7

Lamentation, Abjection, and the Music of Diamanda Galás

During the summer of 1992, I heard a concert by Diamanda Galás in Hamburg, Germany. The performance took place from 1:00 to 2:30 A.M. in an ornate theater in downtown Hamburg. The initial seconds of the concert shocked me visually and acoustically. Galás sang at the front of the stage, naked from the waist up; behind her, the stage looked like the ruins of a bombed-out building; the stage and Galás were soaked in a bright red light that made Galás's sweat look like blood several minutes into the visceral performance.[1] The dynamic level of the sound was incredibly high, and I heard static in my ears—the telltale sign of sound having crossed the pain threshold. I found the music first repellent and then curiously beautiful; friends who were with me shared these ambivalent responses. In the pages that follow, I will ponder the structures that could have produced these responses culturally and psychoanalytically.[2]

Diamanda Galás is an American of Greek (Maniot) heritage. Her great-grandparents emigrated to the United States around 1912. She studied the piano with her father and played jazz, gospel, and classical music in public at an early age.[3] Having studied avant-garde music with Xenakis, she began creating performance art in the mid-1970s, although, as she says, "I never use that word [*performance artist*] for myself. I use the word *auteur,* as Hitchcock would. Yes, I compose the music and I perform the music and I compose the libretto and I design the lights until I turn it over to a professional lighting designer. But Wagner did that, too! People who call this performance art do it out of

sexism—any woman who organizes a *Gesamtkunstwerk* is condemned to this territory."[4] Galás describes her vocal technique as follows: "In 1975 I decided upon the creation of a new vocal music which employs an unmatrixed production of vocal sounds as the most immediate representation of thought. The primary concern is with the execution, chordally, or contrapuntally—of different processes of severe concentration, 'mental' or 'sentient' states, for which vocal sound is used as the fundamental physical coordinate."[5] Having explored the possibilities of manipulating her voice as unmatrixed sound, Galás turned in subsequent years to the study of bel canto singing techniques; her teachers include Frank Kelly, Vicki Hall (in Berlin), and Barbara Meier.[6]

The issue that galvanized her work in the early 1980s was AIDS.[7] She lost her brother to AIDS in 1986, and much of her subsequent work has been dedicated to people infected with HIV: "There are people who will not go hear something confrontational when they are confronting it daily. Perhaps they would rather see Madonna or something they can dance to. I'm not saying there's not a place for that because there certainly is. But as an artist I have to create what I see and what I hear—what's grounded in reality."[8]

Galás plays the piano in jazz, gospel, blues, and classical styles; she has a powerful voice with an enormous range; she has been influenced by American, commercial television, the avant-garde, and feminist performance art. What holds such heterogeneous elements together in Diamanda Galás's art? In part, it is the lament of her Greek, Maniot heritage. I begin my discussion of Galás's art with an investigation of the history, form, style, and gender specificity of lament.

Lamentation

Women occupy a contradictory position in Greek society. On the one hand, they are central to the family and to the complex and crucial rituals of mourning the dead.[9] Holst-Warhaft confirms the centrality of women in lament and broadens the assertion to cover several cultures: "One point on which those who have studied lament in cultures as diverse as those of China, New Guinea, India, Greece, Saudi Arabia and Ireland agree is that laments are generally performed by women."[10]

Yet, on the other hand, women's lives are restricted during the

mourning process. A reason for the marginalization of women, particularly during mourning, has to do with the structure of the Greek notion of death and women's relation to it. Danforth describes the Greek notion of death as a gradual transformation of the deceased from the world of the living to the world of the dead that progresses through three phases that are represented in funerary rites: (1) the phase of separation; (2) the liminal, or transition, phase; and (3) the phase of incorporation. Separation begins with phenomenal death and ends with the completion of the burial; the transition period is the time after burial and before exhumation in which the deceased is neither wholly dead nor alive; the incorporation phase begins with the exhumation and inspection of the bones of the deceased. If the bones are clean and white, they are brought to the village ossuary, and the grave is destroyed. If decomposition is not complete, they are reburied, and exhumation is repeated at a later date. During each of these phases, women sing laments and tend the grave, ensuring a successful transition of the body and soul of the deceased from life to death. Since women communicate with the not-yet-wholly dead during the liminal phase, they are linked to the danger that can arise if the corpse of the deceased only partially decomposes. The deceased can return to the realm of the living as a revenant and haunt the living.[11]

Holst-Warhaft argues that male fear of women's power in mourning in ancient Greece had profound consequences for Western culture. She argues that male classical Greek culture appropriated the female role in lament and transformed it into two new literary genres that were the province of men: the encomium or funeral elegy and the tragedy. Holst-Warhaft suggests that, as women's roles in rites of mourning were being *restricted* in Athens, Delphi, and Keos from the sixth to the fifth century B.C., the funeral elegy and tragedy *emerged* as male-dominated forms of literature. At Athens, for example, women's participation in ritual offerings was limited, and the laws at Keos and Delphi legislated women's silence at crucial phases of death rites. Holst-Warhaft suggests that preclassical lamentation may well have continued in classical Greece, owing to repeated forms of legislation that aimed again and again at limiting women's roles.[12] If Holst-Warhaft is right, then there is a gender-specific tension between a woman's lamenting voice and the institutions of the modern state. *Antigone* works out this

problem in ancient Greek drama. While the specificity of Galás's political commitment suggests contemporary issues such as AIDS, in part at least the affective intensity of her art rests on this ancient antagonism that pits the voice of women against the law of the state.

Although there are many differences among laments even within certain regions of contemporary rural Greece, laments share paradoxical elements. For example, the lament is at once very expressive (with sharp cries and acts of self-mutilation) and very carefully constructed. The singer of lament is usually a close relative of the deceased, but not *too* close a relative; she is often a professional lamenter/artist whose skill is evaluated by the community.[13] Mourning and performance were linked in ancient Greece, a feature that Diamanda Galás transposes to her contemporary art.

Danforth points out that the same lament can be sung (with changes as appropriate) at weddings, funerals, or occasions that mourn relatives in exile.[14] The essence of lamentation is thus not the representation of an event in itself but the structure of *separation* that marriages, death, and exile produce and that rituals of mourning represent. Within specific laments, as well, even the affective charge can shift from one of mourning to one of ridicule and satire.[15]

Laments often shift perspective, with the narrator addressing the deceased, the deceased addressing his/her survivors, the singer addressing the cause of death, the priest, members of the community, forces of nature that are omens, Christian elements, herself, etc.

In general, everything that has been described above obtains for Maniot lament, with two crucial classes of differences: (1) the style, tone, and imagery of Maniot lament are unique in the Greek tradition; and (2) Maniot lament often blurs the distinction between the emotive expression of loss and a *call to avenge* an unjust death. Maniot laments are often long narratives that recount both the manner of the death of the deceased and the reaction of those who survive the death, often the story of revenge (in the case of revenge laments). They often have stories within stories.[16] They have a flat, understated tone and an intense concern with recording the minute details of death.

Maniot laments are punctuated by sharp cries that express pain, address the cause of death, and/or call for revenge. Holst-Warhaft describes them as follows: "It is clear that these women know the power

of their cries. In the revenge laments, they are put to immediate use, but even when there is no possibility for translating anger into action, the outbursts in the controlled body of a narrative are so persistent a feature of the Maniot laments, their position within the text sufficiently regular (almost always preceded by a calm introduction . . . followed by a return to practical detail) to suggest that they are a conscious device of the lamenter."[17]

Like cries, "sobs, sighs and sudden intakes of breath are integral to the performance of Maniot lament." Holst-Warhaft locates the importance of the breath in lament in the meanings of one word: "The soul and breath are synonymous in Greek culture (being out of breath, dying and losing one's soul are all conveyed by the single word *xepsyhismenos.*"[18] There is thus a common ground between the breath of the singer in lament and the last breath of the dying relation: "Many people believe that at the moment of death a person's soul . . . which is described as a breath of air . . . located in the area of the heart, leaves the body through the mouth."[19] I will show below that representations of cries are crucial elements of the music of Diamanda Galás.

Maniot laments are crucial elements in blood feuds.[20] On the surface, the call to revenge works to assuage grief by turning it outward. On a deeper level, it affirms loyalty to family over the state and thus radically reverses the classical Greek appropriation of women's role in lament centuries earlier.[21] The call to revenge also provides Maniot women with a voice that can address a wide variety of political issues.

Holst-Warhaft asserts that the texture of a woman's voice is crucial to lament: "We must at least be aware that the reactions of a contemporary audience to any lament, including those we find in classical tragedy, were as much conditioned by their musical structure, the timbre and pitch of the lead lamenter's individual voice, her sobs, moans, shrieks and sighs and by the polyphonic texture of the women's voices, as they were by the text."[22]

The importance of the texture and timbre of a woman's voice is reflected in the music of the Furies. The Furies sing music that binds; Holst-Warhaft describes it as follows: "To claim their victims, the Furies sing a magic 'binding song' while dancing in a ring. . . . Words are repeated, or nearly repeated, like incantations . . . together with the exclamations—the muttered spells of witches."[23] In addition to

cries, mastery of vocal texture is also crucial to Galás's music, as I will show below.

Danforth suggests that music differentiates the lament of separation sung at weddings from the lament of separation sung at funerals, even when the texts are nearly identical; "When these songs are sung at weddings, the style is more forceful, vigorous, and joyful; the melody more elaborate, with trills and light melismatic phrases. At death rites the style is more somber and restrained, the melody flatter and less elaborate."[24] This quote suggests not only that the affect of a lament is more determined by the music than by the text but that it is the ornamentation of given musical materials that determines the affect of lament. If Danforth is right, then the outline of a melody can be used for a lament both at a wedding (lightly embellished with, e.g., neighbor notes, bent notes, appoggiaturas, trills, vibrato) and at a funeral (with a minimum of ornamentation). Such subtle differences would probably not be notated but would lie within the spontaneously executed "grain" of the singer's voice.[25]

Lamentation and Music: *Vena Cava*

Lamentation in the Greek tradition is a symbolic working out of the pain of loss at a wedding, exile, or death through ritualized acts, language, and music in public performances that incorporate individual suffering into a communal context. Lamentation frequently crosses and recrosses thresholds: between separation and incorporation, the world of the living and the world of the dead, pain and pleasure, expression and construction, mourning for the deceased and mourning for the self. And these thresholds are enunciated and crossed by a woman's speaking, singing, and crying voice.

I will explore below Diamanda Galás's *Vena Cava* from 1993 as lamentation: the work is dedicated to Galás's brother, Philip Dimitri Galás. There are no direct references to her brother in the text, but, according to the CD liner notes, some of the musical passages are taped excerpts from recordings that her brother made before his death—"There Is a Balm in Gilead" (vocals) and "When I Am Laid in Earth" (accordion).

The title of the work refers to a major vein that returns blood to

the heart; this image thus condenses the images of the heart as source of emotion in popular and high culture, the heart as the center of the body's blood (infected with HIV), and the heart as the place of the soul's residence. Here is an overview of the work on a track-by-track basis with a few phrases from the text of each track and a few examples discussed in detail.

Track 1. "I wake up and I see the face of the devil and I ask him 'What time is it?'" (repeated over and over). A common feature of *Vena Cava* and much of Galás's work is repetition. As we saw in the first chapter, repetition can produce or erase a wide variety of meanings in a wide number of contexts. Repetition is crucial to lament since lament *is* a repetition, a working out of the significance of an already experienced trauma. On the surface, *Vena Cava* represents the hallucinations of a person suffering from AIDS-related dementia, and much of the work does represent the listening position of the mind of a deluded person. But, as I will show below, the listening positions produced by the music often shift, as in Maniot lament, and repetition of text and music cannot be assigned exclusively to any one listening position.

In the middle of the repetition of the line "What time is it?" the music enters quietly—synthesized, highly artificial notes, sustained and quiet. The array of taped music, noises, and electronically manipulated sounds gives the work an antiseptic quality. I find this the most disturbing of Galás's works, despite the manifest clarity of its artificial nature.

At 1:39, Galás shifts the timbre of her voice to a low question: "How do you feel today?" This suggests a visitor, relative, or doctor having come into the patient's room, and the rest of the track develops the antiphonal relation between these two "voices"—one high and whiny asking, "What time is it?" the other low and restrained asking, "How do you feel today?" At 3:16, the low, declamatory voice that had sounded like a visitor, relative, or doctor asks, "How much time do you want?" making him/her sound like the devil with whom the dying man/woman is bargaining for time.

At 3:36, the word *time* is electronically manipulated into the sound of a bird (it sounds like a crow to me) that echoes from channel to channel into the distance. In Greek lament, birds mediate between the worlds of the living and the dead: "Birds . . . are able to cross the boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

What is more . . . birds are able to cross this boundary in a direction that nothing else can go except revenants: they can return from the world of the dead to the world of the living. They act as messengers who report to the living the condition of the dead in the underworld."[26]

What actually happens in the music, of course, is that the sounds of the birds get quieter; they do not get far away. For me, however, they sound as if they were receding into the distance for two reasons. First, I think that the ear distinguishes between close sounds and far sounds, not necessarily in terms of decibels, but more crucially in terms of noise. Most sounds have an aura of noise around them (one of the purest, least "noisy" sounds is a tuning fork held at the tip and struck with moderate force on a medium-hard surface such as one's skull). This aura of noise decays rapidly as its source moves away from the ear. Thus, sounds that have no audible aura of noise and are quiet *tend* to sound far away.[27] Second, there is an enormous sense of space in this work. While much of Galás's voice is close to the listening plane, voices, noises, sounds, and music echo into what sounds like infinite space.[28]

At 3:51, another voice enters and says, "We've been talkin' about you downstairs, and we don't think you're being realistic." This line gets repeated over and over and becomes transformed into gibberish—a reversal of the process discussed in chapter 1 in which children experience the meaningless sounds of the sonorous envelope divide and become organized in the acoustic-mirror stage and find relatively stable form in the mother tongue of the Symbolic Order.

At 4:48, a series of cries emerges in antiphonal response to the word *insane*. These cries sound like uncontrolled wails that echo into the distance and turn to nightmarish noises. At 5:24, Galás sings cries that recall the Maniot cry that breaks like a fissure from the hard surface of lament. These cries come from nowhere; they are frightening but quite controlled. Galás leaps from silence to the very top of her range and sings notes with an intense purity. (I will discuss these "structured cries" in the remarks on *Plague Mass* below.) Galás's highly controlled cries take over and give form to the less controlled cry of the man/woman dying of AIDS. This is a musical example of Galás identifying with the pain of someone mourning a loved one's immanent death.[29]

At 7:19, a noise emerges from the music's open spaces that sounds

poised between a high sound emitted by an electronic device and a ringing in one's ears. This ambiguity opens the threshold between the man/woman dying of AIDS and the listener and his/her/our immediate environment. An iambic, quiet heartbeat emerges at 7:57. The grotesque atmosphere turns humorous from time to time in the work, as at 9:05, when Galás sings, "I'm fine Miss Thing; I just feel like singing 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic.'"

Track 2. "Porgi Amor" from Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro.* This track shows how beautifully Galás can sing using conventional techniques. The aria is a representation of the dying man/woman's memory/imagination since the heavy echo continues throughout, and there are quiet, sustained electronic sounds throughout—like monitors in a hospital. At 3:10, the dying man/woman imagines having died, with a crowd of people looking down at him/her saying, "At last he is at peace." In the seconds that follow, Galás draws in her breath slowly and noisily and breathes out, barely comprehensibly, "free at last."

Track 3. "Amazing Grace." This track represents a radical revision of gospel music. First, there is an ironic sense of the placement of this music so early in *Vena Cava.* The text of "Amazing Grace" was written by a white slave merchant after surviving an intense storm at sea. The source of the music is unknown. It is clear from the first two tracks of the CD that the music represents the long and agonized death of a man/woman from AIDS. The song leads without transition to Galás's flat declamation of the following lines: "I dreamed I was lying in the green grass, and the wind was blowing softly, and blue was everywhere, and I saw heads popping out through the green grass, and it seemed as if they knew me." This surreal text condenses both the expressionistic idea of the return of the dead and green grass as an image of heaven in Greek poetry; the work adds a continuous texture of birds and insects sounding far away in the distance.

Track 4. Garbled sounds of medical staff discussing scheduling. Galás: "Yes, I like the TV." Television sounds in the background. At 2:00, the listener is placed in the position of the dying man/woman as we hear relatives whispering, "I just thought we'd have a small service; just the family, nothing big you know." The words disintegrate into the pure consonants of breath, tongues, and lips. From 10:16, Galás begins to produce a noise that sounds like a bow on a stringed instrument play-

ing a note with too little speed and too much pressure; she gradually releases the pressure, and, at 10:24, the noise releases into a pure vowel that sounds into track 5.

Track 5. The line "Wait for me" turns into a heavy spondee "for me" like heavy breathing;[30] the line alternates with the line: "Take me down mother down to the cellar in a garbage bag." "Where's the old death bird"; the Christmas song "You'd Better Watch Out" bleeds in and out to applause on the television. "Silent Night" bleeds in and out. At 6:04: "Don't you know that you have destroyed me" (the voice of the dying person's mother, perhaps?).

Track 6. "Fishy fishy on the wall, who's the biggest fuck of all."

Track 7. "Stay awake little pony, stay awake. Don't let that maniac come in here." "Hush Little Baby." Galás sings this quite high in her range, quietly; this places her voice under enormous pressure. Her voice tightens throughout to the breaking point. "Silent Night"; television applause; "old dog bone"; "no surprises, no secrets, no needles, no puncture." A taped voice played so slowly it is incomprehensible.

Track 8. "I miss you; it's been so long; how are you? I'm fine; I've been out here so long, I remember us together, so green there; it's so black here." This sounds like a representation of the dead speaking through the lamenter. "Silent Night" close to the listening plane. "Silent Night" smears to silence—an acoustic equivalent of Francis Bacon's faces. The music ends with the listener located squarely in the position of the dying man/woman, who dies while remembering this Christmas song.

Vena Cava represents crossing the thresholds of listening positions, from the singer, to people in the hospital room (visitors, relatives, doctors), to the person him/herself, to the listener. There are frequent antiphonal structures that suggest conversation with the dying man/woman; there are frequent uncontrolled cries that are answered by Galás's structured cries. The work is dedicated to Galás's brother, but neither his name nor his relationship to the singer is present in the work, signifying the distance between the singer and the act of mourning; the work is clearly mediated with sophisticated electronic effects, and it freely borrows from classical and gospel music, commercial television, Christmas songs, and spirituals.

In other works, gospel and blues influences are more transparent. For example, her album *The Singer* (1992) contains powerful versions

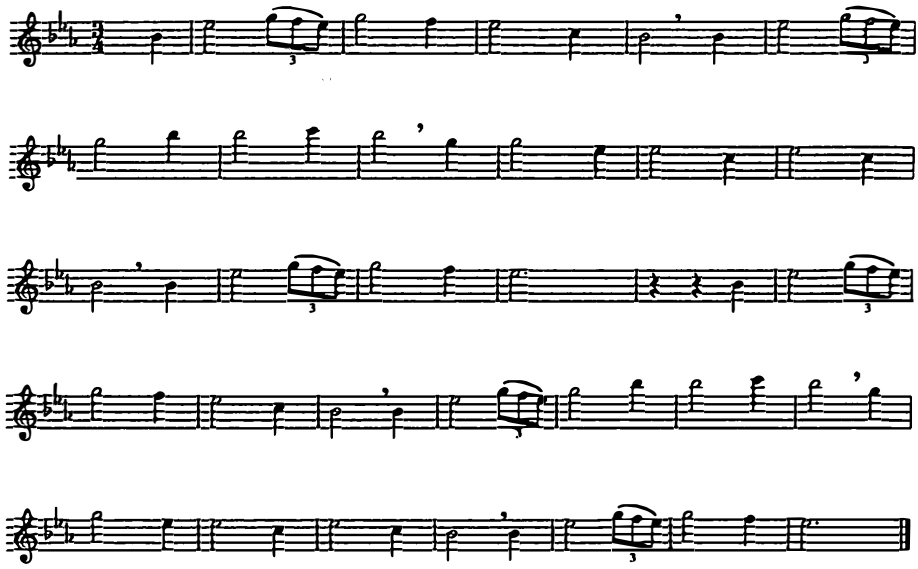
of "Put a Spell on You," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," and "Let My People Go" (written by Galás). Yet, even on this album, which flirts with presenting Galás as a sadomasochistic sex object (the CD has her photographed in a dark blue light wearing a leather jacket with straps tightly wrapped around her breasts), the words "we are all HIV+" are clearly visible on her fingers in the cover picture. *Plague Mass* (1990) is also a form of lamentation; it is a large-scale work devoted to people infected with HIV. Before listening to passages from *Plague Mass,* I would like to negotiate a transition to abjection—a psychoanalytic perspective on the culturally specific forms of lament whose musical representation we have been theorizing. In a nutshell, both lamentation and abjection negotiate *separation.*

Abjection and Music

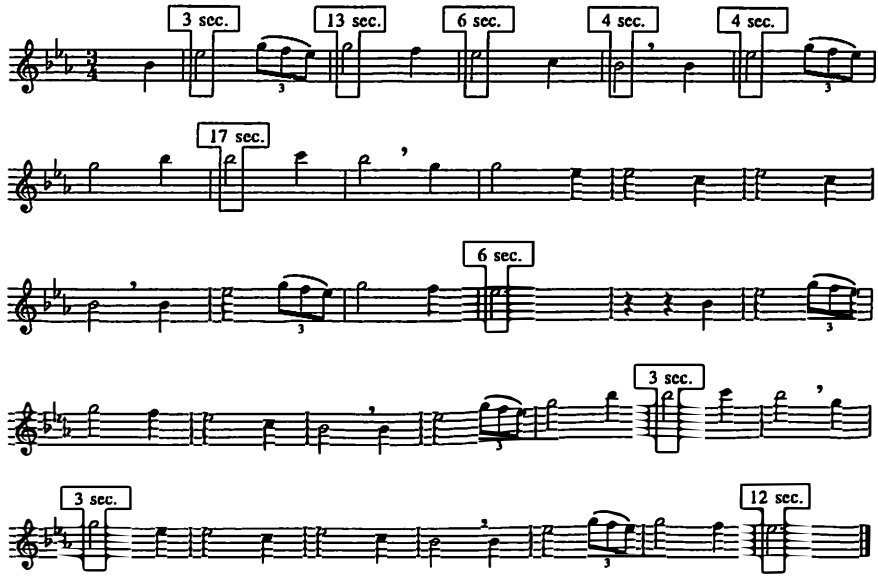
Abjection has aesthetic, semiotic, theological, and psychoanalytic registers—all of which overlap. Aesthetically, sensations and representations of sensations that are extremely repulsive yet fascinating are abject —particularly representations of body *fluids* and *waste* such as blood, urine, semen, and feces, *decaying* flesh, sores on the skin, *decaying* food, and elements of all these that cross boundaries.[31] Semiotically, the abject runs constantly beneath the process of signification in which words represent (and are therefore cut off from) concepts of things; the abject is the semiotic residue that escapes (and is paradoxically produced by) signification. Theologically, rites of defilement are linked to rites of purification in many pagan religions, and dietary prohibitions are crucial particularly to Judaism. The image of the crucifixion in Christianity suggests the centrality of abjection as well. Psychoanalytically, the abject is that which is set aside by the psyche outside the economy of repression. The following discussion of Diamanda Galás's music will unpack these different registers of abjection through a reading of Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror.*[32]

Before focusing in some detail on *Plague Mass,* I would like to refer once more to the version of "Amazing Grace" performed in *Vena Cava.* A transcription of the song in E♭ major, as it might be sung in a more or less "neutral" fashion, is given in ex. 58. Example 59 suggests how Diamanda Galás sings the song.

Galás sustains many of what are half notes in the "neutral" version



Example 58. "Amazing Grace" in E♭ major.



Example 59. A representation of Diamanda Galás's version of "Amazing Grace" from *Vena Cava*.

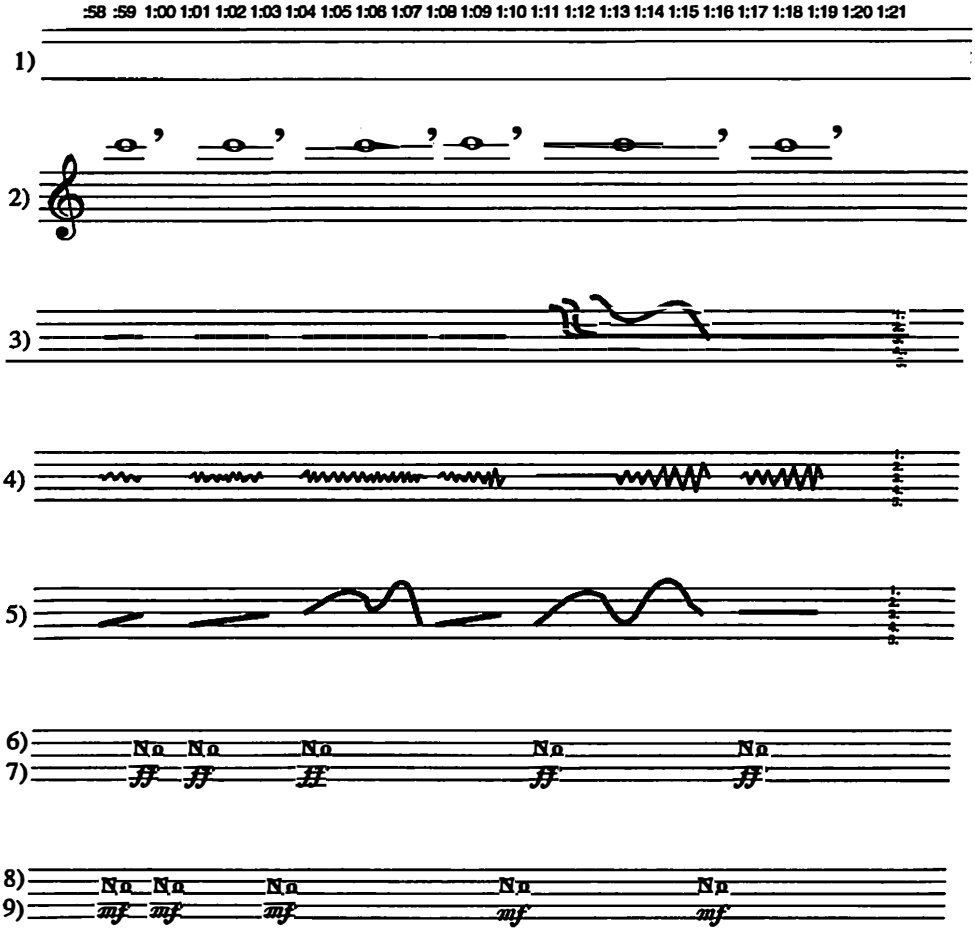
for quite a long time. It sounds as if she were opening up the music and listening to what she heard inside each of these long and sustained notes. "Inside" the first G♮[2] in the second full measure, she hears a distant female choir, barely audible; this choir drifts around pitches that I cannot determine. After the song proper is over and Galás speaks the surrealist lines "I dreamed I was lying in the green grass," the female choir echoes *diminuendo* for thirteen seconds to silence. This echo signifies the abjection of a remainder, something that persists long after language emerges. Galás found these voices within a note of "Amazing Grace," and they remain as abjected bits of music after the song has ended.

Plague Mass (1990)

The work opens with a flat, declamatory question that is repeated: "Were you a witness?" The question and its sternly spoken repetition sound like a reproach, as if the rhetorical question were obviously answered no. The imperative of witnessing the death(s) in question suggests the function in lament of inscribing a death into the shifting contours of social space. What follows is a transcription from track 1:

> Were you a witness?
> Were you a witness?
> And on that holy day,
> And on that bloody day,
> Were you a witness?
> Were you a witness?
> And on that holy day,
> And on that bloody day,
> And on his dying bed,
> He asked me:
> "Tell all my friends, I was fighting, too."
> But to all cowards and voyeurs,
> There are no more tickets to the funeral;
> No. . . . No more tickets to the funeral.

Until the *no* followed by an ellipsis, the language is declaimed in a flat, severe tone echoing into the recesses of the cathedral of St. John



Example 60. Track 1, *Plague Mass,* 0:58–1:20.

the Divine in New York City in which the music was performed live. Right after the declamation of this *no,* Galás begins a series of cries that we have so far been linking to the cry that pierces the Maniot lament. There are many such passages in *Plague Mass* and other works by Galás in which cries alternate with declaimed monologue, antiphonal narration, and song. I would like to spend some time getting into Galás's cries, theorizing them as signifiers of abjection. According to Kristeva, the abject "beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out."[33] For a representation of this musical negation, see ex. 60.

First, a few remarks about the ideology and technique of the ex-

ample. Peter Winkler discusses the ideological stain that transcription places on music in his excellent study of the voice of Aretha Franklin.[34] Winkler explores what transcription reveals in naming and describing the contours of a voice that resists conventional notation and how his own ideologically determined desires shape the results he sought. My own transcription is similarly charged with my own desire to mark Galás's voice, to understand it, to possess it. I have arranged the music into nine levels that represent different aspects of what I hear happening in the work.

Level 1 represents the left-to-right progress of phenomenal time as shown on the digital screen of the CD player. I decided for clarity's sake to notate seconds on each line; phenomenal time is thus notated as a span that connects points in time. There is, for example, one second that spans 0:58 to 0:59; what happens during that second is notated on various levels between the lines on which 0:58 and 0:59 are poised.

Level 2 represents the pitch that Galás sings in her cries; in *Vena Cava,* she sometimes cries, shrieks, moans, as any person might who is not a trained virtuoso; in *Plague Mass,* all her cries are highly studied and crafted soundings of notes at the top of a soprano's range. Since Galás bends notes extraordinarily, I could have notated much more pitch variation on level 2, with quarter tones edging the pitch up toward D♭ or down to B♮, for instance. I decided to notate C♮^{3} as the pitch structure of these cries since she begins and ends the series of cries squarely on C♮^{3} and because her bending occurs in waves, to be described below. I have done away with rhythmic notation entirely since I hear no fixed meter in this portion of the work. The pitch notation for each cry lasts as long as the C♮^{3} is notated. For example, the last cry in this series lasts for two seconds, from 1:17 to 1:19.

Level 3 represents what I call noise. In other chapters, I have discussed noise in aesthetic, cultural, and acoustic registers. Here, I am speaking acoustically, as if one could look at a graph of Galás's voice. Clearly defined lines would reflect "sounds"; thin, multiple, or thick lines would reflect "noise." I hear two kinds of noise in Galás's voice: noise as the result of too much pressure and too little air, on the one hand, and noise as the result of too little pressure and too much air, on the other.[35] A horizontal line on level 3 represents minimal noise; the pitch is sung "pure." Line 2 represents noise that is close to the "crushing" point; line 1 represents the noise of crushed pitches; any-

thing above line 1 represents what can be described only as the vocal equivalent of static produced by little air speed and immense pressure on the vocal chords. Line 4 represents sound produced by much air speed and little pressure; line 5 represents sounds that are emptied of pitch content and sound like pure breath.

The breath marks that look like apostrophes refer, as in traditional vocal notation, to the singer taking a breath. There are three noise articulations that begin above line 1 in these cries. They sound like extreme versions of guttural articulations at the beginnings of notes in the vocal style of Elvis Presley or Buddy Holly.

Level 4 represents vibrato; a horizontal line on line 3 represents minimal vibrato; a wavy line from line 3, up to line 2, down to line 3, down to line 4, and back up to line 3 represents a wide vibrato such as would be acceptable in contemporary operatic performance practice. A wavy line from line 3, to line 1, to line 3, to line 5, and back to line 3 represents a very wide vibrato that reaches a semitone above and below the pitch.

Level 5 represents pitch variation. A horizontal line on line 3 represents no pitch variation; line 4 represents pitches approximately a quarter tone below the pitch notated on level 2; line 5 represents pitches a half step below the pitch notated on level 2; line 2 represents pitches approximately a quarter note above the pitch notated on level 2; and line 1 represents pitches a half step above the pitch notated on level 2.

Level 6 represents the sung text, level 7 the dynamic level of the sung text. Level 8 represents the spoken text, level 9 the dynamic level of the spoken text.

The antiphonal style of this series of negations and the way the sung *no* from 0:59 to 1:00 pierces the texture of declamation suggest Maniot lamentation. The alternation between *mezzo forte* spoken *no*s and excruciating *fortissimo* sung *no*s gives the music an element of control.

The sung *no*s are signifiers of abjection in two ways. First, their negation is so extreme it ruptures the denotative structure of the sentence in which the word *no* appears: "There are no more tickets to the funeral." The alternation between spoken *no*s and sung *no*s suggests a radical exclusion that repeats an escape from, but is trapped within, a boundary: "what is *abject,* radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses." Or, "There are lives [abjection] not sustained by *desire,* as desire is always for objects. Such lives are based

on *exclusion*. They are clearly distinguishable from those understood as neurotic or psychotic, articulated by *negation* and its modalities, *transgression, denial,* and *repudiation.*"[36]

But the abject is not silent: "From its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master."[37] But who is the master of abjection in *Plague Mass*? On a simple level, the sung *no*s shown in ex. 60 challenge the society that has excluded people who are HIV+ from public view. Galás, like Antigone, is saying no, as well, to the patriarchal order.[38] In *Enjoy Your Symptom!* Žižek describes the Lacanian choice between the Name of the Father or the superego in the French phrase *père ou pire:*

> The original position of man *qua* being of language is decidedly that of *alienation* in the signifier (in the symbolic order): the first choice is necessarily that of the Father, which marks the subject with the indelible guilt pertaining to his very (symbolic) existence. . . . Yet Lacan's wager is that it is possible for the subject to get rid of the superego pressure by *repeating* the choice and thus exculpating himself of his constitutive guilt. The price of it is exorbitant: if the first choice [*père*] is "bad," its repetition is in its very formal structure "worse" since it is an act of *separation* from the symbolic community [*pire*]: Lacan's supreme example is here of course Antigone's suicidal "No!" to Creon.[39]

Example 60 suggests another aspect of abjection in the sounds of Galás's voice itself. First, she smears the pitch content of her cry around the C♮ up to D♭ in the seconds 1:07–1:08 and 1:15–1:16 and down to B♮ at the beginning of the second 1:04–1:05. This smearing of boundaries suggests a paradoxical aspect of abjection; it can signify *drawing* boundaries with the side-by-sideness of psychic apparatus and the excluded abject discussed above, and it can signify *erasing* boundaries, such as in the representations of horrid oral/anal/genital substitutions that permeate the film *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover.* This drawing/erasing of boundaries suggests a double, semiotic register of abjection. Abjection is produced by all stages of developing subjectivity from the separation of our bodies from those of our mothers, from the separation of our voices from those of our mothers, from the separation of our mothers' voices from those of our fathers, and from the sepa-

ration of words from things. Such separations produce abject residues at each stage and belong to the primary register of semiotic abjection. These primary abjections are produced when *boundaries are drawn.* Secondary abjection fantasizes a return back across these thresholds. These secondary abjections are produced when *boundaries are erased.* Kristeva associates this regressive register of abjection with the consequences of renouncing the father (the *ou pire* discussed above): "It is worth noting what repercussions such a foreclosure of the Name of the Father have on language. That of the borderline patient is often abstract, made up of stereotypes that are bound to seem cultured; he aims at precision, indulges in self-examination, in meticulous comprehension, which easily brings to mind obsessional discourse. But there is more to it than that. That shell of ultra-protected signifier keeps breaking up to the point of desemantization, to the point of reverberating only as notes, music, 'pure signifier' to be reparcelled out and resemanticized anew."[40]

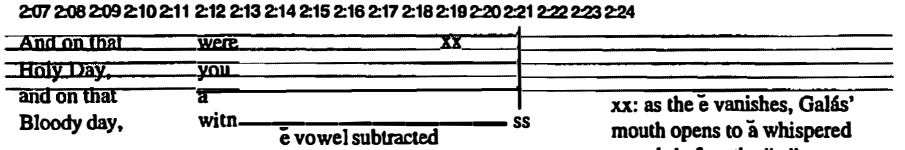
Galás often tears meaning from sound in her work, as in the passage represented in ex. 60. And, along the regressive trajectory back across the threshold that had separated words from things, we come to the noise that lies at the heart of the acoustic mirror, as discussed earlier.[41] Galás crushes the pitch C♮^{3} as discussed above in the seconds 1:04–1:05 and 1:11–1:12, and she articulates crossing the threshold between pitch and noise through too much pressure/too little air from 1:12 to 1:14. The regressive trajectory suggests a fantasy of the body of the mother—a crucial site of abjection. We have seen throughout this book how the gender specificity of the sonorous envelope and acoustic mirror produces a highly charged ambivalence associated with the voice of the mother: "The abject confronts us . . . and this time within our personal archaeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of the *maternal* entity even before existing outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling."[42]

Cries that erupt in unmetered time signify abjection in yet another way. Kristeva distinguishes the economy of the unconscious with its negations that propel a variety of psychic returns, on the one hand, and the economy of the abject, on the other, in which time is at once infinite and explosive:

> Once upon blotted-out time, the abject must have been a magnetized pole of covetousness. But the ashes of oblivion now serve as a screen and reflect aversion, repugnance. The clean and proper (in the sense of incorporated and incorporable) becomes filthy, the sought-after turns into the banished, fascination into shame. Then, forgotten time crops up suddenly and condenses into a flash of lightning an operation that, if it were thought out, would involve bringing together the two opposite terms but, on account of that flash, is discharged like thunder. The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth.[43]

Example 61 is from track 2 of the work; it reworks the lines with which the piece opens and turns the accusatory question "Were you a witness?" into a horrid hiss. The example shows the register of nőise that Galás uses to drain spoken words of vowels; the example shows that, at 2:13, Galás splits the word *witness* into its two syllables and drains the syllable-*ness* of the short *e* until only a sinister hiss remains. The example shows with two *x*'s a unique sound at 2:19. Right at the point at which the short *e* is almost entirely drained from the syllable *-ness,* Galás opens her mouth widely, twice, in demonic acoustic smiles that transform the short *e* into *ah* right before the vowel gets extinguished altogether. While ex. 60 had shown Galás crossing the threshold from pitch specificity to crushed noise, ex. 61 shows Galás crossing the threshold between language and pure sound by subtracting vowels from consonants. Although I concentrate on Kristeva for the reasons cited above, the way that Galás turns beautifully sung notes to noise is like the acoustic equivalent of Georges Bataille's flowers, in which lovely petals surround an obscene, hairy center: "The interior of a rose does not at all correspond to its exterior beauty; if one tears off all

Example 61. "Were You a Witness?" from *Plague Mass,* track 2, 2:07–2:21.



of the corolla's petals, all that remains is a rather sordid tuft."[44] For Bataille, the flower is abject because of a *lack* of relation between the beauty of the petals and the obscenity of its center. Notes at the top of a soprano's range are like flowers that Galás mutilates petal by petal to reveal the pure noise that resides within the human voice.[45]

Track 4 contains passages from the Old Testament and texts composed by Galás; the liner notes are misleading since they show all the passages from Leviticus followed by those composed by Galás; the music is composed of passages from Leviticus interrupted by and juxtaposed to texts as shown below:

[Leviticus 15:]

When any man hath an issue out of his flesh
because of his issue he is unclean;
Every bed whereon he lieth is unclean;
and everything whereon he sitteth unclean;
and whosoever touches his bed shall be unclean;
and he that sitteth whereon he sat shall be unclean;
and he that touches the flesh of the unclean becomes unclean;
and he that be spat on by him unclean becomes unclean.

[Excerpt from Psalm 22:]

Strong bulls of Baashan, do beset me round.
They gape upon me with their mouths
as a ravening and a roaring lion.
But thou, O Lord shall laugh at them,
Thou shalt bring them down,
into the pit of destruction
greedy and deceitful men shall be exposed as vermin
And their days as iniquity.

[Return to Leviticus 15:]

And who soever toucheth anything under him shall be unclean;
And he that beareth any of those things shall be unclean;
And what saddle he rideth upon is unclean;
and the vessel of earth that he touches unclean;

[Excerpt from Psalms 58 and 59 and text by Diamanda Galás:]

Deliver me from mine enemies,
Defend me from them that rise up against me;
Deliver me from the workers of iniquity
and save me from bloody men.
For lo, they lie in wait for my soul;
The wicked are gathered against me,
not for my transgressions, not for my sin, O Lord.
They run and prepare themselves without my help, without my fault,
Awake to help me and behold:
Swords are in their lips, for who, say they, doth hear.
But thou, O Lord, shall laugh at them.
The God of my mercy shall let me see my desire upon my enemies.
And at evening, let them make a noise like a dog,
and go around about the city.
Let them look up and down for meat,
and grudge if they be not satisfied.
Break out the great teeth of the young lions,
Break out the great teeth of the young lions,
and when they laugh at the trial of the innocent,
Let them be cut as in pieces!

[Return to Leviticus 15:]

And if any man's seed of copulation go out from him, he is unclean;
Every garment, every skin whereon is the seed, unclean;
And the woman with whom this man would lie will be unclean;
And whoever touches her will be unclean.
This is the law of the plague,
to teach when it is clean and unclean.

[Text by Diamanda Galás:]

The Devil is an impotent man.
He says it nice and plays himself off as the friend.
He tries to make you uncertain
so your hands shake
and then he tells you, you're insane
when you call him by his rightful name:
Impotent homophobe and coward!

So you will miss when you aim at this evil man
who cannot get it up
except
in the TV public operating room
of another man's misfortune!

[Return to Leviticus 15:]

And the priest shall look upon the plague
for a rising, and for a scab, and for a bright spot.
And the priest shall shut up he that hath the plague;
He shall carry them forth to a place unclean;
He shall separate them in their uncleanness;
This is the law of the plague,
to teach when it is clean and when it is unclean.

In this portion of *Plague Mass,* Galás directly confronts the quintessential text of exclusion in the Old Testament. The added text by Galás makes clear her political commitment to bringing the suffering of people infected with HIV before the public eye. The devil is uncloaked as an "impotent homophobe" whose cowardice is central to the sensationalist media. But where is purification in the text? Kristeva suggests that the economy of abjection involves two elements that occur not diachronically, one after the other, but synchronically, at the same time: immersion and purification. I will show how Galás's music represents these two registers below.

Galás's setting of the text cited above superimposed three layers of sound: (1) a continuous percussion line, (2) Galás's declamatory delivery of text with typical Galás cries (to neutral vowel sounds), and (3) male voices. The piece opens with percussion; at 0:00, there is a *fortissimo* bass drum attack with a secondary hissing sound of very short duration. The bass drum sound resounds into voluminous space and is repeated every seven seconds until 0:28, when other drums enter, the dynamic is lowered to *mezzo forte,* and the music is metered in a moderate $\frac{4}{4}$, subdivided into eighth notes. The first twenty-eight seconds thus present four large beats lasting seven seconds that then get divided, separated, into a moderate $\frac{4}{4}$ at 0:28. At 0:36, the initial secondary hissing sound emerges from its hiding place into the foreground;

it articulates the entry of the male voices and is an example of musical sneaking.[46] The male voices sing *piano* and add pitch structure to the piece; they sing vowels—long *ee*'s, short *a*'s, and long double *oo*'s—to B♭. They smear the note down almost a half step to A♮$_1$ on the short *a* vowel; thus, the articulation sounds almost like a single lower neighbor decoration of B♭$_1$.[47] At 0:46, Galás begins to declaim text in a tight, *forte,* sneering tone. These three layers of music continue to 1:49, concluding with the line "And he that be spat on shall be unclean." The sound is ritualistic, as if Galás were staging the pronouncement of the law of the plague herself. A series of cries erupts from 1:50 to 2:05; these function as cathartic responses to the horror of the law of the plague in which the Old Testament text is seen as a double for contemporary society's exclusion from public view of AIDS patients. Not only are these cries emotionally cathartic, but they also represent the shifting subject positions within the purification process itself. Galás's declamation from 0:00 to 1:49 represents the voice of the law that separates; her voice from 1:49 to 2:05 represents the voice of an artist identifying with those who are now dying of AIDS. The structure of these cries is similar to the cry shown in ex. 60, with one difference; the pitch structure is not one note that is crushed into noise but the interval of a tritone—the "devil in music" in Western sacred music. Galás smears and crushes the downward tritone from C♮^{2} to F♯^{1} from 1:50 to 1:56 and from 1:57 to 2:04, ending in an unpitched, pinched-off, acoustic grimace.

From 2:06 to 2:51, Galás declaims the lines from "Strong bulls of Baashan do beset me round" to "and their days to iniquity." The male voices cease, and the metered percussion becomes fragmented to what sounds like improvised *mezzo forte* attacks on the bass drum. Galás shifts the position of her voice from the voice of the law that separates to the voice of someone in need of divine intervention. At 2:52, a series of scorching cries begins, with cries beginning on high C♮, D♮, and even E♮. These cries alternate with a series of (for me) horrifying and disgusting sounds that remind me of the "binding song" described above. This binding song involves the *mezzo forte* articulation of three sounds: (1) *sh* + a short *u,* (2) *g* + a short *u,* and (3) *d* + a short *u.* Galás speaks these sounds as quickly as possible in the pitch area between B♮ and B♭ an octave above middle C♮. Together with the initial male voices that also smear this pitch class, B♭ signifies in this section

the abjection of the voice stripped of its signifying function. Throughout this portion of the work, a new element is added: a heavy breathing, sneaking into the texture from silence, articulating quarter notes on beats 1 and 3 of $\frac{4}{4}$ that (re)emerges around 3:00.

After the line "Let them be cut as in pieces," a series of cries and "binding music" is accompanied by the male voices, which have begun to move up the chromatic scale from their initial B♭; here, they articulate the clear motion C♯-D♮-C♮. This continuous sound is accompanied by Galás's declamation of the lines "And if any man's seed of copulation go out from him, he is unclean" to "This is the Law of the Plague, to teach when it is clean and unclean." During this passage, the heavy breathing that had occurred on beats 1 and 3 becomes quieter but quicker—occurring on each *upbeat.* From 8:16 to 8:28, Galás sustains the long *e* vowel of the second syllable of ***unclean*** for twelve seconds while her voice is superimposed with a tape of herself singing the same word; her taped voice tears away from this electronically produced unison—a horrid representation of the acoustic mirror. There is another way of understanding this "tearing away." The acoustic-mirror phase occurs along the way to socialization that will lead to language acquisition and the law (Žižek's *père*); tearing yourself away from the acoustic mirror places you at the threshold of the Real (Žižek's *pire*). This horrifying moment of threshold crossing is articulated in the music through the most intense cries in the music thus far, which are interrupted by repeated fragments of the taped voice "unclean" tearing away from Galás's more phenomenally "real" voice singing the same "unclean" from 8:30 to 8:50.

The track ends with Galás singing the final "unclean" as a descending perfect fifth from C♯ to F♯. This perfect fifth is then blurred by a low $C♮_2$ played by the synthesizer; this note decays to silence and reminds us of the tritone (F♯-C♮) that Galás had smeared earlier in the piece. Galás's music represents an immersion in abjection in the setting of the notated passages from Leviticus and the Psalms; her music releases a cathartic identification in the settings of her own texts and in the structured cries that re-mark classic climactic notes at the top of a soprano's range.

Track 11 is declaimed in Italian: "Sono l'Antichristo." There are ***no*** Galás cries in this track, just declaimed text, a very hard and bright percussion section that articulates the slow $\frac{4}{4}$ rhythm with rapid groups of

notes played on the synthesizer that sound like insect calls speeded up as decorative, rhythmic appoggiaturas. There is a quiet synthesized accompaniment that sounds poised between male voices and low strings. The text is given below. Galás declaims the Italian; the English translation of each line is provided to the right:

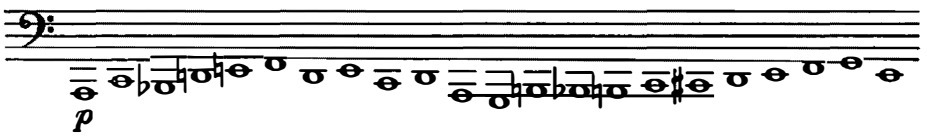
Sono la prova	I am the token
Sono la salva	I am the salvation
Sono la carne macellata	I am the butcher's meat
Sono la sanzione	I am the sanction
Sono il sacrificio	I am the sacrifice
Sono il Ragno Nero	I am the black spider
Sono il scherno	I am the scourge
Sono la Santa Sede	I am the Holy Fool
Sono le feci dal Signore	I am the shit of God
Sono lo signo	I am the sign
Sono la pestilenza	I am the plague
Sono l'Antichristo	I am the Antichrist

In "Sono l'Antichristo," the understood "I" speaks in each stanza, not the abjection of separation and exclusion, but the abjection that erases boundaries among holy, profane, and signifying categories. On the surface, the rhetoric seems ontological; it is, in fact, topological—abjection as that place that disturbs stable identity: "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order." But, more important, abjection is linked to the body of Christ. This text represents an abject version of the Eucharist; Kristeva describes the Eucharist as follows: "The *division* within Christian consciousness finds in that fantasy, of which the Eucharist is the catharsis, its material anchorage and logical node. Body and spirit, nature and speech, divine nourishment, the body of Christ, assuming the guise of a natural food (bread), signifies me both as divided (flesh and spirit) and infinitely lapsing."[48] "Sono l'Antichristo" lacks cathartic release (thus the absence of structured cries) as equations erase boundaries among disease, signification, shit, and God. Galás's voice splits off from itself, and it often becomes difficult to distinguish the phenomenal voice we

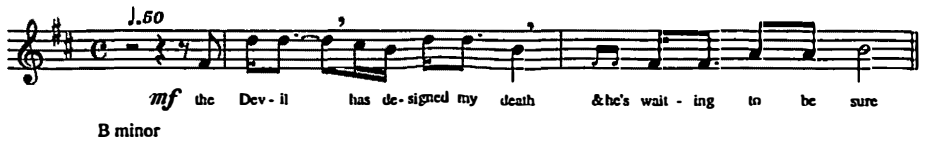
first identify as "hers" at the outset of the track from the taped voice that veers away, returns, and veers away again.[49] This veering away and returning to one's own voice is an extended acoustic mirror fantasy in which the ambivalence of the acoustic mirror is a signifier of abjection. The bass line that accompanies Galás's voice drifts modally away from and eventually returns to a low A♮.

Example 62 shows the pitch structure and approximate duration of notes of the first minute and twenty seconds of the piece. This bass line also suggests the slow, stepwise motion of Gregorian chant—a working out of a modal scale on A with secondary material on the D♮ a perfect fourth higher. The material based on D has another function, however; it anticipates the "Dies Irae" theme prominent in the last movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* that will become explicit in track 12. The bass accompaniment thus musically foreshadows a call to final judgment as *Plague Mass* draws to a close. As the piece ends, the bass articulates an oblique wedge, with the low A♮ sustained over a chromatic ascent connecting the low A♮ to the D♮ above it, followed by a modal ascent to G♮ and a falling fifth from E♮ down to A♮. The chromatic ascent signifies the musical language of nineteenth-century harmony and brings the appearance of the "Dies Irae" of track 12 closer.[50]

The work ends with a bluesy version of "Let My People Go." With this familiar song, Galás reaches out to her audience; after an hour-long representation of abjection, this song sutures a sustained separation that Galás has drawn between herself and the audience. The first half of the concert that I saw consisted of excerpts from *Plague Mass;* this is the only concert I have ever seen in which there was intentional distance created between performer and audience—a highly ambivalent interpellation.[51] This distance is created by the painful noise level of the music, the images of explicit abjection (Galás's body soaked in blood), and implicit abjection (the complex series of identification with and purification from the suffering of people infected with HIV). With "Let My People Go," the floodgates of identification between audience and performer open. The musical materials are basically the same as those (mis)used by Oi musicians from the blues. While Oi produces a deadly but ingenious music that affirms musically what it denies textually, Diamanda Galás uses the blues so that her audience can identify with her through the register of racial injustice, onto which members of the audience can transpose their fear of identification with people



Example 62. Track 11, *Plague Mass,* "Sono l'Antichristo," bass line of the opening.



Example 63. "Let My People Go," from *Plague Mass,* the opening melody.

infected with HIV. Example 63 shows the basic melody of the song that enters after open B♮ octaves in the lowest register of the piano.[52] Note two very familiar elements in the melody: (1) the minor third B♮-D♮ within which the melody moves and (2) the lowered seventh scale degree. Galás sings the melody in a flexible rhythm that the example only approximates, with long pauses for breath at the spots marked on the example. In this version of the song, there are no cries that would have signified cathartic release or a shift in subject position.

A crucial repetition of lines from the beginning of *Plague Mass* provides the repetition that is crucial to abjection—the emergence from identification to a redrawing of the boundaries of the ego. The lines are as follows:

> And on that Holy Day
> And on that Bloody Day
> And on his dying bed,
> he told me, "There are no more tickets to the funeral
> There are no more tickets to the funeral
> There are no more tickets to the funeral
> The funeral is crowded."

The differences between these lines and those at the outset of *Plague Mass* are both obvious and minute; they are crucial, however, for a sense that one has arrived at a place almost identical to, but different

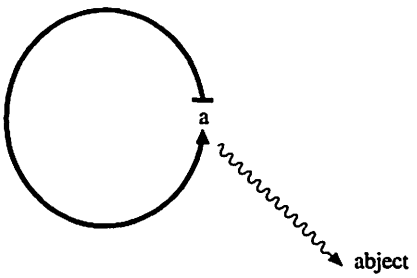
from, the place from which one had begun. I find Diamanda Galás's representations of abjection productively open-ended, however; each cry could emerge again and again from a declamatory texture; Galás could crush over and over again the pitch content of each cry; cries can release a cathartic affect as the representation of the voice that separates turns to the voice of that which has been separated from the law, over and over again. This continuous attraction to and repulsion from a signification is typical of abjection: "Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it [the abject] literally beside himself."[53]

Lamentation and Abjection

Lamentation and abjection share structures of separation, repetition, and representation, as has been suggested above. And a series of represented reversals (affective, logical, rhetorical) also link lamentation and abjection. In lamentation—the pleasure of lament and the pain of the occasion, the pleasure of incorporation and the pain of separation, the rites of mourning and a call to revenge, a tight structure and one broken by spontaneous cries. In abjection—the divisions that separate us from and yet pull us back to the body, the voice of the mother, the repulsive abjected substance and the purity such abjection produces, defilement and purification, the abject and its close relation to the sublime. But do these parallels occupy the same logical space? I think not. Lament oscillates between the poles mentioned above, but it does so with clear one-to-one correspondences to a time, a place, an occasion, and a social context. The abject is more paradoxical; it both evades and constitutes psychic structures.

The Abject and the Sublime

In the chapter on Schubert and the gaze, I introduced the structure of Lacanian psychic apparatus—the cut circle that cannot close, the circulation blocked by the *objet a*.[54] The *objet a* is paradoxical. On the one hand: "The *objet a* is not a positive entity existing in space, it is ultimately nothing but a certain *curvature of the space itself* which causes us to make a bend precisely when we want to get directly at the object."[55]



Example 64. The structure of desire + the abject.

On the other hand, the *objet a* is often described as a thing with just a little bit of otherness, and Žižek asserts in *Looking Awry* that images in literature and film can represent the *objet a*.[56] There are connections among the *objet a*, the voice of Diamanda Galás, the abject, and the sublime.

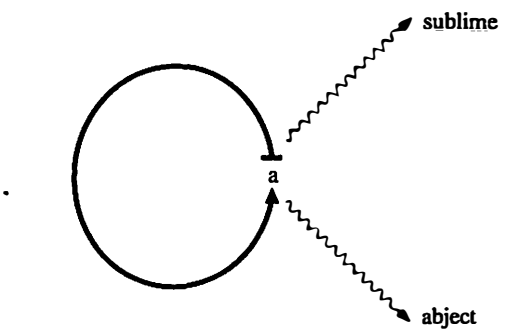
The abject is crucially connected to the Symbolic Order. According to Kristeva: "Abjection, just like *prohibition of incest* is a universal phenomenon; one encounters it as soon as the symbolic and/or social dimension of man is constituted, and this throughout the course of civilization."[57] This connection between the abject and the symbolic may sound counterintuitive. Could one not just as well assert that the abject is associated with the Imaginary Order, with the body of the mother, as Kristeva so often emphasizes? The abject *does* represent separation that occurs in prelinguistic stages of development. But these separations are retrospectively named from a position within the Symbolic Order. Anyone who has raised a child knows that very young children are not disgusted by fecal matter. Once *language* sets in, children "feel" disgusted by body fluid, fecal matter, slime, etc. Within a structure of desire made possible by language acquisition, I would like to argue that the abject can be represented by Lacan's cut circle, as a substance that drains off in a downward spiral from the *objet a*. See ex. 64.

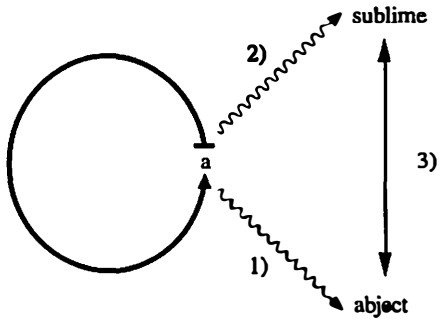
Galás's voice separates noise from sound; it splits notes open; it drains vowels from words; it is loud, threatening, and heavy. Her voice draws and obliterates the boundary between familiar sounds, melodies, techniques, and the abject substance that is their support. This is the structure of Galás's voice as a representation of abjection. How is the sublime related to the abject?

In *The Critique of Judgement,* Kant opposes beauty to the sublime: "The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of *limitlessness.*"[58] Kant divides the sublime into the mathematical and the dynamic sublime. The mathematical sublime is a representation that suggests infinite space or time —a series infinitely divisible or expansive.[59] The dynamic sublime is a representation of *might* or power that is beyond comprehension. For Kant, the essence of the sublime is not within the object but within the viewing subject whose horizon of perception seems to be expanded by the mathematically or dynamically limitless representation: "True sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging Subject, and not in the Object of nature that occasions this attitude by the estimate formed of it."[60] Galás's voice is mathematically sublime in its capacity to signify for a listener a seemingly infinite division of sound from noise. It is dynamically sublime in its capacity to signify for a listener immense power and range.

Žižek understands the sublime in terms of a paradox that closely resembles the paradox of the *objet a:* "The paradox of the Sublime is as follows: in principle, the gap separating phenomenal, empirical objects of experience from the Thing-in-itself is unsurmountable—that is, no empirical object, no representation . . . of it can adequately present . . . the Thing . . . ; but the Sublime is an object in which we can experience this very impossibility, this permanent failure of the representation to reach after the Thing. Thus, by means of the very failure of representa-

Example 65. The structure of desire + the abject + the sublime.





Example 66. The structure of desire + the abject + the sublime + a path connecting the abject to the sublime.

tion, we can have a presentiment of the true dimension of the Thing."[61] The abject and the sublime are representations that veer away from the *objet a*. See ex. 65.

The abject is a representation of the thingness of the limit on a downward spiral; the sublime is a representation of the (impossible beyond) the limit of the thing on an upward spiral. But I think that the abject and the sublime are more intimately bound up with one another. My own sense of Galás's music requires such a possibility. I find her music at once abject and sublime. Example 66 represents such a connection between the abject and the sublime.

The relation between the abject and the sublime represented by line 3 is a paradox. On the one hand, the abject and the sublime can turn into one another. Disgust at Galás's voice can turn into an acoustic Kantian sublime, either mathematical or dynamic. Yet, on the other hand, the abject and the sublime are both *simultaneously* produced at the impossible impasse of the *objet a*.[62] It is precisely this paradox that causes Galás's voice to be both abject and sublime at the threshold of the Real.

NOTES

Introduction

1 Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). See, especially, the chapter "Music as Expressive Doubling."

2 See Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); and Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); and Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

3 V. Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

4 The distinction between musical things and spaces is similar to a distinction in semiotics between a "speaking subject" and a "subject of the speech." See Émile Benveniste, *Problems of General Linguistics,* trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971). See also Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 43–48, and 195–98. For a discussion of the relation between signifiers and ideology, see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy,* trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), reprinted in *Mapping Ideologies,* ed. Slavoj Žižek (New York: Verso, 1994). See also Slavoj Žižek, *Metastases of Enjoyment* (London: Verso, 1994), 57–62.

1 Music as Sonorous Envelope and Acoustic Mirror

1 For a discussion of oceanic fantasies and subjectivity, see Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents,* trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961).

2 See, in particular, Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); Michel Chion, *La voix au cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1982); and, for an introduction to sound and cinema, "Cinema/Sound," *Yale French Studies,* no. 60 (1980). See also Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 40.