

Liminal Women: Diamanda Galás' *Plague Mass* as a work of Death Midwifery

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ABSTRACT

The United States AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s was a complex space for activism due to its dual nature as a politicized social justice movement and a bona fide public health crisis. To be effective, activist work needed to address the political discrimination that led to the disease's spread, while also acknowledging the ubiquitous nature of the illness. Composer and performer Diamanda Galás, known for her involvement in the AIDS activist movement, successfully carries out this work by creating a musical persona that resists definition and continually occupies liminal spaces of being. Her 1990 protest piece *Plague Mass* performs effectively as an activist work because of the ways in which it embraces the liminal. This thesis analyzes the indefinable, in-between aspects of *Plague Mass* through a gendered lens; in particular, it traces Galás's legacy back through historical moments in which women, through their association with the liminal, have been tasked with caring for the dead and dying.

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Introduction: “The murdered do not rest in peace.”

The AIDS crisis in the United States has been one of the deadliest health crises in modern history, with CDC estimates indicating nearly 450,000 deaths occurred due to the disease between 1981 and 2001.¹ The overwhelming majority of people who contracted and died from AIDS were gay men and racial and ethnic minorities; more than a public health crisis, it became a major political issue as the disenfranchised groups affected by the illness sought the necessary representation to fund research about the disease and educate the public about its transmission, all under a political legislation that appeared to put the needs and rights of these citizens behind its own self-interest. As countless scholars and artists have noted, social justice movements such as AIDS activism draw heavily on the arts as a manner of communicating their goals while expressing the very human anguish that comes with the fight for visibility and respect. Journalist Richard Goldstein, whose work has focused primarily on the effects of AIDS on the United States, has claimed that “...virtually every form of art or entertainment in America has been touched by AIDS.”² However, Goldstein also claims that AIDS is a unique cause in this regard due to the centrality of the arts in the queer community, stating,

“[gay men’s] complex involvement with creativity became a powerful weapon for a community under medical and political siege. The arts enabled gay men to bear witness to their situation, express feelings of grief that society often distorts, and create a model for communal solidarity, personal devotion, and sexual caution that would be necessary to combat a sexually transmitted disease with no known cure.”³

Goldstein’s claim rests first on the presupposition that gay men are involved with the arts in more prominent or effective ways than other sociocultural groups, and second on the fatally harmful notion that the AIDS crisis has affected only gay men. This reflects much of the

¹ “HIV and AIDS” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, accessed 14 December, 2016. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5021a2.htm>

² Richard Goldstein, “The Implicated and the Immune: Cultural Responses to AIDS.” *The Milbank Quarterly*, vol. 68, 1990, pp. 295.

³ Goldstein, 197.

discourse surrounding the AIDS crisis: that it was an issue that primarily affected the LGBTQ community, and that this was the sole community advocating against the crisis.

Diamanda Galás is frequently evoked during discussions of AIDS activist art. Galás is a California and New York-based composer and performer whose work uses electronic sound manipulation, extended vocal techniques, and visceral imagery to deal with themes of AIDS, mental illness, death, and injustice. Galás trained as a pianist from a young age, later earning an MM from UC San Diego, and accompanying jazz greats including Ornette Coleman and Albert Ayler. Her origins as a pianist, however, are often overshadowed by her skill as a vocalist: her three and a half-octave range and adept skill with a variety of extended vocal techniques tend to garner most of her audience's attention. Galás herself has expressed frustration with this misattribution ("I was a piano player who wanted to sing because I didn't want to be backing up horn players."⁴) as well as with journalism's tendency to describe her as a "performance artist" ("Women who do radical material are called 'performance artists'... Women composers are generally not recognized, so people always ask, 'Who composed the music?' I'm, like, 'Who the fuck are you talking to? I did, and I played all the pianos and keyboard synthesizers too.'"⁵).

Journalistic misattribution of Galás' work carries over into her protest pieces, as well: Her brother's death from the illness in 1986 is nearly always cited as the catalyst for her work that confronts AIDS. Galás frequently acknowledges the potency of this tragedy to her work, but also laments, "Unfortunately, people tend to want to sentimentalize the work, to see it as a reaction to my brother's illness... "Oh, she's mourning the death of her brother from aids!" This is seen as sufficient explanation. It is also used by idiots and misogynists as a deprecation of the work, as if

⁴ Luke Turner, *Diamanda Galás, Devil Woman*. *Dazed & Confused*, March 2008. <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/diamanda-gals-devil-woman>

⁵ Mark Dery, "Diamanda Galás: Hymns of Empathy," *Keyboard*, August 1992.

it is some pathetic sentimentality...”⁶ The piece she is referring to here is her 1990 live performance at New York’s Cathedral of St. John the Divine, entitled *Plague Mass*.

Plague Mass is often written into a timeline of Galás' involvement with AIDS activism, particularly as an extension of her 1989 arrest at St. Patrick’s cathedral with ACT UP. The liner notes of the commercially-released recording of the piece’s premiere performance actually begin with a description of this event, as if it set a precedent for her to create even more radical resistance-- and in many ways, the *Plague Mass* did mark a new height of radicalism for Galás. The piece is pointedly intended to directly implicate the Church for its role in perpetuating the AIDS crisis-- this included openly advocating against condom use, as well as the homophobic attitudes of many Christian parishioners. Several months after the piece’s premiere performance in New York, Galás staged it once more in Florence, Italy. The piece’s use of Biblical scripture interspersed with original, often obscene, text, its use of Galás’ signature jarring sonic techniques, and her physical performance, which featured nudity and a healthy serving of costume blood, led the Catholic church to accuse her of blasphemy and temporarily ban her from Italy.

The *Plague Mass* runs roughly an hour long, and its recorded release is separated into ten separate tracks, although the performance itself featured minimal breaks in sound. It begins in a somewhat narrative space, which features a few vocal characters telling the story of an AIDS patient undergoing judgment and redemption at the hands of angels and demons. As the piece progresses, however, Galás begins to take a confessional, external position: some movements manifest as protest speeches that refer directly to the AIDS death rate and those Galás deems responsible. Others take on a perspective of mourning that make no pretense as to their intended

⁶ Rebecca A. Pope and Susan J. Leonardi, “Divas and Disease, Mourning and Militancy,” in *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood, and Sexual Difference*, ed. R. Dellamora and D. Fischlin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 322.

purpose: to be perceived from a real-world perspective, outside of the piece's loosely-established plot. The tracks, which I will here refer to as movements, are listed as follows in the CD release:

- I. "There Are No More Tickets to the Funeral"
- II. "This is the Law of the Plague"
- III. "I Wake Up and I See the Face of the Devil"
- IV. "Confessional (Give Me Sodomy or Give Me Death)"
- V. "How Shall Our Judgment Be Carried Out Upon the Wicked?"
- VI. "Let Us Praise the Masters of Slow Death"
- VII. "Consecration"
- VIII. "Sono L' Antichristo"
- IX. "Cris D' Aveugle"
- X. "Let My People Go"

In many ways, this track listing is a simplified reduction of the piece, not only because it was staged as one continuous, shifting work, but because many of the tracks are a pastiche of Galás' previously-written or recorded materials. An in-depth breakdown of the movements that consist of various re-imagined pieces can be found in Chapter Two of this thesis.

Music journalists have faced great challenges in their attempts at defining Galás and her work. She continually resists categorization as a musician or a performance artist, as an activist or an oppressed figure, as an opera singer or a jazz pianist, as a Greek or an American, and more. In nearly every aspect of her performance and her legacy, Galás occupies a liminal space that resists binary categorization.⁷ Liminal spaces have historically been gendered in Western

⁷ Julia Meier initiates this theory in her essay, "Diamanda Galás: Defining the Space In-Between," in *American Studies as Media Studies*, eds. Frank Kelleter and Daniel Stein, *American Studies: A Monograph Series*, Vol 167, Heidelberg, Winter, 2008. Meier's argument

cultures, as patriarchal powers have often written women and non-gender-conforming individuals out of dominant narratives, forcing them to find power in spaces outside of, or in between, these frameworks. Even biological human existence, categorized into “alive” and “dead” has been subjected to this phenomenon in various cultural spheres, in which women are frequently assigned roles of caretaking for the dying. This idea resonates in Death Positivity pioneer Caitlin Doughty’s excellent account of her career in the death industry, in which she notes, “In many ways, women are death’s natural companions. Every time a woman gives birth, she is creating not only a life, but also a death.”⁸ Women, she suggests, serve a crucial and highly gender-specific role during times of widespread death. Gail Holst-Warhaft, in her work on the role of the lament in Classical Greek death rituals, concurs with this observation, noting that “What is common to laments for the dead in most ‘traditional’ cultures is that they are part of more elaborate rituals for the dead, and that they are usually performed by women.”⁹ The responsibility to help people die, in short, is traditionally a gendered role, and this stems partially from the Western inclination to categorize women as caring and nurturing, but also from a widespread association of women with death. This gendered association has been explored in the realm of psychoanalysis through the work of feminist cultural critics such as Julia Kristeva, in her work on the abject, and Barbara Creed, in hers on the monstrous-feminine. This thesis explores Galás’ use of the abject and evocation of the monstrous-feminine, while engaging with the history of women’s roles within public health crises, to place Galás within the lineage of death midwives, rather than in a role of direct inclusion or allyship within the AIDS crisis.

revolves around intermediality, however, rather than external cultural and philosophical liminality.

⁸ Caitlin Doughty, *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes and Other Lessons from the Crematorium*, (New York: WW Norton & Co, 2014), 172.

⁹ Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women’s Laments and Greek Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1.

Chapter One of this thesis explores the complexity of Galás' liminal role in the AIDS crisis, arguing she occupies a space of neither an ally nor an afflicted individual, but in a liminal role *between* the two, which evokes the history of death midwives' conceptual space *between* the living and the dead. Chapter Two opposes the notion that the *Plague Mass* is a staging of previously-recorded work, arguing instead that its liveness and the considerable amount of newly-composed material makes it a potent work of protest in an activist movement that relies on immediacy, urgency, and physical presence. Chapter Three explores Galás' use of cultural signifiers (both of her own Greek heritage and cultural communities to which she does not belong) and the ways they allow for representation of groups that are under-represented *within* AIDS activism. Chapter Four argues that the Catholic text and imagery in the *Plague Mass* do more than simply attack the Church for perpetuating harm towards people with AIDS (PWAS). It views these codes within the scope of the work's allusions to the Black Death, another public health crisis that was aggravated due to the Church's negligence, to align Galás with the women who were tasked to care for the death and dying during that outbreak. Finally, my concluding statements further explore the role of liminality as it reoccurs consistently throughout each aspect of this project: the liminal space between the living and the dead occupied between death midwives throughout history, Galás' liminal space within AIDS activism, and her musical evocations of the ephemeral spaces between life and death, health and sickness, subject and object.

“I’m asking what it’s like to be told there’s a death sentence hanging over you”:

Diamanda Galás as Death Midwife of the AIDS Crisis

Allyship in social justice movements is a naturally fraught position because of its reliance on the ally’s identity as a member of the oppressive, or at least privileged, group in the context of the respective movement. Artists and musicians can frequently exercise solidarity with political causes through their work, and are often labeled as allies for doing so, particularly when they possess a degree of cultural influence. However, when the advocacy movement at hand is based on a collective, even conflicting, array of identity intersections, the role of the ally, and by extension, the role of the allied artist, becomes further complicated. Rather than showing reticence to engage in the AIDS activist movement because of this complexity, Diamanda Galás embraces this somewhat tense space, and in many ways, she is uniquely qualified to occupy it. Her work, which engages with concepts that echo a global history of a gendered association of women with the liminal space between life and death, works in nuanced and productive ways in the frequently uncomfortable context of AIDS allyship. She exists within and outside the movement simultaneously, in a way that many popular artists and musicians did not (or were not open about). Like the death midwives I will continue to discuss in future chapters, she creates communion between the interior and exterior of the AIDS activist movement, comforting the insiders while communicating with the outsiders.

Galás' artistry in contemporary journalistic and academic discourse is nearly always directly linked to AIDS activism, due primarily to the *Plague Mass*' premiere performance, the publicized death of Galás' brother, and her visibility with ACT UP. However, this discourse simultaneously struggles with exactly where to place Galás within the AIDS activist movement, primarily because the AIDS crisis itself occupies a precarious space between identity-based

social justice movement and public health crisis. To politicize the AIDS crisis in response to legislative neglect was also an act of establishing a community, which inherently includes and excludes certain individuals. However, HIV does not discriminate: any human body is susceptible to contracting it. Because the lines between insider and outsider of the AIDS movement are so indistinct, many scholars and journalists have attempted to claim Galás as an insider to the movement: after all, she is open about her history of intravenous drug use and prostitution-- both risk factors for HIV contraction. However, Galás' physical status as HIV-negative and her identity as a heterosexual woman has more often led to her being considered an ally to the movement. Allyship, though, is a complicated and often problematic concept, particularly in the context of AIDS activism, whose inclusivity is complex due to the disease itself.

In this chapter, I argue that the tension between insider and outsider, ally and oppressed individual, creates a false binary in a movement that inherently resists insider-outsider categorization. I suggest that it erases an important role, exemplified in the AIDS crisis by lesbian women, and throughout history by women such as the *moirologhístres* of Greece and the Searchers of the Plague: that of the death midwife. Death midwifery situates women in the liminal space between the living and the dead, and in the AIDS crisis, many of the people who cared for the dying occupied a liminal space in the political movement, as well. For the lesbian women who were members of an increasingly cohesive queer community, this liminality manifested in their sharing of social and political struggles with the gay men who were dying, but the very low incidence of HIV within their sexual circles. For Galás, this liminal space relates to her own risk factors and almost exclusive association with the queer community, but her ultimate status as an HIV-negative straight woman. This chapter explores, but resists,

categorizations of ally or insider that scholars such as Freya Jarman-Ivens, Airek Beauchamp, and David Schwarz, and journalists from sources including *Independent* and *Dazed & Confused* have ascribed to Galás. It then seeks to use psychoanalytic theory to place her role in the AIDS crisis, instead, as that of death midwife.

Allyship's complexity in the context of AIDS, as I noted, is due to the crisis's nature as a politicized health crisis, leading to the categorical muddling of who is, or was, *within* or *outside* of the movement. AIDS became a political issue because of the underprivileged identities of its most numerous victims, and the government's subsequent neglect of the issue. AIDS activism was overwhelmingly represented in mainstream discourse by white, gay, cisgender men. However, diseases themselves do not discriminate, and by adopting AIDS as a queer issue, these activists intrinsically excluded equally-affected communities of intravenous drug users and people of color. As Goldstein notes, although, "...no one who is sexually active can be presumed immune to AIDS, the progress of this epidemic (and the technology that enables us to assemble a perceptual pattern of its spread) has given AIDS in the West the quality of a selective blitz. That, in turn, has made it possible for mass culture to assume the perspective of a "witness" to AIDS who also stands outside it."¹⁰ It is crucial to note that this "outsider" standpoint is entirely fabricated by the politicization of AIDS and the groups it affected. The result of this politicization was the over-representation of white gay men in AIDS activism, but subsequently, a right-wing social and political backlash specifically directed at white gay men.

If the AIDS activist movement is to be conceptualized along the same criteria as contemporary activist movements that are based on identity, such as civil rights or queer liberation, it is easy to construct Galás as an ally. She is not at all reticent to claim her identity as

¹⁰ Richard Goldstein, "The Implicated and the Immune: Cultural Responses to AIDS." *The Milbank Quarterly*, vol. 68, 1990, pp. 295.

a heterosexual woman, although she does so with a degree of eye-rolling, lamenting, “I think God is a callous bitch not making me a lesbian. I’m deeply disappointed in my sexual interest in men.”¹¹ Galás' personal stake in the AIDS crisis, in fact, is continually attributed solely to the death of her brother, an event that is referred to as pivotal in nearly every piece written on her, regardless of context. However, her interviews, in which she is prone to gushing about her closest gay friends (she gloats that her “gay husband” Carl Valentino “can turn words into sulphuric acid”) and makes clear that she does not associate with straight men, reveal a deep personal tie to the queer community.¹² Her service to the queer and AIDS-afflicted community, too, is well-publicized, particularly her commitment to playing piano in AIDS hospices and at funerals of people with AIDS. Her most well-known non-musical acts of allyship, however, are the result of her involvement with ACT UP. Her arrest at the infamous “Stop the Church” protest at St. Patrick’s Cathedral is frequently evoked as a means of characterizing her, even in the *Plague Mass* liner notes. Turner notes that, “Co-activist and artist Aldo Hernandez believes that in her involvement with ACT-UP and affiliated arts collective Art Positive, Galás "redefined political art", adding, "her unfeigned dedication in AIDS activism parallels her artistic ferocity."¹³

Because of the intensity of the AIDS activist movement and the marginalized identities of the people with HIV risk factors, it is tempting to classify some participants as “allies” to the movement rather than insiders. As previously discussed, though, AIDS allyship is a more complex space than in other movements, particularly because many queer allies did not have HIV, or even its risk factors. As of 1986, the early days of organized grassroots AIDS activism,

¹¹ Diamanda Galás in conversation with de Muth, *Killing Men Softly With Her Song...* Independent, 26 October 1994.

¹² Galás in conversation with de Muth.

¹³ Luke Turner, *Diamanda Galás, Devil Woman*. Dazed & Confused, March 2008.

only about 17 percent of the volunteers in the earliest leader in AIDS caretaking, the Gay Men's Health Crisis, were not gay men.¹⁴ This is not to say that the other 83 per cent were HIV-negative gay men, but that the vast majority of early allyship specifically geared towards people with AIDS, came from within the gay male community. Later, as the threat to the queer community increased, so did the involvement of non-gay and/or non-male people in the caretaking work. Faderman recalls,

“Gay Men's Health Crisis advertised in the gay papers for ‘buddies’ to pay visits to people with AIDS and hold their hand, clean their apartments, walk their dogs shop for groceries, cut up their food and feed them, take them to doctors, read to them in hospitals. Five hundred volunteer buddies-- gay men, lesbians (many who'd been lesbian separatists in the 1970s but found their grudge against males to be irrelevant in the face of such devastation), straight women-- all flocked to give succor to the sick.”¹⁵

Faderman's description of GMHC reveals not only a shift in the demographics of the organization, but in the queer community's relationship with AIDS. As the death toll rose and the oppressive hegemonic factors that allowed the disease to continue spreading became exposed, the unified queer community as we know it today began to form. While previously, as Faderman states, lesbian separatism and similar ideologies led to independent communities of gay men, lesbian women, transgender women, transgender men, and so on, AIDS revealed the deadly consequences of systemic homophobia and led to a uniting of forces among queer communities.

Faderman is particularly concerned with highlighting the role of lesbian women in this cohesive queer activism. She notes that lesbians were, “... actively involved in helping those suffering by starting food banks and working in hospitals... It was very important here that women with nursing backgrounds, with any kind of medical backgrounds, sort of run

¹⁴ Philip Kayal, *Bearing Witness: Gay Men's Health Crisis and the Politics of AIDS* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 102.

¹⁵ Faderman 420.

interference for men who had AIDS with the medical establishment.”¹⁶ As Kayal notes, women are socialized to be suited for and inclined towards these caregiving roles, and eventually came to occupy a significant portion of GMHC’s volunteer base. While Kayal does not investigate the queer or non-queer identities of these women, Faderman’s more anecdotal accounts could corroborate a disproportionate number of lesbians in this group. Women who have sex with women are considered one of the most low-risk demographics for HIV contraction-- there have only been five known cases of female-to-female sexual transmission worldwide, and none in the United States.¹⁷ If allyship depends on an individual’s identity as *other*, outside of the marginalized group, and if AIDS allyship depends solely on one’s likelihood of being HIV+, then lesbians, as a collective, are the demographic most likely to fit into this designated “ally” category. However, the adoption of AIDS as a queer issue, for all its exclusion of other vulnerable marginalized people, has become ubiquitous enough for any individual or group with a queer identity is assumed to be an “insider” in the fight against AIDS. Their position of experiencing anti-queer oppression, but having few to no HIV risk factors, made lesbians’ role in the AIDS crisis exist neither within nor outside the activist movement. Conversely, Galás’ lack of queer identity but history of HIV risk factors situated her in a similarly liminal role in AIDS activism.

While it is overly simplistic, not to mention inaccurate, to conflate the AIDS crisis and its related activism with the queer liberation movement alone, Galás’ symbolic proximity to queerness via femininity has led scholars, notably Jarman-Ivens, to analyze her work through a queer lens. Jarman-Ivens acknowledges the variety of vocal characters Galás takes on in her

¹⁶ Brekke, Kira, “How Lesbians’ Role in the AIDS Crisis Brought Men and Women Together,” *Huffington Post*, 9 October 2015.

¹⁷ “Female-to-female sexual transmission,” *National Aids Manual*. Accessed 24 February 2016. <http://www.aidsmap.com/Female-to-female-sexual-transmission/page/1323529/>

work (specifically *Vena Cava*). In the *Plague Mass*, this concept takes shape within the deep voice of judgment in ‘Confessional (Give Me Sodomy or Give Me Death)’ and the doctor/patient conversation in ‘I Wake Up and See the Face of the Devil.’ While this alternating of gender is, in itself, an act of queer vocality, Jarman-Ivens expands this notion by involving Galás' use of electronic manipulation. While the liveness of the *Plague Mass* does not allow for electronic manipulation to the extent Galás uses it in her studio recordings, there are moments that rely on it, notably in the pre-recorded vocal tracks with which Galás accompanies herself. ‘Sono L’Antichristo’ relies on pre-recorded counterpart using distant screams, ‘Cris D’Aveugle’s climax features cackling and babbling over Galás' voice, and ‘How Shall Our Judgment be Carried Out Upon the Wicked’ contains a lengthy juxtaposition of Galás' live screams and glossolalia with a pre-recorded chant part that gradually increases in pitch and intensity throughout. Jarman-Ivens’ integration of these themes involves a presupposition of the cyborg as a queer figure, a concept that has become generally accepted to some degree in contemporary queer cultural discourse.^{18, 19}

Jarman-Ivens’ most compelling factor in her Galás-as-sonically-queer argument, at least within the context of my work, is her insistence that the pervasive liminality of the work is a manifestation of queerness. She says, “... [Galás] persistently crosses and recrosses thresholds-- between human and machine; between human and monster; between the living and the dead; between the lamenter and the avenger; between the pathological, the infantile, and the religious;

¹⁸ For a discussion of the queer cyborg and its cultural manifestations, see Nguyen, “Queer Cyborgs and New Mutants: Race, Sexuality, and Prosthetic Sociality in Digital Space.” in *American Studies: An Anthology*, ed. Radway et al (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

¹⁹ Airek Beauchamp also makes a strong argument toward Galás as a queer figure by engaging with theories set forth by Yvon Bonenfant and Antonin Artaud. His *Queer Timbres, Queered Elegy* notably discusses the physical effects of Galás' music on the body as a queering of the act of listening, but also touches on the issues of voice splitting and gendering discussed by Schwarz and Jarman-Ivens.

among semiotic systems; and between semiosis and glossolalia-- *thresholds that are always drawn along gendered lines*” (emphasis added).²⁰ Many of these boundaries on which Galás teeters function in a similar space as Kristeva’s theories on the abject (to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four), which rely on an in-between space. Thus, if Jarman-Ivens is suggesting that liminality is inherently queer, then abjection, too, is a queered construct. Jarman-Ivens appears to advocate for this notion when she claims that, “... identification [on the part of the listener] is not really being invited in Galás’ work, as the soundscape is so abject that the listener is invited instead-- or rather *also*-- to expel it, to reject identification, and this point is absolutely central to how her work can be read as queer.”²¹ Jarman-Ivens does not draw adequate significance from liminality to queerness, however, which weakens her argument, particularly when liminality is so central to the concept of death midwifery. In effect, Jarman-Ivens establishes a strong argument of Galás as a liminal figure, but succumbs to the discomfort of needing to characterize Galás as *either* queer or an ally. The complexity of the AIDS crisis as an activist movement, as well as the fact that the movement depends on the very liminal space of dying itself, makes this simplistic tendency not only obsolete but inaccurate. I suggest that Galás does create abjection in her work through liminality, but that it does not portray Galás *herself* as queer. Rather, these musical functions evoke the manners in which Galás’ womanhood, and specifically her sexuality, is associated with the abject, a phenomenon discussed at length by psychoanalysts such as Kristeva and Creed. This creates a symbolic parallel between Galás and the queer community, whose sexuality is not only also demonized in this historical moment, but explicitly associated with death, disease, and abjection because of AIDS’ spread.

²⁰ Jarman-Ivens, 160.

²¹ Jarman-Ivens, 158.

“You’re either part of the resistance or you’re a collaborator:” Liveness and Protest in *Plague*

Mass

Discourse surrounding Galás' work, within both academic and journalistic spheres, has often neglected the potency of her work as activism. Musical analyses frequently reduce Galás to the sound of her voice, such as Jarman-Ivens' chapter that contextualizes Galás' voice alone as a queer figure, and popular journalism's fixation on describing Galás' three-and-a-half octave range first and foremost.²² Pope and Leonardi highlight these critical transgressions, generally committed by male journalists, as an act of gendered inscription. Indeed, these analyses frequently lead to an intellectual fixation on the trope of the hysterical woman. Although this focus is not irrelevant or out of place in discussions of Galás' work, McClary notes that it is generally mishandled, writing that, “Galás is not interested in the narrative of raising the specter of the monstrous, flirting with madness, and then reimposing control... she enacts the rage of the madwoman for purposes of protesting genuine atrocities.”²³ In other words, discourse surrounding Galás as an artist takes her depictions of the madwoman at face value, reducing her to a stereotype, rather than engaging with her purposes for depicting this trope. These purposes, and their effectiveness, are summed up by Crimp, who argues that Galás' work exemplifies, “a critical, theoretical, activist alternative to the personal elegiac expressions that [have] appeared to dominate the art-world response to AIDS.”²⁴ Scholars and journalists who have written on protest tactics, particularly in the world of performance art, concur with Crimp's emphasis on the importance of anger in this type of resistance.

²² Sinkler, de Muth, Turner, and Anderson all fall victim to this problematic focus to a varying degree, though they are by no means the only journalists to do so.

²³ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 110.

²⁴ Douglas Crimp, “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism.” In *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, ed. Douglas Crimp (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 15.

The reticence to discuss Galás' work as protest carries deeply into critical discourse on the *Plague Mass* itself. Schwarz's Lacanian perspective on the piece, though valuable in the field of psychoanalysis, and in my own musical analysis of the piece, decontextualizes the *Plague Mass* from the critical urgency of the AIDS activism in which Galás was involved. Other journalistic references to the *Plague Mass*, perplexingly, misattribute it altogether as a live staging of previously-recorded material.²⁵ This, too, erases the importance of the work in its political context, in which one person with AIDS died every fifteen minutes, and it was necessary for activism to happen at an even more rapid pace to combat it. By ascribing the *Plague Mass* as nothing more than a live performance of a studio piece, journalists place the emphasis on Galás' music as an artifact, rather than an event. They neglect the critical difference between making music in a recording studio to be sold as a physical item, and publicly putting one's body in the world's second-largest cathedral to publicly announce through one's music that "ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY IS HOMICIDE."

Misattributing the *Plague Mass* as a live staging of previously recorded material is not only problematic in its failure to recognize the importance of liveness-- it is also factually incorrect. Although the piece does contain four movements that can be found on Galás' earlier *Masque of the Red Death* trilogy, the majority of the work is new material. Further, the material that *can* be found on this earlier work is recontextualized in the *Plague Mass*, not only because of the urgency of the activist space in which the piece participates, but from a purely ontological standpoint. The movements that have been translated into the *Plague Mass* now exist within a new relational standpoint to one another. This chapter will examine the *Plague Mass* in the context of concomitant AIDS activism, with particular analytical attention paid to the movements that echo the tone of this activism. It will then contrast the four movements that

²⁵ Sinker, Polkow, and Turner are among journalists who make this misattribution.

appear both in the live *Plague Mass* staging and on the earlier studio-recorded *Masque of the Red Death* trilogy with one another. This musical analysis is intended to reveal the *Plague Mass*' urgency as a work of live protest versus studio recordings of the same music.

Fig 1. Track Listings for *Masque of the Red Death* and *Plague Mass*. Movements that appear within both works are in boldface.

Track listings: <i>Masque of the Red Death</i>	Track listings: <i>Plague Mass</i>
Disc 1, part A: <i>The Divine Punishment</i> I. "Deliver Me From Mine Enemies" i. "This is the Law of the Plague" ii. "Deliver Me From Mine Enemies"*** iii. "We Shall Not Accept your Quarantine" iv. "Εξελούμε" v. "Γιατί, Ο Θεός?" vi. Psalm 22** II. "Free Among the Dead" i. Psalm 88 ii. "Lamentations" iii. "Sono L'Antichristo"	I. "There Are No More Tickets to the Funeral" II. "This is the Law of the Plague" III. "I Wake Up and I See the Face of the Devil" IV. "Confessional (Give Me Sodomy or Give Me Death)" V. "How Shall Our Judgment Be Carried Out Upon the Wicked?" VI. "Let Us Praise the Masters of Slow Death" VII. "Consecration" VIII. "Sono L'Antichristo" IX. "Cris D'Aveugle" X. "Let My People Go"
Disc 1, part B: <i>Saint of the Pit</i> I. "La Trezième Revient" II. "Εξελούμε" III. "L'Héautontimorouménos" IV. "Artémis" V. "Cris D'Aveugle"	
Disc 2: <i>You Must be Certain of the Devil</i> I. "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" II. "Double-Barrel Prayer" III. "Birds of Death" IV. "You Must be Certain of the Devil" V. "Let My People Go" VI. "Malediction" VII. "The Lord is my Shepherd"	
**Musically appears within <i>Plague Mass</i> but is not given its own track listing. See Figure 2.	

The *Plague Mass*' Contextual Space Within AIDS Activism

Grassroots efforts to combat the AIDS crisis spread and expanded almost as rapidly as the illness itself, and included interest groups intended to care for the ill, fund research, and educate the public, among other causes. ACT UP is likely one of the most widely-known of these organizations, due to both its size and its unorthodox, highly publicized protests. Diamanda Galás has been highly active within ACT UP, and was particularly involved in the years surrounding the *Plague Mass*' performance. Less than a year prior to the *Plague Mass*' debut performance in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, she was arrested at ACT UP'S infamous 1989 "Stop the Church" demonstration at St. Patrick's cathedral, an event that is nearly always presented as a catalyst to the *Plague Mass* performance. This protest, boasting 5,000 participants, was intended to draw attention to Cardinal John O'Connor and the Catholic Archdiocese's stance on AIDS prevention, which condemned condom use rather than supporting education around safe sex. Activists handed out condoms and safe-sex pamphlets to passersby, and 100 of the protesters, one of whom was Galás, disrupted the mass that was occurring with a "die-in."²⁶

ACT UP protests were known for making disruptive, often offensive, symbolic statements, such as the demonstration protesting the price of antiviral AIDS drug AZT, which occurred at the New York Stock Exchange just months before the die-in at St. Patrick's cathedral. This protest featured five protesters handcuffed themselves to the balcony railing while hundreds of other protesters blared foghorns to drown out the opening bell. Earlier, ACT UP activists had hanged an effigy of FDA head Frank Young from the front of Trinity Church. Handelman writes that ACT UP "... personifies the age-old ideal of town-meeting democracy, [and] it is also thoroughly modern, shrewdly blending Sixties-style activism with the same tactics

²⁶ "Stop the Church Action: 10 Year Anniversary Action," *ACT UP New York*, accessed 9 March 2017. <http://www.actupny.org/YELL/stopchurch99.html>

used by sophisticated political operatives: Spielbergian spectacle and media manipulation.”²⁷ It is this flair for dramatic spectacle that is generally associated with ACT UP today; the organization is well-suited to include performing artists like Galás. In a 1999 interview with Percy Howard, Galás quotes a former acquaintance who told her, at the early stages of *Plague Mass*’s conception, “I don’t think that a lot of people at ACT-UP are going to understand your work because it’s not clear enough, we need to understand every word, because we are trying to support this.”²⁸ In other words, the piece seemed *too* symbolically representational for ACT UP’s presentation style, which was generally blatant and direct. Galás resisted the notion that her work would not be explicit enough, and the work’s impact on musical and activist spheres alike proves that its place within AIDS activism was not only warranted, but necessary.

To some extent, Galás’ acquaintance’s concerns were warranted: with regards to narrative content alone, the earliest movements of the *Plague Mass* do tend towards the metaphorical and conceptual. Through Galás’ varied use of vocal timbres, the audience is introduced to characters that include an AIDS patient (who is alluded to be a representation of Christ), the Devil, angels, and the voice of judgment, among others. The heavy use of vocal characters, as well as the text that leans toward the Biblical and the poetic, rarely gives the effect of Galás *herself* addressing her audience. The sixth movement of the piece presents a dramatic departure from this tendency. The movement, entitled *Let Us Praise the Masters of Slow Death*, begins subtly, with a heartbeat-like one-two drum beat embodying a transition out of the previous movement, *How Shall our Judgment be Carried Out Upon the Wicked*. The earlier movement is characterized by a slow recurring half-note rhythm played on a synthesized

²⁷ David Handelman, “Act Up in Anger,” *Rolling Stone*, 8 March 1990. Accessed 9 March 2017, <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/act-up-in-anger-19900308>

²⁸ Percy Howard, “Diamanda Galás in flagrante delicto,” *A Necessary Angel*, 23 February 2010, Accessed 9 March 2017. <https://percy3.wordpress.com/2010/02/23/diamanda-galas-in-flagrante-delicto-1999-interview/>

tympani, complete with audible pitch bending toward the end of each note, but the transition to this new movement features a drum whose tone is now dampened, with no pitch bending. This is the only sonic cue that the new movement has begun, and when Galás' speech begins, it is tied closely to the drum's rhythm. The intensity of both grow until the character of the piece represents parts of *This is the Law of the Plague*. The majority of this movement is sonically simple-- Galás' spoken decrees over the steady heartbeat. The text, however, is the movement's most notable characteristic. This movement is by far the most explicitly direct address to oppressive groups in the work, with text that directly calls out "cowards and voyeurs," advocates for "the brothers living homeless on the streets of New York City," and finally and most emphatically: "We who fight and cry for a life gone every fifteen minutes say: ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY IS HOMICIDE."

Let Us Praise the Masters of Slow Death is a movement that features little to be analyzed in a traditional musical sense. However, its sonic simplicity underscores the intent of the movement and, by extension, the piece as a whole. If Galás' fans or ACT UP collaborators had attended the concert with the expectation of hearing avant-garde music whose activist message was veiled under layers of abstraction, they received what they likely expected up until this movement (although moments such as *This is the Law of the Plague* are only representational in a loose sense of the word). *Let Us Praise the Masters of Slow Death* is the heart of the piece's protest message, with Galás' speech appearing not as a composed piece of music, but as a direct address to those the piece seeks to implicate, the words coming directly from Galás herself. The *Plague Mass* suits ACT UP's activist philosophy of dramatic, attention-grabbing public displays, but concerns that it was too conceptual are all but erased by the forwardness of this movement in particular.

Although the *Plague Mass*' frequent misattribution as a staging of previously-written material is misguided, it can be understood to an extent through an analysis of the music in the *Plague Mass*. The newly-composed movements have a degree of simplicity compared to the pieces that Galás had created in earlier projects, making them rather easy to overlook from a musical perspective. However, this simplicity is the defining factor for these movements as pieces of protest. While movements like *This is the Law of the Plague* and *Cris D'Aveugle* are rich with material for a more cerebral musical and symbolic analysis, they simply can not suit the tone of AIDS activism by themselves. Galás keenly understands this; the urgency of AIDS as a rapidly-spreading killer directly under the nose of religious and political law was too dire for music that is open to artistic interpretation to function as effective activism. When it is balanced with pieces that are sonically simplistic but politically provocative, then the work as a whole could function successfully as a protest piece.

The Problem of Liveness

Even in discussions of her works that do not engage with AIDS as a concept, Diamanda Galás is nearly always discussed in relation to her involvement with AIDS protest initiatives. However, the discussion of her music itself as political implementation of protest strategies is often lacking. While this chapter seeks to accomplish some musical analysis of the *Plague Mass*, its emphasis on protest strategies inherent within the music and its engagement with theories of liveness are also intended to offset this narrative. Galás was, of course, active in protest outside of her music. Her music and performance itself, though, blurs the lines between art and activism, seamlessly integrating her personal political goals into her artistic ones.

The *Plague Mass* is unique in Galás' oeuvre because of its positionality as an activist piece, but also raises ontological questions regarding liveness and reproduction. Many of the

questions I have addressed thus far have alluded to the impact of a live performance versus a studio recording. I have argued first that the multisensory components of a live performance allow for a visceral experience that mirrors much of the artistic creation that became central to AIDS activism. The *Consecration* portion of the work, for example, featured Galás naked and bathed in red light, chanting “Hoc est signum corpus meum” (This is my body), and “Hoc est signum sangre meum” (This is my blood) before bathing herself in ceremonial blood.²⁹ In an audio recording alone, the effect of this moment would be limited only to the reference to Christ, not the pointed implication that lies within the gory visuals: That People With Aids are “... the sacrificial lamb through which the evil clerics seek salvation.”³⁰ Aside from the rather obvious multisensory component of liveness, one needs only to look at the price of concert tickets to understand the social understanding that live performance holds a certain degree of value over recorded music. Many contemporary works on liveness use this fact as a supposition, a universal truth to be taken for granted and used as a foundation for other, more nebulous arguments. Walter Benjamin’s cornerstone work on mechanical reproduction of artworks centers around the notion of “aura,” which is frequently applied to visual art or artifacts, but is inextricably linked to live performance, as well. Benjamin on the aura and replication:

Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things “closer” spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former. To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose “sense of the universal equality of things” has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction.³¹

²⁹ Flanagan Liner Notes

³⁰ Flanagan Liner Notes

³¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Trans. Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969)

To draw on Benjamin's work is to operate under an *assumption* that a live performance is more artistically effective than a recorded version of the same material. This is an assumption that contributes greatly to my privileging of the *Plague Mass* over the *Masque of the Red Death* and other recorded works containing the same material.

The second reason I find the *Plague Mass* to be a richer example of musical activism than its recorded counterparts is its status as an *event*, not a material object. I must problematize my own argument by acknowledging that the *Plague Mass* is now commercially circulated as a recorded album, which was the basis of my own musical analysis. There is no video recording of Galás' performance, so the details of her physicality live on today in anecdotes alone-- this serves only to highlight the temporality of liveness and the "event," a convenient parallel term to Benjamin's "aura" in discussions of performance. To acknowledge the importance of the work as an event when engaging with it nearly thirty years later (and the live recording makes no pretense as to its "live" status) can allow a contemporary listener or scholar to maintain the importance of liveness to the work when considering its overall impact. The thesis of the work, that the Catholic church is implicated in the AIDS crisis because of its negligence, is underscored so deeply by the time and location of Galás' performance of it, that the political impact of the recorded *Masque of the Red Death*, for all its musical innovation and production quality, is diminished in comparison. Music journalist Airek Beauchamp writes of the *Plague Mass*, "... Galás uses the space of [the piece] to re-consider and re-theorize the ailing body. In her work the body represents not just Galás herself, but also the bodies of all the afflicted, the bodies issuing negation of suffering, and finally, the collective body of the spectacle of the AIDS crisis... Galás sees the plague of AIDS as transformative, but without the safe buffer provided by the critical

space of history.”³² That is, Galás underscores the urgency of political and social action within the context of the AIDS crisis by performing the already-charged work in the center of the severely-impacted New York City, let alone in its largest cathedral. Beauchamp unites both of my points of focus in his discussion of the body’s role in the performance, implying that the work’s “liveness” drives home its point because of the physical bodies present. This is a rather elegant extension of Benjamin’s notion of aura, transcribed within the overt physicality of Galás’ work, which seeks to reveal the abjection of a physical illness.

The widespread journalistic tendency to represent the *Plague Mass* as a live staging of previously-recorded work has frequently served to erase the piece’s effects as a work of activism. Inadvertently, journalists align Galás with rock or pop artists whose live performances rely on the audience’s consumption and knowledge of their previous recordings, rather than with the political urgency associated with protests staged by groups like ACT UP. Further, this misattribution neglects the fact that the material that *is* translated to the stage is done so in a very different formal and contextual manner that accomplishes different musical and sociopolitical goals. This portion of this chapter will present a musical analysis of the pieces of the *Plague Mass* that were previously recorded, comparing them with their earlier counterparts, to indicate that aspects of liveness and re-contextualization of the musical material has increased the work’s immediacy to the political issues Galás intended to protest.

The *Plague Mass* is frequently misunderstood to be a live staging of the *Masque of the Red Death* trilogy, which is made up of Galás’ three earliest recordings. These were previously released only on LP, and consist of *The Divine Punishment*, *Saint of the Pit*, and *You Must be*

³² Beauchamp, Airek. *Queer Timbres, Queered Elegy: Diamanda Galás’ Plague Mass and the First Wave of the AIDS Crisis*. Sounding Out! February 25, 2013.

Certain of the Devil.³³ In fact, only four movements in the *Plague Mass* are explicitly extracted from *Masque of the Red Death*: “This is the Law of the Plague,” (entitled “Deliver me from Mine Enemies” on *Masque of the Red Death*) “Sono l’Antichristo,” “Cris D’Aveugle,” and “Let My People Go.” In my musical analysis of the *Plague Mass*, I will focus most heavily on these four movements, in order to highlight the effects of translating these pieces from the studio to the stage. While much of the newly-composed material serves to define these longer movements’ relationship to one another, they also serve to underscore the immediate relevance of the performance as an *event*, and my analysis of these movements will address their role in serving this purpose.

The first movement of the *Plague Mass*, entitled *There Are No More Tickets to the Funeral*, features Galás’ voice, usually speaking, but interspersed with a varied and jarring ululation on a high C. Other than her voice, her sole musical collaborator are the cathedral walls. The movement ends with the first non- vocal (or acoustically resultant from vocalization) sound in the whole piece: a jarring bass drum beat begins, initiating the next movement, “This is the Law of the Plague,” which Michael Flanagan refers to in his liner notes as the piece’s “anti-Kyrie.” Galás shifts her vocal character away from the deep pitch, rich timbre, and vague Southern dialect she used throughout the first movement. Here, she sounds almost like a new vocalist. Her new character’s voice is shrill, proclamatory, and perversely gleeful as she describes the characteristics of the diseased and the manners in which they must be dealt with. The effect of this grandiose decree over the steadily intensifying drum beat is one of a ritual sacrifice. The word “unclean” takes precedence in this section, with Galás stretching it temporally throughout, as well as utilizing a distinctive manipulation of vowel sounds and an

³³ Kenny Glenn and Ira Roberts, “Diamanda Galás,” *Trouser Press*, http://trouserpress.com/entry.php?a=diamanda_Galás

extreme guttural use of vocal fry. Distant sounds of other chant-like voices resonate beneath her, evoking a ghostly choir of witnesses to the slaughter of the diseased. Interspersed with her new character's proclamations, the ejaculatory high Cs from *No More* continue throughout this section, perhaps emerging from the throats of the damned. The text for movement uses Biblical excerpts. The opening judgment is taken from Chapter 15 of Leviticus, which transitions to Psalm 22. The third section, which begins with "Deliver me from mine enemies..." is made up of excerpts from Psalms 58 and 59, tied together with additional text by Galás. The movement closes with original text, as well.

To discuss "This is the Law of the Plague" from a purely technical or textual standpoint would be to neglect perhaps the most arresting technique in Galás' arsenal, which is used throughout her *Plague Mass*, and indeed, her entire oeuvre: her extreme use of glossolalia. Etymologically, the word is a combination of the Greek word, *glossa*, meaning tongue or language, and *lalein*, to talk. Its commonly-used colloquial synonym is, of course, speaking in tongues. While this, like any definition, assumes a lack of textual meaning in glossolalia, early scholarship from linguist William J. Samarin argues that while glossolalia may not be directly translatable, it is far from meaningless. In religious contexts, glossolalia is used worldwide, but in the United States, was originally associated with the Pentecostal denomination of Christianity, which lends the *Plague Mass* an implicit engagement with African-American music alongside the more explicit ones (such as Galás' use of traditional spirituals, and her Blues-influenced style of singing). With her use of glossolalia, Galás invokes an extremely complex network of cultural, religious, and sonic implications, which range from the evocation of the mad-woman trope, to the voice of angels, to linguistic and sonic disorientation, to racial conflict, all of which will be discussed in their respective contextual structures in later chapters.

“This is the Law of the Plague” is the longest movement of the *Plague Mass* that is derived completely from previously-recorded material. In *Masque of the Red Death*, the movement is entitled “Deliver Me From Mine Enemies,” and is made up of six sub-sections, entitled:

- I. This is the Law of the Plague
- II. Deliver Me From Mine Enemies
- III. We Shall Not Accept Your Quarantine
- IV. Εξελόυμε (Deliver Me)
- V. Γιατί, Ο Θεός? (Why, God?)
- VI. Psalm 22

Like many of the pieces that were re-purposed for the *Plague Mass* performance, this movement was condensed greatly between the recording of the respective *Masque of the Red Death* albums and the *Plague Mass* performance. In *Plague Mass*, only the first two and the final sub-sections of “Deliver Me From Mine Enemies” appear-- only one of which, “This is the Law of the Plague,” is completely sonically recognizable between the two versions.

While listening to Galás' work that was recorded multiple times, one could be tempted to consider much of her work improvisation-based: Often, her vocal timbre and enunciation styles are markedly different between versions, her tempos vary, and the tonal centers are often unrelated between versions-- this can appear to be a result of writing, collaborating, and recording by ear rather than from a strict score. Comparing the sub-section entitled “This Is the Law of the Plague,” in *Masque of the Red Death* between versions is a striking reminder that, on the contrary, Galás is a calculating and meticulous composer. Between *Masque of the Red Death* and *Plague Mass*, this material is identical in tempo, rhythm, instrumentation, and Galás' shaping of her vocal techniques. Audience members familiar with her early works were likely gratified to hear material this familiar. The real difference between the two versions is strictly formal: The sections that are transposed verbatim from “This is the Law of the Plague” in *Masque of the Red*

Death appear evenly interspersed between sections from “Deliver Me From Mine Enemies” in the *Plague Mass*.

In contrast, the sub-sections from “Deliver me From Mine Enemies” in *Masque of the Red Death* that appear in the derivative *Plague Mass* movement are deliberately rendered unrecognizable in every way but textually. The effect of this for a listener familiar with *Masque of the Red Death* can be jarring, as Galás has interspersed familiar material with material that has been sonically repurposed. The “Deliver me from Mine Enemies” portion interspersed within the *Plague Mass* performance remains consistent with the vocal character of the rest of the movement, while on *Masque of the Red Death*, it is a distinctly new musical section. In *Plague Mass*, this section shifts back into the vocal character from the first movement-- a deeper, richer tone, and a slight Southern drawl that underscored the Blues techniques she used to end the movement-- but it retains the high vocal energy of the previous sections and remains proclamatory. On *Masque of the Red Death*, this section is spoken almost in slow-motion, nearly too slow to discern the text, let alone the dialect in which Galás speaks. This re-fragmentation of material allows Galás to cover more content without sacrificing the musical effects of the piece: *This is the Law of the Plague* retains its sonic landscape of hellish judgment cohesively, but allows Galás to draw on the Psalm 22 text that enhances the impact of the text from Leviticus. While the studio recording parameters of *Masque of the Red Death* allowed for experimentation and expansion on sonic and textual ideas, Galás knew that for her protest to be effective, she would need to bring the most notable and intense moments of the piece to the forefront. This explains the absence of some sections, the interspersing of others, and the comparative increase in musical energy between some of the repurposed material

Fig. 2: Material distribution from “Deliver Me From Mine Enemies” to “This is the Law of the Plague”

This is the Law of the Plague, <i>Plague Mass</i>	Deliver Me From Mine Enemies, <i>Masque of the Red Death</i>
I. “When any man...” II. “Strong bulls of Baasha...” III. “...and whosoever toucheth...” IV. “Deliver me from mine enemies...” V. “...and at evening, let them...” VI. “And if any man’s seed...” VII. “The Devil is an impotent man...” VIII. “... and the priest shall look...”	I. “When any man...” II. “... and whosoever toucheth...” III. “... and if any man’s seed...” IV. “... and the priest shall look...” V. “Deliver me from mine enemies...” VI. <i>We Shall Not Accept Your Quarantine</i> VII. <i>Εξελόνμε</i> VIII. <i>Γιατί, Ο Θεός?</i> IX. <i>Psalm 22</i> A. “Strong bulls of Baasha...”

The next piece of previously-composed material featured in the *Plague Mass* does not occur for quite some time-- there are five central movements that were composed specifically for the *Plague Mass*. The piece’s eighth movement, *Sono l’Antichristo*, was originally found on *The Divine Punishment*, the first disc of *Masque of the Red Death*. Its relational standpoint to *This is the Law of the Plague* has changed due to the amount of material occurring between the two pieces (*Masque of the Red Death* features only two sub-movements between the two pieces), but also due to the *content* of the material separating them. *Plague Mass* separates these movements with dramatic narrative (*Give Me Sodomy or Give Me Death*), religious chant (*Consecration*) and poignant and dramatic protest speech (*Let Us Praise the Masters of Slow Death*).

The movement begins dramatically after the relative calm of ‘Consecration,’ initiating, like many of the movements, with a bass drum beat. The Italian text, delivered in a proclamatory tone initially, is embellished with interjections of glossolalia that blend seamlessly with the language. Galás’ vocal timbre is husky even when she reaches rough, growling, screaming crescendi. While many movements of the *Plague Mass* feature this type of steady speech, the pounding addition of the bass line creates a new sense of direction. Each vocal line is offset with

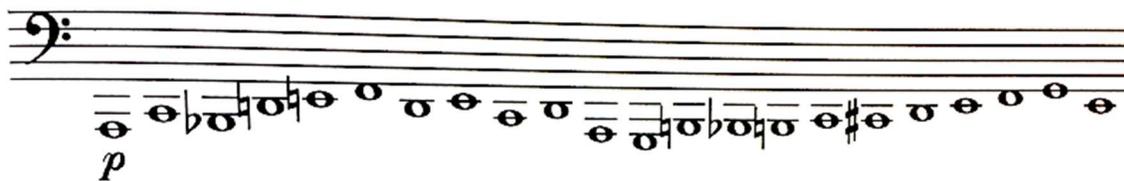
percussion crashes, which Schwarz notes are embellished by “rapid groups of notes played on the synthesizer that sound like insect calls speeded up as decorative, rhythmic appoggiaturas.”³⁴ There is a pre-recorded counter-vocal part that is further down in the electronic mix but screams in harmony with Galás onstage. Around 1:30, the articulations of the bassline begin to fade into a corresponding bass drum hit reminiscent of the earlier movements. This time the effect is less ceremonious because of the addition of pitched bass notes.

Schwarz notes that the bass line is created synthetically with sounds “poised between male voices and low strings.”³⁵ The step-wise motion found in the bassline is reminiscent of Gregorian chant, and creates “a modal scale on A with secondary material on the D [natural] a perfect fourth higher.”³⁶ In other words, this is a D hypodorian scale, although it could also be seen as an A-minor scale with a lowered second. In the context of the movement’s emphasis on Medieval sonorities, this is the more productive designation. Regardless, Schwarz notes that the emphasis on D in this bassline is to support the development of the “Dies Irae” theme in the next movement. Note that the tonal complexity of this bassline, at least in comparison to the straightforward Dorian mode of Dies Irae, precludes the line from ever explicitly quoting the chant. In other words, the bassline does not contain this theme, but it does suggest it, and specifically through its modal tonality and low voice-like timbre, it puts the sound of the chant into the audience’s ear.

³⁴ David Schwarz, *Listening Subjects: Music, Psychoanalysis, Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 157.

³⁵ Schwarz 157.

³⁶ Schwarz 158.

Figure 3: *Sono l'Antichristo* Bass Line, Schwarz's transcription

Example 62. Track II, *Plague Mass*, “Sono l’Antichristo,”
bass line of the opening.

Sono l'Antichristo is notable for being one of the several movements that appears in Galás' previously-recorded *Masque of the Red Death*-- notably, the *Plague Mass* features this re-invented material near the beginning and end of the piece, but *not* in the opening or internal movements. Like ‘This is the Law of the Plague,’ ‘Sono l’Antichristo’ can be found in *Masque of the Red Death* within a differently-titled movement. It serves as the closing theme to a movement from *The Divine Punishment* entitled “Free Among the Dead.” Vocally and textually, the movement is identical to its appearance in the *Plague Mass* in *Masque of the Red Death*. Sonically, there is an emphasis on synthesized sound that does not appear in *Plague Mass*--or if it does, it is lost within the cathedral. The bass line is identical, as well, raising crucial questions about Schwarz’s dismissal of it as a prediction of the explicit appearance of *Dies Irae* in the next movement, ‘Cris D’Aveugle.’ In *Masque of the Red Death*, ‘Cris D’Aveugle’ does not immediately succeed ‘Sono l’Antichristo,’ in fact, the two pieces do not appear on the same original albums: ‘Cris D’Aveugle’ is found on the second LP of the trilogy, *Saint of the Pit*. While the two do coexist on *Masque of the Red Death*, their proximity to one another is expanded, and the two were not originally intended to coexist on one album. For this reason, Schwarz is short-sighted in his explanation for the Gregorian Chant-style bass line in this movement of the *Plague Mass*. The effect of the two co-existing in succession on *Plague Mass* is

effective for the piece's trajectory towards an emotionally cathartic denouement: 'Sono l'Antichristo' is charged, Galás' vocal delivery aggressive and angry, and the steady drumbeat around which the movement is structured hearkens back to 'This is the Law of the Plague,' recalling the sense of omnipresent judgment that characterized the work's earlier plot. Because *Masque of the Red Death* features 'Sono l'Antichristo' and 'This is the Law of the Plague' in the same movement, this separation lends the *Plague Mass* a strong sense of cohesion despite the temporal distance between the two movements. This cohesion allows the movement to be more engaging for a live audience, who are afforded no opportunities to let their minds wander: like activists, they must remain focused on Galás' message.

The following movement, 'Cris D'Aveugle,' disrupts this return to judgment, transporting a listener who is familiar with *Masque of the Red Death* into an unexpected sonic space, and preparing the audience for the piece's emotional conclusion. While speech, screams, harshness, and chaos characterize much of the sonic space of the *Plague Mass*, this movement features the most expansive genuine melodic material. In particular, the melody is composed in a solid harmonic minor tonal space, and Galás' vocal embellishments are distinctly reminiscent of Middle Eastern styles of singing. She is frequently cited as drawing on these musical traditions in her work, and this is the first time in the piece she engages with them. However, what is particularly notable is the juxtaposition of these musical concepts with the French text. The sound of church bells, which offset the vocal line, further complicate this representative muddling, as well as the underlying Gregorian-feeling chant. This emphasis on sonic evocations of the Western medieval takes over when Galás transitions seamlessly into the "Dies Irae" theme, which is doubled in a synthesized pipe organ sound. The sung text here, *lamma lamma sabacthani*, is not derived from the Requiem mass like the music. Rather, it is found in both

Matthew and Mark's gospels, and translates to "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" in both Hebrew and Aramaic. This textual change does not serve to detract from the Medieval undertone: The march-like percussion and continual droning of the bells and bass continue to contribute. Galás' vocals increase in energy, with gradually increasing keens and weeping breaking up her extended vowel sounds. In the distance, there is audible demonic laughter.

The *Masque of the Red Death* version of 'Cris D'Aveugle' closes the collection's first disc as the final track on the *Saint of the Pit* LP. There is a notable change in sonic texture on this version, with considerably less Western Medieval evocation. The bassline is distinctly electronic, with heavy overtones, and the movement begins not with church bells, but with a synthesized squeal sounding somewhere between a scream and a long tone played on a theremin. Overall, the studio recording is much more layered than the live *Plague Mass* recording, which leans more towards organic-sounding effects. It is evident through a reading of this piece on *Masque of the Red Death* that the emphasis on sounds that evoke the European Middle Ages was intentional, although both versions include the 'Dies Irae' theme. This theme on *Masque of the Red Death* sees a less dramatic transition, and Galás' voice is further down in the electronic mix than the ghostly choir that accompanies her. The effect of this is of less emphasis on emotion of the individual, and more on an atmospheric type of mood-setting. Again, the movement is given new meaning due to its recontextualization in the larger body of work; while it can get lost in *Masque of the Red Death* for its situation midway through the work, here, it serves the distinct purpose of shifting the audience out of the space of anger and protest, and into a markedly more mournful emotional state, in preparation for the piece's solemn conclusion.

While the majority of the *Plague Mass*' movements require a degree of textual and sonic analysis due to their myriad unusual sounds, nontraditional pitches and timbres, and vocal

techniques, the final movement, ‘Let My People Go,’ is stark in its simplicity. Galás sings a song that is well-known to many Americans, in contemporary English, with no additional vocal manipulations. She accompanies herself on the grand piano, the only other instrument in the movement-- aside, of course, from the cathedral walls. Other than the context established by the sonic and physical carnage of the previous movements, the only thing that distinguishes this movement from a folk performance of the traditional spiritual “Go Down Moses,” is Galás' updated lyrical content. The stark simplicity of this performance, which is performed at a slow, deliberate tempo, with Galás' voice taking on a quality of mourning throughout. The choice to perform a finale movement in such a familiar style is seen by many as Galás' intention to soothe with an audience who is emotionally exhausted from an hour of intense, often disturbing, music. While Schwarz, as I discuss in the following chapter, interprets this as an act of reconciliation with an audience Galás intentionally alienated, this cannot be true for the audience members for whom Galás seeks to give representation.³⁷ For people with AIDS in Galás' audience with whom the anguish in the previous movements resonated, a finale with such a strikingly familiar sound is less a comforting security blanket than it is a powerful message of hope: an affirmation that there is a community of people with shared experiences that is capable of uniting toward liberation.

‘Let My People Go’ takes on an entirely different emotional context on *Masque of the Red Death*, underscored by the fact that it is not situated as a finale on this work, instead falling toward the middle of the final LP of the trilogy. The tempo is quite a bit faster, and the piano part is an entirely different piece of composition: It is dissonant, angular, and reminiscent of a cabaret-style tango. While the *Plague Mass* version is clearly a song of heart-wrenched

³⁷ Schwarz expresses this sense of alienation on pages 158 and 159 of *Listening Subjects*. I problematize this notion from an intersectional lens in the following chapter.

mourning, the *Masque of the Red Death* recording is charged, bitter, angry. These two interpretations serve the flow of the larger pieces more than anything, with the *Masque of the Red Death* recording maintaining the album's overall momentum towards its own finale, and with the *Plague Mass* version serving as a final, desperate plea.

The *Plague Mass*, while by no means Galás' only notable work that attempts to achieve representation and catharsis for those affected by the AIDS crisis, is perhaps her most effective piece of musical activism. Much of this is due to the immediacy of the performance—its location, its exclusivity, and the Benjamin-esque aura of the premiere performance. However, the most effective conceptualization of the *Plague Mass*'s effect is due to what the piece accomplishes as a work of art, and due to Galás herself. *Plague Mass* has a distinct trajectory that begins in a narrative, implicitly hypothetical format, but shifts along the way to become extremely present in the current moment. Perhaps this immediacy could not have been achieved were the piece performed by someone who was not so notoriously involved with AIDS activism, someone who had not been famously arrested for her protest involvement only a year earlier. Galás' audience had come to expect a certain level of experimental, cerebral high art from her due to the musical complexity of *Masque of the Red Death*. *Plague Mass* retains a great deal of this conceptual flair, but it is the inclusion of direct, pointed protest, and the newly-deepened emotional context of Galás' previously-recorded music that makes the *Plague Mass* singular in the highly artistic world of AIDS activism.

“Robbery is not just the robbery of money or human flesh; it involves the soul murder of cultures which will soon die if they have no more songs to sing.”: Cultural Representation in the *Plague*

Mass

In the United States, AIDS has been adopted as a focus cause by activist groups and mass culture as an LGBT interest issue. This is not to imply that AIDS did not have a devastating impact on the queer community, the effects of which are still felt today.³⁸ The lack of federally-funded sex education and civil rights protection of the Reagan administration assured that the epidemic dealt the queer community a devastating blow. However, racial and ethnic minorities, particularly in low-income communities, were affected with equal force, and were not offered the same type of visibility as white gay men in advocacy efforts to fight the epidemic on a nationally-legislated scale. The effects of this exclusion from activist efforts can be plainly seen in the disease’s spread. CDC Stats indicate that while most AIDS cases occurred among whites in the early 1980s, by 1996 these cases were more prevalent in African-Americans than among any other racial or ethnic group in the nation.³⁹

Galás' involvement with AIDS activism, as well as her personal experiences with the immediate effects of the epidemic, itself, has allowed her to internalize a realistic image of the disease’s true impacts on diverse communities. In the *Plague Mass*, this is manifested in several ways, all of which can be distilled to an overarching notion of cultural borrowing. While much of the lyrical and thematic content of the piece does show a focus on queerness, particularly in relationship to the Catholic church, there are crucial formal elements in the work that feature, and often depend on, cultural creations outside the dominant white gay male narrative seen in an overwhelming amount of AIDS activism. The aspect of cultural borrowing which has received

³⁸ I will discuss the epidemic with a strict focus on the queer community in Chapter Four.

³⁹ “HIV and AIDS” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, accessed 14 December, 2016. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5021a2.htm>

the most scholarly attention is the connection between Galás' work and the ancient Greek tradition of death laments. Many sonic elements in the *Plague Mass* evoke this repertoire, and Galás' own Greek-American identity serves to underscore this connection. Second, the *Plague Mass* dabbles textually in several languages, including Italian, French, English, and Latin. Finally, Galás frequently uses vocal techniques intended to evoke music from other cultures: namely techniques influenced by Middle Eastern music, and by the Blues and African-American music. Underscoring her African-American influence, the piece ends with a strikingly emotional reimagining of the African-American spiritual *Go Down Moses*, re-titled *Let My People Go* and featuring Galás' original lyrics. Through her use of various languages, evocation of traditional Greek death rituals, and vocality and melodic ideas inspired by African-American Blues tradition, Galás represents a wide cross-section of individuals affected by AIDS, including groups that were often neglected in mainstream activist efforts. Her statement with this musical multiculturalism is one reflected throughout much of her art and work, one that is even tattooed on her body: We are all HIV+.

Self-Reflexive Cultural Engagement: Greek Lament in *The Plague Mass*

Numerous scholars have drawn on traditions from ancient and Orthodox Greece, death rituals in particular, to interpret Galás' work. Galás herself has claimed, "[t]he intensity of my work has a lot to do with my being of Greek descent... Greeks pretty much scream about everything - it's part of the family."⁴⁰ Considering Galás' Maniot heritage, these interpretations are arguably relevant, however, I hope to examine these traditions within a broader scope of cultural practices. In other words, these customs are important for understanding Galás' work not only because she is Greek-American, but because they belie cultural beliefs that are not exclusive to Greece. Greek studies scholar Gail Holst-Warhaft, whose work on the traditional

⁴⁰ Stephen Holden, "Diamanda Galás, Avant-Garde Diva," *New York Times*, July 19, 1985.

funeral lament I will draw on extensively, notes that “[w]hat is common to laments for the dead in most ‘traditional’ cultures is that they are part of more elaborate rituals for the dead, and that they are usually performed by women.”⁴¹ Later in her book, Holst-Warhaft cites cultures including China, New Guinea, India, Greece, Saudi Arabia, and Ireland as maintaining mourning rituals that privilege the role of women.⁴²

Women’s roles in all of these death rituals, for which I will use traditional Greece as a microcosm, have contributed significantly to shaping their roles in society at large. Jarman-Ivens, also drawing on Holst-Warhaft’s work to contextualize Galás’ music, notes that because women, “are primarily—even solely—responsible for handling the corpse, for tending the grave, and for lamenting... [then t]his situation both *results in* and is a *result of* associations between women and death that have conflicting implications for their position in society. Women are, in a sense, afforded a certain amount of power because the responsibility is solely theirs, but it is a complex and not altogether positive power.”⁴³

Indeed, this is one of the cornerstones of Holst-Warhaft’s book: ancient Greek civilizations began to introduce specific legislation to limit the use of “extravagant mourning” in funeral rituals. This is a not-so-veiled attempt at restricting women’s power, as women traditionally took on the role of performing vocal laments. Holst-Warhaft argues that this resulted in men’s men’s appropriation of the female role in lament through the development of the male-dominated literary genres of the encomium (or funeral elegy), and the tragedy. It is not, Holst-Warhaft argues, simply a coincidence that these genres emerged simultaneously as women’s roles in rites of mourning were being restricted from the sixth to the fifth century

⁴¹ Holst-Warhaft, 1.

⁴² Holst-Warhaft, 20.

⁴³ Freya Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 152.

B.C.⁴⁴ If these theories are correct, Schwarz posits that there then must be a great deal of gender-specific tension between a woman's lamenting voice and institutions of the modern state.⁴⁵

Equally compelling is Holst-Warhaft's suggestion that as women's roles in cultural practice continued to be legislated away, that preclassical lamentation may have continued in more rural areas in Greece, and by extension, influenced the funeral traditions, and overall cultural concept of death, in other areas of the world.⁴⁶

Danforth's chapter on "Death in Potamia" describes the Greek concept of death as a gradual process, for which he outlines the multiple steps.⁴⁷ The first phase is separation, which begins with physical death and is considered finished when the burial process is completed. The second, liminal phase begins once burial is completed, but before exhumation; here, the deceased is considered neither dead nor alive. Danforth refers to the third phase in the Greek death process as the phase of incorporation. This begins once the corpse is exhumed: its bones are inspected, and if they are deemed fully decomposed (they appear clean and white), they are brought to the village ossuary, and the grave is destroyed. If decomposition is not complete, they are reburied, and exhumation is repeated at a later date. Each phase of this process is accompanied by a certain type of lament, performed by the women who also tend the grave. In this belief system, these women help ensure a successful transition of the body and soul of the deceased from life to death.

Schwarz notes that, "since women communicate with the not-yet-wholly dead during the liminal phase, they are linked to the danger that can arise if the corpse of the deceased only partially decomposes. The deceased can return to the realm of the living as a revenant and haunt

⁴⁴ Holst-Warhaft, 3-6.

⁴⁵ Schwarz, 135.

⁴⁶ Holst-Warhaft, 114-18.

⁴⁷ Loring Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Greece*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) 80-81.

the living.”⁴⁸ This echoes Holst-Warhaft’s implied thesis that women’s functional ties to the dead, under a patriarchal society, contribute to the pervasive essentialist view that equates femininity with the mystical, leading to men’s discomfort with, and subsequent quelling of, female empowerment. Jarman-Ivens weighs in on this, as well, noting that “[T]he fact that the lamenter can speak on behalf of the dead raises the question as to who is foretelling whose fate; it is also... possible to see that the dead man is telling *his own* fate through the lamenting women.”⁴⁹ Although she does not specifically acknowledge the sociopolitical tension ascribed in Holst-Warhaft’s work, Jarman-Ivens touches on the ambiguous nature of this link between women and the dead, implicitly affirming the link’s longevity in global cultures.

Each scholar I have invoked so far has acknowledged women’s role in Greek death rituals as being intrinsically linked to music-- specifically, the lament. Schwarz notes that the lament is “at once very expressive and carefully constructed,”⁵⁰ while Steven Feld, in conversation with Holst-Warhaft, goes as far as to condense characteristics of the lament into a six-point list. Feld’s list essentially defines the lament as a structurally analyzable, gender-specific, cultural (not individual) expression of emotion that exists in a sonic space between speech and song. Feld’s final point: The lament is a ritual giving voice to metaphors of transition.⁵¹ Liminality, according to Feld and Holst-Warhaft, is a crucial defining concept in the lament genre; a lament is neither performance nor prayer, speech nor song, and serves people who are neither living nor dead. In all aspects, laments intend to aid in the ultimate transition. Another aspect of liminality in the Greek lament tradition lies in the manner in which the songs are absorbed into history. Holst-Warhaft’s fieldwork with women who perform laments, known

⁴⁸ Schwarz, 135.

⁴⁹ Jarman-Ivens, 152.

⁵⁰ Schwarz, 136.

⁵¹ Holst-Warhaft, 19-20.

as *moirologhístres*, acknowledges that there is a large body of established lament repertoire, but lament performances are just as regularly original works. She states that, “[t]he lamenter herself may forget exactly what she sang at the time of her grief, but there are always members of her audience who are careful followers of lament... If her lament is skilled, the *moirologhístra*’s creation will be admired and appropriated into the repertoire of what might be termed lament-as-song.”⁵² Here, we can see another connection to Galás’ work: the notion that these women can create culturally-significant music out of a state of sheer grief, rather than musical premeditation. This mirrors much of the theory behind Galás’ use of glossolalia, an equally involuntary expression of religious ecstasy in the Christian tradition, to be discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

Maniot laments in particular communicate a sort of extended liminality, while retaining a vivid memory of the world of the living. Schwarz points out that these laments “blur... the distinction between the emotive expression of loss and a *call to avenge* an unjust death. Maniot laments are often long narratives that recount both the manner of the death of the deceased and the reaction of those who survive the death, often the story of revenge.”⁵³ This recurring theme of revenge within Maniot laments is one Schwarz ties specifically to themes in Galás’ work thousands of years later.⁵⁴ These themes, he claims, affirm loyalty to family over the state, challenging the political appropriation of women’s roles in death rituals centuries before. The political issues that women can therefore address through these revenge-oriented laments, according to Schwarz, are plentiful.⁵⁵ Holst-Warhaft expands the power of the revenge lament further, arguing that, “even when there is no possibility for translating anger into action, the

⁵² Holst-Warhaft, 45.

⁵³ Schwarz 136.

⁵⁴ Popular music journalism frequently refers to Galás as a “revenge artist” or a “revenge rocker,” see her interview with Susan de Muth for the Independent.

⁵⁵ Schwarz, 137.

outbursts in the controlled body of a narrative are so persistent a feature of the Maniot laments, their position within the text sufficiently regular (almost always preceded by a calm introduction... followed by a return to practical detail) to suggest that they are a conscious device of the lamenter.”⁵⁶ Because Galás' work, particularly in the *Plague Mass*, is so centered around Galás' voice, she often can engage with a similar sense of organic improvisation, while her reputation as a classically-trained operatic vocalist could lead her audience to assume she is performing strictly from a pre-composed score. She, in this regard, is an ideal artist to assume the Maniot type of performative ambiguity in her work.

While I have enumerated to some extent the connections between Galás' work, specifically the *Plague Mass*, and Maniot lament traditions, this is an area upon which many scholars have written. Schwarz goes as far as to argue that Galás translates classical Greek politics into her work, for example, stating that while her art deals explicitly with contemporary issues, “... the affective intensity of her art rests on this ancient antagonism that pits the voice of women against the law of the state.”⁵⁷ Galás' activist efforts should be acknowledged here, as well as her direct implication of the Catholic Church's authority in her performance of the piece.⁵⁸ I would like to focus, however, on specific musical and performance-oriented components of the *Plague Mass* and their contemporizing of the Greek lament tradition.

In my musical analysis of Galás' performance, I engaged heavily with Schwarz' work in his book *Listening Subjects*, which deals with parts of Galás' later recorded album, *Vena Cava*. This work includes a great deal of material also used in the *Plague Mass*. *I Wake Up and See the Face of the Devil*, for instance, is present in both works (entitled *Vena Cava I* on the eponymous

⁵⁶ Holst-Warhaft, 70.

⁵⁷ Schwarz, 136.

⁵⁸ I will delve deeper into the ways in which Galás addresses the church in Chapter Four.

album).⁵⁹ While this is not the only moment in the *Plague Mass* that centralizes rapid repetition of musical ideas, it is one of the only moments that utilizes it as its sole structural basis. Schwarz argues that repetition is a crucial component of a lament from any culture, that laments serve as “... a working out of the significance of an already experienced trauma.”⁶⁰ For an AIDS patient, perhaps this particular musical moment, with the repeated inquiries of “how do you feel?” could mimic the frequency of doctor’s visits, or of inquiries by concerned friends and family. Further, this movement achieves liminality through its therapeutic musical repetition that mirrors the lament’s ability to transcend the border between life and death-- after all, due to Galás' gradually shifting voice, we cannot pinpoint the exact moment in which the “doctor” character becomes the devil. This is a nearly on-the-nose parallel to the aspects of transcendence that made the women who performed laments so threatening to Greek men.

Galás' vocal techniques are, in many ways, her claim to fame, and throughout the *Plague Mass* she utilizes a certain ululating wail, frequently with a harsh vocal fry effect on the tail end of extended exclamations. Holst-Warhaft refers to this as “... the spilling over from song to scream,” and applies it both to Galás' work and to her fieldwork with the Mani lamenters.⁶¹ Laments of Mani, she notes, are often characterized by a “calm, hard” surface narrative that is broken in a few places by a cry. The *Plague Mass* begins with no less than this exact technique: Galás ululates on a high C with increasing frequency, interspersed with her softly spoken textual

⁵⁹ The two versions of the movement differ sonically in ways that transcend the difference between two separate live performances-- Galás expands on the melodic opportunities in the “patient” character’s role, for instance, and performs the “doctor/Devil” in a lower timbre. The electronically manipulated sounds are lush and more layered, and Galás highlights the repetitive nature of the piece through techniques that can only be achieved in audio engineering, such as rapidly shifting the sound’s focus between left and right speakers. There are enough similarities in structure, content, and overall impact, however, to render Schwarz’ analysis useful, still.

⁶⁰ Schwarz, 139.

⁶¹ Holst-Warhaft, 12.

lines. The fact that both Mani laments and the *Plague Mass* intersperse these emotional outbursts with graphic, macabre texts contribute to the fact that, “the rituals of death can also be confused with or appear to be identical to the manifestations of madness.”⁶² Jarman-Ivens explores the function of techniques reminiscent of madness in Galás' music, as well, noting that Galás' uses sonic functions typically associated with madness to subvert the gendered trope of the hysterical woman-- a particularly effective device in a piece so strongly tied with Christianity. The role Galás takes on, of the mad woman as a figure to be feared, reveals an awareness of the political tension caused by women's role in Greek death traditions, building an effective bridge between Catholicism and the tense history of Greek laments. Holst-Warhaft notes this connection as well, noting that, “[t]he witch and the shaman, the medium and the wailing woman are all seen, at some historical moment or in some particular culture, as being possessed by dangerous powers, but the lamenter, in her ritual dialogue with death, may be viewed as linking madness to death in a unique equivalence.”⁶³

Holst-Warhaft, Schwarz, and Jarman-Ivens have all contributed to the notion that the formal aspects of Galás' work that connect her to the Greek tradition are also what create such striking emotional effects in its listeners. I have distilled this notion further into two main aspects Galás' work borrows from the lament tradition: liminality and therapeutic catharsis. Holst-Warhaft connects them in the context of Greek lament rituals:

“[L]aments are perceived by those who perform them as fulfilling an emotionally necessary, even a satisfying, function both for the lamenter and the bereaved. This therapeutic aspect of lament is related but not identical to the liminal aspect of lament, to lament as a bridge between the living and the dead. The apparent contradiction between the identification of lamenting women with insanity or wildness and a perception of lament as calming and controlling violent emotion may be partly a difference of

⁶² Holst-Warhaft, 27.

⁶³ Holst-Warhaft, 27.

viewpoint between participant and observer. Women who lament are more likely to see their role as therapeutic than men who observe them...”⁶⁴

Jarman-Ivens, in her discussions of the role of madness and glossolalia,⁶⁵ and Schwarz, in his discussion of therapeutic repetition, serve to connect Holst-Warhaft’s thesis directly to Galás’ work. While I do not intend to argue that any Greek death rituals or laments can be reduced to only two main factors (remember; Feld condensed them into six!), I believe these are notions that are crucial enough to the discipline that it would essentially be rendered meaningless without either of them. The *Plague Mass*, too, relies on notions of life-death liminality and dramatic catharsis so heavily that it could not function without them. In these two regards, and certainly others, the *Plague Mass* is no less than a contemporary rewriting of a traditional Greek death lament.

External Cultural Sounds

The scholarly focus on Classical Greek death rituals’ manifestation in Galás’ work is due in part to Galás’ self-inscribed ownership of it, and in part to the omnipresence of death within her work. However, lengthy moments within the *Plague Mass* are sonically explicit about their engagement with cultures with which Galás does *not* claim involvement. These include her use of various linguistic modes, and her keen attention to cultural signifiers within vocal techniques across cultures. Part II of this chapter explores the implication of the *Plague Mass*’s engagement with musical codes associated with Middle Eastern music, foreign language, and musical representations of the African-American community.

Galás is frequently cited as drawing on a Middle Eastern style of singing in her work, and the *Plague Mass* includes a considerable amount of this cultural borrowing in “Cris D’Aveugle.”

⁶⁴ Holst-Warhaft, 29.

⁶⁵ To be discussed further in Chapter Four.

The movement's solid footing within a harmonic minor tonality and reliance on vocal embellishments evokes a strong sense of "Eastern-ness" in a Western listener. Galás herself has noted that the specific tradition on which she draws, though, is derivative of her own heritage. This tradition, called *amanedes*, is a style of mourning song that belongs to the Amanes, the refugees forced out of Greece beginning in the 15th century through the Greek war of independence.⁶⁶ Because the *amanedes* tradition did not begin within Greece, but rather is associated with the Greeks who were relocated, its sound has come to be associated with the Ottoman empire as a region: Today's Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and surrounding countries. In essence, the collective ear of the West has come to attribute the music of a group with a shared *national* identity to a vague, and thus depoliticized, *regional* identity.

While the reasons for this misattribution of musical codes could fill another thesis altogether, Galás herself has addressed this issue succinctly. She describes the simplistic misattribution of *amanedes* musical style to the Middle East, recalling, "It's most recognizable when people sing the Quran or prayers of the Middle East, because the Greek people were from the part of land that they got deported from! The land of Egypt! They had been there for so many years, and the culture's mixed in Turkey. There were so many different groups that combined and sang together."⁶⁷ On a practical level, this raises questions of organization for the sake of my project: are these musical ideas to be considered intracultural or extracultural from Galás' perspective? Critic Simon Reynolds wrote, of Galás' 1989 *Masque of the Red Death* performance in London, that her first movement was "like a Moslem widow's prayer wail" and later refers to

⁶⁶ Note that *amanedes* mourning does not always connect to death or loss of an individual-- frequently, as Galás notes, these songs were created to express a longing for home.

⁶⁷ Diamanda Galás, "The Music That Made Diamanda Galás," edited by Brandon Stousy, *Pitchfork*, 13 May 2016.

her “voice multi-tracked into a choir of wizened Middle Eastern crones.”⁶⁸ Reynolds is not alone in his assumptions that Galás is drawing on cultural traditions that are outside of her own national origin-- journalists frequently add “Middle Eastern” to the list of musics that influence Galás' style. The ambiguity of cultural belonging attributed to this music is, ironically, a result of its originators having no national belonging due to banishment. This raises an ideological parallel to the sense of not belonging, of unwelcomeness, that individuals affected by AIDS experienced. Galás' musical suggestion of the amanedes tradition is extremely culturally loaded, and ultimately serves not to represent her, but to evoke the history of a displaced people.

Throughout Galás' oeuvre, she has engaged with myriad languages other than English, including German, Spanish, Italian, French, Greek, Armenian, and Assyrian Arabic. Jarman-Ivens claims that “to use so many [languages] is to wield power very forcefully through a mechanism that is already bound up with the exercise of power,” and that Galás wields power by controlling how her audience must interpret her words. The *Plague Mass* becomes more linguistically diverse as the piece progresses thematically: while the beginning of the piece depicts illness and judgment, the latter sections feature themes of conciliation and spiritual retribution. Galás communicates overwhelmingly in English up until the piece's seventh movement, aptly named *Consecration*. Here, Galás chants the Eucharist in Latin, setting up the death of her Christ-associated protagonist.⁶⁹ This effect, in light of Jarman-Ivens' observation, is one of stripping the power away from her audience as they become invested with her character's

⁶⁸ Simon Reynolds, “Diamanda Galás: Queen Elizabeth Hall, London,” *Melody Maker*, 14 January 1989.

⁶⁹ It is notable that Galás includes “signum” or “sign” in her chants of “hoc est signum sangre/corpus meum,” as many Catholics are quick to note that Jesus does imply that the Eucharist is a metaphor, but rather *is* his body and blood. Galás erases this by specifying that the Eucharist is a representation of the character's physical body.

story-- initially, the audience is merely a witness. By the seventh movement, they are absorbed helplessly into the protagonist's journey.

The *Plague Mass* includes one language in particular that removes this power of understanding from any audience member who hears it: glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. Jarman-Ivens describes the sonic effect of glossolalia as "...a kind of free-form phonemic vocalizing that resembles language at its surface level, [but is] a kind of nonsensical babbling."⁷⁰ Galás uses glossolalia heavily in the *Plague Mass*, notably in "This is the Law of the Plague" in which she intertwines glossolalic sonic cues with the same ululation she employs in the piece's opening.⁷¹ Because of its strong role in the piece's religious impact, glossolalic speech will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, but is nevertheless worth acknowledging in the context of Jarman-Ivens' linguistic argument. In this light, Galás' use of glossolalia becomes a form of linguistic equalizer, bringing the entirety of the audience into a powerless state. Jarman-Ivens notes, somewhat contradictorily, that *because* of glossolalia's role in the church, in which it often serves as a gendered signifier of madness, that it cannot be so easily condensed into just another language.⁷² However, within Jarman-Ivens' acknowledgement of glossolalia as an archetypically primitive sound (she uses "pre-Babel" and "pre-semiotic infantile babbling" in turn⁷³), lies an assumption that the sound is inherently disorienting to all human beings. Glossolalia's role as an equalizer in the *Plague Mass* is therefore also that of a universal *alienator*-- forcing the audience to consider why they are able to understand some words, concepts, and behaviors and not others. Pope and Leonardi agree, claiming that Galás' use of glossolalia, "... reminds listeners of the epistemological and representational limits of the

⁷⁰ Jarman-Ivens, 142.

⁷¹ It is crucial to note that the role of glossolalia in the Pentecostal tradition contributes another layer of reference to African-American music.

⁷² Jarman-Ivens, 145.

⁷³ Jarman-Ivens, 142.

discursive system.”⁷⁴ The interspersing of glossolalia with English and non-English text serve to bring these limits even further into relief. By varying her use of language to bring her audience in and out of textual understanding, Galás forces her audience into self-awareness of the spaces in which they are permitted, and by extension, of the places in which they are comfortable.

I have acknowledged that Diamanda Galás' personal involvement in the fight against AIDS was initiated by the death of her brother, a white gay man. Her relationship with the communities affected by AIDS is complicated: She has stated a preference for socializing with only gay men, and is exceedingly open about her past as an intravenous drug user and prostitute, often expressing a kind of bemused disbelief that she, herself, did not fall victim to the virus.⁷⁵ At the same time, she demonstrates a fierce disgust with the hip-hop community in most of her interviews, a generalization that is often read as racially-charged in contemporary music scholarship.⁷⁶ I do not intend to diminish the questions of morality raised by this attitude, which she demonstrates fully in her piece *The Sporting Life*. At one point, the piece features a depiction of rapper Snoop Dogg being brutalized, raped, and murdered by a gang of women because, “Women are sick of these no-dick motherfuckers prancing around singing about their 'bitches' and the bad things they do to them. I'm just giving it back.”⁷⁷ Statements like this are often rightly condemned for being racialized, particularly because they often allude to fundamental misunderstandings of both the real-world effects of socioeconomic discrimination on communities of color, and of the complexities of the musical genre as a whole. Coming from Galás, the statement raises questions about her own work, which frequently depicts violence and

⁷⁴ Pope and Leonardi, 325.

⁷⁵ Turner

⁷⁶ In general, AIDS-conscious hip-hop did not receive commercial exposure until the illness had already devastated African-American communities. The Red Hot Organization, an AIDS benefit group that released numerous compilation albums by best-selling artists across genres, released its first album focused on Black music until 1994, and its first hip-hop album in 1996.

⁷⁷ De Muth

is often condemned for its vulgarity. It seems contradictory, then, that she is unable to identify with hip-hop music, which to this day receives an overwhelming amount of criticism for similar content.

Galás' outspoken qualms with hip-hop and gangsta rap become even more complicated in light of her use of Blues vocality. A versatile artist, she often becomes the recipient of a laundry list of styles and influences when fans and critics describe her music; the Blues tops nearly every one of these lists. Indeed, she spent the vast majority of her early career singing the Blues-- after, of course, her lengthy stint as a jazz pianist.⁷⁸ Her disdain for hip-hop music uncomfortably mirrors the criticisms purported by detractors of Blues and Jazz expressed when the genre reached widespread consumption by whites in the 1920s and onward. At the same time, her use of these styles is not an act of appropriation-- as Dery acknowledges, her musical upbringing revolved around these genres, and she was an active participant in the still-diverse California jazz scene as a young adult. In the context of the *Plague Mass*, the use of Blues styles and formal use of African-American spiritual hymns shows an awareness of the impact of AIDS on communities of color. Pope and Leonardi argue that by "...[u]sing gospel idioms and reworking... well-known spirituals... Galás taps for the *Masque* and the *Mass* an American folk tradition that, she claims, is about survival and resistance, and recontextualizes it in a new fight against the forces of marginalization and bigotry."⁷⁹ This adds another layer of nuance in its evocation of the importance of spirituals for African-American slaves, and later during the Civil Rights movement. In effect, Galás' choice to evoke, or outright use, these songs produces a bold statement that does more than compare the struggles of people with AIDS to the history of racial

⁷⁸ Dery.

⁷⁹ Pope and Leonardi, 322.

tension in the United States; she reminds us that the AIDS crisis *is* a Civil Rights issue, that AIDS was another weapon deployed by those in power to continue to oppress Black people.

Complicating Galás' engagement with Black music in the context of the *Plague Mass* can raise more questions than it answers, making it necessary to re-engage with my initial argument: that Galás is situating *herself* as a death midwife in the AIDS crisis. Here, it becomes necessary to engage with the somewhat loaded notion of artist intent. Although Galás has expressed arguably racialized criticism for genres of Black music outside her artistic work, her well-informed use of historically Black musical techniques in the *Plague Mass* reveals an *intention* to serve as an ally for communities of color affected by AIDS. Galás' self-imposed positionality as a death midwife, performed through a piece with an intent to soothe all the communities impacted by AIDS, does not change when racially contentious things she has said come to light. These things should, however, not be neglected when discussing the ways in which her work is racialized.

Perhaps because of its staging as a work of protest art, the *Plague Mass* was one of a too-small number of highly-publicized commercial artistic works that fully acknowledged and embodied the ways in which AIDS' reach spread into a vast number of communities. Galás engages with her own cultural heritage by centering the techniques of Mani lamenters, and gives musical representation to the African-American community, a group that, at this point in history, was often overlooked in activist efforts. Her engagement with other musical cultural signifiers, such as Middle Eastern scale patterns and vocal techniques, as well as her deployment of a wide array of languages, including ones that cannot be understood by any culture, force her audience to be critically introspective about spaces in which they are, or are not, included. By manner of conclusion, I would like to add to my discussion of Galás' cultural engagements that these modes

of cultural significance also have crucial historical ties. In the words of Pope and Leonardi, “*The Masque*’s strategy of quoting many and varied discourses reminds listeners that the new is always read through epistemological frames provided by earlier discourses, discourses that always have ideological investments.”⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Pope and Leonardi, 322. Although this discussion is explicitly centered around the *Masque of the Red Death* trilogy, the “varied discourses” they mention are the same ones that occur in the *Plague Mass*, namely the evocation of the Greek lament tradition.

“The certainty of the Devil with no hope in God.” Epidemics and the Church’s Uncomfortable Past

The *Plague Mass*, like much of Diamanda Galás' work, has a central musical and ideological theme of subversion of Catholic church practices. Her methods of engaging with these themes are by no means exclusive to her work, rather, a vast amount of Western cultural production with themes of morbidity often expresses these themes by playing on religious, and specifically Catholic, anxieties: think horror movies' fixation on demonic possession, and satanic themes found in black metal music. The reasons for this cultural emphasis on religious iconography to underscore themes of death and the macabre could be delineated in another full-length work altogether, but for Galás, religious references serve the *Plague Mass*' political goal while also allowing her to engage with the history of social responses to public health crises. Pope and Leonardi note that Galás' engagement with Christianity, as well as the other cultural idioms I discussed in the previous chapter, serves as a “... return to the sources of traditional discourses about disease, desire, punishment, and homosexuality in Western culture as a whole.”⁸¹ While many of Galás' explicit references to the Church and disease can be traced all the way back to Biblical plagues, there is a particular emphasis on music and imagery related to the Black Death, another public health crisis in which the Church notoriously played a key detrimental role. The effect is a distinct parallel drawn between the Church's response to the Bubonic Plague in the fourteenth century, and its response to AIDS in the twentieth. Munkhoff notes that, “[p]lague was certainly viewed by contemporaries as a sign of God's wrath against sin; the more widespread the epidemic, the more plague would be read as a sign of some larger

⁸¹ Pope and Leonardi, 322.

communal failing.”⁸² Compare this to the Church’s role in the AIDS crisis, which involved advocating against condom use and continuing to decry homosexual actions as sinful. Although the Church played an important role in providing healthcare to people with AIDS, a conspicuously large number of Americans-- 36% of those surveyed by PRRI in 1992-- subscribed to the belief that AIDS was a punishment from God.⁸³

By engaging with Biblical text and performing the *Plague Mass* in a cathedral, Galás subverts the Catholic Mass tradition, explicitly implicating the Catholic church in the widespread horror of the AIDS crisis. Simultaneously, she evokes the historical moment of the Black Death, during which members of the church implicitly attributed the death of thousands to God’s punishment for sin. Her criticisms take musical and performative form in techniques intended to evoke the abject, both physically and religiously. In the context of my overall argument regarding women’s roles in public health crises, Galás takes on several vocal and musical roles in the piece that place her in dialogue with the delineated positions of women who dealt with victims of the Plague.

Galás explicitly presents her work as a mass through its titling, leading her audience (who set foot inside a cathedral to hear the work) to expect a level of parallel with typical church music.⁸⁴ Her audience members may not have all been entirely familiar with the form or content of the liturgical mass, but scholars and journalists who have studied the piece, as well as Galás herself, have drawn parallels to this structure, implicitly and directly. For example, Michael

⁸² Richelle Munkhoff, "Searchers of the Dead: Authority, Marginality, and the Interpretation of Plague in England, 1574-1665." *Gender & History* 11, no. 1: 1. 1999. *Historical Abstracts*, EBSCOhost, 9.

⁸³ "Stigma, Discrimination, & HIV AIDS," *PRRI*, 20 March 2014, <http://www.ppri.org/spotlight/hiv-aids/>

⁸⁴ Note that I will *not* engage, in this chapter, with Galás' use of African-American spirituals, as the effect of this engagement, and its intent, is more complex than the manners in which she engages with European Catholic traditions.

Flanagan describes ‘This is the Law of the Plague,’ in the album’s liner notes as an “anti-Kyrie,”⁸⁵ and Pope and Leonardi refer to ‘There Are No More Tickets to the Funeral,’ as a “...rework[ing of] the antiphonal structure of the traditional introit...”⁸⁶ For obvious reasons, including the work’s emphasis on the fate of the dead, as well as the direct musical reference to the *Dies Irae*, many scholars and journalists have likened the *Plague Mass* specifically to the Catholic Requiem Mass. Galás resists this designation, arguing in one interview that “It’s a plague mass, as opposed to more traditionally a requiem mass, in the sense that it’s very active mourning... It’s a political discussion. It’s for the dead, but it’s for people living with AIDS, for the AIDS community, for the families. It deals with a geography of the plague mentality, a slow death in a hostile environment. It discusses how to stay alive in this kind of place.”⁸⁷ In another, “A requiem mass helps to pacify the living so they can feel the dead are resting in peace... the dead from this disease, I don’t think of them as resting in peace.”⁸⁸ Pope and Leonardi take Galás’ disenchantment with Mass comparisons a step further, arguing that the implied liturgical form has been transformed, through Galás’ use of musical dialogue, into the operatic genre of the masque.⁸⁹

Although Galás is careful to draw the distinction between her work and any particular type of mass, there are specific musical and textual details that evoke music associated with the Catholic tradition, and these evocations serve the specific purpose of implicating the Catholic Church in complicity with AIDS. Perhaps the most obvious evocation of Christianity-- beyond the work’s title and the location in which it was performed-- is the overall story arc and its

⁸⁵ Flanagan’s designation appears to be primarily based on the movement’s location within the larger piece, as the textual content does not align with the subject matter of the liturgical Kyrie.

⁸⁶ Pope and Leonardi, 324.

⁸⁷ Joe Brown, “With Songs of Rage,” *Washington Post*, April 7, 1991.

⁸⁸ Dennis Polkow, “Beating the Devil, Galás Tries to Face Reality of AIDS in her ‘Plague Mass’” *Chicago Tribune*, April 3, 1991.

⁸⁹ Pope and Leonardi, 324.

parallels to the New Testament, and specifically, the allusions to Jesus Christ in reference to the protagonist. The ontological line between the work's protagonist and Christ are blurred from the piece's first movement, with its early textual reference to an unnamed person "on his dying bed," and the later, more explicit, description of crucifixion and being dragged to the tomb.

Continually, Christ is referred to explicitly as an external figure, but implicitly as an embodiment of the protagonist himself, normally through contextual parallels, but occasionally through this method of narrative ambiguity. Schwarz points out that the "I" in 'Sono l'Antichristo' is ambiguous, and 'Consecration' before it is similarly vague. The use of the Eucharist text, however, carries a strong implication that Galás is taking on the character of somebody who represents Christ.

Biblical text permeates the *Plague Mass*, often in even more direct quotations than in the Latin 'Consecration' text. The Leviticus text found in 'This is the Law of the Plague,' is the piece's longest segment of direct Biblical text, and will be discussed later in this chapter because of its influences on public health. Aside from this, Galás either paraphrases or directly quotes text from the following Biblical passages:

- I. Psalm 22
- II. Psalm 59
- III. Revelations 19
- IV. Revelations 16
- V. Matthew 26/Luke 22/Mark 14

With the exception of the New Testament excerpts, which she translates to Latin for 'Consecration,' Galás has specifically selected passages that deal explicitly with themes of judgment and retribution. This is critical for several reasons: First, it serves as a narrative device to advance the protagonist's journey through death and into an afterlife. Second, it highlights the Church's hypocrisy in not denouncing Christians who believed that disease is God's punishment

for sin, simply by directly engaging with Biblical text that underscores the supreme power of God's judgment. Finally, and most effectively, Galás' earlier establishment of an ambiguous narrator (and therefore, an ambiguous intended audience) is in dialogue with the use of Biblical text, implying that the members of the Church itself could be the ones receiving judgment due to their rejection of others.

Although Galás resists the notion that the *Plague Mass* has any formal or structural allusions to the traditional Catholic mass, the work frequently evokes sonic imagery of church music through the use of particular melodies and sounds. The most obvious example is, of course, the direct use of the well-known *Dies Irae* theme. The theme can be traced back to a poem written in the thirteenth century by Thomas of Celano, and once set to music, was later included in the Italian Requiem Mass in the fourteenth century.⁹⁰ Galás does not use Celano's text, but instead the linguistically-ambiguous Matthew excerpt, 'lamma lamma sabacthani.'⁹¹ The melody, as it appears in the earliest Requiem masses, has been absorbed into the Western musical canon to essentially signify hell-- it occupies the central theme in the final movement of Berlioz's *Symphony Fantastique*, and is used to create an ominous foreboding in film music, notably in the opening credits of *The Shining*. In other words, this theme carries strong connotative significance for Western audiences, and Galás' direct, blatant quotation of it was meant to evoke associations with her audience. Other musical references to the Catholic Mass include the sonic aesthetics of 'Consecration,' which presents the Eucharist text, in Latin, in a manner that evokes the chanting intonation of any liturgical rite. Also notable is the effects of the

⁹⁰ John Caldwell and Malcolm Boyd. "Dies irae." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40040>.

⁹¹ This excerpt is Matthew's quotation from Christ himself, and translates essentially to "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" However, the linguistic roots of these words are debated, often attributed as Greek transliterations of either Hebrew or Aramaic words.

cathedral space on the sound of the piece throughout-- no matter what Galás does, there is an effect of being in a sacred space, because she *is* in one.

The concept of the abject, as introduced in Julia Kristeva's cornerstone work, *Powers of Horror*, is central to much of the effectiveness of Galás' work. Kristeva's work on abjection engages with psychoanalytic theory to conceptualize and explain the human reaction to the disintegration of boundaries between subject and object, or between self and other. This notion is frequently used to engage with the universal response of horror towards disease or death, which forces a confrontation with human materiality, and this response is the source of power for much of Galás' work. This sense of physical abjection plays a central role in the expressive intent of the *Plague Mass*, and will be addressed within the context, namely, of disease later in this chapter. However, I would like to present a second, more subjective, form of abjection that contributes equally to the effects of the *Plague Mass*: Religious abjection. Barbara Creed, in dialogue with Kristeva, notes that, "... definitions of the monstrous as constructed in the modern horror text are grounded in ancient religious and historical notions of abjection-- particularly in relation to the following religious 'abominations': sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration; decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest."⁹² With the exception, perhaps, of incest, every item on Creed's list of religious abject signifiers is represented somewhere in the *Plague Mass*. Kristeva's earlier text engages with the religious abject in its fourth chapter, discussing it in a broad sense as follows:

" To the extent that the Temple is the Law, one is biblically pure or impure only with respect to social order, that is, with respect to the Law or the cult... If, on the other hand, one tries to go back further into the archeology of that impurity, one indeed encounters fear in the face of a power... that might become autonomous evil but is not, so long as the hold of subjective and social symbolic order endures. Biblical impurity is thus always already a logicizing of what departs from the symbolic, and for that very reason it

⁹² Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 8-9.

prevents it from being actualized as demonic evil. Such a logicizing inscribes the demonic in a more abstract and also more moral register as a potential for guilt and sin.⁹³

In other words, the *centrality* of purity and impurity within a community's or individual's commitment to religion, combined with religion's inherent symbolism, is what creates anxiety surrounding faith and piety with relation to the defying of religious order.

It is impossible to discuss Galás' engagement with Catholic musical and textual traditions without noting the implications of the manner in which she subverts them. Galás had already established herself as an enemy to the church, having been banned from Italy after her Florence performance the summer before she performed *Plague Mass*, over accusations of blasphemy. This, in addition to her publicized arrest during the ACT UP protest at St. Patrick's cathedral the year before, as well as the general theme throughout her work of criticizing the Church, placed Galás in an opportune space to challenge Catholicism to the extreme. To do this, the *Plague Mass* engages in musical, textual, and physical subversions of Catholic iconography at large that serve to evoke strong feelings of religious abjection in any pious audience member. This includes, and in fact relies on, moments of engagement with Catholic tradition that do not, in and of themselves, create abjection. For instance, 'Consecration' is simply a Latin recitation of the Eucharist, performed as a chant through Galás' steady and straightforward speech delivery, underscored with synthesized chimes, which strike continuously and rhythmically like the tympani in the earlier movement. These steady overall rhythms, both instrumental and vocal, lend the movement a sense of a somber processional or rite. They serve as a sonically, and contextually, comfortable starting-point for the movement, which increases in tempo until the moment of abjection: the recurring high C ululation that startled in the first movement.

⁹³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 91.

Schwarz speaks at length on the high C ululation throughout the piece as its most distinctive abject signifier. However, her use of glossolalia creates even more potent abjection in its occupation of the anxious space between speech and meaningless vocalization. While I defined and discussed this technique for its linguistic disorientation in an earlier chapter, I would like to address it here specifically as a technique used to invoke a specific identification with, and anxiety around, religious faith. A technique frequently used in the exorcist-horror genre of films, glossolalia is most commonly known as “speaking in tongues,” and directly implies a link to the Holy Spirit in many Christian denominations. For Galás to employ this tactic in the *Plague Mass* is to indicate that she possesses the ability to commune with angels. This can produce a sense of religious abjection in two manners: First, the reproduction of an effect thought to be produced through religious ecstasy by someone committing other blasphemous acts can be seen as the desecration of something sacred. On the other hand, if an audience member were to interpret this act as a genuine production of the Holy Spirit’s voice, they could also assume Galás herself is a tool of God, whose judgment will be passed not on People with AIDS, but on those who condemn them.

Galás also creates religious abjection by contextualizing the physically abject with religious iconography. Most obviously, this includes her use of extreme vulgar language within the Cathedral, the references to ‘the shit of God’ in ‘Sono l’Antichristo,’ and her selection of Biblical text that discusses disease, the Devil, and punishment. The use of blood in Galás’ performance has been analyzed contextually as a symbolic juxtaposition of the blood of Christ with HIV-positive blood.⁹⁴ ‘This is the Law of the Plague,’ however, most effectively marries the religiously abject with the physically abject, primarily due to the centrality of physical abjection within Biblical doctrine itself. It is text taken verbatim from the Bible, but discusses

⁹⁴ Pope and Leonardi, 326.

disease in great detail-- Galás' musical setting for it underscores the sense of terror evoked by the prediction of epidemic. Schwarz' analysis links the aspects of religious abjection in *Plague Mass* to physical abjection, noting that nearly all religious iconology engages with the physically abject, which in turn, creates abjection towards blasphemy in believers. Schwarz acknowledges that “[t]heologically, rites of defilement are linked to rites of purification in many pagan religions, and dietary prohibitions are crucial particularly to Judaism. The image of the crucifixion in Christianity suggests the centrality of abjection as well.”⁹⁵

Galás' use of abjection in Kristeva's more obvious, physical sense, permeates the *Plague Mass*. Schwarz engages with the sonic signifiers of physical abjection to a rather extensive degree, in which he, too, applies Kristeva's concepts to the sonic characteristics of Galás' work. He invokes the ululation of the opening movement as an abject signifier in two ways: First, in the disruptive nature of the rhythm and semiotic meaning of the text, and secondly in the “smearing of boundaries” between pitches. This is abject, he argues, because Kristeva defines abjection as deriving from disintegration of subjective boundaries: the elimination of boundaries between pitches, according to Schwarz, mirrors the “stages of developing subjectivity” that produce abjection.⁹⁶ Schwarz discusses the ‘Sono l’Antichristo’ in a similar mode of engagement with Kristeva, noting the moment in which Galás' voice splits off from itself as abject (note, however, that this particular moment can be disconcerting or uncomfortable for Western audiences simply because it is quite harmonically dissonant). Overall, Schwarz is fixated on Kristeva's theories from a literal perspective, focusing only on the notions of subjectivity and liminality that produce abjection. There is a parallel here to the liminality I invoked during my discussion of women's roles in Mani death rituals, and the subsequent politicization of these roles by men. Recall that

⁹⁵ Schwarz, 143.

⁹⁶ Schwarz, 150.

moirologhistres were inevitably silenced and pushed out of the tradition of death rituals because their liminal position assisting spirits cross to the afterlife was threatening to the men in political power-- to use Kristeva's vocabulary, they produced abjection in these men.

While Schwarz's analysis of abjection in Galás' work, including *Plague Mass*, is thorough and deeply engaged with Kristeva's concepts, his inundation with this critical theory prevents him from engaging with other manners in which Galás engages with the abject.⁹⁷ His fixation on assessing sonic abjection in Galás' vocal techniques mirrors the way many critics assess her by reducing her to her voice. In fact, much of Schwarz's analysis comes from a perspective of privilege and of disengagement with Galás as an activist, and more importantly, with the effects of AIDS. He appears to emotionally fall victim to some of the abject signifiers in the piece, noting at several points in his analysis that he felt as if Galás was intentionally *distancing* herself from her audience, a reading resultant of Schwarz's projection of his own identity onto the groups Galás implicates through her work, and an inability to identify with the people for whom Galás created the piece to advocate. This perspective is diametrically opposed to my argument that Galás' work seeks to achieve catharsis for victims of HIV as an inclusive community. For instance, in his work on the "Let My People Go" movement, Schwarz claims that, "Diamanda Galás uses the blues so that her audience can identify with her through the register of racial injustice, onto which members of the audience can transpose their fear of identification with people infected with HIV."⁹⁸ This statement assumes, first, that her audience did not include people whose lives were affected by HIV, and second, that racial injustice and discrimination against PWA are not related. I do not seek to problematize Schwarz's work to discredit it, but rather to suggest that his theories of the abject may not apply homogeneously to

⁹⁷ Schwarz's book is *explicitly* a work in the psychoanalytical genre, and he does not imply that there are not other ways of analyzing Galás' performance.

⁹⁸ Schwarz, 158-159.

Galás' entire audience. Further, I suggest that his analysis lacks engagement with abject signifiers that are *not* purely sonic in nature, but that interact with the complex historical and cultural networks with which Galás implicitly engages.

Signifiers of the physically abject in *Plague Mass* that Schwarz neglects to discuss include Galás' physical performance, in which she appeared naked from the waist up and covered in blood. In doing this, Galás juxtaposes her own living body (which, in its state of undress, is sexualized by Western audiences) with the bodily fluids that carry the disease she is confronting—like AIDS, she renders sexuality threatening. Her textual references to disease (notably, of course, in the Leviticus text of ‘This is the Law of the Plague’), while technically abject on their own for their suggestion of destabilized bodily control, are doubly abject when juxtaposed with Galás’ sexualized physicality. As I noted in chapter one, this abject juxtaposition serves to highlight the qualities of AIDS as an illness, which makes sexual activity deadly, and also to underscore the resultant cultural anxiety towards homosexuality.

Galás engages with physical abjection within the narrative plot of the piece, as well. The third movement, ‘I Wake Up and See the Face of the Devil,’ sets a scene removed from the previous movement’s evocation of an archaic Bible-era disease, creating a strong visual association with a contemporary hospital. A multiphonic electronic buzz permeates the movement, standing in stark contrast with the throbbing ritualistic drums of the earlier one. The movement evokes a conversation between a patient and a doctor, in which Galás uses two separate vocal characters: one frail and breathy, one rich and rumbling. In fact, this movement is in many ways the piece’s most explicit reference to AIDS thus far, revealing that this new composition’s purpose is not solely narrative, but rather engages with the immediacy of the piece as a protest. The “patient” character’s questions, beginning with, “What time is it?” and later,

their responses, such as, “Yes, I think I’m feeling better,” repeat in a cyclic fashion, with longer repetitions as the piece progresses. This repetition, a technique used frequently throughout the performance, has been noted by several scholars and journalists to be reminiscent of Galás’ experiences with patients suffering from AIDS-derived dementia.⁹⁹ The following movement, ‘Confessional: Give Me Sodomy or Give Me Death,’ continues this evocation of physical deterioration, with the characterized voice of the patient struggling to sputter out their confession. Here, Galás emits choked-off whines, squeals, and croaks, gradually becoming more intelligible as the scene progresses.

The invocation of physical abjection through music, and the engagement with text describing manners of handling disease, contribute to the epistemological connection Galás builds between the AIDS crisis and the Black Death. Through her use of the Leviticus text in ‘This is the Law of the Plague,’ Galás reminds us that these instructions, developed to combat leprosy and thought to be the world’s earliest example of sanitary regulations, were not consulted during the Black Death (colloquially still known as ‘the Plague’) until the death toll had already reached devastating numbers.¹⁰⁰ Further, the text’s emphasis on *exclusion* of individuals suspected to be afflicted mirrors both the Church’s scapegoating of the queer community during the AIDS crisis, and the widespread exclusion and othering of Jews, foreigners, lepers, and Romani people during the Black Death.¹⁰¹ Galás’ engagement with the Leviticus text, alone, blurs the conceptual and historical divides between the two epidemics, and particularly, religious

⁹⁹ Tim Holmes liner notes

¹⁰⁰ Ussher’s notes on the text of Leviticus (pages 9-10) are in relation to the orthodox Jewish laws of *niddah*, which use the warnings in Leviticus to dictate purity procedures during women’s menstrual cycles. Although Galás’ use of the text evokes Plague and, by extension, HIV, the historical and cross-cultural implications of the text add a gendered layer to its effect.

¹⁰¹ For contextual analysis on the religious and social constructs that contributed to the scapegoating climate of the Black Death, see David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

and social reactions to them. However, her engagement with other musical and textual references to the Plague continue to obscure this line, and as a result, draw parallels between the two epidemics.

In their historical account of the Black Death, Moote & Moote place a great deal of expository emphasis on the sonic environment of London during the height of the Plague's impact. In particular, they note that the air was consistently ringing with the steady pealing of church bells-- they would ring to honor each new death, which were occurring at a rate fast enough to make the pealing nearly constant.¹⁰² Galás uses steady pealing of church bells throughout 'Cris D'Aveugle,' and the synthesized tympani in 'How Shall our Judgment be Carried Out Upon the Wicked,' echoes this as well. The tempo at which Galás presents these plodding, steady percussive rhythms, as well as the ones found in 'Let Us Praise the Masters of Slow Death,' 'Sono L'Antichristo,' and 'Consecration,' can also suggest Black Death-era rituals to contemporary audiences. There is a certain fixation in popular culture with the practices of the flagellants, whose self-harm practices of repent were often timed with the chanting of psalms. Whether their depictions in popular culture, from the surreal 'Dies Irae' variation in *The Seventh Seal*, to the absurd spoofing in *Monty Python in the Holy Grail*, are accurate, is debatable and somewhat beside the point. Contemporary audiences' associations between the Black Death and slow, steady rhythms accompanied by Biblical text are considerable, and Galás engages with these associations to evoke an atmosphere of religious desperation and widespread death.

The parallels Galás draws between the Church's role in the Black Plague and its role in the AIDS crisis are purposefully transparent, and audience members could easily see the intent behind drawing them. However, viewing Galás in a larger context of women serving as

¹⁰² A. Lloyd Moote & Dorothy C. Moote, *The Great Plague: The Story of London's Most Deadly Year*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 183.

caretakers or mediums of the dead and dying reveals a parallel to the Plague that is *not* explicitly noted in the work itself. Just as women served a specific gendered role in funeral rites of Classical Greece, women during the Black Plague, too, were given a crucial task: identifying citizens who would soon succumb to the disease. The Journal of the London Court of Common Council, 7 September 1592, contains the “Orders to be used in the tyme of Infeccion of the Plague within the Cittie and Liberties of London,” which describes the role of these women, known as “searchers.”

“That in or for every parishe there shalbe appointed twoe sober Ancient Woemen, to be sworne to be viewers of the boddies of such as shall dye in tyme of Infeccion, and twoe other to be veiwers of such as shalbe sicke and suspected of Infeccion: which woemen shall imediatly, uppon suche there Viewes by vertewe of there Oath, make true reporte to the Constable of that precincte where such personn shall dye or be infected, to the intent that true notice may be given both to the Alderman or his Deputie, and to the Clarke of the parishe, and from him to the Clarke of the parishe Clarkes, that true certificat may be made as hath bine used. And every woman so sworne, and for any corruption or other respecte falsely reportinge, shall stande uppon the Pillory, and beare Corporall payne by the Judgemente of the lord Mayor and court of Aldermen. They at there goinge abroade to beare redd wandes, goe neere the Channelles and shunne Assemblies as before.”

It is notable that the searchers of the dead were required, by decree, to be women, and specifically elderly women. What this indicates about Medieval attitudes towards the elderly could be productive for plentiful discussion, but at the minimum, the act of assigning the women who were closest to death, temporally speaking, to predict death in others indicates a similar wariness to the classical Greek attitudes surrounding women and death. Notable, too, is that elderly women were likely to have been members of their communities for many years, and were therefore highly knowledgeable about the neighbors they were officially hired to inspect. Here, there is an implied disregard for the physical and emotional well-being of these women-- an assumption that their proximity to death may render them stronger in the face of their loved ones

experiencing it. Munkhoff notes that, “this authority was vested in older women, often widows, dependent upon pensions seems particularly odd given the cultural bias against the credibility of ‘old poor women’. Yet precisely because their authority was transient, searchers became expendable – physically, symbolically, historically – once their duties had been performed.”¹⁰³ Because searchers essentially served to predict the numbers of the dead, and therefore gather intel on how God’s will would be retributed, their role, ascribed by men, was to compile information rather than to interpret it.¹⁰⁴ This could be seen as a parallel to the liminal role of women in Greek death rituals, whose role depends on communication between the living and the dead, but does not necessarily involve any degree of control or influence on either-- and, in fact, these rights were stripped rapidly when Greek men became threatened.

Diamanda Galás' engagement with musical and textual themes that recall the Catholic Church's role in the Black Death range from intentionally obvious to understandable only through study. However, the manners with which she engages with these themes serve as an acerbic criticism of the church through her use of techniques that create abjection in the listener, both from a visceral perspective, and for the devout, a religious one. The effect of these engagements is to explicitly implicate the Church in the AIDS crisis by recalling its history, but they fill space in Galás' presentation of herself as an ally to the sick and dying, as well. By presenting a visceral and direct attack on the church through its own traditions, Galás engages with and promotes a deep anger towards the church, establishing it as a common enemy to people with AIDS. The effectiveness of anger as a medium of protest has been discussed by performance scholars and political theorists alike, and for the purposes of this chapter, I turn to the work of Jeffrey Stout. While not a performance scholar, Stout offers a persuasive case study

¹⁰³ Munkhoff, 2-3.

¹⁰⁴ Munkhoff, 9.

on the role of emotional expression during political trauma in his essay on anger and grief in grassroots activist efforts during Hurricane Katrina. Stout's argument rests on two suppositions: First, that grief as an emotional response to tragedy can often give way to anger, especially in situations such as the AIDS crisis and Hurricane Katrina, wherein those in power do not perform their duty to protect those without power. Second, Stout assumes that external emotional expression, particularly of anger, is not just cathartic for resistance efforts, but *crucial*. These suppositions are framed as follows:

“If we did not think of ourselves as bound together to some extent by mutual respect, then we would not be angered by the behavior and negligence of elites. To feel anger is to have the importance of the relationship and its demands drawn to our attention. Accordingly, the individual who rarely experiences anger in response to the injustices that express disrespect, or who represses anger under a veneer of niceness, is ill-equipped to lead others in a struggle for equal consideration.”¹⁰⁵

Another supposition Stout depends on to form his argument is the notion that groups that lack political or economic power can reclaim power to some degree by becoming organized. This may seem a somewhat obvious assumption, but in the context of emotional expression for political means, it takes on new meaning. A leader, Stout argues, is necessary to create citizen organization-- and an emotionally uninvolved leader is an ineffective one. “Someone who professes love of justice,” Stout says, “but is not angered by its violation, is unlikely to stay with the struggle for justice through thick and thin, to display the passion that will motivate others to join in, or to have enough courage to stand up to the powers that be.”¹⁰⁶ In this regard, it is not difficult to view Diamanda Galás, chanting about “the shit of God,” inside New York’s largest cathedral, ululating naked onstage covered in blood, as a strong leader in the fight against AIDS.

¹⁰⁵ Jeffrey Stout, "Domination, Anger, and Grief." In *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America*, 53-69. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 66.

¹⁰⁶ Stout, 64.

Conclusion

This thesis's stated goal, to situate Diamanda Galás within a global history of women as caretakers of the dead, was initially intended to be accomplished through an exploration of women's roles in rituals of caretaking for the dead and dying in various geographical and historical spheres. These examples of women serving physical or symbolic roles as attendants to the dead or dying, I anticipated, would reveal a repeated, culturally-ingrained, conceptualization of women in a space parallel to death itself. Research in this area did confirm my predilections, revealing that this association is notably present across cultures, and has frequently contributed to misogynist cultural anxiety and fear, particularly surrounding women's sexuality. As an alternative to the ally/insider dichotomy established by so much of the conceptual work done on Galás, I suggest that Galás' engagement with the abject in the *Plague Mass* ignites this cultural fear of women's connection with death, and symbolically aligns her identity as a woman with the experiences of gay men with AIDS, whose sexuality posed a similar threat to the contemporary right wing. This parallel gives space for Galás in the community of women, often lesbians, who joined the fight against AIDS, often very directly, by caring for gay men who were afflicted or dying. While in the context of the AIDS crisis, these women occupied a space of liminal allyship, they also take space in the larger historical, and global, narrative of women as culturally-designated caretakers of the dead and dying, particularly during public health crises.

While many aspects of this project were self-fulfilling in the manner I anticipated, much of my research unveiled new patterns of relational symbolism that further nuanced the identity of the death midwife. In chapter two, I explored some of the ways in which the United States AIDS crisis and its related activism fundamentally differs from other American social justice movements, and how this difference complicates the "insider/outsider" dichotomy so often

associated with activist efforts. AIDS activism's complexity relies most prominently on the movement's relationship with death: the reality of the high death toll gave the movement immediacy and urgency, but the complex intersections of various HIV risk factors created an uncertainty over how to define people with AIDS as a collective. This complexity of inclusion produces liminal spaces for individuals and ideas. I had not anticipated, when initiating this research, that the concept of liminality would arise so frequently when considering Diamanda Galás' work, or that it would be so central to global history of women as death midwives. It is driving force behind Kristeva's theories of the abject, and was the source of power, and later oppression, for Greek *moirologhistres*. The cultural associations of women with death rely more heavily on the idea of *dying*, of the space *between* alive and dead, than on death as a conceptual state of being. The role of the death midwife, despite the misogynist fear surrounding her, is to assist people in transitioning through this liminal space. Diamanda Galás is uniquely equipped to fulfill this role in the AIDS crisis, in part because her role in the movement is liminal, as well. The *Plague Mass* was a public act of death midwifery; a Greek lament-style musical transitioning act for Galás' dead loved ones and AIDS victims as a collective. Meanwhile, her space as neither within nor outside the activist movement allows the work to address multiple audiences consisting of both the oppressed *and* the oppressor. Galás, and the *Plague Mass*, exists at the nexus of numerous practical roles in the AIDS crisis; because of the ever-present role of death in the movement, as well as established psychoanalytic theory by the likes of Kristeva and Creed, which links women to the liminal space between life and death, it follows that the liminality of Galás' identity attributes this role of death midwifery to her in the context of AIDS.

Scholarship on Galás' work, particularly the *Plague Mass*, tends to engage to some extent with the death rituals of Greece, her place of nationalistic heritage. My earlier analysis of cultural signifiers within the *Plague Mass* participated in this discourse as well, but it is necessary to restate that Galás has indicated that she, herself, feels that her art places her within this lineage.¹⁰⁷ In the context of my larger argument, this acknowledgement on Galás' part indicates her awareness of gendered associations with death from, at least, her own cultural heritage. By engaging specifically and explicitly with the roles of women in classical Greek death traditions, Galás opens her work to inscriptions of similar phenomena from other cultural histories. The other tradition of gendered care roles for the dead and dying I have associated with Galás' work is the strictly-legislated duties of the Plague-era Searchers. According to Munkhoff, these women's "... relationship to the corrupt body and their association with matters of life and death intersect symbolically with early modern culture's deepest anxieties about women, anxieties more familiarly figured in witches, prostitutes and midwives."¹⁰⁸ Here, Munkhoff implicitly engages with the notions of life-death liminality addressed by Holst-Warhaft and the abjection of separation introduced by Kristeva, both of which Schwarz evokes psychoanalytically and musically in his work on Galás.

This early-modern anxiety surrounding women and death is by no means a mindset that subsided with the Plague in the West. Psychoanalytic theory like Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* has spawned feminist cultural criticism such as Barbara Creed's work of film analysis, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. Both of these works discuss the abjection of the feminine, which is a direct result of human anxiety surrounding death-- particularly because of Kristeva's establishment of abjection occurring at the *moment* of

¹⁰⁷ See Galás' conversation with Holden.

¹⁰⁸ Munkhoff.

separation between subject and object-- it is not the quality of *being* dead that creates abjection, but rather the awareness of the transition *into* death. Critical theory that equates the feminine with the monstrous is dealing with this particular type of fear. Creed's introduction includes an assertion that, "[a]ll human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject."¹⁰⁹ She cites figures and events from art, mythology, and history including feminine monsters, the vagina dentata in Surrealist art, and the pervasiveness of the witch-hunt in world history. Creed's monstrous-feminine depends on a certain abject link between women's sexuality and death, a connection that Galás evokes through her work's embodiment. As I mentioned briefly in Chapter Four, Galás' act of performing nude from the waist up, particularly in a cathedral, subjects her to readings of immodesty at least, and outright sexualization at most. To complicate this inherent sexualization by bathing in blood, as Galás did, is to almost explicitly engage with the notion of the monstrous-feminine.

In my Chapter Four mention of Galás' concurrent use of nudity and bodily fluid, I noted that the use of blood in an AIDS-related performance is very likely to create associations with the manners by which HIV can spread. A similar comparison can be made on a more abstract level when engaging with Kristeva's or Creed's notions of abject feminine sexuality. While female sexuality has, according to these theorists, been historically condemned as unnatural, abject, or horrifying, AIDS created a potent climate for gay male sexuality to be even *more* explicitly considered a threat by mainstream society. The manners with which Galás participates in (or subverts) the monstrous-feminine in her work allow her to comment on the AIDS crisis in a particularly nuanced way: by drawing comparisons between her own demonized sexuality, and the demonized sexuality of the people for whom she is advocating. Because AIDS was essentially a medical mystery during the height of the outbreak, even medical professionals were

¹⁰⁹ Creed, 1.

prone to fearing the afflicted. Faderman notes, “In the hospitals, people with AIDS were pariahs. They often sat for days in emergency rooms. If they were finally admitted, terrified orderlies would let them lie in their own excrement and urine, refusing out of fear to even enter their room. They left the patients’ food trays piled up in the hallways. When a patient with AIDS died, he’d be put in a black trash bag. Many funeral parlors were refusing to handle the dead.”¹¹⁰ The experience of AIDS, for countless reasons, was a prolonged experience of the abject moment, and its status as a sexually-transmitted disease created pervasive and damaging associations between this abstract horror and the sexuality of the most vulnerable.

In Chapter Two, I explored the various ways in which the *Plague Mass* is a work of live protest. Some of the theories with which I engaged addressed the productivity of anger in protest art through emotional catharsis. Indeed, emotional catharsis plays a significant role in the *Plague Mass*’s categorization as an act of death midwifery. Acceptance of death became necessary for everyone touched directly or indirectly by AIDS. This acceptance did not signify or create complacency, rather, it allowed for a collective grieving that gave way to action. In Galás' own words, "After you die, it's over. There's none of this mysticism about it, and that is brutal. With that brutality comes an obsession with life... I always felt I was trying to understand things, so that I didn't have to suffer as much by them. Singing about these things keeps it away, because it's a fear that you then address. You don't try to avoid thinking about it, and then when you grab on to it as your own, you are free."¹¹¹

In the *Plague Mass*, this attitude manifests most prominently in the work’s final movements, particularly “Cris D’Aveugle” and “Let My People Go.” These movements

¹¹⁰ Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 419.

¹¹¹ Diamanda Galás, in conversation with Melissa Locker. “Death Becomes Her: The Dark Arts of Diamanda Galás.” *Village Voice*, 9 May 2016.

showcase Galás' most accessible, melodic singing style and give space for the use of vocal techniques that evoke emotional response in Western audiences. Schwarz refers to these moments as a suturing of a divide that he claims Galás established between herself and the audience in the earlier, more abject or sonically threatening movements.¹¹² While I resist this interpretation due to its lack of consideration for the cathartic potential of abject sounds for audience members who may have been experiencing the physical effects of AIDS, Schwarz is correct to acknowledge the work's shift in tone. By ending the piece in a space of musical reconciliation, Galás not only brings comfort to an agitated audience, but allows for a poignant transition out of the work's early space of narrative storytelling, and into its broader, all-consuming statement. These final movements, which *demand* the audience to listen, to feel, and to relate, situate Galás, pleading for justice, back in the familiar space of the liminal: this time, between the oppressed and the oppressor.

My goal in completing this thesis was to contextualize the *Plague Mass*, a piece that has been analyzed by countless scholars and journalists for its role in the AIDS crisis, Galás' cultural history, psychoanalysis, and other concepts and establishments. All of these works have contributed to the global history of women's conceptual proximity to death, but have not explicitly united these notions with this as their goal. My work is more closely focused on the phenomenon of death midwifery, a somewhat essentialized gendering of this already-gendered concept. However, I hope to have united the critical scholarship on the *Plague Mass* that has been accomplished, towards this goal.

¹¹² Schwarz, 158.

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