

## ***Close Reading/ Close Singing: Poetry, Music, and Voice in the Art Song***

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A musical setting of a poem in an art song, for instance a *Lied*, is traditionally understood as a composer's interpretation of a poet's work of art. Most analyses of musical settings imply that the composer has aspired to *imitate* the poem as precisely and empathically as possible, and thereby to create an artistic synthesis of poetry and music, an intensified performance of the lyric text. This traditional, *mimetic* approach to word-and-music analysis has been to demonstrate how the *unity* of word and music is attained in vocal masterworks, much in the same way as the traditional analysis of instrumental masterworks has tried to demonstrate how unity is attained through thematic and rhythmic elaboration and formal coherence.

But the idea of a symbiotic unity of word and tone in the art song presupposes that both the poem and the music have a definable and finite meaning. When we judge a composer's musical setting of a poem to be a perfect realization of it, we imply that there is one meaning in the text, and that the chosen music has a meaning which in some way is similar to the textual meaning. But the "meaning" of music is notoriously hard to pinpoint, and the lyric poem is maybe the literary genre where "content" is most difficult to extract from the artistic form. The combination of poetry and music in the art song is bound to be intangible, since both art forms in themselves escape definite meaning. But this does not exclude the *play* of meaning as such. Post-structuralist literary theory has the potential to trace the production of meanings that the combination of words and music can initiate. Recent musicological contributions by Lawrence Kramer and Richard Kurth, amongst others, conceive of musical settings of poetry as productive, infinite and interchangeable *close readings*, instead of symbioses of words and music.

However, this fascinating perspective has its shortcomings in the context of music appreciation. The experience of the musical work is dependent on *performance*. And as musicians perform a work, they also perform *themselves*. More than any other instrument, the human voice is inseparably connected to the body of the performer, which opaquely comes in between the work of poetry-and-music and the listener's experience. The close reading perspective, therefore, needs to be supplemented by an account of what we could call *close singing* – the special relation between the singer and the listener in a performance of a song. In this argument I will consider theories of voice and meaning in the writings of Roland Barthes and Michel Poizat.

## Close reading poetry and music

A central thought in the mimetic model of musical settings of poetry, is that the independent art forms of poetry and music enter into a synthesis, or even symbiosis, in the successful art song. One of the most pronounced, almost caricatured, advocates of the mimetic model was Jack M. Stein. He opens his study *Poem and Music in the German Lied* from 1971 with the idea of symbiosis: "Potentially the lied, or art song, is a miniature *Gesamtkunstwerk* or fusion of two arts, poetry and music."<sup>1</sup> Stein's main concern is to examine the aesthetic balance between poems and music – and the lack of such a balance – in the German romantic lied. His basic view is clearly mimetic in that he regards a synthesis of the arts, with music as the yielding, imitating part, as an ideal in the art song. But Stein has a uncommonly harsh opinion of the results that the romantic composers achieved in their musical settings of poetry. In his view, the ideal of aesthetic balance has very rarely been realized, even by the greatest lied composers. Stein's pessimistic point is paradoxical: Schubert and his successors raised the lied to new musical heights through their devoted interpretation of the spirit and the semantic details of the poetry, but their resulting inspired music crossed out the poem as a text. In Stein's opinion, the interpretation of the semantic aspect of the poems was carried out on the expense of the meter, rhythm and natural diction of the text. In addition to the increasingly orchestral character of the piano part, this creative bending of the metric form destroyed the *audibility* of the text, which in Stein's view is a necessary precondition for a synthesis of poetry and music. With this objection he touches upon a phenomenon which the philosopher Susanne Langer treated as a fundamental aesthetic condition, which she called "assimilation": that music "swallows" words when a poem is sung.<sup>2</sup> I will return to associated ideas later in this presentation, in the theories of Barthes and Poizat. But in Stein's version, the musical obscuring of the text is quite simply a regrettable aesthetic mistake, because his mimetic view demands that both the structure and semantic meaning of the poem is reflected and emphasized musically. The task of textual-musical analysis is for Stein to evaluate "[...] how faithfully a particular composer has interpreted a poem".<sup>3</sup> But the most obvious weakness in Stein's theory, the distinction between "correct" and "faulty" musical interpretations of poetry, could be argued to be latent in the mimetic model as such. Ultimately, the mimetic model implies that a poem is a self-contained work with definable meaning, and that it can be imitated musically because the language of music also has determinate meanings.

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<sup>1</sup> Stein, Jack M.: *Poem and Music in the German Lied from Gluck to Hugo Wolf*. Cambridge, Massachusetts 1971, p. 1.

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<sup>3</sup> Dahlhaus (1980), p. 112.

But in 1974, three years after Stein's involuntary demonstration of the impasses of the mimetic model, an important study was released which attacked its central aesthetic beliefs: Edward T. Cone's *The Composer's Voice*.<sup>4</sup> Cone maintains that the art song is not about "musical setting" in the traditional sense at all:

[...] a song is not primarily the melodic recitation or the musical interpretation or the criticism of a poem. Although it may be any or all of these it is first of all a new creation of which the poem is only one component. [...] The composer is not primarily engaged in "setting" a poem. [...] a composer cannot "set" a poem directly, for in this sense there is no such thing as "the poem": what he uses is one reading of the poem – that is to say, a specific performance, for even a silent reading is a kind of performance. He must consider all aspects of the poem that are not realizable in this performance as irrelevant. And to say that he "sets" even this reading is less accurate than to say that he appropriates it: he makes it his own by turning it into music.<sup>5</sup>

In Cone's view, then, the composer's version of a poem is not a "faithful interpretation". By definition, the composer cannot set "the poem" as such, for it does not exist as a definite object. It only exists through individual readings, and the composer can only set his own reading of it. But not even this reading is "set" as much as appropriated. Cone's notion of the composer's reading as a "performance" sounds prophetic in the light of the favourable climate for performative theory in art criticism today. Cone is primarily concerned with the composer's choice of one reading and the shutting out of alternate readings as a precondition of this performative act. But by insisting that the composer's musical reading always will be only one of many possible "performances" of the poem, Cone also has become a starting point for musicologists concerned with the coexistence of poetry and music in the art song as a rich field of ambiguous relations.

The most important response to Cone's analysis of song has been made by Lawrence Kramer. The increasing occupation with text and music-analysis the last 25 years seems to a large extent to be inspired by Kramer's many works on the relationship of music and literature, starting with *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* from 1984.<sup>6</sup> In his long chapter on song in *Music and Poetry*, Kramer immediately picks up the thread from Cone, but makes a quite different point. Like Susanne Langer's theory of assimilation – how music "swallows" words – Kramer judges Cone's idea of the composer's "appropriation" of a text as only partially pertinent. In Kramer's opinion, both Langer and Cone have a too "organicist" view of the combination of text and music, in which the poem is seen as fusing

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<sup>4</sup> Cone, Edward T.: *The Composer's Voice*. Berkeley 1974.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Kramer, Lawrence: *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After*. Berkeley 1984.

entirely into the musical substance in an almost alchemistic way.<sup>7</sup> Kramer, on the other hand, maintains that the poem in an art song continues to be effective independently of the music. The poem is not assimilated, but “incorporated”.<sup>8</sup> It does not surrender its autonomy without resistance, and is able to counteract the forming of musical meaning from “the inside”. Kramer transforms Cone’s idea of the composer’s reading of the poem, rendering it much closer to the post-structuralist notion of reading:

A song, we might say, does not *use* a reading; it *is* a reading, in the critical as well as the performative sense of the term: an activity of interpretation that works through a text without being bound by authorial intentions. On this view, the relationship between poetry and music in song is implicitly agonistic; the song is a “new creation” only because it is a de-creation.<sup>9</sup>

The term “de-creation” is easily associated with *deconstruction*, Derrida’s anti-metaphysical strategy of close reading. Derrida’s work is an important precondition for Kramer, but he does not adopt the theory of deconstruction directly, maybe because of a well founded fear of overgeneralization. One single place in the book, though, Kramer attempts a conditioned definition of the musical *rewriting* of a poem as a deconstruction:

A song that masters a significant text, then, does so by suggesting a new interpretation – specifically a skeptical interpretation, one that rewrites the text in some essential way. In other words – slightly exaggerated but only slightly – the music becomes a deconstruction of the poem.<sup>10</sup>

Neologisms often take up a central position in Kramer’s theories, and in *Music and Poetry* he brings in the word “transmemberment” from a poem by Hart Crane to describe the relation between text and music in the art song. It is a portmanteau word, constructed by “transformation” and “dismemberment”, and in my opinion, the simultaneousness of constructive and destructive change links the term closely to the notion of deconstruction which Kramer mostly avoids. The music transforms the poem into another medium, and if this process might involve an intensification of expression, it also implies a destruction of the original poem.<sup>11</sup>

But contrary to Langer and Cone, Kramer does not think that the poem is deleted in the song. “In a sense, he composes his own text,” Cone says of the song composer, meaning

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *ibid.* p. 127.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

that he appropriates the poem and thereby silences its ambiguity.<sup>12</sup> Kramer, on the other hand, asserts that the independent meaning process of the poem is in no way hindered by the musical transformation:

The music appropriates the poem by contending with it, phonetically, dramatically, and semantically; and the contest is what most drives and shapes the song. As Cone observes, the composer must consider as irrelevant whatever cannot be realized in his reading. But this act of exclusion is an audible process in the music, and its presence necessarily evokes the specter of a counter-reading that seems to radiate from the poem being appropriated, to be what the poem “wants to say.”<sup>13</sup>

Kramer, then, claims that the possible interpretations of the poem which the composer, in Cone’s view, leaves out and has to consider irrelevant for his “performance”, still exist in the song. The original wording of the poem is present even though the composer makes a reductive musical interpretation of it, and the excluded interpretations are audible in the song as a contending “counter-reading”. In Kramer’s view, the everlasting contest between musical and textual meaning is the most important forming force in the art song.

Kramer’s conception of musical setting of poetry as “transmemberment” and “rewriting” is a central point of reference for Richard Kurth in his interesting article from 1997, “Music and Poetry: A Wilderness of Doubles”.<sup>14</sup> Delivering an analysis of Schubert’s Heine song “Der Doppelgänger” through Nietzsche and Derrida, it also contains a more radical attempt at a post-structuralist theory of song than Kramer’s writings. In the postscript, Kurth elaborates on the relation between his own and Kramer’s approach, and localizes the most important difference in the use of the term “writing”. Kramer does not appear to use the term in Derrida’s generalized sense, as Kurth himself does. When Kramer calls the musical setting of a poem “rewriting”, it is in accordance with traditional structural and hermeneutic conceptions of reading, Kurth argues. His own use of the term, on the other hand, is linked to Derrida’s focus on semiotics and grammatology. Kurth accommodates Derrida’s theory of speech and writing to the analysis of song, and introduces the concept of text and music “mutually *writing over*” each other:

When Heine’s text is conjoined to music in Schubert’s song, the music does not “set” the poem, it *writes over* the poem. [...] But now one must also mark this relation a reciprocal one. [...] The poem

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<sup>12</sup> Cone (1974), p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Kramer (1984), p.127.

<sup>14</sup> Kurth, Richard: “Music and Poetry, a Wilderness of Doubles: Heine – Nietzsche – Schubert – Derrida” in: *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* XXI/I (Summer 1997), pp. 3-37.

and the music are both acts of *writing*. They are also both acts of *writing over*. They each write over their own **absence** to make themselves *present*; and they also mutually *write over* and defer another.<sup>15</sup>

As speech and writing are at the same time mutually exclusive and mutually affirmative in Derrida's complex theory, Kurth describes poetry and music in the art song as being "mutually independent".<sup>16</sup> Using a musical metaphor, Kurth explains this relation as a "double counterpoint", in which to types of "writing" in Derrida's sense is writing over – and under – each other.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Kurth defines the productive and suggestive counteracting of poetry and music with the neologism "counterwriting": "I coin a term for this mutual contrapuntal *writing over* (and *under*) of poetry by music and music by poetry: *counterwriting*."<sup>18</sup> Kurth's concept may seem excessively focused on conflict, but like Kramer, he makes the *mutuality* of poetry and music a crucial point. As mentioned earlier, Stein's mimetic theory saw the aesthetic balance of word and tone as a precondition for the synthesis of poetry and music in song. Neither Kramer nor Kurth believe in this kind of alchemistic synthesis, one could argue that both share Stein's ideal of an aesthetic balance between poetry and music. However, they do not depict aesthetic balance as a peaceful condition where unequivocal meanings can be mediated without interruption, but rather a condition of mutual interruption which brings about an infinite production of meaning.

### ***Close singing: voice and performance***

But now it is about time to make a halt and reflect on the validity of these elaborate assumptions. The post-structuralist understanding of the art song that we have reached through the theories of Kramer and Kurth emphasizes the ambiguity and indeterminism of the relation between poetry and music. Kramer sees the music in a song as a critical reading of the poem, which simultaneously is reflected as the poem's reading of the music. To Kurth, it is more a matter of a double "writing" in Derrida's sense than of reading, but the crucial point is the same: the poem and the music in a song challenge, distort, and affirm each other mutually in complex and infinitely productive ways.

However, neither Kramer nor Kurth take into serious consideration the problem that occupied Stein and Langer in different ways: the question of *audibility*. Stein was concerned that the musical complexity of the romantic lied rendered the poem inaudible, at least on its

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-29. Kurth puts all forms of the word *writing* in italics to signify that he means Derrida's generalized notion of writing. The word **absence** is written with a line over the word, like Derrida sometimes does, to signify that the word is *written over* in Derrida's sense.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

own terms. Langer saw this deletion or assimilation of the poem as a constitutive characteristic of all song, something more connected to the working of our senses than to specific strategies of musical setting. As we have seen, Kramer rejected Langer's theory of assimilation, and instead launched a model where the poem is "incorporated" into the music without losing its independence. Without any questioning of Kramer's rejection of the audibility problem, Kurth developed this model further, introducing the concepts of "mutual independence" and "counterwriting".

Why, then, was the question of audibility suddenly so unimportant to Kramer and Kurth? The answer, I believe, is far from being hidden in discoveries of new forms of performance or listening which make it possible to discern the text more easily than Langer or Stein were able to. I believe the answer to be connected to the fact that Kramer and Kurth treat song as notated *writing*, and not as sound. Their focus is not on the listener's experience of performed music, but on the analyst's close reading of the double writing of song in the strictest sense: the score and the printed poem.

Even though these post-structuralist interpretations introduce refreshingly paradoxical, unforeseen, and challenging perspectives on the well known art song repertoire, they hold on to the fixation on the score characteristic of traditional music analysis. And like Stein, they base the comments to the song text on an independent literary analysis of the poem. Of course can be fruitful to make separate close readings of the score and the poem, and I do not underestimate the intellectually interesting, even stunning, quality of the complex relations between poetry and music which Kramer and Kurth describe in their analyses. My objection merely concerns the problem that these ambiguous constructions of meaning tell us little about the listener's perception of the art song as sounding presence, as performance. The focus on "close reading" obscures a qualitatively different experience of song, which I tentatively will call "close singing".

It is no longer groundbreaking, but still necessary, to point out that song consists not only of text and music, but also of a third category, linked to the *voice*, a term which can be understood both in a narrowly concrete and a broad sense. The voice cannot be notated and repeated, it is unique in every performance. Not even a recording can repeat the experience of the voice fully, since an essential aspect of voice is the bodily presence of both the singer and the listener. In the following, I will make a short presentation of two theories of song – in the writings of Roland Barthes and Michel Poizat –, both focussing, in different ways, on the independent meaning potential in the performing voice.

In 1985, Poizat presented a theory about the way the opera enthusiast makes the voice, the high female voice in particular, an object of desire.<sup>19</sup> In his conception, the vocal object is a unique, but fleeting performative presence, which cannot be captured in musical notation or in a recording. The enthusiastic listener demands of the singer that she *becomes* this object of desire: "[The] voice assumes the status of object in the fan's mind. [...] The mission of the artist on stage is, in a certain sense, to approach self-annihilation as subject in order to offer herself as pure voice."<sup>20</sup> Poizat's account of this obsession is founded on the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, and it takes as its point of departure the relationship between the scream of the infant and the voice of the comforting *Other* – for instance, the mother.

The experience in infancy of the relationship between the scream and the voice of the Other is in the first place an inarticulate feeling of satisfaction. But when the child gradually acquires knowledge of the specific meanings that the Other connects to the scream, the voice becomes an instrument of communication, and it thereby loses its initial value as a pure object, Poizat claims: "It is no longer simple vocal expression but demand, a demand for the return of the object linked to the initial jouissance; the cry has once and for all attained the status of 'speech' and 'meaning'."<sup>21</sup> This development creates an unconscious feeling of loss in the child, since the specific *meanings* attributed to the scream are never identical with the overwhelming experience of *meaning* associated with the sonorous materiality of the vocal object in infancy.<sup>22</sup>

This means that our relation to language is divided since early childhood. On the one hand, language is about communication; on the other hand, it is about the feeling of pleasure connected to the mere sound quality of the words. Literature, and poetry in particular, plays with this double quality of language, and in my opinion, one could also regard music as an abstracted play with the nonverbal elements of language: rhythm, intonation, sound texture. But Poizat is above all occupied with the way the voice is given status as a *lost object* by the opera lovers: "The voice as object is constructed both as lost object and as first object of jouissance. It is not surprising that this engenders a *quest* for the object, a search for lost sonorous materiality, now dissolved behind signification."<sup>23</sup>

The desire for the vocal object is, more precisely, a desire for the pleasure connected to the liberation of voice from discursive meaning, a liberation which never can be fully

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<sup>19</sup>Here I quote from the translated excerpt in: Poizat, Michel: "'The Blue Note' and 'The Objectified Voice and the Vocal Object'" in: *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 3, No. 3, (Nov. 1991), pp. 195-211.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

attained, Poizat emphasizes: "[What] is sought is not sonorous materiality in itself, but rather sonorous materiality as it frees itself from the domination of signification through a process of purification or expurgation that is never attained except at the asymptote of silence."<sup>24</sup> The desire for the lost vocal object is a desire for the transcendence of the borderlines of the voice, approached by screaming or silence respectively. The borderlines of the voice are the borders to the "lost paradise" where the conflict that Poizat terms "the antagonism between meaning and the vocal object" seems to be put to an end.<sup>25</sup> But the quest is futile and must always be continued, says Poizat, since there is no actual lost object, only a *feeling* of loss evoked by our ambiguous relation to language.<sup>26</sup>

To Poizat, the experience of pleasure or "jouissance" which the vocal object can give rise to is also erotically charged. Following Lacan, he believes the voice to be one of the fundamental objects of desire, and the different human drives to be tightly and unconsciously interwoven. Poizat considers the erotization of the voice as a natural consequence of this: "The apparent relationships between eroticism and voice originate simply from the participation of the voice as such in a network of drives."<sup>27</sup>

But before Poizat, Roland Barthes presented a sketch for a related theory of the voice, in the essay "Le grain de la voix" from 1972. Like Poizat, Barthes was influenced by Lacan, and like him he gives crucial importance to the Lacan's untranslatable term "jouissance" – a pleasure with stark erotic overtones – in his theory of the voice. In "Le grain de la voix", Barthes introduces the concept of "grain" in an attempt to approach the non-communicative presence experienced in the performance of art song, which Poizat would be occupied with later in the context of opera. If Barthes theory immediately seems more obscure, it might partly be connected to his conscience of treating an aspect of song which eludes ordinary language. Barthes presents the concept of "the grain of the voice" as a way to "change" the musical object itself, since the habitually adjective-based language about music is so hard for us to change. With his concept, he wants nothing less than to move or displace the meeting point of language and music in our approach to song. To make his point clearer, Barthes brings in Julia Kristeva's distinction between two levels in language: the communicative, structural *pheno-text* and the material, textural *geno-text*. Building on this dichotomy, Barthes defines the "*pheno-song*" and the "*geno-song*" as similar levels in the art song:

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 210.

The *pheno-song* [...] covers all the phenomena, all the features which belong to the structure of the language being sung, the rules of the genre, the coded form of the melisma, the composer's idiolect, the style of the interpretation: in short, everything in the performance which is in the service of communication, representation, expression, everything which is customary to talk about [...]. The *geno-song* is the volume of the singing and speaking voice, the space where significations germinate 'from within language and in its very materiality'; it forms a signifying play having nothing to do with communication, representation (of feelings), expression [...] It is, in a very simple word but which must be taken seriously, the *diction* of the language.<sup>28</sup>

Barthes exemplifies this distinction with the diametrically different approaches of the popular lied singer Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and his own song teacher, the by then forgotten Charles Panzera. The examples are overtly connected to his own preferences, as Barthes seldom had ambitions of objectivity in his later writings. To him, Fischer-Dieskau's avowedly perfect command of the communicative, expressive "pheno-song" does not make up for the lack of seduction he experiences in his performance. To Barthes, seductive singing is not achieved by psychologically expressive interpretation, but by through the bodily presence of the voice working with language. Fischer-Dieskau gives him no pleasure or "jouissance", as the singer makes the mistake to sing with the soul, and not with the body.<sup>29</sup> The only body part he can hear in his singing is the lungs, whereas he hears a "bodily" diction of the sounds in Panzera's "geno-song": "With FD, I only seem to hear the lungs, never the tongue, the glottis, the teeth, the mucous membranes, the nose. All of Panzera's art, on the contrary, was in the letters, not in the bellows [...]".<sup>30</sup> What Barthes tries to encircle, is an experience of *materiality*. In his view, Panzera works with the sonorous materiality of language, not with its communicative function, and correspondingly: with the bodily conditioned materiality of song, not with its musically rhetorical function.

It is probably not incidental that the definition of "the grain of the voice" gets increasingly enigmatic in Barthes' text. In an insightful article, Peter Dayan has pointed to the consistently *metaphorical* language Barthes employs in his essays on music. Especially the aspects of music which he really appreciates, like "the grain of the voice", elude unequivocal description in Barthes' texts. "Scientific" definitions would reduce and betray the experience of ineffability which is one of Barthes' central concerns. In Dayan's view, this explains why Barthes chooses a language which describes the musical phenomenon indirectly, a language which appears fictive and metaphorical, even hallucinatory:

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<sup>28</sup> Barthes, Roland: "The grain of the voice" in: *Image Music Text* (Ed. and transl. S. Heath). London 1977, pp. 182-183.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

[How] can we speak of a grained voice without betraying it? For to speak of it as a nameable object would be to reduce it precisely to that which it is not: a scientifically or positively analysable thing. The only discourse that can speak of a grained voice without betraying it is, therefore, that kind of discourse which is improper to its object, in that it must be perceived as fictional, as figurative, as naming something other than what it is about: the language of metaphor or [...] hallucination.<sup>31</sup>

This perspective reveals interesting parallels between the musical aesthetics of Barthes and the Jena Romantics. The ineffable quality of music is central to its greatness, and this quality can only be described metaphorically. But if E.T.A. Hoffmann uses “the infinite” and “the spirit realm” as metaphors of musical transcendence *out of* physical materiality, one could argue that Barthes uses “grain” and “geno-song” as metaphors of a kind of musical transcendence *into* the physical materiality, deeper into the texture of the voice and the presence of the music.

**By way of conclusion: *Close reading/ close singing***

By introducing the term “close singing” in this article, I have wished to focus on aspects of the art song which is left out in the theories of musical settings as “close reading”. Both Barthes and Poizat draw attention to the experience of *the voice* as a close, almost intimate relation between the singer and the listener. The singer is presenting something in this relation, but not primarily a work of art. The experience of the voice as an object of a regressive desire in Poizat, the experience of language as vocal and bodily presence in Barthes: these are perspectives which point beyond the understanding of song as a combination, however complex, of poetry and music. When the voice occupies such a central space in the attention of the listener, not only the poem loses importance, but also the musical form. In Nietzsche’s sense, one could call the listener types of both Barthes and Poizat Dionysian in their “intoxicated” experience of song as a series of intense sonorous moments.

But the perspective of the enchanted listener is of course not the only possible and valid one. The composer has a totally different approach to both the text and musical structure in his song, involving a concern for numerous details which can elude even the most soberly attentive Apollonian listeners. The perspective of the traditional music analyst is also far from the view of art song as a mesmerizing “song of the Sirens”. The analyst, who is more likely to identify with the composer and his work with the musical structure, rarely discusses the enchanting effects of music without attempting to reveal the technical secrets behind them. The perspective of the critic is closest to the one of the listener, but the aspect of

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<sup>31</sup> Dayan, Peter: “‘Song Must Write’: Roland Barthes’ Hallucinations” in *Music Writing Literature, from Sand via Debussy to Derrida*, Ashgate 2006, p. 99.

responsibility involved in public criticism in most cases hinders the perspective of sweet oblivion from coming forth. And as Peter Dayan pointed out concerning Barthes, it is impossible to discuss phenomena like “the grain of the voice” without using metaphors which elude unequivocal signification. In this context, maybe one could regard the complex analyses of Lawrence Kramer and Richard Kurth as imaginatively composed variations on the possibilities of meaning which can be realized through sustained close reading of the manifold manifestations of the art song, as printed poem, musical score and performed song.

My purpose in this article has not been to reject close readings of this kind as worthless. They are theoretically inspiring as studies in hermeneutics and interart aesthetics, and undoubtedly capable of shedding new light on an all too familiar repertoire. What I have been trying to criticize in these interpretations, is the lack of theoretical awareness of the ontological difference between song as lyrical and musical writing on the one hand, and song as performance on the other hand. When Kramer claims that the poem is not assimilated by the music, only “incorporated”, or when Kurth describes the “mutual independence” of poetry and music, it is never discussed whether this complex, polyphonic independence survives in the realization of song as a performative event. My qualified guessing is that the critical variations on the complex networks of musical and textual meaning can only be constructed when the song is silent, and that both the musical score and the book of poetry fall to the floor when the ineffable pleasure of vocal *jouissance* meets the ear.