zurück.

(The voice of Bacchus is now audible. At the same moment, as though drawn by magic, Ariadne comes, listening, out of the cave. The three Nymphs, listening, retreat to the sides and the back respectively.)¹¹¹

For the first time, Ariadne takes notice of her surroundings and steps out from the cave where she has been hiding. Her nymphs see the transformation in their friend, and plead

¹⁰⁸ *Ariadne Libretto*, 28 (English, 33).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 33 (English, 43).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32 (English, 39).

¹¹¹ *Ariadne Libretto*, 42 (English, 55).

for Bacchus to continue: “Töne, töne, süsse Stimme, / Fremder Vogel, singe wieder, / Deine Klagen, sie beleben, / Uns entzücken solche Lieder!” (Resound, resound, voice enchanting: sing on, mystic songster, sadly: lamentation so melodious, who but hears its cadence gladly?)¹¹² And Ariadne, as if being resuscitated by Bacchus’s voice and his accompanying instrumentation, states herself: “Es greift durch alle Schmerzen, / Auflösend alte Qual: ans Herz im Herzen greift’s.” (Through all my woe I hear it: like balm to all my pain, my heart’s heart is enthralled)¹¹³ The arrival of the god revives the princess who senses that change is (literally) in the air. With him, her life in the cave and on the island has come to an end; Bacchus instantly falls in love with her and takes her away from the island as his bride, bearing her toward a life with new possibilities.

Ariadne hits a radical turning point in her life and this moment is presented musically through Strauss’s orchestral sound blend. In the two operas preceding *Ariadne auf Naxos*, one can find the exact same set-up. The *Mischklang* resounds in *Der Rosenkavalier* when the rose bearer surrenders the silver rose to Sophie. This represents the peripeteia of the opera, after which each character finds themselves heading in a new direction: the rose bearer and the young bride fall in love upsetting everyone’s plans in a single stroke. Their first opera, *Elektra*, also contains a moment of intense sound blending in the recognition scene of her brother Orest. Elektra’s scream of surprise and the scenes immediately following it are enveloped in the type of sound that always resounds in a time of change.¹¹⁴

Strauss’s continuous exploration of novel tone colors and his imagination of sound blending is a particularly compelling example of his operas being modernist at

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 42 (English, 55).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 42 (my translation).

¹¹⁴ For more detailed analyses of the musical set-up of both scenes, see Maehder, 162-4 and 169-171.

heart. First, sound blending has a conspicuous affinity to the synthetic sound of everyday life in the modern city, and Strauss and Hofmannsthal consistently place this type of sound in scenes that represent change and transformation. Secondly, in his targeting of sound and tone color, he is a key promoter of a trend that would gain momentum in the twentieth century, which Wolfgang Löffler has called “the century of tone color, maybe even the first century of tone color.”¹¹⁵ All around Strauss, composers, and (as Maehder demonstrates) particularly South-German and Austrian composers, began to search for ways to produce “extraordinary and new colors of sound,” inspiring one another in their orchestral explorations.¹¹⁶ Like Strauss, they built on Wagner’s techniques to imagine and design new and yet unheard sound colors. And like Strauss, they allowed sound and tone color to be a constitutive and constructive force in the compositional process, while other elements were subordinated.¹¹⁷ Some examples are Arnold Schoenberg’s *Farben-*movement in *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, which premiered the same year as *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912) and is a “radically novel experiment with tone-color structure.”¹¹⁸ This work employs what Schoenberg conceptualized as *Klangfarbenmelodie* (“tone color melody”), according to which a chord that always retains its basic structure is replayed in different instrumental variations and as a result changes its timbre continuously, taking the vertical direction of a melody. One of Schoenberg’s contemporaries had felt that the composer’s theory of tone-color melody had been translated into practice in Franz Schreker’s *Der Ferne Klang* (*The Distant Sound*, 1905), an opera dedicated to the

¹¹⁵ Lewinski, 358.

¹¹⁶ Maehder, 144 and 147.

¹¹⁷ Lewinsky, 358.

¹¹⁸ Slawson, *Sound Color*, 3.

thematic and musical exploration of sound and tone color.¹¹⁹ In this opera, the protagonist leaves his fiancé and travels the world to find and hold the “the mysterious, other-worldly sound,” a desideratum which Schreker himself was said to have located with this work.¹²⁰ The French composer Claude Debussy, whom Wolf-Eberhard Lewinsky crowns as the “father of modern sound color compositions” is another “sonic adventurer” of that time.¹²¹ Where Debussy differs is his explicit desire to render tones inherent to nature. This does not mean he simply wanted to reproduce the sound of nature. Instead, he sought to make audible the “inaudible overtones of nature,” as he attempts in the movement “Nuages” of *Three Nocturnes* (1899).¹²² Debussy’s move from audible tones and sounds to a more abstract understanding of an elusive tone oscillating in nature (or, for that matter, in art), brings us to Hofmannsthal’s treatment of sound, which governs his librettistic work in its own way, and draws upon means available to him as a poet.

In Hofmannsthal, Strauss had found a partner who shared his auditory imagination. The composer’s focus on sound and tone color finds its poetic parallel in Hofmannsthal’s belief that a poetic work ought to have a distinct tone to it, to evince an atmosphere or mood which resonated between the lines and served as a carrier of meaning separate from and in addition to words. One place this tone sounds is in the tone of characters’ voices. Fictional or dramatic characters try to hear (or are described as having) a vocal inflection that renders unspoken truths. With the concept of tone, Hofmannsthal described something that resembles the timbre in music: namely, the

¹¹⁹ Berrische, 50.

¹²⁰ Schreker, 11 (“den rätselhaft weltfernen Klang”); See, for example, the review by Schreker’s contemporary Walter Niemann in *Die Musik der Gegenwart*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1922: 254.

¹²¹ Lewinsky, 358; Ross, 47.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 360.

aspect in art that appeals to the aural sense (even if just theoretically), and which is both subjective and elusive in nature.

Hofmannsthal is known for his deep ambivalence about the limitations of language, and in tone, he finds an alternative and word-less mode of expression and representation. This seems at odds with the prevailing theory that his writing was predominantly informed by visuality. Sarah Painitz, Sabine Schneider and Andreas Huyssen have all shown, for example, how the poet was writing *Bilder*, his language conjuring images that turned the reader into a spectator.¹²³ His literary reflections on the language crisis have been examined for their visual aspect. Here, however, opinions differ. Some have argued that Hofmannsthal's most infamous figure, the letter writer Lord Chandos, "finds salvation in the image" which becomes an "alternative form of language" effectively ameliorating the shortcoming of language.¹²⁴ Others have found that visuality (through disturbed vision) lies at the core of the sense of the split self, and thus at the center of the crisis of language.¹²⁵ Hofmannsthal's investment in visual experiences, the image, and other pictorial media, cannot and should not be underestimated or downplayed. Yet, even if these differing accounts of visuality's role in the poet's work are correct about its overall importance, his obstinate return to an auditory imagery suggest that he saw a special promise in the sonic aspect of poetry (which includes his libretti).

My analysis therefore shifts focus away from Hofmannsthal's visual aesthetic and discusses his ideas concerning lyrical tonality. While this precept of a lyrical tone

¹²³ Huyssen, 30; Schneider, 20; Painitz, 104.

¹²⁴ Olin, *The Nation Without Art*, 120 (also in Olin, *Touching Photography*, 72); Schneider 21.

¹²⁵ See, for example, Andreas Huyssen's "The Disturbance of Vision in Vienna Modernism." *Modernism/Modernity*, 5, no. 3 (September 1998): 33-47 and Mihaela Bancila's dissertation *The Writer's Eye. On Vision in Hoffmann, Hofmannsthal and Musil*. University of Virginia, 2002.

appeared in his critical and literary work long before his career as a librettist, he further refined its function and form in his operatic works. Seeking to impart a scene or an entire opera with a tone, he extends it onto the singer-actor's voice where it serves as an additional (extra-musical and extra-linguistic) mode of articulation. Unlike the process of visualization through a pictorial language, the tone in a poetic piece and in a character's voice allowed Hofmannsthal to circumvent not only the shortcomings of language, but language itself.

Hofmannsthal began outlining his thoughts on a work's tone early in his career, maintaining that the character and meaning of a poem cannot be extracted from its words, but rather lies in its tone, which persists within like a mood. The artist should always try to instill a poem with a tone that subtly unveils "the character of things" or "the nature of the thing-in-itself."¹²⁶ In a tract about Stefan George's poetry, he wrote:

Nur, da das Publikum überhaupt nicht mehr gewöhnt ist, dass in irgendeinem Ton zu ihm geredet wird, und völlig verlernt hat die Töne zu unterscheiden, so sei hier kurz gesagt, dass die in Rede stehenden Gedichte einen eigenen Ton haben, was in der Poesie und mutatis mutandis in allen Künsten das einzige ist, worauf es ankommt und wodurch sich das Etwas vom Nichts, das Wesentliche vom Scheinhaften, das Lebensfähige vom Totgeborenen unterscheidet.

(It is only because the audience isn't used to being spoken to in a certain tone anymore, and has entirely lost the ability to distinguish these tones, that I have to quickly say that these poems have their own tone to them, that which is the only thing in poetry, and mutatis mutandis in every art, that matters, and through which a distinction is made between Something and Nothing, the Essential from Appearance, and the Viable from the Lifeless.)¹²⁷

According to Hofmannsthal, a poem has to have a defined tone, that is to say a kind of mood, or undertone, that is not expressible through words, yet resonates outward from the

¹²⁶ Hofmannsthal, "Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten," 485 and 495.

¹²⁷ Hofmannsthal, "Gedichte von Stefan George," 307 (my translation).

lyrical work (*entklingen*). This tone is a poem's most essential feature, and a lack thereof results by default in dead or meaningless poetry.¹²⁸

It is not surprising that Hofmannsthal considered it essential for a poet to have a sensible, almost intuitive, sense of hearing. He admired Stefan George's ability to eavesdrop on his social and natural environment (*lauschen, ablauschen*) successfully translating sounds that he hears into his poetry's unique and insinuating tone (or overtone as he sometimes calls it).¹²⁹ He commented on the aural acuity of Swiss writer Henry-Frédéric Amiel who, thanks to this gift, was unmatched in the poetic description of the supernatural in the natural.¹³⁰ Hofmannsthal further praised Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio for his work *L'Innocente*, in which characters themselves listen like a poet always should: they discern the mood from the people around them in the sound of their steps, the coloration of their voices, or their silence.¹³¹

This concept of a distinctive poetic tone turns the act of reading into one of listening. Rather than being distracted by words, the reader (or "audience" of the work) is encouraged to *hear* the poem's implications, allusions, and moods. Here, the question is not whether this tone can in fact be heard, but rather whether that which gives a lyrical work its real character and meaning is something as elusive and ephemeral as a tone. Considering the tone's conceptual affinity to timbre in music, it was only natural that Hofmannsthal would not only turn toward opera, but use this genre to further refine this concept.

¹²⁸ The important role of the physiological act of hearing a poem is just as important to Hofmannsthal. In his correspondences with other artists, he never talks about *reading* poetry. To him the only proper exposure to the written word is by hearing it. Sessions where he reads out his drafts to friends, Strauss included, are common (see, i.e. Correspondence pp.180 and 421).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, "Gedichte von Stefan George," 277 and 312.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, "Das Tagebuch eines Willenskranken," 277.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, "Gabriele d'Annunzio," 295.

The idea of the tone continued to play a central role in his works for operatic performance. His correspondence with Strauss and his stage directions bear witness to his interest in finding the right tone for a dramatic section and/or the opera as a whole. In his correspondence with Strauss, Hofmannsthal mentions time and again how he attempted, with varying success, to imbue a dramatic section or a character with a persistent, underlying and telling tone: a comedy based on Casanova which they never finished fails partly because he cannot “find the right tone.”¹³² Much time is spent on rewriting sections of *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* until the poet is satisfied with the light and poetical tone he had in mind all along (and not the gloomy and dark atmosphere that saturated his initial drafts).¹³³ Finally, the process of writing the libretto for *Rosenkavalier* is temporarily halted until Hofmannsthal finds the right tone for a character: the Baron Ochs is to be given “his own most distinct individual idiom [*Ton*].”¹³⁴

Hofmannsthal’s obsession with the tone does not end here. Rather, this poetic concept soon extended its reach to include the tone of the voice (*Tonfall*) where it had a similar function. In “Briefe eines Zurückgekehrten” (1907) the narrator describes feeling ill at ease with his fellow countrymen simply because he cannot detect a tone in their manner of speaking. Without it, he explains, he cannot get a sense of their identity “[I]ch bekomme sie nicht zu fassen.” (eines Menschen Wesen).¹³⁵ Without a tone that is unique to them, they simply don’t appear to have a defining individuality. He explains:

Ich verlange nicht, daß einer die Geheimnisse seines Lebens auf der Zunge trägt und mit mir Gespräche führt über Leben und Sterben und die vier letzten Dinge, aber ohne Worte soll er mir sagen, sein Ton soll mir sagen... auf was er sein Sach gestellt hat, nicht mit ausdrücklichen Worten, implicit, nicht explicit.

¹³² *Correspondence*, 23 (*Briefwechsel*, 40).

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 170 and 174 (*Briefwechsel*, 196 and 206).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 46 (*Briefwechsel*, 65).

¹³⁵ Hofmannsthal, “Briefe eines Zurückgekehrten,” 482.

(I don't expect that someone carries his secrets on his tongue and that he talks to me about living and dying and the last four things, but he should tell me without words, his tone should tell me... what he is all about, not with specific words, implicitly, not explicitly.)¹³⁶

To the narrator, the tone of voice is not just particularly telling, its lack causes words to be entirely meaningless in the first place. A voice had to be dressed in a characterizing quality, lest the speaker fail to communicate the “essence of [his] being” (*Wesenheit [seines] Daseins*).¹³⁷

Hofmannsthal's ideas about the vocal tone extended into his work with opera. The idea was for the singer-actor to add a specific modulation or intonation into her voice despite, or maybe because of, the impeding factor that she had to sing at the same time. By regulating her voice according to detailed instructions in his libretti, a performer was to bring out, for example, her character's bitterness, greed, doubt, or suspicion. Hofmannsthal's goal was to expose parts of a character that would have otherwise remained hidden. In his libretti, a character's personality, social status, motivation, motives, desires, fears, emotions and thoughts are revealed through the way a character utters a sentence. Hofmannsthal achieved the same effect, to some extent, by assigning his characters a dialect, an accent, or a nuanced manner of speaking (*Sprechweise*).¹³⁸ Making demands on a singer-actor's modulation of voice further intensified the latter approach as it took advantage of the voice's extra-linguistic articulation. Having always foregrounded the power of the tone in a voice, opera became the perfect setting to explore

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 485.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 485.

¹³⁸ Take as an example Ochs von Lerchenau whose speech is an assemblage of dialects and languages that tells a great deal about his status and personality. A vernacular Viennese dialect is mixed with French vocabulary and aristocratic jargon. His manner of speaking reflects his upper-class status beneath which there lies the same palimpsest of relevant character traits such as his autochthonous disposition and narcissism.

this phenomenon further, given the genre's most infamous weakness, the unintelligibility of the words sung.

Hofmannsthal applies this type of vocal representation in all of his operas, and perhaps most rigorously in *Arabella*, his last collaborative work with Strauss. Its libretto reads more like a drama, given the sheer amount of adverbial suggestions about the kind of tone a singer-actor is to strike. Ranging from “determined” to “bitter” and from “jealous” to “puzzled,” *Arabella* includes nearly sixty instructions on how a character is to express herself (*Die Frau Ohne Schatten* boasts as many as eighty).¹³⁹ By contrast, Mozart's librettist Schikaneder worked with less than five such instructions in *Die Zauberflöte*. Wagner's *Parsifal* contains fewer than a dozen, and even Berg's *Lulu* relies on less than a third as many stipulations. In his libretti, Hofmannsthal often included explicit remarks on the tone of a character's voice that he had in mind. *Arabella*'s father is asked to imitate the inflection of his future son-in-law's speech (“Waldner *Mandrykas Ton copierend*”).¹⁴⁰ A servant changes the tone of his voice to indicate his greed upon seeing money in his master's hand. And Zdenka's voice turns monotonous (*tonlos*) as she contrives a scheme.¹⁴¹ In one instance, a character even takes note of this form of articulation: *Arabella*'s mother, who is a parody of opera's bombast and melodrama, is

¹³⁹ The list of vocal intonation includes *scharf, leidenschaftlich, grimmig, murmelnd, angstvoll, schamhaft, entschlossen, zaghaft, fest, gepresst, schwach, zärtlich, traurig, jubelnd, ängstlich, eifersüchtig, zögernd, hastig, drängend, finster, sanft, kurz, spöttisch, vorwurfsvoll, ernst, munter, visionär, verwundert, zornig, bestimmt, heftig, artig, feierlich, vorsichtig, aufgeregt, beherrscht, naiv, majestätisch, geheimnisvoll, leichtfertig, frech, innig, jovial, eilig, schnell, ruhig, heiter, tonlos, bitter, wütend, böse, glühend, arglos, unbefangen, gequält.*

¹⁴⁰ *Arabella Libretto*, 30 (English, 74).

¹⁴¹ Hofmannsthal also mentions his ideas on a character's tone of voice in his letters to Strauss. He envisioned Sophie's transformation into a self-confident woman to be heard in her newly found “energetic tone” (*Der Rosenkavalier*, Briefwechsel, 82.) Helena's firm determination about sacrificing herself for the sake of truth is to come out in the “gloomy tone” of her voice (*Die Ägyptische Helena*, *Ibid.*, 476). And in *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* he imagines that the Nurse's way of speaking has the capacity to indicate what happens on stage, as she sounds first prophetic then triumphant (*Ibid.*, 239-40).

criticized by her daughter and husband for her exalted and overly dramatic mode of articulation (“Zdenkerl – the way you talk in that excited tone – just like Mama!”)¹⁴²

In *Arabella*, as is the case in their other operas, the tone of voice is instrumental in supporting the representation of characters, dramatic trajectory, and philosophical or poetic allusions. Requiring a singer to add a characteristic modulation as specific as “anxiously,” “majestically,” or “accusingly,” might be a utopian vision on part of the poet and it remains unclear whether performers succeeded (or even tried) to adhere to the requests of their librettist. Hofmannsthal certainly knew that it would be difficult to turn into action his vision of a specifically modulated singing voice. Only a few weeks into his work on *Der Rosenkavalier* (which was the first libretto he wrote for Strauss, *Elektra* having previously existed as a drama), the poet wrote to the composer: “Whether I am going *too far* in my disregard of operatic *convention* and whether, in the constant endeavour to maintain a characteristic tone, I accommodate myself too little to the needs of the singing voice – this is what I should like to hear from you and then I shall go on with all the more zest.”¹⁴³ As many as fifteen years later, Hofmannsthal reiterated his concerns, recalling how he had overstepped his boundaries in a section of *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* and did not want to make the same mistake in their current project (*Die Ägyptische Helena*): “What I am afraid of is an over-excited kind of passage, that is barely singable [*gesanghaft*] any more, like the one the Empress has in the third act of

¹⁴² *Arabella Libretto*, 15 and 59 (English, 62 and 99). “[D]u hast schon ganz den exaltierten Ton von der Mama!”

¹⁴³ *Correspondence*, 28 (*Briefwechsel*, 45). Strauss seemed to be much less worried about it having encouraged the poet at the very beginning of their collaboration never to think about the music at all when writing a libretto for him (*Briefwechsel*, 26).

Die Frau Ohne Schatten; I am afraid of it if the overcharged expression makes it necessary to go beyond the limits of music.”¹⁴⁴

Hofmannsthal knew that it would be difficult to require the singer’s voice to add another layer of expression in the form of a specified tone. Despite the practical difficulties, however, the librettist remained loyal to the aesthetic principle of tone. The tone in a scene and the tone of the voice, both variations of the same concept, were to become two additional layers of signification that were grounded in acoustics (the former metaphorically, the latter literally).

Subsequent scholarship and contemporary critics have failed to recognize how consistently Hofmannsthal’s writings are informed by this audible concept, despite the fact that the poet himself described it as an alternative to the inadequacy of language. In his *The Lord Chandos Letter*, written in 1902, Hofmannsthal formulated his ambivalence about language for the first time, a sentiment which he shared with many contemporary writers and philosophers (i.e. Musil, Wittgenstein, Kafka and Rilke). Language, so went the allegation, had been worn out to a point where it had become “insufficient for a full expression of human experience.”¹⁴⁵ Nearly thirty years after writing the *Chandos Letter*, Hofmannsthal reiterated his skepticism about language in his essay *Die Ägyptische Helena* (1928). In this essay, which comprises a critical monologue and a fictitious conversation with Strauss, he wrote:

Ich scheue die Worte; sie bringen um das Beste (...) Die fälschende Gewalt der Rede geht so weit, daß sie den Charakter des Redenden nicht nur verzerrt, sondern geradezu aufhebt. Die Dialektik drängt das Ich aus der Existenz. Ich behaupte, der Dichter hat die Wahl, Reden zu schaffen, oder Gestalten!

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 414 (*Briefwechsel*, 477) “Was ich fürchte, wäre eine solche überregte, kaum mehr gesanghafte Stelle, wie die der Kaiserin im III. Akt der “Frau ohne Schatten”; ich fürchte es, wenn die Überspannung des Ausdruckes nötigt, über die Grenzen der Musik hinauszugehen” (my translation).

¹⁴⁵ Bottenberg, 118.

(I fear words; they cheat you out of the best (...) The deceiving force of speech goes so far that it distorts not only the character of the one who is speaking, but downright wipes it out. Dialectic crowds out the I from its own existence. I claim that the poet has a the choice between devising speech, or Creating!)¹⁴⁶

Hofmannsthal, exhibiting his characteristic frustration with language, maintains that a character's speech has a distorting rather than enlightening effect. According to him, a character can lose his entire (fictitious) existence in the sea of words with which he is described. More often than not, the artist does not create a character, but only speech. This is where Hofmannsthal reintroduces tone (of a scene or in a character's voice) as a possible alternative. It serves as a mode of representation that conveys dimensions of characters and action that are only covered up by language:

[Der Dichter] kann etwas im Zuhörer leben machen, ohne daß der Zuhörer ahnt, auf welchem Wege ihm dies zugekommen ist (...) Er kann das Verschwiegene anklingen, das Ferne plötzlich da sein lassen.

([The poet] can bring something to life within the listener, without the listener knowing, how it came to him (...) He can make resonant the Unspoken, let that which is far suddenly be present.)¹⁴⁷

The tone of a scene or a voice is suggested to be a mode of art production and reception that circumvents the falsifying sway of words. Throughout the essay, Hofmannsthal makes a case for the importance of a finely tuned aural sense in the reception of (music) drama. He lists other reliable tools of representation, such as working with motifs, analogies, and similes as well as shaping the plot in a certain way. However, even those approaches are always framed in terms of acoustics: for him, their proper application resonates (like the tone of the voice) within the essence of a character, scene, or play:

Wie ich die Handlung führe, die Motive verstricke, das Verborgene anklingen lasse, das Angeklungene wieder verschwinden – durch Ähnlichkeit der Gestalten,

¹⁴⁶ Hofmannsthal, *Helena Essay*, 768 (my translation).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 769 (my translation).

durch Analogien der Situation – durch den Tonfall, der oft mehr sagt als die Worte.

(It is in the way that I guide the plot, enmesh motives, give resonance to that which is hidden, make that sound disappear again – through the affinity of characters, through analogies of the situation – through the tone of the voice, which often says more than its words.)¹⁴⁸

Hofmannsthal's fictitious Strauss interjects that his collaborator makes claims to the aesthetic tools of the musician. After all, it is the composer who gives tones to the voice (through music) and who works with the language of music (and not of words). Hofmannsthal's reply implies that those are the tools of both artists, stating that they are the aesthetic means (*Kunstmittel*) of the lyrical drama, and the only ones that are able to represent the present.

As if opera's sound system was not complex enough, Strauss and Hofmannsthal concentrate it even further by putting that much focus on sound, timbre, and tone. With instrumental tone coloring and the singer-actor's vocal modulation, they created two supplementary audible tiers that carry much of a work's aesthetic intention. Ideally, listening to tone color and the tone of voice would grant the listener a more comprehensive understanding of opera. In addition, there was an atmosphere embedded in each work (and its separate scenes), an atmosphere that Hofmannsthal could only describe as "tone." Though it was not a physically audible entity, this tone, or mood, could best be discerned if one "listened" to its signs.

It is not surprising that Strauss and Hofmannsthal were irked by an audience that failed to listen properly. Despite Strauss's sparse critical and theoretical writings, one can find him making repeated references to a listening audience that is only out for a "feast

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 769 (my translation).

for the ears” (*Ohrenschmaus*).¹⁴⁹ He dismisses what he calls the “naive ear”, a kind of pleasure-seeking, carefree, and mindless organ for listening.¹⁵⁰ To his dismay, the appreciation of his art is most often primitively reduced to a sensory stimulation by fascinating sounds.¹⁵¹ Strauss laments that audiences want to be impressed with high notes, vocal virtuosity, and compositional audacity, yet are not perceptive of a deeper level of musical structure and meaning. Disagreeing on how much information they should share with the public before their operas’ premieres, Strauss once goes as far as to freshly write to Hofmannsthal that “[i]t is always better to tell the people in advance what to listen for... .”¹⁵² His librettist is reluctant, holding that the points which he would rather hint at subtly are already “driven into the listener’s head with a sledgehammer, point for point” in his revised libretto, making the opera’s message embarrassingly evident.¹⁵³ What good is an opera, so he seems to ask, where the listener is nothing but an anvil for all-too evident metaphoric blows? Listening carefully was all the more important for the works he created with Strauss having made opera’s acoustic more complex than ever through Strauss’s tone-coloring and his own tonal poetics. Like the urban citizen, their audience finds itself confronted with an acoustic environment that obligates them to listen more carefully than ever before.

Strauss and Hofmannsthal had made sound (as opposed to music or language) the backbone of musical, poetic, and dramatic meaning. An initial example considered was Strauss’s compositional approach in his operas with Hofmannsthal, which was driven by

¹⁴⁹ Strauss, *Betrachtungen*, 99, 102, 123, 145.

¹⁵⁰ Strauss, “Zeitgemäße Glossen,” 125.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁵² *Briefwechsel*, 162. “Es ist immer besser, man schreibt vorher den Leuten, was sie herauszuhören (...) haben.” (my translation).

¹⁵³ *Briefwechsel*, 162. “dem Hörer förmlich in den Kopf gehämmert...” (my translation).

the quest for a new orchestral sound. Through various techniques, including both instrumentation and the compositional text, Strauss was able to draw tone-colors from his orchestra that left contemporary audiences dumbfounded. One particularly striking example was the creation of a sound blend, a type of tone coloring that bore a striking resemblance to the soundscape of the city. In addition to making the actual sound of his music a guiding principle in his compositional approach, he also assigned it dramatic function, making the medium of music (and not music itself) an important carrier of the work's intention. A case in point was *Ariadne auf Naxos*, which contained carefully placed moments of sound blending, which, much like the lo-fi sound in the metropolis, constituted an audible analogy to change, novelty, and innovation.

Strauss's focus on sound and timbre, we have seen, was accompanied by Hofmannsthal's conceptualization of the tone of the poetic piece (*Ton*) and of the voice (*Tonfall*). Both concepts rested on the desire to provide a layer of knowledge that language alone would not be able to provide (given its epistemic shortcoming in general as well as its drowning out in an operatic setting). Having reflected on the potential of tone in a poem or dramatic scene since his early years as a poet, Hofmannsthal matured this mode of representation even further when he began working with opera. Imparting his operas with a defining character or atmosphere (tone), he also brought the idea of the tone of the voice to new heights. In his libretti, he painstakingly records the vocal intonation that he envisioned for a specific statement determining not only *what* characters would say but also *how* they would say it. Whether determined, naive, or visionary, a character's tone was to turn into a revelatory signpost pointing the way through an often intricate dramatic landscape. In both his pre-operatic works and his

operas, tone emerges as an extra-linguistic mediator of meaning and must be acknowledged as an important station in Hofmannsthal's continuing efforts to overcome the representational insufficiency of language.

Ultimately, Hofmannsthal and Strauss amplified the acoustic complexity of opera by adding several additional signifying layers for the ear to untangle. Listening to their works meant listening beyond musical categories (such as melody, harmony, instrumentation, or dynamic structure) and beyond words; it meant engaging the medium of sound itself. Given the operas' novel complexity and density, along with the unprecedented operatic soundscapes they contained, their acoustic make-up resembled the sound of the modern city. In both settings, the operatic and the urban, listening to the many (and often new) sounds, timbres, and tones makes the encounter of either more profitable and enjoyable. Heard in this way, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Arabella*, and each of the remaining four works, have to be understood as ambassadors of one conjunctive message regarding the importance and benefits of approaching modern life and art with open and carefully attuned ears.

Chapter 2: Into Battle with the Art of Noise¹⁵⁴

Klytämnestra

Bei dem Spektakel soll ich ruh'n?
Meine Tochter, du willst mir Übles tun.
Du willst mich töten. Du weißt recht gut:
Auch meine Nerven sind ganz kaput
Und gegen mein Prinzip wird's sein:
Ich bin im Antilärmverein.

Generalanzeiger, Eberfeld-Barmen, No.61, 13.März 1909¹⁵⁵

In this parody fragment, Klytämnestra, wife and murderess of king Agamemnon, gives notice that she has joined the anti-noise movement. This is the same Klytämnestra who plays a lead role in *Elektra*, an opera whose premiere only two months earlier had left its audiences baffled, struck dumb by its noise (indeed, if anybody was a member of the anti-noise movement, it was her literary creator, Hugo von Hofmannsthal).¹⁵⁶ Music critics were alarmed about the ear-battering and numbing noise of *Elektra*, with one of them suggesting that the opera would do well to use acoustic damping measures: “Wenn je eine moderne dramatische Musik die Anwendung akustischer Dämpfungsmaßnahmen unsrer offenen Opernhausorchester verlangt hat, ist es die Richard Straußens zur “Elektra.” (If there ever was a modern dramatic music that required the application of

¹⁵⁴ EP (“Into Battle”) by *Art of Noise*, ZTT records, released in 1983.

¹⁵⁵ Klytämnestra: “I am supposed to rest in this racket? / Dear daughter, you want to harm me. / You want to kill me. You know exactly: / My nerves are destroyed / And it is against my principles: / I’m a member of the anti-noise association.” (my translation)

¹⁵⁶ Payer, “Herr von Hofmannsthal lernt böllern,” 2.

acoustic damping measures, then it is Richard Strauss's *Elektra*.)¹⁵⁷ Exactly one hundred years later, the European Union would follow up on this suggestion by passing a law obliging every opera house manager to protect the ears of musicians and conductors alike from the 120 decibels that an opera like *Elektra* generates.¹⁵⁸

The din in *Elektra* would not remain an isolated episode in the collaboration of Strauss and Hofmannsthal. Reviews of *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911) described sections of the last act as dreadfully noisy (*wüster Lärm*), an acoustic pandemonium (*Höllenslärm*), and a ruckus (*Tohuwabohu*).¹⁵⁹ *Ariadne auf Naxos* transported one critic into the racket of a downtown city center.¹⁶⁰ By the early 1920s, the noise of Strauss's music had become a truism. In "The Litany of Din" (1916), the Edinburgh surgeon Dan McKenzie listed Strauss's *oeuvre* among the many noises that fill the air of modern urban life: "Buzzers busy; factory bulls – / The screeching of mishandled tools – / squealing breaks and clanking rails, – / Strauss's music (shrieks and wails)."¹⁶¹

But this was the heart of the situation: if contemporary audiences struggled with urban noise on the way to the opera house, once inside this putatively autonomous sphere of art appreciation, they were faced with the same issue. By the turn of the century, the

¹⁵⁷ A. Prgr, 1915. The same reviewer referred to parts of the score as ear-battering (*ohrenbetäubend*). Another critic describes the opera as deafening noise (*betäubende[r] Lärm*) (F.B. "Elektra." *Dresdner Anzeiger* (26.01.1909): p. unknown.).

¹⁵⁸ The works of Wagner and Strauss can be louder than a chain saw or jack-hammer. A law by the European Union, passed in 2009, requires employers to provide ear protection for employees that are exposed to sounds louder than 85 decibels. As a result, the *Bamberger Symphonie* equipped their instrumentalists with custom-made earplugs (often problematic for the musicians themselves) as well as made structural changes to the orchestra pit so sounds are channeled away from the musicians. (www.zeit.de/online/2008/07/laermschutz-im-orchester; accessed Jan 5th 2013). The *Stadtheater Bremerhaven* solved the problem by installing a custom-made protective wall right in front of the trombonists and trumpeters to protect the players that sit in front them as well as the director. (www.wdr5.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Sendungen/Leonardo/2009/02/Manuskripte/ms090226L-344rmschutz_Kersting.pdf; accessed Jan 5th 2013).

¹⁵⁹ N., *Nürnberger Generalanzeiger*, 1911, 2; Wieland, *Chemnitzer Neueste Nachrichten*, 1911; Freund, *Breslauer Morgenzeitung*, 2.

¹⁶⁰ K.N., *Basler Nachrichten*, 1913.

¹⁶¹ McKenzie, 112.

din had invaded every corner of daily life, including modernist art. In examining the intersection of (urban) noise and art in the early twentieth century, the operas of Strauss and Hofmannsthal prove to be uniquely insightful. Far from being merely an unwelcome acoustic phenomenon, noise was an aesthetic texture and experiential category through whose exploration one could critically confront the issues and benefits of a rapidly modernizing society. Indeed, city-dwellers of all social standings and professions critically engaged with the noise inherent within the modern urban acoustic in order to come to terms with extra-acoustic (i.e. social, political, urban) transformations taking place all around them.

The works of Strauss and Hofmannsthal are fertile grounds for the study of this phenomenon because their representations of noise have both a formal and a critical aspect, thus give consideration to the fact that noise is a physical sound as well as a constructed cultural concept.¹⁶² Listening to the din in their operas (in this chapter mostly to *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Die Ägyptische Helena*) gives us a more complete comprehension of contemporary conceptions of urban noise. Such an act of listening reveals the constitutive features that the urban racket was felt to have, its psychological impact on the hearer, and, related to that, the impact of modernity itself, which noise had come to symbolize. Strauss and Hofmannsthal recreate the sonic physiognomy of the modern city, configuring urban noise as marked by an acoustic diversity, eclecticism, and polyphony as well as rhythmic irregularity. At the same time, they link noise to an array of affective states or emotional dispositions, including sleeplessness, aggression,

¹⁶² Two scholars who highlight that a soundscape (whether urban, rural, technological, or other) is “simultaneously a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment” are Alain Corbin (*Village Bells*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) and Emily Thompson (*The Soundscape of Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004 (quote is hers)).

confusion, cognitive numbness and passivity. In this way, they offer a multi-medial conceptualization of noise which emphasizes crisis and the disintegration of the self. In so doing, they relate the modernist crisis, which has typically been configured as a scopic crisis, to the aural experience of modern life. Their project is an acoustic phenomenology: the noise of the city, marked by an ever-evolving polyphony, eclecticism, and diversity, becomes an audible pendant to modernity's political, social, cultural, and ideational impermanence, and, at the same time, of the disintegrative force, that this overwhelming dynamics was widely felt to have on the individual.

With this critical approach, they counter the avant-garde's "noise-positive" celebration of urban cacophony. Though the musical avant-garde is typically credited with the creation of noise music, these operas represent a compelling corrective to this confined view. Strauss and Hofmannsthal fashioned a noise aesthetic for musical composition at much the same time as the vanguardists were engaged in similar projects. However, Strauss and Hofmannsthal's aesthetic approach was, much like their critical stance, fundamentally different. Rather than focusing on the incorporation of specific noise sounds (as the Futurists did with their noise machines), the composer and his librettist set out to reproduce the sonic physiognomy of urban noise: they created a complex acoustic network of sounds which resonated how the city sounded to the contemporary ear. In doing so, they acknowledged that noise is more than just the sound of the machine. Instead, they treat it as an acoustic phenomenon that is culturally constructed.

Noise is a “broad, yet imprecise category of sounds,” elusive as a concept and ambiguous in its relation to music.¹⁶³ It registers variously as loud, disruptive, confusing, inconsistent, turbulent, chaotic, and unwanted, excessive, incoherent, confused, degenerate, and inarticulate.¹⁶⁴ Paul Hegarty’s notion of “noise as a negativity” somewhat summarizes these adjectives, and stresses that it generally represents the undesired, the other, and the insignificant.¹⁶⁵ The idea of noise as insignificant sound is picked up by R. Murray Schafer who considers it to be sound that we have learned to ignore. Douglas Kahn also uses this term in connection with noise, yet with a different meaning: “The terms *significant sounds* and *significant noises* are used (...) not to differentiate these sounds and noises from insignificant or meaningless ones but to counter long-standing habits of imagining that sounds transcend or escape meaning or that sounds elude sociality despite the fact they are made, heard, imagined, and thought by humans.”¹⁶⁶ Kahn’s observation is crucial, in that it underscores that noise, and sound in general, is always embedded within a specific cultural and historical setting. He listens beyond the sonic or phonic content, pointing out that noise cannot escape human signification. In other words, noise is cultural and always bound to its historical context.¹⁶⁷ And this is what makes it such a yielding medium for cultural-historical analyses: “The everyday definition of noise is ‘any unwanted sound.’ What an opening for a historian! By its very definition, noise is an issue less of tone or decibel than of social temperament, class background, and cultural desire, all historically conditioned.”¹⁶⁸ Noise is like an acoustic

¹⁶³ Bailey, 23.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 23; Kahn, 20.

¹⁶⁵ Hegarty, ix.

¹⁶⁶ Kahn, 4.

¹⁶⁷ Hegarty, 3.

¹⁶⁸ Schwartz, 52.

chameleon that changes its timbres, tones, and rhythms according to its social, cultural, and historical context.

Urban noise was hardly an invention of the twentieth century. For at least two centuries, writers and artists voiced their frustrations about the street noise that interrupted them in their labors.¹⁶⁹ William Hogarth's etching "The Enraged Musician" (1741) is perhaps the most well-known early artistic representation of the artist struggling with the noise of the city. Charles Dickens was one of many Victorian Londoners who was exasperated by the worst city nuisances of them all: street music.¹⁷⁰ In 1851, Arthur Schopenhauer wrote his cantankerous essay "Über Lerm und Geräusch." Yet, both urban noise and the response to it were to reach a new height after the turn of the century. Between 1890 and 1930, the noise of the modern city had become so loud, incessant, and eclectic that, for the first time in history, triggered a broad social response. Citizens founded anti-noise associations (sometimes as subgroups of local health care and sanitation commissions), voiced their despair over (or fascination with) noise in newspapers and journals, and swamped municipal authorities with countless noise complaints against factory owners, neighbors, restaurateurs, and even amusement parks.¹⁷¹

This was not any different in Vienna, Berlin, and Munich, three cities that Strauss and Hofmannsthal lived closed to and/or visited frequently for work.¹⁷² Theodor Lessing,

¹⁶⁹ Picker, 11.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁷¹ See *Der Antirüpel* 1908-1910.

¹⁷² Of those three cities, Vienna seems the least likely to be excessively noisy. David Frisby discusses in *Cityscapes of Modernity* the popular image of fin-de-siècle Vienna of having been retrograde in its industrial, cultural, and political development. He compares it to the representation of Berlin in the early 1900s which is portrayed as a site of modernization, progressiveness, and Americanism – all phenomena that were connected to noise. According to Frisby, this was a deliberate representation of the Austro-Hungarian capital that sought to isolate its capital from conceptions of modernization (meaning

a leading figure of the growing noise-abatement movement, happens to single out these three cities: “Every city makes its own noise; citizens in Berlin make a clamor, in Munich a commotion; and in Vienna a racket.” (“Jede Stadt macht besonderen Lärm; der Berliner macht ‘Radau‘ und ‘randalirt,’ die Münchner wollen eine ‘Gaudi,’ die Wiener veranstalten eine ‘Hetz.’”)¹⁷³ Lessing suggests that each city had its own noisescapes both in terms of the acoustic sounds that were produced, but also in the way that these sounds were perceived. The only thing they unquestionably had in common was a set of developments that made these places enormously noisy.

Vienna, Munich, and Berlin had experienced immense population growth rates in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, necessitating a spatial expansion that took the form of massive housing and road construction.¹⁷⁴ New roads were paved, while a large percentage of inner city streets remained cobbled.¹⁷⁵ New buildings were erected and old ones renovated or expanded. Particularly in the old inner cities, spatial expansions of buildings was only a vertical possibility, which resulted in houses being increasingly taller.¹⁷⁶ Both cobbled streets and the street canyons fundamentally changed the soundscape of inner cities, as sounds were thrown back by stone walls and pavements, adding a diffused and dense sound field to the sounds that were directly

Americanism) and to present it instead as protector of high (meaning European) culture. Vienna underwent the same developments that Berlin did (such as industry, transport, and commerce) and was just as exposed to the noise of modernity as its German counterpart (Frisby, David. *Cityscapes of Modernity: Critical Explorations*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

¹⁷³ Lessing, 80 (my translation). Lessing uses terms that designated “noise” in the dialect of each city alluding to the fact that the noise in each city was as different as the words that its population used to describe it.

¹⁷⁴ Between 1890 and 1914, Berlin underwent a wide-scale construction that was to give the city its “modern appearance” (Winteroll, 82).

¹⁷⁵ In Vienna, the surface area given over to traffic increased from 2.7 to 15.7 million square meters between 1870 and 1913, and eighty percent of the inner city streets were cobbled by 1913 (Payer, “Age of Noise,” 775). Munich spent a record sum on new cobble stone roads in 1899 (Kronegg, 284).

¹⁷⁶ In Vienna, for example, two-thirds of the inner city buildings had more than two floors by the end of the 1910s (Payer, “Der Klang von Wien,” 106). Pictures of Berlin and Munich from the 1910s show that the average building in the inner city had four to five floors.

perceptible.¹⁷⁷ In the suburbs, the number of houses multiplied significantly increasing population density and with it the amount of sounds produced.¹⁷⁸

The spatial expansion of all three cities increased the need for private and public transportation, and with it traffic volume: “As living and working quarters, shopping facilities, service industries, and cultural and leisure facilities gradually became separated from each other, people were required to become more and more mobile.”¹⁷⁹ Modes of transportation ranged from horse-drawn to steam-driven carriages; all these rattled alongside automobiles, trams, and thousands of bicycles. The electric tram became particularly popular in Vienna, Berlin, and Munich alike, in each of which cities its network of tracks was continuously expanded since the turn of the century.¹⁸⁰ This now meant that citizens were first exposed to the deafening construction noise of the track-laying, followed by the tram’s screeching wheels and the frequent ringing of its bell signals.¹⁸¹ A further cause of frustration among city dwellers was industrial noise. By the turn of the century, few zoning regulations had been put in place. Industrial and residential quarters were only loosely separated, with factories being often adjacent to a

¹⁷⁷ Payer, “Der Klang von Wien,” 106.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, “The Age of Noise,” 775.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 776.

¹⁸⁰ Munich expanded its tram tracks from 23 to 93 kilometers between 1880 and 1899 (Kronegg, 286); Berlin boasted 364 kilometers of (horse-drawn) tram tracks in 1895 (Machel, 18). During the first ten years of the new century, there was a massive expansion of the electric tram and its network of tracks (Machel, 22)

¹⁸¹ For Vienna: “Die Glockensignale der Wiener Trambahn sind die häßlichsten, die irgendeine Stadt der Welt besitzt, kreischend, roh, aufreizend, marternd und widerwärtig.” ([Unsigned Entry.], “Oeffentliche Klagen, Proteste und Siege des D.A.L.V.” *Recht auf Stille. Der Antirüpel*, 1, no. 3 (Januar 1909): 45. For Munich: “Dass es in München vielleicht mehr und schlimmeren Lärm gibt, wie in anderen ebenso großen Städten, weiß jeder, der einmal die Münchener Trambahn hat donnern hören...” (*Recht auf Stille. Der Antiruepel* 1909). See also complaints in *Der Antirüpel (AR)* 1, no.1 (1908): 10; and *AR* 1, no.8 (Juni 1909): 143.

residential building. Berlin residents, in particular, voiced frequent complaints about industrial noise produced by factories, plants, and mills.¹⁸²

As the population density reached its peak in those decades, the vast majority of the population was forced to live in poorly insulated apartment homes where they could hear every sound made by their neighbors.¹⁸³ From simple conversations, to footsteps, and banging doors, the thin walls between neighbors in close living quarters left little undisclosed.¹⁸⁴ Familiar urban sounds, such as the beating of rugs, playing children, and barking dogs had become a major nuisance. The same was the case with music making, a phenomenon which was the target of many complaints in the quarterly journal *Der Antirüpel* (*Antirowdy*). Whether in the form of a band concert in a café, the neighbor practicing on the piano, or phonographs blasting music through the windows of a store, the density of the population turned music into noise in the ears of many denizens.¹⁸⁵

Finally, the twenty-four-hour patterns of alternating noise and quiet that had still been part of city life in the later nineteenth century had come to an end by the turn of the century.¹⁸⁶ Simultaneous to the increase of amount, form, and volume of city sounds, periods where silence had reigned, such as meal-times and the late nights, were encroached upon and finally disappeared altogether. The din even ruled the night:

¹⁸² Large industries move toward the margins of Berlin as late as 1900 (Winteroll, 83). Only gradually (and after the turn of the century) laws were put in place that would forbid the building of loud and dirty factories in certain urban areas (for specific examples see *Der Antirüpel* (AR) 2, no. 9 (1910): 46-7; AR 2, no.1 (1910): 8; and AR 1, no.1 (1908): 12.)

¹⁸³ In Vienna only 1.2 percent of Viennese residences lived in single homes. The rest had to do with poorly insulated apartments (Janik/Toulmin, 49); In Berlin nearly 800,000 citizens lived with their families in a single room (Winteroll, 82).

¹⁸⁴ To give only two of the countless examples in *Der Antirüpel*: “Ich leide entsetzlich (...) unter den Geräuschen in unserem Hause...” (Frau W. “Symphonia domestica aus Briefen.” *Recht auf Stille. Der Antirüpel*, 1, no. 3(Januar 1909) 42); “Die Wände dieses [neuen] Hauses sind so dünn, daß nicht nur die Geräusche aus den Nachbarwohnungen, sondern jedes gesprochene Wort durchdringt.” (Fried, Alfred. “Zwei Briefe.” *Recht auf Stille. Der Antirüpel* 1, no.5 (März 1909): 83.)

¹⁸⁵ Berger, “Das Recht auf Stille,” 315-16.

¹⁸⁶ Payer, “The Age of Noise,”777.

Streetcar tracks had to be overhauled and streets cobbled and asphalted. In railroad stations and post offices, switchboards and markets, sewers and hospitals, bars and restaurants, people were working. So too were street cleaners, policemen and firemen, night watchmen and printers. Urban social activities advanced further and further into the night, as street lighting illuminated a growing number of streets.¹⁸⁷

As residents became more and more flooded with the city's incessant and multifarious sounds, the early twentieth century is also the time when the Antiphon, a device designed to protect its wearer from noise, was invented.¹⁸⁸

As the city became a "noise-boiler of the devil" (*Lärmkessel des Teufels*),¹⁸⁹ its noise became a major topic in the cultural imagination. Literary writers and composers berated or celebrated the racket of the city in their aesthetic texts and criticism. Two such figures were Strauss and Hofmannsthal, whose opera *Der Rosenkavalier* contained several scenes that brought the noise of everyday life into the opera house. Early on in the first act, a crowd floods into the private chambers of a main character, the Countess, exercising their right for a public visit. Among the visitors are a notary, a chef and his assistant, a clothing designer, a vendor of animals, a scholar, two paparazzi, a mother and her three daughters, the majordomo, the hairdresser and his assistant, an Italian tenor, a flute player, a messenger, several servants, the almoner, the hunter, and her cousin's valet. As they circle around the Countess, Hofmannsthal's allusion to William Hogarth's *Marriage à-la-mode* (1743-45) becomes visible as the scene hosts many of the same guests:

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 777.

¹⁸⁸ The "Antiphon" was designed by M.Pleßner, Hauptmann a.D, in an attempt to abate daily noises (Koller, 235). It was in essence the early version of the earplug, a metal ball with a knob to put it in the ear canal. It never achieved full success due to its lack of being a significant improvement to cotton, as well as side-effects such as boils in the user's ear canal (Hoffmann, 121).

¹⁸⁹ An expression used by protagonist Morosus in Richard Strauss's and Stefan Zweig's 1935 opera *Die Schweigsame Frau*.



Figure 1: William Hogarth, *Marriage à-la-mode*.

Having their operatic scene set up like the eighteenth-century painting, Hofmannsthal and Strauss produce its acoustic backdrop, a representational soundscape that is anachronistic in its mediation of twentieth-century conceptions of noise.¹⁹⁰ As the guests vie for the Countess's attention, they interrupt each other or, if necessary, talk and sing simultaneously. They create a soundscape whose acoustic silhouette conforms to contemporary conceptions of urban noise, specifically in its polyphonic texture, its eclecticism, and its rhythmic, tonal, and linguistic diversity.

¹⁹⁰ On Hofmannsthal's familiarity with the works of Hogarth in general, and this painting in particular, see M.E. Gilbert, "Painter and Poet: Hogarth's *Marriage à-la-mode* and Hofmannsthal's *Der Rosenkavalier*." *The Modern Language Review* 64, no. 4 (Oct., 1969): 818-827.

The acoustic medley is thereby produced on a poetic and musical level. The aristocratic mother and her three daughters plead for money in an archaic and highly stylized language. The Baron speaks in an idiosyncratic mixture of a court-inflected jargon and a vernacular dialect. A paparazzo chats in German with a heavy Italian accent, while the clothing designer converses exclusively in French. The animal vendor expresses himself solely in rhyme, a tenor sings an aria in Italian, and a notary shares his knowledge in bureaucratic parlance. Hofmannsthal's mixture of languages, dialects, and jargons is matched by Strauss' diversity of musical styles. The three daughters sing slowly, and in rhythmic unison (with each other and the orchestra). The designer and the animal vendor advertise their products with fast-paced, choppy exclamations. These voiced elements are accompanied, or rather interrupted, by the jolting polyrhythm of the orchestra which plays ascending triplets or trills (the flutist even incorporates flutter tonguing, a technique which produces a unique kind of trill). When accompanying the animal vendor, the strings play heavy and loud accents in one measure (*sforzando*) and choppy, quiet accents in the next (*staccato*). The paparazzo sings much faster than all of his predecessors with a limited vocal range evoking spoken utterances. He is joined by the celli which imitate the man's furtive occupations by playing with a muffler and *sul ponticello*, a bow technique played close to the bridge creating a thin and whiny, almost nasal sound.

Amid this chaos, a tenor begins, seemingly randomly, to perform a traditional Italian aria. Unlike the other sounds that fill the air, his song has a discernible melodic line, a specific key, a distinct rhythm, and is sung in the demonstrative *espressivo*. During his performance, a group of servants begin to fight, which does not stop the singer and his

flutist. In the end, the performance is acknowledged by the clapping hands of the hairdresser. The conglomeration of sounds is amplified by the continuous change in pace, rhythm, and meter of the orchestra, and also by a *sui generis* set of percussion instruments which clatter their own commentary (including the triangle, the tambourine, a large cog rattle, the small drums, and the cymbals).

This scene offers in a more radical form the type of musical and poetic texture that runs, albeit in a more subdued form, throughout the entire opera. Thomas Mann found the end result confusing, wondering why Hofmannsthal would allow Strauss to drown the text in so much noise. A few days after the Munich premiere of the opera (1911), he wrote:

But how, for God's sake, do you really feel about the way in which Richard Strauss has weighed down and stretched out your delicate creation?! Four hours of loud noise (...). All the thousand linguistic delicacies and curiosities of the text are crushed to death and swallowed up. In the end that's good, for they stand in a blatant stylistic contradiction to the refined noise in which they perish, and which should have been twice as refined, but had much less noise.¹⁹¹

Mann criticizes what he views as a discontinuity between the opera's musical and its poetic material, identifying a "blatant stylistic contradiction" between the racket of the orchestra and Hofmannsthal's "linguistic delicacies." Experiencing the opera as simply noisy, Thomas Mann is reluctant to acknowledge Hofmannsthal's participation in it or to consider the interplay between its verbal and sonic elements any further.

But listening closely reveals that there is indeed a stylistic affinity between music and libretto. The poet, not a victim but co-producer of the noise, aligns his poetic techniques with Strauss's compositional style. He, as much as the composer, reproduces (and ultimately amplifies) the noise of modern urban life. What Hofmannsthal's

¹⁹¹ Mann, 202.

“linguistic delicacies” are concerned, *Der Rosenkavalier* alludes specifically to Vienna’s soundscape which, at that time, was marked by a mix of language and dialects. The Austro-Hungarian capital had seen an immense population influx from the outlying and non-German speaking areas in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁹² The variety of languages and dialects of the densely populated and multi-cultural city is incorporated in this opera (which is set in the capital after all), evoking the acoustic potpourri of fin-de-siècle Vienna.

Incidental commentaries on noise by contemporaries of Strauss and Hofmannsthal persistently list polyphony, eclecticism, and diversity as constitutive features of urban noise. In his tract “Über den Lärm” (1907), Theodor Lessing berates not only the loudness of city life, but specifically the multiplicity of sounds: “Diese scheinbaren Kleinigkeiten: schreiende Hähne, knarrende Thüren, pfeifende Schusterjungen, lärmende Torf- oder Früchteverkäufer, rasselnde Eisen- und Straßenbahnen, dröhnende Droschkenräder – die uns täglich einige Stunden Leben rauben (...), die bilden die wahre Tragödie des Lebens... .” (These seemingly trivial sounds: screaming roosters, creaking doors, whistling apprentices, vociferous turf- or fruit vendors, rattling trains and trams, droning carriage wheels – they rob us daily of precious hours (...), they are the real tragedy of life...)¹⁹³ Lessing builds a climax into his list, making each contributor sound louder than the last; this indicate that it is the conglomeration of the sounds that make them so unbearable.

One of the side-effects of the acoustic palimpsest was the lack of a rhythm which, as Karin Bijsterveld has shown, was commonly conceived as one of the reasons why

¹⁹² Huyssen, 40.

¹⁹³ Lessing, 73.

street and industrial noise was so hard to adjust to.¹⁹⁴ This also comes through in the account of Freiherr von Berger, a prominent Viennese theater director who analyzes the sounds in his backyard (in suburban Vienna) on a late afternoon. Like Lessing, he highlights the sheer variety and asynchronicity of sounds and comes to the same conclusion. Within a few minutes he notes street performers, barking and whining dogs, rattling and honking vehicles, church bells, chirping sparrows, practicing musicians, a microphone magnifying a musical performance, a screaming peacock, several factory sirens, the screeching breaks of a tram, a hooting train, the wind, horses and their coachman, the sharpening of a scythe, trumpet signals from the barracks, the beating of rugs, a whistling pedestrian, and a hurdy gurdy.¹⁹⁵ Berger finds himself surrounded by an endless variety of sound produced by workers, musicians, instruments, animals, nature, and mechanical apparatuses. This conglomeration of discrete sounds, jumbled together, is audible in the visitation scene of *Der Rosenkavalier* and it is achieved at the level of form, through the use of dissonance, melismas, trills, poly-rhythms, neologisms, onomatopoeia, and multi-lingualism, to name only a few.

From a music-historical perspective, the aesthetic approach of Strauss and Hofmannsthal is unique because they fuse two different kinds of noise music. Paul Hegarty, musician and author of *Noise/Music* (2007), stresses that there is music that sounded noisy to contemporary ears and, on the other hand, the noise music of the Futurists (and their allies) who deliberately integrate street or machine noise into their works.¹⁹⁶ The former applies to artists making compositional decisions (such as dissonance, large orchestration, or unfamiliar elements) that struck contemporary

¹⁹⁴ Bijsterveld, 154.

¹⁹⁵ Berger, 315.

¹⁹⁶ Hegarty, 14-15.

audiences as being noisy. Often, what had initially been considered noise, became accepted and intelligible over time.¹⁹⁷ The latter including real-life sounds into musical compositions trying to establish a new appreciation for noise as being both progressive and aesthetically pleasing. Operas such as *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, and *Die Ägyptische Helena* walk the fine line between both categories. They were in fact experienced as noisy by a then-surprised public while also having integrated a more literal representation of the noise of the city. Thus, Strauss and Hofmannsthal built on opera tradition while contributing to its revision.

Audiences' perception of "noise in newness" greeted many opera composers long before the Strauss/Hofmannsthal collaboration. In the nineteenth century, Rossini and Wagner would be the ones who were frequently mocked and criticized for presenting noise, instead of music, to the audiences. Critics of Gioachino Rossini's operas were "filling the papers with jokes about his excessive noisiness."¹⁹⁸ Especially well known was the Rossini crescendo (or Rossini Rocket) toward the end of an act, as well as the rhythmic force, the frequent use of trumpets, trombones, and bass drums and the introduction of trombones, horns and cymbals into his score.¹⁹⁹ Opening one of his operas, *La Gazza Ladra*, with a drum roll (instead of bow strokes) didn't help this reputation. Rossini was accused of over-scoring his compositions creating a cacophonous orchestration that one contemporary compared to the *Grande Armée*: "[Rossini] proceeds

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15. Hegarty insists that such judgments, imposed by a then-surprised public, should prevent us from imagining a compositional decision such as dissonance as a synonym for noise. Schoenberg, for example, who revolutionized the concept of tonality and accepted "that art could stay far from beauty," was at bottom uninterested in the use of noises. Quoting Schoenberg's *The New Music*, Hegarty reminds us that Schoenberg "rejected the idea that he was doing anything other than continuing the project of 'classical' music, with a 'more inclusive sound-material', so that 'nothing essential changes in all this!'" (Hegarty, 12-14).

¹⁹⁸ Walton, 148.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 147-48.

like Napoleon; for him, all the available instruments are deployed together, even those that until now, have never appeared in the ranks.”²⁰⁰ Rossini is an example of those who employed a set of compositional innovations that resulted in music that was felt to be noise. What makes his case interesting to us is the fact that he also strove to integrate in his music the sound of modern life which, in his time, was marked by political unrest, revolution, and war.²⁰¹ While his goal was not to reproduce the sounds of war, he searched for a musical language that would express the “ravages of arbitrary power, the excesses of ambition,[and] the imposing apparatus of conquest.”²⁰² Rossini’s compositional goal can be considered a first step toward the later modernist agenda, when composers were trying to “branch out, to address the world of sound and human interaction with and/or construction of that world.”²⁰³

The same applies to Richard Wagner who worked with noise on at least two levels. He also chose compositional elements that were construed as noisy. At the same time, he opened up his music to “the world of sound,” much the same as Strauss half a century later. In 1850, a reviewer of *Lohengrin* wrote in dismay about Wagner’s work: “Wagner reveals himself in this work (not to mention his earlier ones) to be completely *unmusical*. He has given us not music but noise, and such an ugly noise, that only a general cannonade on stage was missing to make it sound like the thunder of hell itself.”²⁰⁴ Noise and music, which would achieve equal footing for the avant-gardes half a century later, are still two neatly separated acoustic phenomena in this review.

²⁰⁰ Walton, 149 (quoting Ludovic Vitet’s review of Rossini’s *Le Siège* in 1828).

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁰² Walton, 147 (quoting Rossini (1826)).

²⁰³ Hegarty, 5.

²⁰⁴ Osborne, 108.

Thirty years later, in 1879, another audience member expressed the same dislike, the young Richard Strauss himself, who ranted to his friend Ludwig Thuille about the noise in Wagner's *Siegfried*. In his letter, a condescending account which Strauss would regret in his later years, he writes:

Wäre eine Katze krepirt oder sogar Felsen wären vor Angst vor diesen scheusslichen Misstönen zu Eierspeisen geworden. ... Mir haben die Ohren gesummt von diesen Missgestalten von Akkorden, wenn man sie überhaupt noch so nennen kann. ... Der Anfang des dritten Actes ist ein Lärm zum Ohrenzerreissen.

(It would kill a cat and would turn rocks into scrambled eggs from fear of these hideous dischords. ... My ears buzzed from these abortions of chords, if one can still call them such. ... The opening of the third act made enough noise to split the ears.)²⁰⁵

Strauss's accusation rests on two assumptions he would later drastically review. First, music stops being music if certain aesthetic boundaries are transgressed. Secondly, noise is to be kept separate from its beautiful sister called music.

In this regard, Wagner failed miserably. In addition to straining his audience's ear with musical novelties, Wagner virtually forced the noise of modernity into the opera house. Performances of the *Ring* cycle (in Bayreuth, but also a few years earlier in Munich premieres of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* in 1869-70) were accompanied by the noise of the modern machine.²⁰⁶ Steam, which has a central theatrical and metaphorical function in *Ring* operas, was delivered to the theater's stage through a locomotive boiler. It was the cause for much debate: "Worst of all was its noise. Hardly anyone failed to mention the "coarse materialist hissing and swoosh" that accompanied each cloud of steam. And while some critics thought it a fitting addition to Nibelheim's anvils (...), most considered it (...) an untimely reminder indeed of the railway station

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 241.

²⁰⁶ Kreuzer, 192.

where their Bayreuth experience had begun.”²⁰⁷ The noise of the machine inadvertently “catapulted audiences outside the carefully simulated virtual realm of myth and into the practicalities of modern life.”²⁰⁸ The locomotive boiler was not to be the only element that would catapult audiences back into the realities of modern life. As Friedrich Kittler points out in his insightful study on Wagner’s media technology, the composer destabilized music’s relation to the non-musical sound world: “Whereas classical music drama abstracts music from the lived experience of sound and occupies only a ‘symbolic relation’ to the actual ‘sensory field’ it occupies (...), Wagnerian total art-works correlate in the real itself to the materiality they deal with, working with sound *qua* sound and attempting to “reproduce sensuous data as such”.”²⁰⁹ Kittler postulates that Richard Wagner’s music dramas were a precursor to modern media which duplicate or reproduce, rather than remain abstract from, the lived experience of the sound world.²¹⁰

Kittler’s assessment suggests that Wagner’s aesthetic anticipated modernism by including real-life sounds into musical compositions and, in its most extreme form, by creating music for which noise provided a raw material.²¹¹ Its apogee would be reached in the music of Futurism, the second of the two kinds of noise music sketched out by Hegarty. Futurist compositions relied on a literal, direct use of noise; the movement’s composers incorporated sound and noise machines in their pieces. Spearheaded by Filippo Marinetti and Luigi Russolo, Futurism proposed a new music in which “instead of musical tones, sounds would be created, often inspired by machines.”²¹² Russolo

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

²⁰⁹ Epstein, 270 (in reference to Friedrich Kittler’s “World-Breath: On Wagner’s Media Technology”. In *Opera Through Other Eyes*, edited by David Michael Levin. 215-35. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993).

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 270.

²¹¹ Hegarty, 14.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 14.

replaced the old orchestra with noise machines (*intonarumori*, noise-generating devices that produced hissing, popping, crackling sounds) and noise harmoniums (including hummers, bursters, rubbers, and cracklers). Noise had ceased to be “at the bottom in a hierarchy of sounds.”²¹³ Swiss Dadaists and the French avant-gardists, inspired by Futurism, also celebrated the inherent aesthetic potential of those sounds categorized as undesired and insignificant. The Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich was home to Dada noise (noise music, noise making, and sound poetry that fell under the term *bruitism*) with Richard Huelsenbeck as its main representative.²¹⁴ In France, Edgar Varèse, George Antheil, and Erik Satie complemented their traditional orchestra with noise makers; Varèse’s *Amériques* (1918-21) incorporated sirens; Antheil included airplane propellers in *Ballet Mécanique* (1924); and Satie used sirens, a gun, a typewriter, and a spinning lottery wheel in *Parade* (1917).

In distinguishing these two forms of noise music, Paul Hegarty positions Richard Strauss in the first group where compositional decisions, rather than the literal use of noise, made his works appear noisy. According to him, Strauss’s compositions are only noise music in so far as the audience is overwhelmed with the introduction of new media, instruments, and arrangements. His work shows no sign of the Futurists’ (and Wagnerian) reaching into the world of sound of the every day. However, and this is the crux of the matter, Strauss and Hofmannsthal assimilate both aesthetic trends making their collaboration a particularly interesting case in the history of musical noise-making. While Strauss did incorporate a vast set of performance techniques that would makes his music sound to contemporary ears as Wagner’s *Siegfried* sounded to his, Strauss’s

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

²¹⁴ Kahn, 45.

compositional *modus operandi* goes beyond that. He and his poet bring the noise of everyday life into the opera house. Like the Futurists, they allow everyday sounds into their opera. Unlike them, they are less interested in the replication of an isolated sound, focusing instead on the evocation of a complex noise construct: the entire acoustic physiognomy that constitutes the noise of the city.

Strauss and Hofmannsthal build on conventional ways of musically representing noise while expanding their musical and poetic tool box in order to create an acoustic construct that would be associative to the noise of modern life. A quick comparison with a late nineteenth-century opera reveals the difference. Verdi's *Falstaff* (1893) and Strauss's *Die Ägyptische Helena* (1928) stage nearly identical scenes, in each of which the protagonist is being attacked by noisy elves. When *Falstaff*'s elves (friends which are disguised as such) approach their victim, they sing in quick succession: "Pizzica, pizzica, stuzzica, spizzica, pungì, spilluzzica, pungì spilluzzica, finch'egli abbai!" (Nip him, pinch him, sting him, prick him, nibble him, bite him, goad him, peck him, until he howls.)²¹⁵ Boito, the librettist, focuses on words with plosives (p, ts, sp, k), and alternates these with open and closed vowels. The harshness of the plosives, the monosyllables, and the speed give their cries an intrusive and nervous air. As the entire orchestra joins, it pounds in on Falstaff's ear with increased volume and same fast-paced tempo.

By contrast, Hofmannsthal's elves sing: "Dreht ihn! Drillt ihn! Zwinkert und zwitschert, belfert und balzt, schnattert und schnaubt, drommetet und trommelt! Hudelt ihn! Hetzt ihn! Flitz, flitz, flitz!" (Twist him! Whirl him! buffet and beat him, snarl ye and snort. Blow trumpets and beat drums! Hustle him! Harry him! Flitz! Flitz! Flitz!).²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Boito, 50.

²¹⁶ *Helena Libretto*, 22 (English, 89).

Like Boito, Hofmannsthal relies on alliterations, assonances, and plosive sounds. He goes a step further, however, by infusing the elves' speech with neologisms which are, through onomatopoeic allusion, evocative of verbs that signify sound production (drommen - trommeln; hudeln - dudeln, hupen; belfern - bellen, keifen).

A corresponding expansion of technique takes place in the musical material. Verdi's music is fast-paced, repetitive (descending tonal lines), increasingly loud, and played in *staccato* (short, detached notes). At the same time, harmony, instrumentation, and the singer-orchestra relationship remain within aesthetic norms of that time. The singers' voices work in unison with the orchestra, whereas *Die Ägyptische Helena's* voices and instruments interrupt and intersect each other, are layered, pushed to the side, and drown each other out. Musical dissonance, high-pitched tones, irregular rhythmic beats, and a constant play with sound volume are some other means that Strauss employs to create a convoluted sound. Within a handful of measures, Aithra, the sorceress who called the elves, sings interval jumps, trills, quick chromatic arpeggios, and fast-paced melismata, an ornamental vocal style in which a group of notes is sung to one syllable. When the elves begin to sing, some turn out to be in the orchestra pit which further intensifies the acoustic multifariousness of this scene. Polyphony is ensured by splitting the elves into six groups. Each one attacks Menelas from a different spatial angle, temporally slightly shifted, and with subtle rhythmic and harmonic variations. The result is an acoustic entity that is as unsystematic, disorderly, and heterogeneous as the soundscape of the modern city with all its eclecticism, polyphony, and interlocking of old and new sounds.

Strauss's music is grounded in nineteenth-century music tradition, while dramatically expanding the expressive tools available to him. Traditional instruments are as important as familiar musical paradigms, including melodies, harmonic chords, and familiar rhythms (i.e. the orphans in *Der Rosenkavalier*). At the same time, he includes dissonance, excessive orchestration, and unfamiliar sounds, elements which were unintelligible to contemporary audiences to whom the music sounded noisy. Finally, he joins his avant-garde contemporaries by reaching out from the realm of music and into the world of sound, trying to incorporate sound phenomena in a non-symbolic, non-abstract way in his work. This ranges from quick interjections, such as children screaming "Papa! Papa!" in *Der Rosenkavalier*, to a complex replication of the noisy soundscape of the modern city.

Working close to, but not within the genre of avant-garde noise music, they stay clear of a mindset that Marshall Berman has described as an Either-Or attitude among modernists: "If we listen closely to writers and thinkers of modernity and compare them to those of a century ago, we will find a radical flattening of perspectives and shrinkage of imaginative range."²¹⁷ In fact, Berman has Futurism in mind: "The basic polarizations take place at the very start of our century. Here are the Italian futurists, passionate partisans of modernity in the years before the First World War."²¹⁸ They celebrated the triumphant progress of science and technology, "hacking an abyss between those docile slaves of tradition and us free moderns who are confident in the radiant splendor of our future."²¹⁹ Problematic in this polarization is, according to Berman, the *other* experience (virtually absent from the Futurist manifesto). In their "romance of machines," Futurists,

²¹⁷ Berman, 24.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

²¹⁹ Boccioni, 25.

like many of their modernist and avant-garde allies create an art and aesthetic philosophies that are marked by an “utter remoteness from people.”²²⁰ The artistic *modus operandi* of Strauss and Hofmannsthal avoids this kind of distance. Instead of dwelling entirely within abstract compositional modes, they work with noise in a way that mirrors contemporary thought (both in terms of an aesthetics and critique of noise). This also applies to their stance on the relation of music to noise.

As the two examples of *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Die Ägyptische Helena* have shown, Strauss and Hofmannsthal keep music and noise closely aligned. Unlike the avant-garde, Strauss uses (among other techniques) conventional musical paradigms to represent noise. They employ a gamut of traditional and novel musical and poetic means to reproduce noise. In the noise music of their avant-garde contemporaries, however, artistic pieces consist only of, or are substantially composed of, literal noise sounds. The implied separation of music and noise cannot be found in the works of Strauss and Hofmannsthal which insist on a close affinity between both acoustic phenomena. In so doing, they mirror contemporary conceptions of the noise-music relation. In Expressionist poetry, critical treatises, and even public complaints, music was repeatedly experienced as noise, while noise is time after time described in musical terms. Both tendencies entail the same slippage between music and noise as it is promoted in the Strauss/Hofmannsthal oeuvre.

To the composer, music is an appropriate means for the reconstruction of urban noise, given the inherent musicality of the urban racket. Even Theodor Lessing, the most ardent opponent of noise, cannot help but feel that city noise is musical: “Nun erst gar das Rollen schwerer Lastfuhrwerke, deren Schwingungen die Häuser erzittern lassen und sich

²²⁰ Berman, 26.

allen Gegenständen des Zimmers mittheilen, von denen jeder in seinem Eigentone antwortet, während das Stampfen der Hufeisen auf hartes Steinpflaster wechselnde Töne von *d* bis *fi* bewirkt.“ (Or the rolling thunder of trucks, whose vibrations leave houses trembling communicating with all objects of the room each one of which answers in its own intonation, while the stamping of hooves on hard cobble stone produce tones alternating from *d* to *fi* sharp).²²¹

Like a musical composition, noise is generated by an “orchestra” of sound producers, can be examined for its inherent chords and melodies, and has a rhythm and cyclicity all its own. Automobiles are equated with drum rolls, encouraging other instruments to join. Each item in the room, from ashtray to window frame, answers in its own intonation to the vibrations of the freight vehicle. The stamping of horseshoes even have a specific pitch for Lessing, who even wonders how a musical translation of urban noise would sound. Such a piece, he proposes, would include “the melodic thirds and fifths of shouting vendors of furs and potatoes; the very different sounds of people’s gaits and calls; the characteristic vowels of various instruments.”²²² As much as Lessing hates noise, he cannot refrain from acknowledging its inherent musicality.

Even Freiherr von Berger, whose writing on the Viennese din was examined earlier, refers to the noise of modern culture as *Kulturmusik*, the music of culture. The city assumes the form of an orchestra creating a musical piece. According to Berger, this explains why the city’s music is sometimes hard on listening ears: the orchestra has been supplemented with new instruments that have not been assimilated yet by the hearer’s

²²¹ The apostrophes after *d* and *fi* refer to the notes’ high pitch; Lessing, 79.

²²² Lessing, 79 (“die melodischen Terzen und Quinten der Ausrufer von Fellen und Kartoffeln; die sehr verschiedene Klänge des Ganges und des Rufens verschiedener Menschen; die charakteristischen Vocale diverser Instrumente”) (my translation)).

nerves.²²³ Musical or music-esque noise (“musikalischen oder doch musikartigen Lärm”²²⁴) also resurfaces in Expressionist poetry. In Gottfried Benn’s *Nachtcafé*, bar guests become instruments and render a song, that is composed of the sounds of gulping, burping, and the nervous drumming of fingers on a table:

824: Der Frauen Liebe und Leben.
Das Cello trinkt rasch mal. Die Flöte
rülpst tief drei Takte lang: das schöne Abendbrot.
Die Trommel liest den Kriminalroman zu Ende.

(824: The Love and Life of Women.
The cello has a quick drink. The flute
belches throughout three beats: his tasty evening snack.
The drum reads on to the end of the thriller.)²²⁵

Music is invoked through the instruments, the ambiguous name of the song (*Abend(b)rot*), and the reference to Adelbert von Chamisso’s cycle of poems, “Der Frauen Liebe und Leben,” which had been set to music by several German composers. In one of the next verses, musical sounds and sounds continue to merge when a guest begins to play a Chopin sonata:

B-moll: die 35. Sonate
Zwei Augen brüllen auf:
Spritzt nicht das Blut von Chopin in den Saal,
damit das Pack drauf rumlatscht!
Schluß! He, Gigi! –

(B flat minor: sonata op. 35.
A pair of eyes roars out:
Don’t splash the blood of Chopin round the place
for this lot to slouch about in!
Hey, Gigi! Stop!)²²⁶

²²³ Berger, 330 (“Ich glaube, die Empfindlichkeit gegen Lärm wird heute darum so lebhaft empfunden und geäußert, weil in das Orchester der Kulturmusik einige neue Instrumente eingefügt worden sind, denen sich unsere Nerven noch nicht angepasst haben” (my translation)).

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 324.

²²⁵ Benn, 86 (my translation).

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 86 (my translation).

Berger's conception of *Kulturmusik* comes to full fruition in this poem as art music becomes part of the bar concert. The vibration of piano strings, the rhythmic beating of fingertips, vocal (some of them verbal) interjections, the knocking of the beer glass on the counter top, and Chopin create the same kind of music that is fabricated in *Der Rosenkavalier's* visitation scene with the merchant's vocal advertisements, the whining orphans, applauding hands, and the aria of the Italian tenor.

In Georg Heym's poetry as well (particularly his first cycle of poems *Der Ewige Tag* ("Ignis")), noise is presented as a form of urban concert.²²⁷ Its instruments are music bands, steamboats, the horns of the bridges, thundering trains, and church bells. In "Vorstadt," a babbling madman ("ein lallender Irrer") sings songs in a muffled voice, children are screaming, a hurdy-gurdy is yammering, and castanets are clattering to the sound of bright little bells who call to church service. In "Gott der Stadt," the sound of the metropolis is described as a song: "Wie Korybanten-Tanz dröhnt die Musik / der Millionen durch die Straße laut." (Like the dance of the corybants, the music / of millions resounds loudly through the streets.)²²⁸ In "Dämonen der Städte," the noise of the city takes on the shape of a requiem:

Um ihre Füße kreist das Ritornell
 Des Städtemeers mit trauriger Musik
 Ein großes Sterbelied. Bald dumpf, bald grell
 Wechselt den Ton, der in das Dunkel stieg.

(Around their feet the city's dark refrain
 Is circling like a rondo of the waters.
 An ode to death. Now faint, now shrill again,
 The dirge ebbs into darkness till it falters.)²²⁹

²²⁷ See, for example, "Berlin I", "Berlin II", "Laubenfest", "Die Züge", "Vorstadt", "Gott der Stadt", "Die Gefangenen", "Vorortbahnhof", "Dämonen der Stadt."

²²⁸ Heym, 13 (my translation).

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 16 (English, 167).

As ever repeating chorus (*ritornello*), the city emits its death song with a timbre ranging from muffled to shrill. In these poems, as was the case in polemical journal articles, noise is time and again associated with music, and contemporaries hear noise in singing voices, instruments, harmonies, melodies, and structured rhythms.²³⁰

Some commentators in Lessing's journal go so far as to enjoy urban noise, precisely because it is musical. Particularly interesting is the comment of one Geißler, a Dresden citizen who suggests that the musician should use the noise of the modern city as an inspiration because it comprises sounds of life within which the resonance of reality itself are contained: "Darum sollte der Musiker nicht ohne weiteres dem Kriegsruf gegen den Lärm Folge leisten, sondern in ihn einzudringen suchen als in die große Symphonie all der Klänge, Töne und Geräusche, die mit unserm Dasein untrennbar sind, weil sie gleichsam dessen akustische Ausstrahlungen darstellen." (That's why the musician shouldn't all too readily follow the war cry against noise, but instead try to permeate the great symphony of the sounds, tones, and noises that are inseparable from our existence, because they are the acoustic incarnation thereof)²³¹ Geißler considers urban noise to be both an aesthetic inspiration and an acoustic manifestation of a quickly transforming modern culture (with noise opponents combating "the tonal manifestation, the sounding echo of our entire life and its daily modernizing processes.")²³² A look at the interplay of lyrical and musical material in the Strauss/Hofmannsthal operas confirms that their opera aesthetic was uniquely attuned to the noise of the city around it. According to Geißler, this kind of artistic approach would acknowledge the fact that life and its constant

²³⁰ See also August Endell. "Die Schönheit der grossen Stadt." In *Kunst und Kultur*. editor W. von Oettingen. Stuttgart: Verlag von Strecker & Schröder, 1908.

²³¹ Geißler, 16. (my translation)

²³² *Ibid.*, 16 ("[D]ie klangliche Erscheinungsform, das tönende Echo unseres gesamten [sic] Lebens, der an jedem Tage sich erneuernden modernen Entwicklung.").

transformations unfold in daily sound. This is precisely what takes place in Strauss's and Hofmannsthal's representation of noise. The boisterous scenes in *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Die Ägyptische Helena* carry in their very acoustic shape the social, political, cultural, and ideational polyphony of modernity itself. Noise evolves as an acoustic pendant to modernity as it had been associated with impermanence and dynamism as early as the 1860s in Baudelaire's writings.²³³ Composer and librettist go even a step further, linking the impermanence of modernity (via the noise it produces) to the thematization of subjective disintegration, a common theme in modernist literature. Here, they align themselves once more with the attitude of so many citizens in the early twentieth century, representing, in Marshall Berman's words, the *other experience*, the gap left open by the musical avant-garde. In addition to staging noise as it was heard by contemporaries, and to upholding a certain proximity between music and noise, Strauss and Hofmannsthal also include a criticism of noise that, once more, reflects how many residents of Vienna, Berlin, and Munich felt in those years.

In virtually all of their operas, characters rely on their acoustic environment as a spatial, and cognitive compass. Noise, on the other hand, is represented as being inhibitive to this process. In the case of *Der Rosenkavalier*, noise has a distracting and narcotizing effect, and in *Die Ägyptische Helena* the victim of noise suffers from disorientation and loss of a sense of a unified self. These representations counter the avant-garde's more optimistic celebration of noise, while offering an aural explanation to notions of crisis that have often been linked to the visual experience of modernity.

In 1913, Luigi Russolo wrote: "An eighteenth-century ear could not have endured the dissonant intensity of certain chords produced by our modern orchestras – triple the

²³³ Morgan, 134.

size of the orchestras of that day. But our own ears – trained as they are by the modern world, so rich in variegated noises – not only enjoy these dissonances but demand more and more violent acoustic emotions.”²³⁴ Russolo’s excitement about noise, both in art and life, is one that he claims is shared by many. Modern ears, so he argues, are trained in hearing, understanding, and enjoying the aesthetic qualities of noise. Like many Futurists, Russolo celebrated, even adored, noise. It signified, to them, progress, speed, motion, power, and destruction which all allow for the creation of new things.²³⁵ Yet, the operatic material by Strauss and Hofmannsthal proposes a different (his)story. They design characters who are exposed to an overpowering sonic spectacle and struggle accordingly. Apart from precipitating irate and irrational behavior, noise is shown to incite a disruption of a sense of space and of cognitive processes in general, causing protagonists to experience their very selves as decentered and split.

In *Der Rosenkavalier*, the Countess reveals early on how reliant she is on her sonic environment as a spatial compass, and even more so as a subjective and cognitive one. She dreams in sounds, analyzes her spatial surrounding through sound, and assesses others’ characters through sound. From the moment of the curtain’s rise, the Countess is immersed in her acoustic environment. The first scene shows her lying in bed with her young lover Octavian, relating to him what she dreamt the previous night: her husband returned unexpectedly, causing a ruckus (*Lärm; Rumor*) outside their residence.²³⁶ It was

²³⁴ Russolo, 179.

²³⁵ Albright, 173.

²³⁶ “Mir hat von ihm [husband] geträumt (...) / Es war ein Lärm im Hof von Pferd’ und Leut’ und er war da. / Vor Schreck war ich auf einmal wach, nein, schau nur, / Schau nur, wie kindisch ich bin: ich hör noch immer den Rumor im Hof. / Ich brings nicht aus dem Ohr. Hörst du leicht auch was?” (I dreamed a dream of him (...). There was a noise below of horse and hound – and he was here. In fright I started up in haste. Now look, look what a child I am – still I can hear it, all the noise below. ’Tis ringing in my ears. Do you not hear it?) *Rosenkavalier Libretto*, 12 (English, 80).

the noise in her own dream that woke her up. Furthermore, despite her flirtations with Octavian, she cannot get the sound out of her ears.

Paranoid that the noise was in fact real, she has difficulties focusing on her conversation with Octavian. She is continually distracted as she listens intently to her acoustic surrounding. To her shock, the din outside her private chambers turns out to be real after all. Frantically, she tries to analyze what she hears: “Es is der Feldmarschall. / Wenn es ein Fremder wär’, so wär’ der Lärm da drüben in meinem Vorzimmer! / Es muß mein Mann sein... .” (T’is true. It is the Field Marchal. For were a stranger here, the noise would surely be there in the antechamber. It is my husband...) ²³⁷ From the location and type of sounds she hears, the Countess reconstructs events that take place outside her visual field. While her lover tries to shut out any outside (and thus unwelcome) sounds, she depends on them in order to gain a sense of the world that creates them. As it turns out, the man who approaches is neither her husband nor a stranger, but her cousin, the Baron Ochs auf Lerchenau. The Countess comes to this conclusion after a reevaluation of acoustic feedback: “Die Stimm’! / Das is ja gar nicht die Stimm’ vom Feldmarschall! ... Die blöde, große Stimm’ müßt ich doch kennen. / Wer ist denn das? Herrgott, das ist der Ochs.” (That voice! That is not, surely not, my husband’s voice! ... That loudish, foolish voice, surely it is familiar. Who is it then? Mon Dieu! ’tis Ochs.) ²³⁸ Hearing is a central mode of orientation for the Countess, albeit one soon disturbed by a racket that will be conducted in her private chambers. After her visitors have left and taken their noise with them, the Countess seems as if numb getting lost in random contemplations. Her thoughts

²³⁷ *Rosenkavalier Libretto*, 13 (English, 81).

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 14 (English, 82).

circle around the Baron's announcement of wanting to marry a young woman which triggers a set of self-reflective memories in the Countess:

Wo ist die [das junge Mädchen] jetzt? (...)
Aber wie kann das wirklich sein,
daß ich die kleine Resi war
und daß ich auch einmal die alte Frau sein werd!...
Die alte Frau, die alte Marschallin? ...
Wie kann denn das geschehen? Wie macht denn das der liebe Gott?
Wo ich doch immer die gleiche bin.

(Where is she [the young Countess] now? (...)
But can it be - can it be - though I say so,
that I was that young Tess of long ago.
And that I shall be called, ere long,
"the Old Princess ..." "The old Field Marshal's lady." ...
How can it come to pass? How can the powers decree it so?
For I am still I, and never change.)²³⁹

Having been frolicking around with her young lover a few moments earlier, she now wonders and worries about the finitude of life. God, so she concludes, is cruel for making her watch her own aging, a process which she wishes was hidden from herself. The Countess is uneasy about such cognitive insights, and indicates that she would very much prefer oblivion.

Her meditations, which have become increasingly solipsistic and correspondingly unsettling, came with silence. A few minutes later, after Octavian has returned to her, she states that she can *hear* herself age when she is alone at night. The silence of the night, so she tells him, makes audible the soundless time as it passes:

Und zwischen mir und dir da fließt sie wieder.
Lautlos wie eine Sanduhr.
Oh Quin-quin!
Manchmal hör' ich sie fließen unaufhaltsam.
Manchmal steh' ich auf, mitten in der Nacht
und lass' die Uhren alle stehen.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 36 (English, 107).

(And there 'twixt you and me it flows in silence,
trickling like sands in an hour-glass
Oh! Mignon!
But sometimes I hear it flowing ceaselessly.
Sometimes I arise in the dead of night
and take the clocks and stop them every one.)²⁴⁰

Cognitive clarity is torturous to the Countess, who goes as far to pause all the clocks in her house in an effort to prevent time from passing. Her initial aural acuity from the beginning of the opera has been numbed by the sounds of the day, leaving her vulnerable in moments of silence. Only as she is surrounded by silence does she begin to hear the volatility of time, life, and her current happiness. It is in this very scene that she realizes that her love affair can only be short-lived and will end, just as her years as a light-hearted young woman will also end.

The Countess's reaction to noise recapitulates a common conception in early twentieth-century thought. Noise is repeatedly presented as a distracting side-product of mass culture, one which fosters cognitive and critical passivity. Betty Kurth and Elsa Asenijeff, both fin-de-siècle writers and political activists, voice this view about the acoustic clamor in the city. Under her pseudonym Vera, Kurth writes in 1902:

I am fond of writing at night, when all is hushed in slumber. Then I do not feel myself alone. The consciousness of my 'ego,' which I lose in the bustle of the day, is my consolation. In the daytime I act automatically, I force myself into the narrow frames of everyday life, while at night I live my own life, a rich and varied life. I hearken to the faintest beating of my heart, which is no longer deafened by the noises of the day.²⁴¹

Unlike the Countess, Vera wants to hear herself, and thus to be in connection with her "own thoughts, [her] own feelings, views, words."²⁴² Asenijeff's *Diary Pages of an Emancipated Woman (Tagebuchblätter einer Emanzipierten)* presents a similar attitude.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 40 (English, 110).

²⁴¹ Kurth, 35.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 37.

Like Kurth, Asenijeff's diarist longs for silence because only then she can "get to know life."²⁴³ Introspection and reflection are vital; noise, on the other hand, is a constant antagonist: "What do people know about life? They get lost in their self-made, noisy filth and tell themselves: I have seen life. Settle yourself out of the way, quietly to the side, and being [*das Dasein*] will sweep over you. It roars, how it roars! I can still hear it in my dreams."²⁴⁴ Asenijeff's protagonist surrounds herself with silence, so she can hear life (as it roars). She avoids what the Countess strives for: losing oneself in noise. The latter surrounds herself with the distracting racket, because without it she would be forced to hear "her own thoughts, feelings, views, and words."²⁴⁵

Asenijeff and Kurth are joined by other early twentieth-century writers who explicitly conceptualized noise as a form of distraction that keeps the individual from introspection, ultimately generating a cognitive and critical passivity. Theodor Lessing refers to the din of the city as a weapon against consciousness, a narcotic that inhibits thought processes and promotes a longing for unconsciousness and oblivion (*Waffe gegen das Bewusstsein; Betäubungsmittel*).²⁴⁶ Alfred von Berger blames noise for the "mental emptiness" of city dwellers (*Gedankenleere*). Berger argues that noise allows the modern man to drown out his own voice, just as people do in busy cafés, where they can "hide their selves and talk, without having to hear themselves speak."²⁴⁷ In *Der Rosenkavalier*, this kind of hiding ultimately results in a crisis, not only of subjectivity but of identity as well. The Countess finds herself in her late thirties, wondering where the past years of her life have gone, and who that aged version of her teenage self is.

²⁴³ Asenijeff, 18.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁴⁵ Kurth, 37.

²⁴⁶ Lessing, 73-75.

²⁴⁷ Berger (1907) 1913, 320 (my translation).

In *Die Ägyptische Helena*, the connection between noise and subjective disorientation is presented even more explicitly. Here, the exposure to noise is no longer a matter of choice. Instead it violently intrudes into human minds, leaving people bewildered, emotionally unbalanced, and spatially disoriented. The inevitable exposure to a multi-tonal and multi-rhythmic noise is now inextricably linked to the experience of disorientation, disintegration, and crisis. Menelas, husband of beautiful Helena, is the victim of the acoustic racket. In an effort to protect his wife from his rage, the sorceress Aithra calls the forest elves and orders them to lure the man out of her house.

They are told to do so with the help of noise: “Nachtelfen ihr! (...) ich hab hier im Haus einen heißen Kerl, einen rechten Raufbold, den schaffst mir vom Leib! Mit Lärm einer Schlacht bestürmt ihm den Kopf, narret ihn fest / Laßt ihn anlaufen, / sein Schwert in der Hand, / an zwanzig Bäume!” (Dark Elves of night, seeking to draw to you men, slaves of lust. Here in my house is a hot-headed rogue, a wild, reckless fighter – drive him hence from me! With noise of a fight bewilder his brain until he is mad! In wild frenzy drive him against twenty tree trunks, his sword in his hand!).²⁴⁸ The attack on the king’s ears is, in Aithra’s own words, an attack on his mind. Her melismatic singing and the elves’ multi-directional provocative calls are a sign of the corruption of the phonic space that Menelas’s “exhausted mind cannot withstand.”²⁴⁹ He is increasingly perplexed and frantic, and eventually storms out of the palace where the acoustic chicanery hits him full force: “Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! / Hetzt ihn auf s neu! / Jagt ihn im Kreis um sich selber herum! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!” (Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Drive ye him mad! Ha, ha, ha, ha,

²⁴⁸ *Helena Libretto*, 21 (English, 22).

²⁴⁹ Hofmannsthal, “Die Ägyptische Helena. Aufsatz,” 763 (my translation).

ha, ha! Turn ye him madly about and about! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!)²⁵⁰ Menelas's world is spinning. He turns toward every acoustic trigger and begins to run, first physically then mentally, in circles. The musical representation of noise is once again phenomenological: his disorientation is acoustically represented by the scattered placing of the singers and through a musical chiasmus: half way through the scene, the orchestra reverses the motif of the elves.

Bombarded by the acoustic chaos, the king falls into a hallucinatory delirium. He begins to chase after wafts of mist which he believes to be Helena and Paris. When he regains consciousness, he describes how he killed them both (having in fact just fought against fog):

Im weißen Gewand – zerrüttet das Haar –
und doch schöner als je
flüchtete sie in Angst – und warf
zwei herrliche Arme – um eine verfluchte Gestalt,
die im Mondlicht aussah wie Paris!
Mit einem Streich doch traf ich die beiden!

(In a garment of white, her hair floating wild,
yet never more fair to see,
in frenzied fear she fled,
with both her lovely arms clasping a hideous, villainous form:
Twas the very semblance of Paris!
'Neath one strong blow they both fell together!)²⁵¹

Staring at his untouched sword, he sees blood that has not been shed. For the rest of the opera, Menelas struggles. The elves' aural assault have left him feeling utterly decentered: "Zerspalten das Herz, / zerrüttet der Sinn! (...) Gebt mir mich selber / mein einig Wesen, / der unzerspaltenen Mannheit Glück, / o gebet mir Armen / mich selber zurück!" (O, sad stricken heart! O mind overthrown! (...) O heal me! Give me back my

²⁵⁰ *Helena Libretto*, 25 (English, 30).

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 29 (English, 32).

old manhood! O give me, wretched, my self back once more)²⁵² Menelas, who fluctuates between feebleness and aggression, begs for his inner unity to be restored.

This inner unity was a connection that had existed between ear and mind—between aurality, subjectivity, and mental health. It had been theorized before, by no other than Max Nordau, who commented in *Degeneration* on the impact of noise on city dwellers, particularly those that have failed to adjust to the fast pace and high stimulation of modern life. Nordau makes repeated references to the current increase of criminal acts committed by urban dwellers who were too overwhelmed by the din of the city. While noise might not be the only trigger for the increase of a general nervous irritability (*nervöse Reizbarkeit*), in Nordau's opinion it necessitated a mass of new laws which might protect fellow citizens from irate behavior of those whom it caused to act aggressively.²⁵³ Theodor Lessing would consider such behavior not a sign of degeneration, but on the contrary the act of a sensible and intellectual man who cannot (nor wants to) become numb to the urban racket. Either way, both writers exemplify the commonly held notion of ear and mind being closely linked. Lessing states: "Wohlweislich hat die Natur das Cortische Organ tief in die Schädelhöhle gelegt, als das zarteste von allen."²⁵⁴ Lessing postulates that hearing is the most fragile of the senses. Positioning the aural organ inside the skull is, according to Lessing no coincidence. Almost as if trying to hide, the inner ear is in close proximity to the mind. Time and again, Lessing returns to the issue of the impact of noise on mind and body, going so far

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 30 (English, 34).

²⁵³ Nordau, 538.

²⁵⁴ Lessing, 77.

as to argue that the increase of encephalitis (*Gehirnentzündung*) among city dwellers can be attributed to their exposure to city noise.²⁵⁵

After visiting a performance of *Elektra*, contemporary reviewers used the same adjectives as members of the anti-noise movement. Overwrought (*überreizt*), exhausted, strained, numb, and – to use Menelas’s word – mentally overthrown (*zerrüttet*) were some of the most commonly voiced attributes used in reviews of *Elektra*.²⁵⁶ Cultural-historical context and operas stay once more in close proximity. In their effort to bring the noise of modern urban life into the opera house, Strauss and Hofmannsthal apply, adapt, and revise a variety of aesthetic models. Hofmannsthal expands conventional poetic tools used in a libretto, incorporating dialects, languages, and neologisms in addition to more common techniques (i.e. alliteration, phonetic tricks). For his part, Strauss works the same way, employing conventional sounds that were commonly linked to noise (such as large instrumentation, heavy percussion, high tempo, and *fortissimo*). Like other composers before him (Rossini, Wagner, but also Berlioz or Dvorak), Strauss also incorporates elements into his music that were new and unintelligible (and thus noisy) to the contemporary ear, such as dissonance, convoluted rhythms, and real-life sounds. Finally, the composer contributes to a breakdown of music’s abstraction and symbolism put in motion by Wagner in his aesthetics of media technology. While this approach was pushed to its limits by some of Strauss’s contemporaries, and particularly those in avant-garde composition circles, Strauss is not especially interested in

²⁵⁵ The journal *Der Antirüpel* frequently includes articles and announcements by medical professionals who write or lecture on topics such as “Neurology and Noise.”

²⁵⁶ Ther, 172. Also in contemporary reviews: “Das Publikum schien zunächst wie betäubt und erst nach einer Weile setzte der Beifall schüchtern ein.” (R.P. “Theater, Kunst und Literatur. Die Uraufführung der “Elektra” von Richard Strauss.” *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* (25.01. 1909): p. unknown); “Zermürbt von Nervenemotionen geht dieser [Zuhörer] heim ,wie von einer schwindelnden Fahrt.” (O.S., “Richard Strauß’ “Elektra” .” *Dresdner Journal* (04.07.1913): p.unknown).

reproducing isolated sounds; he strives instead for a more encompassing approximation of an entire acoustic landscape.

By employing a vast repertory of musical and librettistic techniques, Strauss and his librettist replicate the rhythmic and acoustic diversity, eclecticism, and polyphony of the urban soundscape. In the process, their representation turns into an acoustic phenomenology. By representing the modern noisescap as it is – a multi-layered convolution of rhythms, sounds, timbres, melodies, and harmonies – they create an acoustic pendant to modernity’s multifariousness, and to the subjective disunity that it fostered in the modern urban citizen.

Just as Walter Benjamin sought to see beyond the glamour and façade of modern Paris, Strauss and Hofmannsthal listened beyond the noise generated by the city. Their staging of noise as an omnipresent narcotic and catalyst of subjective disintegration, also constitutes a performance of the challenges brought about by a rapidly modernizing society. Seeking refuge in the opera house, as a safe haven from the acoustic imbroglio, is not possible anymore as audiences and characters alike are confronted with the same noise both in- and outside the opera house. Only momentarily was the modern individual freed from its grasp, which is when a contemporary listener comments with relief: “Der Lärm verhallt endlich.” (At last, the noise abates.)²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Freund, 2 (commenting on the last act of *Der Rosenkavalier*).

Chapter 3: A Female Acoustic

“Wer achtet ein Weib und Geschrei eines Weibes?” (Who pays heed to a woman and a woman’s wailing?)²⁵⁸ Referring to his sister-in-law, this character from *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* mocks the only woman in the household of the Dyer family. The man’s disdain for women reflects itself in the inarticulate screaming that he hears whenever she speaks. Whatever she says rings a meaningless sound in his ears, a *Geschrei* that is as insignificant as her entire existence. Best, he suggests, to not even listen to her.

Ironically, not paying attention to the woman (and her clamor) proves impossible when attending to *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*. The opera is marked by a distinct acoustic dominance of women, bringing as much as three dramatic sopranos on stage (in addition to two other sopranos, a dramatic mezzo-soprano, an alto, and a female choir). In fact, this is the case for all of the operas by Strauss and Hofmannsthal. *Elektra* boasts eleven women allowing male voices to resound for less than fifteen minutes over the course of an opera that runs almost two hours. In *Die Ägyptische Helena*, the mythological figure Helena is transformed into an outspoken protagonist defying her classical presentation as a silent and observed object of desire. The second of the two acts in *Ariadne auf Naxos* is dedicated to women alone, with the exception of a powerful, but short aria by the only man, Bacchus. The same opera also hosts Zerbinetta who performs her renowned coloratura aria which requires an almost extra-human vocal virtuosity. In *Rosenkavalier*, the man’s voice is dually appropriated by the woman’s: not only is the male protagonist

²⁵⁸ *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*, 39 (English, 19).

played and sung by a woman, he also spends most of his dramatic time pretending to be one. The strong vocal presence of these women is complemented by their pronounced sense of hearing: the sorceress Aithra (*Die Ägyptische Helena*) is called *die Schnellhörende*, the Empress (*Die Frau Ohne Schatten*) can hear particularly far, the Countess (*Der Rosenkavalier*) registers the most subtle sounds even when sleeping, and Elektra has the ability to listen beyond the meanings and sounds generated by the voice, hearing truths that are not stated explicitly.

The vocal dominance and aural self-sufficiency of these women gives them an acoustic presence that reveals them as self-confident and emancipated figures. At the same time, the dramatic trajectories of these operas seem to suggest otherwise as these women submit themselves to a patriarchal power complex. Arabella, the Empress, and Sophie marry, the Dyer's Wife and Helena reconcile with their husbands, Ariadne is saved by Bacchus, and the most rambunctious of them all, Elektra, eventually dies. It is perhaps not surprising then that interpretations of the operas have consistently concluded that they mirror the conservative, reactionary, even misogynist agendas of composer and librettist.²⁵⁹ In light of a waning patriarchal social system at the early twentieth century, particularly in the Habsburg Empire, their operatic women seem to hold on to and reconstruct obsolete socio-political (and aesthetic) forms.²⁶⁰ Like the musical material of their post-*Elektra* operas, the female characters were often said to contain a longing for

²⁵⁹ See Richard Taruskin's section on Strauss in *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005: 49 and 57-58; *Frauenbilder* edited by Ilija Dürhammer Ilija and Pia Janke. Wien: Praesens, 2001, particularly the contributions by both editors, Gerhard Scheit, and Eva Rossmann; See also Pia Janke, "Reaktionärer Eskapismus? Die Hofmannsthal-Strauss-Opern als Projekte der Antimoderne." In *Traum und Wirklichkeit in Theater und Musiktheater*, edited by Peter Csobadi et al., 460-69. Salzburg: Verlag Mueller-Speiser, 2002; Nancy Michael, *Elektra and her Sisters*. New York: Peter Lang, 2001; Sonja Bayerlein, *Musikalische Psychologie der drei Frauengestalten in der Oper Elektra von Richard Strauss*. Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1996; Alfons Ott, "Frauengestalten im Werk von Richard Strauss." *Mitteilungen der Internationalen Richard Strauss Gesellschaft*. No. 43 (Dez 1964): S.2-9 and 16-19.

²⁶⁰ Dürhammer and Janke, 13.

the restoration of nineteenth-century conventions. This chapter examines this rift between the acoustic and the dramatic staging of female characters in the Strauss/Hofmannsthal *oeuvre* and reads this (seemingly) paradoxical representation against the backdrop of the thriving women's movement in Germany and Austria between 1890 and the late 1920s. Figures such as Sophie, Elektra, and the Woman without a Shadow echo the calls of working, middle class, and bourgeois women (including Adelheid Popp, Marianne Hainisch, Auguste Fickert, Herta Sprung) who fought, among other things, for the improvement of women's public health, their legal position, access to education and professional life, and the right to vote. Simultaneously, women's presence in public life grew and with it their ability to participate both vocally and aurally in political debates, academic lectures, and professional work environments. Underlying the Strauss/Hofmannsthal operas, the (anti)feminist discourse of that time as well as testimonies from a lived feminism is the notion that there is a need for women to establish a vocal and aural presence for themselves. In so doing, they usurp the acoustic realm, a territory that traditionally belonged to men and that is reverted into a space where they are on par with their husbands, fathers, and brothers. I make this argument by bringing together voices from the women's movement, as well as examples from the Strauss/Hofmannsthal operas, showing how their vocal and aural faculty begin to take center stage, as it were, becoming an audible agent of resistance.

The goal of this chapter is not to read these operas as vulgar feminist plays, but to explore the nexus of gender, power, and sound that lies at the heart of both the Strauss/Hofmannsthal operas and the feminist project.²⁶¹ I argue that registered in these

²⁶¹ Like Agatha Schwartz, I use the word feminist both "as a noun, to designate authors and activists who fought for the advancement of women, and as an adjective, to express the goals of the women's movement,

operas is a politics of sound that was an integral part of the women's movement in Germany and Austria in the early decades of the twentieth century. The acoustic terrain turns into a battleground where traditional gender roles and power relations are resisted and re-negotiated. By way of Sophie from *Der Rosenkavalier* and the Empress from *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*, I will show how the woman's voice was conceived as a powerful tool to audibly resist prearranged roles in the domestic and public sphere. The Dyer's Wife, also from *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*, will help to demonstrate how this vocal emancipation entailed both her bodily, sonorous voice *and* her intelligible, articulate voice (or speech). The figure Elektra, from the homonymous opera, will serve as an example of the role that aurality played in this battle: she rearranges power hierarchies not only through her outspokenness, but also employs an active and critical type of listening, an aural gesture that had been, up to this point, assigned to men alone. More specifically, she takes in the position of the listening psychoanalyst who conducts a talking cure. Supporting these operatic analyses with historical testimony by feminists will help underline how both opera and lived feminism rested on a "transgressive acoustics" where conventional gender roles, such as the (speaking) male subject and the observed, yet silent woman, were undermined.²⁶²

Sophie from *Der Rosenkavalier* is one of many female characters whose emancipation from her father's rule (and more broadly from social expectations) takes place on the acoustic plane. This might also be the reason why her emancipatory efforts

i.e., the furthering of women's social and economic status, and in opposition to the terms "conservative" or "traditional," meaning the maintenance of established patterns of femininity." (9) In the Germanic context women who were involved in the women's movement at the fin-de-siècle referred to themselves not as feminists but as "progressive women" (8-9) (in *Shifting Voices. Feminist Thought and Women's Writing in Fin-de-Siècle Austria and Hungary*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

²⁶² On the concept of a "transgressive acoustics" (which will also be further discussed later on) see Carolyn Abbate, "Envoicing Women," 235.

have been entirely overlooked in previous interpretations. Like so many women in the Strauss/Hofmannsthal *oeuvre*, Sophie appears as the prototype of a reactionary representation of women who are firmly positioned between the two poles of matrimony and motherhood.²⁶³ She is determined to accept a pre-arranged marriage and, while ending up with a different husband, ends up in the safe haven of married life after all. Yet, Sophie's acoustic development tells a different story. While she enters the opera stage as a submissive girl who never speaks in front of her father, she exits as a candid woman who has liberated herself from the corset of gender norms. This transformation is contingent on her vocal awakening which clashes with, but supersedes, the rule (and quite literally the voice) of her father.

Sophie is introduced in the second act, just as she is about to meet her future groom, an arranged union that was more a business merger than anything else, a phenomenon still common in contemporary Habsburg society.²⁶⁴ Her father, Faninal, fully represents the patriarchal social complex of fin-de-siècle Vienna where the paterfamilias was "the guarantor of order and security and, as such, possessed absolute authority."²⁶⁵ He has chosen her husband whom Sophie, being a well-bred daughter, is ready and willing to accept. She states explicitly that a woman is nothing without a man at her side and manages to squeeze the word *Demut* (humility, submissiveness) as often as five times in one short statement.²⁶⁶ Her many good intentions falter, however, when she actually meets her fiancé, the salacious Baron Ochs. His sexual advances and indecent comments catch her off guard. This is not how she imagined him or their first

²⁶³ Scheit, 254; Dürhammer and Janke, 13 and 17.

²⁶⁴ Janik and Toulmin, 42 and 47.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁶⁶ *Rosenkavalier Libretto*, 44 and 48.

meeting to be. She tries to bear his behavior, but soon realizes that she will not be able to marry this man. Breaking the engagement, however, would mean to refuse her father's choice which would entail the impossible: she would have to speak up against him. Her deep-seated fear of doing such a thing surfaces when she begs Octavian, the rose bearer, to inform Baron Ochs that she won't have him. Octavian makes several attempts to encourage her to speak up for herself:

Erst muss Sie sich selber helfen...
Nun muss Sie ganz allein für uns zwei einstehn! ...
Für sich und mich muss Sie sich wehren.

First you must take courage yourself...
Now must you strike a blow alone - you for the two of us...
To save us both you must be steadfast.²⁶⁷

But Sophie struggles:

Ich möchte mich bei [Octavian] verstecken und nichts mehr wissen von der Welt.
Und schweigen ...
Mein Gott, was soll ich sagen, Er wird mich nicht verstehn! ...
Nein! Nein! Ich bring' den Mund nicht auf. Sprech' Er für mich!

I want to hide behind [Octavian] and hear no whisper of the world. ...
And remain silent ...
My God, what could I say? You would not understand ...
No, no! I cannot speak a word. Speak for me!²⁶⁸

Octavian animates her to be proactive and brave, and to resolve the issue by standing up for both of them. Her answers revolve entirely on her fear of vocally asserting herself. She wants to hide behind him and be silent. Wanting to keep her lips sealed, she begs her male companion to speak for her. This time, he helps her and informs Ochs about Sophie's refusal which ends in a dual between the men.

²⁶⁷ *Rosenkavalier Score*, 220-222 (English, 129).

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 223-224, 233, 236 (my translation).

Things get more tumultuous when Sophie's shocked father enters the scene. Octavian, no longer willing to speak for Sophie, announces to her and her father that the truth will now come from "his daughter's mouth."²⁶⁹ Sophie, who has never uttered a word in front of her father up until this point, finally makes the leap: "Wie Sie befehlen, Vater. Werd' Ihnen alles sagen." (As you command me, Father, I will tell you the truth of it all.)²⁷⁰ When Faninal hears what she has to say, he is first dumbfounded, then enraged. His refusal to accept her decision is underlined with the reminder that she is the one who has to do the listening: "Sie heirat' ihn! (...) Hör' Sie mich! Sie heirat' ihn! Und wenn er sich verbluten tät', so heirat' Sie ihn als Toter!" (You marry him! (...) Do you hear me? You marry him, and if he now should bleed to death, his lifeless corpse will be your bridegroom.)²⁷¹ Faninal quickly regrets having allowed his daughter to speak and tries to undo his mistake by chasing her back out of the acoustic arena. His resolve is reprised four times by the orchestra which faithfully mimics his octave sung on the word "Toter." Surprisingly, Sophie does not seem to be intimidated by the force and *fortissimo* of her father and his supporting brass. As he reiterates his decision, she repeats her refusal. In a last ditch attempt, Sophie proclaims that she will simply give a 'no' instead of a 'yes' to the wedding priest. This "No!" is the highest note that she will strike in the opera.²⁷² During this altercation, Sophie's voice has struck a different tune. Up until now, she was soft-spoken her subdued attitude being musically represented through conventional musical paradigms. Her vocal lines were fixated in tonality and had a recognizable melody. Her cooperation was audible through her peaceful co-existence with the oboe,

²⁶⁹ *Rosenkavalier Libretto*, 66 (English, 139).

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 66 (English, 139).

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 66 (my translation).

²⁷² She will hit this note (B) only a few other times in her arias when she sings the words "heavenly", "heaven", and "eternity" suggesting that B takes on a symbolic function for the ideal and finality.

and her acceptance of her destiny was resonant in each closing cadence that concluded every one of her statement. Now that she resists, her vocal parts are quick and choppy, which makes her sound petulant. She does not indulge in downward cadences any more, but ends each statement with an upward movement that ends provocatively on a high note.

Her father counters her obstinate (vocal) behavior with the threat to force her into a convent, the epitome of submission and silence. In an effort to appease him, she now begs him to forgive her for her disobedience, yet he only presses his hands on his ears. If he cannot stop her from vocalizing her ideas, at least he can keep her newly established acoustic presence out of his ears. Her unruly speech is an attack of his authoritarian position which becomes evident in his repeated assurance to Ochs (and himself) that he is the man in the house after all (“Bin Manns genug” (I’m master here)).²⁷³

By the end of the third and last act, things have changed drastically. Faninal has come to recognize Och’s true color and has agreed to his daughter’s wishes. In fact, tables have turned so far that she now acts as her father’s mouthpiece, notifying Ochs about her father’s change of mind (“Hab’ ihm von mei’m Herrn Vater zu vermelden...” (I have to bring you a message from my father)).²⁷⁴ Despite Och’s attempt to keep her from talking, she delivers the message:

Und mein Herr Vater lasst Ihm sagen: wenn Er also weit
die Frechheit sollte treiben, dass man Seine Nasen nur
erblicken tät’ auf hundert Schritt von unserm Stadtpalais,
so hätt’ Er sich die bösen Folgen selber zuzuschreiben.
Das ist’s, was mein Herr Vater Ihm vermelden lässt.

(And this my father bids me tell you: should you ever
Carry your presumption so far as to dare to let your face

²⁷³ *Rosenkavalier Libretto*, 68 and 69 (English, 142).

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 91 (English, 167).

Be seen within a hundred yards of where our mansion is,
You'll have yourself alone to thank for all that will befall you.
That is the message that my father sends to you.)²⁷⁵

One hardly recognizes Sophie anymore. Three times she highlights that she is speaking for her father and, as if having absorbed his authority, articulates herself boldly and in an almost provocative tone. Sophie underwent a major transformation over the course of this opera: from submissive daughter to self-confident woman who has found her own voice, both in the literal and metaphorical meaning of the word. Sophie makes her physical voice heard, an act that symbolizes her growing autonomy and agency.

The vocal emancipation of Sophie, which is only one of many examples in the Strauss/Hofmannsthal *oeuvre*, is representative of the attention that was given to sound, the voice, and aurality in the women's movement in Austria and Germany in the early twentieth century. Figures such as Sophie give voice to a sentiment that, while not necessarily being as defined and clearly outlined as it is in their operas, governed feminist thought and activism. Women sought to gain a contending voice for themselves, a fight that has to be understood literally as much as metaphorically. As Dunn and Jones have stressed, the metaphor of the voice (as a sign for authority, autonomy, and agency) is so intrinsic to feminist discourse that we often forget the literal, audible voice. Tracing the physical dimensions of the female voice in the contributing essays of their *Embodied Voices*, Dunn and Jones seek to show that this voice too has been subject to a silencing as well as an instrument of empowerment.²⁷⁶ This is also the case for the women's movement in Germany and Austria which gained in significant strength only after the

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 91 (English, 167).

²⁷⁶ Dunn and Jones, 1.

turn of the century.²⁷⁷ In studying the emergence and course of various women's movements in German and Austrian cultures, scholars have employed a vocal and acoustic rhetoric (women "made themselves heard," "raised their voices," "decried inequality," "revealed conflicting voices," etc.), while overlooking the role that the literal, audible voice played in women's attempts to change her social, legal, and economic status in modern society.²⁷⁸

Scholars have predominantly focused on women's growing visibility in public life, as they joined the work force, participated in political meetings, and became part of the student body of universities.²⁷⁹ Susan Anderson, Liz Connor, and Andreas Huyssen have shown, for example, how women entered "into an economy of glances and stares" and trace these processes of objectification in literature and film.²⁸⁰ Their growing visibility made them as a spectacle and "self-conscious object of the male gaze" and was followed by attempts to "efface or at least to contain the power of the female gaze."²⁸¹ Women's visible presence made them, so it was found, "absent as subject and yet

²⁷⁷ Petro, 43.

²⁷⁸ This is not any different in scholarship that focuses on the women's movement in fin-de-siècle Austria and Germany. See, for example, Agatha Schwartz, *Shifting Voices. Feminist Thought and Women's Writing in Fin-de-Siècle Austria and Hungary*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008: 9-10; Harriet Anderson, *Utopian Feminism: Women's Movement in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992: pp.141; Nancy Reagin, *The German Women's Movement: Class and Gender in Hanover, 1880-1933*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995; Ute Gerhard, *Unerhört. Die Geschichte der deutschen Frauenbewegung*. Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990; and, focusing on early nineteenth century writer Caroline de la Motte Fouqué, Karin Baumgartner, *Public Voices*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009.

²⁷⁹ See, for example, Liz Connor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004; Susan Anderson, "The Power of the Gaze: Visual Metaphors in Schnitzler's Prose Works and Dramas." In *A Companion to the Works of Arthur Schnitzler*, edited by Dagmar Lorenz, Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003. 303-34; Patrice Petro, "Perceptions of Difference: Woman as Spectator and Spectacle." In *Women in the Metropolis*, edited by Katharina von Ankum. 41-66. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; and Andreas Huyssen, "The Disturbance of Vision in Vienna Modernism." *Modernism/Modernity* 5, no. 3 (1998): 33-47.

²⁸⁰ Susan Anderson, 304. Or, as Huyssen has called it, a "gendered and sexualized economy of vision" (42).

²⁸¹ Huyssen, 41; Petro, 58.

overpresent as object.”²⁸² In examining the role that women’s heightened acoustic presence played in those years, we not only acknowledge the sonic aspect of their emancipation but also find a reverse effect: the operas of Strauss and Hofmannsthal represent the sentiment among many that women self-confidently appropriated the acoustic space for themselves.

Since the last decade of the nineteenth-, and increasingly so during the first two decades of the twentieth century, women’s footsteps were heard on the streets as they began to organize themselves through protest (“Durch die Straßen dröhnt Frauenschritt.”); the ruffling of their dresses cut through the silence in lecture halls; their laughter echoed on corridors of business buildings; and their voices were amplified by the microphone as they began to stand behind the lectern of party meetings.²⁸³ The loudly resonating female voice in particular was an unfamiliar, and to many a disturbing, sound: “It is a striking and to many Germans a distasteful phenomenon to see women standing on high pedestals and hear them talk with a widely resonating voice.”²⁸⁴ Yet, as the women’s movement gained momentum, so did the demand for female speakers who would share their ideas, critical feedback, and concerns at political events.²⁸⁵ Writer and feminist Elsa Asenijeff voiced her dislike of her co-fighters’ vociferous arguing, debating, and screaming for their rights: “Oh I shiver, when I imagine noble women getting mired in wild party fights and lies, when I hear the sweetly modulated voice of a

²⁸² Petro, 43.

²⁸³ Stern, 16.

²⁸⁴ “Es ist eine auffallende und dem deutschen Geschmack wenig zusagende Erscheinung, Frauen auf so hohem Piedestal zu sehen und mit so weithin tönender Stimme reden zu hören...” Bussemer, 121 (quoting an [Unsigned Entry.] in *National-Zeitung* entitled “Gebietserweiterung für die weibliche Gewerbsthätigkeit. Der Leipziger Frauentag,” on 17.10.1865).

²⁸⁵ Contemporary feminist Adelheid Popp notes how the demand for female orators was so high that female guest speakers were brought to cities that lacked their own (Popp, *Gedenkbuch*, 13).

woman sink down to a brutal croaking.”²⁸⁶ To Assenijeff, the woman’s voice is deformed when she joins men in their screaming at political meetings (“Sie schreit in öffentlichen Versammlungen wie der Mann.”)²⁸⁷ To her, it is a prostituting of thoughts and sentiments which not only deforms women’s voices but also their nature, which according to Assenijeff, is grounded in an inscrutable secrecy and noble loneliness.²⁸⁸ At the same time, she admits that, as much as she detests this new trend, there is no way around it: “But it has to be, because a bad time has come for women.”²⁸⁹

What was degrading for some, was empowering for others. Many women speakers described the leap to public oration as a defining moment in their lives. Adelheid Popp, one of the leading feminists of that time, recalled the days before and of her first public speech as a key moment in her life. After having read an article in a Socialist newspaper, she began feeling the insatiable urge to speak out: “I could not possibly keep what I had read to myself, the words came to my lips in due form when I wanted to speak. I mounted a chair at home, and held forth as I would have done if I had to speak at a meeting. I was called a “born orator.”²⁹⁰ Years later she noted again how she couldn’t possibly remain a silent listener for long, as everything inside her “bubbled up and wanted to be expressed.”²⁹¹ Attending political meetings, collecting money, distributing flyers, and writing did not have the same effect on her as the act of speaking

²⁸⁶ Assenijeff, “Aufruhr der Weiber,” 29. “O mir schaudert, wenn ich mir edle Frauen in dies wüste Parteigezänke und -gelüge verstrickt denken soll, wenn ich süß modulierte Frauenstimme zum brutalen Gekrächze herabsinken höre.” (my translation)

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4. “Aber es muß so sein. Denn eine schlimme Zeit kommt für das Weib.”

²⁹⁰ Popp, *The Autobiography of a Working Woman*, 96. “Ich konnte das Gelesene unmöglich für mich behalten, die Worte drängten sich mir förmlich auf die Lippen, wie ich reden wollte. Ich stieg zu Hause auf einen Stuhl und hielt eine Ansprache wie ich es machen würde, wenn ich in einer Versammlung zu reden hätte. ‘Die geborene Rednerin’ urteilte der Freund meines Bruders.” (*Jugendgeschichte einer Arbeiterin*, 69).

²⁹¹ Popp, *Gedenkbuch*, 8. “Stille Zuhörerinnen konnte ich nicht lange bleiben. Alles in mir gärte und drängte nach Mitteilung.” (my translation).

in public. After her first public speech, she felt empowered as never before: “An unspeakable feeling of happiness inspired me, it seemed to me as though I had conquered the world.”²⁹² Unlike any other form of political activism, public oration gave her attention, respect, and acknowledgement, and introduced her to a life of independent thinking and acting.²⁹³ Having initially felt that leaving any form of acoustic trail (i.e. cheering, applauding) was “unwomanly” and an act reserved for men (“nur den Männern zukommend”), she ended up contributing vocally to the acoustic landscape of those meetings.²⁹⁴

To return to the Strauss/Hofmannsthal’s operas, women’s employment of their physical voices in their attempt to resist and renegotiate conventional gender norms and power relations is a key behavior of so many of their female characters. In their fourth collaborative work, *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* (1919), two of the three female protagonists step out of their silence and, in so doing, attain control over their lives which were previously in the firm grip of a male-dominated power hierarchy (the third protagonist fails to do so and is subsequently expelled from her community). The role and effect of women’s vocal appearance in these operas has gained virtually no scholarly attention in the past, despite the pivotal role that it plays in the dramatic outcome of the work.

²⁹² Popp, *The Autobiography of a Working Woman*, 106. “Ich war wie im Taumel als ich nach Hause ging. Ein unnennbares Glücksgefühl beseelte mich, ich kam mir vor als hätte ich die Welt erobert.” (*Jugendgeschichte einer Arbeiterin*, 81)

²⁹³ Male supporters of the female cause wrote about women’s calls for change in a way so that “the voice” always occupies both its metaphorical and literal plane. See, for example, contributions of *Der Frauentag. Festbroschüre zum Internationalen Frauentag am 19. März mit Gedichten, Grussadressen und Beiträgen zur Arbeiterinnenbewegung, zum Frauenwahlrecht etc.*, edited by Adelheid Popp. Wien: Verleger Vorwärts, 1911. Among the contributors is Eduard Rieger who ridicules the shock that many felt about women’s refusal to keep their voice down (“Ihr seid entsetzt, (...) daß sie um Freiheit ringt, um Menschenrechte, [u]nd nicht wie eh’dem mehr geduldig schweigt” (“Zum Frauentag”, 4)). Josef Luitpold Stern recalls how a female factory worker’s speech in front of parliament in 1893 drastically changed the tone of the thirty seven preceding meetings (“Jählings war ein neuer Ton aufgeklungen.” (“Vorzeichen”, 16))

²⁹⁴ Popp, *Jugendgeschichte*, 73.

One of the protagonists is the Empress, the woman without a shadow. She is a creature from the realm of the spirits who fell in love with and married a human, the Emperor. She has not been able to conceive a child from him, a sign that she has not transformed into a human herself. If she fails to become pregnant, her husband, unbeknown to himself, will petrify to stone. Secretly, she travels to live among humans to steal another woman's shadow (and thus her fertility). While the shadow becomes the key visual indicator of her human existence, I argue that what makes her human is her vocal assertiveness. After having remained silent in the presence of humans, she utters a piercing scream in the third act and in so doing finally discloses her own will. Like a birth scream, this sound is the first sign and irreversible act of her own human existence.

From the outset of the opera, the Empress is surrounded by the acoustic omnipresence of Keikobad, the king of the spirits and her father. As is also the case with Agamemnon in *Elektra*, the king exists only through a musical motif, yet one that is easily recognizable and recurs throughout the work. Keikobad's motif is introduced within the very first measures of the opera played resolutely and in *fortissimo* by the bass and tenor tubas. This short theme is similar in style and instrumentation to Wotan's motif in *Der Ring der Nibelungen*, alluding to a legendary character in opera history who embodies paternal and regal power and control. The Empress, who wants to liberate herself from her former life as a spirit, is relentlessly reminded that she is in the presence of the will and law of her father by the repeated and threatening thunder from the brass section. Unlike him, she herself severely lacks this kind of acoustic presence. While she sings often and powerfully with a difficult vocal part that requires a wide tonal range and stamina, she only does so in the presence of her nurse (who is also a spirit), or when she

is alone. As soon as she is surrounded by humans, she becomes silent, addressing only the nurse, whispers, or talks to herself. An early audience member found this confusing, noting that the silence of a main character leaves too much ambiguity about her internal development as well as her dramatic purpose: "... and of all characters, it is the Empress who is almost entirely mute in the house of the Dyer. She stands in the background, and nearly no word or note discloses, what she thinks and feels."²⁹⁵ The reviewer's confusion about the silence of the main character is exemplary of the issue at hand. Her failure of making herself heard, of audibly sharing her thoughts, ideas, and will, push her to the margins of a society of which she wants to become part. She is not human because she cannot engage in social interaction by audibly demarcating and securing her place among humans. Without a voice, it is as if she doesn't exist.

Her failure to become pregnant causes Keikobad's threat to come true: her husband, the Emperor, is petrified to stone. This happens in the third act during which Keikobad's motif resounds more frequently and angrily than ever before. Needless to say, the Emperor's petrification entails also the suffocation of his voice: "Ihm stockt der Fuss, / sein Leib erstarrt. / Die Stimme erstickt." (His foot is halted, his body stiffens, his voice is choked.)²⁹⁶ Only after witnessing this, does the Empress gain the courage to raise her voice. She resists a set of temptations which offer her the shadow by various means. She refuses knowing that this theft would ultimately harm the shadow's rightful owner, the wife of the Dyer. Instead of agreeing to obtain what would save her husband's life, she focuses her strength and courage on vocalizing her will. Finally, her voice awakens. First, she announces with spoken and clearly intelligible voice that she would rather die than

²⁹⁵ Thari, 1919 ("... und gerade die Kaiserin ist im Färberhaus fast ganz zur Stummheit verurteilt. Sie steht im Hintergrund, und fast kein Wort, fast keine Note verrät, was in ihr vorgeht.").

²⁹⁶ *Frau Ohne Schatten Libretto*, 48 (English, 28).

decide between two people's lives ("Meine Schuld, dort wie hier!" (My fault there as here!)).²⁹⁷ Then, as she resists the last temptation, she finally rears up screaming out the key sentence: "*Die Kaiserin erhebt sich auf die Knie, ihren Lippen entringt sich ein qualvoll stöhnender Schrei, in dessen Intervallen die Worte "Ich – will – nicht!" hörbar sind.*" (The Empress raises to her knees, an agonizing, groaning scream wrenches from her throat, making audible the words: I – will – not!)²⁹⁸ The score indicates that these three words are not sung, but in fact screamed out. This cry, which according to Strauss is the climax of the opera, presages the death of her life as a spirit ("When the heart of crystal is shattered with a cry..."), and her birth as a human ("a human shriek is torn from the wounded throat!").²⁹⁹ Evoking a child's first scream, the Empress is reborn as a human and now casts a shadow. What made her human was her ability to establish her own acoustics: she resisted the paternal law by usurping his space (the acoustic realm which was governed by his motif) and by using the newly acquired space to utter her own desires and demands.

This scene is relatively short and takes place within an intricate plot with a performance lasting over three hours. Yet Hofmannsthal insisted that the Empress and her vocal awakening was the central theme of the opera. He titled her *die Lautlose* (the silent one) in his homonymous narrative and stressed her importance several times in his correspondence with Strauss. In 1914, five years before the opera's premier, he wrote to the composer: "I would like to draw all your attention to the character of the Empress. She has not a great deal to say and yet is the most important figure in the opera. Never

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 72 (English, 43).

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 75 (my translation).

²⁹⁹ "Wenn das Herz aus Kristall / zerbricht in einem Schrei..." *Ibid.*, 75 (English, 44); "ein menschlicher Schrei / ringt sich aus der wunden Kehle!" *Ibid.*, 66 (English, 41).

forget that.”³⁰⁰ Two years earlier, he had already pointed out to Strauss that her “humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] is missing.” He elaborates further that acquiring this humanity “is the meaning of the whole work, even in the music. Not until the third act will the voice of the Empress gain its full human ring.”³⁰¹ Strauss evidently agreed, writing to Hofmannsthal in 1915: “Surely, there ought to be a big explosion here - such as the first frightful human cry bursting from the Empress’s breast at the end of the scene, something like the scream of a woman in childbirth. In short, it ought to be a moment of the kind that has come off so well in *Elektra*, with Electra’s cry of ‘Orest!’”³⁰² In his next letter, written two days later, he suggested that the Emperor’s first words after his wife’s scream should be “A human cry!” (“Ein Menschenschrei.”)³⁰³ The centrality and power of the Empress’s scream is an indication of the weight that Strauss and Hofmannsthal, and many of their contemporaries, assigned to a person’s acoustic presence in society.³⁰⁴ She and Sophie represent the need (and urge) of women to have a say in their private and public lives which they found was not possible unless they were literally heard.

³⁰⁰ Hofmannsthal, *Correspondence*, 209. “Ich möchte Ihre ganze Aufmerksamkeit auf die Kaiserin lenken. Diese hat nicht viel Text und doch ist sie eigentlich die wichtigste Figur des Ganzen. Dies dürfen Sie niemals übersehen. Um ihr Menschwerden dreht es sich, sie ist – nicht die andere – die Frau ohne Schatten.” (*Briefwechsel*, 243)

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 184. “[D]as Menschliche fehlt: dieses zu gewinnen, ist der Sinn des ganzen Stückes - so auch in der Musik: erst im dritten Akt wird die Stimme der Kaiserin ihren vollen menschlichen Klang annehmen.” (*Briefwechsel*, 219)

³⁰² Strauss, *Correspondence*, 230. “Es müßte hier doch eine starke Explosion erfolgen - etwa so, daß am Schluß sich der Brust der Kaiserin der erste furchtbare Menschenschrei entringt, etwa wie bei einer gebärenden Frau - kurz, es müßte ein Moment sein, wie er mir in “*Elektra*” bei dem Ausruf Elektra: “Orest!” so gut gelungen ist.” (*Briefwechsel*, 267)

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 230 (*Briefwechsel*, 268).

³⁰⁴ In *Tagebuchblätter einer Emancipierten*, Elsa Asenijeff, who had expressed her distaste for women’s vocal explosions four years earlier, created a first-person narrator who feels the uncontrollable urge to scream: “Ich leide unsäglich. Kaum weiß ich, was es ist. Die Brust ist zusammengepresst zum großen Schrei, der Befreiung brächte, aber sie bringt ihn nicht heraus.” (107). Eventually, she gives in: “Da steilte sich ein wahnsinniger Tierschrei aus meiner Kehle empor. Wie es durch die Nacht gellte! Ich selbst erzitterte vor diesem wilden, anklagenden Schrei.” (110). Her scream is both accusing and liberating, a sentencing of and rebellion against the many social and political laws that subordinates her free will (*Tagebuchblätter einer Emancipierten*. Leipzig: Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1902).

The lack of attention to the women's voices in this operatic *oeuvre* is, at least in part, contributed to the long-upheld narrative that Strauss's and Hofmannsthal's post-*Elektra* operas were reactionary (as they relied on musical and gender conventions). These conclusions are drawn from analyses that focus exclusively on the dramatic development of each opera and/or on the harmonic structure of its musical material. Catherine Clément's groundbreaking, yet also heavily criticized, book *Opera: The Undoing of Women* might be the most well-known example of the problems that arise when operatic women are analyzed without attending to their voices.³⁰⁵ Compiling a long list of dying heroines in *opera seria*, Clément argued that female protagonists are killed off by operatic plots "so that their dangerous energy, contained by death, will be rendered innocuous."³⁰⁶ While her critique of gender bias in opera was radical at the time, her argument was considered flawed. Opera scholars disapproved of her sole focus on the libretto, thereby disregarding how their voices make women triumphant in opera despite their "undoing" by the plot:

Opera is built on one of the great natural equalities, namely, the equality of men's and women's voices. Women can sing as loudly as men, their voices embrace as large a range as those of men and they have the advantage of commending the heights where they can emit sounds of unparalleled incisiveness. They also enjoy greater vocal facility than men, thus allowing them to convey a sense of tremendous energy. In no other purely physical respect are women so clearly on par with men.³⁰⁷

Women are, according to Clément-critic Paul Robinson, the most potent figures in opera. They are able to rise above any gender-based suppression given that their voices are

³⁰⁵ See Robinson, Paul. "Review of Catherine Clément's "Opera Or the Undoing of Women"." *New York Times Book Review* (1. January 1989): 3; Carolyn Abbate in her preface to *Unsung Voices*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991; and Katherine Bergeron in "Clément's Opera, or One Woman's Undoing," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2, no.1 (1990): 93-98.

³⁰⁶ Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 4.

³⁰⁷ Robinson, "Review," 2.

soaring over the orchestra, male singers, and even their own dramatic death.³⁰⁸ To Carolyn Abbate, the voice of the woman doesn't even need to be particularly forceful, loud, or high. The performing female voice alone engenders what she calls a "transgressive acoustics of authority."³⁰⁹ Through the woman's voice, opera chronically inverts "the conventional status quo between the sexes."³¹⁰ It "displaces the authorial musical voice onto female characters and female singers" and thereby largely "reverses a conventional opposition of male (speaking) subject and female (observed) object."³¹¹ While she stresses that this subversion is "inherent in *all* opera by virtue of its phenomenology (live performance, unavoidably involving women singers)," she cites that the operas of Richard Strauss particularly affirm this representation.³¹²

Abbate's unveiling of opera as the locus of a transgressive acoustics is a persuasive model for early twentieth-century women's movement in Germany and Austria which also employed the tangible (performing) voice as a weapon to secure social recognition and political authority. What the women's movement and the Strauss/Hofmannsthal operas then share is the same phenomenal reality: women become the makers of sound and in so doing take in the commanding and creative positions traditionally occupied by men. To put it differently, the physically audible voice brings to

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 2. One of the few scholars that shows how the female voice in opera was an inspiration to feminists is Susan Rutherford. In "The Voice of Freedom," she shows how the prima donna was perceived by female writers (i.e. George Sand, George Eliot, and Willa Cather) as a "positive symbol for liberation (...) whose voice is quintessentially the voice of freedom" (95). Looking at women's fiction and journals, memoirs and other writing, Rutherford reveals how the prima donna was perceived a free woman whose voice was a "positive expression of independence, individuality and artistry" (98). The prima donna is a quasi-feminist both sharing "a proud self-confidence, (...) an intelligent creativity, and an unconventionality of manners, ideas, and behavior" (98) ("The Voice of Freedom: Images of the Prima Donna." In *The New Woman and her Sisters. Feminism and Theater 1850-1914*, edited by Susan Rutherford and Vivian Gardner, 95-113. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

³⁰⁹ Abbate, "Envoicing of Women," 235.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 228.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 228-29.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 228.

life the metaphorical meaning of voice as bearer of authority, autonomy, and agency. Sophie in *Der Rosenkavalier* and the Empress in *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* become the maker of sound, occupying, against the will of their fathers, the acoustic space, and in so doing, resisting the role of the silent and subservient daughter.

Another work, which presents the same overlapping of the corporal and metaphorical voice, is Grete Meisel-Hess's *Die Stimme*, a novel published the same year that saw the premiere of *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*. Like the operas, the novel works with "the concrete physical dimension of the female voice upon which [the] metaphor is based."³¹³ The protagonist is a singer who wants to be able to use her artistic voice (*Singstimme*) to be the provider of material income, thus a means of supporting herself and becoming self-sufficient.³¹⁴ At the same time, physical voice is inextricably linked to the inner voice which also supports her owner's quest for freedom from restricting social expectations. Her inner voice continuously encourages her to remain true to her feelings and desires and to not allow others to silence her. When her fiancé tries to impose the rule, among many others, of her not singing in public anymore (he does not want her to be heard in public), she hears her inner voice pleading: "And it was as if I was hearing a threatening, pleading, compelling voice: Do not sacrifice me! Protect me! Me, your voice! ... and that voice called with a force that could not be drowned out."³¹⁵ Not singing would automatically mean the death of her inner voice which continuously communicates to her how she envisions her future life. The louder she can hear her physical voice resonate, the stronger her inner voice can become. In an ideal case both would merge into

³¹³ Dunn and Jones, 1.

³¹⁴ Meisel-Hess, 42 (my translations).

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 72-73. "[A]ls hörte ich eine drohende, flehende, zwingende Stimme: Opfere mich nicht! Schütze mich dir! Mich, deine Stimme! (...) die Stimme rief mit einer Gewalt, die nicht zu übertönen war!"

one: “Oh, if only my art, my voice, could eventually make me free! Entirely free! Sound loudly, my voice, and bring her to me, my much longed for voice.”³¹⁶

In *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*, one can find another woman who tries to liberate herself through the voice and fights this battle, like Meisel-Hess’s protagonist, mostly against her husband. It is the Dyer’s wife, the woman whose shadow the Empress tries to steal. Being referred to in the libretto as Woman, the derogatory statement “Wer achtet ein Weib und Geschrei eines Weibes?” is uttered in reference to her.³¹⁷ Her voice turns into a noisy clamor in the ears of the male family members (her husband and his three brothers). Not being heard takes on a different meaning here, as the Woman’s voice is heard, while the meaning that the voice generates is not. In the acoustic confrontation between men and women, she serves as an example of another form of silencing the woman: the distortion of her semantic voice. While her bodily, sonorous voice might be heard, it is relentlessly drowned out, by family members or by an orchestra (which stands in for anti-reformist (male and female) voices of that time that fought to keep, or reinstate, women’s traditional role as domestic care-givers). As a result, the verbal content of her voice goes unheard. All that is left, in the ears of the other, is her inarticulate bleating.³¹⁸

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 43. “Oh, dass mich meine Kunst einmal frei machte, meine Stimme! Ganz frei! Klinge mir voll auf, meine Stimme, und bringe mir sie, die heißersehnte Stimme.”

³¹⁷ *Die Frau Ohne Schatten. Libretto*, 39 (English, 19). “Who pays heed to a woman and a woman’s wailing?”

³¹⁸ In the narrative that Hofmannsthal wrote while finishing up the libretto, the relationship between the family members is made accessible to the reader through a description of their voices. As Nurse and Empress eavesdrop at the hut’s wall, they hear the disgruntled voices of the three brothers, the angry and bossy voice of a young woman, and the deep, equanimous sound of a fourth male voice, the mediating *pater familias* whose deep and calm voice indicates that he is the securer of domestic order. The hierarchical power structures between the family members can be quickly decoded just by Hofmannsthal’s description of the vocal soundscape emanating from the hut.

The Dyer's wife is an unusual character in opera history. She is an angry woman whose deep dissatisfaction with her marriage is the topic of nearly all of her conversations and comments. She fights with her brothers-in-law, snaps at her husband, and adamantly refuses to perform any duty assigned to her including cooking, cleaning, satisfying the sexual needs of her husband, and above all producing children. In the two and a half years of their marriage, she has not been able to conceive a child, one of the many reasons for her brothers-in-law to shower her with mockery and disdain (other reasons are her sex ("What's a woman amount to!"; "And who are you!"), her low social status before marriage ("You beggar's brat"), her existence as possession and object ("My husband stands before me! Oh yes, my husband, I know, oh yes, I know what that means! I am bought and paid to know it, and kept in the house, and cared for and fed, so that I know it...").³¹⁹ Seeking protection from their harassments, the Woman begs her husband to throw them out of the house. He downplays her plea, pointing out that this has been their home since they were children, and returns to his favorite topic: when will she give him children.

While she curses her lot and ridicules him, he calmly continues daydreaming about his future as father. It is as if he is not hearing her: what she has to say and the despair that underlies her aggressive words. Between the two of them, he holds the dominant position, a fact which is instantly audible. He is supported by the orchestra, while she has to fend for herself in complete acoustic isolation. His melody is in homophonic unison with the orchestra which plays softly when he sings (*piano*). As a

³¹⁹ "Was ist ein Weib!"; "Wer bist denn du?"; "Du Tochter von Bettlern" *Frau Ohne Schatten Libretto*, 22 (English, 8); "Mein Mann steht vor mir! Ei ja, mein Mann, / ich weiss, ei ja, ich weiss, was das heisst! / Bin bezahlt und gekauft, es zu wissen, / und gehalten im Haus / und gehegt und gefüttert, / damit ich es weiß..." *Ibid.*, 22 (English, 9).

result, his words are easier to be heard and understood. His voice and the orchestra work together fostering the sense that he is in control of the acoustic environment. His wife, on the other hand, is on her own. She lacks the orchestra's support having instead to sing against it. The violins' particularly frenzied bow movements (they play eighth notes) interrupt and disturb her vocal line. These movements are executed at the very bottom of the bow creating a coarse sound. The strings also play much louder (*forte*) and sporadically shift to very quick thirty-second notes. It is an orchestral sound above which she cannot rise with her voice. The support of the Dyer's voice, along with the drowning-out of his wife's, comes particularly to the fore when they sing simultaneously ("Heia! Die guten Gevatterinnen"). In this section, the Dyer's melody is supported by the cello which accompanies his melodic line tone for tone. His wife, however, has to sing against him, the cello, and the remaining instruments. He can maintain an acoustic presence, while her voice, and with it the meaning of her words, always runs risk at being drowned out.

Time and again, the verbal content of her voice trails off unheard. When the Woman complains about the harassment by his brothers, he replies that he would like to have children. When she suggests that he should abandon his obsessive desire to have children, he "hears" her hormonal excess due to an ostensible pregnancy. When she calms down and explains to him slowly and rationally how the past has shown that she cannot bear children, he mishears her altogether. She sang calmly and in a lower register, yet he wonders why she speaks to him in such a harsh and stubborn way: "Aus einem jungen Mund / gehen harte Worte / und trotzige Reden..." (Out of a young mouth come

hard words...).³²⁰ Despite her composed explanation, he hears defiance and stresses once more how eagerly he awaits his future children. No matter what her words (or the tone in which they are uttered), she is misunderstood. Given the indifference and/or resistance to anything that she has to say, she has to raise her voice to a point where anything she utters begins in fact to sound like *Geschrei*.

In the homonymous narrative, written contemporaneously to the opera, the Woman laments: “Ich bin wie eine angepflockte Ziege, ich kann blöken Tag und Nacht, es achtet niemand drauf... .” (I am like a goat tied to a pole, I can bleat day and night, nobody pays attention...)³²¹ Her voice is like the barking and bleating of animals in the ears of her family members. While they perceive the sound of her voice, the acoustic vibration that it creates, they are deaf to the semantic meaning of her voice.³²² The Dyer’s wife suffers the same destiny as the Sirens which, according to Adriana Cavarero, gradually got stripped off their speech in Western tradition. While the Sirens in the *Odyssey* are creatures that narrate by singing, the history of the Western imaginary turned them into speechless lures, singing songs without words.³²³ The Woman is also stripped of her speech, leaving semantic articulation in the hands of men which, according to Cavarero, came to be seen as “naturally masculine.”³²⁴ Her husband himself reminds his brothers not to take her words to heart, after all, those are only the words of a woman: “Esset, ihr Brüder, und lasset euch wohl sein! / Ihre Zunge ist spitz, und ihr Sinn ist launisch, aber nicht schlimm – / und ihre Reden sind gesegnet / mit dem Segen der

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 320 (English, 11).

³²¹ *Frau Ohne Schatten Erzählung*, 199 (my translation).

³²² What I call “semantic meaning,” Dunn and Jones call “the verbal content of the voice” (1). In *Acoustic Mirror*, Kaja Silverman distinguishes between “the sounds and the meanings generated by the female voice” (viii) (*The Acoustic Mirror. The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

³²³ Cavarero, 103-4. “They sing words, they vocalize stories, they narrate by singing” (105).

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

Widerruflichkeit.” (Eat up, brothers, and enjoy yourselves. Her tongue is sharp, and she is ill-humoured, but not wicked – and her speech is blessed with the blessing of recantation.)³²⁵ Being uttered by a woman, her words, even if they are heard, bear little weight. They can simply be revoked. “Ihr Sinn” can mean two things in this context, “her mood” (as of the woman being temperamental), or “their meaning” (the meaning of her words being fickle and inconsistent). Originating from the throat of a woman, whose mood and words are capricious, any statement, even the most aggressive ones, has only limited validity and is therefore to be taken only half serious.

Only once is the Woman able to make herself heard and understood. Having met the Nurse and the Empress, she informs her husband that the two strangers will stay with them from now on, working as their maids. It is the only time that she stops singing, telling him calmly and with a spoken voice what is to happen: “Von morgen ab schlafen zwei Muhmen hier, / denen richt’ ich das Lager zu meinen Füßen / als meinen Mägden. So ist es gesprochen, / und so geschieht es.” (From tomorrow on two cousins of mine will be sleeping here. I’m making them a bed at my feet, as they’ll be my maids. So is it spoken and so so it will be.)³²⁶ In addition to speaking, the orchestra completely recedes creating an acoustic vacuity that she entirely takes over. Not knowing what to make of her announcement, he withdraws from her, settles on the floor and quietly wonders whether her obstinate behavior is a sign of an early pregnancy. Either way, he accepts her decision showing not only that he heard her, but also realizes that resistance would be futile. For once, the Woman made herself heard. This time, the lack of any sound via the orchestra or other voices came to her assistance. The ultimate test will be the moment that

³²⁵ *Frau Ohne Schatten Libretto*, 38 (English, 19).

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 31 (English, 15).

she has to achieve the same, despite resisting forces, such as the orchestra or the voices of her brothers-in-law.

This moment comes toward the end of the second act, when the Woman rises violently above her acoustic suppression. The marital and domestic crisis has come to an apex, the perfect moment for the Nurse to strike. In exchange for the shadow, she promises the dissatisfied wife wealth, true love, and – through this act of resistance and independence – everlasting power over men. The Woman comes dangerously close to giving in to the temptation, but her guilty conscience flares up and she tries to warn her husband. She explicitly tells him that his failure to listen to her will cost him his marriage: “[K]ann sein, dann komme ich eines Abends / nicht wieder heim zu dir. – / denn es ist nicht von heute, daß du meine Stimme hörst / und fassest sie nicht in deinen Sinn.” ([M]aybe, one evening I won’t come home again to you. For today is not the first time that you hear my voice and do not grasp what I am saying.)³²⁷ Not being able to make any meaning of her warning (“I hear and do not understand what they say.”), he shows no other reaction other than gloomily staring at his feet.³²⁸ The die is cast and his wife strikes the deal. Everyone has gathered inside the hut as a storm is brewing, announcing the Woman’s impending revolt. As the atmosphere gets increasingly gloomy, she draws all attention to herself by stamping her foot on the ground followed by a salvo of confessions: her disgust and disdain for her husband and his brothers, her secret meetings with another man (sexual temptation facilitated by the Nurse), and her finding a way of liberating herself from all of them. Repeatedly, she disrupts her litany by yelling at her husband asking whether he can hear her: “[H]örst du mich, Barak? (...) Hörst du

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 47 (English, 27).

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 46 (English, 27). “Ich höre und weiß nicht, was eines redet...”

mich, Barak? / Schweige doch [deine Brüder], / damit du mich verstehen kannst!” ([D]o you hear me, Barak? (...) Do you hear me, Barak? Make them shut up, so that you can understand me!)³²⁹ She finally pronounces her decision:

Aber es ist mir zugekommen,
wie ich dir entgehe
und dich ausreiße aus mir,
und jetzt weiß ich den Weg!
Abtu' ich von meinem Leibe die Kinder,
die nicht geboren,
und mein Schoß wird dir nicht fruchtbar
und keinem andern, (...)
und des zum Zeichen
habe ich meinen Schatten verhandelt.

(But it has come to me
how I might escape from you
and pluck you out of myself,
and now I know the way!
I will rid my body
of the unborn children,
and my womb will not be fruitful for you
nor for any other, (...)
and as a sign of this
I have sold my shadow.)³³⁰

When the Woman announces that she deliberately chooses infertility (“Abtu' ich von meinem Leibe die Kinder”), she sings on one note only over the course of eight bars (F). Her earlier vocal acrobatics are replaced by a much more monotonous style of singing and takes places within a section that is written in C-Major, the most fundamental of all keys and, as it is in major, a key that for centuries has been assigned to masculinity representing rationality and objectivity.³³¹ The Woman deploys this key and the sustaining F note making her voice unmistakably heard both literally and figuratively. And it seems to work. Her family listens in shock to what she has to say.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 51 (English, 32).

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 51 (English, 32).

³³¹ McClary, pp.11.

During this scene the stage has become increasingly darker until characters are barely visible anymore. Being invisible supports the Woman in her quest for acoustic recognition. Considering his rage, he seems to have finally heard (understood) her: “Das Weib ist irre, / zündet ein Feuer an, / damit ich ihr Gesicht sehe!” (The woman is out of her wits; stir up the fire so that I can see her face.)³³² As soon as a fire emits light again, his brothers confirm that what they all just heard is in fact true: “Sie wirft keinen Schatten. Es ist, wie sie redet!” (She casts no shadow! It is, as she said!)³³³ This statement – “It is, as she said!” – marks the turning point of the wife’s battle. Finally, the men surrounding her hear more than a meaningless sound in her voice and register its verbal content. Needless to say, they do not like what they hear. The Dyer, being overwhelmed at his wife’s truly performative speech, jumps at her, trying to silence her by taking her life, an attempt that fails because his three brothers hold him back. Having risen her voice above all four men, and having forced them to hear her decision, leads to a collapse of the family structure and its intrinsic power relations. This collapse is audible in the paroxysm of sound that follows her proclamation: all seven characters on stage sing against each other, none of them being assigned a specified note or pitch. The vocal chaos is as anarchical as the current state of the Dyer clan. The act ends with a dramatic orchestral climax in which trumpets, trombones, the tuba, and various percussion instruments repeatedly hammer the father’s (Keikobad’s) motif, an orchestral outcry that articulate the Dyer’s rage over finding his patriarchal dominance questioned, and at the worst, successfully attacked.

³³² *Frau Ohne Schatten Libretto*, 52 (English, 32).

³³³ *Ibid.*, 52 (English, 32).

The next time the Dyer and his wife appear on stage (third act), they find each other in separate and empty chambers of a vault. In their isolation, they reflect on their deeds, both acknowledging that they might have gone too far. The Woman regrets having spoken so harshly, yet maintains that her complete submission is also not an option. The former comes out in her words (“Listen to me, Barak! My mouth was a traitor to me.”) which, as the libretto indicates, continue to be dominating at times (*“stellenweise dominierend”*).³³⁴ Her husband, on the other hand, regrets his hotheaded reaction remembering that he was supposed to respect her and cherish her wishes (“[T]hat I might tend her, that I might wait upon her hand and food, and look after her and cherish her...”).³³⁵ As both spouses realize that they sought to dominate the other, they are released from the dungeon and, after frantically looking for each other, reunite toward the very end of the opera (hearing the voices of their unborn children singing to them). As the opera closes, husband and wife stand side by side expressing their appreciation for each other. She has stopped fighting him and goes as far as to welcome his position as her powerful and stern husband.³³⁶ He, on the other hand, realizes that he should not try to dominate her (“Entrusted to me – and she fell reeling to the ground in mortal dread of my hand! Woe is me!”).³³⁷ By breaking through a sound barrier that kept her from expressing her will and wishes, the Woman has put into effect a newly defined relation between both spouses.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 54 (English, 35). “Höre mich, Barak! / Verräter ward mein Mund an mir.”

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 57 (English, 36). “[D]aß ich sie hege, / daß ich sie trage / auf diesen Händen / und ihrer achte / und ihrer schone...”

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 57 (English, 37).

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 57 (English, 37). “Mir anvertraut – / und taumelt zur Erde / in Todesangst vor meiner Hand! / Weh mir!”

The demands of the Woman resonate the kinds of changes that members of the women's movement sought to bring about in terms of women's treatment and legal rights as wives and mothers. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, women began to point out how marriage was based on inequality, dependency, and violence.³³⁸ The critique of marriage remained the focus of much criticism by early twentieth-century feminists (i.e. Thusnelda Vortmann, Ella Haag, and Helene von Druskowitz) who denounced the institution as being based on female suppression and male egoism.³³⁹ Being a business contract more than anything else, the husband possessed absolute authority while their spouses, for example, did not have rights for any type of ownership, including their own children.³⁴⁰ Marriage was also the site where the "conspiracy of silence about sex" took a paradoxical turn: while female sexuality, and any open dialogue about it, was repressed during a girl's childhood and adolescence, marriage suddenly expected them to respond openly to any and all kinds of sexual demands.³⁴¹

In *Sagt uns die Wahrheit* (Tell us the Truth), Austrian novelist and outspoken member of the women's movement, Else Jerusalem condemns how young girls are kept in the dark about the realities of married life, including sexual interaction with their husbands. Significantly, she frames the issue in acoustic terms. According to her, women are forced into a *Unmündigkeit* (immaturity, but literally "the lack of a mouth"). Particularly the process of raising a girl in bourgeois and middle-class circles is framed in a terminology of a casting of silence, a muting of women, and suffocation of screams of honesty ("[D]a bricht aus unserer geängstigten Seele ein einziger, bittender Schrei, der

³³⁸ Gerhard, *Unerhört*, 43.

³³⁹ Harriet Anderson, pp.142; Evans, pp.13.

³⁴⁰ Janik and Toulmin, 42 and 47.

³⁴¹ *Ibid*, 47.

manchmal dicht genug an den Ohren unserer Eltern vorüberfliehet. ... Warum?“).³⁴² Jerusalem suggests that the silence imposed on women's sexual repression before (and exploitation during) married life needs to be broken. At the same time, she knows full well that society, while accepting and fostering these conventions, is not prepared to *hear* the truth being said out loud: “Das Aussprechen gewisser Thatsachen wirkt, in unserer ankeuschen - Ohren so reichen Gesellschaft immer weit verletzender, als deren Ausübung.”³⁴³ The same is expressed by Vera, a protagonist from a novel by Bertha Kris, who is expected to submit herself to a life as devoting wife, a destiny she wants to avoid so much that she commits suicide. While she is surrounded by women who have become vocal about their dissatisfaction (“Die lieben Weiblein, mit ihrer Emancipationssehnsucht machen einen Heidenlärm, stoßen sich die Köpfe blutig.”³⁴⁴), she herself only finds the courage to scream out her opinion in her diary: “Alles in mir schreit und stöhnt nach dieser Wahrheit.” (Everything in me screams and yearns for this truth.)³⁴⁵ Yet, according to Jerusalem, the tides are changing and society begins to listen up: “[D]ie Gesellschaft horcht auf.” (Society harkens.)³⁴⁶ What it hears is what has been muted for millennia – women's free will, and with it, her demands.³⁴⁷

The Woman from *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* brings to the operatic stage the many issues that feminists began to loudly disparage, including women's position at the bottom of a family hierarchy, the repression and yet exploitation of female sexuality, and her lack of ownership and legal protection. The Dyer's wife defeats her *Unmündigkeit*, meaning

³⁴² Jerusalem, 18.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁴⁴ Kris, 12.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁴⁶ Jerusalem, 11.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

both the silencing of her voice and (if latter proves impossible) stripping her voice of meaning. While the Dyer's wife causes the disruptive sound of truth within the four walls of her modest hut, Elektra (from the homonymous opera) screams it out on the public and political stage. As I will show, Elektra changes the power balance within the royal family of Mycenae and she does so through her extraordinary vocal and aural abilities. Her voice not only rises above all other characters and the orchestra, it boldly takes over the position (or musical motif) of her father, king Agamemnon. In addition, she displays a unique aural behavior taking on the position of a listening psychoanalyst, an aural gesture that was understood to belong to men at the time of the opera's genesis.

The action takes place at the Court of Mycenae. King Agamemnon has been murdered by the queen who also sent his son into exile. This leaves the court (and operatic stage) almost entirely in the hands of women. The opera opens and closes with women's voices. Men, on the other hand, are heard less than fifteen minutes over the course of one hundred and ten minutes.³⁴⁸ The vocal parts are notoriously difficult to sing, requiring endurance and extreme control over each singer's voice. They have to tackle a broad vocal range, constantly fight against a large orchestra, and embark on complex chromatic singing.³⁴⁹ This is particularly the case for Elektra, who, after entering the stage a few minutes after the curtain's rise, never leaves it. Her voice

³⁴⁸ Compared to Sophocles's *Electra*, Hofmannsthal foreground female figures both in the amount of dramatic time and their behavioral patterns. Elektra, in particular, has been converted from a sad, ashamed, and powerless woman to an infuriated and highly resentful one. Chrysothemis has traded her self-reliance and calmness for anxiety, submission, and repression. Klytämnestra does not suffer the same mental crisis as she does in Hofmannsthal's later version.

³⁴⁹ Gilliam, 87. "[Elektra] is Strauss's most difficult soprano role. The title soprano is on stage for every scene save one, and she must do constant battle with a tumultuous orchestra."

remains nearly ubiquitous and is constantly forced to overpower a boisterous and polyphonic orchestra.³⁵⁰

Needless to say, early audiences were overwhelmed, confused, and often disturbed by Elektra's superhuman vocal demeanor. One reviewer described it as "a rampant scream-singing" (*zügelloser Schreigesang*).³⁵¹ Another stated: "What Richard Strauss expects from the voice slowly but surely murders it [the voice]. One barely exaggerates when claiming that he uses the human voice solely to create the kind of screaming (*Geschrei*) so characteristic for his work."³⁵² Elektra sounded to contemporary audiences the same way as the Woman in *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* did to her brothers: "[The singer of Elektra] had to hiss, scream, snarl, screech, and here and there also sing for a handful of measures."³⁵³ The connection between vocal anarchy and mental madness was quickly made by contemporary audiences. One reviewer referred to the female protagonist as an Ueberwoman (*Überweib*) who is surrounded by furies who are just as out-of-control as she is:

Man glaubt, in ein Irrenhaus versetzt zu sein. Alle rasen wie Furien: Elektra, Chrysothemis, Klytämnestra, die Mägde. Alle Weiber rasen. Es scheint wie eine Absicht, daß sich die Männer, sogar die Memme Ägisth, ruhig besonnen zeigen, während die Weiber in einem grenzenlosen Sinnestaumel befangen sind, der sie wie brutale Bestien erscheinen läßt.

It feels as if one is brought into a madhouse. Everybody is raging like furies: Elektra, Chrysothemis, Klytämnestra, the maids. All women are raging. It seem as if on purpose that all men, even the coward Aegisth, are calm and sober-minded,

³⁵⁰ So challenging was the vocal score for Elektra that even the best singers struggled to perform her: "Aber geschreilich war die Dame der riesigen Aufgabe für die Stimmbänder nicht gewachsen." (R.B. "Elektra Erstaufführung in der Wiener Hofoper am 24.März." *Fremden-Blatt*, Wien (25.03.1909): 21-22)

³⁵¹ Batka, 15.

³⁵² Spanuth, 1909. "Was Richard Strauss den Stimmen zumutet, ist langsamer aber sicherer Stimmord. Man übertreibt kaum, wenn man behauptet er benutze die menschliche Stimme da nur noch zum charakteristischen Geschrei."

³⁵³ Prinzhorn, 17. "Sie [Frau Krull] mußte fauchen, schreien, zischen, kreischen und immer mal wieder auch ein paar Takte singen."

while all women are caught in an abysmal frenzy of the senses that lets them appear like brutal beasts.)³⁵⁴

Elektra and her fellow female characters are described with the same exact words as feminists (particularly the suffragettes) who were labeled as wild, brutal, hysteric, and howling women.³⁵⁵ Like the voices of the suffragettes, Elektra's voice was experienced as irritating in its dominating and schismatic force. And both operatic protagonist and political feminist take part in intricate politics of sound which decides the outcome of their battles.

The opera opens with five servants gossiping about Elektra and how she spends her days howling, moaning, snarling, and screaming. When she enters the stage, she launches right into a forceful aria that gives a glimpse of why she is so angry: she mourns her father's murder while condemning everyone around her for being silent onlookers of the crime. The aria is sung almost entirely in *fortissimo*, sticking to the "higher portions of an enormous tessitura," engaging in "extravagant leaps," and does all that against an orchestra that is everything but timid.³⁵⁶ From this early moment on "the action is wholly dominated by Elektra – by her voice, her presence, her desire."³⁵⁷ Both the previous defamations by the servants and Elektra's own narrative during the aria suggest that she is a suppressed and cornered outcast at the Court of Mycenae. At the same time, her larger-than-life voice proves that she is a much more dangerous and powerful individual than these accounts suggest.

³⁵⁴ F.B., 1909 (my translation).

³⁵⁵ Schirmmacher, 2. "wilde Weiber"; "rabiante Weiber"; "hysterische Weiber"; "heulende Derwische"

³⁵⁶ Kramer, 193.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

Her true standing within the courtly power structures are further corroborated by a bold vocal move on her part: she assimilates the motif of the king. As was the case with Keikobad in *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*, Agamemnon's musical theme (descending Fourth, ascending Sixth, with an emphasis on the A-D interval) was introduced by the orchestra from the start of the opera.³⁵⁸ Moments after her first appearance, Elektra sings her father's name and as she does, she sings his motif. She appropriates his motif by abducting it from the orchestra and repositioning it in her own throat. Her physical voice comes to be the bearer of his theme, his voice, his authority. For the rest of the opera, she retains the musical gesture that Carolyn Abbate has found to be the foundation of the Agamemnon motif (jump from A to D, with a triad built on D).³⁵⁹ From the start and for the rest of the opera, Elektra's vocal manner signifies how she, and not her mother, her mother's lover, or the king's son Orest, comes closest to assuming the role of the governing sovereign. Despite all attempts to suppress her, Elektra is and will remain his unspoken proxy.

Felix Overhoff has argued that this gesture is a sign of Elektra's complete identification with her father.³⁶⁰ According to him, Agamemnon is the actual protagonist of the opera whose ear-catching motif stands in contrast to Elektra's lack thereof: she is only granted a chord without rhythm and *melos*.³⁶¹ Overhoff is joined by Gerhart Scheit who interprets Elektra's assimilation of her father's motif as a sign of her total dependency on him who is the actual hero of the opera.³⁶² Elektra's vocal potency within the opera make these interpretations problematic. Her annexation of the king's musical

³⁵⁸ Abbate, "Elektra's Voice," 117.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁶⁰ Overhoff, 32.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁶² Scheit, 252-3.

pattern, in an aria that inaugurates her vocal prowess, shows how she has not only claimed the operatic soundscape for herself, but how she deliberately takes over a position that used to belong to a man.

Compared to her, no other character takes a position as powerful within the complex sound system of the opera. Orest, the son of the king, remains acoustically and physically on the margin. While Sophocles's play opens with Orest, he enters the operatic stage only after half of the opera has already passed. After having disclosed his identity to Elektra (and the audience), it is still she who governs the acoustic space. She immediately embarks on yet another extensive aria. Orest, on the other hand, sings only two solo lines, followed by a duet with Elektra. His killing of their mother is also a silent act as it takes place off stage. Despite his return to the Court of Mycenae, he remains acoustically in the background and does not fill in the space left open by his father's death.

Their sister Chrysothemis does not wish to be in power and makes this perfectly clear. More than anything else, she wants to maintain the gender status quo and her position in it. She begs Elektra to stop fighting, so they can both live the life that is predestined for them, a life of marriage and motherhood: "Ich bin ein Weib und will ein Weiberschicksal" (I am a woman, and a woman's lot I crave).³⁶³ Her plea to live a life grounded in traditional values (patriarchal family structures) is nestled within a lyrical passage whose classical musical paradigms stand isolated amidst Elektra's bi-tonal dissonance.³⁶⁴ Her vocal line is melodious, the strings play harmonious E-flat-major triads, the rhythmic pattern (3/4) is easily recognizable, and her sentences repeatedly

³⁶³ *Elektra Libretto*, 121 (English, 19).

³⁶⁴ Scheit considers Strauss's choice for E-flat-major to be telling: it is the same chords that opens Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen* where it symbolized the purity of nature that is not endangered by dissonance and alienation (252).

conclude in closing cadences. The music that surrounds Chrysothemis evidences her stance toward a woman's place in society. Elektra, in an attempt to get Chrysothemis on her side, explains to her that she will never be able to lead that kind of life if she lets their murdering mother continue to oppress them. She encourages Chrysothemis to join her in screaming out the lies that hide in every corner of the palace: "Dein Mund ist schön, / wenn er sich einmal auftut um zu zürnen! / Aus deinem reinen starken Mund muss furchtbar / ein Schrei hervorsprüh'n, / furchtbar wie der Schrei / der Todesgöttin..." (How beautiful, when they in anger open, are thy lips! And from those lips, so pure and strong, must well forth, a cry of vengeance, dreadful as a cry of rav'ning harpies...) ³⁶⁵ Elektra reminds Chrysothemis that their mother forces them to live silently and only by breaking out from the suppressive silence will Chrysothemis win the freedom to chose the life she wants. Chrysothemis, however, is far from being able to act out in such a way. She is too scared to use her voice, needless to say to scream: "[M]ir ist die Kehle / wie zugeschnürt." ([R]opes feel I tight'ning close round my throat.) ³⁶⁶

This leaves us with Klytämnestra, the queen, whose voice oscillates between two extremes. On the one hand, she sings over lengthy periods of dramatic time and does so in an equally difficult style as Elektra. On the other hand, her voice is constantly in danger of faltering. Repeatedly the "suffocated scream" is mentioned in reference to her. Her servants mention that she screams in her sleep and how these screams sound as if she was being choked ("[S]ie sagen (...) daß sie geschrien hat aus ihrem Schlaf, / wie einer schreit, den man erwürgt" (And in her sleep she loudly shrieked, e'ven as one shrieks that

³⁶⁵ *Elektra Libretto*, 137 (English, 45).

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 120 (English, 17).

dies in pain).³⁶⁷ The sound of the suffocated scream is also the sound that surrounds Klytämnestra in general. Her arrival on stage was accompanied by it: “*ein gedämpftes Keifen, ein schnell ersticktes Aufschreien.*” (a muffled scolding, a quickly choked shouting).³⁶⁸ In her visions about the queen’s future, Elektra hears the same sound. The queen’s cries of desperation fall silently to the ground: “Du möchtest schreien, doch die Luft erwürgt / den ungeborenen Schrei und lässt ihn lautlos / zu Boden fallen... .” (Cries would’st thou utter, but the unborn word is strangled in thy throat, and in the silence, makes but faint echoes).³⁶⁹ The perception of the queen’s voice as faltering is problematic considering that her position as the ruling sovereign presupposes a strong vocality. With her husband and her son gone, she is now the rightful owner of the throne, a position that she fails to uphold despite the fact that she violently seized it. Listening to Elektra’s gruesome predictions about her future is sufficient for words and voice to fail her: when she hears them, she turns utterly silent. Similar to the Emperor in *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*, the queen’s acoustic presence, which symbolizes her political power, is dying. Klytämnestra might officially be in charge, yet her dying acoustic potency indicates her impending decline. The same is the case for Aegisth, the queen’s lover and accomplice in the murdering of Agamemnon. His dying screams, one of the few times he speaks at all, underscore once more the nexus between vocal and political potency in this opera: “Sie morden mich! / Hört mich niemand? hört / mich niemand?” (They murder me! Does none hear me? Does none hear me?)³⁷⁰ Combined with Agamemnon’s lack of a voice and Orest’s failure to establish a contending vocal presence, women’s acoustic dominance is

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 121 (English, 19).

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 122 (English, 19).

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 130 (English, 33).

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 148 (English, 63).

closely tied to a complete phasing out of men's audibility, and therefore authority. In processing women's domestic and public un-silencing, *Elektra* gives voice to a widespread unease with the ramifications that their boisterous bearing would have on an already unsteady patriarchal social system.³⁷¹

As if her vocal imperialism was not enough, *Elektra* exhibits another trait that secures her a commanding position amidst oppressive forces: she pierces her acoustic environment with her ears, so much so that she takes on characteristics of a doctor conducting a revelatory psychoanalytic treatment. This aural gesture grants her yet another status that was held by men alone (male doctors). *Elektra*'s acuity to what she hears is yet another manifestation of a cultural phenomenon that came as a result of women's growing presence in public life since the late nineteenth century. They not only began to leave an acoustic trail in cultural, political, and academic gatherings, their ears were now also precariously present during political talks, academic seminars, and the workplace. Having been systematically excluded from hearing and listening in all these public settings, the gradual change of law allowed them to enter into new sound spaces where they became listening participants.

Carolyn Abbate has called *Elektra* a "drama of hearing."³⁷² Its characters are obsessed with aurality, so much so that Abbate calls the constant regurgitation of the

³⁷¹ The threat to patriarchal power and the resulting "crisis of manhood" in Austrian and German culture came as a result of various historical developments and incidents, including World War I, which disrupted the balance of the gender system as women "entered spheres formerly defined as exclusively male, but which now lay deserted while the men were at war" (Mesner, 50). Another historical moment was the defeat of the Habsburg Empire and its resulting decline of former authorities, including the imperial dynasty, the Catholic Church, the army, and the state bureaucracy (50). Finally, industrialization lured women away from "the patriarchal sphere of the rural farm economy." (50) (Maria Mesner, "Educating Reasonable Lovers: Sex Counseling in Austria in the First Half of the Twentieth Century." In *Sexuality in Austria*, edited by Gunter Bischof et al., 48-64. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009.)

³⁷² Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 134.

word “hearing” an “inescapable linguistic tic.”³⁷³ They incessantly make auditory references in the form of questions (“hört ihr das?”; “hörst du’s nicht?”), injunctions (“hör mich!”), and declamations (“ich will nichts hören”). Elektra is no exception being in close touch with the sounds that surround her, whether it is a far away racket inside the palace (“I hear them running”), or sounds that embellish her own visions of the future (“I hear him go through the chamber. I hear him lifting the curtain from thy couch.”).³⁷⁴ Abbate has also shown that Elektra, unlike most operatic characters before and after her, can also hear the non-diegetic soundscape, that is the music produced by the orchestra, her fellow characters and herself. When being asked by her sister whether she cannot hear the sounds of celebration, Elektra replies: “Ob ich nicht höre? ob ich die Musik nicht / höre? sie kommt doch aus mir.” (How should I not hear the music? It cometh from me.)³⁷⁵ Being liberated from a deafness as it pertains to opera’s non-diegetic sounds, Elektra is not only “cognizant of the music that surrounds her, but more than this, as its *source*.”³⁷⁶ Above all, however, Elektra performs a mode of listening that resembles that of a judge and/or of a psychoanalyst. Unlike any other character, she listens as a higher authority imposing her Solomonic judgment on those who seek her out, most notably her mother and her sister. The mother undergoes a talking cure with her daughter who, like a psychoanalyst, hears out a recounting of her dreams, eventually revealing their (fatal) meaning to her patient.

³⁷³ Abbate, “Elektra’s Voice,” 107.

³⁷⁴ *Elektra Libretto*, 122 (English, 19) “Ich hör sie laufen.”; *Elektra Libretto* 129 (English, 33). “Ich hör ihn durch die Zimmer gehn, ich hör ihn / den Vorhang von dem Bette heben.”

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 149 (English, 65).

³⁷⁶ Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 135.

Hofmannsthal's private copy of Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer's *Studien der Hysterie* contains many annotations next to Breuer's case study on Berta Pappenheim.³⁷⁷ Better known under the pseudonym Anna O., Breuer's medical account of Pappenheim's recovery offers a detailed insight into the doctor-patient relation and the role both occupy within the psychoanalytic treatment of hysteria. As the patient is offered a space to talk freely, the (male) doctor recuperates repressed memories by listening to the (female) patient. Elektra and her mother mobilize this therapeutic practice with Elektra taking the position of the listening doctor.

This interpretative angle contradicts a large body of scholarly readings that consider Elektra to be the hysteric.³⁷⁸ Her "maenadic traits" have been read as a sign of her hysteria, as were her shrieking voice, her ecstatic dance at the end of the opera, and her hallucinations in the evening (which are in fact memories). However, many of Elektra's behavioral patterns run counter to a reading of her as the patient. As Antonia Eder has stressed, the name Elektra stems from the Greek "clarity" which the character maintains throughout the drama. Rather than suffering from "reminiscences," she recapitulates over and over the traumatic event whose memory is "painfully

³⁷⁷ Worbs, 280.

³⁷⁸ See, for example Jill Scott, *Elektra after Freud*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005: 61 (and generally the chapter "From Performance to Pathology"); Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004: 190; Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005: 48-58; Nancy Michal, *Elektra and her Sisters*. New York: Peter Lang, 2001: 82; Silvia Kronberger, *Die unerhörten Töchter: Fräulein Else und Elektra und die gesellschaftliche Funktion der Hysterie*. Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2002; Silvia Kronberger, "Elektra: stark - allein - hysterisch." In *Kundry & Elektra und Ihre Leidenden Schwestern. Schizophrenie und Hysterie*, edited by Silvia Kronberger and Ulrich Müller. Freilassing: Verlag Mueller-Speiser, 2003: 121-128; Michael Worb, "Anna O. als Modell für Hofmannsthal's Elektra." *Nervenkunst. Literatur und Psychoanalyse im Wien der Jahrhundertwende*. Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1983, 280-295; and Juliane Vogel, "Priesterin künstlicher Kulte: Ekstase und Lektüren in Hofmannsthal's Elektra," In *Tragödie: Idee und Transformation*, edited by Hellmuth Flashar. 287-306. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1997.

superconscious.”³⁷⁹ It is not Elektra who has to exhume repressed memories, but her mother. It is also not she who suffers from anxiety, sleeplessness, or nightmares, but again her mother. Finally, it is not she who seeks the advice of a doctor, but her mother.

The first encounter between them, which is also one of the dramatic and musical highlights of the opera, makes all of this unmistakably evident. After Elektra and her sister have been introduced, the queen and her retinue make a histrionic stage entrance. A gloomy and nervous atmosphere accompanies them: “[Es] schlürft ein hastiger Zug vorüber: es ist ein Zerren, ein Schleppen von Tieren, ein gedämpftes Keifen, ein schnell ersticktes Aufschreien, das Niedersausen der Peitsche, ein Aufraffen, ein Weitertaumeln.” (A hurried procession rushes and staggers past the luridly lighted windows; it is a wrenching, a dragging of cattle, a muffled scolding, a quickly choked shouting, the hissing of a whip in the air, a struggling of fallen men and beasts, a staggering onwards.)³⁸⁰ These oxymoronic stage directions (“schlürfender hastiger Zug”; “ersticktes Aufschreien” etc.) are emulated by the music which mimics the restless, yet heavy limping motions of the queen and her servants (4/4 meter, strong emphasis on the first and third beat with grace notes following each downbeat). Both give a first taste of the queen’s struggle with a paralyzing fatigue on the one hand and her anxious restlessness on the other. Haunted by nightmares and insomnia, Klytämnestra is desperate to find a remedy that will allow her to sleep calmly again. Unable, or unwilling, to recognize her own guilt as the root cause for her insomnia and bad dreams, she indulges in rituals including blood sacrifice and self-adornment.

³⁷⁹ Eder, 163-64.

³⁸⁰ *Elektra Libretto*, 122 (English, 19).

With tired eyes and covered in talismans, she spots Elektra. The queen is startled and frantically points at her daughter: “Seht doch, dort! so seht doch das! / Wie es sich aufbäumt mit geblähem Hals / und nach mir züngelt.” (Look you there, look but at that! How she defies me with her neck outstretched, and with tongue darting.)³⁸¹ From the start, the queen is presented as struggling with hallucinations which is only one of many symptoms listed for hysteria in Freud’s and Breuer’s volume.³⁸² As the course of events will show, Hofmannsthal has assigned her many more. She not only suffers from insomnia, anxiety, and nervousness, but also from suicidal thoughts, dyspnoea (difficulty breathing; “immer schwer atmend”), partial paralysis (her limping motions and stiffness), sudden mood shifts, bad dreams and disturbances of vision (staring with enlarged eyes, suffering from misconceptions).³⁸³ Most importantly, the queen has evidently repressed a traumatic event (the murdering of her husband) which is the root cause of her nocturnal struggles. She does not seem to remember her lethal deed at all, being rather surprised and confused about her own poor mental health.³⁸⁴

Her nightmares and insomnia become so overwhelming that she seeks out the advice from the woman she hates most, her daughter Elektra. Despite her deep hostility toward her, she has to admit that her daughter is perceptive and bold (“Ja, du! denn du

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 123 (English, 21).

³⁸² Freud, “The Clinical Picture,” 24.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁸⁴ Freud and Breuer: “We must, however, mention another remarkable fact(...), namely that these memories, unlike other memories of their past lives, are not at the patient’s disposal. On the contrary, *these experiences are completely absent from the patient’s memory when they are in a normal psychical state, or are only present in a highly summary form*” (9). Freud and Breuer outline two reasons that lie behind the repression of memory, both of which are applicable to the queen. The first is a deliberate act of repression in order to forget the traumatic experience (“[T]hings which the patient wished to forget, and therefore intentionally repressed from his conscious thought.” (10)). The second explanation is that the traumatic event occurred during a moment infused with a severely paralyzing affect, such as shock. Having murdered her husband, both causes are possible and support a reading of the queen as hysteric patient (Freud Sigmund, und Joseph Breuer. “On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena.” In *Studies on Hysteria*, edited and translated by James Strachey. Vol 2. 1-18. London: The Hogarth Press, 1955).

bist klug. / In deinem Kopf ist alles stark.”)³⁸⁵ Perverting the power relation between them, the queen wants to be granted an audience by her daughter. Instead of enforcing her ruling voice onto others, she seeks advice of a younger subordinate. And rather than requesting full auditory submission from everyone, she opens the acoustic floor for someone else. For Elektra, this means that she further establishes her acoustic hegemony. Aurality comes now as a double *entendre*: Elektra has achieved aural attention by everyone (including the servants, her sister, and finally her mother), a prerogative that she takes fullest advantage of by applying a mode of listening different from anybody else. Like a psychoanalyst, she listens between the lines for the kind of information that is not instantly audible. After a short initial conversation with her daughter from afar, the queen stammers: “Ich will hinunter. / Laßt, laßt, ich will mit ihr reden. / Sie ist heute nicht widerlich. / Sie redet wie ein Arzt.” (I want to descend. Room! Room! I fain would speak with her. She hath to-day no hostile mind. She speaketh like a doctor.)³⁸⁶ The reference to “Arzt” and her request “Ich will hinunter” indicate the beginning of a psychoanalytic session that will excavate the queen’s repressed memories. She is willing, so her own words, to bare her soul (“... will ich von meiner Seele alle Hüllen abstreifen...”)³⁸⁷ The talking cure with Elektra can begin.

Klytämnestra approaches her daughter asking anxiously, almost politely: “Ich habe keine guten Nächte. / Weißt du kein Mittel gegen Träume?” (I am distraught with nights of horror. Know’st thou no simples against dreaming?)³⁸⁸ Elektra’s task is a difficult one. She has been asked to help uncover the truth. At the same time, the queen

³⁸⁵ *Elektra Libretto*, 125. (Yes, you! Because you are wise. In your head everything is strong (my translation))

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 123 (my translation).

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 124 (English 23).

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 124 (English, 25).

has stubbornly announced just a minute ago that the truth will never be revealed: “Was die Wahrheit ist, das bringt kein Mensch heraus.” (What is truly truth, no mortal will retrieve.)³⁸⁹ Elektra proceeds as if she was familiar with Freud’s recommendations and neither proclaims the truth to her patient nor comments on her patient’s confessions. Instead, she encourages free speech paving the way for the (undeliberate) release of repressed memories. She simply asks: “Träumst du, Mutter?” (Dream’st thou, Mother?)³⁹⁰ Klytämnestra responds with a monologue in which she details her insomnia and frightful dreams. When she asks her daughter which animal, child, or virgin she has to sacrifice for this torment to end, Elektra steers her mother toward the truthful answer by providing only guiding clues:

ELEKTRA: Wenn das rechte / Blutopfer unterm Beile fällt, dann träumst du / nicht länger!

KLYTÄMNESTRA *sehr hastig* Also wüßtest du mit welchem / geweihten Tier?
–

ELEKTRA *geheimnisvoll lächelnd*: Mit einem ungeweihten!

KLYTÄMNESTRA: Das drin gebunden liegt?

ELEKTRA: Nein! Es läuft frei.

KLYTÄMNESTRA *begierig*: Und was für Bräuche?

ELEKTRA: Wunderbare Bräuche, / und sehr genau zu üben.

KLYTÄMNESTRA *heftig*: Rede doch

(ELEKTRA: When beneath / The axe the appointed victim bleeds, then dreamst thou /no longer

KLYTÄMNESTRA *very hastily*: Then thou know’st what sacrifice / That’s consecrated –

ELEKTRA *with a mysterious smile*: ’Tis not consecrated.

KLYTÄMNESTRA : That fettered lies within?

ELEKTRA: No! It roams free.

KLYTÄMNESTRA *zealously*: What rites are needed?

ELEKTRA: Rites most wondrous / To be observed most closely.

KLYTÄMNESTRA *vehemently*: Tell me quick!)³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 124 (my translation).

³⁹⁰ *Elektra Libretto*, 125 (English, 25).

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 126 (English, 27).

Like a doctor's, Elektra's voice is calm and slow. She sings mostly in quarter and half notes.³⁹² Her mother, on the other hand, is nervous and impatient. She sings faster, in eighth notes. The libretto details Klytämnestra to be anxious, urgent, hasty, and fierce (*(sehr) hastig, dringend, wild, begierig, heftig*) while Elektra remains calm and distanced (*ruhig, geheimnisvoll lächelnd*). Elektra conducts a Freudian talking cure which combines a reservation of advice with careful listening and a gradual extraction of information.

Her approach stands in contrast to the doctoral advice provided to the queen by her advisors whose imposing and opposing voices have caused only more confusion and insecurity. Right before seeking out Elektra's council, the queen had complained about their approach:

Redet ihr
 nicht jede etwas andres? Schreist nicht du,
 daß meine Augenlider angeschwollen
 und meine Leber krank ist? Und winselst
 nicht du ins andre Ohr, daß du Dämonen gesehen (...)
 Zerrt ihr mich mit euren Reden
 und Gegenreden nicht zu Tod? Ich will nicht
 mehr hören: das ist wahr und das ist Lüge!

(Do you not
 each one give different counsel? Cries not though
 though know'st my eyelids with disease are swollen
 And all my body tainted? Whine'st no thou,
 in the other ear, thou hast seen visions (...)
 Do ye not with all your prating
 Distract my soul, even unto death? No more
 I'll listen: this is truth and that is falsehood.)³⁹³

The advisors' pronouncements fail to provide the necessary contemplative space for the queen and her unfolding of repressed memories. Instead of letting the patient speak, to

³⁹² Freud emphasized the importance of maintaining "in all that one hears the same measure of calm, quiet attentiveness – of 'evenly-hovering attention'..." ("Recommendations", 357).

³⁹³ *Elektra Libretto*, 124 (English, 23).

Freud and Breuer the *sine qua non* of a successful psychoanalytical treatment, they overburden her with input. Elektra describes them as worms that firmly cling to the queen's ears:

Du bist nicht mehr du selber. Das Gewürm
hängt immerfort um dich. Was sie ins Ohr
dir zischen, trennt dein Denken fort und fort
entzwei, so gehst du hin im Taumel, immer
bist du als wie im Traum.

(Thou art thyself no longer. Yonder reptiles
cling aye too close to thee. What without cease
they hiss into thy ear doth all thy thoughts
embroil; and ever to and fro art driven
amazed, as in a trance.)³⁹⁴

The viola, and its quick ascending and descending *arpeggi* on the words *Reden* and *Gegenreden*, make the distracting babble of the advisors audible. The same sound disappears instantly with a *piano-pianissimo* when the queen makes her servants and advisors leave. Unlike Elektra, they talked, but failed to listen. Their failure only emphasizes how the queen's daughter has developed an unusual aural competence, particularly considering her sex. Hysteria was considered as much a "female malady" at the turn of the century, as the doctors that treated these female patients were exclusively male.³⁹⁵ Elektra has developed a skill that was, at the time of the drama and opera's genesis and staging, an exclusively male profession. By listening like a male psychoanalyst (in other words actively, critically, and counter-intuitively), she makes the

³⁹⁴ *Elektra Libretto*, 123 (English 21).

³⁹⁵ Hysteria was considered a female malady which roots partly in the fact that almost all of Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer's patients were women. The same was the case for Jean-Martin Charcot, the first of the great European theorists of hysteria: "Yet, for Charcot, too, hysteria remained symbolically, if not medically a female malady. By far the majority of his hysterical patients were women..." (Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*. New York: Penguin Books, 1987: 148).

acoustic territory her own. This kind of ownership of an intangible yet actual space gives her the kind of regulating and influential power that previously belonged to men alone.

Compared to her, all other characters, both male and female, fall short of this kind of aural acuity. Her sister Chrysothemis suffers from a variety of aural inhibitions. She listens to second-hand information (“She dream’d a dream; I know not what - her women have told me the tale”), to muffled sounds (by eavesdropping at doors), and singles out what she hears (“I don’t want to hear it!”).³⁹⁶ Aegisth suffers from an aural ineptitude that will end up costing his life. As Elektra guides him to the palace, he can hear something treacherous in her voice (“In truth thy voice sounds strangely.”).³⁹⁷ He can’t put his finger on what is essentially a luring tone in her speech. He disregards it and enters the palace where his murderer is awaiting him.

As was the case with Elektra’s vocal *tour de force*, her aural proficiency is an artistic representation of the work’s historical context. As women’s presence in public life grew, so did their ability to listen in on debates, lectures, and speeches from which they had traditionally been barred. The growing aural autonomy of women was noted by writers, social critics, and political activists. In her memoirs, Adelheid Popp recalls the first few times that she attended political gatherings organized by supporters of the socialist party. She found herself being mesmerized as she listened, for the first time, to speeches given in those meetings: “I heard clearly and convincingly expressed that which

³⁹⁶ *Elektra Libretto*, 119 (English, 19). “Sie hat geträumt: / ich weiß nicht was, ich hab’ es / von den Mägden gehört.”; *Elektra Libretto*, 119 (English, 19). “Ich will’s nicht hören.”

³⁹⁷ *Elektra Libretto*, 147 (English, 61). “Was hast du in der Stimme?”

I had instinctively felt but had never been able to think out.”³⁹⁸ Becoming an auditor of those meetings opened a new world to her (“eine neue Welt erschlossen worden”).³⁹⁹

Universities had also been opening their doors for women (in Austria women could audit lectures starting in 1878). Depending on university and academic field, women could enroll as full-time students in German and Austrian universities since the late nineteenth and increasingly so in the early twentieth century. Academia is steeped in a jargon of aurality (*Hörsaal*, *Gasthörer*, etc. (auditorium, auditing a lecture). Accordingly, women’s access to the lecture hall was largely framed in terms of their newly granted privilege of hearing: women had been officially granted “admission as listeners” (*Zulassung zur ordentlichen Hörschaft*).⁴⁰⁰ Hermine Heusler-Edenhuizen, the first German gynecologist and one of the first German women to receive the university-entrance diploma (*Abitur*) in 1898, recalls her reaction when reading through the course book of Berlin’s university: “Und das alles dürfen wir nun hören!” (And all of that, we are now allowed to hear!).⁴⁰¹ Some academic fields, such as medical studies, continued to block women from their lectures requiring them to ask for a “permission to listen” (*Hörerlaubnis*) for each and every seminar they wanted to attend.⁴⁰² Also, many professors kept insisting that, while women were eager and successful students, their access to the lecture hall did not mean they were qualified for all professions.⁴⁰³ When Austria opened the judicial auditorium to women (in 1896), Edmund Bernatzik, well-known Austrian professor of law, stressed that women’s success as students does not

³⁹⁸ Popp, *Autobiography*, 99 (*Jugendgeschichte*, 72). “Was ich instinktiv gefühlt hatte, aber noch nicht auszudenken vermochte, hörte ich hier klar und überzeugend vorgetragen.”

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 101 (*Jugendgeschichte*, 74).

⁴⁰⁰ See, for example, Edmund Bernatzik. “Die Zulassung der Frauen zu den juristischen Studien. Ein Gutachten.” Wien: Verein für erweiterte Frauenbildung, 1900.

⁴⁰¹ Heusler-Edenhuizen, 52.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴⁰³ Gleispach, 9; Maresch, 12;

necessarily mean that they were fit for positions in which governmental authority has to be exerted.⁴⁰⁴ Bernatzik's comment is an attempt to preemptively create a distinction between women's aural intrusion and the authoritative position that this could grant them, a suggestion that Elektra once again proves to be false. She not only audits her social environment but also takes advantage of the authority that she gains through this kind of aural activism: she ends the talking cure with her mother by pronouncing the death sentence over her.

Having finally blurted out the truth to her mother, Elektra ecstatically describes how she envisions her mother's execution, an event that she chronicles as a final silencing of the queen's voice. In Elektra's prophecy, Klytämnestra's own fear will suffocate her screams. The death of the queen is accompanied by the death of her voice: "Du möchtest schreien, doch die Luft erwürgt / den ungeborenen Schrei und lässt ihn lautlos / zu Boden fallen." (Cries would'st thou utter, but the unborn word is strangled in thy throat, and in the silence, makes but faint echoes.)⁴⁰⁵ Elektra indulges in her vengeful fantasies in the form of an aria: until now she has restrained her vocal force when being around her mother. Her ariatic sentencing is the first vocal uprising against her mother who falls, in that very moment, into a speechlessness and voicelessness: "... und so wie jetzt kannst du nicht schrein!" (... and like now, your frenzied shrieks will naught avail thee.)⁴⁰⁶ While Elektra's vocal resuscitation won't last very long, this aria marks the moment where she has fully established an acoustic presence for herself, one that is so powerful that the queen herself is left lost for words and voice.

⁴⁰⁴ Bernatzik, 8.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 130 (English, 33).

⁴⁰⁶ *Elektra Libretto*, 130 (my translation)

Despite Elektra's eventual death, the opera is somewhat open-ended. After Orest kills his mother and her lover, Elektra falls into a delirious dance and collapses. The last voice heard is Chrysothemis's, calling out the name of her brother and therefore signaling her continued longing for the restoration of a patriarchal order. Elektra's death and her sister's call for Orest is reminiscent of Catherine Clément's claim that the death of female heroines is a way of containing their powerful energy. While the protagonist might have lived out her emancipatory desires throughout the opera, her death seems to level out her revolutionary excesses. Not surprisingly, Elektra's collapse has been read as a sign of Hofmannsthal's anti-feminist conservatism: "To see Elektra as an example of the 'emancipated woman' (...) is a misperception. Hofmannsthal was neither a bourgeois liberal nor a feminist (...). Hofmannsthal's Elektra is instead the creature of a biological-determinist view of woman as a subspecies of man."⁴⁰⁷ As was the case with Clément's approach to opera, however, conclusions such as those do not take into consideration the powerful role of the protagonist's vocal ascendancy throughout the opera. As Naomi André has stressed: "... despite [the heroine's] ultimate death at the opera's conclusion, the sound of triumph is heard in her soaring voice."⁴⁰⁸ Matters are further complicated by the fact that Orest does not answer the call of his sister. His voice does not resound, and neither does any other character's or even the orchestra's. As a matter of fact, the opera ends in silence. Hofmannsthal's notation in the libretto insists that the work does not end in the final chord of the orchestra, but in the silence that follows thereafter. The libretto reads: "Stille. Vorhang." (Silence. Curtain.)⁴⁰⁹ While there might be a final call by a female voice for male leadership, this call is not answered. Instead, the acoustic space

⁴⁰⁷ Michael, 84.

⁴⁰⁸ André, 2.

⁴⁰⁹ *Elektra Libretto*, 151 (my translation).

remains empty and open, ready for new voices to fill the void left open after the decline of a male-dominated sound system. Despite all attempts of suppressing Elektra and despite her final collapse, she is the most powerful figure at the Court of Mycenae. She is neither a hysteric, nor a mere vessel for Agamemnon, nor the victim of yet another misogynist opera. Through her vocal assertiveness and her proactive listening, she succeeds in usurping male territory assuming the king's voice, the doctor's ear, and the judge's gavel.

Opera not only has a complex sound regime, it has also, since its genesis, been a popular cultural venue where gender norms were articulated and solidified and, at the same time, challenged and compromised. *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*, written at a time that reevaluated the relation between sound, politics, and gender, embrace both elements of opera: female characters reach into every acoustic niche of opera to renew their status within domestic, social, and political domains. Reaching deep into their historical context, these operas process the sounds and sentiments that were activated by a flourishing women's movement in the early twentieth century. These works give credence to the extent that feminist discourses, as well as the lived feminism of the early twentieth century relied on the acoustic world in their promoting of their cause. Inside and outside the opera house, vociferous female characters staged the power of acoustics in the resistance and renegotiation of conventional gender norms and power relations. The women's movement in Germany and Austria adopted an acoustic (vocal and aural) rhetoric of sound while its fighting representatives actually relied on the acoustic sphere to gain strength and credibility. This phenomenon is taken up in these operas where queens and maids, mothers and daughters,

wives and sisters hold specific positions within a politics of sound. Time and again their lives depend on whether they succeed in establishing an acoustic presence for themselves which requires vocal courage on one hand and aural pro-activity on the other. Sophie, the Empress, the Dyer's Wife and Elektra exemplify how the vocal and aural participation in domestic and public life is a necessary condition for an emancipated life.

At the same time, male characters frequently find themselves silenced, either by death (Agamemnon, Aegisth), exile (Orest), or petrification (Emperor). Their silencing also is an acoustic indicator of the fears that were associated with the destabilization of a patriarchal social system in those years. Stepping in as a powerful, yet receding support for fathers, husbands, and kings, Strauss's orchestra, which often takes on the symbolic role for the many anti-feminist voices, fights to drown out the sonorous and semantic voice of women. Ultimately however, women succeed in asserting themselves within confining social, political, and legal boundaries through their voices and acute sense of hearing. This makes them victorious in their battle for emancipation despite dramatic outcomes that seem to suggest otherwise: Sophie ties herself to another man (Octavian); the Empress transforms into a human and is thus able to conceive children; the Dyer's wife reconciles with her husband and both prepare themselves for parenthood; and Elektra collapses. What makes them victorious nonetheless, is their governing of opera's most powerful signifying layer, its acoustics. In so doing they create a space for themselves in which they can move freely both vocally and aurally. This acoustic liberation is in turn an audible sign and sponsor of their socio-political emancipation: in each case, women enter into a new social contract that was drafted according to their terms. Sophie marries the man of her choice, the Empress has traded a violently imposing

father figure with a husband who honors her wishes, and the Dyer's wife has spun her strained marriage into a union where both spouses consider each other equal. As both couples reunite at the very end of *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*, the singing voices of unborn children accompany them. Never visibly appearing on stage, however, the singing children remain a concept that stands in for the yet-to-be-known fruit that the new contract between man and woman will yield.

Chapter 4: The Visual Ear



Figure 2. Phonograph Cabinet built with Edison Cement

Built in 1912, this phonograph cabinet is so elaborately designed that one might not even recognize its function as acoustic machine. The clockwork portion of the cabinet is hidden in an octagonal box which is also the pedestal for a decorative sculpture. The nude

figure is enveloped by a wave of water that wraps around her hips and opens up over her head. The shell-shaped portion above her head is the amplifying horn of the phonograph. Sight and sound become curiously intertwined as the naked figure is evidently immersed in the process of listening. She stands with her eyes closed and looks as if she is trying to physically embrace the sound that surrounds her. The design visualizes sound and the experience of listening, and, simultaneously, presents an acoustic device as visual art. This cabinet contains a machine that is all about the production and reproduction of sound, yet it instantly attracts visual attention and ironically does so through a sculpture that is immersed in the process of listening.

The multi-layered intertwinement of aural and visual perception in this phonograph contrasts the current scholarly verdict on modernity which has been called “the age of sensory dissociation.”⁴¹⁰ Jonathan Crary, Jonathan Sterne, and Sara Danius are among the scholars who have shown how changing medical, techno-scientific, and cultural practices have fostered the notion that the senses work independently from each other. Danius interrogates the interaction between technology and aesthetics in the early twentieth century, and shows how high-modernist literature (Joyce, Proust, and Thomas Mann) incorporated the perceptual division of labor in phonography, telephony, and cinematography into its aesthetic program. Characters’ eyes and ears seem to be dissociated from the body, autonomous agents that perceive the world independently from the other sense.

As the phonograph design reveals, however, these sensory experiences with modern technologies were not the least homogenous. Crary’s, Sterne’s, and Danius’s evaluations do not line up with the design of Edison’s machine which suggests that

⁴¹⁰ Danius, 4.

phonography appeals to both eye and ear. Rather than highlighting a divorce between sight and hearing, the design shows listening and seeing to be delicately intertwined. The perceptual model imprinted on the exterior of the phonograph can also be found in a variety of artistic projects by Strauss and Hofmannsthal. They include telephonic / radiophonic scenes into their operas, turn their famous *Rosenkavalier* into a silent film, and finally merge opera with cinematography in their final project *Arabella*. Each time, the separation of the senses, which is enforced by the innovative technology, is remedied through synaesthesia: one sense compensates for another's shortcoming. In *Die Ägyptische Helena*, which stages a telephone conversation, the ear is required to process both aural and visual information compensating for that which cannot be seen. In their silent film *Der Rosenkavalier*, the acoustic world of the characters is made audible through visual signs. And in *Arabella*, which is in essence an operatic silent film, hearing becomes a pivotal way of gaining access to visual close-ups on characters' faces and bodies. Each time, synaesthesia is key in rectifying the aural and visual breach imposed by new technologies. Ultimately, this new kind of listening (whether through the visual ear or the listening eye) is a mode of perception that is not only required by the audience, but is suggested to be a possible way of encountering modern life and its increasingly ubiquitous technological gadgets.

Neither Strauss nor Hofmannsthal seem to be the kind of artist that would engage with modern technology in their art considering their reputation as being conservative (aesthetically and/or politically).⁴¹¹ One has to keep in mind, however, that both of them

⁴¹¹ Assenka Oksiloff considers Hofmannsthal's experimentation with new media the only reason why he could be called a modernist at all ("Archaic Modernism: Hofmannsthal's Cinematic Aesthetics." *The Germanic Review* 73.1 (Winter 1998): 70-85). Hofmannsthal scholar Jacques LeRider also deems the poet to be a "conservative modernist" given his humanistic education and inclination toward historical culture

had the kind of social status, financial means, and profession that exposed them consistently to modern technologies and new media. Both of them had telephones installed in their homes, and both listened to music on the gramophone (Strauss owning both a gramophone and a radio).⁴¹² Hofmannsthal also participated in a project by the Viennese Phonograph Archive which set out to collect voice-portraits of famous people (*hervorragende Persönlichkeiten*) (other contributors were Richard Beer-Hofmann, Hermann Bahr, Stefan Zweig, and Karl Kraus).⁴¹³ Strauss, on the other hand, conducted radio orchestras and, at the least, must have been aware that his works were played on radios and imprinted on gramophone records as early as the 1901.⁴¹⁴ Both were curious yet also ambiguous about the promise and issues that new technologies held. Strauss was resistant first to Hofmannsthal's idea of turning their opera *Der Rosenkavalier* into a (silent) film and commented once on radio fostering a problematic form of listening ("in der problematischen Form des Radiohörens").⁴¹⁵ Hofmannsthal, on the other hand, had somewhat of a love-hate relationship with the telephone. He was impatient with bad connections, disliking its ability to constantly interrupt his thought process, and felt alienated by the fact that his conversation partner was audible, but not visible, present and absent at the same time.⁴¹⁶ At the same time, he couldn't help being mesmerized by the telephone's ability to overcome large distances: "[D]a klingelt es auf dem Schreibtisch, zuerst leise, dann sehr heftig, ich laufe hin, da heißt es "Weimar" und dann kommt Ihre

(*Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Historismus und Moderne in der Literatur der Jahrhundertwende*, edited by Leopold Federmaier. Wien: Böhlau, 1997). As far as Strauss is concerned, it has been rather his disinterest in technology that has been highlighted, see, for example, Kurt Wilhelm in "Richard Strauss persönlich." Berlin: Henschel, 1999: 186.

⁴¹² Hiebler, 371; Wilhelm, 186; *Correspondence Strauss*, 495.

⁴¹³ Hiebler, 396-397.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 398-99.

⁴¹⁵ Unfortunately, he does not further elaborate on this comment. Strauss, *Betrachtungen*, 101.

⁴¹⁶ Hiebler, 376-79; *Correspondence Degenfeld*, 61.

Stimme. Es ist doch *so* märchenhaft (...) So nah waren Sie mir.” [There it rang on the desk, first quietly, then impetuously, I run toward it and hear “Weimar” and then your voice arrives. It is *so* magical (...) You were so close to me.)⁴¹⁷ A friend of his, Willy Haas, also recalls an instance of Hofmannsthal being smitten about the device: “Hofmannsthal war einfach außer sich. Ich hab sie gehört, als ob sie nebenan wäre!” rief er immer wieder. Er war kaum zu beruhigen, dieser schwierige Schuljunge.” (I could hear her as if she was right next door! he shouted again and again. He was barely able to be calmed, this difficult schoolboy.)⁴¹⁸ The telephoned earned much attention by both artists resulting in a surprisingly large set of projects that involved the device. It reappears in Strauss’s opera *Intermezzo*, Hofmannsthal’s drama *Der Schwierige* and his pantomimic piece “Das Zauberhafte Telephon.” With the opera *Die Ägyptische Helena* composer and librettist tackle telephony together, a fact that has been entirely missed in scholarly treatments of the opera. Granted, the telephone sneaks its way into the opera in the form of an ominous character, the Omniscient Sea Shell (*die Allwissende Muschel*) which keeps chiming in on the action throughout the first Act. The enormous Shell sits on a pedestal of Aithra’s palace informing characters and audiences about events that take place outside everyone’s visible realm. Her function as a telephone has been missed despite the semantic innuendo of the word Shell which in German means sea shell, external ear cap, and telephone speaker/receiver (*Muschel, Ohrmuschel, Muschel eines Telefonhörers*). As a result, the Omniscient Sea Shell has had to put up with a lot of criticism in the scholarship of the latter half of the twentieth century. Strauss scholar Norman DelMar calls her “a preposterous object,” an “odd impression,” and one of

⁴¹⁷ *Correspondence Degenfeld*, 88.

⁴¹⁸ *Correspondence Haas*, 9.

“Hofmannsthal’s fantastic proposal[s].”⁴¹⁹ Strauss scholar Bryan Gilliam finds her delightful, yet also only a “fanciful, satirical touch.”⁴²⁰ German musicologist Ernst Krause berates her existence altogether citing that “[s]uch characters as the “Omniscient Sea-shell” (...) are highly unrealistic additions by Hofmannsthal.”⁴²¹ And more often than not, she is simply accepted as “Aithra’s companion and a magical source of information.”⁴²²

Reactions among the contemporaries of Strauss and Hofmannsthal were different as many responded positively to this character finding the reference to modern technology witty and humorous.⁴²³ One reviewer calls her “a delightful idea that interlaces myth with modernity.”⁴²⁴ Identifying the Shell’s guise as a telephonic device might have been easier for contemporary audiences for several reasons. To them, apparatuses that could inform about distant events was a novel and exciting phenomenon and the Shell an all-too obvious realization of that. Also, unlike today, the telephone had not yet established itself as being primarily a medium for communication. Curiously enough, it was also used as a medium to broadcast and listen to operas.⁴²⁵ In the 1880s and 1890s, visitors to electro-technical exhibitions across Europe (including Stuttgart, Munich, Frankfurt) flocked around the newest sensation – telephones playing music. Soon, the new musical device became accessible to the public as cafés, hotels, or

⁴¹⁹ Del Mar, 315.

⁴²⁰ Gilliam, 128.

⁴²¹ Krause, 407.

⁴²² Mann, 225.

⁴²³ Schönewolf, *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten*, 1928.

⁴²⁴ Büttner, *Volkszeitung Dresden*, 1. “[E]in entzückender Einfall, der poetisch-reizvoll Mythisches mit der Moderne verknüpft.”

⁴²⁵ This is what Thomas Edison actually had in mind when he invented an upgraded version of the telephone receiver in 1877: “[H]e thought it would become a medium for broadcasting concerts and plays to remote auditoriums” (Nurnberg, Geoffrey. *The Years of Talking Dangerously*. New York: Perseus, 2009, 141).

amusement parks installed coin machines giving visitors several minutes of access to telephonic opera broadcasts.⁴²⁶ Munich, Strauss's home town, became particularly involved with what was now called the opera telephone (*Operntelefon*). On June 17th, 1924 Munich's postal service presented the opera telephone to a group of stunned journalists (playing Wagner's *Walküre*), and three months later the service was made available to its 80 000 subscribers. For a relatively small subscription fee, subscribers could listen each night to an opera performance by the Bavarian State Opera via their telephones. A contemporary was astonished:

The opera telephone is an establishment of highest cultural significance, and so simple as one can only imagine. Whoever owns a telephone, pays 7 Mark, gets six months free access to the service, and can listen to opera every night, in pajamas and slippers, smoking a cigar or a pipe, with or without stein.⁴²⁷

A journalist of the *München-Augsburger Abendzeitung* was also singing its praise: "Soon I didn't even realize anymore that I only listen to the opera through the telephone. I believed myself to be in the opera house."⁴²⁸ The telephone's ability to transport the listener to the world at the end of the other line, in this case the opera house, also stands at the center of attention in Strauss's and Hofmannsthal's representation in *Die Ägyptische Helena*.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁶ Haase, 82; In Paris, for example, the Théatrophone Society furnished hotels, cafés, and restaurants with coin machines, so guests could listen to music or theater plays for up to ten minutes. The "Theatrophon" also became a major attraction in Berlin's amusement park Urania where up to twelve people could listen to operas, although only for 15 minutes because the line was so long (Haase, 86).

⁴²⁷ Feudel, 14 (quoting Karl Reichsgraf von Bothmer: "Das Operntelephon ist eine Einrichtung von höchster kultureller Bedeutung und so einfach, als sich nur denken läßt. Wer ein Telephon hat, der zahlt im Monat 7 Mark, bekommt auf sechs Monate probeweise kostenlos seinen Opernanschluß und kann jeden Abend in Schlafrock und Pantoffeln, seine Zigarre oder Pfeife rauchend, mit oder ohne Maßkrug, die Oper hören." (my translation)). Initially 800 subscribers took advantage of this service, a number that had risen to 3500 by 1927. Because many couldn't afford a telephone, the postal service also offered public listening booths (*Opernhörstuben*, also in 1924) (see Haase, 87).

⁴²⁸ Haase, 87. "Bald merkt man gar nicht mehr, dass man die Oper nur durchs Telephon hört, man glaubt, im Opernhause selbst zu sein." (my translation).

⁴²⁹ Two decades later, another opera would stage telephony: "The Telephone," an opera buffa by Gian Carlo Menotti (1947), followed by "La Voix Humaine" by Francis Poulenc (1957).

The owner of the Shell is the sorceress Aithra who has been banished on an island by Poseidon. Aithra (also called *die Schnellhörende* by Helena) uses the Shell to gather information and to find distraction from her uneventful life on the island. The opera opens with her asking the Shell where her former lover Poseidon is, and receives an immediate answer: in Ethiopia. A few scenes later the sorceress is bored and orders her servant: “Frage das unnütze Geschöpf dort, ob sie rings auf dem weiten Meer kein Wesen erblickt, das kennen zu lernen der Mühe wert wäre.” (Ask the useless creature there, whether she cannot catch sight of someone on the sea that would be worth the hassle of getting to know.)⁴³⁰ Both times, Aithra uses the Shell as binoculars enabling her to see beyond the palace walls, into the forest and past the sea’s horizon. Thanks to her telephonic / radiophonic device, her visual limitations, represented by her enclosed life in a palace and by the boundaries of her island, is overcome.⁴³¹ Several more times, she will take advantage of the Shell’s farsightedness, asking for more visual information.⁴³²

Following the order, the Shell catches sight of a ship on the sea. It belongs to Menelas, who, after having destroyed Troy, wants to bring back home his famous wife Helena. During their journey, Menelas is overpowered by his jealousy of Paris and decides that Helena must die instead. The Shell zooms in on his ship just as he rises between sleeping soldiers making his way to the hold where Helena is resting. In describing the events on the ship, the Shell’s narrative style is descriptive rather than analytical. This allows her listeners to reconstruct a visual image of the events on the sea:

⁴³⁰ *Helena Libretto*, 9 (Translations are my own unless noted otherwise).

⁴³¹ Hofmannsthal mentions in his essay “Die Ägyptische Helena” that the Shell is a mixture of radio and newspaper, a comment he later crossed out (Hofmannsthal, 762; also see footnote 10 in Hiebler, 516). Nonetheless, the Shell can also be considered a form of radio which has the same sensory prerequisite and would lead to the same synaesthetic mode of perception.

⁴³² “Rede! Was siehst du!” (Speak! What do you see!); “Wer trägt wen?”! (Who carries whom?) (*Helena Libretto*, 13).

“Der Mann steht auf. Er ist der einzige an Bord, der nicht schläft (...) Er weckt einen von den Schläfern und gibt dem das Steuer in die Hand. Er selbst steigt hinunter in den Schiffsraum... Jetzt ist er unten: die Schlafende regt sich ... Er beugt sich zu ihr.” (The man gets up. He is the only one on board who does not sleep (...) He wakes one of the sleepers and gives him the steering wheel. He descends to the hold. Now he has arrived. The sleeping woman stirs... He bends over her.)⁴³³ The eyes of the Shell follow the man’s every move and communicates to others what she can see. By giving such a descriptive account, she allows the events to be visualized. For characters and audiences alike, the sense of hearing takes on a compensatory function for the lack of sight. By listening to the Shell, the exact course of events can be seen despite the spatial distance.

Thinking that Menelas had come to kiss his wife, the Shell realizes now that the events are about to take an unexpected turn: “Er greift mit der Linken ein Tuch. Das will er über ihr Gesicht werfen – denn in der Rechten hält er einen Dolch – er will sie töten!” (He grabs a cloth with his left hand. He wants to throw it over her face – because in his right hand, he is holding a dagger – he wants to kill her!)⁴³⁴ Despite her rising panic, she continues to report everything very descriptively. The listener learns that he grabs a cloth with his left hand while holding a dagger in his right.

Strauss’s music enhances the visibility of the event by providing descriptive music: the celli’s descending *pizzicato* (plucking of strings) indicate Menelas’ secretive steps down to the hold, and the abrupt, dissonant strokes of the violins the rising of the dagger. In response to the Shell’s report, Aithra sends a storm to protect Helena. Here also the music contribute to the visualization of the incident: “Der Sturm hat das Schiff!

⁴³³ *Helena Libretto*, 12.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

Er hat es! Er hat es! ... Die Masten splittern! Die Schlafenden taumeln drunter und drüber ... sie schwimmen! Da er trägt sie.” (The storm strikes the ship. The ship reels! The ship reels! The masts are riven. The sleepers are tottering hither and thither ... They swim! Lo! He carries her.)⁴³⁵ The music mimics these details, as strings and brass unite in two massive two-chord *sforzandi* (sudden, strong emphasis on note/chord) illustrating the rising wind, lightning, and the growing waves of the sea. The trombone’s *marcato* (forceful, loud passage) followed by the violin’s shrill downward *arpeggio* (notes played one after another without letting them ring out), and the organ’s final chord displays the storm as it takes hold of the ship. The ensuing counter-rhythmic triplets in the strings amidst the heavy regularity of the bass depict Menelas and Helena as they struggle to swim through the water. Every aspect of the Shell’s verbal portrayal is reiterated in the music.

During the storm, the instrumental accompaniment is particularly loud making the Shell’s singing hard(er) to understand. At the same time, the music takes over the descriptive and narrative style of the Shell eliminating the need to hearing the Shell’s exact words. In the previous scene, when the Shell reported on Menelas’ intentions, the orchestra took a back seat making it possible for the audience to hear and understand her words. In those scenes, hearing what the Shell has to say is crucial, after all, not hearing would mean audiences were to miss out on aural *and* visual information. Being a notoriously difficult issue in opera, Strauss and Hofmannsthal made every effort to ensure that the Shell’s report would be intelligible. Aithra shifts from singing to speaking the first time she addresses the telephonic device. When it replies, as is the case for the vast majority of her report, the orchestra recedes: fewer and quieter instruments play

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14 (English, 12).

(strings, contrabassoon, cymbals, tam-tam etc) playing *pizzicato* and *piano/pianissimo* (quiet/very quiet). As more instruments join (mostly wind instruments), they also stick to *piano* and play mostly *tremolo* (subdued trembling effect) refraining from sudden interjections. The vocal line of Shell stays within a lower register making verbal articulation easier. This is also the case for the servant girl, who repeats every sentence of the Shell (humorously mimicking her as the person who holds the telephone receiver passing on to others what she is told). The orchestra gets louder and more aggressive once the Shell utters the word “kill” which marks the start of the storm where the music begins to speak for itself.

That the Shell’s comprehensibility was of great concern to both artists shows this complaint by the poet who anxiously writes to Strauss after having witnessed a post-premier performance in Vienna: “One cannot hear a single word of what the Sea-Shell says, indeed one hardly hears that anyone is singing at all. An undefined sound mingles with the orchestra, the audience (I watched the boxes and the dress circle through the glasses) loses interest and concentration – people say to themselves: this is *unimportant*.”⁴³⁶ Considering this scene pivotal for the opera’s exposition and believing that it was also one of his better ideas in his career, Hofmannsthal did not want this specific scene to be considered irrelevant. He quickly lists all the things that need to be fixed to save later performances: the singer of the Shell has to be repositioned further in the front and sing toward the audience through a concealed hole in the curtain; the

⁴³⁶ *Correspondence Strauss*, 480 (*Briefwechsel*, 550).

servant who repeats everything also has to stand further away from Aithra so she sings loudly *toward* her (Hofmannsthal's emphasis).⁴³⁷

By ensuring that the vocal report of the Shell can be understood, the way is paved for a synaesthetic experience. Aural and visual information interweave as visible events are related through the voice. Synaesthesia is further fostered in the staging of the Shell. Both artists requested a presentation of the device that was acoustically and visually arresting. Acoustically, this was achieved by giving her a unique sound. In a letter to Strauss, Hofmannsthal states that "it might in fact be amusing if the sea-shell were to sound distorted like the voice on the telephone when one stands beside the receiver."⁴³⁸ Strauss reproduced the distant and transduced voice of telephony by making her sound low, murmuring, and somewhat slurry: the role of the Shell is assigned to an alto (the only alto in the opera) who sings in a very low voice, through a megaphone, while standing off stage.⁴³⁹ In addition to making the Shell an acoustically absorbing character, she was also to be the optical center of the stage. Hofmannsthal reiterates in his correspondence the importance of a visually captivating staging of this character wanting her to be of "immense size."⁴⁴⁰ In the premiere, she ended up being about fifteen feet tall and placed in the middle of the stage with several steps leading up to her.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 480 (*Briefwechsel*, 550). Hofmannsthal had voiced his concerns about the Shell's words being comprehensible (and how to achieve that three years earlier as well (*Correspondence*, 396; *Briefwechsel*, 458).

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁴³⁹ *Helena Score*, 10.

⁴⁴⁰ *Correspondence Strauss*, 396 (*Briefwechsel*, 458: "mächtig groß").

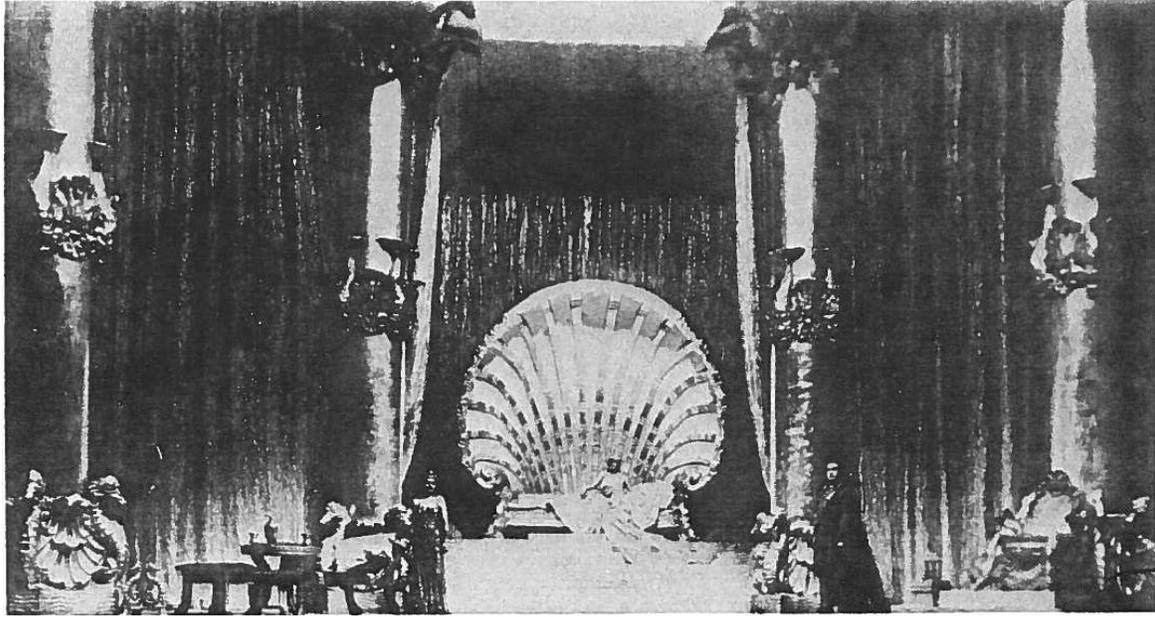


Figure 3. The Omniscient Shell at the world premiere of *Die Ägyptische Helena*, 1928. Reproduced under Fair Use from Heinz Hiebler, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal und die Medienkultur der Moderne*.

The shape of the Shell, which is similar to the wave in the design of the Edison phonograph, also attracts visual attention. The converging lines on the surface of the Shell draw the eye toward the lower center of the structure inviting the visual sense to sink into her. As the singer is positioned behind the Shell, both eye and ear are drawn toward and merge in this construction.

A few scenes later, Aithra takes care of an exhausted Helena while an erratic Menelas runs through the forest frantically looking for a non-existent Paris. The Shell updates both women about Menelas' whereabouts providing once again a description of Aithra's blind spot: "Jetzt läuft er wie ein Toller einem Nebelschwaden nach, den er für Helena hält!" (Now he is running like a madman after wafts of mists which he believes to be Helena!)⁴⁴¹ Thanks to the Shell, Aithra and Helena have once again visual access to Menelas' frenzied chase in the forest. The sorceress's visual restriction is superseded

⁴⁴¹ *Helena Libretto*, 24.

because her tele-/radiophonic device does the seeing for her. Her eyes become expendable as ears begin to process both aural and visual stimuli. The senses are (re)united in the usage of an acoustic apparatus whose most valuable feature turns out to be its ability to see.

Staging the encounter with a sound-production technology as a synaesthetic experience runs counter to recent cultural-historical and literary studies which have found for a conceptual emphasis on the separation of the senses since the nineteenth century. In *Techniques of the Observer*, art historian Jonathan Crary shows how conceptions about the subject and its perceptual relation to the outside world changed in the nineteenth-century.⁴⁴² According to him, new medical/physiological research and changing cultural practices showed man in a new light, namely as a physiological subject with competing systems of senses. This contradicted with, and ultimately replaced, the classical notion of a unified interior self where the convergence of sensory input produces a “true” representation of the outside world. The belief in a unified human sensorium dissolved with the study of the senses as physiological organs each working independently from the other. Crary’s theory is reinforced by Jonathan Sterne’s work who traces the same perceptual autonomy in relation to early twentieth-century sound-reproduction technologies. Sterne argues that specific audile techniques pre- and succeeded these innovations, among them a more directive, virtuosic, or highly technical listening skill. Apparatuses that particularly promoted new skills of listening were those that separated hearing from the other senses. This was for example the case with the stethoscope, the

⁴⁴² Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990.

telegraph, and the telephone which turned hearing into a “mechanical function that could be isolated and abstracted from the other senses and the human body itself.”⁴⁴³

Artistic production was not to be untouched by these developments. Interrogating the mediating relationship between technology and high-modernist aesthetics, Sara Danius traces new aesthetic idioms that were launched as a result of modern technologies. She locates new matrices of perception in the works of Proust, Joyce, and Thomas Mann, and uses Joyce’s *Ulysses* as an example where each sensory organ, particularly the ear and the eye, operate independently and for their own sake.⁴⁴⁴ One of her many examples shows Buck Mulligan as he appears in the door frame. That is to say, his face appears hovering in the air to shortly thereafter vanish again. Then, as if separate from the character’s body, his voice travels through the staircase and the doorframe. Danius highlights how the protagonist’s perceptual experience of Mulligan is processed in two different registers: “On the one hand there is Stephen’s visual impression, and on the other, the auditory one. Each is distinct; indeed, each is separate and independent of the other.”⁴⁴⁵ Eyes and ears (in this case of Stephen Dedalus) operate independently from each other, and, as is the case with telephony, “what is heard is not joined together with what is seen.”⁴⁴⁶

Locating the dissociation of the visual and aural all across Joyce’s novel, Danius also finds cases where a mediation between the senses takes place. She mentions, yet only in passing, how the differentiation between the senses is dialectically related to synaesthesia: “For once the work of the senses has been separated, (...) new perceptual

⁴⁴³ Sterne, 23. Sterne does point out that early versions of the phonograph (i.e. Leon Scott's *phonautogram*) rendered speech visible by engraving the sound onto a surface (such as a wax cylinder) (Sterne, pp. 35).

⁴⁴⁴ Danius, 151.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

and descriptive possibilities open up, and now the perceptual activity of a single sense may well be translated into that of another, even give way to a synaesthetic experience.”⁴⁴⁷

Danius concedes that the separation of sight, enforced by telephony, phonography, and cinematography, also opens up the possibility of new modes of perceptions, and accordingly of representation. This observation remains a passing reference in her study which returns to the other side of this dialectic relationship – the disjointing of the senses. She does so even though Strauss and Hofmannsthal are by no means alone in their artistic exploration of the visual ear. In Thomas Mann’s *Der Zauberberg*, Hans Castorp also turns the activity of listening to an acousmatic voice into a visual experience. After having spent several years in the sanatorium on the Magic Mountain, he obsesses over a newly-acquired entertainment device – a gramophone. As is the case with the Edison phonograph, the gramophone is first introduced as visual art. The narrator provides a detailed description of its visible qualities, including its intricate construction, colors, fabrics, accessories, decorations, and the shapes of its various parts. From the outset, the sound machine is celebrated as a visual beauty. The mediation of sight and aurality continues, yet reverses, once Castorp begins to listen to the shiny records. When the phonograph reproduces the performance of an Italian baritone, the singer appears in front of Castorp’s inner eye: “... [ein] Virtuose des welschen Da capo-Geschmacks, hielt er den vorletzten Ton, vor der Schlußtonika, zur Rampe vordringend, wie es schien, und offenbar die Hand in der Luft...” (... a virtuoso of the Italian *da capo* school, he came forward to the footlights and flung up his arm, as he held the last tone

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

before the closing tonic).⁴⁴⁸ Castorp can see before his inner eye the singer as he approaches the edge of the stage raising his hand while he holds on to the closing tonic. The same phenomenon takes place when the record of the Cancan is played: “Den Schluß machte (...) ein unverschämter Cancan, der die Vision in der Luft geschüttelter Zylinder, schleudernder Knie, aufstiebender Röcke erzeugte...” (The presentation is brought to an end with a shameless *cancan* that called up a vision of top-hats waved in the air, flying skirts and tossing knees).⁴⁴⁹ Without an orchestra being in sight, the sound of the music resonating from the gramophone invites the hearer to fill the visual space. Neither Castorp nor his fellow listeners are disappointed with the machine’s inability to provide visual stimuli. On the contrary, it allows them to let their seeing ear wander freely. When listening to Bizet’s *Carmen*, Castorp’s vision travels to the tavern in Spain where he sees each and every detail of the dive, including its layout, decoration, and architecture. As suggested by the elaborate design of the Edison phonograph, listening to a sound-reproduction technology is never only an acoustic experience. As sight and sound are separated by the technologies, the ear refuses to stay within the bounds of its assigned sensory register.

One particularly intriguing, if slightly dubious, reflection on technology, perception, and aesthetics is given by another immediate contemporary. In his essay “Ur-Geräusch” (1919), Rainer Maria Rilke recapitulates his first exposure to the phonograph as a school boy. He remembers what fascinated him most about this machine. It was not the reproduction of the human voice that struck him most. His awe centered around the thin lines on the wax cylinder for the phonograph needle to travel on. These lines were a

⁴⁴⁸ Mann, 675.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 675.

visible trace of sound. Over the years, these very lines elicited in him a set of – as he admits himself – peculiar ideas. The surface tracks on the cylinder reminded him of the seam on top of the skull, the junction where the two main bone elements fused together right before the skull ossified into its final shape (*Kronen-Naht*):

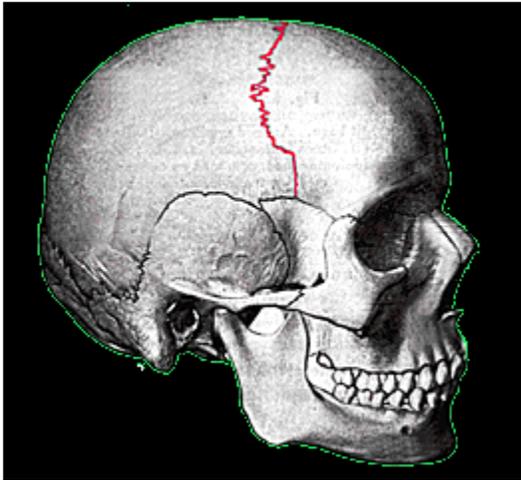


Figure 4: Die Kronennaht (Coronal Suture)

Looking at the *Kronen-Naht*, Rilke begins to speculate what kind of sound, or music, would resound if one were to run the phonograph needle along this line. The resonating sound, so he concludes, would have to be the original sound, the *Ur-Geräusch*. Rilke expands on this idea transferring it onto a broader meditation on aesthetics. It should be imperative for all artists, he argues, to establish the urgent connection between the “oddly disjoined sensory realms” (“so seltsam abgetrennte Bereiche”).⁴⁵⁰ Only then could an art work be created that would grant access to the kind of primordial and intuitive sphere of reality that the poet always strives to reach. He criticizes the mono-sensory approach among today’s poets, especially in their heavy reliance on the visual sense. Only an aesthetics of synesthesia, one that allows all five senses to interact, would make it

⁴⁵⁰ Rilke, 1093.

possible for the poet to reach the depth of knowledge and experience that the scientist always strives for, but ultimately never achieves (*das Unerfaßliche*).

With his visionary poetics, Rilke speaks directly to a group of avant-garde composers, writers, and painters (*Der Blaue Reiter* group, *Ballets Russe*) who also experimented with synaesthesia. These experimentations were inspired by a post-Wagnerian search for a synthesis of genre with an additional focus on the synaesthesia of the senses. Combined, this was to bring about a comprehensive, organic work of art and ultimately a “state of oneness with ultimate reality.”⁴⁵¹ For the Symbolists the synthesis of genres and the synaesthesia (correspondence) of the senses were inseparably related: “Correspondences between the senses - primarily sight and sound but also involving taste (Proust!) and smell - not only made synaesthesia a key to the synthesis of the arts from Baudelaire to Scriabin but suggested a reciprocal correspondence between the arts: if one sense can take the place of another, then one art can substitute for another.”⁴⁵² These synthesizing intentions would take shape in the form of color organs, musical paintings, and visual music. Scriabin’s color symphony *Prometheus* and his *Poem of Fire* simultaneously stage color and sound; Kandinsky’s theater piece *The Yellow Sound* merges visual, musical, and physical movement (dance, music, film); and Schoenberg’s *Die Glückliche Hand* combines singers, mimes, orchestra, and colored lighting.

While synaesthesia in modernist art is typically drawn to the projects of these artists, their goal and mode of representation is fundamentally different from the one in *Die Ägyptische Helena* or *Der Zauberberg*. Representatives of the avant-garde were interested in attaining a higher, spiritual reality (comparable to Rilke’s envisioned poetics

⁴⁵¹ Roberts, 149.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 124.

and Swedenborg's philosophy in the eighteenth century). Strauss, Hofmannsthal, and Mann, on the other hand, sought out an aesthetic that would mimic a possible mode of perception in the encounter with modern technology. The first group provided a multi-sensory experience, one could say forcing synaesthesia onto the audience through the multiple staging of visual and aural stimuli. The second group reverted to synaesthesia precisely because this multi-sensory input was lacking. The former predetermined how visual and aural signs correspond to each other, while the latter imposed the burden of sensory recapitulation on the audience. In their representations of telephony, radio, and phonography, the aural sense is assigned the ability to expand its epistemic reach to make up for the lack of visual information. The goal of the visual ear was not to attain a higher spiritual reality, but to develop a kind of listening that would grant the recapitulation of a material reality that is not within reach of the eye.

These aesthetic explorations take another intriguing turn in artistic projects that work with technologies, or media, that withhold acoustic information creating the same scenario of partial sensory input. This is for example the case in silent film which had hit the screen in the late 1890s and quickly gained popularity and cultural presence (remaining silent until the gradual take-over by sound film in the second half of the 1920s). The silent film was a new artistic medium that was able to provide unprecedented visual detail, at the price of a major compromise: audiences had no aural access to diegetic soundscape, the acoustic environment that surrounds the characters. Hofmannsthal, who had always shown an inclination to working with a broad range of media and art forms, also grappled with this sensory set-up and convinced his collaborator to create a cinematic prelude to their popular *Rosenkavalier* opera. While the

final product had little to nothing to do with Hofmannsthal's initial screenplay, his script is worth more attention because it once again tackles the separation of the senses as it is imposed by silent film. The wording of the screenplay suggests that the disconnect between what is seen and what is heard was to be remedied by putting the eye in charge of listening. By projecting countless visible cues of the diegetic soundscape onto the screen, the sound world of Ochs, the Countess, and Octavian becomes audible. In their continuous quest for an expansion of aural competency and capacity, Hofmannsthal now creates an artistic situation which requires the eye to listen.

Turning an opera into a silent film seems to be a peculiar project given silent film's limited acoustic resources. Silent film can never match opera's sonic opulence, just as opera cannot provide film's visual intricacies considering the distance between actor and audience. This isn't to say that silent film is silent. Many sound practices were developed that supplemented the diegetic and non-diegetic soundscape of the film. Well known are the cinema organ and the motion picture orchestra. Other practices included narrators escorting viewers through the film, percussionists producing sound effects, the chronophone / cameraphone sync-sound systems, and impersonators behind the screen that provided dialogue and sound effects.⁴⁵³ Despite these many practices, however, silent film would never achieve the same acoustic complexity of opera. More often than not its characters were still muted, diegetic sound production confined, and a full orchestral accompaniment rare. In addition, many of opera's acoustic tricks couldn't be applied (i.e. the acousmatic voice, the singing voice, simultaneous speech of characters, intonation of characters, the interplay between vocal and instrumental sounds, and unique types of

⁴⁵³ Rick Altman unearths these and many other types of silent film sounds in his homonymous study (*Silent Film Sound* (2004)).

sounds, such as the echo). The disparity of the acoustic (and visual) dimension between opera and silent does not bode well for a marriage of both genres. Yet Hofmannsthal's idea becomes less arbitrary when taking into consideration that silent film relied from its beginning on opera borrowing its performers, plots, and style.⁴⁵⁴ By 1915 as many as seventy operas had appeared in silent film versions. The first movie stars were opera singers who acquired fame through the screen despite having being stripped of their powerful voices.⁴⁵⁵

It would only be a matter of time that Hofmannsthal, who had always shown an openness to all kinds of artistic media, would turn toward cinema (he also made no secret about the financial gain that the turn toward the rising cultural genre could bring).⁴⁵⁶ He stated as early as 1911, the year of the premiere of *Der Rosenkavalier*, that he would like to work with the cinematic genre.⁴⁵⁷ In 1923, he began playing with the thought of making a *Rosenkavalier* film, yet it took a while to convince his collaborator who was concerned about a film being a potential competitor to the opera.⁴⁵⁸ Strauss became more inclined to take on the project when Hofmannsthal's intentions became clearer: the film was to be a prequel to the opera. This way, the film could also be a form of advertisement for the opera addressing and attracting those who were previously not familiar with the genre.⁴⁵⁹ In the end, Hofmannsthal wrote parts of the script, and Strauss composed a new march, incorporated previously composed pieces, and eventually even conducted the

⁴⁵⁴ For a resourceful study on opera being appropriate by early film directors see David Schroeder's *Cinema's Illusion, Opera's Allure* (2002).

⁴⁵⁵ Fyer, p.1 The most famous one being Geraldine Farrar, a leading opera diva who played the lead role in the silent film *Carmen* by Cecil DeMille.

⁴⁵⁶ Krenn, 15.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁵⁸ Kennedy, 238. Strauss's concerns were also fed by his publisher Fürstner who recognized film as a dangerous competition to the theater (Krenn 14).

⁴⁵⁹ Krenn, 12.

film's premier on January 10th 1926 – the 15th anniversary of the opera.⁴⁶⁰ This final version, however, had little to do with Hofmannsthal's original ideas. After Pan-Film had acquired the rights for the movie (1925), screen writer Ludwig Nerz and director Robert Wiene (known for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*) were put in charge of writing the screenplay. They disregarded Hofmannsthal's initial ideas and preliminary screenplay almost in its entirety which led to a rift between him and Pan-Film Inc.⁴⁶¹

What remains is Hofmannsthal's unused initial script (the first Act so to speak) which reveals right away that Hofmannsthal's film-version of *Der Rosenkavalier* was all but silent; it was noisy. This is particularly the case for the Baron Ochs who is not only surrounded by noise but as much as characterized through it. It follows him wherever he goes symbolizing his all-but-sensitive manners. In the short scene that introduces Ochs, a sullen housekeeper slams a bowl of food on the table, a pack of dogs angrily chases a young rascal, Ochs knocks over his wine glass, and a maid bursts out in laughter. When a messenger arrives and asks for the master, a dirty maid, a hunchback, and young teenage boys roar with laughter (“brüllendes Gelächter”) and the dogs welcome him with a salvo of barking (“Hunde verbellen ihn wütend”).⁴⁶² Trying to make his presence known to Ochs or his chamberlain, the messenger begins to scream (“Der reitende Bote schreit nach dem Haushofmeister”).⁴⁶³ When this doesn't help, he grabs and drags one of the boys (by the ear) through a group of quaking geese and dogs toward Ochs's house. This kind of racket follows Ochs wherever he goes. He shouts for his servant, rings for them so impatiently that the bell's cord rips apart, and in a last effort to get his attention shoots

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8 and 14.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁶² *Rosenkavalier Film*, 219.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 219.

a heavy handgun through his window. Later, having been caught in a tête-a-tête with the miller's wife, Ochs bangs his fists at her door while being attacked by another pack of barking dogs. Equally full of sound are the scenes that portray the canoness, Ochs's aunt. In one of them, she knocks over a room divider which crashes on the floor startling her pets (one of which is a parrot). Small dogs begin to bark, her cats scurry around the room, and a squirrel begins to run nervously in its wheel.

The way Hofmannsthal brings noise into these scenes is by turning sounds into visual markers enabling the eye to take over the epistemic mandate of the ear. Each sound is translated into a visual sign making the diegetic soundscape of the silent film audible to the cinema audience. The perceptual division of labor reinforced in early cinema is circumvented and Danius's observation no longer holds true: "Just as humans laughed and babies cried without auditory traces, so trains and motorcars sped across the screen in utter silence."⁴⁶⁴ Despite the lack of acoustic feedback, characters, animals, and object are all but "utterly silent" in Hofmannsthal's script. Sound is no longer cut off from what can be seen, because seeing becomes a form of listening.

Capturing the process of sound production is only one example of the way that Hofmannsthal bridges the sensory gap. Two other modes are the depiction of the anatomical ear as well as characters being immersed in the process of hearing or listening. The camera will show, for example, an angry messenger grabbing a young rascal by the ear, or little rocks flying past the ears of the same messenger (thrown by boys who try to defend their friend). Another scene shows the Fieldmarshal who, in a gesture of victory, removes a pearl earring from the ear of his defeated enemy (no doubt an insinuation of film's lack of art's most precious element). In terms of portraying the

⁴⁶⁴ Danius, 149.

act of hearing, the camera shows Octavian and the Countess pricking up their ears to the approaching sound of the hunter's horn ("Sie horchen: Das Halali! dort!"), while Sophie can hear the clip-clopping of her heart-throb's horse.⁴⁶⁵ Maids eavesdrop at closed doors, an accomplice is startled by a knock at the door, and Ochs listens up as a servant's lantern breaks.⁴⁶⁶ The Fieldmarshal and his wife listen to the mass, and a servant of Ochs is caught trying to eavesdrop on his master.⁴⁶⁷ Even the gesture of deliberately not hearing is included when the Countess pretends not have registered an indecent remark by Ochs ("Marschallin überhört diese Indiscretion.").⁴⁶⁸

The eye not only hears sounds, but also silence. Symbolizing secrecy, privacy, and desire in this film script, silence is often sought out by the Countess. One example is her secret stroll with Octavian on a peaceful summer evening in a remote meadow. The silence of their walk is illustrated through the contrasting switch between them and the hunters who are surrounded by horse stamping, horn blowing, and more barking dogs. Octavian also tiptoes frequently around her residence or carriage ("lautlos") while her husband the Fieldmarshal is always surrounded by blazoning fanfares and cheering soldiers.⁴⁶⁹

Hofmannsthal humorously pushes the interplay between sight and sound *ad absurdum* even when characters are unable to hear the voice of another character and counter their deafness by employing their visual sense: they read from the speaker's lips. Consulting a card reader about his future, the Fieldmarshal cannot hear the old woman's message: "Ihre dünnen Lippen bewegen sich. Man hört nichts. Annina springt zu ihr,

⁴⁶⁵ *Rosenkavalier Film.*, 229, 221.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 208, 232, 240.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 231, 235.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

horcht ihr die Worte von den Lippen.” (Her thin lips are moving. Nothing can be heard. Annina jumps up, moves close to her, and listens to the words on her lips.)⁴⁷⁰ The old woman is speaking, her lips are moving, yet nothing can be heard. In an attempt to hear her better, Annina leaps to her mother and moves close to her lips, so that she can hear and relate the barely audible words of her mother. More acute is Octavian whose eyes cling on the lips of his lover. Being desperate to get a sign of her inclination toward him, he stares at her lips trying to catch with his eyes every divine word from her mouth: “Sein Blick haftet ängstlich an ihrem Mund. ‘Halb versprochen’, sagen ihre Lippen.” (His glance anxiously clings to her mouth. ‘Almost promised,’ say her lips)⁴⁷¹ Octavian gapes at her mouth trying to see what he needs to hear: her promise. Her lips, on the other hand, seem to take on a life of their own and move as autonomous entity. It is not the Countess who is speaking, but her lips, the one body part that gives away a visible sign of the her uttering the promise. Hofmannsthal’s screenplay pushes the visibility of sound in silent film to an extreme by incorporated those various modes of visual hearing. Instead of striving for an acoustic substitution (i.e. through behind the screen sound effects, or by asking Strauss to compose an entirely new soundtrack), he makes the acoustic space visible.

Cross-sensory mediation in silent art was explored by Hofmannsthal long before embarking on a screenplay of *Der Rosenkavalier*.⁴⁷² In 1893, he wrote the pantomimic piece “Das Zauberhafte Telephon,” which is essentially a visual representation of an audile event. A narrator and two pantomimes relate the story of a young couple as they

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁴⁷² In addition to *Der Rosenkavalier*, Hofmannsthal had been working on three more screenplays throughout his career (*Das fremde Mädchen* (1911/13), *Daniel Defoe* (1922/26), and *Film für Lillian Gish* (1928)).

secretly exchanges vows of love over the telephone. Acoustic and visual input synthesize as the content of the verbal conversation is represented visually. Voices that greet each other turn into waving hands, and verbal affection is translated into embracing bodies. The piece closes with the narrator's contemplation about life comparing it to a sounding picture book ("ein tönend Bilderbuch") with snapshots that are both colorful and loud ("Momentaufnahmen bunt und kraus, / und laut auch – wie das Leben").⁴⁷³ The narrator sees life as an endless row of pictures, an uncountable number of snapshots which, collected in a picture book (or rather a photo album), portray life's highs and resonate its lows. Photography, like the snapshots of silent film, represent life in all its colors and modulations.

Synaesthetic hearing, whether it takes place through the visual ear or the listening eye, comes to its climax in their last collaborative work, *Arabella*, which is a unique synthesis of opera and silent film. Having received next to no scholarly attention, *Arabella* is groundbreaking in its merging of a cinematographic and operatic aesthetics. Unlike many other contemporary film-opera projects, including *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Arabella* is not the muting of opera into a silent film, but conversely a silent film whose pictorial and ocular-centric aesthetics is transferred onto opera. Similar to the telephony scenes in *Die Ägyptische Helena*, *Arabella* makes the visual detail of film accessible through its acoustic feedback. Instead of projecting distant events, however, listening grants the listener close-ups of characters' faces. As if having a magnifying camera lens at their disposal, audiences see anger twitching at the corner of a mouth or tears filling up in an eye.

⁴⁷³ Hofmannsthal, "Das Zaubhafte Telefon," 133.

Innuendos about *Arabella* being a screen art are manifold in this opera. The main character, beautiful Arabella, is celebrated like a movie star. In Hofmannsthal's initial draft one of Arabella's courtiers describe her as a sphinx that plays a masquerade with everyone putting a spell on people.⁴⁷⁴ Her mother predicts that she is destined to have thousands of fans (“[S]ie wird Untertanen haben in die Tausende!”), an allusion to the fact that opera singers held the monopoly of grand movie stardom in the early twentieth century.⁴⁷⁵ Also, all of Arabella's outstanding features are those of a screen character including her captivating facial expressions (“eine Gewalt ist da in Ihren Zügen”), and her powerful gaze (“Zu stark ist so ein Blick! zu stark!”).⁴⁷⁶ The libretto (or screenplay) mentions as often as sixteen times how dazzling Arabella looks referring repeatedly to the beauty of her facial features. From the start, the audience *looks* at Arabella in that they are constantly encouraged to envision her beauty.⁴⁷⁷

Accordingly, words are not Arabella's forte. Her sister explains apologetically to one of Arabella's suitors: “Du weißt: sie ist verschlossen wie das Grab, mit Worten sagt sie's nicht.” (You know that she is silent as a grave, she doesn't say it with words.)⁴⁷⁸ Another admirer complains indignantly about him not being able to express his feelings toward her with words: “Kein Wort? Kein Wort soll ich zu Ihnen reden dürfen?” (No word? No word? I may not say a word to you then?)⁴⁷⁹ As is the case in silent film, the lack of words, which particularly Arabella's suitors struggle with, is replaced with expressive facial gestures which give away her (often secret) intentions, emotions,

⁴⁷⁴ *Arabella Original Draft*, 83.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 81. Fyer, 1.

⁴⁷⁶ *Arabella Libretto*, 19; *Arabella Original Draft*, 84.

⁴⁷⁷ The language of *Arabella* also depends heavily on a visual vocabulary. The German word *sehen* is used as often as sixty times, and there is barely a page in the libretto without a visually-inflected word (i.e. *Augenblick*, *Auf Wiedersehen*, *Auf Nimmerviedersehen*, *Blicke*, *Augen*, etc.).

⁴⁷⁸ *Arabella Libretto*, 12.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 15 (English, 66).

moods, and desires. Whether admiration, love, repugnance, mischief or punishment, Arabella shows it all in her facial countenance. Matteo, one of the many men she rejects, gives the audience a glimpse of that: “Sie hat nichts mehr für mich als hie und da einen halb finstern halb zerstreuten Blick!” (I am nothing to her, and all I get is, now and then, an absent-minded glance!)⁴⁸⁰ His verbal description of the way she looks at him betrays her feelings toward him long before they both interact on stage. She is evidently annoyed and preoccupied with matters not related to him. Another admirer, Mandryka, makes the same observation being not even worthy of her gaze: “Sie gibt mir keinen Blick, sie sagt nicht Gute Nacht (...) Aber geschenkt hätt ich gern einen Blick genommen – so einen halben Blick.” (She does not have a glance for me, she does not say goodnight (...) Yes, as a gift, I’d had gladly taken one of her glances).⁴⁸¹ A third suitor, Elemer, boasts himself of having received flirtatious messages through her eyes: “[M]it Ihren Blicken hat Sie [Arabella] uns gefordert, Ihr zu stehn: Ein Mädchenblick ist stark und gibt und nimmt – und er verheißt noch mehr!” (With her glances she defied the three of us to fight: A girl can talk with eyes. They give – they take – and they bespeak still more!)⁴⁸² Each one of those three men give the audience an insight into Arabella’s feelings. By describing whether or how she gazes at them, the audience can gather how much or little Arabella is inclined to each suitor.

By making visible a character’s eyes and facial expression, *Arabella* undoes what Cecil DeMille stressed to be a major distinction between both genres. Being a well-established film director and producer of the first opera as silent film (*Carmen*), DeMille underscores that the eye of the actor, that which cannot be seen in opera, is the most

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 12 (English, 58).

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 68 (English, 108).

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 19 (English, 65).

crucial difference between film and opera: “[The audience of an opera] must be moved by voice and gesture. They cannot see the actor’s eyes. But the camera can, ruthlessly and infallibly. You cannot lie to a camera. Until an actor learns to use eyes (...), the motion picture audience will not believe him.”⁴⁸³ This distinguishing feature becomes blurred, however, when the opera audience begins to see precisely that – the eyes of the character. Despite the lack of a camera and screen, Hofmannsthal makes visible the sadness and anxiety glittering in Zdenka’s eyes, the desperate and naïve love in Matteo’s, and Mandryka’s entire personality in his. She sees water in her sister's eyes, comments on Matteo imploring her “with eyes as big as a child’s” and is instantly drawn to Mandryka because of his big and earnest eyes.⁴⁸⁴

The eye will not remain the only body part that is made visible. The listening audience of the opera also gets to see characters’ lips as they are moving. An emotional comment by the jealous Matteo leaves Arabella stunned asking him: “Siehst du mich wirklich so wie deine Lippen sagen?” (Do you really see me the way your lips are saying?)⁴⁸⁵ As if the character is adopting the same visual attentiveness required by the audience, he reads from her lips rather than actually listening to her voice. It happens again later on when Matteo is the one whose lips are under visual scrutiny. His antagonist Mandryka watches him carefully as Matteo is trying to justify his actions. Being interrupted, Mandryka protests: “Hätten Sie den Herrn [Matteo] ausreden lassen! Ein kleines Wort war ihm noch auf der Zunge – ‘nein keines – außer’ hat er sagen wollen und

⁴⁸³ Schroeder, 22.

⁴⁸⁴ For Zdenka: “Lass dich anschauen! Deine Augen sind ja voll Wasser! Zdenkerl, sag was ist mit dir?” (Let me look at you! Your eyes are full of water! Zdenka, say, what is wrong? (*Arabella Libretto*, 21); For Matteo: “[Wie er] mich so anschaut mit Augen wie ein Kind?” ([How he] implores me with eyes as big as a child’s.” (*Arabella Libretto*, 33 (English, 76)); For Mandryka: “Schau seine Augen an, was das für grosse ernste Augen sind.” (Look at those eyes of his! How big they are! His grave and earnest eyes! (*Arabella Libretto*, 21 (English, 67)).

⁴⁸⁵ *Arabella Original Draft*, 75.

hat es schnell verschluckt! Ich aber habe es gerade noch gesehn auf seinen Lippen.” (If only you’d let him finish his sentence. A little word had remained on his tongue still – I’ve ... no right ... only ... I could almost hear it, but then he swallowed it. I saw it- that silent little word, I saw his lips move.)⁴⁸⁶ By keeping a close watch on Matteo’s mouth, and by relating to everyone what he can see, the opera audience is given the kind of information about Matteo to which it would otherwise have no access: subtle facial cues that indicate his hesitancy to speak, his insecurity about what kind of action to take, and his temptation to voice his true feelings (his love for Arabella).

In addition to its vocal and instrumental information systems, *Arabella* provides magnified images of its characters. Each time, these kinds of visual close-ups are granted through the act of listening as characters communicate faithfully what they can see. By constantly elucidating on visual details, they create a screen for the audience to look at. This also explains why their comments are not interpretative, but descriptive offering an objective (as objective as can be) account of what they can see. When Arabella comments on Zdenka’s, Mandryka’s, and Matteo’s eyes, she does not take a conclusive stand always only describing what she can see. The interpretation of each depiction (eyes watering up, the eye of a child, big and earnest eyes) lies in the hands of the listening audience. When Arabella’s mother Adelaide sees Mandryka’s glowing eyes, she simply wonders: “Wie darf ich das deuten?” (How may I interpret this?)⁴⁸⁷ Rather than Adelaide noting his blissful state, she describes what she can see and leaves it up to the audience to draw interpretive conclusions.

⁴⁸⁶ *Arabella*, 59 (English, 100).

⁴⁸⁷ *Arabella Libretto*, 40 (English, 83, second quote my translation).

Here, as was the case in the telephony scenes of *Die Ägyptische Helena*, understanding the words of the singer-actors are essential. Kenneth Birkin, having provided one of the few studies on *Arabella* also stresses how the “theatrical effect [of *Arabella*] was dependent upon the comprehensibility of the dialogue.”⁴⁸⁸ Birkin underlines that, by the time their final collaboration rolled around, “a great fund of technical experience was now at Strauss’s and Hofmannsthal’s disposal derived from a chain of experiments running from *Rosenkavalier* to *Intermezzo*.”⁴⁸⁹ One of those techniques was the application of Strauss’s conversational or *parlando* style.⁴⁹⁰ This was matched with a cautious orchestration: “[I]ndividual, delicately balanced instrumental timbres comprising various groupings of strings, woodwind or brass highlight a notable restraint in scoring – thus ensuring maximum comprehensibility of dialogues.”⁴⁹¹ In addition to delicately navigating the orchestra and the vocal style of the singers, Strauss also uses the music to enhance the lucidity of the plot development. A contemporary music critic notes that the tonal language carefully follows the course of action in each scene comparing it to the soundtrack of a film (“die Tonsprache [geht] nun fast filmisch den Wendungen der Handlung nach”).⁴⁹²

In the merging of opera with film, *Arabella* keeps opera’s sonic opulence at bay while combining its acoustic complexity with the visual intricacies of silent film. Opera’s

⁴⁸⁸ Birkin, 5. Birkin stresses that the entire collaboration of Strauss and Hofmannsthal stood under the aegis of developing a new way of expression (realized best in *Arabella*, *Intermezzo*, and *Ariadne*) where music and word would support each other so that dialogues would be comprehensible: “All the composer’s skill and artistry is directed toward this end; its achievement takes account of practical elements ranging from the definition of vocal tessitura and pitch to the precise computation of accompanying instrumental forces. Complementary factors - action, decor, costume, lighting, and production techniques - are no less important, all being closely monitored by poet and composer prior to performance.” (5)

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁹² Sensing that *Arabella* was a hybrid between opera and film, the same critic notes about the libretto being suspenseful, almost like a film (“... und zuguterletzt für etliche Augenblicke sogar spannend, fast wie ein Film.”) (Schmitz, *Dresdner Nachrichten*, 1933).

lack of the magnifying lens of the film camera is overcome by providing the ear with visual detail. At the same time, the dissociation of the visual and aural information in silent film is superseded. In addition to synthesizing of two genres, *Arabella* also contains an unambiguous allusion to opera's gradual waning with the rise of cinema as the upcoming and dominating scenic art form. Hofmannsthal knew all too well that the problematic silence of film would be remedied soon. Completed in 1929, the same year of sound film's final break-through, *Arabella* is opera's own critical review and predicts its retirement as one of the leading cultural art forms. After twenty-three years of writing libretti, Hofmannsthal takes stock of the genre that, despite its tradition and versatility of signification, would withdraw from the cultural forefront. With humorous self-irony, its characters voice their own points of criticism about opera. Zdenka denounces her (uniquely operatic) trouser role: "Mama, warum muss ich in Bubenkleidern gehn? Was soll diese Lüge? (...) Mama, ich verlange, dass man mich sein lässt, was Gott mich gemacht hat - und dass das Theater ein Ende hat!" (Mama, why do I have to wear boy's clothes? Why this lie? (...) Mama, I insist that I can be the way that God made me - and that the drama comes to an end.)⁴⁹³ Mandryka also longs to play a different kind of role proclaiming at the end of *Arabella*: "Ich werde helfen (...) vertuschen diese hässliche Comödie, da ich die Rolle nicht geeignet bin zu spielen, die sie mir haben zgedacht, mein Fräulein." (I want to help you (...) to cover up this ugly comedy, since I am unsuitable for the role in which you chose to cast me, my Fräulein.)⁴⁹⁴ Their father Waldner ridicules the genre's melodramatic bombast scolding his wife: "Jetzt keine

⁴⁹³ *Arabella Original Draft*, 77 and 79.

⁴⁹⁴ *Arabella Libretto*, 58 (my translation).

Arien, wenn ich bitten darf!” (Let’s have no more arias, if you’ll be so kind.)⁴⁹⁵ Zdenka is chided as well for sounding increasingly like her dramatic mother: “Zdenkerl, du hast schon ganz den exaltierten Ton von der Mama (...) Mir scheint, Zeit wärs, dass du ein Mädchen wirst vor aller Welt und die Maskerad ein Ende hat.” (Zdenkerl - the way you talk in that excited tone - just like Mama! (...) It might be time you were a girl once more, for all the world, and that this masquerade were ended.)⁴⁹⁶ Finally, Matteo and Arabella remark how difficult it is to understand opera characters. Matteo complains: “Missdeutet hat man alles. Ich habe nichts von dem gemeint, was Sie zu hören glaubten.” (Everything was misinterpreted. I meant nothing of what you thought you heard.)⁴⁹⁷ Arabella also struggled with this problem: “Von allen Ihren Reden da versteh ich nicht ein Wort.” (I do not understand a words of what you’re telling me.)⁴⁹⁸ As *Arabella* pushes once more the envelop of opera’s expressive capabilities, it also faces the truth about its declining prominence. The atmosphere of an irrevocable farewell to its dominant cultural status looms throughout the work which was also to be Hofmannsthal’s last work. He died before receiving Strauss’s telegram in which the composer congratulated him on the completion of the final draft.

With *Arabella* the collaboration of Strauss and Hofmannsthal comes to an end and with it their unremitting exploration of synaesthesia in the encounter with modern technologies. Rather than highlighting how acoustic technologies turned the sense of sight and that of hearing into autonomous activities, they develop modes of listening that would overcome the breach between visual and aural input. In *Die Ägyptische Helena*

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 59 (English, 98).

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 (English, 62).

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 61 (my translation).

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61 and 55.

and *Arabella* the ear refuses to stay within the bounds of its assigned sensory register providing an access to that which cannot be seen. Listening to the phonograph, the telephone, or the radio is not only an acoustic experience but instead triggers a hypersensitivity that allows the ear to see. In *Der Rosenkavalier* and Hofmannsthal's "Das Zauberhafte Telephon," where the diegetic soundscape cannot be heard, it is the eye who is put in charge of listening. Being the sole sensory point of reference, the eye begins to tune in to the sounds that are generated and the words that are exchanged. Hearing takes now place through the sense of sight.

As new technologies became part of everyday life, Strauss and Hofmannsthal were left wondering, like so many of their contemporaries, how these inventions challenged conventional ways of perceiving the world, irrespective of whether that world was the seat in front of a screen, the chair next to a telephone, or a room filled with the radio's voice. To the composer and his poet, the encounter with modern technologies was always accompanied by the advancement of new ways of listening that can overcome the sensory divide enforced by a cohort of (sound production) technologies. Whether the situation is a telephone conversation, a radio report, an opera performance, or the screening of a movie, they all invite a synaesthetic experience to remedy the dissociation of the senses. With the staging of the visual ear and the listening eye, their operas becomes an unlikely, yet compelling, show case for possible ways of engaging with modern urban life and its increasing reliance on ground-breaking and at the same time impairing technologies.

Conclusion

In light of the many studies that looked at the role of vision and visuality in Austro-German urban culture of the early twentieth century, this dissertation drew attention to the aural experience of modernity. It was shown that, ranging from female activists of the working class to the bourgeois aesthete, the sounds of everyday life stimulated an aesthetic and critical engagement by many that lived in rapidly growing cities. Among them were Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal who engaged the novel acoustic environment of the city threefold: they took advantage of opera's complex sound system to recapitulate sounds and acoustic situations that were characteristically modern; they explored new modes of listening that evolved as a result of these changing aural conditions; and they reflected on the socio-political, cultural, and techno-scientific developments that the many novel sounds represented

Exploring any aspect of modern urban life through the operas of Strauss and Hofmannsthal would seem an odd choice: Strauss has been considered a "Romantic relic" throughout the twentieth century, and Hofmannsthal is generally held to be a poet endowed with a keen visual sense.⁴⁹⁹ However, as this dissertation has shown, these

⁴⁹⁹ Ross, 195.

operas emerge as a critical inquiry into modernity based on the transformation of its acoustic and aural culture after the turn of the century.

The first chapter identified two operatic sound effects that Strauss and Hofmannsthal embedded into their operas. Building on the advances of his predecessors Berlioz and Wagner, Strauss made sound a new musical and dramatic role. No longer an accidental by-product, the sound of a piece was purposely created by putting other musical categories (such as harmony, melody, and instrumentation) in its service. The result was the creation of novel and extraordinary tone colors. Hofmannsthal, for his part, sought to imbue each opera and character with their own distinct tone, a concept he developed so he could bring to bear dimensions of the drama with means other than language. By imparting each scene with a tone, and by regulating the tone of voice of the singer-actor, the librettist found a mode of expression and representation that circumvented the shortcomings of language (effectively ameliorating the crisis of language expressed by so many of his protagonists). Sound was found to constitute the very foundation of their operatic aesthetic making it all the more important for their audience to listen with a particularly keen and attentive ear.

Chapter two tuned in to urban noise which had become so massive in volume and variety after the turn of the century that entire social movements fought for its abatement. The noise of the city resounds from these operas as composer and librettist pull together music and text (from the ratchet to neologisms) to recreate distinct features that were widely held to constitute the downtown racket. In so doing, they offer a new variation of the noise art of their avant-garde colleagues. Rather than replicating distinct noise sounds, they give an audible account of the acoustic physiognomy of the urban din. Creating

scenes where characters hear, and suffer under, a cacophonous surrounding, both artists engage critically with noise offering a response quite different from the noise-celebration of the avant-garde. The characters in their operas are either numbed or disoriented by noise, or become aggressive.

Chapter three lent an ear to early twentieth-century discourses on female emancipation. Gaining a contending voice only in the late nineteenth century, German and Austro-Hungarian feminists took to the streets, associations, newspapers and fiction to express their discontent about gender inequality in private and public life. By analyzing the vocal and aural performance of female characters in *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*, and *Elektra*, I was able to demonstrate how the acoustic terrain was instrumental in the support and escalation of the feminist cause. Sophie, the Woman, and Elektra were shown to have established a dominant acoustic presence for themselves by having an overpowering vocal presence and, in the case of Elektra, an aural competency that was traditionally reserved for men, that of the psychoanalyst. These characters illustrate how the acoustic plane was a key battle field for securing social recognition and political authority, by taking on the position of king, judge, and/or psychoanalyst, figures who embody the concept of listening followed by the proclamation of a verdict (or diagnosis). As was the case with noise, the composer and his librettist utilized the full array of representational means available to them to emphasize the acoustic hegemony of their female characters and the associated political underpinnings.

The fourth chapter showed how Strauss and Hofmannsthal actively dealt with modern technologies exploring forms of representation that could mitigate the sensory

shortcomings that many modern inventions imposed. They offer various operatic and cinematographic scenarios that posit synaesthesia to be an alternative mode of perception, offering a solution to the contemporary conception that technologies fostered a dissociation of the senses. In *Die Ägyptische Helena*, ears begin to see, as they are offered an acoustic reconstruction of the visual space. And in their silent film *Der Rosenkavalier*, eyes are encouraged to make up for the lack of sound as they begin to see characters producing sounds. Their mode of composition ran parallel and yet counter to the experiments of many of their contemporaries who also explored synaesthesia in art, such as Kandinsky's color-tone drama *The Yellow Sound* or Schoenberg's opera *Die Glückliche Hand*. While the latter group forced synaesthesia on the audience through the simultaneous stagings of visual and aural stimuli, Strauss and Hofmannsthal reverted to synaesthesia due to the lack of multi-sensory input in technology. While many of their contemporaries predetermined how visual and aural signs correspond to each other, Strauss and Hofmannsthal encouraged the audience, through their synaesthetic aesthetics, to overcome the sensory deficiencies themselves through a visual ear.

Having to limit the scope of this dissertation to the most prominent acoustic features in their operas, some sounds and sonic sensibilities remained marginalized. The inclusion of them would lend further depth and texture to the study of the Strauss/Hofmannsthal *oeuvre*, and in extension, to the historical culture of sound and listening. Two examples that come to mind are the acousmatic voice in *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* and the musical and personified representation of the echo in *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Both are two more examples of an engagement with sound-reproduction technologies, the first hinting at the experience of the bodiless voice emanating from

audio technologies, the latter thematizing the ever repetitive, mechanical, dehumanized nature of the recorded voice. Furthermore, there are many projects by Strauss and Hofmannsthal that had to be left on the sidelines in this dissertation, but are also in need of further inquiry including their unfinished operas *Casanova* and *Semiramis*, and their third version of *Ariadne: Der Bürger als Edelmann*.

This dissertation included other musical compositions that centralize sounds and timbres, dramatic stagings that mediate and promote a changing culture of listening, and poetic texts that earmark a rhetoric and philosophy of sound. My examples included the sonic adventures in the works of Richard Wagner, Franz Schreker, and Claude Debussy; the noise music of Luigi Russolo and noise complaints by Theodor Lessing; the urban poetry of Georg Heym and Gottfried Benn; the autobiographical accounts of Adelheid Popp and Grete Meisel-Hess; the aural-centric psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud, and many more. While they made an appearance, their compositions and writings are in need of more detailed and thorough analyses in order to provide additional insights and perspectives to the history of sound and listening in early twentieth-century modern culture. These literary, musical, and operatic texts bolster the thesis that Austro-German modernism is marked by an acoustic/aural paradigm as a whole. The goal of this dissertation was always to show that the *oeuvre* of Strauss and Hofmannsthal was more than just another facet in the aesthetic and stylistic kaleidoscope that defines modernism, and that their works resonated an aspect of modernism that is surprisingly prominent. Without wanting to put an inadequate corset around the corpus of modernism, which is characterized by its very plurality in style and form, the acoustic component is a characterizing trait and unifying element in this artistic movement.

This brings us to the artistic production outside the German and Austrian borders. It was argued that Germany and Austria were particularly prone to developing a sound-centric engagement with modernity because of the concurrence of several historical developments since the late nineteenth century that changed the acoustic landscape. This included the disproportionate growth of the city, the feminist movement, and the commodification of audio technology between 1890 and the mid 1920s. This is not to say that the artistic venture into sound and aurality was a uniquely German or Austrian phenomenon. Other European and non-European regions and nations underwent the same developments (if somewhat asynchronously), and their artistic production show the same interest in sound. Some of the studies that suggest this are Emily Thompson's *The Soundscape of Modernity* (2004), focusing on the North American continent, and Angela Frattarola's "Developing an Ear for the Modernist Novel," which traces the influence of sounds and the auditory experience in the literary writings of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British authors.⁵⁰⁰ Future studies must collect more data from other places to study the impact and representation of the aural culture in other countries. Only then can we confirm the hypothesis that one can speak of a transnational acoustic modernism.

Switzerland is one of the first countries that should be looked at. Having often referred to German-speaking literary and operatic production, the Swiss neighbors have received little attention. Yet, as the reviewer of the *Basler Zeitung* (chapter 1) confirmed, the changed acoustic urban landscape was also thematized there. Arthur Honegger, a Swiss composer with close ties to France, offered probably one of the most famous

⁵⁰⁰ Emily Thompson. *The Soundscape of Modernity*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004; Frattarola, Angela. "Developing an Ear for the Modernist Novel: Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce." *Journal of Modern Literature* 33, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 132-153.

treatment of modern sound with *Pacific 231*, inspired by the sound of the steam locomotive. Switzerland is a particularly interesting case given its plurality of languages and cultures. Being a neutral country during the first World War, it also became a temporary home for many artists across the European continent. For example Zürich's Cabaret Voltaire gave the stage to the sound poetry of Richard Huelsenbeck and Tristan Tzara, and Ernest Ansermet's Orchestre de la Suisse Romande which supported musically innovative works.

Rural sound and its treatment should also be considered. Focus on the city was necessary, due to its density of novel sounds and its hosting of artistic, critical, scientific, and medical ideas concerning acoustics and aurality. Yet, life outside urban bounds was also affected by acoustic shifts. The sounds of modernity must have been particularly startling given the stark contrast between the familiar soundscape and the intrusion of modern sounds. The best example is Hofmannsthal's telephone ringing in Rodaun, and Strauss's car rattling through the streets of Garmisch. Historical testimonies from rural sound experiences may highlight the schizophrenic soundscape created by modernity.

While these questions have remained open, this dissertation has offered many important insights as they pertain to the Austro-German context in the early twentieth century. It pointed to the necessity of acknowledging the role that sound played in the experience of modern urban life and, as a result, in its artistic representations. At stake was an inadequate understanding of both "branches" of this changing acoustic and aural culture: the new sounds and aural practices in urban life on the one hand, and its acoustic, conceptual, and critical treatment in the arts on the other. Conducting these inquiries through opera made it both necessary and possible to provide a reevaluation of Strauss's

operas in terms of the composer's role as a modernist composer; a long-overdue study of Hofmannsthal's librettistic works; and an example of the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach to opera that pays heed to musical, poetic, dramatic, and dramaturgical elements of the genre. Only by doing the latter, was I able to locate Strauss and Hofmannsthal's investment in the acoustic reality of their everyday lives. And only by attending to the many signifying layers in their works, could I gain an insight into the history, politics, and aesthetics of the sound of modernity.

Appendix

The Six Strauss/Hofmannsthal Operas

Opera	Written	Debut	City	Opera House	Acts	Main characters
<i>Elektra</i>	1901-1903 (drama by H); 1906-1908 (opera)	1909	Dresden	Staatsoper	1	Elektra; Klytämnestra (her mother); Chrysothemis (her sister)
<i>Der Rosenkavalier</i>	1909-1910	1911	Dresden	Staatsoper	3	Octavian; Countess (lover of Octavian); Baron Ochs; Sophie (fiancé of Baron Ochs)
<i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i>	1911-1912; 1916	1912; 1916 (revised)	Wien; Stuttgart	Hofoper; Kleines Haus des Hoftheaters	2	the Composer; Ariadne; Zerbinetta
<i>Die Frau Ohne Schatten</i>	1913-1916	1919	Wien	Hofoper	3	the Empress; her Nurse; the Dyer and his Wife
<i>Die Ägyptische Helena</i>	1923-1928	1928	Dresden	Staatsoper	2	the sorceress Aithra; Helena Menelas
<i>Arabella</i>	1927-1932 (H died 1929)	1933	Dresden	Staatsoper	3	Arabella Zdenka (her sister) Mandryka (Arabella's future husband)

H: Hofmannsthal

S: Strauss

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