

The Republic of Sound: Listening to Florence at the Threshold of the Renaissance

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THE ACOUSTIC ART OF CITY-BUILDING: For the Italian futurists of the early twentieth century, the industrial noise of an increasingly mechanized city represented the cleansing power of sound as part of a multisensorial assault on the contemporary urban condition. The whirs, bangs, rumbles, and hums generated by the countless currents and machines that would set the modern city in perpetual motion—trams, trains, and automobiles—would, according to Futurism’s founder, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, wash away the nearly silent “feeble prayers” of the old shipping canal and the “creaking bones of the sickly palaces.”

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Those sounds belonged to a static, stultifying Italy whose museums were the artistic slaughterhouses of the present and the graveyards of a long-dead cultural heritage.¹ Marinetti set the murmur of a moribund past against the earsplitting violence of a future careening on the near horizon. It was sound that could symbolically represent and actually accompany both the demolition and the rebuilding of a city, as well as the intensifying speed that would characterize modern urban life.

By the later twentieth century those very sounds would come to represent everything that was wrong with the soundscape of the modern city. Instead of a blasting sonic purge, the sonic effusion of mechanical production and vehicular speed had become a confusing and damaging noise to the sound environmentalists who made up the World Soundscape Project (WSP).² If Marinetti enthusiastically drank the factory's untreated sludge, composer R. Murray Schafer wanted to transform its acoustic cacophony into a more salubrious system. He, along with his collaborators in the WSP, believed that an urban soundscape was something to be created by and for a city as part of its aural, social, and environmental well-being.³ They listened with a certain nostalgia to the lost sounds of the preindustrial city, which provided a model for constructing an urban soundscape on aesthetic principles that would supplant industrial noise. However, what linked the Futurist writer and the modern classical composer was the understanding of industrial noise as a pure sign, bereft of any specific content. For Marinetti that sign was to be filled with, and for Schafer it was the meaningless effect of, the relentless power of mechanical production.

1. "Poi il silenzio divenne più cupo. Ma mentre ascoltavamo l'estenuato borbottio, di preghiere del vecchio canale e lo scricchiolar dell'ossa dei palazzi moribondi sulle loro barbe di umida verdura, noi udimmo subitaneamente ruggire sotto le finestre gli automobili famelici. . . . Musei: cimiteri! . . . Identici, veramente, per la sinistra promiscuità di tanti corpi che non si conoscono. Musei: dormitori pubblici in cui si riposa per sempre accanto ad esseri odiati o ignoti! Musei: assurdi macelli di pittori e scultori che varino trucidandosi ferocemente a colpi di colori e di linee, lungo le pareti contese!" Filippo T. Marinetti, "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism," in *Art in Theory, 1900–1990*, ed. C. Harrison and P. Wood (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 146, 148. Marinetti's *Fondazione e manifesto del futurismo* was first published in the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909.

2. The WSP was founded by R. Murray Schafer as an educational and research project at Simon Fraser University. See <http://www.sfu.ca/~truax/wsp.html>. It was followed by the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology, whose "members represent a multi-disciplinary spectrum of individuals engaged in the study of the social, cultural and ecological aspects of the sonic environment." See <http://wfae.proscenia.net/>.

3. Schafer's pioneering work on the conception of the soundscape as a historical and sociological category, first published in 1977, can be found in a revised edition in R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT, 1993).

In the twenty-first century the technological currents that move, warm, cool, and connect our urban environments are subject to the increasingly silent power of electronic systems. Unwanted sound is defined negatively as noise and subject to regulation, but was it always like this? Was the sonic world of the early modern city so radically different from the one we have inherited from the Industrial Revolution? Was it as satisfyingly harmonious and universally appreciated as we might assume? I would suggest that Marinetti's belief in the creative and destructive power of sound and Schafer's belief that an urban soundscape could and should be consciously constructed were, in fact, the fundamental—if often clashing—building blocks of a city's acoustic regime. I would also add that all such sounds in the premodern city were burdened with meaning and were never purely beautiful, creative, or destructive. All sounds contained within them an ambivalent power to attract and repel listeners, and their meaning depended on precisely who was listening, what was being communicated, when such sounds were heard, and from where such sounds emerged. The urban soundscape was always a fluid phenomenon experienced simultaneously as comforting music and disquieting noise.⁴

As a result, the functioning of the soundscape and its subversion, the harmonics of a well-governed city and the discordant noises of its restless inhabitants, were opposing extremes of the way in which sound was at the heart of the production of civic society and urban space. The soundscape united the two fundamental elements that constitute a city but that are often fractured into an unhappy dislocation: the city as physical phenomenon, a collection of buildings surrounded by a wall and located in space (the *urbs*), and the city as a social dynamic, a collection of people gathered together to live according to laws (the *civitas*). In practice, however, medieval and Renaissance writers collapsed both aspects of the city into the single term *civitas* and its vernacular derivations, so that both the social and the physical were always inextricably intertwined.⁵

4. Barry Blesser has argued recently that it is more accurate to speak of a "sonic eventscape" since sounds are the effects of things happening and are not a static pattern. I fully agree with the argument but have stuck with the term "soundscape" because of its usefulness in describing the repetitive sonic markers that define specific urban configurations.

5. This convention is demonstrated by the way in which medieval authors called Aristotle, by *autonomasia*, simply "the philosopher," just as they referred to Rome as "the city" (*urbs*), a usage with classical precedent. See Quintilian, *The Institutio oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. Harold Edgeworth Butler (London, 1921), 5.3.104: "it became common for the term *urbs*, though the proper name was not added, to be taken as signifying Rome." This usage has survived to this day. As an example, see Robert Hugo Kuhn Auty et al., *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 7 (Munich, 1977), col. 1006G. Rome was more commonly called an *urbs* than a *civitas* by medieval writers in Latin; a search of the database Library of Latin Texts, series A and B (Brepols Publishers), limited to 1200–1500, shows the usage

A remarkable example of this phenomenon is expressed in the depiction of the city of Florence in the Bigallo fresco of the Madonna della Misericordia in Florence (fig. 1). This image is often referred to as a representation of the state of the built environment around the mid-fourteenth century. However, it is rarely reproduced in its entirety. As a result, the much more complex system of symbolic signification at work in the image is lost because gathered within the protective embrace of the Virgin is the city of Florence. Walls inscribed with the words “civitas florentie” surround the jumble of buildings, some recognizable, but surrounding those walls is precisely the social body whose collective identity constitutes the city as a social phenomenon (fig. 2). And what makes this image so provocative is the way in which walls, bodies, and the Virgin’s cloak provide a succession of concrete, social, and spiritual layers of protection, all working in harmony. There is also a dramatic reversal of roles suggested, as the encircling bodies visually take on the defensive responsibility of walls, as if those bodies had

urbs Roma and *urbs Romana* and their variants to be more than nine times more common (168 vs. 18) than the usage *civitas Roma/na*. Similarly, Rome was sometimes said to be the only *urbs*. Isidore of Seville wrote that “the only ‘city’ (*urbs*) is Rome, and the others are towns (*oppida*).” See Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney (Cambridge, 2006), 9.4.41, 205. This had been enshrined in classical and postclassical Roman law, where Rome (and, in some special circumstances, Constantinople) alone was called *urbs* and the other cities of Italy were called *municipia*, a “term superseded by gradually analogous expressions (*oppidum, colonia, praefectura*)” and to which “*civitas*, and to a certain extent, *res publica*” were synonymous. See, Adolphe Berger, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law* (Philadelphia, 1953), s.v. “municipia,” 590. The *Digest* or *Pandects* also included various definitions of *urbs*, of which the most commonly cited was the jurist Marcellus’s quotation at 50.16.87: “As Alfenus said, ‘*urbs*’ means that part of ‘*Roma*’ which was surrounded by walls.” See Theodor Mommsen, Paul Krueger, and Alan Watson, eds., *The Digest of Justinian* (Philadelphia, 1985), 4:454. This, in turn, influenced the definitions of medieval and Renaissance Italian jurists. Among the most nuanced discussions is that of the fifteenth-century Veronese jurist Bartolomeo Cipolla, *In titulum De verborum et rerum significatione doctissima commentaria* (Lyon, 1551), ad D. 50.16.2, cols. 74–87 and especially question 4 (at no. 12, on col. 80), where Cipolla discusses whether the word *urbs* should be read solely as *urbs romana* or as any *civitas*. Understanding the distinction could often be crucial to juridical interpretation; for an example of this, see Robert Fredona, “Baldus de Ubaldis on Conspiracy and Treason (*Crimen laesae maiestatis*) in Late Trecento Florence,” in *The Politics of Law in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Essays in Honour of Lauro Martines*, ed. Lawrin Armstrong and Julius Kirshner (Toronto, 2011), 141–60, 144. In general and official usage, walled cities in late medieval Italy routinely called themselves *civitas* or its vernacular equivalents, not *urbs* (vernacular equivalents of which were exceedingly rare), even and especially within their walls; see, e.g., Federico Bambi, *Una nuova lingua per il diritto: Il lessico volgare di Andrea Lancia nelle provvisioni Fiorentine del 1355–7* (Milan, 2009), 406. The semantic distinction I am making between *urbs* and *civitas* represented two poles of the narrative construction and understanding of the city, but they were, in practice, integrated within a single term for the Italian medieval and early modern city, usually the Latin *civitas* or the Italian *città* or *cittade*. However, both concepts were, I believe, always entangled with and extractable from each other, as the following discussion will show. My thanks to Robert Fredona for helping me track down sources in order to disentangle the use of these terms.

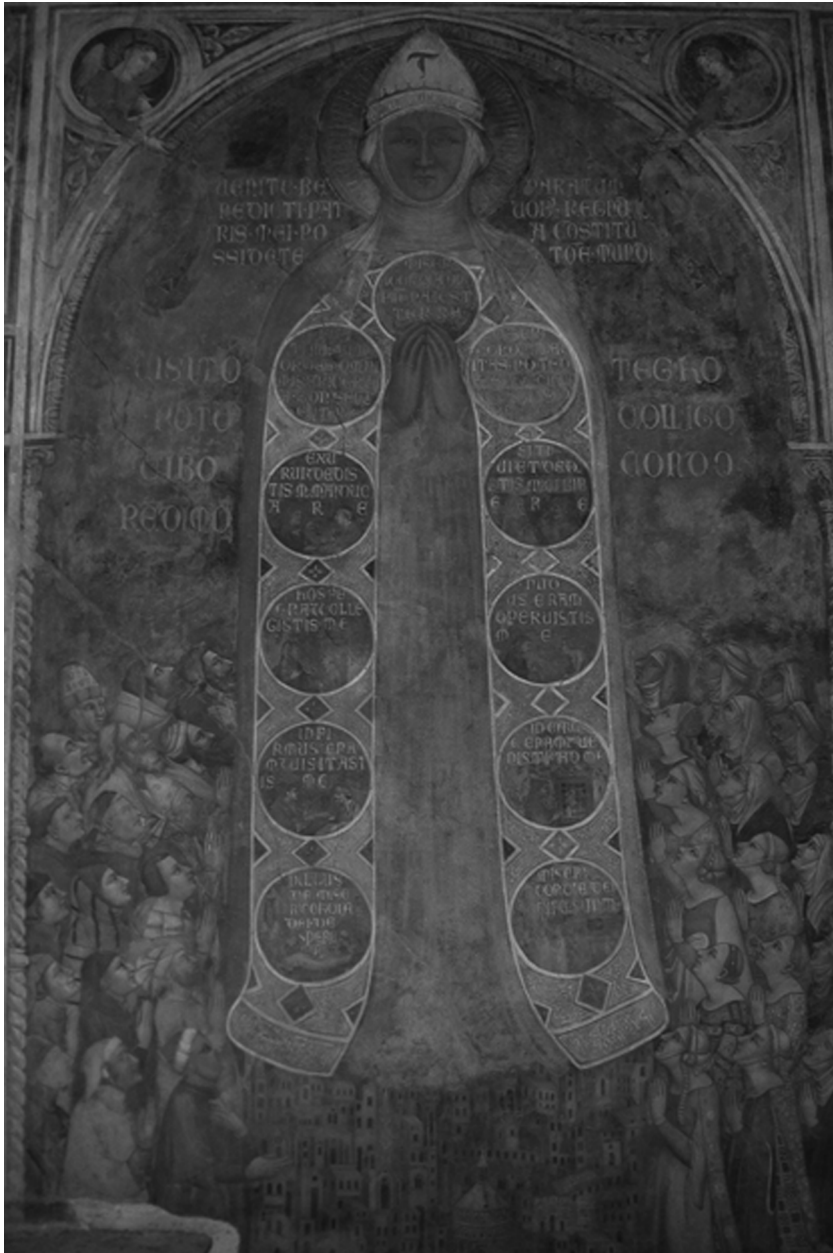


Figure 1. Madonna della Misericordia, Museo del Bigallo, Florence. Image in the public domain.
Color version available as an online enhancement.



Figure 2. Madonna della Misericordia, Museo del Bigallo, Florence, detail. Color version available as an online enhancement.

become the very stones with which the city was built. As a result, the image forcefully conflates the identity of the builders of the city (its inhabitants) and the material from which it is made—stones assembled into walls.

The soundscape, however, went even further in showing how both the concrete and the social city derived their identity from and were produced by each other in a dialectic that was ceaselessly constitutive of urban form and civic life. To make the point historically, I would like to refer to two texts, both written by the Florentine poet Antonio Pucci (ca. 1310–88).⁶ Pucci served as an official bell ringer of Florence as well as one of its heralds, which meant that he was something of an expert on the city's soundscape, ensconced as he was at the center of the city as a noisemaking machine. However, as a popular urban poet he was also very sensitive to the way in which the more random and chaotic social relations between people in Florence also contributed to what I define as the “acoustic art of city-building.”

In his fourteenth-century *zibaldone*, which was a compilation of various narratives and textual fragments that served as a repertoire for itinerant storytellers,

6. An autograph copy of Antonio Pucci's *zibaldone* can be found in Biblioteca Laurenziana, Laurenziano-tempiano 2. See also Antonio Pucci's poem, *Proprietà di Mercato Vecchio*, in *Rimatori del Trecento*, ed. Giuseppe Corsi (Turin, 1969), 870–80.

Pucci describes the mythical origins of the ancient city of Thebes: “Amphion was the son of Jove and husband of Niobe and builder of the city of Thebes. He was an expert and very well educated and with the help of the sciences he ordered and made that city, especially through the science of music because he and his wife played and sang so sweetly that, according to the poets, the stones picked themselves up and moved and arranged themselves one on top of the other. And in this way he walled the city” (fig. 3).⁷ After recording this story, Pucci then does what any self-respecting fourteenth-century Florentine would do: he immediately appeals to his fellow erstwhile compatriot Dante for clarification on the story’s significance. Using the *Commedia* as a compendium of knowledge, Pucci finds in the *Inferno*, canto 32, that Dante had appealed to the same muses of the human sciences that he believed had helped Amphion to build Thebes: “But may those ladies aid my verse / who aided Amphion to wall in Thebes / so that the telling may not be diverse from the fact.”⁸ Dante’s narrator makes this appeal so that the powers that helped Amphion might also give him the same rhetorical power to construct, through words in this case, the enveloping and protective textual frame around the Hell into which he was descending. Pucci, quite capable of spotting a musical metaphor when he saw one, concludes that the stones of Amphion did not actually move and transform themselves into walls at all but that the city was

7. “Amfione fu figliuol di Giove e marito di Niobe et edificatore della città di Thebe edera molto sperto e molto scenziato e coll’aiuto delle scienze ordinò et fece quella città ispezialmente per la scienza della musica però ch’egli et la moglie sonavano et cantavano sì dolcemente che secondo i poeti le pietre per se medesime si moveano et aconciavansi l’una sopra l’altra, et in questo modo murò la città”: Biblioteca Laurenziana, Laurenziano-tempiano 2, fol. 103r. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own. Pucci’s version of the story is not completely accurate. Amphion, son of Zeus and Antiope, was abandoned along with his twin brother Zethus to die on Mount Cithaeron, but they were saved by a shepherd. Amphion became a great musician and singer, and along with his brother and reunited mother they built and fortified Thebes, “the huge blocks of stone forming themselves into walls at the sound of Amphion’s lyre.” See *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Amphion and Zethus,” <http://www.britannica.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EBchecked/topic/21573/Amphion>. For biographical information on Antonio Pucci, see Domenico Maria Manni, “Notizie istoriche intorno ad Antonio Pucci,” in *Delle poesie di Antonio Pucci celebre versificatore fiorentino*, Delizie degli eruditi toscani 3, ed. Fra Ildefonso di San Luigi (Florence, 1772–75), iii–xxii. For a discussion of the performance and contents of such texts in Florence in the fifteenth century, see Dale V. Kent, *Cosimo de’ Medici and the Florentine Renaissance: The Patron’s Oeuvre* (New Haven, CT, 2000), 39–93. For his position within Florentine merchant and textual culture, see William Robins, “Antonio Pucci, guardiano degli atti della Mercanzia,” *Studi e problemi di critica testuale* 61 (2000): 29–70, and “Vernacular Textualities in Fourteenth-Century Florence,” in *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity*, ed. F. Somerset and N. Watson (University Park, PA, 2003), 112–31. See also the introduction to Antonio Pucci, *Le noie*, ed. Kenneth McKenzie (Princeton, NJ, 1931).

8. “Ma quelle donne aiutino il mio verso / ch’aiutaro Anfione a chiuder Tebe / sì che dal fatto il dir non sia diverso”: Dante, *Inferno* 32, 10–12.



Figure 3. Detail of the Bonsignori map of Florence, 1584. (Source: Harvard Map Collection). Color version available as an online enhancement.

protected and maintained by the wisdom and good judgment displayed by Amphion.

In doing so, Pucci was following a general trend in Dante scholarship that argued that Amphion's musical ability to assemble stones into walls was a metaphor for his supreme gracefulness as a speaker by which he could motivate builders to construct the city's walls. In Jacopo della Lana's commentary on the *Divine Comedy*, written between 1324 and 1328, the author claims that the workers refused any payment other than the sweet sound of his voice for building the city.⁹ Guido da Pisa's contemporary commentary identified the stones as symbolizing recalcitrant bodies, men who were enticed to obey laws and follow customs simply by the enchanting sound of reason itself.¹⁰ In the 1330s, Andrea

9. Luciano Scarabelli, ed., *Comedia di Dante degli Allaghieri col Commento di Jacopo della Lana bolognese* (Bologna, 1866–67), 488.

10. Vincenzo Cioffari, ed., *Guido da Pisa's Expositiones et Glose super Comediam Dantis; or, Commentary on Dante's Inferno* (Albany, NY, 1974), 668.

Lancia claimed that although the story recounts how Amphion played and sang so sweetly with the help of the muses, this was a figurative image and that it was not the songs or the music but the sound of Amphion's voice as a wise speaker that allowed the city to grow and prosper. For him it was the men of the city who were sweet and capable of being shaped, but they were also rugged like the stones guided into place by his words.¹¹ By the end of the fourteenth century, the commentary of the Anonimo Fiorentino could claim that artisans built the city without suffering any physical fatigue while they listened to the sonorous sounds of Amphion's lyre. The text goes on to declare that Amphion's sonic power was actually contained in his speaking voice, a voice capable of moving the souls of men to build what he desired.¹² In each case, Amphion's rhetorical power, the sheer eloquence of his voice, lay in motivating people, inciting souls to action, literally civilizing men into a particular urban social space—the *civitas*.

Pucci was subsequently able to make the connection between the acoustic metaphor expressed by the Amphion myth and what he read in Dante with what he saw and heard in the public sphere of the city square. In a poem he wrote about Florence's market square, the Piazza del Mercato (Mercato Vecchio), Pucci describes the riotous goings-on and noisy ebullience of the civic culture that flourished there, where all the messy elements that constitute urban society found a voice amid the chaotic architecture of commercial exchange. This jumbled acoustic narrative evokes the lively oral culture of a premodern city and was likely a poem recited, sung, copied, or repeated by professional singers in the city's public squares.¹³ Therefore, it was a poem representing one type of auditory environment through its performance in the context of another, making the soundscape both the subject and the medium of the narrative itself.

At first, Pucci's claim in the poem that no other piazza—those of Perugia and Siena being the examples invoked for comparison—exhibited either the abundance or the beauty of the Mercato Vecchio appears to be a typical example of the formulaic hyperbole of a Florentine partisan:

11. Alessandro Torri, ed., *L'ottimo commento della Divina commedia [Andrea Lancia]: Testo inedito d'un contemporaneo di Dante* (Pisa, 1827–29), 548–49.

12. Pietro Fanfani, ed., *Commento alla Divina Commedia d'Anonimo Fiorentino del secolo XIV, ora per la prima volta stampato a cura di Pietro Fanfani* (Bologna, 1866–74), 671.

13. As one of the most popular repertoires of professional storytellers in Florence, many of the poems in Pucci's *zibaldone* would likely have circulated aurally through the streets of the city, and he may have even performed them himself. For a discussion of the relationship between texts and oral performances in Florence, see Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici*, 41–93.

Ma queste e l'altre, se chiaro dicerno, But these and others [piazze], if I clearly discern,
 niente son di frutte e di bellezza are nothing compared to the fruits and the beauty
 e di ciò ch'a la gente dà governo. of the one that governs its people.¹⁴

Pucci goes on to say that this piazza, which filled him with the desire to sing of it in rhyme, is found in the city where he was born. Yet the nature of this beauty is mystifying to the reader when later in the poem Pucci describes what actually went on there. He gives very little sense of what the Mercato actually looked like, and throughout the centuries, ironically, this piazza has left the weakest visual imprint on the rhetoric and representation of Florentine urban space (fig. 4). Destroyed in the grand urban renewal projects of the nineteenth century, its legacy remains in various fragments. These fragments range from the meticulous planimetric reconstruction of the dense urban properties that surrounded the square, and the nostalgia evoked by the photographic documentation of its demolition, to its linguistic commemoration in the neoclassical inscription on the triumphal arch of the present-day Piazza della Repubblica, which celebrates modernity's triumph over the squalor of a nineteenth-century urban slum (fig. 5).¹⁵

In light of the fact that the market was defined by the activities that took place within it, it was more important for Pucci to describe those things about the piazza that struck the tangle of his senses. In the piazza itself, well-stocked food vendors jostled against a vibrant commerce of fraud.¹⁶ Moneylenders' tables stood next to gaming tables. The shrieks of insults traded between garrulous female vendors clashed with the sounds of mocking banter aimed at willing young girls.¹⁷ Gentlemen and ladies looked on as swindlers and sellers, prostitutes and pimps, cantankerous rustics and *bon vivants*, delivery boys and scabrous beggars all became embroiled in noisy scuffles.¹⁸ One hears the wheezing, puffing, and

14. Corsi, *Rimatori*, 871; translation is mine.

15. On the destruction and rebuilding of the Mercato Vecchio neighborhood, see Luciano Artusi and Vincenzo Giannetti, "A vita nuova": *Ricordi e vicende della grande operazione urbanistica che distrusse il centro storico di Firenze* (Florence, 1997); Guido Carocci, *Il Mercato Vecchio di Firenze: Ricordi e curiosità di storia e d'arte* (Florence, 1975) and *Firenze scomparsa: Ricordi storico-artistici* (Rome, 1979); Carlo Cresti, *Firenze, capitale mancata: Architettura e città dal piano Poggi a oggi* (Milan, 1995); Elena Tempestini, Dante Mattani, and Guido Carocci, *Il Mercato vecchio: Quaranta immagini del centro di Firenze com'era sino al secolo scorso* (Florence, 1997).

16. "E sempre quivi ha gran baratteria: / contentanvisi molto e barattieri / perchè v'è pien di lor mercatantia, / cioè di prestatori e rigattieri, / tavole di contanti e dadaiuoli, / e d'ogni cosa ch'a lor fa mestieri": Corsi, *Rimatori*, 872.

17. "vi stanno trecche: / diciam di quelle con parole brutte / che tutto il dì; per due castagne secche / garrono insieme chiamandosi putte . . . vengon le forsette con panieri / di fichi, d'uve, di pere e di pesche / se le moteggi, ascoltan volentieri": *ibid.*, 872–73.

18. "Gentili uomini e donne v'ha dal lato, / che spesso veggion venire a le mani / le trecche e' barattier c'hanno giucato. / E meretrice v'usano e ruffiani, / battifancelli, zanaiuoli e gaglioffi / e i tignosi, scabbiosi e cattani": *ibid.*, 874.



Figure 4. Piazza del Mercato Vecchio, ca. 1890. (Photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz—Max-Planck-Institut).

curses of those who recoil from the exchange of violent blows.¹⁹ And if the occasional murder shattered the beauty of the piazza, Pucci writes, “one could still contentedly fritter away the time and sing” as arrogant youths of the city’s festive brigades—known as *potenze*—gambled and dined next to a wretched humanity that went naked and begging in the middle of so much alimentary abundance and acoustic mayhem.²⁰

In the midst of these coarse and, at times, questionable activities, it is difficult to discern just what it was about the piazza that Pucci found so compelling. Such apparent chaos at first appears to completely undermine Pucci’s claim for its paramount beauty. Historically, however, the Mercato Vecchio figured most prominently in the daily lives of Florentines. Legally, it was among the oldest and most important public spaces of the city. It was also the geographic center, the site of the Roman forum, the zone of prostitution, and the heart of daily social life. To

19. “E vedesi chi perde con gran soffi / biastimar con la mano a la mascella / e ricever e dar di molti ingoffi”: *ibid.*

20. “E talor vi si fa con le coltella / ed uccide l’un l’altro, e tutta quanta / allor si turba quella piazza bella / E spesso ancor vi si trastulla e canta, / però che d’ogni parte arriva quivi / chi è vagabondo e di poco s’ammanta. / E per lo freddo v’ha di sì cattivi / che nudi stan con le calcagna al culo / perché si son di vestimenti privi / e mostran spesso quel che mostra il mulo; / pescano spesso a riposata lenza / perch’è ciascun di danar netto e pulo”: *ibid.*, 874–75.



Figure 5. Piazza della Repubblica. (Photo: Sean Nelson). Color version available as an online enhancement.

Pucci, it was this piazza that was more valuable, more dignified, more esteemed, and more precious than any other piazza, not because of its visual beauty but because of its functional virtue.²¹

Pucci makes a remarkable and revealing statement in this poem. What exactly does he mean when he declares that the most beautiful square in the world literally “gives government” (*di ciò ch’a la gente dà governo*) to the people? Beauty, in this instance, is linked not to the visual order of urban space but to the power of urban space to instigate, however imperfectly, collective self-governance. The Mercato was beautiful because it was a dynamic process rather than a compositional unity. Not only did the piazza, as Pucci states, nourish the city, but it also communicated spatially how people ought to behave as a political community. Even the disruptive power of murder could be contained by the stubborn refusal to interrupt the practices of daily life, to remain in the square, to continue to sing and counter the momentum of the internecine violence that could plague Italian cities. This kind of beauty was not formally pure, and it was hardly connected to

21. “*sí ch’è d’ogni altra piazza il pregio serra*”: *ibid.*, 871. The term he uses, “*pregio*,” connotes economic, moral, and aesthetic value.

divine beauty, but it was nevertheless the product of a morally resilient community.²² In “giving government,” urban space took part directly in helping to regulate social interaction by forcing it out onto the urban stage where inhabitants were both interested actors and an engaged audience. The built environment therefore played a crucial role in enabling the very self-governing civic society that Florentine republican regimes claimed to represent. I would argue that, for Pucci, the piazza’s value as urban space lay in its direct involvement in civilizing urban society through a forced confrontation of social diversity that contained the potential to regulate itself.²³ The Mercato provided the space not for some impossible ideal of social cohesion but for the expansive inclusiveness of a more chaotic and heterogeneous civic belonging.

As a keen observer and participant in both the ideal and the real soundscapes of Florence, therefore, Pucci was able to simultaneously hold two seemingly contradictory notions of the city as a harmonious work of art and a discordant dynamic clatter of conflict and commerce. Such a city was defined precisely by the ability of its citizens to engage with an imperfectly functioning social and architectural configuration while imagining that it also contained perfect sociospatial relations. However, these local communicative social practices were as difficult to maintain as they were to police in a city like Florence, where every sound could matter and where anyone wishing to negotiate the dynamics of exchange in the market square had to be an extremely acute listener.²⁴

THE URBAN SOUNDSCAPE

The early modern city was continually shaped by the regular rhythms of its soundscape, which linked the temporal and the spatial construction of both urban space and the communities that defined themselves through it.²⁵ From morning to evening, the Florentine day was punctuated by the sounds of both

22. It is worth noting that the violence of murder is linguistically countered by singing in the poem, which recalls the civilizing power of music established by myth of Amphion.

23. Leon Battista Alberti, in his treatise on architecture, makes a similar case when discussing the classical forum as a public space where the gaze of elders helps to discipline the actions of youths. One of the functions of the piazza, therefore, was to provide sight lines for just such disciplinary vision. See Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 263.

24. For an example of the importance of being aware of the circulation of information through face-to-face social relations that characterized localized soundscapes and on Paolo da Certaldo’s advice, see Niall Atkinson, “A Guide to Listening in Renaissance Florence,” in *On Listening*, ed. Angus Carlyle and Cathy Lane (London, 2013).

25. The soundscape as a historical phenomenon was developed by researchers involved in the WSP. See esp. Schafer, *Soundscape*.

civic and sacred bells, the loudest man-made sound anyone would have heard in the preindustrial city.²⁶ These bells permeated the city within a sonic exchange that regulated sleep and work and called people to prayer, meals, celebrations, councils, executions, and bed. Although they contained an important disciplinary function, the power of bells lay primarily in their ability to create and maintain urban communities, to unite them in space, as they choreographed the theaters of everyday life.²⁷ Drawing on the ancient power of religious bells to assemble bodies in space and to ward off evil, the civic bells of Florence were put to the task of creating a universal civic community that was distinct from, but in harmony with, the religious communities brought into being by the hierarchy of cathedral and parish bells.²⁸ Premodern European communities were, almost without exception, intimately tied to their bells, which in turn bound them to their urban environment. Bells lay at the intersection of popular expressions of communal identities and the disciplinary control of space by the state. As a result, tracing their echoes within urban history is critical to understanding the spatial construction of social relations in urban communities.

Control over the soundscape of Florence was a major preoccupation of successive republican administrations that attempted to ground their legitimacy in a variety of political maneuvers. In 1250, the first popular government reorganized

26. Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago, 1999), 49. Studies of bells and bell ringing constitute a wide-ranging corpus of texts. Some of the most useful in the present context are Percival Price, *Bells and Man* (Oxford, 1983), 134–83; Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *Die Geschichte der Stunde: Uhren und moderne Zeitordnung* (Vienna, 1992), published in English as *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders* (Chicago, 1996); Schafer, *Landscape*, 53–56; Renato Bordone, “Campane, trombe e carrocci nelle città del regno d’Italia durante il medioevo: Il ‘paessaggio sonoro’ delle città italiane nel medioevo,” in *Information, Kommunikation und Selbstdarstellung in mittelalterlichen Gemeinden*, ed. A. Haverkamp and E. Müller-Luckner (Munich, 1998), 85–102; Alain Corbin, *Les cloches de la terre: Paysage sonore et culture sensible dans les campagnes au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1994), published in English as *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside* (New York, 1998).

27. For analyses of the character of medieval and early modern time spaces, see Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, 1980), 29–52; and a critique of Le Goff’s thesis in Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour*, 217–87.

28. On the way in which the Florentine regime integrated itself acoustically with the sounds of the church as part of an urban strategy of legitimizing its role, see Niall Atkinson, “Sonic Armatures: Constructing an Acoustic Regime in Renaissance Florence,” *Senses and Society* 7, no. 1 (2012): 39–52. The precise ringing sequences for the bells of the Florentine cathedral are contained in an eighteenth-century edition of a thirteenth-century ordinal transcribed in Franklin Toker, *On Holy Ground: Liturgy, Architecture and Urbanism in the Cathedral and the Streets of Medieval Florence* (London, 2009), 265–84. On Florentine religious bells, see also Richard C. Trexler, *Synodal Law in Florence and Fiesole, 1306–1518* (Vatican City, 1971), 30–31. On the ritual practices associated with the Florentine cathedral in general, see Marica Tacconi, *Cathedral and Civic Ritual in Late Medieval and Renaissance Florence: The Service Books of Santa Maria del Fiore* (Cambridge, 2005).

the city legally, spatially, and acoustically. New laws regulated the height of private defensive towers that powerful clans used to maintain their control over city neighborhoods. New flags were issued to the newly defined jurisdictional wards, and a bell to assemble the entire urban community was cast.²⁹ Following a wave of political reform in 1293, the second popular government, which still lacked a tower in which to place it, set aside funds to repair an existing bell and cast a new one to ring from their temporary meeting place in properties belonging to the wealthy Cerchi family.³⁰ Clearly, even without a permanent architecture of government, the regime still attempted to ground its authority sonically in the city by ringing its own distinct secular bell and not borrowing the sound of a nearby church. Finally, in 1344, the third popular government, which came to power in the wake of fiscal and political crises, transferred the bell that called its councils together from the roof of the city's town hall, the Palazzo della Signoria (Palazzo Vecchio), to its tower "so that one heard better in the Oltrarno and throughout the entire city, that which was the noble sound of its great magnitude."³¹

One cannot underestimate the importance of casting a bell in the context of political conflict and reform. It was an extremely costly, complicated, and time-consuming undertaking.³² However, it was an essential component of the capacity of a government to establish its own unified voice and open up lines of mass communication. When the communal bell rang, citizens were required to assemble in the main square (Piazza della Signoria), an act that legitimized, protected, and celebrated their republic. By the time of the Ciompi Revolt in 1378, the government of Florence had constructed an acoustic regime that was based on an exchange of rings between its four principal bells, located in the towers of its two

29. For a description of this regime, see Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica* (Parma, 1990), 1:326–29 (bk. 7, chap. 39). On the law against the height of private towers, see Romolo Caggese, *Statuti della repubblica fiorentina* (Florence, 1999), 2:305 (bk. 4, rubric 41).

30. Aurelio Gotti, *Storia del Palazzo Vecchio in Firenze* (Florence, 1889), 29. The Chronicler Dino Compagni's reference to this bell in 1301 suggests that it was hanging on or at the Cerchi family palace. However, at the time he was writing his history, it had already been transferred to the Palazzo della Signoria. For a transcription of the council deliberations on the bell, see Alessandro Gherardi, *Le consulte della repubblica fiorentina: Dall'anno MCCLXXX al MCCXCVIII* (Florence, 1896), 4:428. Other funds were set aside for the repair of a number of different bells around this time.

31. Villani, *Nuova cronica*, bk. 13, chap. 36. For a historical account of these three popular governments, see John Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200–1575* (Malden, MA, 2006), 66–72, 81–87, 132–39.

32. On historical methods of bell casting, see Elisabetta Neri, *De campanis fundendis: La produzione di campane nel medioevo tra fonti scritte ed evidenze archeologiche* (Milan, 2006). Bells were still a major but necessary communal expense in nineteenth-century France. See Corbin, *Village Bells*, 80–93.

centers of authority: the courts of the Palazzo del Podestà (Bargello) and the legislative and executive councils housed in the Palazzo della Signoria (Palazzo Vecchio; fig. 6).³³ This daily cycle of sounds, which developed in an increasingly coherent and complex form and is reflected in successive redactions of the city's statutes, manifests one of the most important features of communal bell ringing in Florence.

The sounds that these bells made did not exist as abstract points in time but were conceived and experienced as a series of interlocking dialogues across space between judicial, legislative, and spiritual authorities. As I have argued elsewhere, the government was careful not to create sonic discord and integrated its daily ringing exchanges into the spaces between the cycle of sacred sounds that marked the time of prayer, mass, and labor.³⁴ The resulting soundscape therefore manifested a harmonic unity between church and state. A series of exchanges between towers marked the end of the dawn mass and the beginning of the day.³⁵ The hours of prayer were announced from the cathedral and the Badia, the city's venerable Benedictine monastery. The opening and closing of the courts, announced by the Montanina, was enveloped within the ring of the bell of justice (Leone), while the onset of darkness was marked by a series of rings between the Bargello and the Palazzo della Signoria that guided the city's inhabitants from their evening activities to their nighttime repose.

Such a strategy, I believe, was a way of harnessing the power of the ringing of bells, already deeply ingrained in the Christian sacred soundscape, to unite and assemble people, to eradicate differences, and to harmonize the conflicts between institutions and communities. This was in stark contrast to the urban strategies of popular regimes to reorganize the city spatially through new political jurisdictions, the demolition of defensive towers, the creation of public thoroughfares, and the exclusionary laws suffered by magnates that deprived them of access to political office.³⁶ Instead of such antagonistic urban strategies, the soundscape de-

33. The four bells are named in the 1355 and 1415 statutes. The "Leone" and the "Popolo" hung in the Palazzo della Signoria, while the Bargello housed the "Montanina" and the bell of the "Podestà." See Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASF), Statuti del commune di Firenze 13, fol. 32r; Michael Kluch, ed., *Statuta populi et communis Florentiae: Publica auctoritate, collecta, castigata et praeposita anno salutis MCCCCXV* (Freiburg, 1778), 545.

34. See Atkinson, "Sonic Armatures." Sacred sounds sounded primarily from the bell towers of the cathedral and the Benedictine Badia.

35. The following discussion of Florentine civic bell ringing has been assembled from the city's statutes, redacted in three editions. See ASF, Statuti 13, fol. 32v (rubric 181); Caggese, *Statuti*, 1:31, 35; 2:13, 33, 61, 68, 184, 208; Kluch, *Statuta*, 545.

36. On the antagonistic urbanism of the Florentine republic, see Niall Atkinson, "Architecture, Anxiety, and the Fluid Topographies of Renaissance Florence" (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2009), 41–87, 129–38.



Figure 6. Bell towers of the Bargello (*left*) and the Palazzo Vecchio (*right*). Color version available as an online enhancement.

veloped by the Florentine government formed part of a plan to create the appearance of a harmonic regime of inclusiveness. It was a subtle, syncopated rhythm that respected the sacred marking of time and prayer, giving a distinct acoustic imprint to various times when, and spaces in which, these tasks were performed. It was also characterized by a shared orchestration of sacred and secular activities (fig. 7). It was the Badia that marked the hours of prayer and the beginning of the workday, but it was a civic bell, the Leone, that rang the triple sequence of the evening prayer of the *Ave Maria*, sonically binding a political community to a spiritual one. The message of the acoustic regime was one of harmony and unity between bodies in space, whose movements were the building blocks of an urban ideal of social peace.

This was only the foundational acoustic matrix that gave Florentine urban spaces, like any comparable city, their particularly dense cadences. It does not include the ringing of all the bells of the commune, *a martello*, to mark the ceremonial entrance of the new executive council of the priorate into the Palazzo della Signoria, which took place every two months.³⁷ This was a solemn affair in which the randomly elected officials donned their red robes as they were assimilated, visually and aurally, into the governing apparatus of the state.³⁸ Nor does it include the bells that rang to accompany the movement of civic and religious processions or the alarm relay for fires, insurrections, or preparations of war. It does not account for the celebratory announcements of military victories or the election of popes, or the death tolls of clergy, homicides, executions, or excommunications, or even the declarations of treaties, rebels of the state, news from abroad, or the passing of new laws.³⁹ So much depended on the sound of bells to communicate official messages that the city's airwaves were as meticulously policed as its streets. Bells ringing out of sync, however, created strange and terrifying spaces, causing chaos and confusion not unlike the pernicious threat of rumor and innuendo. Before the technologies of modern mass media, the dissemination of official information was integrated into this acoustic regime, a nonverbal language that was, unlike written texts, universally understood. Consequently, it allows us access to a historical dialogue that penetrated down to the lowest orders of society.

37. Kluch, *Statuta*, 545.

38. On the ritual silence of the priors within the economy of the government's sonic regime, see Ulrich Meier, "Die Sicht- und Hörbarkeit der Macht: Der Florentiner Palazzo Vecchio im Spätmittelalter," in *Zwischen Gotteshaus und Taverne: Öffentliche Räume in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Susanne Rau and Gerd Schwerhoff (Cologne, 2004), 229–71.

39. Atkinson, "Fluid Topographies," 319–20.



Figure 7. Bell towers of the Bargello (left), Badia (center), and the Palazzo Vecchio (right). (Photo: Sean Nelson).

As an example of the properly functioning system of official aural communication in Florence, which was supposed to radiate from center to periphery, from government to citizens, consider the events surrounding the defeat of the city of Arezzo by Florentine forces in 1384, as it was recorded in a contemporary anonymous diary.⁴⁰ On the evening of November 18, the news of victory reached Florence by letter, and the city began celebrating by lighting bonfires. The next morning, toward the end of the hour of terce, the commune's bells rang to assemble the citizens (Popolo) in the main square, the Piazza della Signoria. The city's heralds were sent out to order all shops to close, while the government itself assembled on the *ringhiera*, the platform built in front of the Palazzo della Signoria that served as a stage for the political spectacles of state, where they were accompanied by the sounding of the commune's trumpets (fig. 8).⁴¹ Then the bells of the palace rang a second sequence, and this time they were answered by

40. Anthony Molho and Franek Sznura, eds., *Alle bocche della piazza: Diario di anonimo fiorentino, 1382–1401* (Florence, 1986), 54–55.

41. On the rhetorical meaning of the *ringhiera* as the liminal site of ritual political discourse, see Stephen J. Milner, "Citing the *Ringhiera*: The Politics of Place and Public Address in Trecento Florence," *Italian Studies* 55 (2000): 53–82.



Figure 8. Piazza della Signoria. (Photo by author). Color version available as an online enhancement.

the bells of the cathedral and the Badia, after which all the bells of the rest of the city's churches rang to signal the collective, official jubilation of a united and victorious city (fig. 9). The festivities culminated with crowds filling the piazza to watch celebratory contests of jousting horsemen.

This account clearly depicts the official dynamics of civic celebration, which were characterized by opposing directions of movement. As sounds—bells, trumpets, and voices—radiated out from the center of political power to outlying neighborhoods, bodies were drawn toward the central spaces of the city, where they fulfilled the promise of the sonic construction of social unity through the collective celebration of the power of the republic. Both government and citizens had specific roles to play, which were organized through a sequence of carefully choreographed aural signifiers.

Only sound had the capacity to make authority present, real, and universal as a series of omnidirectional waves radiating out from the center in all directions. Rather than a one-way monologue, it was an attempt to unify the disparate localities of the city into a common and connected aural space through a system of call and response. The call went out from civic authorities to religious institutions and then prompted the response from parish churches around the city. It represented an attempt to counter the decidedly uncontrollable networks of local communications that continuously traversed the city and always threat-



Figure 9. Piazza della Signoria from the Palazzo Vecchio. (Photo by author). Color version available as an online enhancement.

ened to undermine the regime's universalizing pretenses, that is to say, its claim to speak to and for everyone. In this way, the audible environment was a way to know how well the state was functioning, so that mutations in its usual sonic rhythm were indexes to significant developments, to the secret realities and strategies that lay behind official acts of state, or to the imminent danger of political instability.

THE SOUND OF REVOLT

On the morning of July 20, 1378, a certain Nardo di Camaldoli entered the church of Santa Maria del Carmine at the southern edge of the Oltrarno neighborhood of Florence and began to ring its bells.⁴² Almost immediately the bells of the nearby church of San Frediano rang in response. What witnesses then heard was a successive relay of eight ringing church bell towers that engulfed the city in a terrifying acoustic siege (fig. 10).⁴³ The dramatic events that were set in

42. Gino Scaramella, *Il tumulto dei Ciompi: Cronache e memorie* (Bologna, 1917), 22.

43. Alessandro Stella was the first to point out the way in which the Ciompi surrounded the city center with the sound of parish bells. See Alessandro Stella, *La Révolte des Ciompi: Les hommes, les lieux, le travail* (Paris, 1993), 69–73. I would like to thank Lawrin Armstrong for referring me to Stella's text and initiating my long journey into the soundscape of Renaissance Florence. Most contemporary accounts of the Ciompi uprising have been collected in Scaramella, *Il tumulto*. See also the



Figure 10. Bell ringing of the Ciompi Revolt, 1378. Detail of the Bonsignori map of Florence, 1584. (Source: Harvard Map Collection). Color version available as an online enhancement.

motion by this sonic choreography would become known as the Ciompi Revolt, the first successful worker revolution in Europe and the object of a vital debate about the development of class consciousness, conflict, and revolution in the early modern West.⁴⁴ However, my interest in these events concerns a series of

diary of Pagolo di Ser Guido Cimatori in ASF, Carte strozziane, 2nd ser., 59, fols. 98r–101r, which has been transcribed in Stella, *La Révolte*, 271–75.

44. Although they were joined by other urban groups and guildsmen, the term “Ciompi” denoted primarily the large number of unskilled workers in the wool industry, mostly carders and combers. The literature on the tumult is vast, but the most significant studies are Sergio Bertelli, “Oligarchies et gouvernement dans la Renaissance,” *Social Science: Information sur les sciences sociales* 15, nos. 4–5 (1976): 601–23; Gene A. Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society, 1343–1378* (Princeton, NJ, 1962), and “The Ciompi Revolution,” in *Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein (Evanston, IL, 1968), 314–56; Niccolò Rodolico, *I Ciompi* (Florence, 1945), and *La*

acoustic strategies, interventions, and exchanges that were critical to the success of the revolt and that can teach us a great deal about the relationship between architecture, space, and sound in the early modern city.

Contemporary witnesses could do nothing but count, one by one, the measured construction, through successively sounding towers, of an enveloping wall of sound that encircled the city that morning. It was immediately obvious that a revolt was underway as thousands of wool workers, artisans, and guildsmen assembled in the city's main square, demanding their incorporation into the city's guild-based political structure. Within two days, the government would fall, but the political enfranchisement of the most radical and numerous of the wool industry's workers lasted only six weeks when, on August 31, 1378, the Ciompi were routed in the very same square in which their revolution began.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, as the following section makes clear, crucial stages in the insurrection were marked, and facilitated, by very loud sounds, which staged a continually developing aural negotiation of power relations. The dissonance that such strategies generated and the forces they unleashed across the city, therefore, cannot be fully recognized without an appreciation for the acoustic regime that they were noisily tearing asunder.

SONIC DISCORD

The Florentine merchant Paolo da Certaldo warned readers in his family diary about the constant threat of hostile auditors that lurked around almost every corner of the city, hungry for information on which to profit.⁴⁶ Therefore, if the sound of intimate conversations gave rise to so much anxiety, then one can imagine the collective anxiety caused by the sonic threat of a whole chorus of voices assembled in the Piazza della Signoria during the political crises of 1378. The

Democrazia fiorentina nel suo tramonto, 1378–1382 (Rome, 1970); Viktor I. Rutenburg, "I ciompi nel 1378," in *Il tumulto dei ciompi: Un momento di storia fiorentina ed europea*, ed. Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento (Florence, 1981), 1–11. See also the rest of the collection of essays in *Il tumulto dei ciompi*, esp. Najemy, 59–93. For more general studies of Florentine labor culture, see Samuel K. Cohn, *The Laboring Classes in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980); Franco Franceschi, *Oltre il "Tumulto": I lavoratori fiorentini dell'Arte della lana fra Tre e Quattrocento* (Florence, 1993); Stella, *La Révolte*; Richard C. Trexler, *Power and Dependence in Renaissance Florence*, vol. 2, *The Workers of Renaissance Florence* (Binghamton, 1993). Recent scholarship includes Ernesto Screpanti, "La politica dei Ciompi: Petizioni, riforme e progetti dei rivoluzionari fiorentini del 1378," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 165, no. 1 (2007): 3–56, and *L'angelo della liberazione nel tumulto dei Ciompi: Firenze, giugno-agosto 1378* (Siena, 2008).

45. For a street-level view of these events, see Richard C. Trexler, "Follow the Flag: The Ciompi Revolt Seen from the Streets," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance* 46 (1984): 357–92, republished in *Power and Dependence*, vol 2.

46. See Atkinson, "Guide to Listening."

Ciampi had evidently developed secret conduits of communication across neighborhoods, which suggests that they had been able to turn the ringing of bells in neighborhood towers into secret signals. They had also held secret meetings, and it was only when it was too late that authorities learned of the insurrection.⁴⁷ The aural explosion of the Ciampi Revolt was precisely the kind of collective voice that the best laid plans of the official acoustic regime were meant to preclude. Against the massive bells that the commune used to embrace the city with the sound of its authority, the Ciampi bells staged a sonic siege that bypassed entirely the acoustic transmitters at the center. The sounds that erupted that morning directly confronted the heart of the regime's authority and its power to communicate.

As a politically disenfranchised community, the Ciampi had no representational rights within the discourse of communal identity formation. They could not march in processions under their own banner. They could not patronize churches or chapels, display their arms on buildings, or participate in civic building projects. In short, they were officially rendered voiceless and invisible within the ritual expression of urban communities. The Ciampi understood, however, that they were in a double bind. In order to gain corporate legitimacy, they had to participate in the representational strategies of urban exchange that made the city a network of circulating signs and symbols. This participation, however, was precisely what was denied them.⁴⁸ Therefore, their success or failure as a political community rested on their ability to appropriate what means were available to make themselves both seen and heard. The question was how they could make the city's architecture speak for them. They realized that they were caught within the dynamics of representation negatively, as those who were its objects rather than its subjects, who were excluded, negated, and unworthy of an official voice. As a result, any intervention they made in the symbolic dimensions of the city would have been immediately understood as highly transgressive, and this they used to their advantage, keenly aware of how signs and symbols functioned to exclude them.⁴⁹ By appropriating the power of bells to assemble, unite, and give

47. According to one source, a clock maker in the tower of the Palazzo della Signoria heard the forced confession of the plot and alerted the Ciampi. See Scaramella, *Il tumulto*, 22.

48. According to the statutes of the powerful wool guild, wool workers were subject to strict laws that denied them the means to organize or negotiate the value of their labor. On this institutional subjection, see Niccolò Rodolico, *Il popolo minuto: Note di storia fiorentina, 1343–1378* (Florence, 1968), 55–77.

49. The Ciampi were condemned precisely for calling together an armed gathering by ringing the bells of several churches independently of those of the Popolo and the commune of Florence. See Rodolico, *La Democrazia*, 445.

life to an imagined community across space, they demonstrated how the soundscape of a city was made up of a series of representational positions (bell towers, *ringhiera*) and a matrix of conventional sound makers (bells, trumpets, voices), whose rhetorical power could be appropriated by whomever set them in motion precisely because that power resided in the apparatus of bells themselves—power that predated the bells' absorption into the commune's hierarchy of sounds.⁵⁰ In other words, by ringing the bells the way they did that morning, the Ciompi both acknowledged and defied the conventional construction of acoustic meaning.

What has not been taken into account, despite Alessandro Stella's remarkable insights, is the way in which sound was deployed as part of an integrated strategy. Not only was this sonic design crucial to the success of the revolt, but it demonstrated how the construction of the urban sphere, of the city as a dynamic spatial enterprise, was inextricably linked to the sounds circulating through it. No one gives a clearer understanding of this than Alamanno Acciaiuoli, who, as one of the elected priors, ritually entered the Palazzo della Signoria on July 1, 1378, to take up his office. He noted, with intense foreboding, that there was no customary ringing of the communal bells to honor and sanction the event. The public swearing in, normally held on the *ringhiera* with much pomp and ceremony, was performed in secret behind the fortified walls of the palace.⁵¹ A silent regime, listeners understood, could only be a nervous one, and it was precisely into the gaps left in the soundscape of the city that the Ciompi were able to insert their newly found collective voice.

On July 21, the day after the bells had broken that silence, an angry and armed crowd of the Ciompi and their allies—textile workers, artisans, and guildsmen—filled the Piazza della Signoria, while the government deliberated on their petitions of political reform (fig. 8).⁵² Alamanno gives a vivid eyewitness account of the events from inside the palace, and it is the emotional anxiety that pervades his words that is emphasized in the following narrative summary. If the petitions were to be accepted, thousands of disenfranchised laborers would be assimilated into the structure of power through the legitimization of a new guild to represent

50. On the universal aspects of bells in Christian Europe, see the entries for “cloche” and “clocher” in Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq, eds., *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* (Paris, 1907).

51. Scaramella, *Il tumulto*, 17.

52. The petitions called for the creation of a single new guild of textile workers. See *ibid.*, 28. Ultimately, within days these trades would be organized into three new minor guilds of skilled industrial workers, other artisans in the clothing trade, and the largest, which comprised most of those whom the Florentines recognized as Ciompi. On the creation and corporate identities of the three new guilds, see Najemy, *History of Florence*, 165.

them. It was the overwhelming noise of the crowd outside the palace, however, that induced the terrified priors inside the palace, breathless from fear, to send the petitions to the advisory colleges where they were immediately accepted.⁵³ Having called the council of the Popolo, the assembled priors then nervously presided over the passing of the petitions. When the bell sounded the next morning to convene the council of the commune for the next reading of the petition, the crowd returned to the square and began to make so much noise that no one inside the palace could actually hear the reading of the petitions, so they felt powerless to do anything but immediately approve them. When a terrified prior was seen attempting to flee from the palace, the angry crowd let loose a colossal cry, demanding that all the priors step down from their positions and leave the palace. Those cries, our source tells us, reached the heavens.⁵⁴ Those priors remaining inside were stunned since they believed that their colleague had descended to inform the crowd of their decision and to guard the door against those assembled in the piazza. So they wept, wrung their hands, wailed, beat their faces, and completely lost their nerve, but the noise only grew louder, provoking for Alamanno the terrifying image of the entire city going up in flames.⁵⁵ The priors, abandoned and not having a clue what to do, finally left the palace with the remaining officials, gave the keys to the taverner, Calcagnino, in the square, and went home. According to Alamanno, “And so one could say that the happy and peaceful and good state of the city was lost.”⁵⁶

Two days of sustained screaming had successfully drowned out the ability of the government to conduct its business. The noise constructed a combination of physical barrier and psychological threat. It was precisely the verbal disorder, the loss of control over the acoustic dimensions of the piazza, that constituted a major weapon in the Ciompi’s arsenal that led to the government’s defeat. As Stephen Milner has remarked, control of the spoken word was paramount in maintaining social order, and the piazza, as the privileged site of the spoken word, was at the heart of the relationship between sound and architecture.⁵⁷ It was here, at moments of extreme crisis, that sound revealed its power over walls by penetrating spatial barriers, wantonly annihilating architecture’s pretences toward concrete

53. Scaramella, *Il tumulto*, 29.

54. Ibid., 30. The phrase “insino al cielo” is repeated several times as Alamanno seems to struggle to express the extent of the acoustic mayhem.

55. Ibid., 31.

56. “E così si può dire essere perduto el felice e quieto e buono stato della città”: ibid., 32.

57. Milner, “Citing the *Ringhiera*,” 71.

permanence. The thick walls of the Palazzo della Signoria, constructed to contain and protect the government as well as prevent its secrets from leaking into the acoustic volatility of the public realm, succumbed to the furious sounds made in the piazza. The failure of the government's carefully built sonic fortress demonstrated how voices united in the square could appropriate the power of Joshua's trumpet to dismantle a regime's architectural foundations. When this biblical instrument sounded, the people gave a great shout, and the walls of Jericho collapsed, allowing the Israelites to take the city. Looking back, Paolo da Certaldo's anxiety about ears listening around every corner seems completely justified in a culture in which every sound could matter.

EPILOGUE

If Amphion's lyre can stand in for Florence's bells and if Pucci's market can stand in for the Ciompi's screaming piazza, then we can see how the former transformed the rhetoric of reason and laws into the materiality of stone, while the latter transformed the materiality of stone into the rhetoric of civic reform—a transformation made possible in part by the sound of voices and bells. Pucci, who lived to witness the events of the summer of 1378, would have seen and heard a vindication of the literary interpretative skills he brought to bear on the myth of Amphion as he recorded it in his *zibaldone*. For just as he had suspected in his critique of the story of the building of Thebes, not a single stone was moved in the Piazza della Signoria in those tumultuous days, but the noise of the crowd helped induce recalcitrant men inside the palace, however haphazardly and temporarily, to follow new laws and remake the city, as if they heard a distant echo of Amphion's civilizing rhetoric amid the din of aural confusion. The noise dissolved those palace walls, and it toppled a regime's confidence, all the while leaving the concrete architecture of the piazza and its monument completely untouched. When the piazza was not the site of the beautifully orchestrated ritual of state, it could, noisily, annoyingly perhaps, fulfill Amphion's promise.

When the victorious Ciompi and their allies entered the palace in July 1378, their first act was to consecrate their victory by ringing the great bell of the commune (Leone).⁵⁸ It was a fitting counterpoint to the bells with which they had begun their assault. Now they had symbolically restored an inverted acoustic world by appropriating the mechanism of aural order. But it would be precisely this bell that would help to defeat the remnants of their newly found voice six

58. Scaramella, *Il tumulto*, 75.

weeks later after they had been betrayed and violently chased from the square.⁵⁹ On August 31, the bells of the parish church of Sant'Ambrogio, a working-class stronghold, began to ring *a martello*, but a terrified government responded this time by ringing the bells of the commune relentlessly for two full hours in an effort to rouse and assemble its supporters.⁶⁰ Even though a witness remarked that the regime was so weak that the broken ranks of the Ciompi could have taken the city that night with only one hundred men, the terrible sound of the city's bells drowned out any remaining hope of a resurgent campaign. Their voices silenced once again, they could only watch and listen as the stones assembled themselves into position in the piazza. These stones were the men that rallied together to protect the newly installed regime, and they were induced to do so by the magnificent and noble sound of the great bell of the commune: *Amphion's revenge*.

59. For an analysis of the new government's strategy for destroying the most radical faction of the Ciompi, see Trexler, "Follow the Flag."

60. Scaramella, *Il tumulto*, 83.