

## Windbags and Skinsongs

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This was written as a chapter for my *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion 2004) but expanded to such a size that there was no room for it. This is part 1 of 9 parts. Some of the material from it was given as a lecture entitled [Seeing to Sound: The Displaying of Marsyas](#), at the University of Nottingham, 16 October, 2002. Section 8: [With the Help of Your Good Hands](#) has been separately published in the *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), pp. 67-76. When another version of the material was given as a lecture at the [Skin: Texture/Textuality/Word/Image](#) conference at the University of London [Institute of English Studies](#), 14 May 2004, it was introduced by this preface:

The skin has been on at me, and I have been about it, for some 7 or 8 years, but there was a time, hard though it may be to conceive, when the very idea of thinking and writing so sustainedly and singlemindedly about such a subject seemed outlandish, implausible and in every way enticingly ill-advised. Even so, I can distinctly remember, when I was still at the beginning of my tether with the skin, and the subject lay all before me, feeling a distinct gust of dismay, as I realised how perfectly and providentially the skin could be, and surely would be made to function as the bearer for our relentlessly intracurricular thinking in the humanities, allowing us to carry on all our clamorous commotions about identity, difference, race, gender, inscription, power, trauma, otherness and other such prepossessions, especially the last, in all the clammy narcissism that permits us to speak at such length about the otherness of the skin, without mentioning the name of a single (other) animal. I should have known then, and in a way did, that there was no prospect of this frail, fickle, silly familiar of ours bearing up against all this discursive duress, and that the skin was for it. But I spilled my 140,000 words nevertheless, trying first of all to write the skin into this curriculum, and then, catching from its success, secession, to write it out, digging secret passages and scooping places for my skin and I to hide out from the hue and cry.

*What follows are some exfoliations from what is by far the longest chapter I wrote for my book, *The Book of Skin*, and my favourite chapter from it. 'From' is the right preposition though, because the thing is, the chapter is not actually in *The Book of Skin*, since Michael Leaman gently floated it off from the final manuscript, saying rightly that it seemed to belong to a different book, something I was happy to go along with, precisely because it was my favourite and I wasn't ready for it to leave home. And maybe the real reason it was my favourite is because it represented such a obvious and protracted byblow, a sort of defection from a book that in any case had come more and more to be made up of diversions. It is a chapter about the sounds of the skin and particularly those sounds that arise from the skin's intriguing with the air. For the fact is that the skin, or the living skin at any rate, always has air on either side of it, and is therefore truly a mid-air matter. The chapter is borne*

*on this notion, which also, I now see, initiated the enquiry I have been inching into ever since, into the [air](#).*

*So I am preparing to go back on the skin by way of a piece of thinking or writing that got me out of it. Or so I say. For, thinking about this talk, which I promise I will in a moment, in the end, begin giving, I suddenly remembered yesterday what it was that first made me think it might be possible to go in for the skin in a serious way in the first place. It wasn't a bruise, or a scar, or a tattoo, and it wasn't Kafka or Beckett or Stelarc or Princess Di or any of the other needleworkers and razor artists. It was the sight of my three-year old son rapt by the light, rasping tautness of a balloon, and then his shocked awe at what the ruined engine of air could shrink to, a sudden red shred in his little fist. So expatiating about windbags gets me out of the skin by going back to what got me into it. Now isn't that the skin all over for you?*

## **1. Me Mihi Detrahis**

When our cheek burneth or eare tingleth, we usually say that some body is talking of us, which is an ancient conceit... hardly to be made out without the concession of a signifying Genius, or universall Mercury; conducting sounds unto their distant subjects, and teaching us to hear by touch. (Browne 1964, 2.385)

Like the skin, which both feels and is felt, the eardrum is a reciprocal organ; it both receives and reproduces sound, just as a drum, when struck (as the eardrum is struck by sound) produces and reproduces sound. The skin, in other words, is an audiophonic aggregate, both a kind of mouth, or sounding board, and also a kind of ear. The automated production of sound and the production of amplified sound has moved away from strings, as in the hurdy-gurdy, and horns, in megaphones, speaking tubes and other kinds of enhancement of the windpipe, to the use of diaphragms and membranes. In the newly-invented telephone, one spoke into a diaphragm in the mouthpiece that seemed almost identical to the diaphragm in the earpiece. Held just inches from the mouth and up against the outer ear, the telephone seemed to link together sound production and sound reception in a single connective tissue. The whole, vastly extended network of wires was thinned to this fantasy of a single vibrating membrane, on either side of which the interlocutors spoke and listened in turn. The membrane of the loudspeaker is still characterised by its reversibility; when one sees a vast bass speaker visibly pulsing, it resembles nothing so much as a vast ear. Though they do not collect and broadcast sound, satellite dishes preserve a fantasy of the transponding ear, as an elastic skin, which gathers, harbours and re-radiates sound.

One might even say that the sonorous capacity of the skin, which is directly related to its resilience, which is to say, its power both to suffer and to recover from sound, is equivalent to its vitality. A living skin is a tight, which is to say, resonant skin: a slack

skin is mute. Traditionally, the first sound of the infant is not the vagitus, or birth cry, but the smack on the skin that induces it. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has written of the importance to her life as a writer of the sonorous scenes of her childhood chastisements: ‘the two most rhythmic things that happened to me were spankings and poetry’ (Sedgwick 1987, 114).

Some myths of life preserved in skins emphasise the tautness or stretching of the revived skin. The taut skin is upright, resistant, gathered, tense with life - and also ‘tuned’. When a dead skin is stretched across a frame, it can not only be given back the uprightness and tensile quality it had in life, but it can also be given a voice. The fantasy of the skin that talks, as well as standing up and walking, is one of the strangest allotropes of skin. It should not therefore be surprising that stories of life surviving or returning in dead bodies, especially those that have been the victims of violence, should often involve the corpse being turned into a musical instrument that is able to broadcast the story of the death and denounce the murderer – a harp, for instance, formed from a breastbone and locks of hair in versions of the ballad known as ‘The Cruel Sister’, ‘The Two Sisters’ and ‘Binnorie’. In the Grimms’ story ‘The Singing Bone’, a young man who kills his brother in order to marry a princess is undone when one of his victim’s bones is found and sings of his betrayal (Grimm 1975, 148-50). After having been silenced by having her tongue cut out, Philomela first tells her story in a tapestry and is then transformed into a bird, unspecified in Ovid, but by later tradition a nightingale. Before he became interested in prosthetics, the performance artist Stelarc specialised in hanging himself at considerable heights from hooks in his skin. I have heard that, when he did this at the Centre for Twentieth Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin, the wind, which blows hard in Milwaukee, could be heard thrumming and keening against his stretched skin.

A rather different and richer example of a musical survival of the skin is the story of the flaying of Marsyas. Like many such stories, it exists in no one version all together. One of the most extended versions is that given by Ovid in 19 concentrated but compelling lines in Book 6 of his *Metamorphoses* (Ovid 1977, 1.314-5). Here we learn of the fate of the satyr Marsyas who has lost a musical competition between his rustic pipe and Apollo’s imperious lyre and has as a result been flayed. The tears of those mourning the cruel death of Marsyas soak down into the earth and gave rise to the river that came to bear his name. Other accounts of the myth provide a prelude. We learn that Athena has first formed the flute out of bones, but discarded it when she saw from her reflection in water how ridiculously puffed-out it made her face look. She has thrown it away, only for Marsyas to pick it up. The synopsis given in the *Library* of Apollodorus refers to the tradition that Marsyas found the pipes that Athena had thrown away (‘because they made her face ugly when she blew on them’) and adds the detail that Apollo won the competition by playing his lyre upside down and demanding that Marsyas do the same, an impossibility with a flute, which can only be blown from one end. (1.4.2; Apollodorus 1976, 7) Other accounts provide a musical sequel to the flaying. Herodotus alludes to the story in passing when describing the march of Xerxes’ army through the town of Celaenae in Phrygia. ‘The Catarractes rises right in the main square of Celaenae and issues into the Meander. Another feature of the Celaenae is

that the skin of Marsyas the silenus is hanging there, where it was put, according to local Phrygian legend, after Marsyas had been flayed by Apollo' (7.26; Herodotus 1998, 418).

In the opening chapter of *The Skin Ego*, Didier Anzieu draws out from the myth a compendium of the nine functions that he attributes to the skin (Anzieu 1989, 46-55; the nine functions are reduced to eight in the second French edition of the work, Anzieu 1995, 67-75). A later chapter focusses particularly on the function he calls the 'acoustic envelope'. One of the earliest of the many skins by which the child is surrounded, he writes, is a metaphorical skin or envelope of sound, formed by the echoing interchanges between the mother's voice and the child's own sounds. At this early point in the child's development, there is no clear distinction between tactile and auditory sensations, and the sensations of being held, stroked, and patted are experienced in terms of the soothing, containing, enclosing contours of the voice, while the voice itself becomes something palpable. Anzieu's discussion of the sound envelope is joined to a case history of a patient whom he names 'Marsyas', who seems to suffer from an unformed sense of an acoustic skin, which manifests itself in a kind of 'deafness' or unresponsiveness. Anzieu substantiates this reading with a story from the man's childhood:

Marsyas was left in a passive-apatetic state. After a few months it was apparent that he was not reacting normally and the maid announced that he was hard of hearing, that he was retarded. His mother, horrified by this judgement, grabbed Marsyas, shook him about, stimulated him and talked to him. (Anzieu 1989, 159)

Anzieu describes this pattern repeated in the patient's deafness or failure to comprehend things said to him:

[H]e does not understand what I say to him. The problem was acute in the last session: he remembered nothing and did not even *hear* what I said to him. Moreover, if he thinks about his problems between sessions and an interesting idea occurs to him, he cannot produce it for me. He is suddenly struck dumb, empty-headed. (Anzieu 1989, 161)

At first Anzieu interprets his need as being for forms of exchange that will approximate to the stimulation that he failed to receive as a baby: 'it is as if I were lifting and carrying him, warming him, setting him in motion, and when necessary shaking him and forcing him to react, gesture, speak' (Anzieu 1989, 160). Later, Anzieu suggests that 'Marsyas' suffers from the residues of a more specifically audio-phonic disturbance: 'his mother had spoken in hoarse, raucous tones, corresponding to her frequent, abrupt and unpredictable swings of mood: Marsyas's relationship as a baby to the maternal melody as a source of meaning in general was therefore cut up or interrupted' (Anzieu 1989, 161).

Anzieu's 'Marsyas' is so named because he is skinless, either because the skin of his 'acoustic envelope' is lacerated and interrupted, or because it has never been properly formed. It might seem, then, as though the myth offers an image not just of the

excoriation of Marsyas, but also of the reparation offered in psychoanalysis. For we learn from the third-century anthologist of myth and anecdote Aelian of a tradition that ‘at Celaenae, if someone plays a Phrygian tune in the vicinity of the Phrygian’s skin, the skin moves. But if one plays in honour of Apollo, it is motionless and seems deaf’ (13.21; Aelian 1997, 430-1). Frazer zestfully amplifies this report in his discussion of the Marsyas myth in *The Golden Bough*, a discussion on which Anzieu himself appears to rely quite heavily:

At Celaenae, if we can trust tradition, the piper Marsyas, hanging in his cave, had a soul for harmony even in death; for it is said that at the sound of his native Phrygian melodies the skin of the dead satyr used to thrill, but that if the musician struck up an air in praise of Apollo it remained deaf and motionless. (Frazer 1936, 5.289)

Aelian and Frazer make of the skin a double-sided image: a deaf, inert ‘unskin’ on the one side, and a reborn *plusquepeau* or hyperskin on the other, a sensitive membrane which, seeming to hear its own or ‘native’ sound, replies with the song of its hearing-voice.

However, in establishing his general equivalence between sound, music and the skin, Anzieu neglects what might appear to be the most important feature of the myth, namely the antagonism it charts between the specific kinds of sound produced by Apollo’s and Marsyas’s contending instruments. He therefore leaves hanging in the air the agonised question Marsyas asks in Ovid’s version: ‘“quid me mihi detrahis?” Inquit; “a! piget, a! non est” clamabat “tibia tanti” ‘. ‘“Why do you tear me from myself?” he cried. “Oh, what pain! All this, for a pipe?” ‘ (VI.385-6; Ovid 1977, 314-5). What follows will attempt to provide Marsyas with some kind of answer, by considering the claims and characteristics of the contending instruments. Perhaps focussing on the instruments involved, and the particular kinds of sounding bodies they represent, will help us to understand the sonorities of the skin in a more richly specific way.

What are the instruments in question? Conventionally, and emblematically, Apollo plays the lyre, though this term really names a family of instruments, of different sizes, all of which are held, stringed instruments, which are played by being plucked. The pipe or aulos of Marsyas is a wind instrument, still often described as a flute, though as a reeded instrument its timbre would have been much closer to that of a shawm, oboe, or clarinet. The story of Apollo and Marsyas encodes a more general antagonism which grew up in Greek culture between the lyre, which became the symbol of refinement, and the coarse, rustic pipe. This prejudice is preserved well into the Renaissance and beyond in Europe, in the form of a preference for stringed over wind instruments. The lyre becomes identified in medieval and Renaissance Europe with other stringed instruments, especially the lute and, through convergence with Biblical tradition, the harp. The associations of the aulos similarly pass across into a range of wind instruments. Later representations of Marsyas conflate him with the figure of Pan by giving him to play the syrinx, which Pan is said to have made from a bundle of

reeds after his unsuccessful pursuit of a nymph, who has taken refuge in a reedbed. More especially, as we will see, Marsyas will come to be associated with the bagpipes.

The lyre and the pipe embody the principles of action at a distance and actions performed by direct contact about which classical and medieval philosophers argued so vigorously. It was well known from antiquity that the sound of a plucked string will cause another string in the vicinity tuned to the same pitch to vibrate in sympathy. This resonance was evoked repeatedly as an image of the relations of sympathy that bound the world together. Pythagoras had used the subdivisions of a string to demonstrate the mathematical basis of harmonic relations, and his model was generalised into a vision of a universe of shared laws and powers. At the end of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche offers a less conservative reading of the politics of resonance, finding in the lyre, or cithara ‘Doric architecture expressed in sound’ (Nietzsche 1956, 27). In a sense, Nietzsche seems to be saying, the music of the lyre is no longer music at all, but only the symbol of the higher, more abstract kind of music of mathematical relations. The lyre is identified with reason and measure, presumably because it includes within itself the regularly-spaced intervals of the mode, or the octave. The strings arrayed in parallel approximate to the abstract picture of music provided by the stave. The lyre stands for the possibility of metaphorical relations, in which things are both themselves and the signs of themselves. Parallelism, gapping and homology are fundamental both to the structure of the lute, and to the relations it figures. Included in this might be the parallelism of the bowstring and the string of the lute; Apollo, whose epithets are ‘the god who shoots from afar’ and ‘far-shooting lord’ in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, would frequently be shown playing viols and other bowed instruments from the mediaeval period onwards (2001, 27). It is this parallelism and inclusion of intervals which makes possible the vision of universal relations coexisting with singularity, an ethics of responsible individuality operating within a vision of finely-tuned degree. ‘The virgins who, carrying laurel branches and singing a processional chant, move solemnly toward the temple of Apollo, retain their identities and civic names’ observes Nietzsche (1956, 56). The lyre embodies the principle of this coordinated parallelism.

The violence of the interval is wonderfully displayed in Raphael’s painting of the flaying of Marsyas. This draws on the detail found in some versions of the story that Apollo delegates a Scythian slave to do his skinning for him. As Apollo lines up his target, like a darts-player with his eye on double-top, his gesture is echoed and completed by the slave who is about to make his first surgical incision in the chest of Marsyas. The excruciation at a distance is partnered and parodied by the delicacy of the gesture whereby the bay of laurel is about to drop on Apollo’s brows.

Cutting across this drawing and quartering kind of music is the ‘orgiastic flute’ (Nietzsche 1956, 44), which belonged to Dionysus, and expressed, or embodied, the principle of dissolution into unity. Nietzsche says that, where the temperate, intellectual lyre stands for an abstract unity which allows singularity to persist, the flute expresses a more primitive, protean sense of interflowing. In the Heraclitean or Dionysian commotion of sound, no relations are possible between things because

there are no gaps between them, and everything is pressing up against its neighbour. In the Apollonian world, according to Nietzsche, I am a part of the cosmic order by being and remaining apart. In the Dionysian world, I am a part of everything in a much more literal sense, because I become what I touch upon, or what touches on me. Where the lyre requires an order of coordinated parallelism, the pipe procures an order of copulative commixture, which involves ‘projecting oneself outside oneself and then acting as though one had really entered another body’ (Nietzsche 1956, 55). In contrast to the Apollonian procession of passported persons, the dithyrambic chorus is ‘a chorus of the transformed, who have forgotten their civic past and social rank’ (Nietzsche 1956, 56).

Nietzsche suggests that the defeat of the pipe by the lyre is not a victory of one kind of music over another, but a subduing of the ear by the powers of the eye. The lyre wins by silencing the pipe of Marsyas, and stripping away his richly resonant skin. ‘The sculptor...is committed to the pure contemplation of images. The Dionysiac musician, himself imageless, is nothing but original pain and reverberation of the image’ (Nietzsche 1956, 39). Although Marsyas is not named explicitly in Nietzsche’s essay, he seems implicated in the joyous suffering which characterises Dionysian excess. Indeed, his very skin seems to be figured in the fragile veils that are repeatedly evoked through the text: the ‘thin veil hiding from [Apollonian consciousness] the whole Dionysiac realm’ (Nietzsche 1956, 28) and the ‘veil of illusion’ associated with the domain of Apollo (Nietzsche 1956, 51), along with the desire of Dionysus ‘to tear asunder the veil of Maya, to sink back into the original oneness of nature’ (Nietzsche 1956, 27) and the ‘elusive rags of ancient tradition [which] have been speculatively sewn together and ripped apart’ (Nietzsche 1956, 46-7) in trying to account for the origins of Greek tragedy, as well as the dissolving ‘shudder’ (Nietzsche 1956, 27, 28) that ripples across this frail skin at the breath of Dionysian music. Dionysian ‘un-selving’ (Nietzsche 1956, 39) is, it seems, also a kind of unsleeving. Following the double logic of mythical sufferings, Dionysus is both victim and perpetrator of this ego-annihilating mutilation. Read in this way, the flaying inflicted by Apollo is in fact a victory for the tearing, dissolving powers of which Marsyas is necessarily both victim and vehicle.

More recent accounts have confirmed Nietzsche’s intuition, perhaps in part because they are formed knowingly or unknowingly in the shadow of his commanding Apollo/Dionysus dichotomy. Emanuel Winternitz finds in the Renaissance a deep and sustained ‘antinomy between the orgiastic, intoxicating ‘low’ music and temperate “ethical” music, and with it the differing symbolic characters of the kithara and the aulos, of stringed and the wind instruments’ (Winternitz 1979, 152). Winternitz saw the saxophone as the inheritor of this rasping, orgiastic sound: had he been framing this judgement in the wailing heyday of Jimi Hendrix and Jimmy Page in the mid 1970s, rather than ten years earlier, he might well have commented instead on the appropriation by the electric guitar of the excitingly fuzzy and dirty timbre that had always been proper to the reed. (Winternitz 1979, 153). Nico Staiti’s extensive review of the representation of stringed and wind instruments in Italian painting from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries similarly finds in the symbolic confrontation of

stringed and wind instruments ‘the inflexible opposition of the Dionysiac – the orgiastic realm of the body and the earth, of the corybantic *mania* and the carnival... to the sublimity of the Apollonian order, the universe of the spirit and of reason’ (Staiti 1990, 71).

Edith Wyss keeps a more prudent distance from the modern obsession with the antagonism of Apollo and Dionysus, pointing out that the aulos was also associated with the worship of Apollo until it fell into disfavour after the fifth century, just as the lyre was also associated at times with Dionysus. Nevertheless, her account of the argument between the lyre and the pipe works within the conventional opposition between reason and passion. Resisting the modern identification with the suffering Marsyas, as it begins to appear for example in late nineteenth-century poetic treatments of the myth by Eugene Lee-Hamilton (1884), or John Davidson (1908), for example, Wyss emphasises the degree to which Renaissance appropriations of the Marsyas myth made out from it the lesson that the forces of instinct and sottish sensuality must be chastened by the powers of reason. During the Counter-Reformation in particular, the punishment of the satyr was evoked repeatedly as an image of the just punishment of those who set themselves up against the will of God (Wyss 1996, 121). One of the most remarkable readings of the myth as purification is its evocation at the beginning of Dante’s *Paradiso*, where the poet calls on Apollo for divine inspiration:

Entra nel petto mio, e spira tue  
 sì come quando Marsia traesti  
 de la vagina de le membre sue

Enter into my breast and breathe there  
 As when you drew Marsyas  
 From the sheath of his limbs (Canto 1.19-21; Dante 1975, 4-5).

There are a number of remarkable features of these lines. One is the emphasis on the drawing out of Marsyas. Dante uses the same word as Ovid - ‘trahire’/‘trarre’, to draw or drag - but where Ovid emphasises the way in which Marsyas is torn apart from himself, Dante uses the word to suggest that Marsyas’s real, spiritual self is being drawn out of the shell or carapace of his bodily being. The other is that Apollo is imagined as performing this purification not by an act of plucking, or drawing with a bow, as might be appropriate to a stringed instrument, but by the action of his breath. We need not go as far as H.D. Austin, who argued many years ago that this is evidence that the contest between Apollo and Marsyas might have been thought of as one between rival pipers, despite the apparently striking corroboration of his argument in the fact that Chaucer makes reference in *The House of Fame* to ‘Marcia’, a female Marsyas ‘that loste her skyn,/Bothe in face, body, and chyn,/For that she wolde envien, loo,/To pipen bet than Appolloo’ (Chaucer 1988, 363, ll.1229-32; Austin 1934, 314-6). Flaying is imagined in terms of the musical exercise of the breath: it consists of entering the skin of another’s being, as Apollo was thought to enter the body of the Pythia at Delphi, and then drawing out the spirit from it, perhaps as a drawn breath is



exhaled from the body. But even if Apollo is not to be thought of as literally a piper, the fact that the purification of Marsyas is achieved by means of an apotheosis of his own musical means is worth noting.

## 2. Losing Face

In order to answer Marsyas's question, we will need an explanation for this prejudice against blown instruments. This will involve more than simply reading off the emblematic or symbolic meanings of the plucked and the blown. We are perhaps far from being sensitive enough to the cultural phenomenology of musical instruments, and, more particularly, the forms of bodily fantasy they represent. Before instruments acquire their specific values and associations, they enact a primary transformation of the human body. If the two extremes of human existence are the animal or biological being of the body and the power of thought and self-representation given by language, then the realms of sound, voice and music lie between body and language. They are no longer merely body, for they are the emanations of the body, the body put forth or doubled. But neither are they yet wholly language, in the sense of grammar, syntax, or semantics. Rather, they are the *body of language*, sometimes thought of as the inert mass or form out of which music will be shaped, or words selected, sometimes as an unchannelled impetus or power. An instrument, of whatever kind, is a paradoxical fixing in visible form of this possibility of bodily morphology. A tool performs work upon an object in the world, enabling it to be reshaped and re-produced. As its name suggests, an instrument also works as a mediation: it is instrumental. But the object of the work performed by an instrument is the body itself. An instrument is an image of this body transformed, or rather of its transformability, an effigy of the body's possibility of remaking itself in sound, and, reciprocally, of the casting of sound in a bodily form.

Instruments provide precipitations in space of the many different postures and phantasms of what I have elsewhere <http://www.oup.co.uk/pdf/0-19-818433-6.pdf> called the 'vocalic body' (Connor 2000, 35-42). These postures are usually ecstatic, involving various forms of stretching, twisting, unbalancing or doubling of the body. Here we might note that the very word instrument (from Latin *instruere*, to instruct) has acquired overtones suggestive not only of enacted purpose but also of torture. The Inquisition practice of 'showing the instruments' to potential victims of torture, Joan of Arc and Galileo being the most famous victims, perhaps resonates with the Christian idea of the 'instruments of the passion – the lance, nails and crown of thorns – which were depicted in icons and stained glass, and celebrated in the medieval festival of the 'Arma Christi'. The crooning bones and skins of legend and ballad retain this connection between suffering and music. When the body has become an instrument of torture to its owner, it can then become a musical instrument to preserve and recall that suffering.

One of the reasons for the discredit attaching to the pipe and other wind instruments in classical Greece is undoubtedly the predominance of vocal over instrumental music, and the use of the lyre as the instrument of choice to accompany the chanting or recitation of verse. As John Hollander observes, music without text was looked down upon by Greek theorists of music (Hollander 1961, 34-5). Where one might have expected the flute to be identified with the exercise of the breath and the voice, the highest faculties of the human, it was in fact the lyre which became identified with the voice precisely by leaving it free to be exercised. By engrossing the mouth, by contrast, pipes and flutes swallowed articulate language in a flood of sound. Contrasted with the Greek ideal of the unity of harmony, rhythm and language, writes Bruce R. Smith, 'Marsyas's piping is mindless noise...With no reference to cosmic harmony, with no embodiment of *logos*, his sounds appeal only to the senses, not to the intellect and soul' (Smith 1979, 88-9). This prejudice is expressed in the Marsyas myth in the accounts of the laughter among the gods by the sight of Athena playing her new invention, the aulos. When she leaves the divine precincts and catches sight of her reflection in a stream, with its puffing cheeks and the 'dreadful grimace into which the exigencies of the embouchure had twisted her face' (Hollander 1961, 35). she immediately sees her colleagues' point, and flings the aulos aside, with a curse for anyone who should pick it up. The reading of the myth supplied in the *Ovidio volgare*, a rumbustuous 15th-century paraphrase of Ovid with allegorical interpretations, carefully distinguishes the ways in which lyre and pipe are played in order to signify the superiority of the former.

Apollo conquered with the cithara, that is, with true, resounding arguments, and with strings rather than with voice: and this signifies that true knowledge comes from the organs of the heart. The cithara demonstrates this, for it is held on the left side, pressed against the heart, which shows that true knowledge comes from the organs of the heart. (Ovid 1497, sig. g2r)

This rationalist interpretation of the myth may draw on Aristotle's discussion of flute playing in his *Politics*, where he explains that 'it is not a bad point in the story that the goddess did this out of annoyance because of the ugly distortion of her features; but as a matter of fact it is more likely that it was because education in flute-playing has no effect on the intelligence, whereas we attribute science and art to Athena' (1341b; Aristotle 1959, 667). Despite the distinction he draws here, Aristotle himself sees the effect of instruments on the body as part of their more general moral and philosophical profile, urging that 'the study of music must not place a hindrance in the way of subsequent activities, nor vulgarize [more literally 'make mechanical'] the bodily frame and make it useless for the exercises of the soldier and the citizen' (1341a; Aristotle 1959, 665).

Athena's transformation into a bloated gargoyle as she bends over the stream has called for little comment, aside from Didier Anzieu's hilariously doctrinal judgement that the episode illustrates 'what might, in contrast to penis-envy, be termed penis-horror in women. Athena, virgin and warrior, is horrified at the sight of her face transformed into a pair of buttocks with a penis hanging down or standing erect in the

middle' (Anzieu 1989, 48). The horror here may be a more general concern with what Greek called *amorphia*. What Athena sees is her face bloated, distorted, or drawn away. Flowing water transforms and distorts her features, just as water will later provide an apotheosis of Marsyas's tortured flesh. (Emmanuel Winternitz points to the cohering force of water in the myth, since it provides the reeds which furnish the material both for the pipe and the vibrating mouthpiece - Winternitz 1979, 161-2). The desire to save one's face from such convulsions survives as late as Plutarch's life of Alcibiades, which records that his dislike for the ignobility of the instrument was responsible for the decline in its standing:

[H]e refused to play the flute, holding it to be an ignoble and illiberal thing. The use of the plectrum and the lyre, he argued, wrought no havoc with the bearing and appearance which were becoming to a gentleman; but let a man go on blowing on a flute and even his own kinsmen could scarcely recognize his features. Moreover, the lyre blended its tones with the voice or son of its master; whereas the flute closed and barricaded the mouth, robbing its master both of voice and speech. "Flutes, then" said he, "for the sons of Thebes; they know not how to converse. But we Athenians, as our fathers say, have Athena for foundress and Apollo for patron, one of whom cast the flute away in disgust, and the other flayed the presumptuous flute-player." (Plutarch 1916, 7-9)

There is another tradition about the invention of the aulos by Athena which brings this danger of losing face into much sharper focus and establishes some intricate connections with the skin. Pindar's 12th Pythian ode, written in 490 BC to celebrate the victory of Midas of Akragas in a flute contest, records that Athena invented the aulos after assisting Perseus to cut off the head of Medusa and in order to imitate the horrifying cries that issue from the mouth of the Medusa's sister Euryale. Pindar specifies that she 'wove [*diaplexais*], from *diaplekô* to plait, or interweave] into music the dismal death-dirge of the Gorgons' (Pindar 1915, 308-9). Euryale has not suffered her sister's fate of decapitation, but it is as though her threnody were itself both mimicking and giving voice from out of the headless, faceless condition of Medusa. As Thalia Feldman has shown, there is a close relationship between the face of the Medusa and the fearsome cry which is associated with her. The very name 'Gorgon' derives from the Sanskrit root *garg*, which, according to Feldman, signifies 'a *gurbling*, guttural sound, sometimes human, sometimes animal, perhaps closest to the *grr* of a growling beast'. This word spawns a range of forms in various Indo-European languages, including the words *gurgle*, *giggle*, *gargoyle* and *gorge* (Feldman 1965, 487). The head of Medusa is traditionally to be found represented with mouth gaping and tongue protruding (with the tongue out, one cannot speak articulately, but only slobber and grunt). The Gorgon's name is a name for the nameless, a word for a sound that is not a word at all, but roars words down, gagging logos in pitchblack, annihilating noise.

This paradox of sound is matched by the visual paradox of the Medusa. The Medusa is associated not only with a terrifying cry, but with a death-dealing visage. Her face is a kind of black hole in vision, just as her cry is a kind of sonorous wound, a blind,

shrieking hole gouged out in, but also of, sound. Freud famously thought that the head of the Medusa signified the female genitals, inducing a petrifying, if also in a certain sense bracing, castration-panic in men (Freud 1998, 273-4); but those less fixated upon penis fixation might find a more encompassing panic at the figuring of a face that has no *figura*, no form or face. As Françoise Frontini-Ducroux points out, the Medusa is never given any of the privileges attaching to the *prosopon*, the social face which confers identity and acceptance, for hers is 'the paradigm of the non-face' (Frontini-Ducroux 1995, 65).

A face that has been torn away or effaced and a cry that has no form both seem to imply a body without clear lineaments or settled contours. In its swarming, liquid flaccidity, that face is copulative and generative, threatening both to swallow and disperse the gaze. The Medusa's head is all raging, ragged, flaccid body, and, after decapitation, becomes a vagina through which Pegasus will be born. As Charles Segal has suggested, this is in absolute contrast to the body of Athena. The bodies of Athena and Medusa are opposites, the one metallic and impenetrable, the other bloody, baggy and torn, in death and parturition (which are the same for her, since Pegasus is born from her beheading):

Athena's body, covered by masculine armor or her decorous peplos, is always hidden and never obtrusive. Everything about Medusa, however, contributes to the corporealization of her being: the hair with its individualized, snaky locks, the protruding teeth and tongue, the bulging eyes, the full, fleshy cheeks, and, of course, the wound, blood, pain, and cry of her final parturition. (Segal 1994, 21)

### 3. Aegis

Athena's aulos attempts in sound to repair the affront and terror of the sound of the Gorgon's cry. The weaving of what in the 12th Pindaric Ode Athena somewhat puzzlingly dubs the 'many-headed' melody [*ônomasen kephalan pollan nomon*] of the flute seems similarly to attempt to reconstitute the body that has been torn apart. This weaving is perhaps an attempt to recreate the integrity of the body severed by Perseus's sword, and to turn the sound that gushes from that gashed body into something more tolerable (Pindar 1915, 310-11). Jenny Strauss Clay suggests that what is woven together are the two very different sounds of the Gorgons' lament and Perseus's shout of triumph (Clay 1991, 523). The capture and regularising of the sound of the Gorgon in music is paralleled by the capture of her head and its incorporation into the breastplate or the aegis of Athena, on which the Medusa's head came usually to be depicted. Like many other such magical skins, the aegis, variously represented as a cloak, shield or breastplate that protects Athena invincibly, is not her own, but is shared, inherited or appropriated. Some myths have it that she has stripped the skin from a giant, Pallas, whom she has defeated in battle, or some other adversary, even the Medusa herself. Other accounts represent her as sharing in the aegis of Zeus, who

has in turn inherited it from his mother, the goat Amaltheia, who nursed him and kept him safe from the wrath of his father. In some versions of the story of Perseus, it is Athena's highly-polished shield, the double of her aegis, which enables Perseus to despatch the Medusa without meeting her gaze. Françoise Frontiri-Ducroux argues that the literal unspeakability of the Medusa's face, which is rarely described in Greek writing, produces a synaesthetic displacement of image into sound (Frontiri-Ducroux 1995, 66). But the importance of the aegis is to ensure that the opposite also takes place. For the capture of the roaring Medusa, either in the bag of skin in which Perseus will transport it, or on the magic skin of the aegis, as though in a flash photograph, also stabilises sound by displacing it into image, and specifically an image borne on the skin. The skin which both repels and holds together in one place the terrifyingly formless image of the Medusa parallels the sound of the flute. The stilling of the image by the skin is the equivalent to the distilling of noise into melody.

Striking confirmation of the power of the aegis to temper immoderate sound is provided by a comic glimpse of the goddess Athena provided at the end of *Brachomyomachia* or *Battle of the Frogs and Mice*, once attributed to Homer. Asked by Zeus to interfere in the battle, Athena gives the following reasons for refusing to help either side:

I would never go to help the Mice when they are hard pressed, for ...this thing that they have done vexes my heart exceedingly: they have eaten holes in my sacred robe, which I wove painfully spinning a fine woof on a fine warp, and made it full of holes... Yet even so I will not help the Frogs; for they also are not considerate: once, when I was returning early from war. I was very tired, and though I wanted to sleep, they would not let me even doze a little for their outcry; and so I lay sleepless with a headache until cock-crow. (Hesiod 1977, 555)

The tattered aegis makes Athena vulnerable to the encroachments of sound, in the broken and disturbed cacophony of the frogs. A more literal acoustic aegis is reported by Pliny, a statue of Athena known as the 'Murmuring Athena', because the dragons on her gorgoneion 'sound with a tinkling note [*tinnitu* ] when a harp is struck' (Pliny 1942-52, 9.182-3).

In order to be made image, the head of the Gorgon must be reduced to the condition of superficiality or depthlessness that is the essential characteristic of Athena. It is as though she has inherited an allergy to innerness from her mother Metis, who was swallowed by Zeus, but, according to Chrysippus, spent her time in his belly cunningly knitting together the impermeable armour with which Athena will break out from his head (Arnim 1903, 256-7). Nicole Loraux goes even further, suggesting that the terror and the power of Athena come from the fact that she has no body, that she is all skin, or rather, since skin implies a living body beneath it, that she is all surface. Though the aegis is formed of living skin, it is as if it 'dispensed her from [sic] having a body' (Loraux 1995, 222). More even than the capacity to block or defend, the aegis confers a kind of incorporeality: 'Athena has an incorporeal touch, which makes javelins and

arrows glance off the heroes, without any movement on her part' (Loraux 1995, 224). This incorporeality is reinforced by the two other characteristic features of Athena, her flashing eyes, and her terrifying voice. She is, in fact, 'nothing but a voice and semblances'. Even the gift of weaving, signified in her peplos, seems held back from the circuit of gift or exchange: 'the Parthenos wears on her body the product of her work, taking back what her hand had made. The autarchic Athena, the goddess seems to live within a closed circuit, and there is no breach giving access to her' (Loraux 1995, 225). The fifth Hymn of Callimachus, which tells the story of the blinding of the young Tiresias as a result of seeing Athena naked at her bath, also emphasises the self-enclosed entirety of the goddess. She spurns the second skin provided by gleaming unguents, restricting herself only to the 'manly olive oil' (V.29; Callimachus 1955, 115). from the fruit of her own olive tree. The Hymn associates unguents applied to the body with the doubling of the body provided by mirrors, which Athena also eschews:

Bring not, ye companions of the Bath, for Pallas perfume nor alabasters (for Athene loves not mixed unguents), neither bring ye a mirror. Always her face is fair, and even when the Phrygian judged the strife on Ida, the great goddess looked not into orichalc, nor into the transparent eddy of Simois. (V.16-20; Callimachus 1955, 113)

Callimachus contrasts Athena with the self-regarding and self-multiplying Aphrodite, who 'took the shining bronze and often altered and again altered the same lock'. The Greek - *pollaki tan autan dis metethke koman* - implies the bringing of the mirror – the *diaugea chalkon* - repeatedly up to or even amid her hair, lines which suggest not only the multiplication of the face and hair in the mirror, but the mirror-like surfaces of bronze multiplying in the hair (V.21-2; Callimachus 1955, 114-5). With her simple oils, Athena attempts to make of herself a pure, plain, self-reflecting mirror, which hoards its own appearance as it grudgingly gives it out. The mirror of the other's look insinuating itself into one's own would introduce by contrast the turbulence of water into the self-image.

Athena has two principal aspects. As goddess of battle, she is masculine and martial. As protectress of cities and the inventor of weaving, she is domestic. These two principal aspects are signified in the two garments with which she is closely identified: the peplos and the aegis. Both have protective functions, though these functions are exercised in different ways. The peplos - soft, complex, vegetable - absorbs threats, where the aegis - hard, uniform, mineral - averts them. These different surfaces have a close relation to birth and generation, as is suggested, not just by the story of Athena's birth from Zeus's head, in full clanking combat gear, but also by the story of the rape attempted on Athena by the lame smith of the gods Hephaestus, who, by splitting open Zeus's pounding temples with his axe, acted as midwife in Athena's delivery. Hobbling gamely after the goddess, Hephaestus is able to catch her only a glancing blow with his ejaculation, which he sprays over her thigh. She fastidiously wipes the sperm away with a piece of wool and discards it. Nourished by Gaia, the swab becomes her serpentine offspring Erichonios. Here the wool soaks up and neutralises Hephaestus's contaminating spray. But the steely thigh of Athena stands for the deflection or

warding off of danger, for which Athena requires, not the woven peplos, but the toughened and tempered aegis, which we are told is strong enough even to turn aside the thunderbolts of Zeus.

There are acoustic correlatives to these two defensive functions of absorption and deflection. The weaving of the peplos seems to suggest the coordination of noise into musical measure – Pindar writes of the *diaplexais*' or interweaving of her flute – in which the noise must be accepted and incorporated in order to be transformed. The deflection or reflection of the aegis seems to be associated not with the mimesis of the flute but rather with the sound of the thrilling trumpet or brazen war-cry. It is striking that this cry is often characterised as echoing, in other words, bouncing or refracting, rather than being assimilated and transformed. Rebounding from her aegis, the very thunderbolt of Zeus becomes Athena's. Her spear and shield, the latter a sort of doubling of the aegis, are equivalent, in that the shield can return and redouble the blows that rain upon it. Anastasia Serghidou observes that the trumpet is characterised by its redoubling and reverberative powers (Serghidou 2001, 65-7).

The head of Medusa which mysteriously appears on Athena's breast seems to combine these absorptive and reflective modes. Is the image to be imagined as being a representation *on* the aegis, or as in some way buried *in* it? Is it a flattened, heraldic insignia, or a kind of encrustation or cyst? Depicted, or attached? The face-on frontality which is a feature of many images of the Medusa suggests the former, as does the fact that the Medusa and Athena coupling was common on the front and reverse of coins. On the other hand, the power of the Medusa seems to lie in the fact that it is a head, which Perseus must keep enclosed in a bag, and a head that has the power to envelop the viewer. In a certain sense Athena has swallowed Medusa up, and yet she keeps her displayed upon her surface, as image. This ambivalence about depth and volume survives in the characteristic tassels of the aegis, which are said to be the heads of the serpents from Medusa's hair. At its fringe, the emblematic aegis curls into three-dimensions, recalling the swarming, centreless multiplicity of the Medusa's hair of the aegis. Not only are there many serpents in the Medusa's hair, but snakes are traditionally taken as symbols of the renewal of life because they go through many skins in a lifetime. Is there one aegis, or many? Does it speak with one voice, or with forked tongues?

I have suggested that when Medusa is stilled into an image, magical skin trumps horrifying roar, just as the music of the pipe knits noise into melody. So far the profile of the aegis would seem to confirm François Pasche's reading (1971) of the shield of Perseus as the gift of perspective. But the aegis has sonority as well as perspicuity, and is not simply an antidote to the sound of the Medusa. Remarkably, the aegis of Athena is also sonorous. The *Homeric Hymn to Athena* relates how, when she emerges shaking her spear, the heavens shake and moan at her birth:

great Olympus reeled  
In a fearsome tremor, the earth all around with a dreadful scream

Rang out, and the deep was stirred in a mass of seething waves (*Homeric Hymns* 2001, 88)

All is tumult, chaos, reverberation; yet everything is suspended in some blending of tumult and astonishment:

But the salt sea suddenly checked, and Hyperion's splendid son  
For a long-drawn moment kept still the swift hoofs of his chariot's team,  
Untl from her deathless shoulders Pallas Athena took off  
That armour fit for a god (*Homeric Hymns* 2001, 88)

No sooner has the terrible cry been uttered than it is frozen, as though the aegis were the very form of the sound itself, the means both of generating and of suspending the shock wave. Indeed, it is not clear whether this stilling of sun and wave occurs subsequent to the terrifying birth-scream, or in its raging midst. The aegis which furnishes protection against the piercing or dissolving trauma of sound seems also to prompt it, for it is only when the aegis is removed that the Earth is still. But, just as Athena's aegis is not wholly her own, so also her cry is shared, with the shaking power of Zeus's voice, and with the earth itself, which resounds with terror at her birth. There will be another remarkable doubling of her martial voice, in the scene in the *Iliad* (18. 202-30), when she loans her aegis to Achilles while Hephaetus is forging his new armour. Investment with the aegis is followed immediately by two kinds of emanation – or perhaps one should rather say, it is immediately manifested in them. As the aegis drops around Achilles's shoulders, obscuring him like a cloud, a gleaming flame seems to blaze from his head, like the beacons that flare up at nightfall from a besieged city. Remarkably, Achilles does not take his place in the Greek lines, but stands in a conspicuous position and *shouts* at the Trojans. The flaring out of light from his divinised head is accompanied by the blaring out of a voice, that is halved or doubled between Achilles and the goddess, as though their twinning in the aegis had also twisted together their throats:

There he stood and shouted, and from afar Pallas Athene called out; but among the Trojans he raised unspeakable confusion. Clear as the trumpet's voice when it sounds aloud when a city is pressed by murderous foes, so clear was then the voice of the grandson of Aeacus. And when they heard the brazen voice [*opa calkeon*] of the grandson of Aeacus, the hearts of all were dismayed. (18.219-23; Homer 1999, 302-3)

Accounts of Zeus's wielding of the aegis often suggest that it has a meteorological reference and nineteenth-century meteorological mythography made much of these associations. One of Zeus's commonest epithets is 'aegis-shaker', suggesting a survival of Zeus's skyey power over thunder and tempest, the aegis being the thundercloud. The shaker of the aegis is the one who causes the rumble of the thundercloud, which seems to be imagined as a kind of skin of wind. Noel Robertson is convinced that shaking the aegis would have featured in ritual as 'a form of weather magic, an imitation and a cause of strong wind' (Robertson 2001, 45). The cloud reference



lingers in Homer's depiction of the aegis-clad Achilles, who is like a golden cloud, but with the light of fire breaking from it. There appears to be a synaesthetic link between the ominous sound of this thunder and what is often described as the piercing cry of Athena. The conjoining of thunder and lightening, which, anticipating later confirmation, the ancient world grasped as two different aspects, sonorous and visual, of the same phenomenon, may be a conjoining of a special kind of dazzle or flashing light – a sizzling look that cooks you up – and the ear-splitting effects of Athena's cry. They are conjoined in the shaking of the aegis, which seems to compound the vibration of the thunder and the rapid zigzag of the lightning. This power to shake the forms and foundations of things, though irresistible and disintegrating, is nevertheless held together, in the image of the aegis. It effects a 'convulsion', from *con-vellere*, meaning to tear apart, to pull into all directions. As I have remarked in a longer discussion (Connor 2000a) of the cultural imagination of shaking, the prefix 'con' works to add the sense of pulling together; convulsion is a way of pulling yourself together, as well as being torn apart. It is the enactment of a dismemberment, the body torn into tiny pieces, that is nevertheless held in one place. Convulsion is a held-together-coming-apart.

Athena bears the image of the Gorgon's face on her shield. But perhaps she also can be thought of as wearing it like a mask. This creates another striking reversal of the terms we have been employing so far. For, if the Gorgon is a mask, then it is the Gorgon who is flat and depthless. Jean-Pierre Vernant has suggested that the horror of the Gorgon's image is in part precisely the horror of that which is image, which has no depth, and yet can swallow you up. Françoise Frontini-Ducroux similarly points out that the decapitated head of the Gorgon 'possesses no profile, or back or volume. It is deprived of the third dimension which belongs to the world of the living...it is presented as a pure surface' (Frontini-Ducroux 1995, 68-9). As a mask which emits a terrifying sound, a grimace that is the very shape of the horrifyingly formless sound that is the Gorgonic roar, the gorgoneion is an embodiment of the *persona*, the simulacrum of the person that is born through the sound that emanates from the mask. Though a mask gives the appearance of being the outside of a hidden interior, from which voice surges, gives the appearance, in other words, of being an appearance, it is really only the semblance or apparition of such appearance. The voice comes from the interior of the person behind the mask, and not from the interior of the being represented by the mask. The Gorgon is all mask, all surface, all front. It may display interiority, with its protruding tongue, gaping mouth and its deep wrinkles, but it is the illusory superficial depth of the mirror. The fascinating mimetic effect of the Gorgon's look makes its victims into mirrors of it.

There is a link between the mimesis of the surface and the mimesis of sound. Playing the flute, which she invented in order to imitate the cries of Medusa's sisters, Athena finds that she is unconsciously mirroring them. Her desire to keep aloof from the multiplying and perverting powers of mirrors renders her liable to mirroring mimesis. As Vernant observes, the effect of playing the Gorgon (in both senses) 'is actually to become one – all the more so as this mimesis is not mere imitation but an authentic "mime," a way of getting inside the skin of the character one imitates, of donning his

or her mask' (Vernant 1991, 125). Nicole Loraux agrees: 'To play the flute is to make the face of the Gorgon' (Loraux 1995, 321 n.26). The Gorgon is the double of Athena, therefore, in being nothing but voice and semblance, the semblance of a voice, the voice of semblance. She is a membrane brought into being by the passage of the sound across it, a membrane that then makes the sound possible. She is a mask that howls.

#### 4. Stringing Up

Stripping Marsyas of his skin enables him literally to be represented as the boastful windbag he has seemed to be in life. With the focus on his flayed skin, Marsyas is reduced to the condition of a wind instrument. In his sickeningly explicit evocation of the flaying process, Ovid draws out an alternative logic. Focussing as Ovid does (and uniquely) on the suffering residue of Marsyas's body, the quivering nerves, sinews and veins exposed by the flaying, makes him the very image of Apollo's victorious lyre. This is how Golding renders Ovid's lines:

For all his crying ore his eares quight pulled was his skin.  
Nought else he was than one whole wounde. The griesly bloud did spin  
From every part, the sinewes lay discovered to the eye,  
The quivering veynes without a skin lay beating nakedly.  
The panting bowels in his bulke ye might have numbred well,  
And in his brest the shere small strings a man might easly tell (Ovid 1567  
sig.74r)

Beneath the surface of the skin, Ovid reveals is a latticework of different kinds of string. The punishment therefore seems to take the form of a grotesque act of vengeful predication. 'You claim the priority of the pipe over the string', the flaying seems to say, 'but your piping is as empty and puffed up as a bag of skin. Rip off that lying, vacuous bag and your own body testifies that underneath you are all lyre.'

Ovid's vision anticipates an argument about the relationship between bodies and instruments to be found in a treatise on music written between the first and third centuries (but probably in the late third or early fourth) by Aristides Quintilianus. In chapters 18-20 of his *On Music*, Aristides sets out to account for the effect of music upon the human soul. The first answer he offers is the Pythagorean doctrine that the soul, like music, is made up of mathematical ratios and proportions. The second focusses on the physical nature of the soul. The soul is constituted in a fall from its proper domain in the pure empyrean, which lies in a circle outside the stars and planets. In this condition, it is constituted of pure geometrical relations, of surfaces, circles and lines, and is coextensive with the whole of the Great Soul. As it falls through the different levels of creation, it loses its ethereal constitution, and becomes progressively more material, which has effects on its three constitutive geometrical dimensions, of plane, line and circle. As it approaches the airy and humid region of the

moon, which makes ‘much and vehement whistling because of its natural motion’, the soul

exchanges its surfaces, which are in accord with luminous and ethereal matter, for a membranaceous figure; and it turns its lines, which are reduced around the empyrean and tinged by the yellowness of the fire, into the semblance of sinews; and then it adds wet breath from the things of earth, so that this, for the first time, is a certain natural body for the soul, welded together from some membranaceous surfaces, sinuouslike lines, and breath. (Quintilianus 1983, 152)

The analogy between music and the soul is a consequence of the fact that the body is formed out of the same materials as musical instruments, in the three categories of string, wind and percussion distinguished in the classical world and after. Although all the basic elements of musical instruments derive from the declension of the soul into humid, airy matter, Aristides also sees the sinews, and the musical strings to which they are analogous, as closer in nature to the ethereal region from which the soul has descended.

Of instruments, those fitted together of strands closely resemble the ethereal, dry, simple region of the cosmos and part of spiritual nature, being more without passion, immutable, and hostile to wetness, and displaced from their proper setting by damp air; the wind instruments closely resemble the windy, wetter, changeable region, making the hearing overly feminine, being adapted for changing from the straightforward, and taking their constitution and power by wetness. (Quintilianus 1983, 155)

This elaborate theory of the physical relations between instruments and the constitution of the soul is clinched for Aristides by reference to the story of the flaying of Marsyas. There are, he says, two kinds of person, ‘those persons cultivating the region under the moon, which is full windy and of a wet constitution but which procures its actuality from ethereal life belong to both the mundane and the celestial spheres’, and the higher kind of persons, who aspire to the pure, celestial region. The first ‘are soothed by both kinds of instruments - wind and stranded’, but the second ‘deprecated every wind instrument as defiling the soul and dragging it down to the things here and on the other hand hymned and held in honor the kithara and lyre alone of the instruments as the purer’ (Quintilianus 1983, 157). Aristides recalls that Pythagoras ‘counselled his disciples who heard the aulos to cleanse their hearing as defiled by breath and to thoroughly purify the irrational impulses of the soul with righteous mele to the accompaniment of the small lyre’ (Quintilianus 1983, 156). All of this enables Aristides to venture a neat reading of the final condition of Marsyas, or rather his skin, hung in the cave in which the river bearing his name rises. He is suspended between the elements of airy essence and watery corruption:

The Phrygian, having been hung over the river in Celaenae after the manner of a wineskin, happens to be in the aerial, full-windy, and dark-colored region,

since he is on the one hand above the water and on the other suspended from the ether; but Apollo and his instruments happen to be in the purer and ethereal essence, and he is the leader of that essence. (Quintilianus 1983, 155)

Earlier on, Aristides has advanced what appears to be an original account of how the fall through matter changes the soul from its original, perfectly spherical shape (Festugière 1954, 65-7). As it encounters the different strata in the vicinity of the different planets, it clothes itself in more and more coverings of extraneous matter. Passing, towards the end of its descent, through the wet atmosphere beneath the moon, the bag that it has become is filled with wet, dense air, the effect of which is to stretch it out into the form of a man. The hung, strung Marsyas is an image of the body drawn downwards by humid breath. His skin, filled out by the wind and shaken by the sonorous rushing of the water beneath it, is an image of the soul in its most degenerated condition, as a mere bag of steam. But the fact that, thanks to Apollo, it is hung above the water is a reminder of its aspiration, or rather, if this breathy word seems inopportune, its straining towards what is higher and drier. The figure of Marsyas only has the man-like form it does because it is stretched between the earth and the sky - a windy lyre.

## 5. Windbags

As we have seen, there seems to be a memory of the Medusa in the distortion of Athena's face as she puffs at what will become Marsyas's pipe. We should note, though, that it is not so much the wryness as the bulging of the face that represents ugliness or the loss of decorum. A number of classical sources retain this curiously specific detail in accounts of Athena's invention and discarding of the pipe. Ovid has the goddess herself say in the *Fasti* 'I was the first, by piercing boxwood with holes wide apart, to produce the music of the long flute. The sound was pleasing; but in the water that reflected my face I saw my virgin cheeks puffed up [*vidi virgineas intumuisse genas*]. "I value not the art so high; farewell, my flute!" said I' (6.697-701; Ovid 1951, 372, 373). In one late retelling of the myth, by the fifth century Latin anthologist Nonnos of Panopolis, Athena's engorged cheeks seem to carry over into Marsyas's flayed skin. Nonnos images the skin of the flatulent flautist resounding, not like a sympathetic string to Phrygian melodies, but by being inflated by the wind.

Another Seilenos there was, fingering a proud pipe, who lifted a haughty neck and challenged a match with Phoibos; but Phoibos tied him to a tree and stript off his hairy skin, and made it a windbag. There it hung, high on a tree, and the breeze often entered, swelling it out into a shape like him, as if the shepherd could not keep silence but made his tune again. (19.316-29 Nonnos 1940, 2.113)

What kind of instrument is it that causes the cheeks to be puffed out? Some brass instruments, which require the air to be forced through the compressed lips, produce this effect. But a flute, as the term is understood today, requires no such pressure.

Indeed, it would be quite impossible to get any sound out of a flute played this way, for it requires a thin and steady stream of air to be directed transversely across the top of a hole. Anyone who has ever blown across the top of a bottle knows how carefully this has to be done. The faces of flautists are not made rotund but puckered and retracted by the effort to produce this carefully-aimed and modulated stream of air. The historian of the bagpipe, Francis Collinson, offers some interesting evidence for considering the Greek aulos to have been a transitional instrument between the flute and the bagpipe. He considers that players of the aulos may very well have used a technique which he calls 'nasal inhalation', but which is more commonly known among players of wind instruments as 'circular breathing'. This involves the production of a continuous stream of air through the instrument by using the inflated cheeks as a reservoir while topping up the air supply through the nose. Collinson argues that the references to Athena's puffed-out cheeks which recur in tellings of the story of Apollo and Marsyas, as well as in the story of the fastidious Alcibiades, confirm that this method was in use for playing the aulos from ancient times.

In other words, what characterises the playing of the aulos is that it may require the cavity of the mouth to be employed like the bag of a bagpipe. Collinson breaks off his account of the story of the context of Apollo and Marsyas just at the point where I find it most interesting, namely with the flaying, but he has already made in passing a significant connection between skin and the sound of the aulos, in remarking that the empty skin of Marsyas may be regarded as 'presaging in a sort of way the bagpipe yet to be discovered' (Collinson 1975, 21). It is not clear whether any such instrument as the bagpipe was known to the Greeks. There is a Greek word *askaules* which literally means bagpipe (*askos*, bag and *aulos*, pipe), but it does not appear to have been used until long after the Classical period (Landels 1999). Nevertheless, part of the Greek suspicion of wind instruments that is articulated in the story of Apollo and Marsyas is the fact that they highlight the bellied, baggy animality of human beings. This may be confirmed by what seems to be one of the earliest references to bagpipes in the Roman world, the remark of Dio Chrysostom that Nero was able to play the pipes 'both by means of his lips and by tucking a skin beneath his armpits, with a view to avoiding the reproach of Athena' (Dio Chrysostom 1951, 173). The reproach referred to here may be the curse that falls on anyone who picks up the pipe she has angrily discarded, or may be a more general disapproval of amorpha, or the loss of facial composure. Not that the bagpipe offers any permanent guarantee of staying in countenance. In his 1635 book on musical instruments, the philosopher of music Marin Mersenne wrote that some musicians preferred the cornemuse, which was operated by a small attached bellows, to the traditional bagpipe, 'inasmuch as the inflation by players is the cause of facial deformities' (Mersenne 1957, 356). The apparatus of the pipe and the bag are just too reminiscent of the stomach, the womb, the bladder, the bowels and other cavities in the human (and animal) body, and the biological functions they perform: pregnancy (Athena is the most militant of virgins), digestion and excretion.

The pipes and flutes associated with rustics and shepherds modulated during the sixteenth and seventeenth century into the varieties of the bagpipe, and Marsyas begins to be represented as a bagpiper. The bagpipe is associated with what might be

called an inflationary body image. This is the image of a body, not knitted together as a fabric, but as a simple bag, blown up and let down, lurching between a blocked or distended condition and the sudden, intemperate trumpeting of illegitimate speech. The bagpipe is like a prosthetic lung, or belly, the inner cavity of breath slung on the outside of the body. It can easily suggest an alimentary or excretory function too; indeed this exchange of functions is embodied in the bag, which was often made of an animal's stomach.

Bakhtin's evocation of the grotesque body of medieval carnival may have some relevance here. The grotesque body 'is unfinished, outgrows itself', and draws attention to those parts 'through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world... the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose (Bakhtin 1984, 26). Skin has a large part to play in this process of going out to meet the world. The skin marks a barrier between inside and outside, but is a barrier that can be breached or warped in many ways. The obesity of the body that is figured in the bagpipe is a perfect image of the sound or potential vocality of the skin. A skin that bulges or is stretched resembles a drum, but also gives promise of sonorous eruption, whether in the belch or the fart, or in the vagitus that is the immediate product of childbirth. (All children know how shiveringly full of sonorous catastrophe a balloon is.) The bag of the bagpipe alternates between the conditions of full and empty, life and death, like the lungs, the belly, the bowel, the womb. The sound that it makes is the sound of the skin emptying, passing between the conditions of cuticle and pelt. Its sound is excremental, not only in metonymic fashion, in that it is associated with the voiding of excrement, but also in the sense that it is a metaphorical excretion.

The arousing and disturbing sounds of the pipes involve a certain sonorous image of the body, a body that is able to produce sound, not because it is full of life, soul, self-presence, desire, intention, but because it is half-dead, or intermittently dead, able to be and needing to be repeatedly pumped up and deflated like a bag or a balloon. The bagpipe is the image of the pseudo-life of the body that is simply a bag of winds, a lung, or belly, or scrotum, and nothing more. Such a body is a kind of body formed of skin alone, for even the air that plumps it out is not its own, and its liable to leak away bathetically.

In such a body, attention is focussed on the skin as the straining membrane unstably holding together and apart the inside and the outside, which are constituted as such only topologically, and not by any permanent principle. The fact that strings produce sympathetic resonance suggests that they are self-sustaining and self-multiplying, even though they do require their sound to be renewed; pipes, by contrast require constant and conspicuous reapplication of air, and corresponding effort. Not only do wind instruments use waste products, they also exhaust the body, by drawing the body into their workings.

Almost from its inception, the bagpipe has been thought of as the most copulative of instruments. In the most elementary of metaphorical systems, the tube of the pipe connects together two equivalent organisms, both of them made up of pipes and bags: the body of the player and the body of the instrument. Both player and instrument have intake and outlet, both are receptacles that rhythmically fill and drain. The fact that the bagpipe is so like an external lung or bladder means that the possibility of inversion or blowback is always there: given sufficient pressure, the bag can inflate the blower. The many images of bagpipe monsters in psalters and Books of Hours, such as the Luttrell Psalter, play elaborately with this possibility. The bagpipe suggests a body made up, not of parallel structures, but of mutually-encapsulated skins, and therefore provides opportunities for topological fantasies of literally conflated bodies. These inversions only superficially resemble the reversibility of Apollo's lyre. For the bagpipe is entropically inersive; at each exchange of breath, energy is being depleted, and the taut life of the bag is collapsing. The animal origins of the bagpipe, which has customarily been made from the stomach or skin of an animal, and the conspicuous orality of its manner of playing can suggest that a nutritive function is conjoined with a musical one. ('The dog who eats a bagpipe has meat and music at once', as a bizarre Gaelic proverb has it.). The baby-like wail of the pipes also seems appropriate for the one playing the instrument can indeed appear to be at suck upon it. Of course, it is the bag that is nourished by the breath of the player, and so is an image of a Kleinian 'bad breast'.

Marsyas is of course, not just a foreigner, a Phrygian, from the area now occupied by Turkey, but also half-animal, in the way that many conquered races have been thought to be nonhuman, or of indeterminate species by their invaders. An important part of the humiliation inflicted by Apollo upon Marsyas is that it acts to remind the presumptuous satyr of his animal condition. Bernadette Leclercq-Neveu makes out a distinction between the lyre and the pipe in terms of their use of the bodies of animals. Because the lyre is formed out of the transformed bodies of animals, it stands for inversion and exchange, the body transformed in technique. The pipe, by contrast, is not made, but found (invented by Athena, picked up by Marsyas - Leclercq-Neveu 1989, 261-2). The bodies of animals, bones, hair, skin and guts, are traditional sources of musical instruments. To skin Marsyas is to remind him in the most forcible way possible that he is now matter rather than form, the plucked victim and not the virtuoso. This is the counterpart of the virginal Athena's anorexic horror at her bloated cheeks, which seems provoked in part by the idea that the pipe she invented is turning her at once into an instrument and an animal.

This is given an extra purchase by the animal origins of Apollo's own instrument. The Homeric Hymn to Hermes tells how the newborn Hermes steals 50 of Apollo's herd of cattle. Apollo sets out in search of his animals. In the meantime, Hermes has invented the lyre, by stretching strings of sheep-gut, or in some versions of the myth, cowhide from Apollo's own animals, across a frame formed from the shell of a tortoise. The first half survives of a satyr play known as the *Ichneutae* (The Trackers) in which Sophocles dramatises the Hymn. Apollo employs a group of satyrs to assist him in his search for the lost cattle. The satyrs come to a standstill, terrified by the sound of the lyre being

played invisibly from deep within a cave. Cyllene, the guardian of the cave, appears and explains to the satyrs that what they hear is the sound of the lute which Hermes has recently invented. The Homeric Hymn to Hermes speaks of Hermes teaching the tortoise to sing, and this theme is enlarged in Sophocles's play. The instrument, which will eventually be offered to Apollo by Hermes to reconcile him to the loss of his cattle, is a dumb animal given voice by being eviscerated and skinned. The satyr chorus asks 'How shall I believe that the voice of that which is dead can roar thus loudly?' but receives from Cyllene only the dead-bat reply 'Believe: for in death the beast has gotten a voice, but in life was speechless' (Sophocles 1919, 473, ll. 290-1). The chorus persists, altering the focus of its questions: now it asks, what part of the animal is it that sings after death, 'whether it is the part that is within or the part that is without'? This seems to be the right question, for Cyllene's answer - 'It is, as it were, his coat' - means it is both the animal's inside and his outside (Sophocles 1919, 473-5, ll. 300-1).

The shell of the tortoise is neither precisely part of it, nor precisely apart from it, and thus, perhaps, analogous to the voice. Creatures who have voices are able to go beyond their bodily selves, and so, in a certain sense, live beyond their deaths. The skin is ventriloquial, its doubling of the body a doubling of the way in which the voice shadows the self. The voice is both inside and outside the self, just as the skin faces both ways, into the body, and outwards to the world. The focus on the relation between skin and sound continues in the discussion between the chorus and Cyllene. Where, the chorus is curious to know, does he keep this instrument - 'enclosed in a coffer or, perhaps, in a basket as a pipe?' 'Nay', replies Cyllene, 'but the skin of an ox or a hide well covereth it' (Sophocles 1919, 475, ll. 304-5). The point of this exchange is hard to make out precisely, but it seems to revert to the concern with where the voice comes from. A skin does not appear to have the power to originate voice, because a skin is merely surface. The chorus keeps wanting to know about the inside of things (what is inside the cave, what is inside the instrument, what is the instrument itself kept inside). Cyllene's reply, which seems to say that the instrument doesn't need covering because it is itself covered (the tortoise shell is doubled by an ox's hide), implies the possibility of a voice that comes from the skin alone.

Ovid's account of the flaying anticipates the unflinching realism that will characterise later renderings of the myth, a realism that seems to acknowledge the fact that the smooth, silent patina of beauty that paintings share with Apollo's white and marmorial flesh is contradicted by the grisly surgery that is required to teach Apollo's lesson to the animal, the foreigner. Only Titian seems to have allowed the surface of his painting to be agitated and interrupted by the 'sound over vision' of the violent scene it depicts. The Marsyas story therefore becomes readable as the defeat - or 'purification' of music by the surgery of harmony and metre. Tony Harrison's sardonic rendering of the Ichneutae draws out the politics of this suffering:

Wherever the losers and the tortured scream  
 The lyres will be playing the Marsyas theme..  
 The Kithara cadenza, the Muse's mezzo trill  
 Cover the skinning and the screaming still...



Some virtuoso of Apollo's Ur-violin  
Plays for the skinners as they skin (Harrison 1990, 64-5)

But the tragedy of Marsyas only produces more music: the music of the liquid cries which emerge as the clear-running water of the river which inherits the name of Marsyas. In fact the instrument formed in the cave is a copulative commixture.

## 6. Blithering Idiots

The low status of wind instruments accounts in part for the association which grew in medieval Europe between fools - whose dress emphasised their skinny nature - and bagpipes. The bauble, or bladder on a stick with which jesters were traditionally provided, seems to be linked to their function as emitters of nonsensical vacancy, or hot air. The 1509 English translation of Sebastian Brant's *Das Narrenschiff* shows a fool in a horned cap playing bagpipes, with a lute and harp spurned on the ground beside him. The accompanying poem instructs us:

Of impacient Folys that wyll nat abyde correccioun  
Unto our Folys Shyp let hym come hastely  
Whiche in his Bagpype hath more game and sport  
Than in a Harpe or Lute most swete of melody  
I fynde unnumerable Folys of this sorte  
Which in theyr Bable have all they hole confort  
For it is oft sayd of men both yonge and olde  
A fole wyll nat gyve his Babyll for any golde (Brant 1509, sig. cviir)

The 'bauble' or 'bayble' carried by the fool was sometimes a head on a stick, sometimes a bladder full of air. The word 'bladder' derives from Old Teutonic *blaê-drôn*, from a verb stem *blaê*, to blow and *drôn*, contrivance or instrument. This word spawns a number of words for noisy, vacuous speech, of the kind that one might imagine would issue from a bladder, like, *blether* and *blither*. Etymology thus attests to a strong association between air, skin and idiocy. Perhaps the Pied Piper in his airy motley is a descendant of the flapping, uppity Marsyas. King Lear's fool plays constantly on the idea that he is the embodiment of this substantial kind of 'nothing'. Kent remarks of one of the Fool's speeches 'This is nothing', to which he replies 'Then 'tis like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer, you gave me nothing for't' (Shakespeare 1998; *King Lear* 1.iv, 126-8, p. 639). The Fool's repeated references to paring away shells and rinds - 'Thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides, and left nothing i' the middle' - (Shakespeare 1998; *King Lear* I.iv, 178-9, p. 639) seem to make reference to his bauble, establishing airy nothingness as that which is enclosed in skin. Much of the play is concerned with what happens when people are exposed to 'the enmity o' the air' (Shakespeare 1998; *King Lear* II.ii, 401, p. 647), the blasts of the 'to and fro conflicting wind' (Shakespeare 1998; *King Lear* III.i, 11, p. 648), or who, like Edgar, voluntarily embrace the 'unsubstantial air' (Shakespeare 1998; *King Lear* IV.i, 7, p. 655). Air is heavy, pestilential and

powerful in the play: but it is also associated with the lightness of being associated with 'tattered clothes' (Shakespeare 1998; *King Lear* IV.vi, 160, p. 660) and other skinlike integuments. Pretending to Gloucester that he has fallen over Dover cliff, Edgar tells him 'Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,/So many fathom down precipitating,/Thou'dst shivered like an egg' (Shakespeare 1998; *King Lear* IV.vi, 49-51, p. 659). There is no music in this play, but plenty of crying and wailing. As Lear himself notes, 'the first time that we smell the air/We wawl and cry' (Shakespeare 1998; *King Lear* IV.vi, 175-6, p. 660).

The sound of a bagpipe suggests simple and involuntary venting, the noise made by the friction of air and skin and that escapes from one during the performance of animal functions, such as eating, sleeping, excreting, copulating and dying: the kind of vocal noises, of howling, sighing, coughing, grunting, sneezing, snoring or roaring, that Aristotle said were 'unensouled' voice (2.8; Aristotle 1993, 32-3). The bagpipe is the perfect image of the profane 'bellyspeaking' of which the history of ventriloquism is so full. According to the Christian mythographer Fulgentius, writing in the late fifth century, the 'swollen cheeks' [*tumentes buccas*] or 'inflamed cheeks' [*buccarum inflamina*] which the flute causes in Athena go along with the dirtiness of the flute's sound:

It was according to the art of music that Minerva discovered her double flute, which anyone skilled in music despises for the poverty of its sounds. They are said to have laughed at her puffed out cheeks because the flute has a windy sound in the music it makes [*ventose in musicis sonet*] and no particular character in the tones specific to it (*idiomatum*). It hisses [*sibilet*] rather than clearly enunciates its matter. Thus anyone at all skilled laughs at her harsh blowing (Fulgentius 1971, 94-5; translation adjusted).

As we have already seen, the nobility of the lyre comes largely from the fact that it allows simultaneous speech or song. This seems to be in accordance with the principle of the coordinated parallelism of bodies with which stringed instruments are associated. But wind instruments do not simply monopolise the organs of speech, for they can also suggest the mimicry or mongrelising of speech by musical sound, in accordance with the principle of copulative commixture that animates them. Certainly the bagpipe has often been thought of as a sort of dissociated voice, either prophetic or profane. Aristotle does not mention farting as among those sounds produced by ensouled creatures which do not have soul in them but he might well have, for the fart is the concentrated image of the body's profane, involuntary utterance, a little death which darkly anticipates and perhaps also comically defends against the final grating passage of the spirit through its collapsing walls of flesh in the death-rattle – the 'crack' (a common term in English for the sound of a fart until the nineteenth century) matching the croak. Playing the preposterous pipes turns you arsy-versy.

There is a long tradition associating the bagpipe and the fart. The lust and gluttony of Chaucer's Miller are roundly suggested by the fact that he is an accomplished bagpiper, as well as a monumental farter ('General Prologue' ll. 566-7; Chaucer 1988, 32; Block

1954, 239-43). A sixteenth century German engraving shows a devil playing a bagpipe the bag of which is constituted by a monk's head, while a second, leering face bulges out of the devil's belly, its nose a penis and the navel furnishing its single eye. The suggestion is that devils speak from the lower portions of the body rather than from the upper.

The bagpipe is the substantial embodiment of a more general tradition associating farting with musical performance. It is a mild, but pleasant shock to find in St. Augustine's *City of God* the report that there are those 'who can at will, and without any odour, produce such a variety of sounds from their anus that they seem to be singing in that part' (Augustine 1998, 626-7). And, buried in William Camden's vast geographical and historical survey of Britain of 1586 is the following record of the unusual form of land lease held by one Baldwin in Suffolk:

*Baldwin le Pettour* (marke his name well) held certaine lands, by Serjeanty, (the words I have out of an old booke) for which on Christmasse day, every yeere before our soveraigne Lord the King of England he should perform one *Saltius*, one *Sufflatus*, and one *Bumbulus* ...as we read elsewhere, his tenour was, *per salsum, sufflum* and *pettum*, that is, if I understand these tearmes aright, That hee should daunce, puff up his cheekes making therewith a sound, and besides let a cracke downeward. Such was the plaine and jolly mirth of those times. (Camden 1637, 464)

The most famous example in modern times of this kind of performance is Joseph Puyol, the famous Petomane of the French music-hall (Nohain and Caradec 1967).

Those afflicted with what the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries called hysterical 'vapours' were also subject to being turned into windbags (hysteria would become a stringed instrument in the next century when it came to be thought of as a condition of the nerves). Along with all the other effects attributed to hysteria, hypochondria and spleen, those afflicted with the vapours became involuntarily sonorous bodies, full of grumblings and growlings, and subject to intemperate eruptions either from the anus or the mouth. John Purcell described the onset of an attack of the vapours in his *Treatise of Vapours* of 1702:

Those who are troubled with *Vapours* generally perceive them approach in the following manner; first, they feel a Heaviness upon their Breast; a Grumbling in their Belly; they Belch up, and sometimes Vomit, Sower, Sharp, Insipid, or Bitter Humours; They have a Difficulty in breathing; they think they feel something that comes up into their Throat, which is ready to Choak them; they struggle; cry out; make odd and inarticulate sounds, or mutterings... Some moreover have their Bellies swell'd and stretch'd like a Drum; their Hypochondria's distended; and they fancy they feel some part within them rowl from place to place. (Purcell 1702, 3-4)

The sufferers' loss of self-possession is signalled by the fact that they do not speak from their mouths or vocal apparatus, but through the noisy reverberations of their skins,

either tightly-stretched like a booming tympanum, or borborygmically churning. It should not be a complete surprise therefore that a condition conceived in such sonorous terms should have suggested musical cures such as those proposed by Richard Browne in his *Medicina Musica* of 1729.

## 7. Tattoos

One of the most distressing effects of hysterical swelling was known as tympanitis, which nowadays refers to an inflammation of the inner ear, but previously named a condition in which the belly was so tightly distended with wind that it sounded like a drum. Perhaps the slang expression 'tight' to signify 'drunk', along with the expression 'tight as a drum', may derive from the sense that the condition of the drunkard is to be swollen with the liquid he has guzzled.

The drum is a competitor for the bagpipe and the harp as image of the sounding body. Although the drum is a percussion instrument, it has elements in common with both string and wind instruments. The compression and resiling of the stretched skin of the drumskin, and the corresponding compression and relaxation of the air inside the drum, approximate to the effect of a plucked string, in which tension is first increased and then released as sound energy. The amplifying resonance chamber of the drum is a feature of many stringed instruments. I said earlier that Ovid's rendering of Marsyas's torture turns him into an ironic lyre: but Ovid also writes that his stripped body can be seen pulsating, as though to reveal the action of percussion in him. Indeed, one might say that the bag stretched with wind is a kind of drum. Even the word 'blow' seems to suggest a link between the buffets delivered by the air and the buffeting of air enclosed in skin to produce sound.

The Aeolian Harp does not at first sight look like a form of skin-instrument. It is, after all, a string instrument, rather than a wind, or percussion instrument. But the Aeolian Harp is not played like a stringed or wind instrument, in that it is not plucked or blown. Rather it is brushed, swept or strummed, as one brushes hair or the skin of a friction drum. The Aeolian Harp suggests ghostly visitation. There seems to be a particular fondness for instruments involving touch in evoking the idea of survival beyond mortal life, either as unquiet ghost or emparadised spirit. That the harp has become the instrument of choice, not only in many ghost stories, but also as the instrument played in heaven may have something to do with the implication of the skin in it. The characterising sound of the harp in orchestral music is, after all, the swept arpeggio.

Where the bagpipe signifies and enacts the commerce of living bodies, conjoining inside and outside, human and animal, the role of the drum is to enact the meeting of or passage between the natural and supernatural worlds, or the worlds of the living and the dead. The use of drums and percussion is associated in many cultures with divination and the summoning of or communication with spirits, as well as with

initiation rituals and rites of passage (Worms 1953; Strömbäck 1956; Macdowell 1957). Sometimes these rituals involve the making of secret drums or percussion instruments, on which enormous care is lavished, as though the making of the drum were itself the making of a new body. Rodney Needham has suggested that percussion and the sound of the drum in particular is typically employed in transitions and meetings between worlds or conditions, either in the form of the meeting of the human and the superhuman, or in the form of a transition from one ordered state to another via an intermediary condition of noise, or formless disorder (Needham 1967). Anthony Jackson's 'Sound and Ritual' (1968) extends and particularises Needham's proposals regarding the role of sound in effecting symbolic transitions. Those making their appearance from the 'other side' in European and American culture often knock at surfaces: pounding on the door, like the imperious knocking heard by the drunken porter in *Macbeth*, 'stamping on the floor' like the 'grisly ghost' who invades the king's hunting hall in the ballad 'King Henry' (Child 32), rapping on tables and banging on walls.

Perhaps the most well-known and suggestive case of such a percussive visitant is that of the 'Daemon of Tadworth', or Tadworth Drummer of 1661-2. John Mompesson of Tadworth in Wiltshire had brought a lawsuit against a local drummer, who had been found guilty of obtaining money by fraud. His drum was confiscated and handed over to Mompesson. Soon afterwards, Mompesson's house was afflicted by ghostly drummings. Presuming that it was the spirit of the convicted man or a spirit conjured by him who was responsible for the tumult, Mompesson sought him out and had him arraigned and committed to Salisbury Gaol, though he was eventually released on appeal. The case was investigated by Joseph Glanvill, Fellow of the Royal Society and vigorous defender of the reality of witchcraft and sorcery, who included a detailed account of it in his book *A Blow at Modern Sadducism* (1668). The title indicates how physical a rebuff Glanvill hoped to offer to those who doubted the reality of spirits and demons with his account of this case of demonic assault and battery. Henry More reinforces this in a letter of commendation at the beginning of Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphatus* (1681), in which the Tadworth Drummer case is recapitulated. More tells the story of a rationalist friend of his, who would not believe anything unless it were supported by palpable experience. In his case, this takes a percussive form, for 'while his Servant was pulling off his Boots in the Hall, some invisible Hand gave him such a clap upon the Back, that it made all ring again'. More records the difficulty he has in convincing his friend later in life by argument of the reality of the spiritual realm, for 'nothing of such subtile consideration did any more execution on his mind, than some Lightning is said to do, though it melt the Sword, on the fuzzy consistency of the Scabbard'. But when reminded of the spiritual clap on the back, 'he was more confounded by this rubbing up his memory, than with all the Rational or Philosophical Argumentations that I could produce' (Glanvill 1682, 12-13).

Drums enact the tangible-audible commerce between worlds in other cultures too. Michael Oppitz has described in detail the figuring in the decorations of shamanic drums from the Himalayan region of West Nepal of the different worlds that it brings together: the upper world of gods and spirits, the lower world of animals and demons,

and, as it were stretched between them, the middle world of earth and humans (Oppitz 1992, 69-72). Interestingly, the principal decorative motif among the drums of the Magar people who are Oppitz's subject is the drawing on the drum of the figure of a drum, incorporating on its pictorial surface the idea of the skin's liminality. The large number of examples of purgative flogging, flaying and thrashing assembled in Frazer's *Golden Bough* suggests that an important part of the process may have been the making of noise on the drubbed skins and bodies of those subjected to such ritual assaults, since inchoate noise is as effective at driving away evil spirits as it is at summoning them. Frazer thinks that these malignant influences may be imagined as not just hovering in the vicinity, but as 'clinging...to their persons', or 'sticking like a leech or a bur to the skin of the living' (Frazer 1936, 9.260, 262).

Drums are also associated with resurrection through the skin. One of the most famous stories of tympanic afterlife is told of John Ziska, the leader of a radical group of Waldensians and Wycliffites who engaged in a bitter struggle against papal power in Bohemia the early 1420s. After Ziska's death, stories began to spread that, in the words of Montaigne, he had 'wished to be flayed after death and his skin to be made into a drum to bear in battle against his foes' (Montaigne 1991, 14). Ziska's wish became proverbial for the idea of resolution maintained beyond death and there were reports that his request had been fulfilled and that the enemy had fled at the terrifying sound of his beaten skin. Montaigne tells the story in his essay 'Our Emotions Get Carried Away Beyond Us' (*Nos affections s'emportent au delà de nous*) in illustration of the principle that, as he puts it, 'we are never "at home": we are always outside ourselves' (Montaigne 1962, 18-24). Related to this is the widespread belief in the antagonism between the wolf and the sheep that survives even after death, making it unwise to mix their skins when making a drum. As Robert Heath explains in a poem of 1650:

Such is the strange Antipathie between  
The Wolfe and sheep; that a Drum with Wolves skin  
Headed and beat, the parchment bottome breaks,  
And soundless to the stick no answer makes:  
So the Wolfe's by, the Lambstrings break, so dumb  
Is th'other, when you sound a Wolves-skin'd Drum. (Heath 1650, *Elegies*, 9)

The raucous Marsyas also has a particular mythical affiliation to the drum, since he is said in some traditions to be the companion of the Phrygian goddess of fertility and wild nature, Cybele, whose ecstatic cult centres on the music of the pipe and the tabor, this latter being struck by the palms of the hands. Though it has recently been suggested that the attribution of the tabor or tympanum to Cybele, and Meter, her Greek equivalent, may actually have been Greek in origin, the percussiveness of her rituals was the distinctive sign of the dangerous, delicious outlandishness of her cult (Roller 1999, 148-51).

The kind of corybantic revelling associated with the cult of Cybele experienced a revival in the epidemics of tarantism or dancing mania that flared up in Europe from the

fourteenth century onwards. The frenzied dances, which would go on for hours and even days on end were attempts to cure the effects of the bite of the *Lycosa tarantula* spider of Southern Europe (a wolf spider which is named after the Italian town of Taranto in Apulia and unrelated to the South American tarantula). The spider bite was believed to produce a condition of deathly torpor, paralysis, melancholy and, eventually, death, symptoms which could only be eased by lengthy periods of energetic dancing which left sufferers exhausted but purged of the poison. Nico Staiti has charted in detail the iconographical mergings of the representations of tarantismo with traditions of Dionysian procession and revelry, the two traditions being held together by the shared importance in them of the drum or tambour (Staiti 1990, 94-106).

Tarantism seems to draw together rhythmic sound and the skin in a particularly intense way. Just as the sound of the struck drum, associated often with pipe music, was central to the attempt to stimulate and maintain frenzied dance, so the skin of the sufferer was implicated both in disease and cure. The spider's bite had entered through the skin, and the skin was reciprocally the most important organ in the expulsion of the poison, which was thought to be sweated out by means of the dance. Not only was disorderly rhythm necessary to diffuse the lethargy of the sufferer by opening up the skins in which they had become as it were too tightly confined, sufferers would be compelled to dance annually at the precise time at which they had received their bites (Hecker 1970; Russell 1979; Bartholomew 2000). Some would need to be beaten or would beat themselves into the necessary condition of purgative frenzy.

Among the many medical writers and natural historians to investigate tarantism was Giorgio Baglivi, physician to Pope Innocent XII and professor of anatomy at the Sacred College in Rome, who included a lengthy account of the disease and its cure in his *De praxi medica* of 1699, translated into English as *The Practice of Physick* in 1704. Baglivi offers some interesting speculations about how music might effect its cure. Relying on an atomist account of the nature of matter, he lays emphasis on the percussive nature of music, arguing that 'considering that the Operations of Motion are performed by the Contact of Bodies, tis no Wonder that the slightest Impressions of Motion produce admirable Effects, by communicating the *Impetus* of the Contact to the very remotest Parts' (Baglivi 1704, 404). He represents the skin as a receiver, amplifier and transmitter of the percussive impressions of music to the unhealthily congested spirits of the sufferer. The music of the tarantella seems to have been thought both to pulverise the fixated body and to rearticulate it.

[A]ll of us are sensible that upon Hearing an unwonted and agreeable Harmony of Musick, we feel first a gentle Shivering over the Skin. And a sort of Erection of the Hair... 'Tis probable, that the very swift Motion impress'd upon the Air by Musical Instruments, and communicated by the Air to the Skin, and so to the Spirits and Blood, does in some Measure dissolve and dispel their growing Coagulation; and that the Effects of the Dissolution increase as the Sound it self encreases [sic], till, at last, the Humours retrieve their primitive fluid State, by vertue of these repeated Shakings and Vibrations; upon which the Patient

revives gradually, moves his Limbs, gets upon his Legs, groans, and jumps about with Violence, till the Sweat breaks and carries off the Seeds of the Poison. (Baglivi 1704, 406, 408)

The spider, which can be thought of as an epidermal creature, not only because of the common revulsion at the thought of insects and arachnids running across the skin, but also because of its light and tenuous constitution, was itself thought to be particularly sensitive to the effects of music and itself to be able to dance. Baglivi described the substance of the ‘tarantula’ spider as ‘almost all brittle, membranous, and most subtile, filled with a peculiar sort of nutritious Lymph (for I seldom or never observ’d any appearance of blood in it) so that it is no wonder if the slightest motion from without causes involuntary Throws’ (Baglivi 1704, 383). Baglivi sees the spider’s own tarantella as induced by the rattling tattoo of vibratory sound:

[T]he undulatory or wavering Motion of the Air...being struck pretty sharply by the Musical Instruments, and terminating upon the membranous Body of the Insect, makes it not at all strange, if it seem to move at the sound of the Musick, altho that dancing proceed from these external Motions, rather than any pleasure or natural instinct inclining it to move so on that occasion. (Baglivi 1704, 383-4)

## 8. The Help of Your Good Hands

### *Adversity*

It is to be supposed that clapping among humans may have evolved from the action of slapping and cuffing the body, often accompanied by jumping and stamping, which is characteristic of primates in states of excitement. It is sometimes suggested that clapping and stamping may have provided the first systematic music produced by human beings. Clapping the hands together has several advantages over slapping the body. First of all, it produces a much more emphatic, consistent and easily controllable sound. In clapping, one aims to do more than merely sound skin against skin: think of the flat, insulting patter of applause delivered with gloved hands. Clapping is actually complex action to perform: the truly effective or vital clap aims to compress and explode a little bubble or bomb of air, compressing and accelerating the air momentarily trapped between the palms, just at the sonorous ‘sweet spot’ so relished by tennis players. Suetonius describes the modes of clapping that Nero taught Neapolitans to use in applauding his singing, notably the *imbrices*, which seems to have involved clapping with the hands hollowed like a roof-tile (*imbrex*) in order to create a sharp crack (Suetonius 1924, 2.116-17). Despite the association of handclapping with childish glee, children take a long time to learn how to do it properly, though they seem to learn – or are taught – very early on to want to.

Clapping can be understood as a specialisation of the action of manual striking which is a distinctive accomplishment of primates. Most animals employ an action of tearing



to attack or defend themselves: lions and sharks with teeth, owls and eagles with beaks, crabs and stag-beetles with claws. Some quadrupeds (mostly those whose real speciality is in fact running away) rely upon kicking, of which the action of hitting with the fist special to primates is a specialisation. Given the importance to primates of the actions of pushing, prodding, shoving, rapping, knocking, thumping, slapping, slamming, buffeting, punching, and the other actions proper to the hand, it is not surprising that we should have evolved such an interest in the actions of concussion or violent conjuncture in nature. *Ad-vers-ity*, the impacting of things, things that come up violently against each other: many other kinds of contact or encounter occur in nature, but the attention of human beings continues to be irresistibly drawn to such processes. The work of war continues to enlarge and develop the typologies of impact, through the club, the knife, the arrow, the bullet, the bomb, the missile. It is surprising that other ways of defeating or exterminating one's opponent – through radiation, poison gas or biological agents, and other forms of infiltrating assault – should have taken so long to develop. Many of the words employed to designate enemies – the opponent, the adversary – suggest this meeting, collision or coming together of what stands face-to-face. This notion of adversity – the agon of the blow or smiting – has predominated in definitions of sound.

Not that adversity is always adverse. The word 'smack' which can refer to the sharp sound of an impact with the open hand, usually on another expanse of skin, to the sound of the lips coming together and parting, and to a taste (as also in German *schmecken*), seems to suggest the compacting of sound, touch and taste in the primary action of feeding from the breast. Is not the birth cry itself traditionally elicited by the midwife's smack, as though to start the infant's clock of skin? William James (1890 2.481) refers to the suggestion (apparently first advanced in F.G. J. Henle's *Anthropologische Vorträge* of 1876-80) that the action of clapping is a 'symbolic abridgment of an embrace'.

### **Triumph**

Clapping is a neutralisation and diversification of these actions. In its primary meaning, clapping retains its associations with violence, functioning as an emblematic display on the body of the aggressor of what may be in the offing for his victim. Clapping of hands retains its association with anger, triumph and insulting contempt through the Old Testament. When Balaam has failed to curse the tribes of Israel as he had been commanded, 'Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together' (Numbers 24.10). It is said of the despised Job that 'Men shall clap their hands at him, And shall hiss him out of his place' (Job 27.23), and Job is said to return the insult: 'he addeth rebellion unto his sin. He clappeth his hands among us, And 'multiplieth his words against God (Job 34.37). In fact, the expression 'clapping hands' in English translations of the Old Testament collapse together a number of expressions from different semantic fields (Fox 1995, Rogland 2001).

Similarly, clapping the hands is also associated with the accomplishment of magical actions and transformations in many cultures, presumably because it enacts a sudden, paroxysmic concentration and release of vital force. Many cultures share a notion of

the annunciatory role of the thunderclap. Clapping can summon spirits, and also drive them away. I am told by Santanu Das that, in rural parts of India, hermaphrodites or sexually indeterminate persons signify their approach by clapping.

Compulsive hand clapping is a common behaviour among autistic children, and can also be therapeutically employed among victims of burns suffering the intense solitude of sensory deprivation, perhaps because it provides definition and structure in an otherwise chaotic and insufficiently differentiated flux of experience (Christenberry 1979). There is some evidence (Van der Meij 1997) that clapping can induce pleasurable epileptiform episodes in the brain.

There are important distinctions to be made between the individual clap – the Caliph calling for his dancers, the magician dismissing or summoning his spirits, the clapping which inaugurates and completes the action of Shinto prayer – and collective clapping. A single clap is convulsive and climactic. It marks a precipitate change of state, a coming to completion, or a new beginning, or a reversal: in all cases, a sudden, sharp interruption to the steady unrolling of time. Clapping draws a line in time, as in the ‘clapperboard’ which divides up scenes in film-making. Clapping belongs with the instinctive ejaculations of the body – coughing, sneezing, vomiting, ejaculation of sperm, all of those actions of violent exteriorisation which have been thought of as the overtaking of the body by some outside agency, but which can be brought under voluntary control in the single or separated clap. During the 1990s, Krishan Chander Bajaj began a clapping cult in Delhi, claiming that clapping for about 20 minutes a day had reversed his glaucoma and could cure many other diseases by increasing circulation and dispersing blockages in the blood. (<<http://www.sholay.com/stories/2000/june/10062000.htm>>)

Collective clapping, by contrast, is convergent and conjunctive. Rather than intensifying time, it thickens and spreads it. One might say that the single clap temporalises time, takes a featureless space of time and exposes it to temporality by concentrating it into an instantly diffused instant, while collective clapping slows or arrests the passage of time, forming it into a mass, or durative volume. The clap enacts instantaneity; applause enacts extension. At the same time, extended passages of formless applause themselves mark transitions. It has been suggested (Needham 1967) that the principal role of percussion in some cultures is to mark contacts between the human and supernatural worlds, and ritual transitions between them, and clapping may be a specialised form of this general use of percussion to produce amorphous masses of sound.

Clapping mediates two primary aspects of sound, namely its power to penetrate boundaries and, by a reparative action, its power to form protective milieux. Put simply, sound can be both an intolerable wound, and an armour or cataplasm against the injurious effects of sound itself. Sound pervades, but also surrounds. Clapping turns the puncturing, penetrating sound of the individual clap into a diffuse, knitted multiplicity.

### **Claptrap**

In my book *Dumbstruck* (2000), I suggested that the voice formed itself into characteristic profiles and postures, that could be thought of as imaginary ‘voice-bodies’, bodies shaped performatively out of the implied or enacted relations of the voice to the substance of its sound – self-caressing, self-assaulting, self-inflating. Perhaps clapping, by contrast, is a body-voice, noise made quasi-vocal. Clapping is a spilling over of feeling into formless expression: that nevertheless gives expression a form (a sharp, rapidly declining, rapidly renewed, spike of sound). The clap is one of a number of profane, because indeterminate sounds that humans make. If the distinctive sound of the human is the sound of language, then the quasi-language of non-articulate sound produced from other places than the mouth, always has the taint of the gratuitous, the excessive, or the proscribed. Clapping is the benign superflux of the body, the diarrhoea of sound. Clapping is the absence of speech: clapping is a reduction of sound to primary elements. Early usages of the word clapping reflect discredit on the tongue which, in empty speech, is reduced to a percussion instrument, knocking vacantly against the mouth.

What is wrong with desultory applause, the kind rendered so effectively in the ‘Sirens’ episode of *Ulysses*, to mark the end of a song sung in a bar – ‘Clapclap. Clipclap. Clappyclap’? It is applause that is tattered by gaps. There are few actions as acidly derisive as the slow handclap, especially when conducted by a single individual. Instead of an excited crackle of sound, there is an ominous series of empty clacks, leaving gaping silences between them. The warmly lapping or engulfing garment of sound produced by applause is thereby rent and emaciated. The analogies between clapping and the idea of an ideal garment are dramatised in W.B. Yeats’s question at the beginning of ‘Sailing to Byzantium’

An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing  
For every tatter in its mortal dress

Clapping is made up of gaps, but it aims to obliterate them. Clapping is like the fiercest, most effacing sort of scribbling. Why can no audience sustain a slow handclap? It always disintegrates, or speeds up. It is as though we crave the merging of the separate rhythms, the white noise, the drip-painting, the blizzard, the palimpsest. Clapping is the attempt to knit a continuum of sound, a surface, a volume, a body of sound. Applause forms a warmly lapping garment, a comfortable engulfment formed of many skins. When teams leave the savage exposure of the field of play, the passage into the safety of the dressing room through the birth canal of the player’s tunnel is often mediated by the practice of ‘clapping one’s opponents in’. In this one team forms two lines of applauding players through which the other team funnels in single file. Usually the applauded team will then form themselves into a tunnel through which the applauders can pass, recalling the threading exchanges of inside and outside employed in many forms of country dancing, which are themselves sometimes accompanied by

clapping. In both contexts, clapping participates in an interweaving topology of sound and movement which converts adversary standoffs into inversive interrelations.

### ***Overlapping***

Clapping has silent correlatives in actions of self-touching, in prayer, crossing oneself, or in bringing a finger to the lips, or scratching a nose or ear, which often accompany actions of thought. If clapping is a form of bodily overflow into sound, we might also say that clapping belongs to a bodily system of overlapping. Perhaps the closest correlative to the use of the hands to produce sharp sounds is the conventional action of Christian prayer, which seems to act to close and double the body in on itself, as a way of turning it outwards towards some other centre of concern.

Clapping makes you aware of yourself: and of the other in yourself. In clapping, as in many other activities, you lay the two surfaces of yourself one against another. Children clap by bringing both hands together – the symmetry looks very awkward. Most adults in the West clap by clapping one hand on another; percussion of the self on self, usually the right on the left, or of the I-hand on the it-hand, the me-skin on the world skin. Clapping is ecstatic: it puts us beside ourselves: singular clapping is as inadequate and paradoxical as the idea of one hand clapping. This makes the Zen koan of the one-hand-clapping poignantly appropriate to contexts such as the experience of stroke in which there may be the agonising sensation of the loss of part of the self (Veith 1988). Clapping one hand on another dramatises the fact that you are a subject and an object simultaneously, a doer and a done to; you fold yourself over yourself, you form an interface with yourself, which joins to the interface you form with others. This, after all, is the condition of all sound. John Cage was mistaken in his dream of an art that would liberate the voices buried within things, letting things sing out their individual songs. For there is no sound that is not collateral, the sound of at least two things coming together. The voice is the abstract dream that an entity could have its own sound, though this is as impossible as the sound of a one-handed clap. Clapping lets copulation thrive and itself prospers on it. Clapulation. Collapulation. Collabatteration.

You cannot clap alone. Clapping is not applause (the word that has got so much of the spattering plosiveness of clapping in it). Applause is a kind of infection, inflammation, conflagration, cloudburst. The impulse to clap runs as fast as an electric shock, and certainly faster than thought. This makes applause both unstable and subject to manipulation. The growth of organised ‘clagues’ and ‘claqueurs’ in early nineteenth-century French theatre stimulated outrage on the part of those who sought to restore to manipulated audiences their powers of independent judgement. But when the author of the pamphlet 1849 *A bas le claque!* sought to characterise the authentically attentive audience it was in terms of a quivering, sensitive organism, whose corporeal judgement goes too fast to be overseen by rational evaluation. This is not free and unswayed judgement, but a different kind of automatism:

Observe this attentive face, these dilated nostrils, these quivering lips, this taut neck, these hands ready to come together...What fire! What heat! What impetuosity! The pleasure experienced and the emotion felt in common run like an electric current through the whole crowd. There is no touch of the dead hand in this public! (Segaud 1849, 9)

Applause has sometimes suggested itself as belonging to the sphere of the irrational or the incalculable in human life. For example, the impulse to applaud provided William MacDougall with one of his arguments against behaviourism in his 1928 debate with one of its leading exponents, J. B. Watson:

I come into this hall and see a man on this platform scraping the guts of a cat with hairs from the tail of a horse; and, sitting silently in attitudes of rapt attention, are a thousand persons, who presently break out into wild applause. How will the Behaviorist explain these strange incidents? How explain the fact that the vibrations emitted by the catgut stimulate all the thousand into absolute silence and quiescence; and the further fact that the cessation of the stimulus seems to be a stimulus to the most frantic activity? (Watson and Macdougall 1928, 62-3)

Presumably we speak of a 'round of applause' because of a sense of the circulation of energies within it, a transmission, a passage. It is for this reason, surely, that the size of an audience is proportional to the duration of its applause: why does it take an arena full of people much longer to deliver even a perfunctory round of applause than a small concert hall? Presumably because the clapping has to go round more people. Applause and the desire to applaud feeds on itself. Individuals certainly feel the need to clap hands in pleasure and exaltation, but rarely feel the impulse to applaud out of a crowd. Individual clapping is always slow and deliberate, when one might expect it to be fast and furious, as though to fill all the available gaps. Clapping creates a space, a shape in time and space. A group of people define themselves as a group, rather than merely an aggregate; they enter into an exchange with the one being applauded, who is at once placed in front of the applause, and centred in its midst. Applause performs the same merging together of particularities as occurs in what it names, applause is a collective name for 'plaudits'.

Clapping involves listening as well as the creation of sound, in an agitated, energetic feedback loop; one is adjusting oneself all the time to what one hears, and what one hears is nothing more than the ongoing aggregation of all these minuscule adjustments. I know of no integrated history of the act, as well as the fact, of audience in human history, of the specific material ways in which listening has occurred, in different material circumstances, theatres, concert-halls, churches, classrooms, barracks. All the histories of audience response I have encountered (but I am still looking) seem to concern themselves with more cognitive or moral functions – with the ways in which audiences identify, understand, approve, and so on – rather than with their verifiable actions. The noisy action of clapping, along with all its accompaniments and variants – cheering, stamping, whistling, booing, hissing,

catcalling – would form a central part of such a history. In its absence, it is surprisingly hard to know how and how much audiences have clapped in different places, circumstances and times. Though the word ‘applause’ derives from the Latin ‘plaudere’, which means to beat or strike (the hands) together, the uses of the English word ‘applause’ that I have been able to chart up to the twentieth century may include handclapping but need not refer exclusively to it. It is clear that, in the age in which recorded and transmitted performances are more commonly experienced than ‘live’ performance, the transmission of applause is a way of making audiences and the fact and act of audience audible. All orators and actors learn the art of manipulating the subtle, hairtrigger mechanisms of applause, but the increased audibility of applause makes the sound of this answering response enter in to the performance itself, in something of the way in which sound entered into the silent film image, not supplementing or colouring or rounding out the image, but penetrating and renaturing it. Applause is present as a field phenomenological possibility at every moment of the performance.

Applause can only really succeed in relatively formal situations, in which time is formally segmented or strophed. Under certain circumstances, a speaker taking the podium after having been introduced, the failure, or suppression of the urge to applaud can be as poignant as an absconded sneeze. Time which is broken up by action and response, is also blended into itself – the gaps between the claps are suffused with the incipience of the applause, the applause itself is mingled with silence and its own dying fall.

### ***Clapped Out***

Clapping is a pure multiplicity which is neither decomposable into its separate elements, nor wholly totalisable. It belongs to the order of swarms, storms, floods, epidemics and nature’s semi-random specklings, frecklings and maculations, of ‘crowds, packs, hordes on the move, and filling with their clamor, space’ (Serres 1995, 2). Clapping is a quasi-organism, a quasi-animate substance. The landscape of clapping has its very distinctive and individual contours, as well as its own tones and colours, loops, undulations and fault-lines. It has its moods, weathers, textures, consistencies, rhythms, intensities. Clapping is somewhere between an energy and a substance; an energy trying to solidify itself as a substance, a substance coagulated from events and energies. Clapping is solidity forming out of rupture. The clapperboard marks the place of the cut, but also the place of the synchronising join. Clapping derives its shape and sound from interference patterns, from the intersections and knittings-together of these interruptions. It is background noise of things brought into the foreground, noise become signal. The function of clapping is to interrupt, but it becomes interruption interrupted, as it forms a kind of shape and syntax out of interruption. Clapping involves the filling, and the emptying of time. It occupies time by suspending it. The telling of a joke, the action of a play, must be held back while applause breaks out; but the holding back prepares another impulse to applaud, even while the first is dying away, like an underwave or cross-wave pushing through the ebb.

There are precise gradations of duration in clapping, and clapping is a way of projecting duration into bodily form and taking duration into the body. Under certain circumstances, only clapping for *too long* can be enough. The operators of the house lights in theatres know that they must be brought up at a precise moment before the applause starts to flag, becomes conscious of its own fatigue. Clapping conjures life: At the end of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, children are enjoined to clap to signify their belief in fairies and to bring the expiring Tinkerbell to life. But clapping is itself subject to aging and decomposition. Clapping gathers and loses intensity, in a cycle of increase and diminishment: clapping is associated both with the propagation of energy – 'going like the clappers' – and with its depletion – becoming 'clapped out'.

## 9. Conclusion

The answer to Marsyas's question – 'why do you tear me from myself?' – is that Marsyas dies as a victim of the desire for Apollonian distinction and autonomy, which must always have a subject and an object, a player and an instrument. But we have seen that the very multiplicity of Marsyas's appearances and revivals asserts a copulative commixture. Grafted and extended as it is into the stories of so many other sounding skins, and imaged not just as plane, screen or surface, but as a sounding volume, the skin of Marsyas portends the complex topology of contemporary intermedial relations. Since the work of Marshal McLuhan in the 1960s, the struggles and relations between different media or technologies have been seen in terms of the different sense modalities. According to this model, the senses are mapped on to the different media: the hand with the pen, stylus and keyboard, the ear with the telephone, phonograph and radio and the eye with the camera and the screen. Thus the history of technologies and media which is currently being so energetically undertaken in so many areas is accompanied by an investigation of the cultural history of the senses. We tend to think of these different media either opposing each other, or complementing each other, as though one piece of equipment were being bolted on to another, or one piece of territory being added to another. In either case, the sense, or medium, or technology in question is regarded as inhabiting its own demarcated area in space, as though there were some common ground or substrate upon which they rested.. However, at times of convergence or general aggregation such as ours, new, more dynamic relationships began to become visible, not only in our present, but in the past.

Media and mediation suggest that which comes between or moves across spaces and places. But what is the location in or at which the meeting of the spatial media of the eye – the image and the text – and the nonspatial media of the ear, composed not of shape and space but of duration and intensity – take place? On whose ground does the meeting or mediation of eye and ear, or, come to that, ear, nose and throat, take place, that of the eye, or that of the ear? Perhaps the skin, or the surprisingly composite sonorous skin I have been examining in this chapter, which is not wholly in the grip of

the eye, the ear, or even the hand, is most apt to be recruited to this role, providing the milieu in which the mingled body of the intermedial is shaped.

The skin can provide this topological repertoire, as well as the idea of a plane projection because, as has often been noted, it is the most mingled or intersensory organ. The skin is that of us which is presented to the eye, and our picturings of ourselves and of the world have often been borne and borne out too on one or another kind of skin. But the skin also includes, scooped or coiled within it, all the other organs of sense. The skin is both surface and depth. If skins are the favoured surfaces for inscription of text and image, a kind of primal bodily correlate for every kind of page, canvas or screen, then skins, membranes and diaphragms have also been the favoured forms in which sound has been both gathered and transmitted. Since the inauguration of the era of stored and reproducible sound in the late nineteenth century, it has been various kinds of sensitive surface which have furnished the mnemonic supports for sounds – in tinfoil cylinders, shellac or vinyl disks, ribbons of tape, magnetic or digital, and the exquisitely untouchable surfaces of the CD. Of course, digitisation may appear to have dispensed with the need for this kind of sensitive skin as a carrier of sound, for sound can now be encoded as a string of integers. But touch is liable to linger and make unexpected returns in the imagination of sound. Laurie Anderson introduced in performances of her *Songs and Stories From Moby Dick* a ‘sound-stick’, which was part crutch, part harpoon, and part fiddle-bow. A process that she calls ‘granulation’ allowed different pitches and timbres to be as it were distributed over the surfaces of the stick, so that sounds could be drawn out by the friction of her hands, as though a violin were to play its bow. The effect resembled that conveyed by other apparently virtual or bodiless instruments, such as the theremin, which the performer plays by generating sound waves by movements of his hands in the air, and the hypercello, which one can similarly play by sawing at thin air. These may be thought of as reversals of the Aeolian harp, that favourite Romantic instrument, which consists of strings designed to be played by the air; in the theremin and the hypercello, it is the air itself which seems to be being played. Perhaps behind all these actual and imaginary membranes of sound is the thought of the delicate tympanum of the ear, which vibrates to the impact of sound-waves and also transmits them inwards: the thought of a sounding ear, intimated to a resonating eye.

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