Mladen Dolar, A Voice and Nothing More (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

CHAPTER 3

THE "PHYSICS" OF THE VOICE

Let us now pursue another thread. We have seen that from the point of view of signifying structure, of signifiers as mere bundles of differential oppositions, materiality seems to be irrelevant; the signifier functions by putting it in brackets. But it is by no means irrelevant to the voice. Indeed, the voice appears as the link which ties the signifier to the body. It indicates that the signifier, however purely logical and differential, must have a point of origin and emission in the body. There must be a body to support it and assume it, its disembodied network must be pinned to a material source, the bodily emission must provide the material to embody the signifier, the disembodied signifying mechanics must be attached to bodily mechanics, if only in its most intangible and "sublimated" form, the mere oscillation of air which keeps vanishing the moment it is produced, materiality at its most intangible and hence in its most tenacious form. The first obvious quality of the voice is that it fades away the moment it is produced. *Verba volant, scripta manent*: Lacan reversed this classical proverb, since it is only the voice which remains there, on the spot where it was emitted and which it cannot leave, where it is born and where it dies at the same moment—at least until the emergence of the good-hundred-year-old technology of sound reproduction, which blurred many lines—while the letters fly around and, by flying, form the whirlwind of history.

Alain Badiou begins his latest great book, his *opus magnum*, *Logiques des mondes*, with an assertion which exemplifies the basic tenet of what he calls "democratic materialism": "There are only bodies and languages." This is indeed a doxa which can be seen as a modern—postmodern—avatar of more illustrious predecessors: let us say, of Descartes's division into *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, where both parts have undergone considerable change: the body has evolved since the Cartesian machines, covered by clothes and hats, to a virtual body, a body of multiple enjoyment, a multiply sexed body, a cyber body, a body without organs, a body as life-force and production, a nomadic body, and so on; and thought has evolved from the soul and ideas to the multiplicity of signs and languages, reduced to many versions of semiotics; instead of body and soul, multiple pleasures and signs. Nevertheless,

both parts remain as the firm evidence, the dual substance, of what there is. But in this double world—this is Badiou's whole point—there are also truths, which are neither bodies nor languages nor mixtures of the two, nor are they somewhere else either, in some special Platonic spot. They are "incorporeal bodies, languages deprived of sense, generic infinities, unconditioned supplements. They become and they are suspended, like the poet's conscience, 'between nothing and the pure event.'"[1] So the truths, which emerge as consequences of events, present a break in the world of what exists, a rupture in the continuities of bodies and languages.

Now the voice as the object, the paradoxical creature that we are after, is also a break. Of course it has an inherent link to presence, to what there is, to the point of endorsing the very notion of presence, yet at the same time, as we have seen, it presents a break, it is not to be simply counted among existing things, its topology dislocates it in relation to presence. And—most important in this context—*it is precisely the voice that holds bodies and languages together.* It is like their missing link, what they have in common. The language is attached to the body through the voice, as if the voice were to fulfill the function of the pineal gland in a new Cartesian division of substances. And I suppose we can reach what Badiou is after by another path: the emergence of event and truth through the break presented by the object voice.

The body implied by the voice, disembodied as it may seem, is enough to be cumbersome and embarrassing; in all its living presence it is also like the corpse one cannot dispose of (as in Hitchcock's *The Trouble with Harry,* 1955). There is no voice without a body, but yet again this relation is full of pitfalls: it seems that the voice pertains to the wrong body, or doesn't fit the body at all, or disjoints the body from which it emanates. Hence all the troubles with what Michel Chion (1982) has called the *acousmatic voice.*

THE ACOUSMATICS OF THE VOICE

The acousmatic voice is simply a voice whose source one cannot see, a voice whose origin cannot be identified, a voice one cannot place. It is a voice in search of an origin, in search of a body, but even when it finds its body, it turns out that this doesn't quite work, the voice doesn't stick to the body, it is an excrescence which doesn't match the body—if you want a quick but vivid example of this, think of Hitchcock's *Psycho,* which revolves entirely around the question "Where does the mother's voice come from? To which body can it be assigned?" We can immediately see that the voice without a body is inherently uncanny, and that the body to which it is assigned does not dissipate its haunting effect.

Chion borrowed the word "acousmatic" from Pierre Schaeffer and his famous *Traité des objets musicaux* (published in 1966, the same year as Lacan's *Écrits*). The word has a precise technical meaning: according to Larousse, "acousmatic" describes "the noise which we hear without seeing what is causing it." And it gives its philosophical origin: "The Acousmatics were Pythagoras' disciples who, concealed by a curtain, followed his teaching for five years without being able to see him." Larousse follows Diogenes Laertius (VIII, 10): "[His pupils] were silent for the period of five years and only listened to the speeches without seeing Pythagoras, until they proved themselves worthy of it."[2] The Teacher, the Master behind a curtain, proffering his teaching from there without being seen: no doubt a stroke of genius which stands at the very origin of philosophy—Pythagoras was allegedly the first to describe himself as a "philosopher," and also the first to found a philosophical school. The advantage of this mechanism was obvious: the students, the followers, were confined to "their Master's voice," not distracted by his looks or quirks of behavior, by visual forms, the spectacle of presentation, the theatrical effects which always pertain to lecturing; they had to concentrate merely on the voice and the meaning emanating from it. It appears that at its origin philosophy depends on a theatrical *coup de force:* there is the simple minimal device which defines the theater, the curtain which serves as a screen, but a curtain not to be raised, not for many years—philosophy appears as the art of an actor behind the curtain.[3]

The point of this device was ultimately to separate the spirit from the body. It was not only that the disciples could follow the meaning better with no visual distractions, it was the voice itself which acquired authority and surplus-meaning by virtue of the fact that its

source was concealed; it seemed to become omnipresent and omnipotent. The beauty of it is that this mechanism is the simplest possible, and purely formal—it works automatically: the Master, "by the very cunning of the scene" (*Hamlet*, II/2.586), as it were, turns into a spirit without a body. The body distracts the spirit, it is a cumbersome impediment, so it has to be reduced to the spectrality of mere voice, and entrusted to its disembodied body. The separation thus depends entirely on the spirit acquiring a new kind of body; the spirit is all in the voice, the voice suddenly endowed with aura and authority. Pythagoras became the object of a cult in his lifetime; he was revered as a divinity (Diogenes Laertius, VIII, 11), and no doubt this was not unrelated to that device.

This simple mechanism has indeed been used in various religious rituals, and we can immediately recall the very relevant fact that in the Old Testament God regularly appears as an acousmatic voice—but this is a trait he shares with many other deities, as if there were a direct hidden link between the acousmatic voice and divinization. The voice whose source cannot be seen, because it cannot be located, seems to emanate from anywhere, everywhere; it gains omnipotence. Could we go so far as to say that the hidden voice structurally produces "divine effects"?

But the uses of this device are multiple. To give a light-hearted example from popular culture, think of *The Wizard of Oz*, that very Freudian tale about the nature of transference. (Lyman Frank Baum was, by the way, born in May 1856, just like Freud, and his *Wizard of Oz* was published in 1900, just like *The Interpretation of Dreams*. There is perhaps a story to be written: *Freud avec Baum*.) At the center of the story is precisely the acousmatic voice in which all the wizardry of the wizard consists. Dorothy and her companions make their way to the Emerald City in the hope of obtaining help from the wizard, who will deliver them, but the wizard can be the wizard only as long as his is a voice whose source is hidden,[4] and once the veil is lifted, once the screen is overturned, he necessarily turns into a ludicrous and powerless old man who is no source of rescue, but is himself in great need of help. A more sinister example is *The Testament of Doctor Mabuse* (Fritz Lang, 1933), another great cinematic display of the same mechanism, where again the evil master is merely the voice behind the screen, but it turns out that the effect of authority could be brought about by a mere gramophone, that is, by another screen disguising the origin.

Radio, gramophone, tape-recorder, telephone: with the advent of the new media the acousmatic property of the voice became universal, and hence trivial. They all share their acousmatic nature, and in the early days of their introduction there was no shortage of stories about their uncanny effects, but these gradually waned as they became common, and hence banal. It is true that we cannot see the source of voices there, all we see is some technical appliance from which voices emanate, and in a *quid pro quo* the gadget then takes the place of the invisible source itself. The invisible absent source is substituted by the gadget which disguises it and starts to act as its unproblematic stand-in. The curious remainder of wonderment is the dog intently inspecting the cylinder of a phonograph, and we will come back to that.

We have a grand literary testimony from the early days, a great author seeing with incisive clarity what was at stake. In *The Guermantes Way*, the third volume of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, the narrator finds himself in Doncières, a small provincial town, seeing his friends, and receives a telephone call from his grandmother. "The telephone was not yet at that date as commonly in use as it is today," says Proust (2001, p. 418), lines written during the First World War and published in 1920. The narrator has to rush to the post office to take the call, and to partake of the magic whereby "the absent rise up at our side, without our being permitted to set eyes on them" (ibid.). But they rise at our side in a presence which is more acute, more real than the "real" presence, and at the same time the token of separation, the mark of an impossible presence, a phantom of presence, invoking death at its heart.

> A real presence, perhaps, that voice that seemed so near—in actual separation! But a premonition also of an eternal separation! Many are the times, as I listened thus without seeing her who spoke to me from so far away, when it has seemed to me that the voice was crying to me from the depths out of which one does not rise again, and I have felt

> the anxiety that was one day to wring my heart when a voice would thus return (alone and attached no longer to a body which I was never to see again), to murmur in my ear words I longed to kiss as they issued from lips for ever turned to dust. (ibid., p. 419)

The voice, separated from its body, evokes the voice of the dead. It is the first time the narrator has spoken to his grandmother over the telephone, and he is overwhelmed by a sudden new experience.

> After a few seconds of silence, suddenly I heard that voice which I mistakenly thought I knew so well; for always until then, every time that my grandmother had talked to me, I had been accustomed to follow what she said on the open score of her face, in which the eyes figured so largely; but her voice itself I was hearing this afternoon for the first time. . . . Fragile by reason of its delicacy, it seemed constantly on the verge of breaking, of expiring in a pure flow of tears; then, too, having it alone beside me, seen without the mask of her face, I noticed in it for the first time the sorrows that had cracked it in the course of a lifetime. (ibid., pp. 419–420)

Suddenly hearing that voice as he has never heard it before, at its closest and yet unreachable, he is seized by mortal anguish:

> "Granny!" I cried to her, "Granny!" and I longed to kiss her, but I had beside me only the voice, a phantom as impalpable as the one that would perhaps come back to visit me when my grandmother was dead. (ibid., pp. 420–421)

And at the same time he is seized by an immediate and irresistible desire to rejoin her, that very minute, as soon as possible. So he takes the train back to Paris the next day and rushes to her apartment, longing to free himself "at the first possible moment, in her arms, from the phantom, hitherto unsuspected and suddenly called into being by her voice" (ibid., p. 424). But too late, too late—a gap has come into existence which is now impossible to bridge.

> I found her reading. I was in the room, or rather I was not yet in the room since she was not aware of my presence. . . . Of myself—thanks to that privilege which does not last but which gives one, during the brief moment of return, the faculty of being suddenly the spectator of one's own absence—there was present only the witness, the observer, in travelling-coat and hat, the stranger who does not belong to the house. . . . (ibid., p. 425)

It is as if the presence has been broken, the acousmatic voice has invoked a presence both more real and irretrievably divided, and finding its missing half, the grandmother in flesh and blood, can only make the divide palpable; the impalpable ghost does not vanish but invades the living, he himself a stranger in the presence of a strange woman.

> I who had never seen her save in my own soul, always in the same place in the past, through the transparency of contiguous and overlapping memories, suddenly in our drawing-room which formed part of a new world, that of Time, . . . for the first time and for a moment only, since she vanished very quickly, I saw, sitting on the sofa beneath the lamp, red-faced, heavy and vulgar, sick, day-dreaming, letting her slightly crazed eyes wander over a book, an overburdened old woman whom I did not know. (ibid., p. 426)

The voice filled him with yearning to rush back and to embrace the body from which it emanated, but all he could find in its place was an old woman he did not know.

Among the new media it is, perhaps surprisingly, the cinema which has opened a whole new realm of experiencing the uncanny nature of the acousmatic voice. Surprisingly, because the cinema is based on fitting sight to sound, bringing together both halves, re-creating the seamless flow of the visible and the audible, but in the very endeavor to make them tally it appears that, at immutable margins, they do not fit. Michel Chion's insightful book *La voix au cinéma* (1982) has made us acutely aware of this. The acousmatic voice in cinema is not simply the voice whose source is outside the field of vision, like the "objective" commentator's voice or the "subjective" narrator's voice—those two function rather as directions for watching, guidelines for the gaze, an interpretation of what we see. They are never as innocent

as they may seem; they can cheat and delude us, they can be subjected to a number of sophisticated uses, but this is a different problem. The acousmatic voice proper is the one which we cannot locate, and its paradigm is the mother's voice in *Psycho*. It is paradigmatic, for "the mother of all acousmatic voices" is precisely the mother's voice, by definition the acousmatic voice *par excellence*, the voice whose source the infant cannot see—his tie with the world, his umbilical cord, his prison, his light. Which body does it emanate from? *Psycho* offers a drastic and unsettling answer, but its gruesome extreme (a far cry from Proust's delicacy) points to a crack, and gives us an inkling that the acousmatic voice can never be simply pinned down to this particular woman.

Some cinematic examples use the acousmatic power of the telephone. Think of *When a Stranger Calls* (Fred Walton, 1979), where an anonymous threatening phone call can suddenly change the entire familiar domestic set-up, and populate it with hidden forces. The source of the voice can be anywhere—indeed, "when a stranger calls," as the title most economically indicates, everything changes immediately and radically, the home is seized by *Unheimlichkeit*, and as in this film, the stranger, of course, always calls from inside the house: the invisible source is closest, and the home cannot be a home until the source of the voice is disclosed.

The screen which conceals the voice disturbs our peace of mind, it forces us mentally to step onto the other side. "Pythagoras' curtain doesn't suffice to divert our curiosity, which is instinctively, almost unstoppably occupied by what lies behind" (Schaeffer 1966, p. 184). The situation seems to repeat the famous Hegelian parable about the curtain which conceals the interiority of appearances and behind which we must step—not only in order to see what lies behind, but in order for something to be seen there, namely ourselves stepping behind the curtain.[5] So with the acousmatic voice we have "always-already" stepped behind the screen and encircled the enigmatic object with fantasy. The voice behind the screen not only fuels our curiosity, but also implies a certain disavowal epitomized by the formula "I know very well, but nevertheless. . . ."[6] "I know very well that the voice must have some natural and explicable cause, but nevertheless I believe it is endowed with mystery and secret power." It taunts and troubles us, against our better judgment. It presents a puzzling causality, as an effect without a proper cause. "The acousmatic situation . . . entails that the idea of the cause seizes us and haunts us" (Chion 1998, p. 201). And we could argue that the efficacy of the acousmatic mechanism pertains precisely to the basic quality of the voice we have encountered from the outset: it always displays something of an effect emancipated from its cause. There is a gap between its source and its auditory result, which can never be quite bridged.[7] This is also the point which should serve as a reminder that the methodological isolation of the voice in which we engage for particular purposes is always a simplification: the object voice emerges in counterpoint with the visible and the visual, it cannot be disentangled from the gaze which offers its framework, so that both the gaze and the voice appear as objects in the gaps as a result of which they never quite match.

The real problem with the acousmatic voice is: can we actually ever pin it down to a source? This is the process that Chion calls disacousmatization, the process of dissipating the mystery. When the voice gets attached to the body, it loses its omnipotent charismatic character—it turns out to be banal, as in *The Wizard of Oz*. The aura crumbles, the voice, once located, loses its fascination and power, it has something like castrating effects on its bearer, who could wield and brandish his or her phonic phallus as long as its attachment to a body remained hidden. We may well wonder what kind of effect Pythagoras' appearance in the flesh could have had on the hapless disciples who had spent five years in awe of his voice behind the curtain. We can well surmise that it was not unlike the scene in *The Wizard of Oz*:

> Toto . . . tipped over the screen that stood in a corner. As it fell with a crash they looked that way, and the next moment all of them were filled with wonder. For they saw, standing in just the spot the screen had hidden, a little old man, with a bald head and a wrinkled face, who seemed to be as much surprised as they were. The Tin Woodman, raising his axe, rushed towards the little man and cried out, "Who are

you?" "I am Oz, the Great and Terrible," said the little man in a trembling voice, "but don't strike me—please don't—and I'll do anything you want me to." (Baum 1995, p. 111)

It may well be that, once the lifted screen uncovered a pitiable old man, the disciples' main concern was to maintain the illusion, so that the disillusionment which they must have experienced did not affect the big Other. Another screen had to be raised to prevent the big Other from seeing what they saw, and this second veil entailed a dividing line between the initiated and the uninitiated. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the Pythagorean school was the first to institute the division into esoteric and exoteric knowledge, the esoteric being reserved for those who had seen the Master, and the exoteric for those who knew his teachings merely by his voice, so that the line concerned not the doctrine itself, only its form. Does not the term esoteric imply maintaining the veil after the veil has been lifted?

On another level, the terrorizing murderous stranger in *When a Stranger Calls* turns out to be a trivial, broken and desperate creature the moment he ceases to be the threatening presence surmised on the other end of the line, and we see words coming out of his mouth. Just like, I suppose, any anonymous poison-tongue caller when he or she is found out.

Chion compares the disacousmatization to striptease: it can be a process of several stages, the veils can be lifted one after another; one can, for example, see the bearer of the voice first from a distance, or from the back, or in a number of ambiguous situations; there can be hiatuses and red herrings (for instance, magisterially in *Psycho*, where several times we almost believe we have seen the elusive source of the voice). The ultimate stage is finally reached when one actually sees the orifice, the bodily aperture, from which the voice is coming, the mouth. That is: when one sees the gap, the crack, the hole, the cavity, the void, the very absence of phallus, just as in Freud's famous scenario. This is how Freud accounted for fetishism: one stops at the last-but-one stage, just before the void becomes apparent, thus turning this penultimate stage into a fetish, erecting it as a dam against castration, a rampart against the void.[8] In this light we can grasp the whole problem of the fetishism of the voice, which fixes the object at the penultimate stage, just before confronting the impossible fissure from which it is supposed to emanate, the slit from which it allegedly originates, before being engulfed by it. The voice as a fetish object consolidates on the verge of the void.

One of the emblematic images of modernism is Munch's *The Scream* (1893). It has been subjected to many illustrious analyses, and I can only add a footnote here: we see the void, the orifice, the abyss, but with no fetish to protect us or to hold on to. Many interpreters (including Munch himself) have seen the distorted landscape in the background as the effect of the scream spreading through nature, but we could also read it in the opposite direction: as the landscape which eddies into the black hole of the mouth, as if the scream would suck the background into the orifice, contract it instead of expanding through it. The painted scream is by definition mute, stuck in the throat; the black opening is without the voice which would mollify it, fill it, endow it with sense, hence its resonance is all the greater. Not only are we unable to hear the scream, it is also the homunculus, the strange screaming creature, the alien, who cannot hear us; he/she/it has no ears, he/she/it cannot reach anybody by the scream, nor can he/she/it be reached. If disacousmatization posed the problem of pinning down the voice whose source is hidden, here we have the opposite problem: a source of voice to which no voice can be assigned, but which for that very reason represents the voice all the more. Munch's picture should perhaps be related to Schönberg's opera *Erwartung* (1908)—perhaps we can hear the creature scream in the cry of the hysterical woman in the middle of the night, in that antivoice, in Schönberg's attempt to deprive the voice of its fetish aura.[9] From the one and the other, from the hidden link between the two, there follows the whole program of modernism: it hinges on the tenet that *there must be an object other than the fetish*. We can recall that one of the modernist manifestos was Adorno's famous paper "Über den Fetischcharacter in der Musik und die Regression des Hörens" (1938, later included in *Dissonanzen*, 1956): "On the fetish character in music and the regression of hearing."

From all this we must draw a paradoxical conclusion: ultimately, *there is no such thing as disacousmatization*. The source of the voice can never be seen, it stems from an undisclosed and structurally concealed interior, it cannot possibly match what we can see. This conclusion may seem extraordinary, but it can be related even to banal everyday experience: there is always something totally incongruous in the relation between the appearance, the aspect, of a person and his or her voice, before we adapt to it. It is absurd, this voice cannot possibly stem from this body, it doesn't sound like this person at all, or this person doesn't look at all like his or her voice. Every emission of the voice is by its very essence *ventriloquism*. Ventriloquism pertains to voice as such, to its inherently acousmatic character: the voice comes from inside the body, the belly, the stomach—from something incompatible with and irreducible to the activity of the mouth. The fact that we see the aperture does not demystify the voice; on the contrary, it enhances the enigma.

> An unbridgeable gap separates forever a human body from "its" voice. The voice displays a spectral autonomy, it never quite belongs to the body we see, so that even when we see a living person talking, there is always a minimum of ventriloquism at work: it is as if the speaker's own voice hollows him out and in a sense speaks "by itself," through him. (Žižek 2001b, p. 58)

Ventriloquists usually display their art by holding a puppet, a doll, a dummy, which is supposed to be the origin of the voice (remember Michael Redgrave in *Dead of Night*?). They offer a dummy location for the voice which cannot be located, a hold for disacousmatization. But suppose that we are ourselves the dummy (the Turkish puppet?), while the voice is the dwarf, the hunchback hidden in our entrails?

So the voice as the object appears precisely with the impossibility of disacousmatization. It is not the haunting voice impossible to pin down to a source; rather, it appears in the void from which it is supposed to stem but which it does not fit, an effect without a proper cause.[10] In a curious bodily topology, it is like a bodily missile which separates itself from the body and spreads around, but on the other hand it points to a bodily interior, an intimate partition of the body which cannot be disclosed—as if the voice were the very principle of division into interior and exterior. The voice, by being so ephemeral, transient, incorporeal, ethereal, presents for that very reason the body at its quintessential, the hidden bodily treasure beyond the visible envelope, the interior "real" body, unique and intimate, and at the same time it seems to present more than the mere body—in many languages there is an etymological link between spirit and breath (breath being the "voiceless voice," the zero point of vocal emission); the voice carried by breath points to the soul irreducible to the body. One could use a French pun, and say that the voice is *plus-de-corps*: both the surplus of the body, a bodily excess, and the no-more-body, the end of the corporeal, the spirituality of the corporeal, so that it embodies the very coincidence of the quintessential corporeality and the soul. The voice is the flesh of the soul, its ineradicable materiality, by which the soul can never be rid of the body; it depends on this inner object which is but the ineffaceable trace of externality and heterogeneity, but by virtue of which the body can also never quite simply be the body, it is a truncated body, a body cloven by the impossible rift between an interior and an exterior. The voice embodies the very impossibility of this division, and acts as its operator.

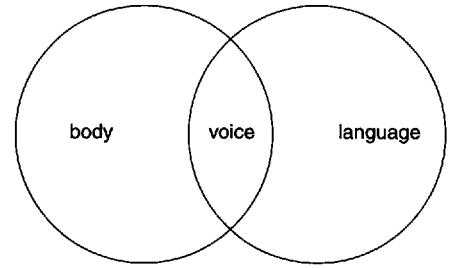
THE VOICE AND THE DRIVE

How can we relate the bodily topology of the voice to our initial thread, the antinomy of meaning and the voice as the antinomy between the signifier and the object? It is here that we must make use of the "classical" psychoanalytic divide between desire and drive, and attempt to treat the voice as the object of the drive. It is as if, in one and the same place, we had two mechanisms: one which strives toward meaning and understanding, and on the way obfuscates the voice (that which is not the matter of understanding), and on the other hand a mechanism which has nothing to do with meaning but, rather, with enjoyment. Meaning versus enjoyment. It is an enjoyment normally streamlined by meaning, steered by meaning, framed by meaning, and only when it becomes divorced from meaning can it appear as the pivotal object of drive.

To put it schematically, in every utterance there is on the one hand the dimension of signification, which in the last instance concurs with the dimension of desire. It is true, of course, that desire exceeds meaning, it is like a negative force which cannot be stabilized in any fixed meaning. This is where Freud, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pinpointed the dream as the paramount wish-fulfillment, *Wunscherfüllung*, the satisfaction of desire precisely in what apparently runs counter to signification, but actually accomplishes its course; where the "nonsense" of dreams lays bare the signifying mechanism. The solution of the riddle of dreams is the satisfaction of desire tied to the signifier. On the other hand there is the dimension of the drive which does not follow the signifying logic but, rather, turns around the object, the object voice, as something evasive and not conducive to signification. So that in every spoken utterance one could see a miniature drama, a contest, a diminished model of what psychoanalysis has tried to conceive as the rival dimensions of desire and drive.

In desire, we have the fireworks of what Lacan has notoriously called "the unconscious structured like a language"; but the drive, Freud *dixit*, is silent—insofar as it turns around the object voice, it is a voice that does not speak, and *it is not at all structured like a language*. Desire is what drives the scream to articulation, it emerges in its function of appeal to the other, it is another name for the dialectic between the subject and the other—and Lacan entitled one of his most famous *écrits* "The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire." The negativity of desire is the lever of transubstantiation of the voice into the signifier, the principle which propels the meaning which is, by definition, addressed to the other, but desire itself, being the driving force, can never itself be exhausted by any meaning. The object voice, on the other hand, is the by-product of this operation, its side-result that the drive gets hold of, circling around it, coming back to the same place in a movement of repetition. If the subject, the desire, and the other are intertwined in a dialectical movement, then the voice is their "non-dialectical" moment.

The voice ties language to the body, but the nature of this tie is paradoxical: *the voice does not belong to either*. It is not part of linguistics, which follows from my initial argument (after all, Saussure himself spoke of the non-phonic nature of the signifier; Derrida will insist on this at great length in *Grammatology*), but it is not part of the body either—not only does it detach itself from the body and leave it behind, it does not fit the body either, it cannot be situated in it, "disacousmatized." It floats, and the floating voice is a much more immediately striking phenomenon than the floating signifier, *le signifiant flottant*, which has caused so much ink to flow. It is a bodily missile which has detached itself from its source, emancipated itself, yet remains corporeal. This is the property which it shares with all the objects of the drive: they are all situated in a realm which exceeds the body, they prolong the body like an excrescence, but they are not simply outside the body either. So the voice stands at a paradoxical and ambiguous topological spot, at the intersection of language and the body, but this intersection belongs to neither. *What language and the body have in common is the voice, but the voice is part neither of language nor of the body.* The voice stems from the body, but is not its part, and it upholds language without belonging to it, yet, in this paradoxical topology, this is the only point they share—and this is the topology of *objet petit a*. This is where we could put Lacan's pet scheme of the intersection of two circles to use in a new application: the circle of language and the circle of the body, their intersection being extimate to both.



In order to conceive the voice as the object of the drive, we must divorce it from the empirical voices that can be heard. Inside the heard voices is an unheard voice, an aphonic voice, as it were. For what

Lacan called *objet petit a*—to put it simply—does not coincide with any existing thing, although it is always evoked only by bits of materiality, attached to them as an invisible, inaudible appendage, yet not amalgamated with them: it is both evoked and covered, enveloped by them, for "in itself" it is just a void. So sonority both evokes and conceals the voice; the voice is not somewhere else, but it does not coincide with voices that are heard.

We could use the distinction between *aim* and *goal* that Lacan introduces to explain the mechanism of the drive: the drive reaches its aim without attaining its goal, its arrow comes back from the target like a boomerang. The drive is satisfied through being thwarted, without attaining its end; it is "inhibited in its goal," *zielgehemmt*, says Freud (PFL 11, p. 119); nevertheless it does not miss its aim; its path to the goal is curved onto itself, it encircles its object—the aim is merely the path taken, and the drive is entirely "on the way."[11] So if the goal of the utterance is the production of meaning, then the voice, the mere instrument, is the aim attained on the way, the by-product of the way to the goal, the object around which the drive turns; the side-satisfaction, but one which suffices to fuel all the machinery.[12]

His Master's Voice, His Master's Ear

Let us consider the HMV label, one of the most successful logos in the history of advertising, the logo which has stuck in the collective memory as one of the emblematic labels of the past century, instantly recognizable by everyone. Its creation is surrounded by a saga:[13] Nipper, the dog in the picture, was born in 1884 and so named because of his tendency to nip the backs of visitors' legs. When his first master, Mark Barraud, died destitute in Bristol in 1887, Nipper was taken to Liverpool by Mark's younger brother Francis, a painter. Liverpool was the place where the most important event in this dog's life happened: he discovered the recently invented phonograph, and Francis Barraud "often noticed how puzzled he was to make out where the voice came from." Three years after Nipper died (in 1895, the year of Freud's and Breuer's *Studies on Hysteria*), he committed this scene to canvas. Barraud completed the painting in 1898 and registered it in 1899, first as "Dog Looking at and Listening to a Phonograph"; he then decided to rename it "His Master's Voice," and tried to exhibit it at the Royal Academy, but was turned down. He had no better luck with magazines—"No one would know what the dog was doing," was given as the reason. Next he tried the Edison Bell Company, the leading manufacturer of the cylinder phonograph, but again without success. "Dogs don't listen to phonographs," the company said. He finally struck luck with the newly formed Gramophone and Typewriter Company, which showed interest on condition that he replace the Edison phonograph in the picture with one of their own products. The deal was finally agreed in September 1899, and the painting made its first public appearance on the Gramophone and Typewriter Company's advertising literature in January 1900 (coinciding with the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, both inaugurating the new century). The painting and title were finally registered as a trademark in 1910.

Francis Barraud was a man of one picture, like Thomas Aquinas's man of one book, *homo unius libri*. He spent much of the rest of his working life painting twenty-four replicas of his original. He died in 1924, the impoverished artist succeeding with a vengeance. Throughout the century, the "His Master's Voice" label has enjoyed a unique reputation with both the music business and the public. Over the years a large market developed in collecting the vast array of items produced in its image, so that *A Collectors' Guide*, published in 1984 and updated in 1997, is a bulky volume. It is now used only by EMI as the marketing identity for HMV shops in Europe, and the original is displayed in the EMI headquarters in Grosvenor Square, London.

Why is this image of interest to us? What lessons can be drawn from it?

First of all, the dog exhibits the emblematic posture of listening; he is placed in an exemplary attitude of dog-like obedience which pertains to the very act of listening. Listening entails obeying; there is a strong etymological link between the two in many languages: to obey, obedience, stems from French *obéir*, which in turn stems from Latin *ob-audire*, derivative of *audire*, to hear; in German *gehorchen*, *Gehorsam* stem

from *hören*; in many Slav languages *slušati* can mean both to listen and to obey; the same goes apparently for Arabic, and so on. Etymology offers a hint of an inherent tie: listening is "always-already" incipient obedience; the moment one listens one has already started to obey, in an embryonic way one always listens to one's master's voice, no matter how much one opposes it afterward. There is something in the very nature of the voice which endows it with master-like authority (which lends itself perfectly to many political uses; we will come back to that). And the dog, in the phantasmatics of our culture, is the ideal embodiment of listening and obedience.

The picture's problem is how to paint the voice, and it solves it brilliantly with a montage. It leaves out the level of using the voice for "intersubjective communication"; it makes the voice appear in its object-like quality by assembling together the animal and the machine, short-circuiting humanity. It could be seen as a peculiar counterpoint to Munch's *The Scream* (painted five years earlier—should one write "*Munch avec Barraud*"?): Munch's picture focuses on the human voice, but in its impossibility of communication, of reaching the other; while Barraud's picture presents a "successful communication," with the caveat that it pertains to the communion of animals and machines. Human communication may not be possible any longer, according to the vulgate of the reception of Munch's picture, but the other one works, at least in one way: the message is triumphantly transmitted to the hapless dog. The object emerges in the very disparity of technology and animality, in the juxtaposition, the montage of the two. And this is precisely how Lacan describes the drive—as a montage, something contrived, not grounded in some natural order or instinct; a montage without finality, seeming to have neither head nor tail, like a surrealist collage.

> If we bring together the paradoxes that we just defined at the level of *Drang*, at that of the object, at that of the aim of the drive, I think that the resulting image would show the working of a dynamo connected up to a gas-tap, a peacock's feather emerges, and tickles the belly of a pretty woman, who is just lying there looking beautiful. (Lacan 1979, p. 169)

The montage of the dog and the phonograph with its absurd cylinder (is there an invisible peacock's feather protruding from it and tickling the dog's ears?) could be seen as the embodiment of such a montage. The drive always functions as this absurd alliance between animality and machinality: they don't fit, but it works nevertheless.

What is the purpose of the painting, its striking advertising value? It demonstrates rather forcefully that this new wonder, the gramophone, works—even the dog is deceived. The sound is so realistic that even animals are taken in. The high fidelity of the sound finds its perfect match in the high fidelity of the dog. The dog doesn't see the source of the voice, he is puzzled and staring into the mysterious orifice, but he believes—he believes all the more for not seeing the source; the acousmatic master is more of a master than his banal visible versions.

So there is the question of deception that exactly matches Lacan's use of the parable of the contest between the two painters:

> In the classical tale of Zeuxis and Parrhasios, Zeuxis has the advantage of having made grapes that attracted the birds. The stress is placed not on the fact that these grapes were in any way perfect grapes, but on the fact that even the eye of the birds was taken in by them. This is proved by the fact that his friend Parrhasios triumphs over him for having painted on the wall a veil, a veil so lifelike that Zeuxis, turning toward him, said, *Well, and now show us what you have painted behind it.* By this he showed that what was at issue was certainly deceiving the eye [*tromper l'œil*]. A triumph of the gaze over the eye. (Lacan 1979, p. 103)[14]

There are two opposed strategies of deception: the birds are duped by looks, the animals are deceived by the appearance of reality; while the humans are deceived by the veil which does not merely imitate reality, but conceals it. The properly human way of deception is the lure; the deception lies in the fact that the gaze has been enticed to penetrate behind the veil of appearance—in a paramount Hegelian moment, for there is nothing behind the curtain except the subject himself who has been lured behind. The gaze has already pierced the veil and entered what cannot be seen; it was duped by taking a step behind the appearances. And we have already seen that the acousmatic

voice has an analogous structure—one is duped by the voice behind the screen by not seeing its source, one is troubled by the enigma of its cause. The acousmatic voice combines the two levels, the voice and the gaze, for the voice, as opposed to the gaze, does not conceal, it is given in a seeming immediacy and immediately penetrates interiority, it cannot be quite held at bay. Thus the deception lies in the inability to find its match in the visible, in the gap which always persists between the two, in the impossibility of their coordination, so that *the visible as such can start to function as the veil of the voice.*

The gramophone in our picture—is it the grapes or the veil? It deceives the dog by being the "authentic reproduction," the genuine appearance of the voice; the dog obeys as the birds pick the grapes. But at the same time, the gramophone is the veil, it hides the source of the voice, and the dog is taken in by the reproduction all the more since its source is disguised. All his senses try to figure out what is behind the screen, so he starts on the animal level and is humanized, as it were, by the deception; he has to learn the lesson that the voice is an acousmatic creature (irretrievably acousmatic, not just of a not-yet-discovered origin). The picture presents a sort of intersection, an overlapping of the two levels, or the necessary crossing of the one into the other. *Trompe-l'oreille*—one has always-already started to listen behind the veil, the nature of the voice is that of being veiled by the visible. We could see, in this montage, a sort of parable of the drive: the dog starts on the animal level, in the realm of the need aiming directly at reality as the place of satisfaction, but he stumbles on a paradox, a veiling or redoubling of reality itself, and finds unexpected satisfaction in an ersatz object irreducible to the veil of reality.

The HMV label presents one side of the voice, the voice as authority, in an emblematic image. This power of the voice stems from the fact that it is so hard to keep it at bay—it hits us from the inside, it pours directly into the interior, without protection. The ears have no lids, as Lacan never tires of repeating; they cannot be closed, one is constantly exposed, no distance from sound can be maintained. There is a stark opposition between the visible and the audible: the visible world presents relative stability, permanence, distinctiveness, and a location at a distance; the audible presents fluidity, passing, a certain inchoate, amorphous character, and a lack of distance. The voice is elusive, always changing, becoming, elapsing, with unclear contours, as opposed to the relative permanence, solidity, durability of the seen. One could say it is by its nature on the side of the event, not of being, in Badiou's parlance. It deprives us of distance and autonomy. If we want to localize it, to establish a safety distance from it, we need to use the visible as the reference. The visible can establish the distance, the nature, and the source of the voice, and thus neutralize it. The acousmatic voice is so powerful because it cannot be neutralized with the framework of the visible, and it makes the visible itself redoubled and enigmatic. This immediate connection between the exterior and the interior in the voice is the source of all the mythical stories of the magic force of enthralling voices (Sirens), something that makes us lose reason and easily leads to disaster, to a lethal enjoyment. And this is also where the mechanism of psychosis, "hearing voices," uses, takes on, only the hallucinatory trait which pertains to the voice itself. Voices may be all in the head, without an external source, because we always hear the voice inside the head, and the nature of its external source is always uncertain the moment we close our eyes.

I must briefly add that if the logic of vision seems opposed to the logic of audition, if the visible appears to be on the side of distance and stability, then Lacan's theory of the gaze as an object aims precisely at dissipating this spontaneous illusion, at collapsing this distance of the eye from what is seen, this exception of the spectator from the picture. "The scission of the eye and the gaze," as the section dealing with the gaze is called in *Seminar XI*, means precisely that the gaze is the point where the distance crumbles, where the gaze is itself inscribed into the picture, as the point where the image "regards" us, looks back at us (Lacan 1979, pp. 95 f.). The illusion of distance has to be unmasked as an illusion, while with the voice the problem tends to be the opposite: how to establish a distance at all, to draw the dividing line between "the interior" and the external world. Where

does the voice come from? Where do we hear it? How do we tell the external voice from the voice in the head? This is the first ontological decision, the first epistemological break, the source of all subsequent ontology and epistemology.

But all this is one side of the ambivalence; the voice as authority is one part of the story. On the other hand it is also true that the sender of the voice, the bearer of vocal emission, is someone who exposes himself, and thus becomes exposed to the effects of power which not only lie in the privilege of emitting the voice, but pertain to the listener. The subject is exposed to the power of the other by giving his or her own voice, so that the power, domination, can take not only the form of the commanding voice, but that of the ear. The voice comes from some unfathomable invisible interior and brings it out, lays it bare, discloses, uncovers, reveals that interior. By so doing it produces an effect which has both an obscene side (disclosing something hidden, intimate, revealing too much, structurally too much) and an uncanny side—this is how Freud, following Schelling, described the uncanny: something that "ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light" (PFL 14, p. 345). One could indeed say that there is an effect—or, rather, an affect—of shame that accompanies voice: one is ashamed of using one's voice because it exposes some hidden intimacy to the Other, there is a shame which pertains not to psychology, but to structure.[15] What is exposed, of course, is not some interior nature, an interior treasure too precious to be disclosed, or some true self, or a primordial inner life; rather, it is an interior which is itself the result of the signifying cut, its product, its cumbersome remainder, an interior created by the intervention of the structure. So by using one's voice one is also "always-already" yielding power to the Other; the silent listener has the power to decide over the fate of the voice and its sender; the listener can rule over its meaning, or turn a deaf ear. The trembling voice is a plea for mercy, for sympathy, for understanding, and it is in the power of the listener to grant it or not.

The voice cuts both ways: as an authority over the Other and as an exposure to the Other, an appeal, a plea, an attempt to bend the Other.[16] It cuts directly into the interior, so much so that the very status of the exterior becomes uncertain, and it directly discloses the interior, so much so that the very supposition of an interior depends on the voice. So both hearing and emitting a voice present an excess, a surplus of authority on the one hand and a surplus of exposure on the other. There is a too-much of the voice in the exterior because of the direct transition into the interior, without defenses; and there is a too-much of the voice stemming from the inside—it brings out more, and other things, than one would intend. *One is too exposed to the voice and the voice exposes too much*, one incorporates and one expels too much.

There is a constitutive asymmetry in the voice, an asymmetry between the voice stemming from the Other and one's own voice. Incorporating the voice of the Other is essential if one is to learn to speak; for the acquisition of language depends not simply on emulating the signifiers, but crucially consists in incorporating the voice. The voice is the excess of the signifier, initially displayed as the excess of the demand of the Other, the demand beyond any particular demands, demand as such, and at the same time the demand put to the Other, the two encompassing the asymmetry of emission and exposure.[17] So the voice presents at its clearest the mechanism of the object of the drive, its topology, its topological paradox. All the objects of the drive function precisely through the mechanism of—excessive—incorporation and expulsion (hence the opposition between the breast and the feces) and are thus, first, extra-corporeal, non-corporeal "supplements" of the body (hence Lacan's myth of the lamella: 1979, pp. 197 f.), and, second, they are the very operators of the division into an exterior and an interior, while in themselves they do not belong to either, they are placed in the zone of overlapping, the crossing, the extimate.