

# **Performing in the Holocaust: From Camp Songs to the Song Plays of Germaine Tillion and Charlotte Salomon<sup>1</sup>**

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In the few studies devoted to musical and theatrical works of the Holocaust, greater attention goes to those created and performed by professional and semi-professional artists interned in the camps and ghettos than to the often anonymous and clandestine works by amateurs.<sup>2</sup> Much more is, of course, known about the former than the latter, especially the public, officially sanctioned events featuring classical and original music, operas, cabarets, musical revues, and plays that took place in Theresienstadt, Buchenwald, Westerbork, Gurs and other camps and ghettos across Nazi Germany and Europe. There are scripts, scores, playbills, posters, photographs, propaganda files, and other material traces of these creations that survive intact or in fragmentary form. In addition, the memory of their performance—indeed, the memorability of seeing many of Europe’s most talented artists, also fellow prisoners, on makeshift stages—has been preserved in letters, diaries, and postwar written and oral testimonies. To the clandestine works, postwar accounts often refer only in passing. These accounts and the rare surviving scripts, scores, and songbooks form nevertheless a heterogeneous body of evidence attesting to such practices as sing alongs, story tellings, poetry recitations, stagings of plays, cabarets, and musical revues taking place at the margins of the more widely recognized public creations by professional artists. Little attempt has been made to give these surviving works their due as aesthetic productions worthy of close analysis. On the one hand, established literary and musical criteria, such as the hierarchical distinction between amateur and professional, have prevented them from becoming visible in their own right. On the other, their effect is disturbing. They demonstrate to the perplexity of some that even under the most harrowing conditions of the extermination camp, prisoners felt the need and were able to summon the physical stamina to improvise, sing, dance, and act, placing their lives at even greater risk through such performances.

Many of these clandestine works (though not all) were darkly comic in nature and directly represented the terrifying cultures of the camp and ghetto. They were not therefore created solely as a means of temporary es-

cape from horrific conditions. In lyrics and music—whose rhythms, rhymes, and harmonies make the works fundamentally mnemonic devices— they documented those conditions. Yet, even survivors have been reluctant to call too much attention to them. The possibility that they might be misconstrued in retrospect as idle entertainment was the basis of Germaine Tillion's refusal to publish the script to an original piece, *Le Verfügbare aux enfers* (*The Verfügbare in the Underworld*), that she clandestinely wrote in the concentration camp for women, Ravensbrück. Knowledge of its existence was an open secret as Tillion had quoted excerpts from it in her written testimony on the camp first published in 1947. But to make this work publicly available in its entirety, Tillion reasoned, might suggest to skeptics, revisionists, and the ignorant that “we amused ourselves greatly at Ravensbrück; and in fact, this [operetta] was written under great risk” (qtd. in Rovit & Goldfarb 10). It was not until nearly 60 years later that she finally agreed to have it published in full.

I will return to *The Verfügbare* but would like, first, to relate it to two hybrid, improvised genres, namely songs and song plays, and situate these in the larger context of what one scholar has called the cultural heritage of the Holocaust and has defined as the “art, music, theater, cabaret, and dance created and sometimes performed *in situ* by professional artists and talented amateurs in Nazi Germany and occupied Europe, 1933-1945. *In situ* means that these works were produced by the victim artists incarcerated in ghettos, transit camps, prisons, concentration camps, and hiding places” (Milton 287). Scholars have only just begun to identify, for example, the hundreds of KZ Lieder, also known as Lager Lieder or concentration camp songs, as one *in situ* genre.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the exchange of prewar songs, groups of prisoners shared hybrid songs with new lyrics set to existing melodies. It is this type of song that I will concentrate on as a virtual genre of the Holocaust and that is also a feature of the more ambitious dramatic song plays. I argue that *The Verfügbare*, classified an operetta by Tillion, is one example of a spontaneous revival of the once popular song plays of the eighteenth century. Song plays constituted a recognized genre, but by the nineteenth century had largely disappeared from the public stage. In their original form, they consisted of dialogue, dances, and songs with new lyrics set to existing melodies. The musical numbers are improvisatory in an objectively definable way, making the song play distinct from other established musico-theatrical genres. In the context of the Holocaust, improvisation defines the song play (and the individual hybrid song) in relation to specific *in situ* circumstances by which other genres such as opera, cabaret, the musical revue, theater, and so on are not conventionally defined. Explicitly about the camps, ghettos, and other contexts, the song play constitutes not only an *in situ* practice; it is also the performance of a self in character, acting and singing certain traumatic situations.

In isolating Tillion's piece, I do not pretend to establish the existence of this genre across the many groups and languages that form the field of Holocaust studies (a task that no one person can accomplish).<sup>4</sup> Instead, I propose one possible avenue of further research on both hybrid songs and other song plays as identifiable forms related to, yet distinct from, the skit, burlesque theater, Yiddish theater, cabarets, musical revues, variety shows, and so on.<sup>5</sup> The recent availability of Tillion's script invites us, for example, to revisit one well known song play that has yet to be examined on the basis of its own designated genre: *Leben? oder Theater? Ein Singespiel* [sic] (*Life? or Theater? A Song Play*) by Charlotte Salomon, a young German Jewish refugee living in the south of France between 1939 and 1943. In spite of (and perhaps even in light of) the vastly different backgrounds, experiences, contexts, and identities of a stateless Jewish exile and a Catholic political prisoner in a camp, I contend that Tillion's script sheds new light on Salomon's possible motives for calling her work a *Singespiel*. By the same token, Salomon's *Life? or Theater?* illuminates what is at stake in Tillion's piece when it is read as a song play. Both works thus share specific requirements for their performance, which I examine in detail in relation to the *in situ* circumstances of, on the one hand, the prisoner and on the other, the refugee.<sup>6</sup> Those requirements underpin a crisis of identity and self performed in the words and music.

## I.

Qualities of the unreal, the unnamable, namelessness, and statelessness associated with the camps were already the conditions for the possibility of theatrical thinking. Being one's self and other as well as being reduced to no one is analogous in certain respects to the relationship between actor and character. Shouted commands in German, the prohibition against speaking one's language, against expression altogether, created the conditions for a kind of theatrical imperative to perform the effects of that interdiction clandestinely. A political prisoner like Tillion, Charlotte Delbo, for example, whose professional background was in theater, writes in *Auschwitz et après* (*Auschwitz and After*) that when she and others in her convoy arrived at Auschwitz—"un lieu sans nom," "l'innommé" ("a nameless place," "the unnamed," II: 37/137)—, they sang in the marshes where they were forced to labor.<sup>7</sup> The songs—signs in this case of intact identity—lost their meaning as Delbo and her group became mere shadows of their former selves: "les trépassés ne chantent pas" ("The dead do not sing"; II: 88/167). A lighter work assignment and better conditions six months later resurrected the silenced singers to theater: "à peine [*les trépassés*] ont-ils ressuscité qu'ils font du théâtre" ("no sooner are they [*the dead*] resurrected, they do theater"; II: 88/167). Not only did they develop a repertory of short acts but they also pieced together from memory Molière's *Malade imaginaire*, which

they put on. Delbo marveled at how well each actress successfully effaced herself to play the role of her character.<sup>8</sup> Yet, the price paid for this outcome, the song of one's self, was high. The stages the self passed through, first, through song, second, through death, and third, through theater was but one way performance came to be about the expression of a profoundly wounded identity: a self-effaced actor in character.

Although I will have occasion to return to Delbo, this article is directed less at improvised stagings of classical comedy recollected in post-war testimonies than at the surviving texts of songs that were about the camps themselves. If songs perished among those in Delbo's immediate circle, this was not the general rule in the camps and ghettos. The melodies harkened back to life before the camps while new words about personnel, meager food rations, political figures, trivial events, beatings, transports, extermination, even the *Muselmänner*—those at death's door, so starved and bereft of self as to be beyond caring for themselves—corresponded to the present experiences of the camp. Folksongs and popular tunes are divided against themselves because the words reinterpret them. Otherwise sentimental, patriotic, melodramatic, boisterous, or ebullient songs transform thus into biting satire and haunting elegy.

The person most responsible for securing a place for these as a genre in their own right, Aleksander Kulisiewicz, created 54 such songs while imprisoned for six years in the German concentration camp, Sachsenhausen; he also committed to memory some 700 songs by others while there and dedicated his postwar life to collecting other examples and performing them. Some of these songs were also accompanied by dances or acts. "Muselmann, Cigarette Butt Collector" by Kulisiewicz combines an improvised dance, original lyrics, and two tunes "Zulejka" and "Szanghai," which Kulisiewicz had learned before his imprisonment during a brief stint as a clown's assistant in a traveling circus. This camp song was, in fact, inspired by the role he played in a classic act of slapstick comedy: a corpse whose "boss" would come beat him on the head with an inflated rubber club, causing the corpse/clown to rise up whistling and singing the tunes. While the first-person lyrics in the camp version sustain the *Muselmann* as a resurrected self given voice, the dance act passes through the stages of a wobbly legged one-step, a Lambeth walk, and a "Cossack" dance that winds down to a crouch with the singer sinking to his knees and assuming a pose and facial expression bereft of consciousness. The dance faithfully represents what is called KZ syndrome, the inability of *Muselmänner* to stand for any length of time. They repeatedly sunk to their knees as though preparing to pray, whence the term *Muselmann*. As the opposite of the clown's resurrection, the dance acts out the words "And you're watching/me, watching me, people/among people, how horribly I die."<sup>9</sup> The words turn the testimony of the *Muselmann* back on the audience, prisoners who

directly witnessed the mute figure succumb to death in the camp. As the end of the dance cancels out the voice temporarily given to a figure bereft of self, the song also enacts the closed theater of the *Muselmann*. This form of theatrical, musical engagement with the inaccessible and expressionless may, on the one hand, suggest an affirmation of a self still able to sing; on the other, it is a reflection on an inner self imperiled, who outwardly performs the *Muselmann*.<sup>10</sup>

Germain Tillion's *Le Verfügar aux enfers, Opérette. Revue en 3 actes* (*The Verfügar in the Underworld*) adds to improvised songs the related genre of the song play even though it is not identified as such by its creator. The full title registers some uncertainty over its classification and suggests that it falls somewhere between an operetta and musical revue.<sup>11</sup> This piece perhaps only happens to be a song play because of the circumstances that necessitated certain improvisations: for example, the use of bowls and spoons, instead of instruments, to beat the rhythms to dances and, more important for our purposes here, found music as settings for the satirical lyrics. The genre of the song play had, in fact, become virtually obsolete when Tillion undertook the great risk of writing this piece for her close circle of companions.

Song plays were dramatic works consisting of dialogue interspersed with dances and songs with original lyrics set to preexisting traditional and popular tunes. Influenced by seventeenth-century French *comédies en vaudevilles*, they were popular in early eighteenth-century England, where they were called ballad plays; John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) and Charles Coffey's *The Devil to Pay* (1731) are among the best known of these. The translation of Coffey's ballad plays into German brought the genre to Germany and Austria where they were called *Singspiele* or song plays, the term preferred here to class Tillion's piece. The *comédie en vaudevilles*, *Singspiel*, and ballad play were all precursors to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *opéra comique* and the operetta, forms that no longer relied on found music but required original musical compositions.<sup>12</sup> Displaced by these genres, the song play faded from public stages by the early to mid-nineteenth century, slipping perhaps to the level of amateur entertainment in family parlors.<sup>13</sup> It did, however, make one important reappearance in London in 1920 with the revival of Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. The production enjoyed a long run of nearly 1,500 performances and directly inspired its modernist reinterpretation, *The Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill. Premiered in Berlin in 1928 and an overnight sensation, this original reworking of the ballad play was adapted to the screen in 1931 and was as such one of the first musical films, also produced in separate German and French versions. The music, however, was composed by Weill and thus departs from the traditional song play whose single creator is not a composer but a librettist-adaptor. But unlike the popular cabarets and

musical revues of pre-Hitler Europe, which consisted of loosely connected sketches and musical numbers, *The Threepenny Opera* shares with the song play an overarching narrative with related songs.

Given the rarity of surviving scripts, it is difficult to determine how many clandestine productions in the camps were reinventions of the song play, were more like the cabaret, or were some mix of the two. Many were not written down. *Schum Schum*, created and produced by Käthe Leichter and Dr. Herta Breuer (Jewish political prisoners of *Ravensbrück*) may have been one of the rare song plays with a written script. Testimonies indicate that it was about two escaped Jewish prisoners who land, shipwrecked, on a deserted island. The narrative included songs mocking the SS with words that may well have been set, as with Tillion's *Verfügbar*, to existing tunes. Leichter, however, destroyed the script to protect herself and others; she also did not survive the Holocaust (Saidel 61-62). Tillion and her script did survive.<sup>14</sup> The lyrics in this unfinished script (the third act was never concluded) come with the titles of the tunes to which they are sung. These were drawn from a variety of genres: from classical opera, notably the aria, "J'ai perdu mon Eurydice," from Gluck's French version of *Orfeo ed Euridice* (the selection draws parallels between the underworld into which Orpheus descends and the concentration camp); from popular late 19<sup>th</sup>-century operettas such as the duet, "Nous avons fait un bon voyage," from Reynaldo Hahn's *Ciboulette*; hit songs of the day (e.g., "Mon ange" by Bruno Coquatrix); traditional songs such as "Au clair de la lune"; and even a jingle for a brand of chicory.

The spoken dialogue advances a narrative that begins in the first act with a comic analysis of the evolution, habits, anatomy, and life expectancy of the song play's protagonists, the *Verfügbaren*. "Verfügbar" was the official camp designation for those persons whose lack of useful skills—or in the case of Tillion and others united in resistance to the camp system, persons who refused to declare useful skills<sup>15</sup>—made them "available" (what the word means as an adjective in German) slave labor. Literally placed at the camp's disposal, they were assigned the worst, often most demeaning tasks such as cleaning latrines and collecting cadavers. In *The Verfügbar*, a pedantic naturalist introduces this group as a new species created from "la conjugaison" or coupling "d'un gestapiste mâle et une résistance femelle," a metaphor for the arrest and interrogation of a female member of the Resistance by a French police officer working for the Gestapo. This initial union is followed by the developmental stages of imprisonment, a stopover in a French transit camp, and deportation to the Nazi concentration camp. Tillion describes in general terms her own experience as well as that of the other participant-characters in *The Verfügbar*. In addition, she brings into play her field of expertise, ethnography, through which the song play's themes are developed.



Performing field research for a doctorate she was writing under the direction of Marcel Mauss, Tillion was in the Aurès region of Algeria gathering notes on Berber kinship systems when Nazi Germany invaded France. She returned to Paris where she joined in the resistance activities of her colleagues from the Musée de l'Homme. Denounced by a priest in the pay of the Gestapo, she along with her mother was arrested in August 1942. After spending more than a year in prison, both were deported to Ravensbrück in October 1943. The conversion of this experience into a lecture on a new biological species in *The Verfügbar* subtly works in a reflection on the difference between the ethnographer's noninterventionist study of customs and cultures and the invasive approach of the naturalist, who observes at a distance but also captures, dissects, and classifies animal species; the latter is at home in the concentration camp, a didactic version of the commandant, SS guard, or medical doctor whose racist detachment sees inmates from a wide range of nationalities and ethnic backgrounds as no more than inferior species upon whom to perform medical experiments.<sup>16</sup> The naturalist's lecture to the very "object" of his study, the chorus of *Verfügbaren*, further reinforces the message of the dehumanizing process inmates undergo to become a new species.

The naturalist manages with little success, however, to hold the attention of his audience, which consists of the chorus of the lowly *Verfügbaren* in addition to two other choruses corresponding to camp classifications: the vulnerable *Cartes roses* (the frail, elderly, chronically ill among whom Tillion's mother was grouped) and the robust *Julots* (French argot for dominant women in same-sex relationships, who were also among the camp's "prominents"). The song play serves, then, as a way to record Ravensbrück's hierarchy of inmates. Other parts of it are dedicated to initiating the more recent arrivals among the characters to the vocabulary and customs of the camp and the ruses of the *Verfügbaren*. At the same time, the narrative seeks over the course of the three acts to develop the *Verfügbaren* chorus into separate characters, who in being individuated, signify the struggle to preserve a sense of self in a place that plunged them into this biologized underworld of anonymity. This chorus, writes Tillion in her introductory notes, "n'est pas anonyme; quelques-unes de celles qui le composent ont un nom et une personnalité qui se développera au cours des 3 actes" ("is not anonymous; some of those who compose it have a name and a personality that will develop over the course of the 3 acts"; 1).

Directions for costume changes from one act to the next follow this progression toward individuation in a more ambiguous way. In Act 1, the *Verfügbaren* are dressed in "costumes 'Schmuckstück'," the soiled rags worn by the female counterpart to the *Muselmann*: "chemises plus longues que les robes, robes en loques, souliers dépareillés noués avec des ficelles, bas en accordéon, etc." ("shirts longer than dresses, dresses in tatters, unmatched

shoes tied with string, stockings bunched around the ankles, etc.”; 5). SS guards derisively called the women who were beyond caring for themselves and their appearance *Schmuckstücke* or pieces of jewelry, a term that derived its cruel wit from its phonetic similarity with *Schmutzstück* or piece of dirt. For Tillion, starvation and exhaustion were not the main causes that brought these women to death’s door; growing isolation and “l’abandon de soi” (“abandonment of self”) preceded their physical decline. In her account of Ravensbrück, she recalls that she witnessed many die of starvation with a sense of self but the *Schmuckstücke*, she insists, “mouraient de solitude” (“died of solitude”; 178). The *Schmuckstück* costume places the *Verfügbar* right on the edge of this abandonment of self. The costume had an additional meaning which Tillion explains in *Ravensbrück*, an account she wrote in the year after her release from the camp. To evade assignments to factories and other work details, Tillion and others in her group deliberately adopted the demeanor and habits of the *Schmuckstück*.<sup>17</sup> Tillion recounts how her “costume” succeeded, in one instance, in having her immediately rejected for work in a Siemens factory: “j’avais, ce jour-là, particulièrement soigné mon ‘look’, par pur patriotisme, car en réalité j’aimais les bricolages minutieux” (“on that day, I had taken particular care with my look out of pure patriotism; for in fact, I liked the meticulous makeshift get ups”; 148). The costume in the song play already had, then, a theatrical function. Yet, the costume change in Act 2 hints that the characters from the first act will not realize this function of the costume but, instead, they will overcome the real threat that the *Schmuckstück* posed as an expired self. The costumes are still “misérables” but now the stockings are pulled up, the clothes are artfully pieced together, and waistlines are cinched in to give the characters a certain “allure désinvolte” or casual air (57). Act 3 appears to confirm this plot line as the characters are “somp tueusement vêtues” (“sumptuously attired”) but their “air accablé” (an overwhelmed or weighed down look) and crouched positions (“accroupies,” like the end of Kulisiewicz’s *Muselmann* dance) refer back again to the *Schmuckstück* (92); the terrible piece of jewelry or trinket that each of the characters symbolizes at the beginning loses its irony as a costume or act and becomes a heavy, literal ornament in the last act’s sumptuous costumes. Tillion, in effect, appropriates the SS term and mines it for its fatal logic.

The Act opens with the famous Gluck aria sung by Orfeo whose gaze has just sent Eurydice back into the depths of the underworld. Sung by an inmate character named Marmotte under the title, “J’ai perdu mon *Innendienst* [sic],” the aria laments the character’s loss of the pass, the *Innendienst*, which would have permitted her to remain inside (*innen*) the blockhouse for reasons of illness or incapacity and thus be spared the exhaustions of hard manual labor (92-93). Singing of the “mortal silence” that attends its loss, Marmotte establishes a link with the solitude of the *Schmuckstück*.



Hard labor, that is, exacts a high price (“sumptuous,” a superlative, derives from the Latin for “cost”) that turns the costume into a killer or “tueuse,” a word that lies in hiding in “sompstueusement.” Tillion also brings into play a discriminatory discourse that identifies the ornament with feminine taste (as well as with so-called inferior cultures) and not with its other functions as a sign of prestige or military prowess.<sup>18</sup> As a sign of inferiority, the ornament is detachable from the functional whole and unnecessary to it. In refusing to declare a skill, the *Verfügbar* places herself on the precarious edge of uselessness. Whereas Tillion holds out the promise of bringing characters into their own as personalities with names, adornment suggests the disposable value of the *Verfügbar*, just a step away from the *Schmuckstück*, in the camp system. The goal of the song play to develop personalities with names appears, in the absence of a conclusion to the third act, to have come to an impasse. How, in any case, could this rescue of personalities from the undifferentiated chorus have been envisioned—and a conclusion given—when, as Tillion hid herself under a packing crate in October 1944 to write *The Verfügbar*, there was as yet little hope of rescue from the camp’s program of annihilation?<sup>19</sup>

The promise to confer names on members of an anonymous chorus turns out, however, to have little to do with restoring identities to perished selves such as those Delbo represents. Inmates had no names; external, that is, public, legal, cultural, and professional identity is of less import to the internal workings of the piece than is the manner in which proper names bear, instead, a musical meaning; identity, as I will demonstrate, was already lost to the music of the names. Tillion’s chosen names come under the cover of group belonging or an insider’s language: Annette, Nénette, Marmotte, Titine, Rosine, Havas, Lulu, Dédé, Bébé.<sup>20</sup> Akin to the nonsense syllables repeated in songs (“tra la la”) as well as to the syllables that babies take pleasure in repeating and that are the first building blocks of meaning (such as Bébé or “baby”), these names (most of which are nick-names) introduce into this discussion the mediating function of music in *The Verfügbar*. Standing on the border between mere sound and meaning, singsong names are signs of selves turned inward through the physical act of singing or playing with sound. At the same time, the names relate to the musical transposition of the various chores carried out in the camp. These chores are also the subject of the song play.

Assigned to ever shifting chores, *Verfügbaren* took advantage of the mobility this afforded to switch in and out of columns and blockhouses. When unable to evade an assignment, other risks were undertaken to undermine labor details as well as to survive: simulated labor, which the song play calls *Arbeit-Ersatz*, and the deliberate slowing down of movement, which the introduction to the song play calls *sabotage perlé* (10). The musical meaning of this last expression offers one point of entry into the

song play's commentary on work routines in the camp and its subversion of these through rhythm. A piece whose notes are distinctly and delicately played is said to be "pearled" in French. This style of playing inspired the expression, *grève perlée* or pearled strike, which was adopted around 1911 to describe the parodic, slow-motion execution of tasks by assembly line workers at certain phases of production. Mechanical execution shifts to an acting out that is almost a pantomime of movement and a new rhythm. The pantomimic rhythm is not only a subversion of the rigid routines of the concentration camp's own factory-like organization; it is also its deconstruction. It is useful to recall with respect to this tactic that one propagandistic device favored by the Nazis was the staging of orchestral concerts in factories. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was, for example, performed in a Panzer factory and Von Karajan conducted a Berlin orchestra in a factory near Paris, which was shown on news reels in French cinemas. The grandiosity of these gestures made music conform to the collectivist goal of Nazi ideology (Nancy 56-57). Musicians and factory workers, whose coordinated, precision movements produced harmonies and weapons, were patterned after each other along ideological lines, this symbolized as well by the parades of goosestepping soldiers dutifully documented in Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 documentary, *Triumph of the Will*, commissioned by Hitler. This tendency to align music with regimented patterns and repetitious movement became vicious parody in Auschwitz with the imposition of so-called Aryan music on inmates marching in formation to and from work assignments outside of the camp by an orchestra of up to eighty other inmates. Music was made to collude with the rigid, collective order of the camp, which inmates experienced as the very antithesis of music: a tortured and torturing monotony emphasizing the anonymity imposed on them. Music's variable expressive timbres, rhythms, harmonies, and dissonances, even when pressed into the service of mobilizing monotonous formations or patterns, are not reducible to this appropriation of its beat to produce repetition. Music can, instead, be rallied against a movement of collective order; for the latter, as pattern, is mere repetition mobilized, an unvarying expression, which music is not.<sup>21</sup> The pantomimic aspect of *Arbeit-Ersatz* and *sabotage perlé* is thus a subversion of this unvarying pattern, that is, it is an inherently musical response to the way the task can be "played" that connects with the song play and the characters' singsong names, whose syllabic playfulness is on the verge of making meaning. Pantomimic rhythms like the names turn meaningless repetition into an expressive act whose principle is to draw out and delay. Furthermore, it steals back music's meaning, the knowledge of which is withheld from camp officials in Tillion's song play. For example, one character, Lulu, tells a new arrival about a roll call that lasted from early morning to well into the night as camp personnel attempted to find an inmate who could play piano. The roll call failed

to enlist a single volunteer even though Lulu, it turns out, is a pianist and a “premier prix du conservatoire,” first in her conservatory class (86-87). This withholding of musical knowledge, an inner *résistance perlée* revealed only within the song play, juxtaposed with the endless roll calls of inmates monotonously organized into uniform rows of five, counters an ideological appropriation of music’s beat with a musical inner life, a survival strategy that was not unique to Tillion’s piece. For example, Delbo, shortly after being transferred from Auschwitz to Ravensbrück where she traded a bread ration for a copy of Molière’s *Le Misanthrope*, memorized and recited to herself the rhyming alexandrins of this play during roll calls: “Bientôt j’ai su toute la pièce, qui durait presque tout l’appel. Et jusqu’au départ, j’ai gardé la brochure dans ma gorge” (“Soon I knew the whole play, which lasted almost throughout the roll call. And until departure, I kept the play within my throat”; II: 125/188).<sup>22</sup>

I have thus far followed two lines of thought in Tillion’s piece. The first has involved tracing instances in which *The Verfügbar* shows evidence of musico-theatrical acts that derive from how the camp was experienced in performative terms. The *Schmuckstück* costumes and *Arbeit-Ersatz* pantomimes are two such examples of ways in which acts performed in the camp are constitutive of the song play. The second line has gradually suggested itself in the aria on the *Innendienst* and then in the musical names that connote group belonging and, finally, the withholding of musical knowledge: all relate in different ways to an inside that is musically expressed. Delbo’s evocative recollection that she kept Molière’s play within her throat also points to a performance that takes place within.

Keeping the musical and poetic rhythms of pieces within one’s throat describes precisely the performative conditions of clandestine songs and song plays. First, the performances of these works were limited often to just a handful of spectators. In the case of Tillion’s song play, its performance was restricted more radically to the players themselves. The introduction to *The Verfügbar* notes that it was “dit et chantonné dans le groupe des compagnes de Germaine” (“recited and sung within Germaine’s group of blockmates”), a claim that is supported by the built-in inclusiveness of the three choruses (7). These choruses play a double role as listeners and singers, which is further reinforced by their inclusion as the unruly, vocal audience to the naturalist’s lecture. The performance had no audience in the traditional sense because there was no listener who would not also at some point be a singer.<sup>23</sup> The clandestine circumstances are also therefore a formal constraint of the song play; for, if the survival of the individual depended upon the support of one’s group, the identity of Tillion’s characters is dependent upon the *Verfügbar* chorus, “le principal héros de la pièce comme dans les tragédies grecques” (“the main hero of the piece as in Greek tragedies”; 1). Second, conditions excluded the possibility of mu-

sical accompaniment, making *The Verfügbar* a piece for voice alone. The musical realization of a self hinted at in the characters' names comes into play through the act of singing solo and with others *in* one's own voice but not to instrumental arrangements in a formal setting such as the concert hall; these latter impose on the voice other roles whose meaning does not derive from the act of singing itself. If, on the first point, there is no listener who is not also a singer, on the second, there is never a singer who is not her own listener from within herself or, to take up Delbo again, from within her throat. That inward turn is a musical meditation on the structure of the self and its alterity.

While I have thus far treated songs as artifacts, as identifiable tunes with words that document a sense of profound dislocation, they may also be examined along the lines of sound and meaning. The act of singing and listening also describes the subject's relation to self, which is caught up in the referral of meaning to sound and sound to meaning, a structure that has been the focus of sustained discussion among French philosophers for decades.<sup>24</sup> One of those philosophers, Jean-Luc Nancy, argues in *Listening* that the philosopher superimposes understanding on listening and neutralizes "listening within himself" (1).<sup>25</sup> Whereas Tillion's piece performs this form of listening, Nancy's attempt to produce meaning from it stands in a problematic relation to what he calls sonorous sense.

A subject *feels*.... This means that he hears (himself), sees (himself), touches (himself), tastes (himself), and so on, and that he thinks himself or represents himself, approaches himself and strays from himself, and thus always feels himself feeling a 'self' that escapes [*s'échappe*] or hides [*se retranche*] as long as it resounds elsewhere as it does in itself, in a world and in the other.

To be listening will always, then, be to be straining toward or in an approach to the self (one should say, in a pathological manner, *a fit of self*: isn't [sonorous] sense first of all, every time, a *crisis of the self*?) (Nancy 9).

*The Verfügbar* captures the intimacy of that persistent, anguished approach to the self. Understanding that intimacy must, then, be relinquished ultimately to listening, perhaps even to performing it one's self.<sup>26</sup>

Nancy's concern that he might superimpose his understanding on listening and thus become a silent spectator and outside commentator, not a participant, highlights the performative requirements of Tillion's piece. I began by proposing that the Holocaust reinvented the song play, a genre that had in any case long been obscure except to persons with a specialized knowledge of both popular and classical music history. Life threatening

conditions turned this genre in one case into a specific kind of performance that is not only thematized in *The Verfügbar*; it is also a formal constraint of the work. Nothing indicates that Tillion was aware of drawing on a lost musical tradition or of redefining it to be a performance of an anguished approach to self. It may therefore be of some interest to look at another song play that was explicitly defined as such for confirmation of the form's adaptability to another crisis produced in response to tyranny. For this other example also builds into the performance of this approach to self a theorist, who, like Nancy (and even Tillion's naturalist), is both silent spectator and voluble commentator, that is, the counterexample of the song play's intimate performers.

## II.

Stepping away from the suffocating confines of the death camp allows us to consider briefly the most famous song play to come out of this terrible period and without which no study of the genre would be complete: *Leben? oder Theater? Ein Singespiel* [sic] (*Life? or Theater? A Song Play*) by Charlotte Salomon, a young German-Jewish refugee. "Theater" in the title opposes "Life"; yet, at the same time Salomon selected a theatrical genre, the song play, which makes the choice the title offers less clearcut, a question concerning whether or not the author's circumstances were perhaps rendering life and theater less distinguishable. As Griselda Pollock persuasively argues, this work was incited, in part, by Salomon's brief internment in the French camp, Gurs, one of the country's worst, with its overcrowded, vermin-infested barracks, poor sanitation, and ankle deep mud due to poor drainage; and yet, it was among those camps noted for intense creative activity in the form of art exhibitions, lectures, and performances (44). The experience may also have motivated Salomon to reconsider the wartime trauma of another person whose influence on her work is decisive: Alfred Wolfsohn, a voice coach, whose role in her life I will discuss shortly.

Originally from Berlin, Salomon was living in the south of France where her father and stepmother had sent her in January 1939 to live with her grandparents. She had been ordered to report to Gurs when France declared war on Germany in May 1940. She was able to secure her release from the camp on the basis of her grandfather's frailty and her promise to take care of him. Soon after, she began work on her song play in response to the theatrical situation imposed on her by the police and her grandfather's demands; forced to act as his caretaker and indulge what she called in her Postscript his "theater of educated, cultured people's act," Salomon rebelled against the official and personal constraints on her freedom (Salomon and Watson 429). To this negative, external theater that had her grandfather performing as a "puppet," she answered with the song play (Salomon and Watson 429). She ultimately deserted her grandfather in late 1941 for the

isolation of a hotel room where, for close to a year, she worked intensively on completing it.

If the experience of Gurs provided the impetus to undertake *Life? or Theater?*, this song play, unlike Tillion's, cannot quite be classed as Holocaust art even though it is an autobiographical work that includes in its narrative episodes of Nazi persecution. Salomon had no knowledge of the extermination camps when she wrote this work.<sup>27</sup> Salomon's more central concern was to tell the story of her life and incorporate into it a history of suicide on the maternal side of her family about which she learned only when her grandmother began exhibiting signs of suicidal depression in early 1940. The narrative, which begins before her birth with the suicide of her aunt, Charlotte (after whom Salomon was named), and ends with her return from Gurs, covers the suicide of her mother when Charlotte was 9 years old, the revelation in France that her mother had not, as she had been told, succumbed to flu, and direct experience with her grandmother's eventually successful attempt to take her life. In particular, the belated discovery of her mother's real manner of death recasts Salomon's family life (and therefore her life story) as itself a kind of act put on for her benefit. This act is further reinforced by her father's remarriage to the mezzo-soprano, Paula Lindberg, who both takes on the role of mother and introduces Salomon to the performing arts. The influence of the stepmother, combined with the motivation that Gurs provided and Salomon's opposition to her grandfather's puppet theater, is another crucial factor in the decision by Salomon to adopt the genre of the song play. Her exposure to vocal music, especially, as well as her probable familiarity with *The Threepenny Opera* leaves little doubt that her choice of genre was consciously made. Yet, unlike Tillion's conventional script, *Life? or Theater?* has the added distinction of being fully illustrated by 769 gouache paintings on paper, a fact explained, in part, by Salomon's interest in painting and the training she received at the Berlin State Art Academy prior to her exile. Narrative, commentary, and dialogue were painted directly into the visual images and onto tissue paper overlays. The diverse genres *Life? or Theater?* incorporates or suggests—painting, third-person narrative, literature, script, memoir, graphic novel, cinema—have therefore drawn sustained interest, but not in the terms Salomon used.<sup>28</sup> Given the aesthetic, historical, and psychological complexity of this work, Salomon's designation, *Singspiel*, may seem for some not just overly simplistic but perhaps even the wrong name for it altogether.<sup>29</sup> Even the English translation of this work exhibits dissatisfaction with Salomon's generic choice, replacing "Ein Singspiel" with "An autobiographical play by Charlotte Salomon."

The scope of this article forbids an exhaustive reading of *Life? or Theater?*; nor is it possible to engage directly with the many excellent studies that have already grappled with this ambitious work and taken it beyond



its self-definition into its wider aesthetic, biographical, historical, and psychological implications. I will address, instead, just the musico-visual/verbal displacements and performative constraints, as yet unexamined in detail, that suggest its close relation to Tillion's song play. It is just one of the unusual features of this work to have diverted attention from the name given to it: a song play.

Salomon's adolescence and early adulthood were marked by daily exposure to Berlin's musical culture. When forbidden to perform in so-called Aryan venues, Paula Lindberg joined the officially sanctioned German Jewish artists' collective in Berlin. Salomon would meet key members of that collective: its founder, Kurt Singer and conductor Siegfried Ochs. In addition, her stepmother's voice coach, Alfred Wolfsohn, would be a regular



Figure 1: Overlay: "Ah, now I've got it!" To the Tune: "Allons enfants de la patrie." *Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam. Copyrights Charlotte Salomon Foundation.*

and influential household presence.<sup>30</sup> All of these persons are characters in *Life? or Theater?* Musical selections for the song play come from pieces her stepmother sang and other classical works: Stökel's "Bist du bei mir" (erroneously thought to have been composed by Bach), Schubert Lieder, the Toreador song from Bizet's *Carmen*, the chorale from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, and the aria from Gluck's *Orfeo*, which was also used by Tillion. Included as well are German folksongs, Christmas carols, popular tunes, and "La Marseillaise" set to the moment in the narrative when Charlotte Kann, Salomon's third-person name for herself, sees her steady application to her drawing lessons in Berlin finally meet with success (*LT* 195). (In Figure 1, Charlotte is shown with arm outstretched to the right).

Painted in France, the life study class directs us to "La Marseillaise"'s political and other implications. It reflects Salomon's situation: a foreigner living the legal limbo of a stateless German in the south of France. She is painting in exile, realizing a work in a present time that the image, situated in the narrative in the past, is stylistically meant to anticipate. The song also sets off other displacements. It commemorates the success further back in France's history in fending off invading Prussian and Austrian armies; the anthem in 1940 could only function as an ironic reference to an opposite outcome. In fact, the region bordering Italy where Salomon had sought refuge, was, by this time, under Italian occupation while the fascist Vichy regime controlled the part that was still nominally French. Salomon stages an analogy with her own situation: a person without a country is like an anthem without a republic; this republic is also literally in exile (i.e., the Free French in London). Unlike the comparatively stable scene in the visual image of the life study class where the site of Salomon's academic accomplishment, the classroom, establishes boundaries of authority (teacher/student, traditions, etc.), the anthem makes it more difficult to determine from where *Life? or Theater?* itself sprang thanks to the displacements or border crossings set up by the anthem. The painterly techniques with which Salomon began to experiment in the song play show as well that she had leapt beyond the academic boundaries of the conventional realism taught in the Academy. Beginning with basic black outlines for her figures, Salomon rapidly brushed in the colors, animating these in such a way that they threaten to go over their lines and escape the figures. Colors relate to the accompanying tunes as moods and sensations. The triumphant Marseillaise marks thus the discovery of a creative process that sets up a tension between sensation in colors and tunes and meaning in images and words. Similar to Tillion, sensation and meaning relate back and forth to each other, a process integral to the performance of *Life? or Theater?*

Salomon left no indication as to how one might perform this song play. She did, however, preface it with a statement, itself a performance,

that is tantamount to a set of instructions :

A person is sitting beside the sea. He [*the person/der Mensch*] is painting. A tune suddenly enters his mind. As he starts to hum it, he notices that the tune exactly matches what he is trying to commit to paper. A text forms in his head, and he starts to sing the tune, with his own words, over and over again until the painting seems complete. Frequently, several texts take shape, and the result is a duet, or it even happens that each character has to sing a different text, resulting in a chorus. (LT 5-7)

Interestingly, the process of creation begins with what Nancy called sonorous sense before the words or meaning take shape. As Salomon painted and hummed, she performed into existence her role as a librettist-adaptor. This makes it seem safe to assume that Salomon made calculated use of the term “Singspiel” to define her work.<sup>31</sup> She revolutionized the genre to refer to her own form of dislocation and growing isolation; for this song play, too, is meant for the voice by itself and is caught up in the referral of sound to meaning and vice versa. The visual images furthermore tie the performance of the work to the page as an intimate act not unlike reading a novel out loud to one’s self. The images do not simply illustrate; they establish the performance of *Life? or Theater?* along private, rather than public, lines.<sup>32</sup> The anthem moreover has Salomon internally acting her subject or humming into existence this moment of discovery in the narrative. It makes of the image itself the event that subverts the conventional, educational setting it depicts.

Other parallels with Tillion’s song play are discernible in, for example, Salomon’s playful, musical treatment of names. The stepmother becomes Paulinka Bimbam, the conductor Ochs appears as Professor Klingklang, and Dr. Singer of the German Jewish collective is, of course, Dr. Sing-song. Both Tillion’s and Salomon’s song plays contain didactic characters against whom the protagonists rebel in different ways: a naturalist in *The Verfügbar* and in *Life? or Theater?*, the painting instructor and the voice coach Alfred Wolfsohn, who appears in the song play as Amadeus Daberlohn, unrequited lover of the stepmother and alleged lover of Charlotte Kann. But whereas the naturalist in *The Verfügbar* is confined mainly to describing the anatomy and habits of a species, teachers, especially Daberlohn, in *Life? or Theater?* play a formative role in the conceptualization of this work as a song play. Wolfsohn stands not only outside the work as a major influence but also inside as Daberlohn, a built-in theorist. He appears in numerous, very long sections that feature his talking head repeated across page after page, didactically spouting the theses of an elaborate theory of the voice.

Salomon's recollection of the real person's ideas is so accurate that as others have noted, it is hard to believe that she did not have on hand a set of extensive notes taken from the voice coach's unpublished treatise, *Orpheus, or the Way to a Mask* (Timms 107).<sup>33</sup>

How Wolfsohn arrived at his theory of the voice is worthy of attention because it resulted from an extreme life and death situation that we may also relate to Tillion's experience. Salomon has him telling his story as Daberlohn to Paulinka Bimbam. As a soldier in World War I, he ended up cornered on a battlefield listening helplessly to the cries of a wounded soldier before losing consciousness. Subsequently, he came to, buried in a pile of corpses. This caused him to lose his memory and though Salomon's version does not represent this part, he was also struck with aphonia. He "was a corpse," he says, who had "risen from the dead" (*LT* 242-47). His desire to regain his memory and voice became the impetus to explore extended vocal techniques for the sounds beyond normal ranges that he had heard in the dying soldier's cries. Although Wolfsohn/Daberlohn would not become a singer, he dedicated his life to teaching others to find their "soul" in the voice.

Other episodes in *Life? or Theater?* have Daberlohn undertaking to have a death mask made of himself in advance so as to discover Orpheus's knowledge of "what lies between death and life" (*LT* 385). The period of self-imposed silence required for the project, he says, results in a "high stage of concentration that *can be* filled by singing" (*LT* 435; emphasis added). The mask reenacts his original trauma and serves as figure that transitions from his aphonia to a reinforcement of his theory about singing abundantly represented by Salomon's depiction of the theorist's talking head. At no point is the mask filled by Daberlohn's singing. His incessant talk throughout *Life? or Theater?* constitutes, along the lines of Nancy's criticism, just a mask or imposition of understanding on listening and singing. He teaches others to sing and is the silent spectator of singing who subsequently indulges in voluble analysis of what he teaches and hears, thus neutralizing his ability to listen within himself; Salomon's underlying criticism of Daberlohn is that although he enjoys hearing himself speak, he cannot listen within himself without imposing his understanding on this process. Her answer (and homage) to Daberlohn's predicament is the song play. She sang within herself a narrative to life, hoping thereby "to go completely outside of herself . . . to allow the characters to sing or speak in their own voices" and to act out her subjects (*LT* 7).

Salomon's song play shares other characteristics with Tillion's song play—notably, the theme of Orpheus's descent into the underworld, the Gluck aria, representations of gender, questions bearing on the relationship between the songs and narrative and between trauma and narrative. Yet the starting point for scholars seeking to analyze these song plays as

contributing to a specific genre is acknowledgment of distinct, performative criteria; there is no external, passive audience to witness the works. Salomon's conscious adoption of the genre therefore draws out the implications of Tillion's improvisation and the similar solution arrived at in representing a self in crisis. As Nancy asserts, hearing one's self places one "in an approach to the self." What he means by this odd phrase is discernible in the difference between the authority figures discussed here and the selves expressed through the voice: on the one hand, the naturalist and the voice coach who confer meaning, on the other, the *Muselmann*, the *Verfügbar*, and the exile. These selves exemplify the theater "from within," what the author of *L'espèce humaine* (*The Human Species*), Robert Anthelme, experienced as a political prisoner in a Nazi slave labor camp. In a short passage that begins with his hands feeling the shriveled skin of his thighs, his face assumes the expressionlessness of Daberlohn's Orphic mask; but the act of feeling his body occasions what the voice coach's empty mask could not perform: thought on a self whose theater was experienced from within. "Mon visage à moi, bouche fermée, yeux fermés... était un théâtre clos, et qui n'avait pas de spectateur" ("My own face, mouth shut, eyes shut . . . was a closed theater, which had no spectator" [my translation]; 123).

### Notes

1. I am grateful to the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., where I first began research on this article. My sincerest thanks to the final, anonymous reader whose comments and suggestions were invaluable. And my heartfelt gratitude to Kristin Bluemel, editor of *The Space Between*. Her faith in this project and her expert advice sustained me throughout the multiple revisions this article has undergone. All translations of quotations from Germaine Tillion's song play, *Le Verfügbar aux enfers*, and her account of her imprisonment in Ravensbrück are my own.
2. The most comprehensive work available on this subject is Rovit and Goldfarb's *Theatrical Performance during the Holocaust*. See also Rosen and Apfelbaum's *Bearing Witness* and Karas's *Music in Terezín 1941-1945*. Petraka's *Spectacular Suffering* and Schumacher's edited collection, *Staging the Holocaust*, treat mainly works created after the war.
3. See, for example, the chapter on songs from Sachsenhausen in Gilbert's *Music in the Holocaust*; Flam's *Singing for Survival* and "The Role of Singing in the Ghettos" also by Flam; and Kalisch's *Yes, We Sang!*.
4. While I propose that at least two aesthetic forms cut across these groups and languages, music from the camps, ghettos, and other contexts reflects at the same time, as Gilbert notes, "communities divided on the basis of power, wealth, class, language, and other factors. It was not only a medium for the discussion and documentation of social disparity, but also a place

where disparity was played out. . .” (4). Much of that ground is covered in Gilbert’s book and Tillion’s script further bears out this thesis. It still remains for scholars to examine specific amateur genres according to how the Holocaust redefined them and/or (re)invented them across the different communities. Hundreds of hybrid songs have survived and show that this kind of improvisation was widespread. Taken as a whole they count both as a practice and form in their own right. This article proposes that the same may be said for the song play. Acknowledging that it is important to take into account the disparities suffered more acutely by certain communities such as Jewish and Roma prisoners vis-à-vis political prisoners, this article does not analyze songs and song plays as a function of community differences except where this factor is foregrounded in the works themselves.

5. The inspiration for these works may have derived from these other contemporary forms but, as Flam notes in her discussion on hybrid songs from the Lodz ghetto, they were “unique in their content. Their musical language is derived from existing pre-war melodies or composed in the popular style of the Yiddish theater or Yiddish folk singing” (“The Role of Singing in the Ghettos” 142). By “burlesque” I mean a parodic or caricatural imitation often of a literary or dramatic work. As with the other genres, this kind of imitation flouts authority. Indeed, the purported origin of burlesque comedy was in tyranny; Epicharmus is said to have invented it in Syracuse under the tyrannies of Gelon and Heron between 467 and 466 B.C., regimes that are also associated with the invention of pantomimic dances because Syracusans were allegedly forbidden to speak and forced to use gestures to communicate (Farenga 1041).

6. Salomon’s song play is not, technically, Holocaust art in that it was not created in a camp, ghetto, or prison. As I discuss later, however, there is some speculation that one of the catalysts for *Life? or Theater?* was Salomon’s brief internment in the French camp, Gurs. Working on the two song plays in tandem, I place them within the somewhat broader category of the cultural heritage of the Holocaust.

7. I have altered the existing translation of “l’innommé” as “the nameless place” to “the unnamed.”

8. Delbo gauged the success of the performance of this work by the near professionalism with which each of the actors applied herself to her role “avec humilité,” “sans vanité,” and “sans se mettre en valeur” (“with humility,” “without vanity,” “without trying to push herself into the foreground” II: 95/171). The “miracle” that Delbo saw in the actors’ capacity to self-efface cannot though be read apart from the original death of identity I associate with the Auschwitz production of Molière’s comedy.

9. “Muselmann” and other songs may be listened to on the “Aleksander Kulisiewicz” webpage of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website under “Music of the Holocaust: Highlights from the Collection.”



The translation of Kulisiewicz's song comes from the liner notes to *Songs from the Depths of Hell* (produced by Peter Wortsman, Folkways Records 1979, FSS37700). As Kulisiewicz explains, "I became obsessed with that circus song ["*Szanghai*"]. I thought to myself, the camp is some sort of dark, perverted circus of sadists and miscreants. But here they don't hit you with inflated rubber clubs. Fellow prisoners looked like striped clowns, upon whom an entire menagerie was unleashed. . . . No one had to *pretend* to be dead" (qtd. on USHMM website). Kulisiewicz's vast collection of songs is now housed in the USHMM archives.

10. It is interesting to note that this song makes the *Muselmann* an active witness of his imminent demise at the same time that his listeners are made by him to witness his consciousness of self die in the dance. This song invites further examination of the performance of the *Muselmann* as witness. Primo Levi called *Muselmänner* in the context of postwar testimony "complete witnesses" because they were "the rule, we [the survivors] are the exception" (84).

11. In her account, *Ravensbrück*, Tillion describes how she wrote "a revue in the form of an operetta. . ." (149). This formulation suggests that she identified the dance numbers and popular songs with the contemporary musical revue but that she distinguished *The Verfügbar* from it because, like the operetta, *The Verfügbar* has an overarching narrative and, in addition to popular tunes, it includes the melodies of classical nineteenth-century music.

12. For more information on the song play and related forms, see Randel and Palisca (403-09).

13. Ballad plays were still a part of some community theatrical productions in England and the United States in the early twentieth century. Hampden's *Ballads and Ballad Plays* provides instructions on how to stage and perform these for local community entertainment. See also, MacKaye. In continental Europe, there is little evidence that the genre, in its original form, was practiced at the local level.

14. It is important to note that Tillion had a greater chance of surviving because she was not Jewish. Leichter was a Viennese socialist feminist who held a doctorate in political economy; during the war she was active in resisting Hitler's National Socialism. Camp authorities had discovered that a play was being performed in one of the barracks, which resulted in Leichter and other participants being selected for extermination shortly thereafter. After the war Tillion pursued a doctoral degree in history. She was active in seeking justice for the victims of the war and played an important role during the Algerian War, speaking out against French imprisonment and torture of Algerians and mediating the claims of Algerians for independence. The author of several books on Algeria, she taught at the *Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes* and received the Legion of Honor in 1999. She passed

away in April 2008 at the age of 100. See Lacouture, *Le témoignage est un combat* and Bromberger and Todorov, *Germaine Tillion*.

15. This position was deliberately sought, declares Tillion, “par patriotisme, le cas de beaucoup de Françaises” (“out of patriotism, the case for many of the French women”; *Ravensbrück* 148).

16. Tillion witnessed the disfiguring results of the medical experiments conducted on the Polish prisoners in Ravensbrück. When the French prisoners in the camp were rescued by the Swedish Red Cross, she was entrusted with undeveloped film taken clandestinely by some of the Polish victims to document the experiments. She had the film developed in Paris and sent it back to them. Her role in preserving a record of these medical experiments is documented along with the photographs archived at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

17. “Être Schmuckstück, cela consistait à se donner l’œil vitreux, les épaules tombantes, l’expression égarée des débris humains qu’à Ravensbrück on appelait ainsi. C’était dangereux...” (“To be [to act the role of] a Schmuckstück consisted in assuming the vitreous eyes, the slumped shoulders, the lost expression of human scraps, which is what they were called at Ravensbrück. It was dangerous. . .”; *Ravensbrück* 148).

18. Jacques Soullou notes that the anti-decorative discourse of, for example, Adolf Loos’s famous manifesto, “Ornament is Crime” (1911) coincided with the advent of European authoritarian nationalisms (*Le décoratif* 67). In addition, he writes that male authors see in women an ontological attachment to adornment, linked later in decorative discourse to their identification as a backward species or “an archaism, which, like the savage, is still under the hold of the ‘instinct to ornament’” (my translation; 45).

19. In March of 1945 Tillion’s mother perished in the gas chamber, another plausible reason why the song play remained unfinished. Ravensbrück was in every sense an extermination camp. Regular selections took place among the prisoners, who were transported elsewhere to gas chambers. In the early spring of 1945 the camp erected and put into use its own gas chamber.

20. There is one exception to Tillion’s exclusion of identifying information in the names. As there are two characters named Lulu, they are distinguished by where they come from: Lulu de Paris and Lulu de Colmar.

21. See, for example, Soullou: pattern is “non-signifying, the meaning in it is pure movement” (my translation; *Le livre* 106).

22. Another passage from Delbo resonates here. The declaration in her own language that all French prisoners were leaving the camp was music to her ears: “Nous allons en Suède. L’homme ne l’ai dit qu’une fois et la phrase se répète en nous, chante sur quelques notes atténuées toujours les mêmes, qui s’égrenent et recommencent” (“We are going to Sweden. The man said it only once, but this sentence echoes within us, like a subdued song composed of a couple of notes, always the same, dropping like pearls and

starting over again"; II: 180/222). In "dropping like pearls," the translator picked up on the connotations of "perler" in the verb "s'égrener."

23. This was also the case for the sing-songs or *Schallerabende* in Sachsenhausen, which, as Gilbert notes, consisted of small groups (107).

24. See Lacoue-Labarthe and Lyotard. Among the texts by Derrida that take up this topic, see "Qual Quelle: les sources de Valéry"; and for a related reading of alterity and language, see Kofman.

25. Nancy plays on the verb, *entendre*, which means both "to hear" and "to understand," when he says that understanding superimposes itself on listening.

26. This reading is in no way meant to suggest that Tillion's song play should not be performed on a public stage. In fact, it premiered on June 2, 2007 at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris.

27. Salomon was, however, soon to become a victim of Nazi Germany's extermination policies. In late September 1943 she was arrested by the Gestapo. She had married an Austrian Jewish refugee on June 17<sup>th</sup> the official record of which alerted the Gestapo to the couple's presence in the town of Villefranche. Salomon was deported with her husband to Auschwitz. Because she was four to five months pregnant, she was selected for and died in the gas chamber upon arrival on October 10, 1943. For more on Salomon's life, see Felstiner.

28. "Charlotte Salomon dared to mix autobiography with fiction, history with story, reality with imagination. A strategy that points to the complex relationship between the self, memory, and art, a strategy that posits the self as (re)invention, as performative act, constituted within representation. . . . She dared . . . to wander . . . across art and theater, literature and music" (Schmetterling 144).

29. Pollock, one suspects, is not alone in the belief that Salomon's work "is desperately miscalled a *Singspiel*" and resembles more "tragic opera" (63). As I will argue, Salomon revolutionized the song play because how she understood the genre corresponded to the process of the creation of *Life? or Theater?*.

30. For an historical overview of the German Jewish collective and its influence on Paula Lindberg and Salomon, see Steinberg (8-16).

31. Eyewitness testimony of Salomon's creative process substantiates the artist's statement that the images and texts originated in tunes. She "painted all the time, always while humming," recalled the owner of the hotel La Belle Aurore where Salomon stayed and completed *Life? or Theater?* (Felstiner 141-42).

32. Most of the theatrical productions of Salomon's work are adaptations such as *Company of Angels: The Story of Charlotte Salomon*, a mask and puppet production without words by Bob Frith for the Horse + Bamboo Theatre Company; *Life? or Theatre?* with book and lyrics by Elise Thoron

and music by Gary S. Fagin; *With Dream Awakened Eyes*, a one hour solo performance piece by Ellen W. Kaplan. On August 25, 2007, the Jewish Museum in Berlin projected on a large outdoor screen the entire picture cycle to musical accompaniment. *The Actors Rehearse the Story of Charlotte Salomon* by David Bridel and Penny Kreitzer, directed by Jonathan Rest premiered at Shakespeare & Co. in June 2009. This production, a play within a play, covers the botched attempt to stage *Life? or Theater?* in Jerusalem in 1982. The play was to star Jenny Kreitzer as Charlotte and Paula Lindberg, Salomon's stepmother, as, of course, herself. Lindberg, who at that time had control of Salomon's estate, insisted on excluding entirely the role of the voice coach despite this character's centrality. These examples among others indicate the challenges involved in staging a work that resists public presentation. Other attempts to make Salomon's song play available to the public include installations of the paintings, but given constraints of wall space, the limited selection, and placement of images, these have not always produced satisfactory results. See Greenberg's excellent study, "The Aesthetics of Trauma" (148-66).

33. Wolfsohn as Daberlohn is shown in the song play at work on this treatise. A month after Salomon left Berlin for France, Wolfsohn fled to London where he lived until his death in 1962. He taught voice and was known as a charismatic teacher—his students called him AW(E). Folkways Records recorded his students' experiments in extended vocal techniques (1956, FWO6123) and he was the subject of a 1958 BBC documentary. He was also the main theorist behind the Roy Hart Theatre founded just shortly after his death. His main treatises, *Orpheus, or the Way to a Mask* (1938) and *The Bridge* (1947), remain unpublished. See Newham. Few studies of Salomon's song play devote much room to Wolfsohn's work and legacy perhaps because in the 467 scenes in which he is featured in *Life? Theater?*, Salomon herself frequently treats her character, Daberlohn, mockingly. That is not to say that she did not make serious, critical use of his work. See Timms (106-07, 110-11).

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