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The Bull of Phalaris

The Birth of Music out of Torture

John T. Hamilton

Recent reports on military and paramilitary uses of music to demoralize and disorient understandably elicit strong denunciation, especially when such practices are explicitly designated as torture. Broadcasting recordings at deafening volumes in order to torment detainees, to wear down terror suspects, or to weaken insurgents is rightfully criticized as immoral, criminal and inhumane. Such disturbing methods are regarded as a *perversion*, insofar as they employ a form of art to achieve ends far removed from any conventional understanding of aesthetic reception. Suzanne Cusick accordingly confesses: “I began desultory research on a phenomenon of the current ‘global war on terror’ that particularly wounds me as a musician—wounds me in that part of my sensibility that remains residually invested in the notion that music is beautiful, even transcendent—is a practice whose contemplation would always lead me to contemplation of bodies and pleasures. Not bodies in pain.”¹ From this perspective, the exploitation of music to inflict suffering is a gross aberration: the art of music should yield beauty and delight; and any manipulation of musical materials to produce ugly, horrific pain is simply deviant.

Cusick, a formidable musicologist and cultural historian, cannot be accused of entertaining a merely facile appreciation of what music achieves. The transcendent beauty of which she speaks is surely not to be misunderstood as an appeal for prettiness or uncomplicated, naive enjoyment. For example, in her work on the composer, Francesca Caccini, she eloquently discusses the roles of pain, agony and lament in early seventeenth-century court theatricals and the composer’s talent for “taking possession of the lament,” as opposed to allowing women’s voices “to performing the work of their communities’ pain.”² Cusick’s objection to using music as a weapon, therefore, does not preclude admitting some relation between pain and musical expression. Rather, it disapproves of what seems to be the perversion of cause and effect. That is, it disputes the way music induces suffering—a heinous path that appears to reverse artistic methods of channeling and sublimating pain. Agony, distress and

¹ Suzanne Cusick, “Music as Torture / Music as Weapon,” *Revista Transcultural de Musica* 10 (2006), http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans10/cusick_eng.html.

² Suzanne Cusick, *Francesca Caccini and the Medici Court: Music and the Circulation of Power* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 136.

misery—physical or emotional—are known to have engendered or inspired composition and performance; but music, as the sublimated result, ought not to be the cause of real abuse.

And abuse is certainly what seems to be the present case. Jonathan Pieslak provides a compelling account of how music or sound in general has been deployed in military operations, marking a decisive development from serving as a psychological tactic to working in a way that does indeed border on torture. Perhaps originating as a means for mustering courage among the troops, the role of musical performance on the battlefield faded into a device for threatening the adversary. The acoustic bombardment aimed at the inhabitants of Fallujah in 2004—blasting heavy metal and rap for twenty-four straight hours by means of specially designed “Long Range Acoustic Devices” (LARDs)—intended to unsettle and stupefy the insurgents prior to a full-out invasion and thereby gain a decided advantage. As Pieslak indicates, this strategy clearly finds its precedent in numerous legendary and historical incidents: from the horns at Jericho and the bagpipes in the Highlands to the relentless singing of the terrifying *Deguello* by Santa Anna’s army on the eve of the Alamo and the sonic inundation targeting the Vatican Embassy in Panama where the dictator Manuel Noriega sought refuge. These examples no doubt motivated the insidious tactic of using repetitive loops of recorded songs to intimidate, humiliate and ultimately weaken detainees, purportedly to facilitate interrogation.³

It may be asked, why does music work so effectively? Is it merely the extraordinary decibel level that produces such disorienting and damaging results? Or is it the music itself that possesses this power? Are we truly dealing with a perversion? Or is it not rather the case that music’s efficacy as a psychological tactic points to a possible affinity between music and pain, song and suffering, melody and the meltdown of mental stamina? Is the use of music as an instrument of torture somehow related to torture as a possible instrument of music?

Modern history of course is replete with vivid anecdotes that attest to the torturous origins of music. The early eighteenth-century court composer at Versailles, Marin Marais, notoriously produced a *Tableau de l’Operation de la Taille* for viola da gamba, a haunting solo piece that intended to sublimate the intense pain of his recent lithotomy, the surgical removal of stones from the bladder, accomplished without the benefits of anesthesia.⁴ Pascal Quignard, has contemplated at length on the role of agonizing, irreparable loss that he hears coursing through Marais’s *œuvre*.⁵ There are moreover countless cases of asceticism and mortification, where

³ Jonathan Pieslak, *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 78 – 99.

⁴ See Joseph Kiefer, “Lithotomy Set to Music: An Historical Interlude,” *Transactions of the American Association of Genito-Urinary Surgeons* 55 (1963), 132 – 37. Marais’s “Tableau” is briefly mentioned in Holsinger, 195.

⁵ Pascal Quignard, *La leçon de musique* (Paris: Hachette, 1987).

musicians suffer acts of violence that come very close indeed to torture. The castrato's sacrifice for the sake of vocal beauty is self-evident, not to mention the hours of practicing trills and *passaggi* that these singers were compelled to endure. Most musicians can bear witness to the various species of self-torture required to perfect their technique: the soreness, the exhaustion, the blisters on their fingers. Perhaps nothing, however, can compare with the trials of Robert Schumann who, in order to strengthen the middle finger of his right hand, utilized a chiroplast, a strikingly medieval contraption endorsed by the virtuoso Frédéric Kalkbrenner. This device, which sharply and painfully held the finger backwards, only further paralyzed the burgeoning pianist. In the end, Schumann desperately followed his doctor's folk remedy, plunging his crippled hand into the warm entrails of a freshly slaughtered pig then soaking it for hours in warm brandy, all to no avail.⁶

The proximity of music and torture is in fact frequently emphasized in ancient accounts. Myths concerning the invention of musical instruments usually include some aspect of gross violence. The Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* quite graphically describes how the messenger god designed the first *kithara* by eviscerating a tortoise. Hermes justifies this dreadful act to the fated creature by claiming that the animal's mortality may thereby be transformed into deathless song: ἦν δὲ θάνης, τότε κεν μάλα καλὸν ἀειδοίς—"But should you die, then you would sing beautifully" (*Hom. Herm.* 38). The catgut strings of the lyre and the cowhide stretched across a drum's frame offer the same intimations of immortality. By modifying flesh or viscera into resonant material, the inventor of musical instruments effects a kind of dematerialization, a sublimation that permits sounds to detach from a corporeal source. Music is premised on the destruction of a body. In Greek mythology, pain or suffering is thus a nearly constant theme in narratives concerning the creation of new musical instruments. According to Pindar, Athena constructs the first reed-pipe or *aulos* in order to recreate the terrifying cries of the Gorgons as Medusa is decapitated by Perseus. Subsequently, when the goddess spies her reflection in a pond and sees how the *aulos* hideously contorts her face, she tosses the instrument into the bushes. The satyr Marsyas retrieves it and, upon challenging Apollo to the famous musical contest, is punished by being nailed to a tree and flayed alive. If we follow Titian's painting of the myth, we see how Marsyas is in fact turned into an Apollonian viola. The wounds of the satyr's abdomen shockingly remind us of the shape of the f-holes. The scalpel is drawn directly across, gliding past the exposed "tendons," taking the place of a bow. The gesture would seem to rest on an allusion to Ovid's account of the Marsyas story, where the poet emphasizes the

⁶ Details are from John Daverio, *Robert Schumann: Herald of a "New Poetic Age"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 77 – 78.

word for “tendons” or *nervi*, the term commonly used to denote the gut-strings of a lyre.⁷ In other words, Apollo’s vivisection turns Marsyas’s body into a stringed instrument; his cruelty thereby rehearses the same movement that allows death to resound musically. The scene of torture is converted into a scene of musical performance. Pain is channeled into melody. Suffering is sublimated into art. Music literally innervates.

Within the discourse of Christian theology, medieval allegories perpetuate the programmatic link between pain and music. For example, Christ’s crucifixion is frequently likened to a harp: as in the case of Marsyas, the Messiah’s *nervi* (the tendons and/or strings) have been stretched upon a wooden frame to form an instrument that sounds out the joyous strains of the soul’s salvation.⁸ With even more explicit intent, among the typological castings found in fourteenth-century versions of the popular *Speculum humanae salvationis*, the Crucifixion scene is made to bear directly on the origin of music. In the Hebrew Bible, Jubal—“the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes” (Gen. 4:21)—is provocatively introduced immediately after the story of Abel’s murder; and in one particular exegetical tradition, it was Jubal who first invented the harp in Pythagorean fashion by listening to his brother blacksmith beat upon an anvil—an accomplishment that is said to prefigure the hammering of nails into Christ’s hands and feet.⁹ Analogies abound. In a *Speculum* from Darmstadt, Jubal holds up his harp in a panel below a depiction of the raising of the Cross; the sound-holes appear in the exact position of Christ’s wounds; the strings replicate the protruding ribs of the dying god. In turning to the history of devotional practices, we find further instances that focus on the potentially redemptive or even beautiful aspects of corporeal pain. An especially grotesque example concerns the Abbey of Unterlinden where, in the thirteenth century, during Lent, the nuns would gather after Matins for their imitation of Christ. The abbess describes how the devotees “lacerated their bodies until shedding blood, so that the sound of whipping themselves resonates throughout the monastery, ascending to the ears of the Lord of Hosts sweeter than any melody.”¹⁰ Flagellation thus turns into a divine recital and exposes the corporal violence implicit in every act of plucking, strumming and striking.

It is noteworthy that, still attending to the medieval imagination, the tortured origin of music for the saved can modulate into a musical source of torture for the sinful. For example, the thirteenth-century mystic, Margeurite d’Oingt, envisions the eternal torment of souls

⁷ See my full account in *Music, Madness, and the Unworking of Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 35 – 43.

⁸ For numerous examples and a comprehensive analysis, see Tobias Kemper, *Die Kreuzigung Christi: Motiugeschichtliche Studien zu lateinischen und deutschen Passionstraktaten des Spätmittelalters* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006), 273 – 315.

⁹ See Bruce Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 203 – 08.

¹⁰ From the *Vitae Sororum* of Unterlinden; cited in Holsinger, 197.

condemned to hell: “The cymbals and harps they will hear will be tumultuous tempests and penetrating rivers which will pierce them through their hearts.”¹¹ One may perhaps find here a curiously fair approximation of a divine Long Range Acoustic Device mercilessly aimed at the eternally damned. Ariel Dorfman’s *Death and the Maiden*, where a sadistic doctor rapes his captor to the strains of Schubert’s quartet, or any one of Quentin Tarantino’s films, where bloody violence is accompanied by an often gleeful pop soundtrack, are but several current illustrations of a centuries-old notion.

Music’s strange capacity to conjure a season in hell, its power to destroy the body and dissolve the mind, comes to the fore in the ancient and horrific legend of the “Bull of Phalaris.” In the ninth book of his *Bibliotheca historica*, Diodorus Siculus relates the story of Phalaris, the tyrant who lorded over the Greek Sicilian colony of Akragas in the mid-sixth century BC. Writing some five centuries later, Diodorus tells how the court sculptor Perilaos presented his king with a peculiar torture machine formed in the shape of a large, hollow bull fashioned out of bronze. The historian describes in detail how the bull’s nostrils were fitted with “small sounding pipes or reeds [*auliskous*].”¹² The perverse sculptor proudly explained to his master that a man could be locked inside the bull and, with a strong fire lit underneath, the victim could be slowly roasted, while the king would derive “pleasure by the groans that pass through the pipes [*aulois*] in the nostrils.” Thus, the tortured noise of suffering would be transformed into the musical pleasure of a reed concert. Agony would become melodious. The screams of a long, violent death would become the sweet sounds of an improvised air. Phalaris, whose reputation for cruelty was unsurpassed in Antiquity, apparently wasted no time in enjoying his new gift. Upon persuading his sculptor to demonstrate the device, the tyrant immediately had the artist locked within the bull, ordered the fire to be kindled, and listened to the extemporaneous performance on the hellish nose-flutes. “But in order that the man’s death might not pollute the work of bronze, he took him out, when half-dead, and hurled him down the cliffs.”

In Pindar’s *First Pythian Ode*, composed for Hieron who ruled the Sicilian colony of Syracuse a century after Phalaris, the nefarious bull and its abominable air are evoked as dark foil for the celebratory music that sustains the reputations of benevolent men. In the ode’s concluding lines, Pindar compares the evil Phalaris with his contemporary Croesus, the king of Lydia known for his generosity.

οὐ φθίνει Κροίσου φιλόφρων ἀρετά.

¹¹ Marguerite d’Oingt, *Pagina meditationum* (para. 91); cited in Holsinger, 214.

¹² Diodorus Siculus, 9.19, C. H. Oldfather, trans. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946). Translation slightly modified.

τὸν δὲ ταύρῳ χαλκῷ καυτῆρα νηλέα νόον
 ἐχθρὰ Φάλαριν κατέχει παντᾶ φάτις,
 οὐδέ νιν φόρμιγγες ὑπωρόφιοι κοινωνίαν
 μαλθακὰν παίδων ὁάροισι δέκονται.

(*Pyth.* 1.94 – 98)

[The kindly disposed excellence of Croesus does not perish. But hatred pronounced by all pours over Phalaris of ruthless mind who burned men in a bronze bull; and no lyres sounding in the halls welcome him in gentle fellowship with the songs of boys.]

Pindar's lines suggest that Phalaris continued to employ the device and that the hideous sounds that once poured out of the Akragan court correspond to the atrocious infamy that now pours over his memory. In curating his diabolic concert, he destroys the "community" (*koinōnia*) of song.

Pindar may already be alluding to the fact that Phalaris is accredited with being the first dictator of the ancient world. From his official position in the colonial treasury at Akragas, he extorted funds to raise a fierce army among the enslaved workers and usurped the throne.¹³ In reference to the taurine punishment, Cicero identifies Phalaris as "the most cruel of all tyrants" (*crudelissimus omnium tyrannorum*, *Against Verres* 2.4.73) and would invent the neologism, *phalarismos*, in order to describe malicious minds motivated by dictatorial plans.¹⁴ According to the *Suda*, Phalaris relentlessly used the brazen bull to execute suspicious foreigners and personal enemies. He did so until his reign was overthrown by the general Telemachus, who promptly locked the cruel tyrant himself into the deadly resounding bronze beast. Thus, the despot came to suffer the same fate as the one he inflicted on the machine's inventor. During the Carthaginian invasion of Sicily, Himilco is said to have taken the original bull back to North Africa as a war trophy. The gruesome contraption would enter into Roman consciousness when Scipio Africanus, in 200 B.C. restored it to Akragas. Throughout the later imperial period, there are reports of such death by roasting, including a few instances in Christian martyrology. St. Eustace is said to have been killed in the bull, under the orders of Hadrian; and St. Antipas, the Bishop of Pergamum, is said to have suffered the same fate under the rule of Domitian. Further accounts of such orchestrated execution are chronicled throughout the medieval period, particularly in Central Europe.

In addition to confirming the decadent brutality of the Akragan court, the story of the brazen bull provided the classical tradition with an instructive moral, namely that designers of

¹³ Aristotle, *Politics* 1310b.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 7.12, where Cicero refers to Julius Caesar's fearful "phalarism."

inhumane torments often fall prey to the same. Diodorus himself prefaces his account by pronouncing this theme: “In general, those who plan an evil thing aimed at others are usually snared in their own devices” (*Hist.* 9.18). Lucian, whose fictional account allows Phalaris to exonerate himself in the first-person, concludes the episode of the brazen bull with a similarly didactic statement: “Thus did [the artist] suffer his just deserts by enjoying his own contrivance” (*Phalaris* 1.12). To be sure, mention of this strange episode is generally made in Antiquity as an illustration of this lesson of just retribution for those bent on inflicting unimaginable pain. Both Pliny the Elder and Ovid focus on the role of the artist, Perilaos (Latin: Perillus), to be regarded as a significant exemplum. In the *Ars amatoria*, Ovid writes in reference to the brazen bull: “There is no law more just than this: that artificers of death should perish by their own art” (*necque enim lex aequior ulla est, quam necis artifices arte perire sua*, 1.655 – 56); while Pliny expresses the same repulsion voiced above concerning the perversion of art used to inflict suffering. The substance of Pliny’s complaint, however, has to do with sculpture:

To such a degree had this man degraded the art of representing gods and men, a most humanly refining art [*humanissimam artem*]. Surely so many persons had not toiled to perfect it in order to make it an instrument of torture! Hence it is that the works of Perillus are only preserved, in order that whoever sees them, may detest the hands that made them. (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 34.19.89)¹⁵

In a curious fashion, the historian appears to be more offended by the crime against art than the cruel treatment of human life. The most humanizing art is the victim here. If the function of art is to refine the senses and provide moral edification, then Perillus’ creation should not be considered art, but rather art’s failing. Accordingly, Pliny follows Polybius (*Histories* 12.25) and reports that the sounds produced by the torture resembled the natural groaning of a bull [*mugitus*], not crafted melodies. All the same, dismissing the device from the realm of true art need not preclude authentically human concerns. In a chapter on cruelty, Valerius Maximus suggests a rationale for transforming the victim’s laments:

There was a savage inventor of a brazen bull, in which men used to be driven, enclosed with a fire lit beneath, made to suffer a long and hidden torture [*longo et abdito cruciatu*], giving out cries that resounded like the lowing of a cow [*mugitus*], so that their wailing would not sound like a human voice [*humano sono vocis*] and could not then implore Phalaris, the tyrant, for mercy. (*Factorum et dictorum memorabilum*, 9.2.9)

¹⁵ *The Natural History of Pliny*, J. Bowstock and H.T. Riley, trans. (London: Bohn, 1855 – 57); slightly modified.

The cruelty consists in the concealment of pain, a facile trick that promotes the despot's delusion that he can somehow retain his humanity. Ironically, it is out of consideration for Phalaris' potential pity (or uncomfortable annoyance) that leads to this pitiless scene. Reduced to an animal, the victim of torture can no longer make any effective appeal.

These various moral interpretations of the hollow bull—as an exemplum of just deserts or as an illustration of the dehumanizing effects of torment—should not detract us from the strange proximity, emphasized by other chroniclers, of music and torture. Lucian's *Phalaris* is especially distinctive in sustaining a connection between musical art and physical distress, aesthetic experience and horrendous violence. Apart from an opening and closing frame, Lucian's text is presented as Phalaris's direct address to the priests of Delphi. The tyrant of Akragas has come to the sacred site to offer the bull to Pythian Apollo, a pious act that aims to clear himself from the charge of cruelty. The bronze sculpture therefore operates as a dual sign, as a symbol of his purported brutality and his humanity. Throughout the text, this double function is further marked and also seriously qualified by describing the bull alternately as “some new form of torture” (καίνην τινα κόλασιν) and a musical instrument.

The sculptor, Perilaos, mistakenly believed it would be a suitable gift for Phalaris, who is reputed to be a man who takes excessive pleasure in torturing (ὥς ἐξ ἅπαντος κολάζειν ἐπιθυμοῦντι). Yet, as Phalaris claims to the Delphic priests, this judgment is unfair—his decision to torture enemies was always made in the interest of his regime's and therefore his state's “security” (*sōtēria*, 1.2). The common verb for torture, *kolazein*, alludes to the noun *kolasis*, which specifically refers to pruning a tree. As Phalaris pleads, rulers who live among enemies and conspirators are compelled to resort to such harsh policies:

Rebellion is a many-headed Hydra: we cut off one guilty head, two others grow in its place. Yet we must harden our hearts to prune [*kolazein*] them from the start, and--like Iolaus--sear the wounds; only thus shall we hold on to our own. The man who has once become involved in such strife as this must play the part that he has undertaken; to show mercy would be fatal. (1.8)

In an argument that today has become perhaps too familiar, the justification for merciless tactics makes an appeal to security: faced with an existential threat, one seeks allowance for overriding claims for compassion and clemency. Whatever acts of violence Phalaris exercised against the citizenry should be condoned insofar as they were committed in a state of exception.

Notwithstanding, Lucian's Phalaris asserts that he balked at Perilaos' perverse design, which would make music—an art sacred to Apollo and the Muses—complicit in acts of torture. At issue here is not the use of music in torture but rather the use of torture to produce music. And throughout his account, Phalaris stresses the musicality of the evil device, while also admitting its capacity to reproduce animal noises. According to Perilaos, the sound that would be emitted through the reed-pipes is conjured as “accompanying the clearest laments and most mournful bellowing” (λιγυρώτατα καὶ ἐπαυλήσει θρηνῶδες καὶ μυκήσεται γοερώτατον, 1.11). Thus, Perilaos is ironically named a “music master” (ὁ διδάσκαλος τῆς μουσικῆς, 1.12), ironic insofar as he has the—in this case dubious—privilege of being the first to perform. In this passage especially, Lucian consistently links the verbs of “torture” and “musical enjoyment.” In one tightly coordinated sentence, Perilaos gleefully boasts: “Thus, on the one hand, as [the victim] is being tortured, you will, on the other hand, enjoy the strains of the pipes in the midst of it all” (ὥς τὸν μὲν κολάζεσθαι, σὲ δὲ τέρπεσθαι μεταξὺ καταυλούμενον).

What precisely is the source of this aesthetic enjoyment? Lucian's description of the taurine threnody as “most clear or shrill” (λιγυρώτατα) immediately recalls Homer's portrayal of the equally sweet and equally lethal song of the bewitching Sirens (λιγυρῇ θέλγουσιν αἰοιδῇ, *Od.* 12.44). The shrillness of the Sirens' song alludes to a simple but prevalent idea across ancient Greek culture, namely that music must be purchased with great pain and suffering. Hesiod suggests as much, when he names “sorrow and grief” as the occasion for all song in the opening passage of the *Theogony* (98 – 103). Scholars of ancient poetics have long recognized how sacrifice serves as the occasion for song—an etiology that is maintained by the myths concerning the invention of musical instruments alluded to above. This notion concurs with a recent thesis presented by Jacques Attali who, on the basis of disparate anthropological evidence, defines “noise” as “a weapon” and “music” as “primordially [...] the formation, domestication, and ritualization of that weapon as a simulacrum of ritual murder.”¹⁶

The myth of Orpheus is of course especially illustrative. The paradigmatic singer sings—at least in Vergil's and Ovid's account—from a feeling of grave deprivation and sacrifice. His melodies have their specific source in a tortured conscience. The lyre of Orpheus eventually receives an apotheosis, taking its place as a constellation in the heavens, providing a cosmological orientation for the art of song, but only after the singer's body has been clubbed to death, only after his flesh has been torn apart by the raving Maenads. On an even more specific level, the Orpheus myth may bring us to a fuller appreciation of the significance of the bull of Phalaris. The paradigmatic singer, we should remember, is also the exemplary hero, the man who once traveled alive into the realm of death, making his way along the torturous paths of

¹⁶ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, B. Massumi, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 24.

the Underworld. And perhaps it would not be too far off the mark, at least in certain respects, to understand this descent into hell, as a metaphor for the tortured origins of music's efflorescence, a confrontation with death as the condition of possibility of song.

To return to the episode of the brazen bull, I would mention one of the most memorable poetic accounts of infernal descents. I am referring to Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, where Aeneas follows the Sibyl into the Underworld in order to converse with his father, learn his fate, and preview the future glory of Rome. What interests me is not the descent per se, but rather in the frame story that Vergil employs. The book, as most of us may recall, opens with Aeneas landing on the Cumaean shore. Upon entering the Sibyl's cave, which will lead him to the gates of Hell, Aeneas regards the relief sculptures produced by Daedalus, who once found refuge in this spot, after fleeing Crete and losing his son, Icarus. Among the represented scenes, Aeneas focuses on the central scene, which depicts the Minoan queen, Pasiphae, as she lies within a hollow wooden cow in order to seduce the bull, for whom she has conceived a monstrous lust. That is, before Aeneas makes his descent, he drinks in an image that cannot fail to summon the court of Akragas: Pasiphae crawling into the cow's belly closely rhymes with Phalaris's victim led into the brazen bull.

Why, then, does Vergil choose to introduce the story of infernal descent with the myth of Pasiphae and the Minotaur? And how might this episode relate to the bull of Phalaris? I can only offer some speculation. It was Daedalus, the Minoan court artist, who constructed the wooden cow at the queen's bidding: it is a work of art prepared for the ruler and therefore clearly cognate with the brazen bull of Phalaris. In all probability both instances refer to an archaic tradition of human sacrifice linked to the Semitic god Baal and his Greek counterpart, Zeus Atabyrius (named after Mount Atabyrion on the island of Rhodes). According to a scholium to Pindar's *Seventh Olympian Ode*, the sacred bulls lodged in the temple would bellow whenever the city was threatened.¹⁷ It was presumably when the Rhodians colonized Gela that the cult was first established in Sicily, where it spread to subsequent colonies, including Akragas. Phalaris's city was founded by the citizens of Gela and Crete, which of course also had an active cult to the bull. Upon the Akragan acropolis there is a temple to Zeus Atabyrius which was likely to have been constructed by Phalaris.

Yet, there is no need to posit archaeological or ethnographic links. Both Pasiphae's cow and the bull of Phalaris are artistic devices designed to house a living being. Although Daedalus's cow is no torture device, it corresponds even further to the bull of Phalaris, insofar as it clearly marks, through Vergil's framing, the origin of song. The song I have in mind is the *Aeneid*'s sixth book itself, which tells of a future empire founded on the destruction of the old,

¹⁷ Scholium ad Ol. 7, 159 – 75. *Scholia in Pindari Epinicia*, E. Abel, ed. (Budapest/Berlin, 1891), 279 – 80.

Trojan past. Moreover, the image of a living queen enclosed within the lifeless shell of art provocatively foreshadows Aeneas's journey as a living human entering into the labyrinthine land of death. Indeed, the scene of the wooden cow announces the theme of life shut within or coming into direct contact with lifelessness, which is the principal motif of all descent myths. As Pasiphae reclines within the bovine enclosure, she also replicates the image of the great wooden horse, which both led to the fall of Troy and sets the surviving Trojans onto the path toward the future of Rome. The foundational force of these images cannot be overestimated. In entering the cow, Pasiphae ritually re-enacts Europa's rape by Zeus who comes in the form of a bull—a founding myth of the West in every sense. Her act, which results in the birth of the Minotaur, can thereby serve as a figure for all art that transmits life by subsuming life, just as the grand work of art known as the Roman Empire will live eternally from the sublimation of individual difference. It is the violent lesson that courses through much of the poetic tradition and a lesson that could be well exploited by colonial dictators like Phalaris. As we have seen, Cicero's invented term, *phalarismos*, was clearly coined with an eye on the ambitions of Julius Caesar. The bull of Phalaris does not simply indulge in the tyrant's sadism, but also functions within the dictator's political program.

Life shut within or coming into contact with lifelessness is a fair way to describe the experience of torture, an experience that brings life dreadfully near, but without accomplishing, death. The Sibyl needlessly reminds Aeneas what everyone already knows: getting into the Underworld is easy, but to emerge from the realm of death is nearly impossible—"here is the work, here is the task" (*hic opus, hic labor est*). The labor of torture is analogous, causing an encounter with death without killing the victim. This is the "season in hell" that aims toward the awesome song of empire.

The bull of Phalaris would appear to be a sick parody of Pasiphae's bestial desires. In both case, the offspring is monstrous—be it the Minotaur or the reed concert pouring out from the bull's nostrils. However, if the scene of life shut within lifeless art is a foreshadowing of the journey through hell toward the promised glory of Rome, or if it is a ritual re-enactment of the rape of Europa and the founding of the West, then these mythic episodes may resonate with the stories of musical creation as modes of *civilizing*. To be sure, such offspring may also be construed as equally monstrous. The point is that, in these particular cases, the transformation of pain into music at least partially has to do with the painful demolition of old worlds and the ordered establishment of the new: Asia sublates into Europe; Troy sublates into Rome. To allude to Elaine Scarry's seminal work on torture, one world is made at another's expense. Hence, Scarry writes: "[T]he torturer dramatizes the disintegration of the world, the obliteration

of consciousness that is happening within the prisoner himself.”¹⁸ It is a necessary first stage in making a new world in the wake of a shattered one. In this sense, torture is less an uncivilized practice and more a de-civilizing one, one that is desperately at pains to establish a civilization by destroying another.

How, then, can torture’s role in the production of music relate to the use of music in acts of torture? In the end, there can only be a somewhat wild conjecture, resting on associations that are quite free and without proof, intended more as a provocation than as definitive interpretation. The idea of torture as an instrument of music—exemplified by the brazen bull, by mythic accounts of the origin of music, and by the Christian beatification of pain—obliquely opens onto notions of sublimation and the creation of new worlds, be it a dictatorial regime, an eternal empire, or a new divine dispensation. Could this be a factor in explaining why certain music has been recently used by American servicemen and agents for inflicting psychological pain? It would seem that the specific musical examples must be regarded from the perspective of the target. Effects are only amplified in the case of Islamic fundamentalists, for whom secular music and singing are strictly prohibited. Consider the legally questionable treatment of the “high-value prisoner” Abu Zubaydah in 2002. Here, the sexual explicitness of Christina Aguilera, the demonic chromaticism of Metallica, the blatant force of hardcore rap, all ostensibly provided the ideal means for obliterating one world and imposing another. Over all, and not only in Zubaydah’s case, the music conjures a scene that is inevitably disorienting and deranging, dissolving a detainee’s subjective will, revealing to the victim that the ground upon which he stands has dematerialized into sounds controlled by another, that he is now subject to a world in which he does not belong, that he is now at the mercy of a world where the cessation of pain may be promised, but only on the condition that he divulge information on suspected terrorists, that he alert authorities to future threats. The torment will end, in other words, only on the condition that the tortured prisoner begins to sing.

¹⁸ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 38.