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Is There a "Christian" and a "Jewish" Avant-garde?

(*Gibt es eine ‚christliche' und eine ‚jüdische' Avantgarde?* *In: Cornelia Klinger, Wolfgang Müller-Funk (Hg.), Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarden, München/Paderborn (Wilhelm Fink) 2004, S. 81-96.)*

What I would like to develop as the thesis in my lecture is the fact that there have been at least two avant-gardes. One can be described as "deconstructive"; the other "constructive." Paradoxically, in this case the deconstruction preceded the construction. The second part of my title, which also requires explanation, refers to the terms "Jewish" and "Christian." With these terms I am not referring to specific people who referred to themselves as "Jewish" or "Christian," or who were classified as such by others. Rather, I refer to traditions of thought that one can assign to each religious tradition and its secularized forms. Due to time restrictions, I will refer only to certain aspects of these traditions of thought and their interplay around the year 1900.

The great upheaval around 1900, of which the avant-gardes are to be considered to be a part, has already often been defined as a crisis of language. There are many symptoms for this, which span from the emergence of linguistics via Rimbaud's poetry and literary texts such as Hofmannsthal's *Lord Chandos-Brief* (*Lord Chandos Letter*) to the birth of psychoanalysis. The similarity of these various expressions of this crisis of language seem to stem from a new relationship between language and "reality," signifier and signified, symbol and symbolized. I would therefore like to analyze this great upheaval in 1900 via the aspect of language—more precisely: via the aspect of Christian and Jewish experience of the relationship between written and spoken word—and from this, to develop the thesis of a specifically "Christian" and a specifically "Jewish" form of the avant-garde. As this is a vast topic, I must ask for your understanding that I only deal briefly with the premises of this thesis; namely, that a differing relationship between written and spoken word is one of the bases of the Jewish and the Christian modes of thought. I have handled this basic hypothesis in other writings.

The Semitic alphabet was the first alphabet ever. It came into being around 1000 BC, around the same time as the first monotheistic religion, the Jewish faith as introduced by Moses. The Greek alphabet came into being only about two hundred years later and brought about such things as: the development of the *polis* and of democracy with its written law; the emergence of philosophy and the sciences, as they, until this very day, shape the thinking of the

Occident, as a sharp division between religion and reason, culture and nature; the beginning of historical thought that led to thinking in utopian models (that of the social life or of scientific development), which call for their realization; and finally also a symbolic gender structure, which simultaneously "biologized" and raised to the level of a "law of nature" the dichotomy of spirit/material (body) and nature/culture. The reasoning that emerged from the Greek alphabet would contribute considerably to the spread of Christianity—the "Platonism for the people," as Nietzsche remarked.

The essential difference between the Semitic and the Greek writing system lies in the fact that in the Semitic alphabet only the consonants are written, while the Greek alphabet includes also the vowels, and thereby reproduced the spoken word in its entire form. A result of the consonant-alphabet was that only those who can speak the language can read the texts written in Semitic script, and could therefore infer from the context which word was meant. It also had as a result that in the Jewish religions and worldly traditions, a parallel relationship maintained itself between the written and spoken word. Among other forms, this parallel found expression in that on the one hand the Holy Scripture became fixed, a canonized text: since its publication by Ezra around 440 BC, it was not permitted to change a single word. On the other hand, the oral exegesis provided time and again for a new interpretation and reception of the text. The passing on of the Holy Scripture, therefore, was carried on from generation to generation via the speaking body and was reflected in the concept of an "oral Torah."

In contrast, the Greek alphabet, with its full record of the spoken language lead to a competition between the written and spoken word, which contained on the one side the devaluation of the fleeting, spoken word vis-à-vis the "eternal" written thought; on the other side it contained the gradual formation of the spoken language according to the laws and logic of that which was written. Christ as the "Word became Flesh" is *the* symbolic figure of this basic relationship of text and speech, spirit and material, and as such, the history of the Christian society can be read as the history of a long historical process in the course of which the spoken word slowly became regulated and formed by textuality: a process that accelerated itself rapidly with the invention of the book press, and around 1800, parallel to the beginning of a comprehensive alphabetization, accompanied a gradual inability to discern between the spoken and written word. The spoken word seemed to have flowed into the written language and to have been "assimilated" by this—and exactly this inability to discern between writing

and speaking stands at the beginning of the crisis of language which took hold in the nineteenth century. Signs and symbols could no longer to be recognized as different from the spoken word. This meant—especially for poets and writers—a crisis of creating and thinking that was determined by the feeling that not the Self speaks, but rather, is spoken. Rimbaud's famous dictum says nothing else: "It is incorrect to say: I think. One should say: 'One thinks me.' 'I' is another." A similar thought appears in Hofmannsthal's *Lord Chandos-Brief* (*Lord Chandos Letter*): "Everything collapsed from me into pieces [. . .] [and] the individual words swam about me [. . .] they are whirlpools [. . .] that never stop swirling, and through which one comes into emptiness." Therefore for him, "the ability is lost to think or to speak coherently about anything." For both—Rimbaud and Hofmannsthal, whom I cite only as examples—the crisis of the language is experienced as a crisis of the subject. But their reactions to this differ. Rimbaud describes himself as the prophet of a new language—and his poetry and writing seems like the attempt to turn back to the materiality of a spoken language that is not imprisoned by the written word. Rimbaud invents "the color of the vowels! *A* black, *E* white, *I* red, *O* blue, *U* green." He "determined form and movement of every consonant. With instinctive rhythms I flattered myself to discover a poetic word that someday would be accessible to all senses." In contrast, Hofmannsthal's Lord Chandos comes to the conclusion that for him, this language, in which he cannot find the "completely feverish thinking," is "more direct, more fluid, more glowing than words," because it is a "language, of which words not a single one is known to me; a language, in which the silent things speak to me." Rimbaud finally gives up and decides to abandon Europe as well as poetry. "My being became bitter as gall. As in a romance, I bade farewell to the world." At the age of 37 he dies, after his body is consumed by illness, alcohol- and drug abuse. On the contrary, Hofmannsthal makes this breakdown a theme—and he can do so, because he maintains a sharp division between the Being and the Sign of the text, between the spoken language and writing about the language. It may seem inadmissible to compare Rimbaud and Hofmannsthal with each other; however, in the perspective of the crisis of language, this comparison certainly offers itself—also, because the texts of Rimbaud are filled with allusions to Christ, the cross, and the Eucharist, while with —the baptized—Hofmannsthal, something seems to have been maintained that is in keeping with the Jewish tradition of the parallel between text and speech.

I just very consciously used the term of "assimilation" in order to describe the relationship between the written and spoken word in the nineteenth century, because hidden behind the

question of the language was the image of the Christian-Jewish assimilation, the fear of the inability to differentiate between Jews and non-Jews. In her essay "Sprache als Ort der Auseinandersetzung mit Juden und Judentum in und nach der Aufklärung in Deutschland,1780-1933" ("Language as Locus of Exchange with Jews and Jewry during and after the Enlightenment in Germany, 1780-1933"), Shulamit Volkov develops a narrative of the relationship between Jews and Christians during and after the Enlightenment. This narrative places language in the midpoint. She states that according to Herder's philosophy of language, language simultaneously becomes a part of the physical identity of the individual, the basis of the "national feeling" and national togetherness. She quotes Arndt who defines the German Fatherland as a place "wo allein die deutsche Zunge klingt" ("where the German tongue alone rings").This materiality of the language, according to Herder, also applied to Jews, who spoke in a language in accordance with their religion. For him, this meant that when Jews speak the German language, they not only betray their own identity, but they also infiltrate a foreign body of language. One recognizes—on the level of language—already early on, the anti-Semitic *topos* of the "Jewish venom" that creeps into the collective body of the German people and "poisons" this from within. The idea that the assimilation had to fail because Jews could never make a "proper German" language their own became a permanent topos of anti-Semitism in the nineteenth century, and led to the presumption that Heine and Börne had created "unauthentic works of art." "There is no doubt that they have all necessary talents; however, their *style* betrayed them—their *language*, their *tone* alone". In Richard Wagner's *Judentum in der Musik* (*Jewry in Music*), this idea found its clearest formulation and a simultaneous transfer onto every possible form of artistic creation.

> Above all, the fact that the Jew speaks the modern European language only as an acquired and not native language, preventing him from being able to express himself in a sovereign and fluent manner, has to be ruled out. A language, its enunciation, and its development is not the work of a single person, but rather a historical community: only whoever has grown up unconsciously in this community also takes part in all of its creations.

Of particular interest in this criticism of the "other language" of the Jew is, on the one hand, that Moses Mendelssohn spoke and wrote a superb German, while his contemporary Frederic the Second of Prussia only inadequately mastered the German language his whole life long. On the other hand, the fact is also remarkable that Wagner does not seem to differentiate between speaking and writing or speech and the founding of eternal intellectual works of art, hereby reflecting the difficulty of differentiating between speech and text that is characteristic of the full phonetic alphabet and the basis for the crisis of language. Paradoxically, though, the "linguistic nationalism" (Volkov) that based itself on *speaking* could only be disseminated

and gain such an influence because—as Benedict Anderson has shown in his book *Imagined Communities*—the printing of books and movable print had contributed to a standardization of thinking and speaking in all the areas in which the language was utilized. The discussion about the "speech of the Jew" appeared not only in anti-Semitic texts, but also played an important role in the inner-Jewish relations. Already around 1804, an author of the Hamburg Jewish community complained in an article about the "state of our Jewish community" about the "Jewish speech." It seemed incomprehensible to him "why our Jews, in the vast majority of cases, still persist on garbling the language of the country in which they have settled and that has become their native language; this is indeed terribly unpleasant to the ear." For this same reason, the Yiddish-speaking Jews of the East were experienced by assimilated Jews as a "burden" and "embarrassment."

If, however, speech is so central in this point of view, then could it not be that hidden behind the topos of the "other speech" of the Jew, there is in reality a criticism of the role of the spoken word in the Jewish tradition, a criticism of this *parallel relationship* of the spoken and written word that had accompanied the Jewish tradition of thought from its very beginning? In a cultural context that distinguishes itself by the non-discernment between speech and text, such a tradition of thought seems to be predestined to stamp him as "foreigner" and "outsider." Exactly this is the question that the avant-garde posed itself as a symptom of a crisis of language: if, as the example of Rimbaud shows, the language were experienced as a prison, so then the "Jewish" parallel of the written and spoken word—that stood for a speech that was *not* captive in the prison of the written word—appeared as the gate that leads out of the prison. If the avant-garde came about out of a historic context that demanded reform and radical change, and if the language—as that which did not differentiate between the written and spoken word—had become a reason for this crisis, then the "Jewish model," the Jewish tradition could have been interpreted as a possibility that would introduce the necessary push for innovation.

At this point I have to once again incorporate a short digression. The history of the Christian Occident is shaped by a phenomenon that Jan Assmann has designated with the term of the "flowing canon" as in Jewish tradition. The canon is constantly updated. This occurs however not via the oral exegesis, but rather via the fact that a canonized text is succeeded by another text that will again be raised to the level of the canon, thereby illustrating on the one hand a confirmation of the old canon and on the other hand its renewal. In order to come from one

canon to the next, there must be an innovative push that comes from the "outside." This "outside"—this now does not have to do with Assmann—can on the one side be the element of the feminine, which, in that it symbolizes disorder, uncertainty, the anomaly, provides a "problem" that moves along the *"Mythomotorik"* ("mytho-rhythm") (Assmann) of the Occident. On the other side, it can, however, be the element of that which is Jewish; for the Christian the 'Jew' is the symbolic figure of "doubt" that provides for the "deconstruction" that occurs before any "New Construction" can take place. The upheaval that paved its way with the avant-garde looked back to both elements. It aimed its gaze on the one hand at hysteria—women's illness and illness of unpredictability par excellence—and on the other hand at the Jews as the personification of doubt, much as Otto Weininger expressed it:

> The psychic contents of the Jew are affected entirely by a certain duality or plurality; he can never overcome this ambiguity, this duplicity, indeed, multiplicity. [. . .] This inner ambiguity, this lack of first-hand inner reality of any psychic event, the deficiency of that sense of being "of-and-for-one's-self," from which alone the highest creative power can flow; I believe this has to be seen as the definition of what I have called "the Jewish element as idea." It is like a condition **before being**, an eternal wandering outside before the gate of reality. [. . .] *Inner ambiguity*, I would like to repeat, is *the absolute Jewish trait, simplicity is the absolute non-Jewish trait.*

In general the late 19th century brought hysteria and nervousness in a close connection with "that which is Jewish." For some, this brought about the hope of innovation, while for others the grouping of "Jew" and hysteria implied a call for "re-virilization" (Koschorke), by which ultimately an *Entjudung* ("de-Jewification") was meant.

With the example of Arthur Schnitzler's *Fräulein Else* (*Miss Else*), and then more fully with Franz Schreker's *Der ferne Klang* (*The Distant Sound*), I would like to illustrate briefly just how closely these two types of impulses for innovation are tied to the crisis of language. Both artists belonged to the secular, "assimilated" Judaism: Schreker's father, a photographer, had converted from Judaism to Protestantism; his mother was Roman Catholic . Schnitzler lived without any religion connection, but was, however, very conscious of the critical gaze on Jewry. Both had read Freud's texts, and both belonged to a literary and artistic movement that administered a break with naturalism and that sought the "truth" not in the visual, material world, but rather in the invisible areas of the psyche. In the center of both works—Schnitzler's *Miss Else* and Schreker's *Distant Sound*—stands a female figure that seems to be a transposition from Freud's theory of hysteria. However, I would argue that these representations of hysteria are to be read not in the sense of the image of the illness and in the context of a trauma, as is often the case in interpretations of Schnitzler as well as of Schreker;

rather, "the" hysteria—and its representation in these works—are to be understood as cultural phenomena. Also, Freud and psychoanalysis had brought to light the fact that the hysterical symptom and the contortions of the hysteric are to be understood as a language of the body which allows the body to speak as a resonating body. In the case of Schreker, this unison becomes paradigmatically evident, in that the character of Grete appears as an allegory for the lost sound as well as for a language that serves to "put new life" into it with new tones. In that hysteria allowed the body to "speak," it had become the embodiment of a concealed language that seemed to resist "guardianship" via text. Therefore, it cannot be a surprise that the crisis of language was accompanied by an interest in hysteria, and that the interest of writers and artists was aimed at its symptoms and "secrets."

Strangely enough: although the question of gender is of primary importance in the play—the central theme is abuse by the father and by a man who wants to sexually exploit her in her time of need — *Miss Else* was conceived by Schnitzler as "a [greater] literary project about Jewish psychology." However, the question of Judaism surfaces only at one single point: namely, where Else expresses doubt as to whether Dorsday's *noblesse* is "completely authentic." And she reflects:

> No one can tell by looking at me. I'm even blond—reddish-blond—and Rudi looks like an aristocrat. Surely, one can instantly tell with Mama. But not at all with Papa. Anyway, they should notice. I certainly don't deny it and Rudi doesn't all the more so.

This picture of the mother, by whom one can *hear* the foreignness and the fact that she does not 'really belong', fits the images as described by Volkov about the inability of the Jew to "speak the language correctly." Also when Else hears herself talk—"How strange my voice sounds. Is that me who is talking? [. . .] I certainly have a different face than normal"—an element of foreignness surfaces. But with Schnitzler, it has to do with a foreignness vis-à-vis the Self. The motif of hearing one's self repeats itself while observing the Self in the mirror: "Am I really as beautiful as I look in the mirror? Oh, please come closer, beautiful girl [. . .] Oh, I'm not crazy at all. I'm just a little bit aroused." The self-commentary that runs through the entire text serves to present the alienation itself. As Lange-Kirchheim explains: the protagonist "splits herself into the Speaking and the Commented, just as in the case of the female observer and the object of the gaze." This means that Schnitzler utilizes a female protagonist and her "inner monologue" in order to turn around the gaze that the others aim at him—as a Jew—and in order to transform the image of the "effeminized" or "hysterical" Jew into an object of his/her own gaze. In this manner, he "deconstructs" the image of the "Jewish

psychology" that was according to himself his "topic." Only in this superimposition does it become evident why *Else* should have the "Jewish psychology" as its theme.

In Schreker's work the female body even more evidently becomes a symbolic figure of sound and language. It also serves as the leitmotif in the analysis surrounding language that marks the relationship between secular Jewish and Christian traditions of thought. Although Schreker—in contrast to Schnitzler—does not address the question of Judaism or the "Jewish psychology" at any point in his play, he was—in contrast to other artists and intellectuals—hated and persecuted by the anti-Semites. Already in 1923 an article appeared in the former *Zeitschrift für Musik* (*Journal for Music*), which had been renamed as the *Kampfblatt für deutsche Musik* (*Call-to-Arms for German Music*); an article, in which Schreker was defamed as a "sheer product of the press" and as an "genius of exploitation of the capitalist system," who brought "whores, murderesses, sick persons with perverse sensuality [and] stigmatized persons of varying types" onto the stage—thereby harming the "sound community spirit." It was reported that his music was "decadent," that he was "incapable of melodic invention and thematic work; of invention of great forms," and that he had an "undermining influence" on German art. Expelled from his office as the director of the Berliner Musikhochschule (Berlin Conservatory) in 1932 and in the following year as composition instructor at the Akademie der Künste (Academy of Fine Arts), Schreker was labeled as a "Jewish scribbler" and as the "Magnus Hirschfeld of opera composers." These are the same accusations that had already been directed against the Jews Heine and Börne. That means, however, that in the attacks against Schreker, not his "Jewish blood" was meant, which he indeed possessed from his father's side alone, but rather a specific spiritual position: he—and above all his composition *The Distant Sound*—represented that which Otto Weininger called "the Jewishness as idea," without having expressly made it a theme himself.

What about this work was considered to be so specifically "Jewish?" *The Distant Sound* describes the story of the love between a musician and a young woman, Grete, whose love he rejects—in the search for the "ideal sound." He is not successful in composing this sound, and she, after she is sold to the bar-keeper by her father as payment of his debts, becomes a prostitute. Only at the end of the play, shortly before his death, does the musician realize that he could only find the ideal sound for which he has searched in her presence. His work is no longer realized—or rather: the description of this drama *is* the work. Schreker, who wrote the music as well as the text, spent about ten years writing the opera. In 1912 it had its premiere

in Frankfurt and was a triumphant success. *The Distant Sound* was the first opera that explicitly referred to Freud. For literature, this was not new—when writing *Elektra*, Hofmannsthal explicitly dealt with the *Studien zur Hysterie* (*Studies on Hysteria*) (a conception that Strauss, in any event, had rejected for the opera. Strauss later actually expressed his disapproval of psychoanalysis). Schreker's interest for psychoanalysis is expressed not only via the theme and the characters, but also in the music itself. "The tonal language of the orchestra follows the laws of free association, as it is described for example by Sigmund Freud, and as it takes form in Arthur Schnitzler's technique of the inner monologue," writes Ulrike Kienzle. Upon being questioned about his "musical-dramatic idea," Schreker himself answers:

> I actually do not have any. I write without a plan. Whatever comes to me, is there. But—I come from music. My "inspirations" have little "literary content"; an esoteric-soulful element gasps for musical expression. Around this creeps an external story that already carries in itself from its origin musical form and structure. With the completion of the poetical work, the musical construction of the work stands before me in bold outlines.

While Richard Wagner (and to some extent, Schreker definitely saw himself as one of his successors) sought to give a certain idea musical expression and Hofmannsthal/Strauss created a literary opera, Schreker concerned himself with a work of art derived from the spirit of music, in which the organization of language was subject to the rules of music. In this sense, he made sound from the language. Therefore, his concept of the artist—as well as of the work—differentiated itself from the self-concept of other opera artists:

> While Wagner's manner of composition, with its orchestral commentary, aims at introducing the "omnipotent narrator" of the great art of the novel of the nineteenth-century, thereby giving the events on stage a meaning that goes beyond what is shown on stage, the instance of the commentating author vanishes from Schreker's score.

As with Wagner, there are also leitmotifs in Schreker's work. However, they "are only inserted for the characterization of psychic condition, not, however—as with Wagner and his successors—for symbolizing persons or objects." If the *Junge Wien* ("Young/New Vienna") set about "abandoning the images of the external world in preference of turning to the riddles of the lonely soul," as Hermann Bahr wrote, then Schreker's self-reflection shifts into the music itself, which reflects an "inner ringing" and thereby becomes a mirror of the psychic reality. Romanticism had already assigned this role to music, which E. T. A. Hoffmann or Wackenroder treated as a holy, transcendental element. In the *Wundern der Tonkunst* (*Wonders of the Art of Sound*), Wackenroder and Tieck write "that God's invisible harp resonates with our tones and bestows the human fabric of numbers with heavenly power." For

Novalis, the human itself becomes the harp, which is made to resonate by the divine. A part of this Romantic conception of music finds its way into Schreker's work. However, it does not relate to the transcendental, but rather to the unconscious and the earthy "impulse." Together, these take the place of God. Which art, he writes, "would be more capable to completely express this secret rising, this self-metamorphosis that is among the driving influences that slumber in the subconscious as exactly this music?" He would therefore like to see that "a *self-acting* role for that which goes unspoken in the text" be assigned to the music.

In the case of Schreker as well as Wagner, attention has been drawn to the fact that their works seem to be the anticipation of film technology (sound film). Naturally, this has to do with the multi-sensory aspects of opera that engage hearing and visuality. However, in the work of both composers, very different forms of a relationship to cinema show themselves. With Wagner, the darkened space for the audience and the sunken orchestra, with which the technique of the cinematic space is anticipated. In contrast to this, Schreker's *Distant Sound* seems to be an anticipation of film technology itself: this counts for his music as a "mirror of psychic condition"—by which it certainly is to be maintained that in today's cinema the music, above all, stands for the audience's psychic condition, while with Schreker, it reflects the condition of the figures. On the other hand, Schreker's opera also compared to the technique of the film cut: "The concept of totality, by means of which the bordello scene is captured as a panorama of simultaneous events, changes as if it were a cut to a close-up," whereas the composer focuses on the second level of reality, the spiritual inner-world of Grete, through the music. Therefore, while for Wagner, the technical methods serve to free the consciousness from the technique itself (the "mystical abyss," into which the orchestra disappears), and an "immersive environment" is created in which the spectator can loose consciousness, Schreker builds a space of sound, in which the spectator never forgets that s/he is spectator and observer of the action. Wagner requires from his music that it, with "its fine, fine, highly-secret, fluids oozes into the subtlest pores of perception up to the marrow of life, in order to conquer everything there that in any way maintains intelligence and responsibility for self-sustenance." Schreker, however, is obsessed with the *composer's* powerlessness and the failure of artistic fantasies of self empowerment. In his *Distant Sound,* he presents the failure of the attempt to conceive the work of art as a substitute for life. The illusion and the impossibility of a realization of the utopia become the central topos of his opera, which ends with the artist's failure with his phantasmagoria to find or discover the "absolute sound." *The Distant Sound* is "the denial in contrast to the postulate of the organic, shut off in itself,

uniformly conceived work of art," which, for instance, Wagner or Strauss monopolized. And this failure becomes the most important message of Shrekers work of art itself: the "specific modernity and daring in Franz Schreker's poetry for music," according to Hans Mayer, "reveals themselves, in "that he [has] designed his operatic works of the extreme bourgeois individuality also as the *failure of art*, not just of the artist." Schreker reportedly had "secretly (and perhaps against his own character) dared for the first time [. . .] to shape the myth of the end of art as a work of art."

This production of the failure—or the artistic presentation of the end of art—reveals itself also in the gender roles in the opera. Alexander Kluge, who designated opera as the "power station of feelings," once remarked that if the word "love" is uttered in the first act, in the fifth a woman dies. Likewise, Klaus Theweleit has shown in many examples—biographic as well as fictional—how fundamental the topos of the "female sacrifice" is for the concept of creativity and the artistic work in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, what has thereby escaped Theweleit—and Elisabeth Bronfen as well—is the fact that this has to do with a specific Christian heritage, in which—in a secularization shift—the self-sacrifice of the Savior is transformed into a self-sacrifice of the woman, which is done out of love. The Christian sacrament, according to Jochen Hörisch, is both "feminized" and "eroticized" in the 18th and 19th century. "In an odd concurrence, Goethe, Novalis, and de Sade transcribe the story of the sacrifice of a godly son into the story of the sacrifice of women." This tradition supposedly remained a determining factor for many works of art in modernity. Quite different with Schreker. "In Schreker's music," writes Gösta Neuwirth, "the old language literally falls out of the grooves." Schreker's reading of Freud's interpretation of dreams leads "the composer to another grammar of the musical language," which [follows] a grammar of the unconscious processes" and presents "the introduction of the subject in an differently lived life: Perhaps Fritz must perish, but Grete will live." In Schreker's *Distant Sound*, it is ultimately the *artist* who dies—and he dies expressly as an "artist of God's grace"—while at the same time, Grete emerges from the drama as "healed." The artist's work of art is not realized, but the opera materializes in that its failure—and its cure—are shown. And it is a cure that means much more than just the single female character:

> The *Distant Sound* that the harp-figures symbolize is only present when Grete is near at hand: the search for the loved one and the hunt for the artistic ideal are in reality identical. The text conceals this insight, but the music lends it expression. It makes itself the speaker of the unconscious, even before Fritz arrives at a clear recognition of these associations.

Although it cannot be denied that Schreker approached his work with a commitment to social criticism, and although he expressly makes a theme of the difficulties that approach the female existence in the modern societies, this theme is *not* the central concern of his opera. The character of Grete is rather to be read as the symbolic character of a spoken language that he—in his work—tries to make resonate. While Fritz, " upon Grete's glance, frees himself from the useless hunt for the tonal phantasmagoria ('What is the sound to me? I no longer search it! The rogue has cheated me out of love and life'), the music reveals to him that he could finally find the sound exactly here, in the unison with Grete."

This assignment of the sound to the feminine is no coincidence. At the outset, I mentioned the Semitic consonant-alphabet. The gender system that emerged from this text system marks the male gender as the signifier of the written word, of the "written" itself, while the female body is the signifier of the "oral." This symbolic gender system is insofar in keeping with that of the Greek alphabet. However, while womanliness as "incarnation of the oral" in the Greek and Christian tradition flows into the speechlessness of the hysterical symptom, it reaches a new meaning in the text system of the consonant-alphabet. The female body, which stands for the vowels, the *unwritten* symbols, refers to the "empty points" of the Semitic alphabet, the "postponed *physis*," the "resonating body," without which the signs can not be born. The female body does not carry the symbol of revelation—that is ascribed to the symbol of the text, and this is furthermore ascribed to the male body via the circumcision—but the female body carries the symbol for the "enunciation" of the revelation, for the "speaking," "oral Torah." However, that means that both symbolic functions—the male body as bearer of the symbol of the sign and the female body as an "enunciation" of the sign—are assigned to one another. The sounds without the signs are insignificant, and conversely, the signs can only have "meaning" via the enunciation. To me, that is exactly what Schreker's opera seems to say.

At this point I will come to a close. The aspects through which the "other avant-garde" portrays itself remain to be demonstrated: that avant-garde that, as Lutz Koepnick has shown, neglected the aural sense; and that avant-garde, that strutted along with a impulse for "re-virilization," that only assigned womanliness the traditional role of the allegory; that avant-garde, that, from Marinetti's self-description, spoke as the "super-potent, futuristic Genius-Penis of the Italian race" and his fantasies of male self-birth; that avant-garde that stood out because of its clear-cut character, voluntarism, actionism, intoxication from speed, and

“manifestationism”; and that avant-garde, that, along with Breton, wanted most of all to take to the street, pistol in hand. This other avant-garde is something that you can possibly imagine for yourself.

Translation: David James Prickett