

Music GARY
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in Renaissance

Toward a
Historiography
of Others

Magic

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repetitious, ever changing yet never out of touch with the old. In this view cultural change is the reciprocal transformation of categories and the contexts in which they are reenacted.

The context of my writers around 1500 was different enough from those of earlier writers, even recent predecessors like Anselmi or Ugolino, that it could foster a powerful transformation of the categories involved. This transformation took the form of a magical merger of ethos and world harmony, more compelling than any approached before in western culture, that brought within man's grasp the power of cosmic music. Of course the context in which this merger arose was, for each of my writers, different; I should speak, to be precise, of distinct (but in many respects intersecting) contexts. Ramos's intellectual context featured, probably, the astrological, musical, and medical traditions of Islamic Neoplatonism. Ficino's was profoundly shaped by the recovery of ancient (and in particular Plotinian) Neoplatonism, which itself must have taken its significance in part from Ficino's acquaintance with al-Kindi's Neoplatonic magic. For Gafori the crucial elements were his reading of earlier musical authorities like Ramos and Anselmi, his introduction to Plato's works in their Ficinian (but mostly nonmagical) guise, and the revelation of Aristides and Ptolemy. For Agrippa, finally, Ficinian magic loomed largest, a magic whose musical aspects could be staunchly bolstered with material from the treatises of Gafori. In such contexts these writers retold the old stories, and in such contexts they made them new.

Ficino's Magical Songs

How did Ficino's magical songs work? D. P. Walker first posed the question thirty-five years ago in his book *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*. I raise it again in order to rethink Walker's answer, for such rethinking can foster a new conception of the place of music and the relation of music and words in important strains of Renaissance thought. It can stimulate corollary questions about Renaissance epistemology, psychology, and theories of sense perception that have not been grappled with in musicological studies of the period. It can, in the broadest sense, offer alternatives to our conceptions of music-making and music-hearing from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth century.

My reconsideration of Walker's conclusions relies in part on research that has been carried out since he wrote—research, I should add, that was in many cases made conceivable by his writing, for *Spiritual and Demonic Magic* is a path-breaking study, one of the most revelatory and original works on Renaissance musical thought that modern scholarship has produced. My reconsideration also springs, however, from a new reading of the same passages in Ficino that Walker used in reaching his conclusions, especially the accounts of magical and astrological song from Ficino's three books *On Life—De vita*—written during the 1480s and published in 1489. In one fundamental regard Walker distorted these passages, imposing on them an interpretive framework that seems to find little support in them.

The crucial misstep in Walker's interpretation of *De vita* is his assumption of a functional difference between the words and the music of Ficino's song: in Walker's interpretation only words, not music, can convey rational significance. This assumption emerges at first only obliquely from his account. On page 6 Walker likens song to the human *spiritus* (an organ of immense importance to Ficino that I will examine below) by noting that both carry an "intellectual content"; the song does so, Walker adds, through its text. On page 7 he supports Ficino's view of the superiority of hearing to the senses of smell, taste, and touch by noting that "they cannot transmit an intellectual content,

which music can do, owing to its text." By page 10 Walker has linked words to the intellective soul and in particular, it would seem, to its highest component, mind; the music that conveys words affects nothing higher than the subrational spirit, ontologically inferior to soul. And on page 21, finally, Walker explicitly voices the postulate behind these statements: "A song works on the body, mind, and on whatever intermediate faculties may be between; but it is the text alone which can carry an intellectual content and thus influence the mind." Strikingly, in a book that is notable for its cautious support of its assertions with primary-source citations, none of these statements is thus buttressed.

Walker's idea that only words, not music, could reach the rational and intellectual faculties of the human soul appears at first glance plausibly Ficinian, and indeed it has been accepted without challenge by most writers on Ficino's magic since Walker. In his study of Agrippa's thought, for example, Charles Nauert, Jr., relied on Walker's account in references to Ficino's musical magic; he noted Ficino's "stress on the words (and hence the meaning) of his celestial hymns" (*Agrippa and the Crisis*, p. 245). In *Divining the Powers of Music* the musicologist Ruth Katz was more specific, summarizing Walker's conclusions on Ficino's magical song and asserting with him that "only the text carries the kind of explicit intellectual content that reaches the mind" (p. 91). And Carol V. Kaske, in her introduction to the important new edition and translation of Ficino's *De vita*, has once again perpetuated, en passant, Walker's dichotomy; she assumes that Ficino's magical music, "provided it is non-verbal," could work only on the spirit (*Three Books on Life*, p. 60).

Michael Allen's adherence to Walker's interpretation in two recent books is more surprising than these examples, for Allen is the most attentive and precise of recent exegetes of Ficino, and the nature of Ficino's epistemology sits near the center of his concerns. (His adherence to Walker is in the present context ironic as well since, as we will see, his illuminating reappraisals of Ficino's epistemology and psychology have helped pave the way for my own rethinking of Ficino's musical magic.) In *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino* Allen repeats, citing Walker and also Paul Oskar Kristeller's classic study *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, the notion that music affects the spirit, words the mind (p. 53). Allen's citation of Kristeller does not put us on firmer ground than his references to Walker, since Kristeller's own references lead us to two writings of Ficino, the letter *De divino furore* and a chapter from the *Theologia platonica*, that provide no basis for Walker's functional dis-

inction of words and music (see *The Philosophy*, p. 308, and Ficino, *Opera omnia*, p. 614, and *Theologia platonica* XII,6).

In his more recent book *Icastes: Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's Sophist* Allen again rehearses Walker's views and argues that for Ficino "the hearing arts are the arts of the word and thus those that best speak to the soul and its powers of understanding and intuition. Hence Ficino's care to emphasize that he has vocal music, not instrumental music, in the forefront of his mind" (p. 164). The assertion is confident; but in the lengthy quotation from the *Theologia platonica* that Allen considers here there is no sign of Ficino's putative emphasis on vocal music. The crucial sentence in this passage reads "Maxime vero in sermonibus, cantibus atque sonis artificiosus animus se depromit in lucem." This hardly warrants Allen's translation "But the artificer's soul is most fully manifest in the works that pertain to the hearing: in speeches and poems and vocal music" (p. 161). Allen knows full well that *sonus* in series with *cantus* here must embrace non-vocal music in addition to song; indeed twelve pages later, in another connection, he more accurately renders the almost identical phrase "*sonisque et cantibus*" as "instrumental music, songs and chants" (p. 173). The earlier mistranslation can only be ascribed to the stiffening authority that Walker's interpretation, allotting words to the rational faculties and music to lower ones, has exerted with the passing years. Indeed, to my knowledge only one writer has called this interpretation into question, and he was the earliest among those mentioned here to scrutinize it. This is James Haar, who in discussing Ficino's planetary songs in his dissertation "*Musica Mundana*" of 1960 objected to Walker's conclusion that all the astrological imitation in them resided in the text (see pp. 359-60).

The overwhelming acceptance in the later scholarly literature of Walker's functional distinction of words and music gives pause, especially since, as I have said, Walker did not usually make any attempt to substantiate it with Ficino's own testimony. We sense in it the shutting of windows on Renaissance mentalities, the a priori imposition on sixteenth-century perceptions of more modern ways of thought. The general acceptance of Walker is all the more surprising since his one attempt to support his view with Ficinian testimony led him to a patent case of special pleading. This occurs on page 21, where Walker at last stated explicitly his thesis that for Ficino only the words of a song could influence the mind. He continued: "The music, abstracted from its text, can reach no higher than the spirit, i.e. sense and feeling, or at most, through the spirit, the lower parts of the soul, phantasy and

imagination." Then, referring to a list he culled from *De vita* matching the planetary spheres to sublunar things that most effectively capture their influences (see p. 15), Walker moved to clinch his argument: "The status of song is clearly shown in the hierarchical list . . . : Apollo [the sun, matched to song] is just above the odors and unguents of Venus, just below the vehement imaginings of Mars, and far below the intellectual contemplation of Saturn." That is, music in Ficino's list of planetary affinities occupies a middle level, below the rational powers associated with Saturn (and with Jupiter, which Ficino links to discursive reason). This seems conclusive enough. But Walker overlooked the fact that in Ficino's list not only songs but musical sounds in general *and words* are ascribed to Apollo: "Verba, cantus, soni, . . . omnia rite dedicantur Apollini, musicae prae ceteris auctori" (*De vita* III,21). Far from a conclusive testimony to Walker's differentiation of words and music, Ficino's list provides instead a confirmation of their ontological equivalence and a strong argument for their epistemological identity as well.

Walker's interpretation seems to have sprung more from his own earlier research agenda than from his close reading of Ficino and other Neoplatonists. Specifically, his distinction of words and music echoes the concerns of his lengthy essay entitled "Musical Humanism in the 16th and Early 17th Centuries." There the emphasis on the words in vocal music, what he called "the subjection of music to text" (p. 114), was Walker's foremost measure of humanistic tendencies. By stressing in *Spiritual and Demonic Magic* the words of Ficino's song, by setting them apart from his music and granting them ontologically superior powers, Walker seems to have hoped to enlist Ficino in the ranks of his musical humanists. Walker wrote: "For [Ficino], as . . . for later musical humanists, the text was much more important than the music" (p. 21). Or, more strongly but again without substantiation: "Ficino's conception of the relative importance of music and text is the same as that of the majority of 16th century humanists, namely, that the text alone reaches the mind and must therefore dominate the music" (p. 26). Here Ficino's own voice has been submerged in the chorus of Ramos, Gafori, Glareanus, Zarlino, Galilei, and the rest of Walker's musical humanists.

All this may seem to make very heavy weather of a trivial issue; I hope that my reconsideration below of Ficino's magical songs will serve in retrospect to justify some blustering here. For now it is enough to suggest how the issue has global implications even in Walker's own account. His emphasis on the words of Ficino's songs informs the con-

ceptual framework of his book as a whole. For he considered the distinction of spiritual and demonic magics in its title to turn on the presence or absence of meaningful intellectual appeals to rational superhuman entities, that is, to demons. Magical operations making such appeals are demonic, while those working only with natural, subrational forces are not. In this distinction Walker (and Ficino) followed Thomas Aquinas, who in the *Summa theologiae* and the *Summa contra gentiles* had liberalized traditional church teachings on amulets and talismans on a similar basis (*Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, pp. 42–44; see also Brian P. Copenhaver, "Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic," pp. 531–34, 551–52).

By making the words the only intellectual element in Ficino's song, then, Walker implied that it could be demonic only by virtue of them. He neutralized the music of this song in the face of his dichotomy of spiritual and demonic magics, rendering it a subrational and therefore innocent force arranging or enhancing natural influxes with no appeal to invisible and perhaps unorthodox intelligences (*Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, pp. 43, 48, 53). As a result of this distinction, music seems to have no demonic potential at all in the general taxonomy of magic Walker offered later in the book (pp. 77, 80–81).

There is, in the end, no compelling evidence that Ficino recognized Walker's distinction of meaningful words and nonmeaningful music. Instead Ficino conceived the effectiveness of music, its magical potential, and its relationship to demons through other conceptual means than these. To clarify them we will need to read again the specific passages from his writings that Walker's interpretation misconstrued. (In the course of this rereading we can also review other, better-founded conclusions of Walker's analysis.) And we will need to traverse challenging terrain in Ficino's thought, including his theories of cognition and perception—his theories, in other words, of the interplay between soul and body, between the intelligible and the material realms of Platonic and Neoplatonic ontology. In Ficino's mind music, musical effect, words, magic, and demons all inhabited this liminal place.

Spirit, Soul, Music

So also did the human organ *spiritus* occupy this middle ground between body and soul. Ficino's concept of the spirit is a rich and complex one, merging various doctrines of Aristotle, the ancient Stoics, the Neoplatonists from the first centuries after Christ, and Galenic medicine. We might almost agree with Ioan Couliano's

recent remark that "Ficino redefines spirit in every treatise" (*Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, p. 28), except that crucial features of Ficino's doctrine recur throughout the body of his writings. Most important is the categorical differentiation of spirit and soul. Ficino saw the two as distinct in function and ontological status. The spirit is lower than the soul in Ficino's hierarchy of being. It is the intermediary linking the soul to the body. The soul is incorporeal and alive, the body corporeal and lifeless, and the spirit somewhere in between. (About this middle position there will be more to say below; its inherent ambivalence helps explain Ficino's frequent recourse, in attempting to describe the spirit, to qualifiers like "quasi" and "quodammodo.") The spirit is a thin and airy substance, as Ficino wrote in *De vita*, "almost not a body but a soul; or again, almost not a soul but a body—quasi non corpus et quasi iam anima, item quasi non anima et quasi iam corpus" (book III, chapter 3). It conveys the animating force of the soul to the body and the stimuli received by the corporeal senses back to the soul. Ficino summarized the relations of body, spirit, and soul and the spirit's functions in *El libro dell'amore*, his famous and influential commentary on Plato's *Symposium*. "Without doubt three things are in us," Ficino wrote,

soul, spirit, and body. The soul and the body are very different in nature; they are joined by means of the spirit, which is a certain vapor, very thin and clear, produced by the heat of the heart from the thinnest part of the blood. Spread from there through all parts of the body, the spirit receives the powers of the soul and communicates them to the body. It also takes up through the organs of the senses the images of bodies outside, images that cannot be imprinted directly on the soul because incorporeal substance, which is more perfect than bodies, cannot be formed by them through the reception of images. But the soul, being present in all parts of the spirit, easily sees the images of bodies as if in a mirror shining in it, and through these judges the bodies; such cognition is called "sense" by the Platonists. While it looks at these images, by its own power the soul conceives in itself images similar to them, but much purer; and such conception is called imagination or phantasy. (VI,6)

Given the importance of these functions, it is not surprising that Ficino should have devoted the whole of *De vita* to the maintenance, nourishment, and uses of the spirit.

Another feature of Ficino's pneumatology appears in his writings

less consistently than these, as Walker noted, but is of considerable importance in the last two books of *De vita* (see for example II,14–15, and III,11,21). This is the distinction and hierarchical ordering of three types of spirits: natural, associated with the liver; vital, associated with the heart; and animal, associated with the brain. This triple division reaches back through Avicenna to Galen and ancient medical doctrine (*Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, p. 5).

Finally, Walker argued persuasively that Ficino's conception of medical spirits was, at least by the time of *De vita*, bound up in his mind with another theory: the Neoplatonic theory that the soul takes on a vehicle in the course of its descent through the planetary spheres into the body. This vehicle was variously conceived by ancient writers like Proclus and Porphyry, even to the point of being subdivided into two or more vehicles. It was commonly thought to consist at least in part of the fifth element, ether. (The nature of this ether itself was not unambiguous, however. Ficino seems to have viewed it not as entirely separate from the sublunar elements but rather as a fiery air or airy fire standing between the fire of the heavens and the elemental realm; see Allen, *The Platonism*, p. 11.) Being a tenuous corporeal envelope for the soul, the vehicle was peculiarly liable to linkage (or confusion) with the medical spirits, likewise thin, corporeal intermediaries between soul and body; indeed such linkage occurred already in ancient writings (see Walker, "The Astral Body in Renaissance Medicine," pp. 121–22).

To Ficino, Walker suggested, the merging of medical pneumatology and the theory of the etheric vehicle must have seemed especially useful. The vehicle's origin among the heavenly spheres served to explain on a general level the potency of astrological influences on the human spirit, a primary concern in *De vita*. And it may have been at the back of Ficino's mind when in the third book of *De vita*—the book entitled *De vita coelitus comparanda*, whose ideas on astrological song I introduced in chapter 3—he posited the existence of a world spirit, a *spiritus mundi*, distinct from the world soul that occurs here and in his other writings (*De vita coelitus comparanda*, chapter 3; see also *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, pp. 38–40, and Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, pp. 43–44). The connection of Ficino's world spirit and the Neoplatonic vehicle is especially probable, Walker noted, since in the years and months before Ficino completed *De vita coelitus comparanda* he had translated two ancient accounts of the etheric vehicle, Iamblichus's *De mysteriis* and Synesius of Cyrene's *De insomniis*.

These doctrines of medical spirit and psychic vehicle are complex in themselves. They came to Ficino after more than a millennium of

growth and hybridization, and his own view of them seems to vary according to both the point along his intellectual development and the dictates of the particular contexts where it is expressed. Nevertheless their complexity and ambiguity is increased notably when we juxtapose them with Ficino's psychology, his views of soul itself. The juxtaposition is a crucial one for us, since Walker's view of Ficino's musical magic, with its division of meaningful words and nonmeaningful music, plays itself out at the juncture of rational and subrational human faculties—that is, in precisely that gray area, between the body and the higher components of the soul, occupied by the spirits, the vehicle, and the lower faculties of soul.

We may start with the psychology of Ficino's central but relatively early work *Theologia platonica* (1469–74), analyzed by Kristeller in *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* (pp. 368–84), enriching it in the light of more recent scholarly discussions and Ficino's own later writings. At the upper end of the soul stands the mind or *mens*, a power of intuitive knowledge contemplating higher intelligible forms and, ultimately, the ideas of the divine mind and higher mysteries. Below it is reason or *ratio*, the middle of the soul. This is a power of discursive, logical thought that, alone of all the soul's parts, wanders freely, at one time associating itself with the mind, at another with the lowest division of the soul. This lowest division Ficino termed *idolum*, following Plotinus. It consists of the three lower forces of the soul, in descending order phantasy, sense perception, and nutritive power. The relation of *idolum* and the etheric vehicle is particularly intimate: Ficino cited the view of ancient writers that the *idolum* is inherent in the vehicle of the soul, that it is "an animating act" brought about by the rational soul in the vehicle: "As the light of the moon in a cloud produces paleness out of itself, so the Soul produces in the celestial body the *idolum*—Sicut enim Lunae splendor in nube promit ex seipso pallorem, sic anima in corpore coelesti emittit *idolum*" (*Theologia platonica* XVIII,4; trans. Kristeller, *The Philosophy*, p. 372). Beneath the three proper elements of the soul, mind, reason, and *idolum*, is a fourth element, the irrational soul. This is the dim reflection of the soul that animates the body much as the *idolum* animates the etheric vehicle.

The highest and most important force of the *idolum* was for Ficino the phantasy. On some occasions Ficino equated this with the imagination, though on others he differentiated them, assigning the imagination to the sensitive soul and assimilating phantasy to the lowest reaches of *ratio* above it; both positions were advocated in the ancient

and medieval sources of Ficino's psychology (see Allen, *Icastes*, p. 124; Kristeller, *The Philosophy*, pp. 235,369). In the simpler view phantasy/imagination receives the external images transmitted by the senses and offers them to be judged by reason. In the other, more complex view, imagination reflects sensible external images, while phantasy itself initiates the process of rational judgment. In either view phantasy and imagination are critical intermediaries between sensation and cognition; I will consider them further below.

In discussing the human organs beneath the level of soul, Kristeller argued for a clear distinction between the etheric vehicle and the spirit. Thus he removed this latter organ, so central to the magical therapies of *De vita*, from intimate contact with soul and left it little role other than as a passive agent in sense perception (pp. 372–73). But Kristeller's differentiation of vehicle and spirit is dubious. Acknowledging the fact that Ficino himself referred to spirit as the "vehicle of the Soul," Kristeller nevertheless admonished us "not to be misled by verbal similarities." He cited as evidence for his separation of vehicle and spirit the following passage from the *Theologia platonica* (XVIII,4): "Many Platonists believe that the soul uses three vehicles—the first, immaterial and simple, that is, celestial; the second, material and simple, that is, air-like; the third, material and composed, that is, made up of the four elements." For Kristeller, the three vehicles Ficino mentioned here were the etheric vehicle, the spirit, and the body; hence he could conclude that Ficino clearly distinguished the first two.

Allen's recent interpretation of Ficino's late *Commentary* on Plato's *Sophist* (ca. 1492), however, suggests another reading of Ficino's words. In this reading the three vehicles are different, hierarchically ordered divisions of the spirit itself. The etheric vehicle emerges as the highest, most subtle variety of spirit, with pure airy spirits and denser, more elemental and vaporous spirits ranged below it. In the *Sophist Commentary*, at any rate, Ficino was explicit on this point: "Whenever you look within at our soul clothed as it were in spirit, perhaps you will suppose that you see a demon, a triple demon. For you will see too the celestial vehicle covered entirely with a fiery and an airy veil, and this veil surrounded with spirit—with spirit, I say, compounded from the vapors of the four elements" (trans. Allen, *Icastes*, pp. 270–73). Leaving aside for the moment Ficino's demons, there is little possibility that Ficino intends the elemental spirit here to refer metaphorically to the body. Rather the different veils form together the spiritual link between body and soul. This interpretation identifies the vehicle with the highest,

most subtle variety of spirit, restores the spirit to its intimate connection with the *idolum*, and allots the spirit a far richer role in perception and cognition than Kristeller endorsed—a role, indeed, that is consonant with its great importance in *De vita*.

Here and there throughout *De vita*, and especially in *De vita coelitus comparanda* (of the three books the one most imbued with magical and astrological thought), Ficino affirmed the profound influence on the spirit of sounds, song, and music. Walker insightfully deduced the two causes Ficino saw behind this influence (*Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, pp. 5–11). It arose first because sounds and music are composed of air and in this resemble the spirit (or some part of the spirit) itself. In book II of *De vita* Ficino asked: “If the vapors exhaled from a merely vegetable life are greatly beneficial to your life, how much more beneficial do you think will be aerial songs to a spirit wholly aerial . . . ?” (II,15). Elsewhere in *De vita* Ficino repeatedly associated sounds and music with fresh air and airy substances like fragrances and vapors (see for example II,8,18, III,11). And he linked sounds and music with the higher varieties of medical spirits, the vital and especially the animal spirits, located in the brain and closest to the soul (II,15,18, III,11,21).

Ficino's second cause of music's influence over the spirit is its motion; that is, music is not merely air, but air set in movement like the living, moving spirit. This property of music tended to link it in Ficino's thought not only with spirit but with the whole of man, for motion was a characteristic feature of body as well as spirit, and it was an essential property of soul, which, as Kristeller reminds us, was for Ficino as for Plato the first moved entity in the world order and the cause of all movement in lower things. Plato had linked music and soul by virtue of their movement in *Timaeus*, where he discovered in harmonic sounds “motions akin to the revolutions of our souls” (47d) and called such sounds “an imitation of divine harmony in mortal motions” (80b; see also 67a-c,90d). The author of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems* stressed the dynamic quality of sound again, as Walker noted (pp. 10–11; see *Problems* XIX 27,29 in Aristotle, *The Complete Works*). For him only sounds' movements gave them the quality of actions and thereby enabled them to work ethical effects on man.

In his *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, written or perhaps only revised in the early 1480s, Ficino also took up the consequences of harmonic motions, describing them with considerable eloquence. “Musical consonance,” he wrote,

occurs in the element that is the mean of all [air], and reaches the ears through motion, circular motion: so that it is no wonder it should be fitting to the soul, which is the mean of things and the origin of circular motion. In addition, musical sound more than anything else perceived by the senses conveys as if animated the emotions, sensations, and thoughts of the [performer's] soul, whether by singing or by playing, to the listeners' souls; thus it preeminently corresponds with the soul. . . . Musical sound moreover moves the body by the movement of the air; by purified air it excites the airy spirit, which is the bond of body and soul; by emotion it affects the senses and at the same time the soul; by meaning it works on the mind; finally, by the very movement of its subtle air it penetrates strongly; by its temperament it flows smoothly; by its consonant quality it floods us with a wonderful pleasure; by its nature, both spiritual and material, it at once seizes and claims as its own man in his entirety. (Ficino, *Opera omnia*, p. 1453; cf. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, pp. 8–9)

Here Ficino emphasized the similarity of music's circular motion to the soul's. Spirit plays a decidedly secondary role, linked to music more by its airy nature than by its motion.

In *De vita coelitus comparanda*, on the other hand, as in the other two books of *De vita*, spirit rather than soul preoccupied Ficino. Here, perhaps prodded by the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems* mentioned above, he arrived at (or simply decided to highlight) a more complex view of music's motion than the perfect circularity of the *Timaeus Commentary*. Now he saw it not simply as circular, but rather as varied and rational in nature. Through this movement music mimicked human gestures, affections, and moral characters, and even the heavens themselves. Thus it enabled music to act powerfully on both spirit and soul. Song, Ficino wrote, “imitates the intentions and affections of the soul as well as words, and reproduces people's gestures, motions, and actions as well as their moral characters. . . . When it imitates celestial things with the same power, it wonderfully arouses our spirit to the celestial influx and the celestial influx to our spirit” (chapter 21).

These imitative motions gave song something approaching a life of its own. The material of harmony, Ficino wrote, “is air, hot or warm, breathing and somehow living, composed like an animal of certain parts and limbs of its own, like a living thing, not only possessing motion and displaying passion but even carrying meaning like a mind, so that it can be said to be a kind of aerial and rational animal” (chapter

21). Harmony was, in other words, air seemingly brought to rational life by its motion. Song had become for Ficino little less than an airy and rational organism. We will return below to the nature of this organism; now it is enough to note that in *De vita coelitus comparanda* Ficino equated it with the spirit: "Cantus . . . ferme nihil aliud est quam spiritus alter," he wrote (chapter 21).

In this almost animate form song was the most compelling of mimetic forces, able to imitate anything in its meaningful, rational motions. "Remember that song is the most powerful imitator of all things," Ficino intoned: "Memento vero cantum esse imitatore omnium potentissimum" (chapter 21). Indeed song derived its special power from this imitative versatility, this unique ability to assume similarities to anything. In a warning to the reader against the danger of idolatrous song that occurs in the same chapter of *De vita coelitus comparanda*, Ficino affirmed the operative potency of his musical mimesis: "Be warned beforehand not to think that in the present matters we speak of worshipping stars, but rather of imitating them and capturing them by means of imitation." Imitation, in Ficino's view, did not merely represent in the modern sense of the word. Rather it seized and captured things. It struck up profound resonances, active affinities, among the thing imitated, the imitation, its maker, and its perceiver. As Ficino explained of music, still in the same chapter of *De vita coelitus comparanda*: "[Song] imitates and enacts everything so forcefully that it immediately provokes both the singer and hearers to imitate and enact the same things." For Ficino musical imitation, as indeed imitation in general, was a provocative force; for us it has come to be merely evocative.

In asserting this special power of musical mimesis and in linking the spirit and music by virtue of their similar motion and airy substance, Ficino gave voice to the more general magical and Neoplatonic belief in the force of similitude I discussed in chapter 2. For Ficino congruities of form revealed relations among things that the magus might exploit to perform magical operations. Formal similarities in the world revealed the connections of all things back to their sources, the ideas in the divine mind. Put the other way around, the ultimate connectedness of things, whether hidden or apparent, occult or manifest, was one corollary of Ficino's view of the world as an emanative outpouring of forms from the divine mind through the heavens and into the material realm. In Kristeller's analysis of Ficino's thought, this connectedness is expressed in the principles of continuity, through which the

static unity of the world is posited, and of affinity, through which the static connections of things are reconceived as dynamic, reciprocal relationships (*The Philosophy*, chapter 7). In tracing all things back to their sources and thereby making their relations to one another an ontological postulate, this view gave philosophical legitimacy to the belief in the operative power of similitude and helped assure its central role in later Renaissance magical thought.

In the midst of his discussion of music's powers in *De vita coelitus comparanda* Ficino gave three rules for composing astrologically effective songs, for "accommodating our songs to the stars" and thus enabling them to seize appropriate and beneficial stellar influxes:

The first is to examine what powers in itself and effects from itself a given star, constellation, or aspect has, what these remove and what they provide; and to insert these into the meanings of our words so as to detest what they remove and approve what they provide. The second rule is to consider what star chiefly rules what place or person, and then to observe what sorts of tones and songs these regions and persons generally use, so that you may supply similar ones, together with the meanings just mentioned, to the words which you are trying to expose to the same stars. Third, observe the daily positions and aspects of the stars and investigate to what speeches, songs, motions, dances, moral behavior, and actions most people are principally incited under these, so that you may imitate such things as far as possible in your songs, which aim to agree with similar parts of the heavens and to catch a similar influx from them. (chapter 21; cf. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, p. 17)

For the most part these rules spelled out a frankly empirical method to achieve the sort of musical imitation Ficino endorsed more generally in the passages quoted above. But the first rule also emphasized, in a manner found nowhere else in Ficino's discussion, the meaning of the words of his astrological songs. This unique emphasis of words—Ficino's phrase is "verborum nostrorum significationibus"—needs explanation, for it might well lead us to retreat headlong to Walker's dichotomy of rational words and nonsignifying music.

To do so, however, would be to disregard Ficino's many remarks on the power of music quoted above. In the passage from the *Timaeus*

Commentary, for example, Ficino spoke of music reaching the body, the spirit, the soul, and even the soul's highest faculty, the mind, *by virtue of its motion, not its verbal meanings*. Moreover, he explicitly assigned such powers to the musician whether singing or playing ("sive canentis, sive sonantis"). Neither do the words of a song seem the chief determinant of its rationality in the general descriptions of musical imitation quoted above from *De vita coelitus comparanda*. There the complex, mimetic motions of music themselves seem to bear meaning and convey emotions, words, ethoses, and so forth. It is these motions, these moving articulations, that make song "a kind of airy and rational living thing—animal quoddam aereum, & rationale."

Even Ficino's question quoted earlier on the airy similarity of music and spirit continues in a manner that suggests music's rationality without linking it to words. I quote it now in full: "If the vapors exhaled from a merely vegetable life are greatly beneficial to your life, how much more beneficial do you think will be aerial songs to a spirit wholly aerial, harmonic songs to a harmonic [spirit], warm and even living [songs] to a living [spirit], songs endowed with sense to a sensate [spirit], songs conceived by reason to a rational [spirit]?" Ficino's language here is tantalizingly imprecise. His assigning of reason—a faculty of the soul—to the spirit probably refers loosely to the rational powers of the soul transmitted to or reflected in the spirit. (Remember that Ficino viewed the *idolum* as a rational animation brought about by the soul in the vehicle or spirit.) In any case Ficino's question unequivocally affirms *without mention of words* music's rational, signifying nature, whatever human organ it might ultimately resemble in this nature.

We are faced, finally, with overwhelming evidence that Ficino granted rational force to music in itself. This rationality does not, of course, in any way compromise that of words. They might well function in song as an additional, reinforcing element of rationality, parallel and equivalent to the music—two appeals to *ratio* for the price of one, so to speak. This is a plausible interpretation of Ficino's first rule for astrological song, one that does not fly in the face of his many other remarks. It has the additional virtue of agreeing with the ontological equivalence of words and music that Ficino established in his list of planets and their sublunar attributes, discussed above.

But what was the nature of music's rationality, and how strictly equivalent was it to that of words? Only by answering these questions can we achieve a reading of Ficino's views consistent with their various embodiments in his prose. To answer them we must start from the

broadest of bases: from Ficino's notions of words and language and from his imagistic theory of perception.

Word, Image, Music

Although it only once mentions words set to music, the chapter in *De vita coelitus comparanda* from which I have quoted many of Ficino's remarks on magical song, chapter 21, does not ignore words in general. Indeed these are featured in its title, which reads in part "On the Power of Words and Song for Capturing Celestial Benefits." In the body of the chapter Ficino repeatedly alluded to the magical powers of certain words and speeches. Such powers are a staple ingredient of magical traditions the world over, of course (see S. J. Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words"); but Ficino did more than repeat commonplaces of occult thought. He revived, translated, and promulgated certain ancient writings that lent the belief in the innate power of words a considerable authority throughout the later Renaissance, rationalizing and legitimizing it in the minds of his followers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In chapter 21 of *De vita coelitus comparanda* Ficino named many of the authorities he relied on to bolster this belief:

Origen asserts in *Contra Celsum* and Synesius and al-Kindi in discussing magic that there is a definite and great power in certain words. Likewise Zoroaster [asserted this] in forbidding foreign words to be changed, and likewise Iamblichus. So also the Pythagoreans, who used to perform certain miracles in the manner of Phoebus and Orpheus with words, songs, and sounds. This the ancient Hebrew doctors especially practiced; and all poets sing that miracles are brought about by songs.

With the exception of al-Kindi, a ninth-century Arabic philosopher and physician to whom we shall return, these writers brought with them the considerable weight of ancient authority. And behind Ficino's views on the innate powers of words stood one more ancient master, not named here: Plato himself, who in the *Cratylus* had Socrates entertain at length the proposition that language is naturally determined and empowered. Renaissance occultists starting with Ficino regularly interpreted Plato's dialogue as advocating this "natural" view of language, in contrast to modern interpretations (see Allison Coudert,

"Some Theories of Natural Language," pp. 64–67, 74–75, and Brian Vickers, "Analogy versus Identity," pp. 97–101).

From all these writers and from other ancient and medieval testimonies to the power of words that he knew, Ficino inherited the view that the names of things were not the result of mere linguistic convention. Rather they were determined in natural, direct, and operative relation to the things they named. In his early *Commentary* on Plato's *Philebus* Ficino alluded to this potent relationship, citing the *Cratylus*: "A name, as Plato says in the *Cratylus*, is a certain power of the thing [named] itself—rei ipsius vis quaedam—first conceived in the mind, then expressed by the voice, finally signified by letters" (pp. 138–41). Later, in his *Epitome* of the *Cratylus* itself, Ficino repeated and elaborated on this remark in a discussion of the power of divine names:

It does not seem surprising that such force lies hidden in true names if only we consider that the natural force of things, when we truly comprehend it, comes from objects to the senses, from these to the imagination, and from this in a certain manner to the mind. Then it is conceived first by the mind and next expressed and as it were given birth by the voice. And in this voice or word, made up of its own certain parts, the force of the thing lies hidden, almost alive, in the form of signification. [It has] a life, I say, first conceived by the mind according to the seeds of things, then given forth in [spoken] words, and finally preserved in writing. So that, if certain names preserve in a way the force of things and therefore make known, almost as images of things, the things themselves, much more do divine names handed down by God himself perpetually preserve his power. And rightly so. For a genuine name, as it seems to Plato, is nothing other than a certain force of the thing itself, first conceived by the mind, as I said, then expressed by the voice, and finally signified by letters. (*Opera omnia*, p. 1310; see also *The Philebus Commentary*, pp. 142–43)

Elsewhere in this *Epitome*, in a manner that invokes a musical vocabulary and looks forward to *De vita*, Ficino mentioned the astrological power of words bearing a certain similarity to the heavens: "Certain divine gifts," he wrote, "are distributed by words attuned to a kind of celestial likeness—*Verbis autem ad coelestem quandam similitudinem temperatis divinae quaedam dotes distribuuntur*" (*Opera omnia*, p. 1309).

In Ficino's view, then, the power of words sprang from their real,

naturally determined correspondences to things; it arose from the force of similitude. In connecting it to this important feature of Ficino's thought we connect it also, as we have seen, to his principles of affinity and continuity analyzed by Kristeller and to his basic Platonic view of the world as an emanation from divine ideas. A word partakes of the power of the thing it names because it is coextensive with that thing, engendered naturally with it in the unfolding of the same idea. An object and its name are both implicated, so to speak, in the same emanative ray. Underlying all these views, as Michael Allen writes, "is a belief in a universal harmony that radiates outwards or downwards from the intelligible to the sensible, and that privileges man as the bond or knot whose mind receives both the perceptions of material forms and the prints or images of the purely intelligible Forms and then fits or justifies the one to the other" (*Icastes*, p. 132).

Allen's words suggest more specific aspects of the connection of words and things. It is a two-phase process whereby images conveyed to the soul from below encounter the impressions of ideas from on high (Kristeller, *The Philosophy*, pp. 49–51, 236–38; Allen, *Icastes*, pp. 120–21, 131–32). These impressions, "little forms" of ideas or *formulae*, are innately present in the soul, according to Ficino's (and traditional Platonic) doctrine. They are activated, brought from potentiality to actuality, when external objects are perceived. The mind matches the appropriate formula to the image of an external object conveyed to it, linking, in other words, one reflection of the divine idea involved (the formula) to another reflection lower down on the ontological scale (the form as embodied in the material object perceived). Ficino explained: "It is necessary that the formulae of ideas are inherent in the mind; through them the mind compares the images [*simulachra*] [of external objects] to the ideas, approves those [images] that agree with the formulae, and disapproves those that disagree" (*Theologia platonica*, XI,4). This process of comparison is the act of cognition; for Ficino *cognitio* is thus "a certain correspondence of the mind with things—*quandam mentis cum rebus aequationem*" (*Theologia platonica*, VIII,16; quoted in Kristeller, *The Philosophy*, p. 50).

The naming of objects is involved also in this coming to knowledge, as Ficino suggested in the excerpt from the *Cratylus Epitome* quoted above. Names arise in the second phase of the process of cognition, in the linkage of images to formulae. The mind conceives them not arbitrarily but "according to the seeds of things—*per semina rerum*," seeds that, as Ficino explained in *De vita coelitus comparanda* (chapter 1), are reflections in the world soul of the ideas in the divine mind. Thus

names also participate in Allen's universal harmony. Conceived in accordance with the world soul infused in all things, they take on a life linked to their things. This vital force is preserved and transmitted when they are spoken and even when they are written: "a certain force . . . expressed by the voice, and . . . signified by letters."

Ficino offered these views on the power of words in fragmentary form across his career; the *Philebus Commentary* is one of his earliest major works, written according to Allen's dating in 1469 (see *The Philebus Commentary*, p. 56). But by 1489, the time of *De vita coelitus comparanda*, Ficino had encountered a treatise that discussed at length the magical power of language and placed it in a Neoplatonic cosmos that anticipated his own. This was *De radiis, On Rays*, by al-Kindi, the medieval Arabic philosopher whom Ficino listed, as we have seen, among his authorities on the powers of words. The powerful influence of *De radiis* on the whole of *De vita coelitus comparanda* has yet to be explored fully by scholars, though a few have noted it in recent years (see especially Couliano, *Eros and Magic*, pp. 118–29; also Kaske in Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, pp. 50–51).

Al-Kindi's treatise offered Ficino an explanation of magic based on the rays or influxes emitted by all things and the universal harmony that endowed these rays with operative force. Words, sounds, and songs all emitted rays and could be used for magical operations. The importance al-Kindi assigned to them is apparent in the fact that his chapter "On the Power of Words" dwarfs each of the other chapters in the treatise. In al-Kindi's view, as in Ficino's, words derived their power from their place in a universal network of correspondences. Indeed al-Kindi pursued this matter with some specificity, voicing an idea that Ficino must have found particularly congenial. He traced all of the qualities of words to the celestial harmonies from which they arise. These qualities include effect (*effectus*), movement (*motus*), power or force (*potestas, virtus*), and, most strikingly, meaning (*significatio*). For al-Kindi, in other words, *significatio* was a consequence of *harmonia*. Al-Kindi allowed that men impose meanings on words; but these words could only have natural powers, he insisted, if their chosen meanings corresponded to the universal harmonies—"licet . . . ab armonica dispositione recipiant significationem" (p. 235). Thus Couliano was right in stating that for al-Kindi "every sound was formed, according to its purpose, by the celestial harmony." He was wrong, however, to assert as well that al-Kindi's magic of sounds was "subordinate to a theory of the natural origin of languages" (*Eros and Magic*, p. 122). Rather it was the other way round: both the magic of sounds and the

theory of natural language arose as corollaries of the participation of sounds and words in the world harmony.

Al-Kindi's views must have intersected neatly with Ficino's epistemology, with its recognition of the natural empowerment of words. Ficino, that is, brought to his reading of *De radiis* his own model for the derivation of names from the universal harmony. The meanings of names assigned by the soul in its matching of images to formulae could not help but participate in the world harmony and partake of its power. For Ficino as well as for al-Kindi the ability of words to signify—in Walker's words their "intellectual content"—was a consequence of this harmony.

In addition to words, sounds, and songs, al-Kindi also discussed, more briefly, magical images and figures, and he traced their powers also to the universal harmony. His discussion no doubt served as an important stimulus to Ficino, who devoted many chapters of *De vita coelitus comparanda* to the same topic. But the topic of magical images was not for Ficino unrelated to the subject of the powers of words, for on a deeper level the concept of *imago* itself was built into his theory of language from the start. Ficino intimated this in a phrase from the *Cratylus Epitome* quoted above, where he called names "almost images of things—quasi rerum imagines." Words, thus, could be conceived as images.

But things also, in Ficino's emanative Platonic cosmos, were no more than images of ideas. In his *Commentary* on Plato's *Parmenides*, for example, he wrote: "Plato . . . clearly explains that substances or true ideas exist but that our things are images of the true things, that is, of ideas—Et plato . . . manifeste declarat substantias quidem veras ideas existere, res vero nostras rerum verarum id est idearum imagines esse" (*Opera omnia*, p. 1142). His *Commentary* on Plotinus's *Enneads* calls the heavens the image of the world soul (*Opera omnia*, p. 1596). And the seventh of Ficino's *summae* for *Timaeus* speaks even more generally: "This world is the image, always in flux, of the exemplar and intellect, always stable and eternal—Hic mundus est imago semper fluens exemplaris intellectusque semper stabilis et aeterni" (*Opera omnia*, p. 1466). Since for Ficino things beneath the realm of pure intelligibles were themselves images, his likening of words to images tended to conflate words and things in the single ontological category *imago*. This affinity helps to explain the ability Ficino perceived in words to enhance the magical powers of images, an ability that he asserted in chapter 21 of *De vita coelitus comparanda*. It followed, like the imagistic nature

itself of words, directly from the Platonic premises of Ficino's ontology: all things below the mind of god, words as well as objects, were more or less faithful reflections of the ideas there.

Where did music fit into this world? Ficino's writings show that he considered it too a kind of image, albeit one endowed, for reasons I will clarify below, with special potency. He expressed this view already in 1457, in the letter entitled *De divino furore* detailing the four divine frenzies of Plato's *Phaedrus*. Ficino saw the frenzies as means by which the soul might be jogged to remember the divinity it had left behind at its descent into the body (see chapter 5 below). The poetic frenzy, one of Plato's four types, could remind the soul of two sorts of divine music, one an idea inherent in the divine mind and the other the *musica mundana*, the harmonic motions of the heavenly spheres. Ficino believed that the echoes of these divine musics were perceived by the ears in the form of images:

The soul receives the sweetest harmony and numbers through the ears, and by these images [*hisque imaginibus*] it is reminded of and aroused to the divine music to be contemplated by the more subtle and penetrating sense of the mind. . . . in the darkness [of its bodily imprisonment] our soul uses the ears as though they were messengers or chinks, and by means of these, as I already said, it accepts the images of that incomparable music (*Opera omnia*, p. 614; translation adapted from Ficino, *The Letters* I,17).

Music, we see, was for Ficino a kind of image, and the ears perceivers of images.

This is confirmed in a passage from the *Theologia platonica* describing the action of the phantasy or imagination. In regard to this faculty sounds and colors are equivalent. Both are reproduced by the soul on the basis of spiritual images supplied by the senses:

When [the internal force of the soul] has reached colors through the spirit of the eye, sounds through the spirit of the ears, and so forth, through its own force by which it governs bodies and possesses their seeds . . . it conceives anew in itself the entirely spiritual images of the colors, sounds, etc., or, those being conceived previously, it brings them forth and connects them into a unity. (*Theologia platonica* IX,5; trans. Kristeller, *The Philosophy*, p. 235)

The conflation of word and image discussed above must be seen, in broader perspective, as the assimilation to image of word, sound, and

music alike. For Ficino, all these were conveyed to the soul as images, *imagines* to the imagination or phantasms to the phantasy. All of them were epistemologically equivalent.

In this epistemology there was no place for a distinction like Walker's of words that carried intellectual content, thus reaching the mind, and music that reached only the spirit. There were only various types of images, all bearing similar relations to the mechanism of perception, all impressed on the spirit and judged by the soul. Music images reached the mind by the same pathway and just as directly as word images. Words, finally, had no claim to any sort of meaning that musical sounds could not also claim. Thus Ficino's imagistic conception of words and music led him by a somewhat different route to the conclusion he had already read in al-Kindi. The meanings of words were a consequence of their place in the harmonies of the world. They were, in the broadest sense, musically determined.

Phantasmic and Demonic Song

There is one more crucial connection of image and music in Ficino's thought. It emerges from his theory of perception. In the simplest version of this theory, one that Ficino summarized numerous times—for example in the quotation from *El libro dell'amore* quoted above (p. 106)—the spirit was the nexus of perception. On it the stimuli of the external senses were impressed as images or phantasms. There they were regarded and judged by the soul in the act of sensation. Moreover, in response to them the soul conceived its own purer images or phantasms; this was the function of the imagination or phantasy, the highest division, as we have seen, of the *idolum*. (In calling the stimuli reflected in the spirit by names relating them to the imagination or phantasy, by the way, Ficino alluded to the intimate relation between the *idolum* and the spirit that I have described above; in the same way Ficino referred occasionally to the *spiritus phantasticus*.) Thus the spirit played a mediating role in the process of cognition traced above, the process matching the formulae of ideas inherent in the soul with the images conveyed to it from the external world. Spiritual images were the means of this mediation. That is, Ficino's mechanism of perception itself allowed words and things to be conveyed to the soul *only in the form of images*. Images were the link between sense perception and the soul's cognition—the passports, so to speak, across the spiritual borderline separating sensible and intelligible realms.

Ficino's spiritual mechanism of perception, then, rendered all things to the soul as images. This must have included music images, of course, and indeed Ficino explicitly applied his perception theory to music in a letter entitled *De musica*, composed before 1476. He wrote: "Since song and sound arise from the cogitation of the mind, the impetus of the phantasy, and the feeling of the heart and, with their broken up and tempered air, strike the airy spirit of the listener, which is the junction of the soul and the body, they easily move the phantasy, affect the heart, and penetrate the deep recesses of the mind" (*Opera omnia*, p. 651). Walker cited this passage as a general example of the close connections between music and spirit in Ficino's thought, and such it is. But in the light of Ficino's perception theory we may read it also—and more precisely, I think—as an enumeration of the stages in the phantasmic mechanism by which music affects the mind of the listener. It is an affirmation that music like all other external stimuli is perceived by means of images impressed on the spirit. Music reached from the senses to the highest faculties of the soul in the same manner as visual images or words.

The passage quoted from *De musica*, however, also summarizes the process of musical creation, the reverse of perception, in which the musician projects the musical cogitations of the upper soul through the phantasy and out into the sensible world. What role do images play in this process? For Ficino, I think, the answer lay in al-Kindi's *De radiis*. Here, as Couliano pointed out, Ficino found his theory of phantasmic perception elaborated as a mechanism fundamental to magical operations (*Eros and Magic*, pp. 119–23, 127–29). In words Ficino must have found extraordinarily compelling, al-Kindi described the operative power that came to man by virtue of his participation in the concordant cosmos and the way this power could be exercised through the making of spiritual images:

Man, therefore, by his proportionate existence arises in similarity to the world. Thus he is a microcosm, and it is explained why he receives the same power that the world has to induce, by his own efforts, movements within an equivalent substance. . . . Indeed, a man wishing to perform something first imagines the form of the thing he wishes to imprint by his operation in some substance. . . . Moreover when man, using his imagination, conceives of some corporeal thing, this thing acquires an actual existence according to the species in the imaginative spirit. So that this spirit emits rays which move external things just as does the thing

whose image it is. (*De radiis*, pp. 230–31; cf. *Eros and Magic*, pp. 120–21)

Thus al-Kindi's magician could employ the imaginative spirit—the *spiritus ymaginarius*, identical to Ficino's *spiritus phantasticus*—to project radiant spiritual phantasms into the material world. Al-Kindi showed Ficino the magical, vital force of the phantasms created by the imaginative spirit, a force that endowed them with rays like all other things in the world, that allowed them to participate in the universal concord of divine emanations. His words lead us into the realm of Ficino's musical magic in *De vita*. Or, more precisely, they take us beyond all but the most radical postulates of that magic—beyond the conception of music as a powerful mimetic device to the idea of song as a rational, living organism composed of spirit. Ficino drew the logical conclusion when he came to treat of music, the spiritual art par excellence: "Song . . . is scarcely anything other than another spirit." In the most daring moments of *De vita coelitus comparanda* Ficino depicted song as a spiritual image with a life of its own, as a powerful phantasm of the musician's imagination.

Or perhaps as a demon made by the musician, as Michael Allen has argued in his most recent books. Allen approaches Ficino's theory of phantasms from a perspective very different than Couliano's, from Ficino's late exegeses of the *Sophist* and the *Phaedrus*, two of Plato's most challenging and lofty dialogues. There is no trace of al-Kindi here. It is all the more striking, then, that so many of Allen's conclusions echo Couliano's. Whether through Plato's "masterpieces of the ancient theology" (Allen, *Icastes*, p. 210) or through an explicitly magical treatise of the Arabic golden age, Ficino evidently was consolidating around 1490 a spiritualized, harmonically unified, and above all magically operative view of the cosmos.

Ficino's demonology is a subject of daunting complexity derived from many ancient and medieval sources. In *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino* Allen has provided the clearest summary of it (pp. 8–27; for one of Ficino's own summaries see *El libro dell'amore* VI,3). Ficino's demons, or at least those he considered in his philosophical works, were not the intrinsically evil fallen angels of Christian tradition. Instead, in accordance with Neoplatonic teachings, they were embodied souls higher than man on the ontological scale. Most of them inhabited the regions between the highest humans and the lowest celestial gods, serving as intermediaries between the two and filling with souls the upper reaches of the sublunar realm (and thus, by the way, manifesting once

more Kristeller's principle of continuity). They were generally associated with the elemental airy sphere located between the spheres of water and earth and the celestial fire. And they possessed airy bodies of varied rarefaction, the highest composed of ether (which, as we have seen, was for Ficino itself a sort of air, albeit a fiery sort), the middle made of pure air, and the lowest compounded of air mixed with the cloudy or smoky vapors of water or earth.

We recognize in these three ranks of demons the same distinctions Ficino had discovered in the three spiritual vehicles of the soul: etheric, airy, and vaporous. Because of this congruence, and because also of the more general association of both demons and the human spirit with air, we might well expect demons to intervene in some way in the various functions of the spirit. And we might also connect demons to the operations of the phantasy or imagination, which, we remember, Ficino viewed as an animation enacted by the soul in the spirit.

In fact Ficino explored just these connections in an extraordinarily suggestive chapter of his *Sophist Commentary* (chapter 46; for text and translation see *Icastes*, pp. 270–76) and in one of the *summae* he provided for the *Phaedrus*. In the *Sophist Commentary*, first, he confirmed the congruence of demons and the spirit (in a passage quoted above whose full significance can now be seen): "Whenever you look within at our soul clothed as it were in spirit, perhaps you will suppose that you see a demon, a triple demon. For you will see too the celestial vehicle covered entirely with a fiery and an airy veil, and this veil surrounded with spirit—with spirit, I say, compounded from the vapors of the four elements." He asserted the demonic nature of the imagination as well: "Our imaginations . . . are possessed in a way of a demonic power. This is both because the demons excite the imaginations in ourselves by way of their own creative imaginations and artifice, and also because what imagines in us is in some respects a demon." And he concluded that the images produced by the soul are the work of demons: "Finally, you will see that the images that are innermost in you, since they are made by this spiritual and demonic animal, arise from a certain demonic contrivance." Thus, as Allen puts it in his trenchant interpretation of this chapter, demons exercise sovereignty over the realm of images; thus "the magician who wishes to affect this realm necessarily must have dealings with the demons" (pp. 191–92). But for Ficino all magicians must have operated in the realm of images; they worked in a world dominated by image, putting into action al-Kindi's creative imagination, making phantasms that acquired true

existence. In Ficino's view, in other words, all magic came down to the magician's exercise of "demonic contrivances."

This must include the magic of sounds, of course, and with it the magic of music. Indeed in his eleventh *summa* for the *Phaedrus*, speaking of Socrates' inspiration, Ficino explained the demons' ability to move our imagination through the sense of hearing. This must happen, he surmised, in one of two ways:

Undoubtedly either [the demon] efficaciously propagates the imagined concept in the innermost hearing, or the demon itself forms the sound [*voce*m] by a certain marvelous motion in its own spiritual body and with this same motion strikes, almost as a kind of sound, on the spiritual body of Socrates. When this vibrates, the innermost hearing of Socrates is excited to the same vibration. (Allen, *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer*, p. 139)

Here Ficino joined together central elements of the musical magic of *De vita coelitus comparanda*—specifically the airy spirit and music's effective mimetic motions—with the demonic perception theory of the *Sophist Commentary*. The magic of sounds in all its varieties is seen to be, at the very least, the product of demonic interactions with man. Musical magic is therefore far from the utterly nondemonic force that Walker, aided by his functional dichotomy of words and music, made it out to be. It is instead one of the many potent sonic images created by the demonic operation of our imagination.

Still, it is a long step from viewing magical music as a phantasm made by a demonic mechanism to viewing it as a demon itself. Allen takes this step confidently, declaring that in *De vita* Ficino broached the possibility "that we 'make' demons by 'making' music" (*The Platonism*, p. 26; cf. *Icastes*, p. 172). Perhaps Allen's confidence outstrips Ficino's own here; but it is difficult to see what place we might find in Ficino's cosmos for the airy, rational, musical animal that he described in *De vita coelitus comparanda* unless we rank it among the demons, airy animals par excellence. We must finally agree with Allen, I think, that at least for a moment in this work Ficino conceived of his magical songs—of the al-Kindian airy phantasms produced by his musician's imagination—as demons.*

*It is worth emphasizing here how far Ficino diverged in all these views from orthodox Christian conceptions of the relations of music and demons. Christian positions were founded ultimately on Scriptural authority, most signally David's musical exorcism

Ficino's musical demonism blurs, if it does not efface entirely, the dichotomy of spiritual and demonic magics that Walker took as his conceptual framework. Whether or not we accept the notion that Ficino viewed music as a demon *per se*, his late exegeses of the *Sophist* and the *Phaedrus*, read together with *De vita*, make it clear that it was for him at least a phantasm produced by means of demonic mechanisms. In his musical magic Ficino was caught between, on the one hand, the Thomist view that distinguished demonic from natural magic on the basis of the presence or absence of rational appeals and, on the other, the wealth of Neoplatonic sources that were incompatible with this position. He was pulled between a simple rational/subrational dichotomy and a much more complex epistemology and ontology in which spiritual demons were ever-present, as higher sublunar beings, as the phantasms we produce, and even as the phantasy in us that produces them. However we go about categorizing Ficino's magics, we must leave an important conceptual space—perhaps the most important space—for a magic that is both wholly spiritual and natural and also thoroughly demonic.

All this suggests a reevaluation of one more subject that Walker raised: the relation between Ficino's magic and that of his student Francesco Cattani da Diaceto (*Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, pp. 30–35). Walker was the first to detail the Ficinian nature of Diaceto's account of a magical rite in his treatise *De pulchro*. At the same time, Walker took pains to distinguish Diaceto's magic from his teacher's on two grounds: first, that it involved the explicit use of demons, and second, that it elaborated a mechanism of the imagination, which Walker deemed "unnecessary," by which spirit was emitted from the magician's body. In the light of Couliano's and Allen's researches and the discussion above, the first of these differences can no longer be main-

of Saul (I Samuel 16), and considered music a force starkly opposed to demons. This opposition was only reinforced in late-Renaissance church teachings on demons. A case in point is provided by Girolamo Menghi, a foremost Counter-Reformation demonologist. Menghi analyzed the role in exorcism of harmonies, herbs, and sensible objects in chapter 3 of his treatise *Flagellum daemonum*, first published in 1576 and reprinted often over the next 150 years. But his concern, far from Ficino's demonic epistemology, was only to determine whether such things as harmonies acted directly against possessing demons or instead disposed the body to resist them more strongly (he settled on the latter alternative). Menghi never doubted harmony's fundamental opposition to demons, so there could be in his thinking no question of an active demonic participation in the soul's music-making itself.

tained. And Walker himself, in any case, recognized later in his discussion Ficino's ambivalence concerning demons, noting that he seemed to accept their use as a mechanism of magic while rejecting the idolatrous worship of them as surrogate gods (p. 42).

The second of Walker's differences proves to be just as ephemeral, because the mechanism that Diaceto described is nothing other than al-Kindi's phantasmic projection by the imaginative spirit. Such projection was the culminating element of Diaceto's magical rite. To give an example he related how influxes from the sun might be captured: at an astrologically propitious moment the magician added to fumigations, unguents, songs, and other preparations "a strongly emotional disposition of the imagination, by which . . . the spirit is stamped with . . . [a solarian] kind of imprint, and, flying out through the channels of the body, especially through the eyes, ferments and solidifies, like rennet, the kindred power of the heavens" (*De pulchro*, pp. 112–13; trans. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, p. 33). Here, it seems clear, we are dealing with al-Kindi's spiritual phantasm, an image participating in the divine and concordant emanation of rays and focusing them to benefit the magician.

The blurring of the distinction between demonic and other magics—the recognition at least, as Couliano put it, "that there are several forms of magic that can be simultaneously spiritual and demonic" (*Eros and Magic*, p. 156)—has other implications than this rapprochement of Ficino's and Diaceto's magics. It tends to pervade Ficino's whole conceptual field, and the whole realm of human operation, with demonic mediation. Ficino's summation of his magic at the beginning of chapter 11 of *De vita coelitus comparanda* sounds innocent enough: "All these discussions are for this purpose, that through the rays of the stars opportunely received, our spirit properly prepared and purged through natural things may receive the most from the very spirit of the life of the world." But if demons participated in the very functioning of spirit and phantasy, in the very interaction of these human faculties with "natural things," then it is hard to exclude them from any magical operations or, finally, from any human exercise of creative imagination. Thus as we understand more and more fully the philosophical background of Ficino's late magical thought, we see more clearly also the difficulties Ficino must have faced in revealing it to a public in whose eyes any kind of demonic contrivance was, at best, a matter of questionable orthodoxy. And—perhaps more to the point—we understand better Ficino's palpable uneasiness in *De vita coelitus comparanda*, an un-

easiness born, I think, more of his clear sense of his own difficulty in distinguishing demonic from other operations than of his fear that his readers would not do so.

Substance, Figure, Sound

It remains for us to consider one more source of Ficino's demonic song in *De vita coelitus comparanda*. This is the treatise *De insomniis* of Synesius of Cyrene (d. ca. 414), which I mentioned above as an influence on Ficino's conception of the etheric vehicle. Synesius's brief work must have been much on Ficino's mind while he completed *De vita coelitus comparanda* in the summer of 1489, for he had translated it only a few months earlier, and in *De vita* he returned to certain topics treated in it (the dedication of Ficino's translation is dated 15 April; the translation appears, under the title *De somniis*, in *Opera omnia*, pp. 1968–78). Much attention has been called in recent years to Ficino's indebtedness to *De insomniis*, by Couliano (*Eros and Magic*, pp. 113–17), Allen (*Icastes*, pp. 194–200), Kaske (Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, pp. 28, 68–69), and Copenhaver ("Iamblichus, Synesius and the Chaldaean Oracles"). Nevertheless its impact on the shape of *De vita coelitus comparanda* has not yet been fully appreciated.

The treatise is an exposition of oneiromancy, or divination by means of dreams. In order to set the stage for this subject, Synesius devoted his first pages to commonplace but fundamental Neoplatonic teachings: to the animate nature of the world; to the harmonious connection of its parts; to the soul and its innate endowment with the forms of things (that is, the formulae we have discussed above); to the phantasy and its projection of images of these forms; and to the etheric vehicle, the phantasmic or imaginative spirit that functions both as the most perfect of sense organs and as the sensible medium of the soul's phantasms. All of this, obviously, must have provided extraordinarily rich grist for the mill of Ficino's magical thought. Indeed Ficino cited Synesius, almost programmatically, along with other authorities in the summaries of his magic that occur in the first and last chapters of *De vita coelitus comparanda*.

Even more suggestive to Ficino were three particulars of Synesius's account. First, he described the images that flow from all things, taking on an independent existence as vaporous, spiritual species of the things that produced them (*Opera omnia*, pp. 1975–76). These "simulachra" recall the radiant forms projected from the imagination of al-

Kindi's magician; though Synesius did not specifically relate them to the magician's powers, they were the foundation of his oneiromancy. His description of them evidently fascinated Ficino, who returned to it in the important forty-sixth chapter of his *Sophist Commentary* discussed above (see Allen, *Icastes*, pp. 274–75).

Second, Synesius unequivocally linked the ethereal, phantasmic spirit to demons. Through its "phantastic essence," he wrote, "all types of demons obtain their essence—*tota quinetiam genera daemonum ex eiusmodi vita suam sortiuntur essentiam*"; and he identified the *spiritus phantasticus* at once with god, *idolum*, and demons of all sorts (*Opera omnia*, p. 1971). Ficino needed to treat such statements with caution, no doubt. But three of his five references to *De insomniis* in *De vita coelitus comparanda* connect Synesius with demons. Ficino mentioned Synesius first in his opening summary of his own magic, shortly after he asserted its ability to attract demons and celestial gifts (chapter 1). He returned to Synesius to bolster the notion that certain magically prepared materials could channel to the magus not merely celestial but even demonic and divine effects (chapter 13). And he turned to Synesius once more near the end of his book in a résumé of the abilities of earthly materials to receive celestial influences. Such materials, Ficino wrote with a bow to Synesius, capture "a certain life or something vital from the world soul and from the souls of the spheres and the stars, or even a certain motion and a vital presence, so to speak, from demons" (chapter 26). Synesius's views seem to inform the demonic magic of *De vita coelitus comparanda* in the most general way. At the very least, they certainly encouraged Ficino's thoroughgoing demonization of his theory of phantasmic perception in his *Sophist Commentary*.

Third, near the beginning of *De insomniis* Synesius referred specifically to the operations of magicians. The reference occurs in the midst of Synesius's description of the harmony of the world and its parts, at the start of a brief chapter that Ficino entitled "Such Is the Concord of the World That Things Are Drawn by Other Things, and Harmonize [conspirent] with Them":

If even the universe is in sympathy with and harmonizes with itself, its parts must fit together agreeably, since these equal parts are of a single whole. It is surely worth consideration whether the charms and spells of magicians do not answer to such unity. Indeed just as the things in the world are mutually betokened by one another, so they are recip-

roccally affected. The true sage understands the parts of the world. Using voices, substances, and figures near at hand as tokens of things far away, he attracts one thing by means of another. (*Opera omnia*, p. 1969)

Synesius's mention of magicians in this context puts the magus's powers clearly under the aegis of the world harmony, just as al-Kindi, Ficino, and other Neoplatonic magicians would do. More provocatively, the passage specifies the three categories of things through which the magician's powers flow: voices, substances, and figures.

Ficino took these three preeminent sources of magic as a primary subject of *De vita coelitus comparanda*. He began the book with a general account of the ontological sources of his magic—of the world soul and the world spirit that mediates between it and the world body, of the correspondences and harmonies of all things, and of the planetary and stellar influxes raining down on us in the form of al-Kindian rays (chapters 1–12). And he ended the book with five chapters discussing in general the magus's use of celestial influxes and summarizing the premises of his magic (chapters 22–26). But the nine central chapters in between these two sections are devoted almost exclusively to a detailed account of Synesius's three magical media: material substances and especially medicines; images, figures, and forms; and words, songs, and sounds. Significantly, Ficino's two references to Synesius in the middle of his book seem once again to be placed with programmatic care. The first occurs in chapter 13, where Ficino first turned in earnest to the discussion of images and medicines. The second comes near the beginning of chapter 21—our all-important account of magical words and songs—where, as we have seen, Ficino cited Synesius as an authority on the powers of words.

Viewing *De vita coelitus comparanda* through this Synesian lens does not, of course, discount the influence on the work of other authorities. In particular it cannot throw into question the impact on Ficino's conception of Plotinus, whose *Enneads* provided its first stimulus, or of al-Kindi, whose rays figure importantly in Ficino's general magical theory and whose emphasis of words, figures, and images, perhaps itself derived from Synesius, certainly played no small part in Ficino's thought. Nevertheless, a Synesian view of the conceptual structure of *De vita coelitus comparanda* clarifies Ficino's intent in several ways.

First, it underscores the strategic importance of the single chapter devoted to magical words and music, chapter 21 "On the Power of Words and Song for Capturing Celestial Benefits." This chapter occurs

precisely at the end of Ficino's long treatment of magical images (chapters 13–20). Indeed it arises from this treatment; its first sentence, beginning in midthought, both completes the discussion of images and asserts the power of words over them: "Moreover, they say that certain words pronounced with a quite strong emotion have great force to aim the effect of images precisely where the emotions and words are directed." In the light of Ficino's conflation of word, song, and image discussed above, this chapter on words and song should be viewed as a consummation or fulfillment of his treatment of images rather than as a digression or turn to a new subject. Choosing among the options offered by Synesius, Ficino seems to have settled upon music and words as the culminating means at the magician's disposal.

Second, the idea that Ficino took Synesius's three magical media as the subject of the central chapters of *De vita coelitus comparanda* clarifies the interaction in these chapters of medicines, images, and sounds. For example, without Synesius in the background it is not immediately clear why Ficino took up medicines in this book, since they were treated at length, and their astrological sources enumerated, in books I and II of *De vita*. Synesius's connecting of materials and figures, in other words, may well have stimulated Ficino to examine their relationship in *De vita coelitus comparanda* (see especially chapter 13). Or again: Ficino's differentiation of the powers of figures and music in chapter 17, entitled "What Power Figures in the Heavens and under the Heavens Possess," likewise suggests a careful parsing of Synesian categories. There Ficino first stressed the priority of the immaterial qualities of things—their colors, figures, and numbers—over their sublunar elemental qualities. Then he continued:

You know that harmony through its numbers and proportions has a wonderful power to calm, move, and affect our spirit, soul, and body. Moreover, proportions, built out of numbers, are almost figures of a sort, made as it were out of points and lines, but in motion. Similarly, celestial figures activate themselves by their own motion; for by their own harmonious rays and motions penetrating everything they daily affect our spirit secretly just as very powerful music is wont to do openly.

The passage as a whole seems to recall al-Kindi's attribution of the powers of images to celestial harmonies. But Ficino is both more specific and more confusing than al-Kindi. In his view harmonies derive their power from their immaterial numbers and proportions, which liken them to figures drawn with lines and points, except that harmo-

nies are in motion. The figures of the heavens, however, unlike sublunar ones, are also in motion, and therefore like harmonies; such figures affect us secretly, by means of their harmonic rays and motions, in the same manner that music overtly affects us. In other words, music is similar to the immaterial, formal aspects of earthly things, but it is even more closely related to celestial figures, which therefore share its powers. (Again, by the way, we are struck by the fluid interplay of music and image in Ficino's thought.)

Finally, *De vita coelitus comparanda* offers a clear if implicit ranking of the effectiveness of the three media Ficino derived from Synesius for capturing celestial benefits—images, medicines, and music. As we might suspect from the first two points above, music is the most effective of the three. Manifesting his ambivalent feelings about images, Ficino stated again and again—at least five times in all—that they are less potent than medicines (see chapters 8, 13, 15, 18, and 20). Then, in chapter 21 “On the Power of Words and Song,” he judged in turn the material of medicines to be less perfect than that of harmony: “Now the very matter of song is altogether purer and more similar to the heavens than the matter of medicine. It is indeed air—Iam vero materia ipsa concentus purior est admodum, coeloque similior quam materia medicinae. Est enim aer. . . .” The conclusion is inescapable that medicines are less effective than airy music in channeling celestial forces. In fact Ficino had asserted this explicitly a few years earlier in his *Commentary* on Plato's *Timaeus*:

If then nature acts in a congeries of herbs mixed with diligence and effort by doctors at an appropriate time, it acts much more suddenly in sound, an entirely supple and malleable material—a nature, I say, everywhere animated and strengthened by heavenly powers, much like the material of the heavens and almost alive, to which is immediately imparted a form, new, alive, and wondrous, whose occult virtue works its effects on body and soul. (*Opera omnia*, pp. 1455–56)

Thus sound and music have greater natural force than medicines, and medicines in turn are more effective than visual images.

How can such a ranking exist, when sound and music and medicines, as I have insisted, are in Ficino's thought all nothing other than images themselves? The ranking seems to depend on Ficino's implicit differentiation of images into separate categories, in this case picture images, sound images, and medicine images. All of these sorts of images are perceived by the same spiritual mechanism, but each has its

peculiar features and therefore its own characteristic potency. In *De vita coelitus comparanda* Ficino listed three traits of medicine images that gave them a power superior to picture images. First, they are made of softer materials than those on which images are customarily engraved, and for this reason they more easily absorb celestial influxes. Second, they can be taken internally and thus become part of us, penetrating deep inside us. Finally, they can be compounded of many substances, combining the celestial virtues of all of them in ways difficult to achieve with images (chapter 13).

Ficino's assertion in *De vita coelitus comparanda* of music's superiority to medicine, meanwhile, occurs in the context of his treatment of the special qualities of music images that give them their extraordinary powers (chapter 21). I discussed these qualities above and need only review them here. They include its flexible mimetic capability, exceeding even that of images (“song is the most powerful imitator of all things”); its airy substance, so similar to the spirit and to demons; and its motion, giving it a demonic spiritual life—*quam spiritus alter*—and enabling it to represent things that images cannot—emotions, ethoses, and thoughts. Because of these features, we may infer, music and sounds triggered Ficino's spiritual mechanism with special effectiveness, creating particularly vivid phantasms and thereby affecting the soul with peculiar force. At the end of the passage in chapter 21 enumerating these features and proclaiming music superior to medicine, Ficino summed up the power of his astrological song: “Music filled with spirit and meaning, therefore, if it corresponds to this star or that not only in the things it signifies, its parts, and the form that results from those parts, but also in the disposition of the imagination, has not less power than any other compounded thing and casts it into the singer and from him into the nearby listener. . . .” Music is endowed with spirit and meaning; it imitates by means of its significance, its form, and its imaginative (or phantasmic or demonic) presence; by means of all these things it channels celestial forces with singular power.

With this passage we look back, from one additional perspective, to our starting point. Words too, as we have seen, were in Ficino's view sound images; this gave them the special power over visual images that he noted in *De vita*. But they derived this power only from qualities they shared with music: their rational mimetic force, their moving air, their phantasmic vitality, and finally their place in the web of universal harmonies. To repeat Ficino's assertion quoted above: “Certain words pronounced with a quite strong emotion have great force to aim the effect

of images." The dynamic qualities of words as sound rendered them potent, not some static, immanent ability to denote. Their force did not arise from a mode of signifying they claimed exclusively, but rather from features they shared with music, features from which they derived a significance equivalent to that of music: the moving, spirit like, living, and celestial nature of rationally shaped sound.

Seeing and Hearing in the Renaissance

Ficino's circumspect treatment of images in *De vita coelitus comparanda* and his assignment of magical powers greater than theirs to words and song may not be surprising, given the (at best) cautious acceptance of talismans in influential earlier writings like those of Thomas Aquinas. But Ficino's ranking of words and sounds over images is striking indeed in one other regard: it undermines the traditional hierarchy of the five senses in western thought, which placed sight over hearing. It suggests, at least, the possibility of reversing this order and conceiving of hearing as the noblest sense.

This turn in Ficino's thought has occasionally been remarked by scholars. The art historian Edgar Wind, for example, noted in passing that Ficino "systematically placed the visual medium below the verbal"; Wind was taking issue especially with E. H. Gombrich who, in an influential essay largely devoted to Neoplatonic iconology, had asserted the superiority of visual symbol over word in Ficino's thought (Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, p. 127; cf. Gombrich, "Icones Symbolicae," especially section 5). More recently Michael Allen has treated the question at greater length than either Wind or Gombrich. First, in *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino*, he perceived in a passage of Ficino's late *Phaedrus Commentary* an attempt to subordinate normal sight, at least, to the most exalted and mystical kind of hearing, in which man gains access to heavenly concords (pp. 51–56). Later, in *Icastes*, he called attention to Ficino's ranking of auditory arts over visual arts in a passage from his *Theologia platonica*. There Ficino began by declaring works pertaining to sight and hearing far superior to those pertaining to the other senses in revealing the character (*ingenium*) of their maker. But the efficacy even of works of sight and hearing could be distinguished. In visual works like pictures and buildings, Ficino wrote, "the soul expresses itself and figures itself forth . . . just as a man's face, when he gazes into a mirror, figures itself forth there. But the artificer's soul is most fully manifest in speeches, songs, and sounds. For in these the disposition of the will and of the whole mind

is represented" (*Theologia platonica* X,4; *Icastes*, pp. 161–62). Thus already by 1474, when he finished the *Theologia platonica*, Ficino could privilege speeches, songs, and sounds in a manner that anticipates the doctrines of *De vita coelitus comparanda*.

Ficino stated this ranking of visual and audible artifacts with perfect clarity, Allen noted, notwithstanding the fact that a few pages later he would reassert the conventional superiority of sight. Ficino's wavering suggests that we are on unsure ground here. Indeed it is doubtful that his many statements about vision and hearing add up to a single, unambivalent conception of their relationship. They seem rather to have emerged from the tension inherent in his allegiances to two opposed modes of thought.

On the one hand was the congeries of age-old associations of vision with understanding, light with knowledge and thought, darkness with ignorance, and the sun with divinity. Such connections reach back at least to Plato and the Old Testament; in the hands of later mystical and Neoplatonic thought they gave rise to an identification of "seeing" with the highest forms of immediate, intuitive gnosis. They also spawned a conceptual vocabulary dominated by visual metaphors. A signal example is easily found in any Latin dictionary under the word *video*: compare the broadly conceptual and existential spectrum of meanings here with the much more limited significative range of *audio*. (The difference persists in modern English, of course; "I see" has a far broader applicability than "I hear.")

The associations clustered around vision in the western mind took on a new significance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, one that Walter J. Ong has analyzed in *Ramus: Method and the Decay of Dialogue*. Ong describes the hegemony, of unprecedented strength, that "visualist culture" came to exert in this period over the aural/oral culture of word and audition. He perceives a "shift toward the visual throughout the whole cognitive field" (p. 281), an overwhelming identification of thought with spatial images and visual objects that was manifested in a new topical logic created by Rudolph Agricola and dispersed widely by his epigone Peter Ramus. In the context of this new brand of dialectic, rhetoric was reduced from a vital communicative art to something like the merely ornamental craft that it is often thought to be today. The memory theaters and palaces described by Frances A. Yates in *The Art of Memory*, sophisticated spatial mnemonic devices first used by ancient rhetoricians, could be revived and thrive. Speech itself, as Ong says with eloquence (if with some exaggeration), was "no longer a medium in which the human mind and sensibility live[d]"; instead it

was a needless accretion on thought, which itself was now conceived as so many "noiseless concepts or 'ideas' in a silent field of mental space" (p. 291).

Ficino shared in the generally visual orientation of the western heritage, of course. His language is fraught with visualist vocabulary used more or less metaphorically: words like *lumen* and *speculum* are commonplace, and we have seen how generally the visual notion of *imago* underpins his ontology. Likewise, he wrote eloquently in late tracts like *Orphica comparatio solis ad Deum* and *De sole* of the mystical symbolism of light and the sun. The visualism of his thought even infiltrates at times his clearest affirmations of the potency of audible things. The passage from the *Theologia platonica* quoted above, for example, plays on a visualist metaphor at the very moment when it asserts the supreme fidelity of auditory works to the soul: "Maxime vero in sermonibus, cantibus atque sonis artificiosus animus se depromit in lucem."

But in the face of these linguistic practices and cultural tendencies—in the face of what amounts to a long series of visualist discourses dominating western sensibilities—Ficino also offered a compelling auralist alternative. This was expressed most incisively in his idiosyncratic conception of sound as an airy, spiritual, animate material, similar or even identical to a disembodied spirit or demon and far more malleable than the materials of visual artifacts. This conception, as we have seen, granted sounds, words, and music a special intimacy with and effect on the soul not equaled (Ficino sometimes clearly asserted) by the things of vision. *Verba volant, scripta manent*, Ong intones several times; but in Ficino's conception it was precisely the mobile, flexible, ephemeral quality of words and sounds that endowed them with unique powers. For him speech and song remained, resoundingly, a medium in which the human mind not only lived but thrived. (He even idiosyncratically tied the spatial arts of memory, prime examples of visualist thinking, to harmony and song; see Patrizia Castelli, "Marsilio Ficino e i luoghi della memoria.") So Ficino's dilemma, at its most acute, was the dilemma of an auralist participating in a visualist culture.

The tension inherent in this position did not, I think, merely pose for Ficino an insoluble aporia. It also placed him in the midst of a productive contention through which (to invoke my own visualist metaphor) a new discursive space might be cleared. In the many hints of auralism scattered through his writings, we see the evidence of a discourse that was destined to remain subordinate to visualist discourses but that would derive from this subaltern status an extraordinary, sub-

versive power to disperse itself through the conceptual field of Renaissance magic.

This dispersion is evident in many later writers who came, directly or not, under Ficino's influence and confirmed and extended his auralist ideas. These writers often represented the Neoplatonic tradition of occult thought in which Ficino loomed so large. In this tradition, as I attempted to show in my survey of the magic of Agrippa in chapter 2, the occult powers of spoken word and music occupied a central place. We may now see that these powers were defined for the Renaissance—were located in a discourse that rendered them meaningful—preeminently by Ficino. Their enduring role in late-Renaissance traditions of occult thought manifests the continued vitality of the auralist discourse Ficino's sonic magic offered as an alternative to the hegemony of the visual imagination.

Thus in the first decades of the sixteenth century in *De occulta philosophia*, Agrippa transmitted whole-cloth—indeed often verbatim—Ficino's views on spirit, natural language, the imitative powers and celestial origin of words and music, and astrological song (see I,69–74 and II,24,26). At the other end of the century Giordano Bruno, writing his *De magia* and *Theses de magia* shortly before he was imprisoned by the Inquisition, emphasized the role of the phantasmic spirit in magical operations, distinguished powerful natural words from less potent man-made ones, and linked the magical force of natural words to that of song (*Opera latine conscripta* III,411,476–79).

Another victim of the Holy Office, Tommaso Campanella, examined and elaborated Ficinian doctrines from his first works to his last. His early treatise on magic, *Del senso delle cose e della magia*, first drafted around 1590, includes a chapter entitled "Sounds and Words, insofar as They Are Motions and Signs, Have a Stupendous and Certain Magical Force" (IV,16). His later works, some surviving in manuscript form and some published in the 1620s and 1630s, contain several analyses of the magical powers of music, sounds, and words and an extended summary of Ficino's views on the subject in *De vita coelitus comparanda* (e.g. *Magia e grazia*, pp. 196–205; *Metaphysica*, part 3, pp. 182–83). In these many older notions are refuted, but central Ficinian ideas survive. They include the view that the effects of sounds, words, and music originate (at least in part) in their motions and airy substance; the recognition of the special affinities of sounds to the spirit; and the suggestion that affective words might gain their force by tapping universal sympathies. Campanella even rehearsed Ficino's three rules for

composing astrological songs; he rejected them not because of any theoretical weakness in them but because of the unmanageable empirical observations they required. His concern with Ficino's rules was probably more than theoretical; he seems to have practiced a sort of astrological music reminiscent of *De vita* in seances with Pope Urban VIII in 1628 and 1630 (see Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, pp. 203–36).

The dispersion of Ficino's auralist thought was not restricted to the explicitly magical tradition represented by Agrippa, Bruno, and Campanella. It was felt also in the less arcane (but in some ways implicitly magical) domain of love theory. The many sixteenth-century writers who contributed to such theory composed their *trattati d'amore* under the influence of Ficino's famous *Libro dell'amore*, his *Commentary* on Plato's *Symposium* (1468–69). In fact, what is perhaps Ficino's earliest hint at reversing the customary hierarchy of sight over hearing occurs in this work. Here Ficino defined love as the desire for beauty; he viewed it as a force that can lead us to a transcendent unification with god. Beauty occurs in only three forms, the beauty of souls, bodies, and sounds; these are perceived respectively by the mind, the eyes, and the ears (I,4; the same doctrine is implied in the opening chapters of Ficino's *Phaedrus Commentary*, which, by Michael Allen's dating, are contemporary with or even slightly earlier than *El libro dell'amore*; see *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer*, pp. 17–19, 72–83). Although elsewhere in *El libro dell'amore* (II,9) Ficino offered a bipartite division of beauty—beauty of body and soul *tout court*—that did not involve sound and hearing, and although he reverted in V,2 to the traditional ranking of sight over hearing, his tripartite division of beauty occupies pride of place in his first definition of love and its inducements. At the least this triple doctrine placed hearing in exalted company and equated it in status, momentarily, with sight. It represents in Ficino's thought (along with his early musical doctrines, for example those in the letter *De musica*) a seed that would grow by the 1480s into the magical exaltation of harmony, music, and hearing evident in *De vita coelitus comparanda*.

At most, Ficino's inclusion of sonic beauty in his metaphysics of love inspired his followers unequivocally to position hearing above sight (see Erwin Panofsky, "The Neoplatonic Movement," p. 148). Pietro Bembo, whose father had been a friend and correspondent of Ficino, was perhaps the most influential of these epigones. In *Gli asolani*, his dialogues on love written around 1500 and published in 1505, Bembo named only the two forms of beauty, beauty of soul and body, that

Ficino had given in *El libro dell'amore* II,9. But Bembo did not thus deal hearing out of his account. Instead, inspired no doubt by Ficino's three-part definition of beauty, he elevated hearing to become the only sense by which we perceive beauty of souls. Sight remained behind, permitting only the (lower) perception of bodily beauty: "Good love is therefore the desire of that beauty which you see both of soul and also of body; and to it, as to its true goal, [the lover's soul] beats and unfolds its wings to fly. It has two windows to aid in this flight: the first, which sends it to the beauty of soul, is hearing; the other, which carries it to beauty of body, is sight" (*Opere in volgare*, p. 134). Note, by the way, the visualist vocabulary featured in Bembo's antvisualist statement: we "see" the beauty of soul through the "window" of our ears.

Another Ficinian theorist of love, Giuseppe Betussi, writing *Il Raverta* in 1544, also ranked hearing over sight. Unlike Bembo, he followed the primary doctrine of *El libro dell'amore* and discerned three forms of beauty, of souls, bodies, and harmonious sounds. Beauty was perceived by the mind and the two "sensi spirituali," sight and hearing (pp. 11–12). Like Ficino's beauty, it could lead us to self-contemplation and thereby begin the ascent of the ontological ladder from body to soul to angel to god. In explaining how the first step from body to soul occurred, Betussi placed hearing above sight by virtue of its greater spirituality:

The first things that cause us to consider . . . beauty are the eyes, to which, because of the acute vision that they have, the corporeal forms of things are first represented; and, immediately after, the second things are the ears, which begin to give hope as soon as they hear harmony, which passes quickly deep within. Indeed hearing is much more spiritual (*spirituale*); so that the eyes and the ears take wondrous pleasure. To these two parts the mind is added. . . . (pp. 15–16)

Here Betussi's reliance on *El libro dell'amore* is obvious enough. But his idea that hearing is a more spiritual sense than sight brings to mind also the world of *De vita*, with its powerful verbal and musical magic based on the spirit and spiritual phantasms. Here, in other words, Betussi seems to have hinted, in the informal and imprecise language typical of the *trattati d'amore*, at an amalgamation of Ficino's theories of love and sonic magic.

The privileging of hearing over sight is by no means pervasive in the tradition of love theory inspired by Ficino. Flaminio Nobili, to cite one counterexample, offered in his *Trattato dell'amore* of 1567 the two-part

definition of beauty that Bembo also had borrowed from *El libro dell'amore* (beauty of body and soul). But unlike Bembo he made no room for hearing in this reduced scheme. He matched the eyes and the mind to his two forms of beauty and went on to voice a fundamental tenet of the visualist tradition. "Our mind," he wrote, "as those who understand the mysteries of philosophy know, is very similar in many ways to the sense of sight (so that by the ancient wise men it was called the eye of the Soul)" (f. 8v).

Nevertheless, the examples of Bembo and Betussi demonstrate that even Ficino's most hesitant gestures ennobling hearing could be shaped by sixteenth-century hands into full-fledged reversals of the traditional hegemony of vision over hearing. Even in *El libro dell'amore*, that is, later writers with the mind to do so could find the basis for an untraditional metaphysical exaltation of hearing, sound, and harmony.

Ficino's auralist orientation surfaced in domains of sixteenth-century culture other than magical thought and love theory, domains more familiar than these to musicologists. It is here especially—in conceptual and practical realms ostensibly disconnected from magical thought—that we perceive the archaeological dispersion of his auralist discourse. Again Pietro Bembo provides an influential example. His linguistic theories, whose profound impact on the Venetian madrigal of the mid-sixteenth century has been explored by Dean Mace ("Pietro Bembo and the Literary Origins of the Italian Madrigal"), Howard Brown ("Words and Music"), and Martha Feldman ("Venice and the Madrigal"), were steeped in Ficino's metaphysics of sound. In his *Prose della volgar lingua* of 1525 Bembo presented persuasive force, *persuasione*, as a requisite of all good writing; he described it, in terms reminiscent of Ficino, as a "ravishment of the souls of the listeners—rapitrice degli animi di chi ascolta." It was stimulated by an "occult force . . . residing in each word—occulta virtù . . . in ogni voce dimorando" (*Opere in volgare*, p. 342). This conception alone relates the poetics of the *Prose* back to the amorous metaphysics of sound in *Gli asolani*; the one is, as it were, a distillation into linguistic practice of the other. Bembo's occult force in words arose from the natural properties of words and even of individual letters. He ranked the effects of the letters of the alphabet according to the fullness of spirit (*spirito*) exhaled in their pronunciation (pp. 322–24); here again Ficino's influence is evident. Bembo upheld Petrarch and Boccaccio as literary paragons because they were able to exploit these relations for expressive purposes while observing Ciceronian requirements of stylistic variety and grace.

Viewed against this linguistic and philosophical background the

madrigals of Rore and of Willaert and his followers might seem an explicit attempt to uncover Bembo's occult virtues of words by matching them to appropriate manifest harmonies—to dress the words, so to speak, in a musical garb that captured and enhanced their own natural sonic potency. They might seem, that is, the playing out in musical practice of the auralist discourse signaled in Ficino's thought. Indeed, in the matrix of auralist discourse the whole development of the polyphonic madrigal across the sixteenth century, with its insistent exploration of a wide range of text-music affinities, takes on the appearance of an elaborate musical revelation of the epistemological and ontological equivalence of words and music and of the magical, phantasmic power of both. This is an enrichment of, not an alternative to, our more usual tracing of the madrigalists' concern for text expression to humanist rhetorical philosophies and strategies (see for example Martha Feldman, *City Culture and the Madrigal at Venice*). But it seems to me an enrichment entirely in keeping with the strains of Renaissance thought initiated by Ficino and widely dispersed by Bembo and others.

Having said this much, it may seem contradictory for me to suggest that we can also understand Vincenzo Galilei's famous disapproval of madrigalisms as a reflection of auralist discourse. In his *Dialogo della musica antica, et della moderna* of 1582 Galilei deplored the madrigalists' text-setting devices: the pictorialisms, the rhythmic extremes, and the harmonic dissonance that composers of his time increasingly employed to express the words they set. But he by no means rejected altogether the musical expression of text. Instead he advocated a return to more natural ways of matching words and music and suggested that musicians might learn from orators or even actors—the *zanni* of the *commedia dell'arte*—better to imitate in music the varied passions of their words. Galilei recommended, in other words, what he considered a less contrived, more sensitive mimesis of emotion and rendering of the natural affective qualities of words. He believed that these could be captured in music and relied on the customary invocation of hallowed musical legends to show that ancient musicians had done so.

Implicit in all this is Galilei's belief that actors, orators, and singers worked effects on others by exploiting to varied ends the natural force and imitative potency of sound. This is a belief he shared with Ficinian magicians like Agrippa, Bruno, and Campanella. Indeed Galilei's expressive goal was nothing other than a restatement in a nonmagical context of a primary aim of such Renaissance magicians. He summed up this goal as "the inducing in another [by means of music] of one's own affection—il condurre altrui . . . nella medesima affettione di se

stesso" (p. 89). A few years after Galilei wrote, Campanella, in his magic treatise *Del senso delle cose*, would argue that the force of words, when deployed wisely, arises "from the feeling they impress and the motion they arouse in those who hear them—per l'affetto che imprimo e moto che destano in chi le sente" (p. 296). Both his words and Galilei's participate, I think, in the discourse set in motion by Ficino's sonorous magic in *De vita*; we sense, in a musical treatise on the one hand, a magic book on the other, the lingering ideal of a song that "imitates and enacts everything so forcefully that it immediately provokes both the singer and hearers to imitate and enact the same things."

To sketch briefly one final, more overt case of Ficinian auralism in late-Renaissance musical traditions we must turn from Italy to Paris. There in 1570 Jean Antoine de Baïf founded the Académie de poésie et musique, whose chief musical aim was the fostering of *musiques mesurées*, chansons whose rhythms matched the quantitative structure of the poems they set. Baïf believed that chansons thus constructed would create musical miracles like those of the ancients. In this belief alone, based on the purely rhythmic affinities of text and music—their attuned harmonic motions—we might suspect Ficinian influence. But there are more grounds for such suspicion. First, Frances A. Yates has argued convincingly that some of Baïf's measured chansons, set to music by Claude Le Jeune for the wedding of the duc de Joyeuse in 1581, were intended to work a kind of astrological musical magic (see "Poésie et musique dans les 'Magnificences'"). And second, Baïf's *académie* arose at the time of a strong upsurge of Neoplatonic magic in Parisian circles. One of the leaders of this trend was Baïf's friend, fellow poet, and, probably, his associate in the *académie*, Guy Lefèvre de la Boderie, who translated works by Ficino and his followers into French in the 1570s and 1580s. La Boderie's translation of Ficino's *De vita* was printed, in fact, in 1581, the very year of the astrological music for the duc de Joyeuse. In making their own astrological songs Baïf and Le Jeune could hardly have been unaware of Ficino's. The circumstantial evidence, at least, suggests that the tradition of *musique mesurée à l'antique* was imbued with the doctrines of Ficino's musical magic.

With these examples I do not intend, I hope it is clear, to discover conscious Ficinian motivation in every aspect of sixteenth-century musical and cultural life. I do not suppose that composers regularly viewed their craft as a making of spiritual demons or phantasms, even though in some exceptional cases they may have

done so (Le Jeune in his collaboration with Baïf?), and though magicians like Agrippa and Bruno continued to regard music in something akin to this Ficinian way. But by the same token it seems to me that to exclude Ficino's ideas, in the absence of positive reference to them, from the discourse of all those who thought about music in the late Renaissance would be the unavailing act of a too restrictive *Quellengeschichte*. This is true, first, because Ficino's musical thought was widely available to the literate public, scattered in the many editions of his letters, of his commentaries on Plato, Plotinus, and other authors, and of other works that issued from presses across the sixteenth century. And the explicitly magical music of *De vita* was likewise widely dispersed: in almost thirty editions of the book dating from 1489 to 1647, seven of which appeared in Italy (see Kristeller, *Supplementum ficinianum* I, LXIV–LXV, and "Marsilio Ficino and His Work," p. 130); in the recountings of its main doctrines not only by Agrippa and Campanella but also, in 1589, by the Venetian Greek professor (and friend of Zarlino) Fabio Paolini (on whom see Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, pp. 126–44); and even in the refutation of it that Martino del Rio included in his huge and oft-reprinted antimagical treatise *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex*, first published in 1600 (see book I, chapter 4, *quaestiones* 2–3).

The impact of Ficino's musical doctrines across the century and a half after he wrote was undoubtedly far more profound than any tracing of their specific influence will reveal. In some circles they probably acquired the status of cultural common coin, as did many of his non-musical teachings that later writers reiterated anonymously or with the vague attribution to unspecified "Platonici." (Indeed F. L. Schoell long ago showed, in an example that was no doubt not isolated, that a late-Renaissance reader like George Chapman might not distinguish at all between Ficino's own views and those, published alongside them, of the authors he translated and glossed. Ficino's ideas thus could take on the luster of ancient authority; see *Études sur l'humanisme continental*, pp. 6, 18.) I would point also to the operation of Ficino's ideas on a still broader and more diffuse level of cultural formation—the archaeological level behind Foucault's discourses. Here they stimulated the growth and dispersion of tacit conceptual underpinnings for questions about the nature of musical rhetoric and effect. (The auralism voiced by Ficino was one such discursive structure.) Ficino's musical psychology flowed underneath such characteristic sixteenth-century concerns, I think, like an underground stream, nurturing the plants above it but only occasionally bubbling into view. It brought to the fore (and, in its

visible, superarchaeological influence legitimized philosophically) the sheen of magical or divine force that had always lingered in music and words. And it thereby encouraged a conscious wonderment at this force that is evident in countless sixteenth-century writings and that would, by the end of the century, crystallize into an "aesthetic of the marvelous."

In this speculation we have moved very far from my analysis of Ficino's own magical songs. But there is one more point to make concerning this analysis. In it I emphasized the ontological, epistemological, psychological, and pneumatological dimensions of Ficino's thought that allowed him to theorize his magical songs. But I neglected one more dimension: the practical. There can be little doubt that Ficino practiced the musical magic he described in *De vita coelitus comparanda*. His enthusiasm for the subject is too apparent and his substantial musical abilities are too well attested for us to suppose that his astrological songs were unperformed intellectual constructs alone. Behind the doctrines of *De vita*, we must guess, stood a successful empirical practice. Ficino's songs, in other words, *worked* for him to channel astral influxes in appropriate, health-giving ways. In order to comprehend this fact it is not enough to understand how Ficino *thought* his songs worked. For if we stop at this point we leave open to ourselves the too easy avenue of chalking up his apparent success to his own deluded belief. Instead we must pursue a kind of historical understanding that recognizes and maintains the reality of Ficino's success in astrological song. I began to sketch such understanding in chapter 1; I will return to it, with the example of Ficino's song in mind, in chapter 8.

FIVE

Musical Possession and Musical Soul Loss

Ficino's music could mediate between the human spirit and the heavens, enhancing the spirit's and the soul's receptivity to beneficial influxes from the stars. This was the essential role of the astrological song of *De vita*. But music could also, Ficino asserted in a number of writings, play a role in a more exalted occult experience. It could serve as the first step along a road to mystical union with god. In other words, it could help its practitioner reach beyond the heavens to the one, the all, the supercelestial origin of things. I might put this dualism of music's powers in the context of Agrippa's division of magics, which in any event grew out of Ficinian thinking: music could lead the magus to transcend natural and celestial operations and unveil the mysteries of ceremonial magic.

Or, among Ficino's own sources, we might see reflected in this dualism a similar dichotomy in the *De mysteriis aegyptiorum* of the early fourth-century Neoplatonist Iamblichus, a treatise on magic and divination that Ficino translated in the late 1480s. Here Iamblichus defended divination from the attacks of earlier Neoplatonists, specifically from a letter on the subject by Porphyry. In his apologia he distinguished two types of divination: a lesser, uncertain, human or artificial variety that depended on the learned reading of signs and the tracing of sympathies among things—this was a limited divination deserving, in Iamblichus's view, of earlier attacks; and a higher, certain variety arising from the soul's ecstatic union with divine intelligence (see A. C. Lloyd, "The Later Neoplatonists," p. 296, and R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 122). Ficino's iatromusical procedures of *De vita*, human operations tapping hidden forces and connections, represent magic conceived along the lines of Iamblichus's first, lesser variety. The role he perceived for music in helping to unite the soul with divinity, instead, reveals his understanding of Iamblichus's higher variety of mystical experience.

In *De mysteriis* Iamblichus himself applied to music his distinction of two types of divination, and Ficino's free rendering of this passage