

The Rhetoric of Seduction; or Materiality under Erasure

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She doesn't "speak," she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the "logic" of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact, she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body.

—Hélène Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa*

What is significance? It is meaning, *insofar as it is sensually produced.*

—Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*

And what is more sensual and significant than the body? Even a body laid bare still obscures parts of itself. It is impossible to view a wholly constituted body all at once. From a catalogue of angles and perspectives, the viewer is left to piece the body together—the gaze tires itself trying to capture the body *in toto*. Is the body, then, only ever fully grasped via synecdoche? What happens when someone strategically deploys the fragmented body in order to seduce, ensnare, or entice? Roland Barthes asks, "Is not the most erotic portion of a body where the garment

gapes? . . . It is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has so rightly pointed out, which is erotic."¹ Perhaps this tactical manipulation of the body is a way female characters in opera regain autonomy within narratives that render their bodies partial.² The body-in-pieces, instead, becomes

¹Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975 [1973]), 9–10.

²Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

weaponized. The voice, deployed as material appendage, represents itself as whole, seemingly without acknowledging its component parts (resonant cavities, tongue placement).³ It emits itself from the body and penetrates the ear of the other; or, in Lacanian speak, it launches one body into the body of an other. Thus, in an act of strategic narrative essentialism, the character becomes more than what the composer or author imagined.

To say “rhetoric of seduction” is to discuss the language of the body—a textualized, material body, a body that speaks itself into existence, a body that penetrates its listening objects with its voice. It is my intention, by focusing on femmes fatales’ episodes of seduction, to reevaluate the material manipulation of the voice. By understanding voice, considered here as a material bodily appendage, we can begin to understand how the femme fatale uses the force of her voice to exploit the symbolic boundaries of authorial agency. That is to say, by voicing, the femme fatale becomes wholly subjective in a way that contends with authorial agency and the narratological apparatuses that seek to relegate her to the condition of a mere object. The femme fatale, wielding her body—her voice, her hips, her eyes—and reclaiming or essentializing its synecdochic portrayal, becomes her own site of authorship.

Throughout this article, I will address two operatic women—Carmen and Salome. My reasons for choosing Georges Bizet’s *Carmen* (1875) as a precursor to modernist femmes fatales, most especially Richard Strauss’s *Salome* (1905), are provoked by Nietzsche—“the middle man,” so to speak. Nietzsche, who by the premiere of *Carmen* had grown disenchanted by Wagner, saw Bizet’s opera as the aesthetic and philosophical standard bearer of opera. Nietzsche, as Gary Tomlinson contends, rejects the “metaphysics” of Wagner (by which he means the lofty philosophical underpinnings) in favor of opera that “dances” and foregrounds the body as a site of subjectivity. Tomlinson argues that with this move to bodily materiality,

Nietzsche puts forth a theory that the “material world, including the body, is nothing other than the flux of . . . appearances.”⁴ With *Carmen*, an aesthetic and epistemic shift that rejects invisibility becomes tantamount to opera. The drama onstage is viewed as what Nietzsche described as “bodily permeabilities and a communication through impulse and force, gesture and movement.”⁵ From this, we begin to see the (proto-) modernist femme fatale as she who embraces the fragmentation of the Self and launches her body into the bodies of Others. In order to seduce, the femme fatale must fragment herself and disseminate herself. The femme fatale is she who uses her voice as body, as material, to seize upon the other, crack herself up, and infiltrate sites of restricted access—the orchestra and the motivic material of other characters.⁶

Carmen traces the life of the eponymous cigarette worker who exemplifies the travels and travails of life as a smuggler and fugitive and who lures the soldier Don José into a messy love triangle. Ultimately, propelled by machismo and ardor, Don José stabs Carmen to death while musing, “I was the one who killed her! / Ah! Carmen! My adored Carmen!”⁷ In the world of opera, the femme fatale trope peaked during the fin de siècle—specifically within the period from 1875 to 1937, beginning with the production of *Carmen* and ending with Alban Berg’s *Lulu*. Though *Carmen* inaugurates, sonically and textually, many of the tropes that come to be utilized in depictions of the femme fatale, it is *Salome* that thrusts the fatal woman in the consciousness of everyday life—spawning global *Salomania*. For Salome is considered the

⁴Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 116.

⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), §1067.

⁶“Voice” is framed throughout this article as bodily materiality, an extension of the body, a “vocal appendage.” Understanding voice as an extension of the body—either as appendage or as bodily fluid—has roots in voice studies theorists such as Brandon LaBelle, Kaja Silverman, Emily Wilbourne, Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze, and Janet Beizer, the latter of whom traces depictions of the voice as bodily fluid (especially female bodily fluid) in Romantic French literature by Bachelard and Flaubert.

⁷“C’est moi qui l’ai tuée! Ah! Carmen! Ma Carmen adorée!” (act IV, sc. 27).

³Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1.

seductress and femme fatale *par excellence*. The eponymous character is a virginal young princess, enamored of the incendiary prophet John the Baptist, who is kept hostage in her stepfather's, Herod's, cistern. Her insatiable desire for John the Baptist, and his unceasing rejection of her flirtations, leads Salome to seek alternate means of possessing his body. She performs a striptease, the "Dance of the Seven Veils" for Herod, and in return demands the head of John the Baptist on a silver charger. In considering these two operas, I will be concerned with the specific deployment of woman, as seductress and femme fatale, in opera generally during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By focusing closely on two scenes, the "Seguidilla" from *Carmen*, and the "Dance of the Seven Veils" from *Salome* (1905), I will seek to show how the agential subjectivity and material presence of the femme fatale character are depicted—sonically, dramaturgically, and metaphysically.

SONIC, DRAMATURGICAL, METAPHYSICAL

Sonic depiction consists in the ability to reify Self through sound, specifically through voice and voicing. *Reify* here has a positive sense; it denotes a character's acquisition of an awareness that lies outside the sphere of influence of the composer/author. The femme fatale manifests her materiality under imminent threats of erasure by manipulating the other characters' voices and contorting their perceptions of the stage world. Adriana Cavarero laments, "Whether in studies on orality or in studies on the vocal nature of the text, there are still no voices that, in communicating themselves, communicate their uniqueness. Rather, there is only voice: a voice that is doubtless rooted in the fleshiness of the body, but a voice of everyone and no one."⁸ It is precisely this generalization of the voice that I will argue against. Each opera to which I refer, working within modernist conceptions of phenomenality and philosophy, depicts a unique coming-to-presence through

⁸Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 11.

body, through a voicing-body. Their femmes fatales are wholly reconceived as representative of subjectivity.

Examples of voice as an index of subjectivity or presence can clearly be found in *Carmen*; Carmen's singing voice and dancing body stubbornly refuse to be implicated in a system of excessive lack. Instead, Carmen links singing to thought and rationality—hers is a *phone semantike*, a signifying voice. (We may then ask what *exactly* Carmen's voice signs off on or, rather, signs out of.) We see this phenomenon again in Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* (1877) where Samson experiences the ecstasy of being inhabited by the "misleading voice" (*voix mensongère*) of Dalila in her aria, "Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix." In this aria Dalila weaponizes her voice as a material sexual object, tumescent and penetrating. The voice becomes a site of opening. This phenomenon, of a body signing and singing itself, arises in moments when the voice *qua* voice destroys the fabric of sound and the sounded world of the opera characters—when it becomes what I call "phonocidal voice." This phonocidal voice must not be taken as a perpetuation of lack by understanding it as a source of destruction and eradication. Instead, the phonocidal voice is a source of deconstruction and *erratication*. It is a voice that, in Jean-Luc Nancy's words, is "everywhere producing and reproducing" and "infinitely mixing the impenetrable with the impenetrable."⁹ Voice becomes phonocidal when, *as* voice, it finds a way of bringing the character whose voice it is to what Lawrence Kramer, referring to Salome, describes as "the extreme limit of knowable and communicable experience"—a level of reality that is outside of and ex-centric to the sonic world of the incorporeal *dramatis personae*.¹⁰

My decision to focus on the material body in rethinking operatic tropes aims to conjoin two opposing fields of operatic scholarship—the corporeal and the dramaturgical performed. The voice of the femme fatale, aside from

⁹Jean-Luc Nancy, "Corpus," in *Thinking Bodies*, ed. Juliet Flower MacCannell and Laura Zakarin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 22.

¹⁰Lawrence Kramer, "Opera as Case History: Freud's Dora, Strauss's Salome, and the Perversity of Modern Life," *Opera Quarterly* 31, 1–2 (2015): 100–15, here 110.

personifying a dramatic character, is an actual bodily entity that affects other bodies. What is the opera singer without voice? What is the operatic character without voice? As part of the total (izing) package of opera, the body must be considered. As Linda Hutcheon, in her plea for paying attention to operatic corporeality, writes: "Opera is an embodied art form; it is the performers who give it its 'phenomenal reality.' . . . And it is specifically the body—the gendered, sexualized body—that will not be denied in staged opera."¹¹

At the same time, dramaturgical considerations also demand our attention. Archival and historical annotations, stage directions, and choreographies may illuminate how the composer conceived of the femme fatale. By exploring the way the composer (and to a certain extent the librettist) sought to depict the action of the onstage presence, we can come to understand that the femme fatale is imbued at times with the power to govern the orchestra. Dramaturgical concerns, often left on the sidelines of operatic critique, demonstrate the ways in which Strauss, Wilde, and Bizet hoped their femmes fatales would be deployed in the staged drama. It is therefore necessary to take into consideration not only the text and music, but also the *mise-en-scène*, the archival addenda, and the marginalia that reshape our understanding of the roles that our femmes fatales play in the metaphysics of opera.

Without a doubt, the modernist femme fatale is endowed with certain sonic metaphysical privileges. In *Unsung Voices*, Carolyn Abbate argues that the "voice" of operatic characters is a site of multiplicity and at times betrays the supposed narrative context of the orchestra.¹² Abbate suggests that "narration"—by which she means diegetic instances or breaches—can, at times, present itself falsely, disassociated (disembodied) from and incongruent with the orchestra. She

contends that the noumenal is represented by the orchestral music in the opera, which is usually unheard by the opera's characters. Drawing on Kantian metaphysics, Abbate describes the divide between what is empirically knowable and thus perspectively available to the *dramatis personae*—the "phenomenal"—and the pure, noumenal thing-in-itself. Occasionally, in rare moments of musical narrative—sites of "multiple disjunctions with the music surrounding it"—the noumenal is breached and the *dramatis personae* are allowed to hear the music that embodies it. With these moments of imagined speech or presence (*prosopopoeia*), Abbate creates a space in which we might ask: What do these operatic characters hear? Do they hear what we (the audience) hear? What are the effects of "pure vocalizing"—music that exists outside of plot and text? The femme fatale seems to have not only the ability to breach the noumenal but also the ability to alter it, seduce it, and in so doing to assert herself as a material agential entity.

Abbate thus theorizes a character who can "hear" at exceptional moments. Going further, I theorize a woman who can "manifest" at exceptional moments. My argument is that not only can the femme fatale hear the music of the noumenal, but she can also govern it. When that happens, the femme fatale reifies herself as a site of authorship and composition. This affirmative reification destabilizes the central authority of the composer and imbues the femme fatale with musical agency. Richard Taruskin argues that noumenal music is not necessarily out of earshot or imperceptible to the stage characters; rather, the characters live within it and "that is precisely what makes the music 'ambient'; its locus is not 'without,' but in a supremely literal sense within."¹³ Nevertheless, there is a symbiotic relationship between the voicing of the femme fatale and the out-of-earshot orchestra. It is my argument that the femme fatale, in an effort to manifest herself, has, at certain moments, the ability not only to hear the orchestra that is otherwise out of earshot, but also to appropriate it, to co-opt it, to outsource her voice into it, and to (re)orchestrate it.

¹¹Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, "Staging the Female Body: Richard Strauss's *Salome*," in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 206.

¹²Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), x.

¹³Richard Taruskin, "She Do the Ring in Different Voices," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4 (1992): 187–97; see esp. 196.

"LA TERRIBLE ESPAGNOLE"

The enchantment and the most powerful effect of woman is, in philosophical language, an effect at a distance, *actio in distans*; but there belongs thereto first and foremost—*distance*.¹⁴

Carmen: chanteuse, singer, and song¹⁵—bodily charmer who thinks in music, fugitive who lures the corporal into narrative with her deceitful song and dance. In search of a corporal and corporeality, Carmen is the Urtext of the femme fatale who voices the boundaries of meaning. As a dancing woman who always "gets outside herself," she signs and sings herself into material existence. Self-undermining and undecidable, she reifies herself while under erasure. So she dances the seguidilla, syncopated and not sure-footed; the seguidilla with its *salidas*, or false-starts (*faux-pas*) and its *coplas*, bridges or links. Carmen, signing and singing, binds not only word to word, but genre to genre, song to dance, inside to outside. Her singing and dancing destabilize the myth that the stage-world is disjoined from and inaccessible to the orchestra. And it is the body of Carmen, of the femme fatale, that reconciles or (re)incorporates the stage-world and the orchestra. Therefore *logos*, as Carmen performs it, consists in the material joining of two worlds, one embodied, the other not.

During Carmen's imprisonment and her seduction of Don José, José shouts: "Stop! I told you not to talk to me!" Carmen replies: "I'm not talking to you, I'm singing to myself, and I'm thinking. . . . It's not forbidden to think!"¹⁶ Traditionally *logos* applied to what were considered masculine figurations such as reason and rationality—in this case Carmen's "thinking"—

¹⁴"La Terrible Espagnole" is from Jean-Pierre-Oscar Comettant (*Le Siècle*), quoted in Susan McClary, *Georges Bizet: Carmen* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 112. "[Carmen enters as] *la terrible espagnole* who leaps like a tiger-cat, writhes like a snake . . . ingenious orchestral details, risky dissonances, instrumental subtlety, cannot express musically the uterine frenzies of Mlle Carmen." (Italics in original.) The extract is from Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* [1882] (New York: Vintage, 1974).

¹⁵"Carmen" etymologically—and probably pointedly—means "song."

¹⁶"Je ne te parle pas, je chante pour moi-même; et je pense . . . il n'est pas défendu de penser!"

and music/*phone* was framed as ineffable, seductive, illogical. Carmen deconstructs this binary, however, in her dialogue with José. Her binding together of *logos* and *phone* reads as dangerous. It summons up a fear of formlessness that has inflected modernist depictions of femmes fatales generally. Jean Baudrillard, Freya Jarman-Ivens, and Mary Ann Doane, in their theories of seduction, conceive of the femme fatale as a representative of unknowability, a lack of substance, "pure artifice." On stage, however, the femme fatale enacts a coming into material presence by coopting and manipulating the other character's voices and their perceptions of the stage world.

Immediately following Carmen's rejection of being relegated to *phone* alone, José begins untying her arms and begs her to promise reciprocated love. That she is untied, unbound, immediately after rejecting the fixity of belonging to either *logos* or *phone* and being made to promise herself exclusively to José, is significant. Carmen must either commit to being imprisoned or commit to being exclusive with Don José. It is here that the narrative and dramaturgical apparatuses strive to renormalize her transgressive body.

With this in mind, we may echo Susan McClary and ask: "Why was Bizet determined to compose this opera in the *opéra-comique* form—featuring spoken dialogue and easily excerpted songs and dance numbers—when he was so critical of the form?"¹⁷ As McClary argues, the form enables Bizet to amplify the tension between speech and song. I would add that it also allows Bizet to thematize Carmen's liminal position in regard to speech and song, the diegetic and extradiegetic. When Carmen seduces, she conjures the orchestra to "sing for herself," to sing *herself*, to draw attention to her vocalic-body. It is as though Carmen demands of José, "Do you see what I'm saying?" with the synesthetic outline of her gyrating body. Voice, body, and dance are imbricated and exploited in order to explode the boundaries of metaphysical oppositions. McClary suggests that "Bizet does not have Carmen dance merely to gratify the ballet-loving Parisian public: her swinging hips—which are alien to ballet—are

¹⁷McClary, *Georges Bizet: Carmen*, 45.

a crucial issue in the opera.”¹⁸ *Opéra-comique* form allows for the re/creation and decontextualization of the femme fatale. The excerpted dance numbers of *opéra-comique* are synecdoches that threaten to mutilate and disseminate the vocalic-corporeal Carmen. The catchiness of their “kitsch” tunes spurs our mind’s ear like an intrusive parasite. In order to become a transgressive figure, Carmen must first create a distance between her object(s) of desire and herself. By synchronizing the orchestra with the gyrations of her hips and by making the otherwise out-of-earshot orchestra audible, she creates metaphysical distance . . . *disdanse* . . . *Dis! Danse!*

Carmen embodies a paradoxical logic; she achieves material existence only in the moment that she escapes from the narrative stage-world. Perhaps this is how the sensual wires of Carmen were crossed. Her body, as site of infection, is cross-contaminated with all sorts of senses; this synesthesia becomes a figure for the going-between of the femme fatale. Opera understands itself as a genre of self-severance, hell-bent on immunizing itself against being misled. Nevertheless, opera is susceptible to intrusions from the Other-world. The call from the Other-world, from what Abbate calls the noumenal, is represented by Carmen’s body, which deconstructs the seemingly hermetically sealed (hermeneutically sealed) interiority of the operatic stage-world. Body and text are intertwined where the text conjures the subject of the poem in the seeing and not the saying of the text.¹⁹

The theoretical formulations put forth in this article allow for broader explications of the femme fatale’s tropology. Not only does this framework allow me to critique an unhealthy dependence upon the divided worlds of the opera stage—the conception of noumenal and phenomenal as separate entities—but it also undermines the rigid parallel oppositions of voice and text, music and language, excess and lack. It

creates a space in which we might ask why the musical idiolect of the Dance of the Seven Veils in Strauss’s *Salome* sounds so jarringly out of place. For whom are these femmes fatales *really* dancing? By asking these questions, we begin to undermine the *to-be-looked-at-ness* of the femme fatale; we move away from the operation of the gaze and toward a vocalic framework. And we begin to untangle gnarled conceptions of the voice and consent (we don’t have earlids after all), so that voice stands an entry point to musical hermeneutics, to the role of seductive voice in opera, and to voice as a way of manipulating selfhood.

BODILY CHARM/BODILY HARM

Salome, the character and the story, presents a palimpsestic view of feminine agency, the power of voice, and shifting ideas of Self. We are presented with a story of necrophilia, thinly veiled incest, seduction, suicide, murder, and blasphemy. We are also presented with a story that has, over the years, garnered fervent criticism, has been banned from various opera houses and theater stages, and has been met with charges of indecency and degeneracy. In equal proportion, the various renderings of Salome have been lauded as a vanguard not only in the sense that Strauss’s *Salome* was deemed a compositional modernist manifesto,²⁰ but also in that they began to represent a female anti-heroine who reflected growing discontent among Austro-Hungarian women. As Bryan Gilliam has elucidated, Strauss’s compositional oeuvre changed with *Salome*; Strauss featured women as central characters from *Salome* onward.²¹

This shift, Gilliam argues, is motivated by three factors: “personal and artistic attraction to the female voice”; the “huge marketing potential of writing for women”—especially with the

²⁰Richard Strauss’s Dresden premiere (1905) was attended by luminaries such as Gustav Mahler, Giacomo Puccini, Alexander Zemlinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, and Alban Berg. Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 14.

²¹Bryan Gilliam, *Rounding Wagner’s Mountain: Richard Strauss and Modern German Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 61–63.

¹⁸Ibid., 56.

¹⁹“Carmen,” the name, puts us within the semantic field of the *carmen figaratum*, a synesthetic literary form that visually depicts the subject of the poem by using text placement—a sort of sacred Renaissance calligram.

growing popularity of the *femme nouvelle*;²² and the centrality of women as a means for Strauss to distance himself from Wagner, “whose worldview focused more on male heroes, with the woman serving as a redeeming force.”²³ Salome presented a figure that could be rallied around as a symbol of social agency and social change—a character that paralleled the political message of suffragists.²⁴ The purpose of the next two sections is to undertake a critical genealogy of the story and the character Salome, looking particularly at the way in which her voice—as both a metaphor and a pure, uncanny (*unheimlich*) phenomenological entity—is transformed throughout various literary and operatic depictions. How does Salome, through voicing, transgress and fashion Self (and indeed manipulate and destroy the self/other binary), seduce other characters, and usurp patriarchal power?

Recent conceptualizations of the *femme fatale* and her function as a narrative trope are sometimes divorced from the historical discourse surrounding the figure. Robert Brussel remarked of the 1905 Dresden performance of *Salome* that “it was difficult to judge the work other than *physically* [italics in original].”²⁵ Reviewing a Parisian performance of *Salome* in 1910, Adolphe Aderer writes: “[The music of *Salome*] entered us like a brutal invasion.”²⁶ Similarly, Pierre Lalo complains of *Salome* that it creates “the fever, the delirium, the fury which acts on the listener like rapid and violent shocks and leaves him debilitated, annihilated,

and vanquished.”²⁷ From these contemporary voices, it is clear that the *femme fatale* and the modernist compositional style associated with depictions of her are bound up with ideas of material presence. It is necessary to acknowledge that these critics are indeed addressing the music and the physicality of its dissonant and excessive sonorities. Nevertheless, this foregrounding of the body and its sensual material properties are often lost in current discussions of the *femme fatale*.

In the “Exergue” of Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, Derrida contends that philosophy has always been predicated on the “metaphysics of presence.” That is, philosophy, without questioning the binding structures of inquiry, has agreed that there is a primary presence, an originary Truth. If we blindly follow logic or reason far enough we will arrive at a universal, unmediated answer. Derrida continues to state that there is no unitary unmediated Truth; instead, there are only supplements—supplements that both substitute and/or augment a partial presence. Mary Ann Doane takes up this line of thought to argue that “woman is truth only insofar as it diverges from itself, is not reducible to the evidence of self-presence, multiplies its surfaces, and produces frames within frames.” In *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, and Psychoanalysis*, Doane asserts that the deception of the *femme fatale* is unconscious, blind, and “absolutely necessary in order to allow and maintain the man’s idealization of her” as his perfect object.²⁸ The insistence upon the woman’s inability to control her own body, plus the fact that “she does not *know*,” is rooted in a system that seems to assert that there is a transcendental essence that propels her actions.²⁹ In this sense, the conception of the *femme fatale*

²²See Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 63–74. See also Chris Weedon, *Gender, Feminism, and Fiction in Germany, 1840–1914* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 12.

²³Gilliam, *Rounding Wagner’s Mountain*, 62.

²⁴Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome’s Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 106.

²⁵“Il était difficile de juger l’œuvre autrement que *physiquement*.” Robert Brussel, “Théâtre-Lyrique de la Gaité,” *Le Figaro* 56, no. 113, 3 (23 April 1910): 5. (Italics in original.) Cited in Megan Coe, *Composing Symbolism’s Musicality of Language in Fin-de-siècle France* (PhD diss., University of North Texas, 2016), 95.

²⁶“La musique . . . entrainait chez nous comme une brutale invasion.” Adolphe Aderer, “Premières Représentations, Théâtre-Lyrique de la Gaité,” *Le Petit Parisien* 35, no. 12, 229 (23 April 1910): 2.

²⁷“Cette *Salomé* nouvelle ne déchaînera pas sur vous la frénésie qui possède la *Salomé* allemande, la fièvre, le délire, la furie qui agissent sur l’auditeur comme par des chocs précipités et violents, et le laissent à la fin terrassé, anéanti et vaincu.” Pierre Lalo, “La Musique,” *Le Temps* (4 May 1910), 3.

²⁸Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 59.

²⁹*Ibid.* Doane’s italicization of “know” possibly signals that the *femme fatale* is an instinctual being—one who operates through some bodily epistemology of feeling, of “divin[ing].”

according to Doane is still implicated within the metaphysics of presence. Doane suggests that there is something wholly Other—perhaps the omniscient master hand of the composer or the gaze of an other—that compels the femme fatale to act. However, this thesis is complicated by a number of cases that will be addressed below.

The default view of the femme fatale is that of a cold, calculating woman who stands for “destruction rather than creativity.”³⁰ She is charged with being a symbol of the degeneracy and disintegration of European society—a manifestation of masculine anxieties. In the same vein, it is theorized that this disintegration and fragmentation allow the female body to act as a tabula rasa. But the presence of the body cannot be ignored. We are compelled to consider the materiality of the femme fatale’s body, especially—to return to *Salome*—as Strauss makes a point of featuring the Dance of the Seven Veils and of narrativizing the bodily charm of the young seductress. The femme fatale is no longer one who functions as pure spectacle—lacking substance or essence. She does not represent psychic lack, but instead represents pure presence in a way that accentuates the artificiality of all other characters. The claim that the power of the femme fatale resides in her “unknowability” is one that I consider to be a critical misreading of the modernist (and even postmodern) femme fatale. On the contrary, the femme fatale represents pure material presence. Doane equates the femme fatale (and woman writ large) with a figure who lacks metaphysical Truth. She writes that there is “a certain slippage . . . by means of which the female body becomes an absolute tabula rasa of sorts: anything and everything can be written on it.”³¹ So we have a sense that the femme fatale herself is either everything or nothing. Doane seems to argue that the femme fatale is a nothing with the ability to become more than what she is. However, this formulation ignores the

materiality of the femme fatale’s body, and particularly of her voice, and argues instead that the femme fatale’s “agency” is a pre-coded unconsciousness that she merely acts out. Doane writes, “Her dissembling is not a conscious strategy. She has no knowledge of it or access to it as an operation.”³² But if we work with the voice as opposed to the gaze, if we question the certification of her subjectivity by the other, we may find that the femme fatale can exist for herself. She can assume her self because she can hear herself singing. And it is her radical self-sufficiency that enables the re-presentation of herself in various contexts, in various media, in various worlds (noumenal/phenomenal, stage/orchestra). The femme fatale trope is the cut that binds.

GAINING VOICE AND EXCEEDING SELF

The literary origins of *Salome* derive from a few short biblical passages, Mark 6:17–29 and Matthew 14:3–11.³³ In these mentions, she is merely referred to as the “daughter of Herodias.” Already we see that she is a subdued character, lacking a name, lacking a voice—a lackey. She is depicted as a silent nigh-marionette controlled by her mother. Salome dances for her stepfather (Herod), at her mother’s insistence, and when he asks what Salome would like in return, she scuttles off to ask her mother who says, “The head of John the Baptist.” Until the Oscar Wilde play (*Salomé*, 1891), the muffled agency of the daughter of Herodias remained; Salome acted primarily under the influence of her mother. Just as Salome was rendered narratively mute, her dance was euphemized, understated, ignored, or altogether extracted from the telling of the story such that Salome’s body could easily be ignored. Udo Kultermann writes: “While Wilde had given the figure Salome an identity, Strauss gave her the chance of a voice and dance, both defining

³⁰George Ross Ridge, “The ‘Femme Fatale’ in French Decadence,” *The French Review*, 34, no. 4 (Feb. 1961): 352–60, here 353.

³¹Doane, *Femmes Fatales*, 170.

³²Ibid., 59.

³³For a detailed account of the literary origins of *Salome*, see Mario Praz, “Salome in Literary Tradition,” in *Richard Strauss: Salome*, ed. Derrick Puffett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 11–20.

in extreme and challenging forms within her person a new dimension of female reality."³⁴

I understand this dimension to be a paradoxical voice (the Dance has no spoken or sung text) that is granted to Salome through the inclusion of the Dance of the Seven Veils. The Dance reifies her as both a femme fatale and as a figure of liberated femininity. Voice granted to Salome in a nonvocalized instance of dance underscores the possibility of a voice being outsourced to the orchestra. The coopting and expansion of the phenomenological Self to parts of the accompanying orchestra (what Abbate would refer to as the noumenal) allow for Salome to give voice without vocalizing. She annexes the sonic domain of the orchestra in order to seduce. That is to say, although Salome is seemingly mute, she voices herself via the orchestral accompaniment, which is usually thought to be extradiegetic, out of earshot for the characters.

Another point of Kultermann's claim is that Salome toggles between depictions of *virtus* and *voluptas*, innocence and harlotry,³⁵ dangerous femininity and transgressive femininity. He writes that what Strauss and Wilde give to Salome is "a conscious and successful personality [that] no longer [fit] into the social frame of subordination and passivity, it was [this] growing awareness of specific powers which when used appropriately could lead to the achievements of goals."³⁶ Salome became the figure of the *femme nouvelle*. Petra Dierkes-Thrun, in *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression*, argues that Wilde's *Salomé* does not produce a story indebted to the social codes of the fin de siècle; rather, it transgresses—exceeds the normative forms and styles of the Victorian era—and produces something wholly Other. Wilde's play presents a narrative outside the norms of sexuality, gender, metaphysics of transcendence, and modesty—a narrative that disrupts the tropologies of its era's concepts of woman.

The idea of transgression by means of the body, gender, sexuality, and excess is one that

³⁴Udo Kultermann, "The 'Dance of the Seven Veils': Salome and Erotic Culture around 1900," *Artibus et Historiae* 27, no. 53 (2006): 197.

³⁵Ibid., 194.

³⁶Ibid., 211.

harbors the potential for deconstructing the trope of the femme fatale. The concept, as derived from the Marquis de Sade, Georges Bataille, and Michel Foucault, refers to the exploitation of excess in a way that brings into question the discursive limits inscribed on a subject.³⁷ In transgressing—literally "crossing over"—the transgressive subject gains critical insight into the imposed practices that are scripted onto Being. Therefore, I argue that Strauss's Salome uses her chameleon-like ability to voice in order to accentuate the discursive limits of her identity, where, as Alfie Brown observes, "moments of transgression encompass a renunciation of one's identity by breaking those limits that guarantee the identification of the subject within the social body."³⁸ This notion of excess and taboo is a way of redrafting or calling into question boundaries of self. Salome and the femme fatale reject erasure as a termination of self and reformulates it as a "constant erasure of stable meanings and beliefs." The result is a productive evaporation of self, an "a-logical explosion of signs," and a "desire free from fixed subjectivity."³⁹

LACK REVISITED

Within a sonic bodily framework, we may begin to reconceive of voice as distanced from ideas of psychological lack; voice is no longer bound to lack.⁴⁰ By arguing against this theoretical mainstay, we can begin to ask how reconceptualization beyond and outside lack might liberate operatic stagings, alter onstage depictions of femininity (dangerous or otherwise), and reimagine the role of body as more than spectacle. The femme fatale, particularly the modernist manifestation of her, rejects becoming an embodiment of lack. Nevertheless, lack is something necessarily tied to desire. For example, the voice of John the Baptist—acousmatic, emanating

³⁷Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, 9.

³⁸Alfie Brown, "Losing the Self: Transgressing in Lawrence and Bataille," *Études Lawrenciennes* 43 (2012): 259–80.

³⁹Chrysanthi Nigianni, "Butterfly Kiss: The Contagious Kiss of Becoming-Lesbian," in *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, ed. Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 169–70.

⁴⁰Alice Lagaay, "Between Sound and Silence: Voice in the History of Psychoanalysis," *E-pisteme* 1, no. 1 (2008): 53–62.

from the cistern—is the dramatization of an abyss that is plentiful. It is an abyss that is not empty. It is an abyss that excites desire in Salome. This deconstruction of presence/absence and lack/plenitude is what the trope of the femme fatale embodies in her drive toward material presence. According to Doane, the system of lack and phallic acquisition is such that: “The initial relation to the mother [Herodias] . . . is too full, too immediate, too present. This undifferentiated plenitude must be fissured through the introduction of lack before representation can be assured, since representation entails the absence of the desired object.”⁴¹ We can understand the coming-to-voice of Salome over the course of her musico-literary genealogy as a progressive departure from a metaphorical system of lack. Salome as a “foil” character, at first nameless and ventriloquized by her mother, morphs into a character who defiantly remarks, “I do not heed the voice of my mother. ’Tis for mine own pleasure that I ask the head of Jochanaan.”⁴²

The portrayals of Salome in the Romantic era, some bleeding into the post-Romantic/modernist era, depict Salome as the virtuous “little Immaculate Conception” who innocently asks that John the Baptist be absolved and not executed by Herod.⁴³ In Massenet’s *Hérodiade* (1881),⁴⁴ Salome admits her love of the prophet (here named Jean) and Herod spitefully sentences her to death alongside him. Salome pleads with Herodias to pardon him since he raised her in the absence of her mother who, at this point, is yet to be revealed as Herodias. As the scene progresses, Jean’s death becomes increasingly imminent. Poignantly, Herodias remains silent in response to Salome’s request; and it is her silence that is the impetus for three plot points: (1) Salome threatens to stab and kill Herodias who, in a fit of panic, reveals that she is Salome’s mother; (2) Jean is executed without

fanfare and without Salome’s knowing it until too late; (3) Salome, ever-determined to die alongside Jean, commits suicide. It is almost an inverted Oedipal tragedy. Salome progresses from an initial relation to the mother that is “too full,” to a relationality that is fissured by an alignment with her object of desire (Jean). Subsequently, with the modernist figuration of Salome, she exists insatiably in search of her object of desire, as evidenced by her dissatisfaction even after kissing the head of John the Baptist in the final monologue of Strauss’s opera.

This hermeneutic of the genealogy of Salome extends the conception of lack outlined by Michèle Montrelay who writes that “the repression that ensures that one does not think, nor see, nor take the desired object, even and above all if it is within reach: this object must remain lost.”⁴⁵ At its most developed, the figure of Salome translates that necessary lack into a point of affirmation.

At this point, it seems that the development of the Salome trope coincides with a struggle toward possession of the symbolic phallus.⁴⁶ In order to become a transgressive figure, within the psychoanalytic theory of lack, Salome must first create the distance dividing her from her object(s) of desire. Toril Moi explains, “Anything that is not shaped on the pattern of the Phallus is defined as chaotic, fragmented, negative, or non-existent.”⁴⁷ But it is precisely the broken up and fragmented object that allows for re/creation and decontextualization in the modernist era.

Salome is portrayed in seminal scholarship elsewhere as something of a Freudian/Lacanian phallic mother.⁴⁸ Kramer reads Salome’s final kiss,

⁴⁵Michèle Montrelay, “Inquiry into Femininity,” *m/f* 1 (1978): 89.

⁴⁶This would seem to be the case when Abbate argues that the Dance of the Seven Veils is precisely so gauche because it reveals that underneath the veils Salome possesses a penis. Carolyn Abbate, “Opera, or the Envoicing of Women,” 267.

⁴⁷Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 2nd edn. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 66.

⁴⁸See especially Lawrence Kramer, “One Coughs, the Other Dances: Freud, Strauss, and the Perversity of Modern Life,” *Musicological Annual* 45, no. 2 (May 2009): 33–44, here 38. Kramer connects Salome’s dance with an effort to wield in bodily form the sovereign power of the word.

⁴¹Doane, *Femmes Fatales*, 171.

⁴²Oscar Wilde, *Salome: A Tragedy in One Act*, trans. Lord Alfred Douglas (New York: Heritage Press, 1945 [1891]), 44.

⁴³Richard Ellmann, “Overtures to Wilde’s Salomé,” in *Richard Strauss: Salome*, ed. Derrick Puffett, 19.

⁴⁴*Hérodiade* is based on the story “Hérodiade” (1877) by Gustav Flaubert. The libretto was penned by Paul Milliet and Henri Grémont.

as both a stylized (symbolic) act of fellatio and an appropriation of phallogocentric institutions of power—writing, rationality, speech, and *logos*—by a character who has been preoccupied with the prophet's mouth. Salome has not only narratively usurped language, but has symbolically seized the phallus for herself.⁴⁹

The depiction of Salome as one who pounces on her objects of desire—who implicates them in a system of a disadvantaged “power differential” by wielding the phallus under the cloak of a nurturer—leads to perceptions of her actions as dangerous, disingenuous, meretricious. It is the sensation of being lied to, of witnessing a bait-and-switch, that is so perturbing. Diane Davis writes that “the nourishment the Mother offers is not free-flowing nor freely given; it is as paralyzing, as fixating, as solidifying as the Father's Law.”⁵⁰ Such vociferous and ferocious backlash toward Salome could be symptomatic of Julia Kristeva's formulation that “the Phallic Mother is even more dangerous than the Primitive Father precisely because . . . her phallus is *always* veiled.”⁵¹

SEDUCTION AS SELF-REIFICATION

The subject is neither prior nor exterior in relation to the outside; it is (if we choose to speak of the subject, that is) much rather, *sujet au dehors*, as we can put it in French [and in English: “subject to the outside”].⁵²

One of the earliest examples of seduction as a process of self-reification and exhibition of dominion over the noumenal orchestra is the seduction scene of G. F. Handel's *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (1724). In this scene, the start of act II, we see a disguised (read: veiled) Cleopatra singing in an effort to seduce Caesar. Cleopatra praises Caesar's eyes (“v'adoro pupille”) and for

maximal effect, she summons an onstage orchestra to amplify her seduction aria. The onstage orchestra, which is heard by the *dramatis personae*, features harp, theorbo, strings (including viola da gamba), and winds. Cleopatra conjures the orchestra and places it in the immanent stage-world of the characters, in order to signal a way out for Caesar—a way out of an imminent assassination plot, but also a metaphysical way out of the stage-world.

In this seduction aria, Nicola Francesco Haym, the librettist for *Giulio Cesare*, defers to the ocular as the superlative sense. Perhaps Haym's regard of the ocular is merely owed to historical context, that of Greco-Roman antiquity. After all, Heraclitus wrote: “The eyes are more exact witnesses than the ears.” This ocularcentrism, however, began to crumble during the fin de siècle and fractured during the modernist era.⁵³ Even so, we may discern similarities between Cleopatra's “V'adoro pupille” and Dalila's voice-centered “Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix.”⁵⁴ Both are synecdochal laudations of a lover's body; both women describe the penetration of their bodies by the piercing gaze or mellifluous voice that is metaphorically linked to Cupid's arrows (Cleopatra: *v'adoro, pupille, saette d'amore*; Delilah: *la flèche est moins rapide à porter le trépas, que ne l'est ton amante*);⁵⁵ both, too, describe the tumescence of the bosom at the sight or hearing of the Other. But the similarities end at a crucial point. The Saint-Saëns aria is not simply vocal rather than ocular. It decisively moves away from the ocular and toward the vocal, the sonic, the bodily. Saint-Saëns's femme fatale has done her job well. More fully than Cleopatra, she has seduced the characters onstage away from the stage-world toward a totalizing abyss.

⁴⁹Lawrence Kramer, “Modernity's Cutting Edge: The Salome Complex,” in *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 138.

⁵⁰D. Diane Davis, *Breaking Up [at] Totality: A Rhetoric of Laughter* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 219.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Jean-Luc Nancy and Roxanne Lapidus, “Rühren, Berühren, Aufruhr,” *SubStance* 40, no. 3, 126 (2011): 10–17.

⁵³Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (London: Wiley-Academy, 2005 [2007]), 15. See also Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁵⁴Translation: “My heart opens to your voice.”

⁵⁵Cleopatra: “I adore you, eyes, bolts of love” / Delilah: “the arrow is less quick in bringing demise than your love is” (trans. mine).

Affirmation of the Will must be properly called Affirmation of the Body.⁵⁶

The Dance of the Seven Veils represents an exceptional moment in *Salome* and in post-Romantic opera writ large because it forms an extended period of vocal silence that represents the climax of the narrative structure. The Dance was the last thing Strauss composed for this opera; the opera score was finished 20 June 1905 and the Dance was completed sometime in August of that same year. Though it may seem counterintuitive, within an argument championing the materiality of the voice, that I should now turn my focus to an episode of silence, it is within this Dance that we witness the voice being transmitted to the orchestra. It is not that Salome is silent per se, rather she has embodied another voice—a voice that is wordless and ineffable, pure song. "Pure song" becomes that which is "spotlighted as a diegetic insertion (or intrusion) . . . that transcends the opera's narrative altogether."⁵⁷ Salome becomes a type of music that stupefies and seizes control of the orchestral forces, the onstage characters, and the metaphysical confines of the operatic stage.

The one-act opera *Salome* is implicitly divided into five scenes. The Dance of the Seven Veils functions as a climactic interlude between the two parts of scene 4; it furthers the drama. It is a diegetic display of a dance; all of the characters onstage witness it. Historically, the Dance was often performed by a body double and the audience beheld the (sometimes quite distinct) multiplication of bodies that resulted. It has since become customary for sopranos to perform the Dance themselves.

The structure of the Dance is a closed one: introduction, three subsections, and coda. The instrumentation is elaborate and includes a large percussion battery. In its use of two harps and E_♭ clarinet, it mimics the orchestration of the

Witches Sabbath movement in Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. The allusion is apt, given that Berlioz's piece with its famous *idée fixe* is a musical portrait of obsession, or monomania, as the nineteenth century called it,⁵⁸ while the Dance of the Seven Veils is the bodily and sonic working out of a monomania for the head of John the Baptist. Strauss uses a variety of leitmotivic technique where Berlioz uses the *idée fixe*. Strauss's Dance is fixated on the idea of recontextualizing, reinterpreting, and transforming motivic material.

In the literary lineage of the story of Salome by Heine, Flaubert, Huysmans, Laforgue, Massenet, and Mallarmé there is no mention of a veil. Wilde differentiated himself by adding it, almost certainly on the basis of two paintings by Gustave Moreau that show Salome's body, but not her face, covered in a diaphanous veil. Wilde, in the Dance, creates an intertextual collage that Theodore Ziolkowski has linked to the Sumerian myth of Ishtar and Tammuz (which mentions seven gates of the underworld) wherein Ishtar must shed an article of clothing, or a worldly possession and symbol of power, to pass through each gate.⁵⁹

Wilde writes, in the illustrated version of the play, a dedication to artist Aubrey Beardsley that reads, "For the only artist who, besides myself, knows what the dance of the seven veils is and can see that invisible dance."⁶⁰ Elsewhere, Wilde writes that "[Salome's] dance was more metaphysical than physical."⁶¹ The lofty statements seem at odds with the absence of specificity in the Wilde script; all he writes is "Salome dances the

⁵⁸"Monomania was named by [Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol] around 1810, and by the 1820's 'monomania' had already percolated down to the nonmedical French intelligentsia and [had] been incorporated into their language." Cristina Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria: Neurosis, Mysticism, and Gender in European Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 68.

⁵⁹Theodore Ziolkowski, "The Veil as Myth and Metaphor," *Religion & Literature* 4, no. 2 (2008): 61–81.

⁶⁰Richard Allen Cave, "Staging Salome's Dance in Wilde's Play and Strauss's Opera," in *Refiguring Oscar Wilde's Salome*, ed. Michael Y. Bennett (New York: Rodopi, 2011), 146.

⁶¹Maria Marcsek-Fuchs, "Literature and Dance: Intermedial Encounters," *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature, Image, Sound, Music*, ed. Gabriele Rippl (Boston: de Gruyter, 2015), 579. Originally quoted in Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

⁵⁶Richard Strauss, Diary Entry (4 February 1893, Luxor, Egypt).

⁵⁷William Cheng, "Opera *en abyme*: The Prodigious Ritual of Korngold's *Die tote Stadt*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 22/2 (2010): 115–46, here 129.

dance of the seven veils" as a stage direction. (*Salomé danse la danse des sept voiles.*) When considering the veil, we might ask what Salome is revealing. What is Wilde imploring us to see (or not see), and how does Strauss orchestrate Wilde's artistic vision? With no explicit mention of musical accompaniment in this moment of the play, we may question if any incidental music was meant to take place at all. With Wilde's mention of the invisible dance and its metaphysical quality, it seems reasonable to assume the dance was performed in silence or that some dramaturgical deceit ensued or was desired.

Strauss, on the other hand, took great care to supply music—and not just any music. Strauss writes a ten-minute orchestral tone poem to accompany the onstage dance in a musical style that drastically contrasts with the musical style surrounding. That the Dance is written in a high Romantic style, reminiscent of (kitschy?) Wagner, has implications for Strauss's modernist aesthetic vision.⁶² The implications of Strauss's move are threefold. First, Strauss differentiates himself from Wagner, in a textbook case of the anxiety of influence. Second, he chooses to represent the moment of this striptease and tawdry drama with a waltz. Salome dances to this frenzied waltz which connotes propriety, but historically connoted lewdness, as it was described as an indecent gyrating dance that drew people too close together.⁶³ The waltz also suggests cultural associations with Vienna, where Strauss envisioned the premiere of the opera. Could this combination of lewdness and cultural iconicity be Strauss's way of commenting on the current sociopolitical climate of Austria-Hungary at the turn of the century? Third, perhaps Strauss was orchestrating silence—as a way of remarking that the style of high Romanticism had become ubiquitous. The music of the Dance positions the audience to hear it as the characters do, with the addition of our awareness of its anomalousness. We are placed in the subject positions of the stage characters who only witness the

dancing body of Salome, unaccompanied, literally or figuratively undressed. For the audience, the music has at once become pure ambience, and the audience—who has up to this point been uninitiated into the drama—is interpellated in the zoned out, "music-drowned" world of the stage.

STRAUSS'S DISTANZ

The individual is not a substance, but exists and constitutes itself by entering various roles.⁶⁴

Looking more closely at Strauss's conception of the dance scene, we find more evidence that he is distancing (this time, *dis-tanz*) himself from the legacy of Wagner and high Romanticism. In the manuscript, Strauss drafts a kind of choreography for Salome during the Dance. A stage direction reads: "Salome rises to her full height and makes a sign to the musicians. They subdue their wild rhythm instantly and lead on to a soft and swaying tune."⁶⁵ This functions as a rejection of the veiled orchestra that Wagner created as part of his *Gesamtkunstwerk* vision. The orchestra, which Wagner hid visually in a pit below the stage, is now summoned by Salome as though she were shining a beam of moonlight upon it. Strauss demands that we view Salome as conjuring up authority over the orchestra and even perhaps appointing the orchestra as a character within the drama. The orchestra is no longer heard as an extradiegetic source of sound, no longer as motivically depicting the unconscious motivations of characters, *pace* Wagner. Salome draws attention to the artifice of the stage drama—a metatheatrical move. She underscores Strauss's affectation. And the music, kitschy though it may be, was meant to mollify the Viennese audience. It is in this way that Salome implicates the audience; so when Herod closes the opera, shouting "Man tötet dieses Weib!" is he not addressing the audience as well as his

⁶²Robin Holloway, "Salome: Art or Kitsch?" in *Richard Strauss: Salome*, ed. Derrick Puffett, 145–64.

⁶³Mark Knowles, *The Wicked Waltz and Other Scandalous Dances: Outrage at Couple Dancing in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), esp. 3, 22.

⁶⁴Michel Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, trans. Michael Gendre (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 95.

⁶⁵"Jetzt richtet sich Salome hoch auf und gibt den Musikanten ein Zeichen, worauf der wilde Rhythmus sofort abgedämpft [*sic*] wird und in eine sanft wiegende überleitet."

troops? “*Tu es cette femme!*” (You are that woman)?⁶⁶

This crucial moment in the opera occurs where words cease in deference to pure materiality. Salome no longer submits to the rhetoric of the orchestra or musical language. She speaks through a language of the body. Does this align with the trope of the femme fatale as usurper of language? Or does this exemplify the paradox that Karmen MacKendrick explains when she asks, “Have we been wrong all along to insist that it matters who is speaking, to insist on the materiality of the voice, when the persona that speaks through seems so capable of multiple embodiments?”⁶⁷ Or perhaps the dance alludes to a sort of *écriture féminine*, the rhetoric of the feminine body that is extralogical, anti-phallogocentric; it would then make sense that the Dance not fit within the sound-world of the rest of the opera, and would explain why the Dance sounds so compositionally distant from the rest of Strauss’s operatic composition.

Contemporary critics and audience members described the composition’s landscape as full of “clashing chords” and “violent dissonances.”⁶⁸ To be fair, for the audience of the early 1900s, this is an even-handed critique; Strauss was after something decidedly abrasive and set apart from Wagner. But curiously, the Dance of the Seven Veils sounds different—disturbingly so. It is, as


⁶⁶Wilde’s French entails a pun: “*Tuez cette femme*” (Kill that woman) coincides with “*Tu es cette femme*” (You are that woman). Strauss’s “negotiation” with the French play is often overlooked. He painstakingly readapted his opera and set it in French with the help of Romain Rolland. We cannot discount the likelihood that Strauss was aware of the French ending and of Wilde’s symbolist aesthetic aims. Strauss wrote to Rolland: “Now, a request: You know that I have finished a *Salomé*, adapted from Oscar Wilde. The composition concerned is a setting of a French text. Oscar Wilde originally wrote *Salomé* in French, and it is his original text which I want to use for my composition. I cannot entrust this work to a translator, but I wish to preserve Wilde’s original, word for word; that is why the musical phrases must be adapted to the French text. When I have finished it, who will be able to check that I haven’t done violence to the French language?” See Richard Strauss, *Richard Strauss & Romain Rolland, Correspondence*, ed. and trans. Rollo Myers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 29.

⁶⁷Karmen MacKendrick, *The Matter of Voice: Sensual Soundings* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 128–29.

⁶⁸Pierre Lalo, *Le Temps*, 14 May 1907.

Joseph Kerman remarks, “the sort [of music] associated with vintage Hollywood extravaganzas in a near-Eastern setting.” In this instance, Strauss’s saccharine compositional style (“sugary orgasm” according to Kerman) breaks the fourth wall as it counters the conventions of the surrounding operatic language.⁶⁹

We are thus confronted with another seemingly paradoxical issue. If Salome is unveiling herself—quite literally removing her veils—and we accept that she is outsourcing herself to the accompaniment of the orchestra, which Salome are we getting? In unveiling, Salome reveals and (re)veils herself. The operation of the veil usually suggests that gazing upon the wearer becomes a mode of possession—a kind of ocular interpolation. However, this model is contingent upon the Other’s recognition of the femme fatale. But what about the function of the veil as not only dissimulation but *dissimilation*—becoming less like and less dependent upon the Other?

The compositional language that Strauss employs throughout the opera is motivic. Emotions, characters, and even physical possessions have motives aligned with them. Salome, as *improvisatrice*, weaves and unweaves the motives together into a dizzying and grotesque pastiche of high Romanticism during the Dance. It is a compression of *all* the motives presented in the opera such that this interlude actually functions like an overture? Of course, the one-act opera strangely lacks an overture, an intermission, and divisions between scenes. If this indeed functions as an overture, an overture to what? An overture that symbolizes the presentation of the body as pure materiality—unveiled? An overture that symbolizes the coming-into-personhood of Salome? An overture that demonstrates Salome’s ability to manipulate the orchestra, to synthesize all the synecdochic representations of characters into mere motives at her disposal? It is as if Salome were declaring: You are nothing but a motif—I am an overture. 

⁶⁹Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama: New and Revised Edition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 210. Lawrence Gilman, “Strauss’s *Salome*: Its Art and Its Morals,” in Gilman, *Aspects of Modern Opera: Estimates and Inquiries* (New York: John Lane, 1909), 77–79.

Abstract.

Operatic versions of the femme fatale, the preeminent figure of European modernist aesthetics, compel and allure because we witness her coming into material presence through the course of her opera. Through vocalizing, the femme fatale manifests her corporeality under imminent threats of erasure by coopting and manipulating the offstage world as represented

by the orchestra. The Seguidilla seduction scene in George Bizet's *Carmen* and the "Dance of the Seven Veils" in Richard Strauss's *Salome* raise the question of how subjectivity and material presence, especially of the femme fatale character, are depicted sonically, dramaturgically, and metaphysically. Keywords: Richard Strauss, George Bizet, *Salome*, femme fatale, dance, Seven Veils

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