CHAPTER 4

THE ETHICS OF THE VOICE

A long tradition of reflections on ethics has taken as its guideline *the voice of conscience*. If the first spontaneous understanding of voice as the medium of speech is omnipresent and trivial, then this second one is not uncommon either. There is a widespread figure of speech (but is there anything else in speech but figures?), a metaphor (*idem*), which associates voice and conscience. We should pause at the extraordinary fact that ethics has so often been associated with the voice, that the voice has been the guiding trope of reflections on moral questions, both in popular reasoning and in the grand philosophical tradition. Is this internal voice of a moral injunction, the voice which issues warnings, commands, admonishments, the voice which cannot be silenced if one has acted wrongly, simply a metaphor? Is it the voice that one actually hears, or is the internal voice still a voice, or is a voice that has no empirical manifestation perhaps the voice in the proper sense, closer to the voice than the sounds one can physically hear? And why the voice? Its metaphoricity has uncertain edges. Is the external voice literal and the internal one metaphorical? But perhaps this is the metaphor which constitutes internality and consciousness, so that the very notion of the literal/external depends on taking this metaphor literally. What is the tenuous and tenacious connection between voice and conscience? Is ethics about hearing voices? Given the link between conscience and consciousness (both are modes of *con-scio*), is consciousness about hearing voices? If I have boldly attempted a brief history of metaphysics through the spyglass of the voice, let me add insult to injury and attempt a brief history of ethics in the same vein.[1]

THE VOICE OF THE DAEMON

At the origin of this history is the best-known of all internal voices, the Socratic voice, the daemon which accompanies Socrates throughout his life. In a very famous passage from *Apology*, Socrates says in his defense in front of the tribunal:

> I have a divine or spiritual sign which Meletus has ridiculed in his deposition. This began when I was a child. It is a voice, and whenever it speaks it turns me away from something I am about to do, but it never

> encourages me to do anything. This is what has prevented me from taking part in public affairs, and I think it was quite right to prevent me. (Plato 1997, *Apology*, 31d)

The voice, this daemon, is like Socrates' shadow, or his guardian angel (and it seems that the very figure of the guardian angel in Christianity stems from Saint Augustine's reading of Socrates). The quote is short, yet in it we can discern five points that serve our purpose:

1. The origin of this voice is supposed to be divine and supernatural, it comes from beyond, yet it dwells in the innermost realms of Socrates' consciousness, the most intimate and simultaneously the most transcendent. It is an "atopical voice," the intersection of the inner and the outer.

2. It is not a prescriptive voice, not a voice telling Socrates what to do; he has to decide that for himself. It merely dissuades him from certain actions, preventing him from doing wrong, but not advising him how to do good. The voice has a negative, apotreptic function, and for this reason it has a close connection to the Socratic stance in philosophy: this is precisely the stance which Socrates adopts in relation to his many interlocutors; he relates to them, at least in principle, in the same way that the daemon relates to him. He does not proffer advice or positive theories, he only dissuades them from bad ways of thinking, from received opinion, not thrusting his own views upon them; he does not offer ready-made answers (although this basic attitude tends to get blurred the moment it is put into practice). His own function in relation to others is apotreptic; he simply wants to open the ways of philosophy to others, just as the daemon has done for him, and in order to achieve this he adopts the posture of his daemon and emulates its strategy. He turns into the champion of the voice which was given him beyond his will or intention; his role is to become its agent.[2]

3. It is a voice with which one cannot argue; it is not a matter of weighing the pros and cons. The voice is always right, but not on the basis of logical argument—ultimately, it is not a matter of *logos* at all.

4. The daemon is not a universal function which would pertain to all, to humanity as such; it belongs to Socrates as the mark of his distinction, it is his special link to divinity, but one which defines his mission in philosophy: to make it universally available, to turn it into an appeal, a call for philosophy, an opening to universalization.

5. In what follows our quote, it transpires that this voice actually dissuaded Socrates from taking part in active political life: the voice pertains to the moral law as opposed to the positive written laws of the community; the voice is sustained by "the unwritten law." (This divide is vividly enacted in *Antigone*, with the division between the divine unwritten laws and the human laws of the *polis*.) We could also see here in a nutshell what Kant will call, a couple of millennia later, the opposition between morality and legality. This division hinges on a certain understanding of the divide between the voice and the letter, where morality is conceived as a matter of the voice and legality as a matter of the letter.

Socrates is a creature of the voice. It is not only that he comitted nothing to writing, so that his revolution in thought was supported merely by the voice, the voice which vanished without trace, as voices do, but keeps reverberating through the history of philosophy, his act of thought being sustained merely by the voice divorced from the letter; it is also that this support in the voice itself takes support from his inner voice, his daemon, of which he was merely the agent.

This Socratic theme will be taken up by a whole tradition, although often in ways that differ greatly from the source: the voice of concience started to function as the firm guide in ethical matters, the bearer of moral injunctions and commands, the imperative inner voice, inescapable and compelling in its immediacy and overwhelming presence, a voice one cannot silence or deny—should one do so, a disaster is certain to follow. It is a voice which circumvents all discursive argument and offers firm ground for moral judgment beyond discursivity, beyond the intricacies of deductions, justifications, and deliberations. Its allegedly infallible authority stems from beyond *logos*.

We can see this mechanism, perhaps at its purest, in that part of *Émile* that Rousseau has entitled "La profession de foi du Vicaire savoyard,"

"The profession of faith of the Savoy vicar" (Rousseau 1969, pp. 565–606), which embodies for him the sound, firm, and astute basis of morality. In the Savoy vicar Rousseau found his own private Socrates, a man of no written work, supported by mere voice and following his own inner voice. The core of true nature in this supposed embodiment of natural reason is nothing but "the immortal and celestial voice," "the sacred voice of nature," "the interior voice" which is "infallible" (ibid., pp. 598 ff.):

> Conscience! Conscience! Divine instinct, immortal and celestial voice; firm guide of an ignorant and limited being, but one which is also intelligent and free; the infallible judge of good and evil, it is you that make man similar to God; it is you that make out the excellence of his nature and the morality of his actions; without you I do not sense anything in myself which would elevate me above the beasts, just the sad privilege to stray from error to error with the help of an intelligence [*entendement*] without a rule and a reason without a principle. (Rousseau 1969, pp. 600–601)[3]

Human dignity cannot be defined by reason and understanding alone, for they merely lead us from error to error if they are not anchored in the voice as their guide and principle, the touch of the divine in the human being. The voice is the link with God, while reason and understanding on their own are deprived of the divine spark, they are simply the deplorable side of our privilege over animals. Other voices can try to tamper with this divine voice, "the shrill voice" of prejudice (ibid., p. 601), "the voice of the body" ("conscience is the voice of the soul, passions are the voice of the body," ibid., p. 594). It seems that human consciousness is a vocal affair, it is a struggle between voices (perhaps we could conceive it as an opera, something that was very dear to Rousseau), yet in this struggle the divine voice ultimately imposes itself, it gains the upper hand, the true voice against the false voices.[4] This voice is necessarily endowed with an immediate moral authority: however much we calculate and argue about morality, all this is groundless without a firm footing in the voice, its immediate intuition and the sentiment it carries.

Rousseau's position may seem terribly naive and simple, but it was deeply embedded on the one hand in the struggle which opposed the Enlightenment generation to the Church and the bearers of traditional authority, and on the other in the struggle at the heart of the Enlightenment itself, where Rousseau figured rather as an exception. He starkly opposed the more radical materialism and atheism, in particular Helvétius and his *De l'esprit* (1758), a book which was burned in February 1759 by a parliamentary decree because of its undiluted materialism and attack on Christianity (thus representing one of the emblematic ties between the spirit and fire that Derrida speaks about in his own *De l'esprit*, whose title is taken from Helvétius). Rousseau took the opposite stance of vigorously defending religion—for him there could be no virtue without religion, but of course the "natural religion," which in its turn entailed an equally vigorous criticism of the Church as an institution, its dogmas and its practices. But no matter how hard he tried, a few years later, in 1762, *Émile* would end up in flames as well, and Rousseau could escape arrest only by fleeing to Geneva.

The natural religion was an inner oracle, a pure spring of internal truth, while the Church was based on the idea of original sin, of man as a sinful being who needs constant surveillance and protection, constantly subject to suspicion—original sin was the tenet of Christianity which gave the Church license for permanent terror. Rousseau's religion, professed by the Savoy vicar, was belief in the God within, his unalloyed intimate presence epitomized by the voice. But from this follows a paradox which permeates *Émile*: in order for this inner voice to come to light, one has to be rid of all the sediment of corrupt social voices, of bad habits inherited from bad history. Émile, who was an orphan, had to be educated by the Teacher, and the main function of the Teacher was an apotreptic one: to protect poor Émile from all evil influences, to dissuade him from ingrained bad habits so that he could discover the inner voice for himself. So belief in the pure inner voice gave the Teacher an unmitigated mandate to terrorize the hapless child in a manner far worse than what the Church did, so that original purity and original sin entailed the same effect. The poor

child is constantly exposed to surveillance and inspection, at the mercy of the Teacher. Émile should thus be led to the point where he would be able to authorize himself, independently of any outer authority, on the basis of his true inner nature, but the Teacher alone can decide what this true nature is, he is the only one who, in the clamor of voices, can tell the good ones from the innumerable host of false pretenders. The pure inner voice thus becomes inherently tied up with the overpowering presence of the Other.

THE VOICE OF REASON

It may seem strange, and rather symptomatic, that we can find this line of the voice in Kant also. Strange, because Kant, albeit a great admirer of his contemporary Rousseau, was at the opposite end of the spectrum in matters of ethics: firm ground can be provided only by the moral law, which, in its universality—or, rather, in its injunction to universalization—is purely formal. Every moral action should be submitted to the test of universality, and there seems to be no room for voices or moral feelings (indeed, Kant harshly criticized all attempts to ground morals on moral feelings). Ethics should be grounded in reason alone. We can contrast Rousseau's invocation of conscience quoted above with the Kant's invocation of duty:

> Duty! Thou sublime and mighty name that dost embrace nothing charming or insinuating but requirest submission and yet seekest not to move the will by threatening aught that would arouse natural aversion or terror, but only holdest forth a law which of itself finds entrance into the mind . . . : what origin is worthy of thee, and where is the root of thy noble descent which proudly rejects all kinship with the inclinations and from which to be descended is the indispensable condition of the only worth which men alone can give themselves? (Kant 1993, p. 90)

The rhetoric of invocation is the same, but its purpose is the opposite: duty as the moral law is the direct opposite of feeling, it is an injunction to cut all ties with the natural, inclinations, sentiments, the affections, the inner oracle:

> But the concept of duty cannot be derived from [the moral sense], for we would have to presuppose a feeling for law as such and regard as an object of sensation what can only be thought by reason. . . . The moral law is, in fact, a law of causality through freedom and thus a law of the possibility of a supersensuous nature. . . . (ibid., pp. 40, 49)

And, last but not least, it entails cutting all ties to the divine—moral law pertains to reason alone and cannot have any other source, natural or supernatural. Yet a few pages earlier, we are surprised to find that even reason is endowed with a voice. While debating what appears to him as the monstrous proposal to promote one's own happiness as the supreme moral goal, Kant says that this principle would entirely destroy morality:

> were the voice of reason with respect to the will not so distinct, so irrepressible, and so clearly audible even for the commonest man [*die Stimme der Vernunft in Beziehung auf den Willen . . . so deutlich, so unüberschreibar* (literally "unovercryable"), *selbst für den gemeinsten Menschen so vernehmlich*], it would drive morality to ruin. (Kant 1993, p. 36)

The proponents of false morals can continue their confused speculations only if they plug their ears against that "heavenly voice [*himmlische Stimme*]" (ibid.).

So after the voice of the heart, the voice of nature, the divine voice, there is also the voice of reason, which, while silent, is nevertheless so loud that no matter how loudly we cry, we can never cover or silence it. Reason itself is endowed with the divine voice, it coincides with it—does Kant nevertheless follow Rousseau? Does he just "innocently" use a common metaphor inherited from tradition, or does he name a specific instance crucial to the functioning of reason? Crucial, although it should not be there in the first place? Is this the blind spot of Kantian reason? (Its unhearable cry?) In any case, with Kant the voice acquires a different form: for Socrates, the voice merely dissuaded him from doing wrong (and was reserved for Socrates' ears only); for Rousseau, the divine and natural (same thing) voice was the guide telling every human being how to act, a compass in every situation, provided one lent it an ear; while the Kantian voice does

not command or prevent anything, it neither advises nor deters. It is merely a voice which demands, inexorably imposes, one thing alone: submission of the will to the rationality and formality of the moral law, the categorical imperative. The voice of reason is merely the injunction to submit to reason, it has no other content. It is a purely formal voice, the form of a voice, imposing pure formality, submission to form. Reason itself is powerless—something that Kant will develop at some length in *The Contest of Faculties* (1794),[5] where the whole argument will hinge on the postulate that the faculty of philosophy should be divorced from any lever of power, yet precisely as deprived of any ties to power it can rely on the power of reason, which will ultimately prevail. The advantage of the faculty of philosophy (as opposed to theology, law, and medicine) is that it autonomously pursues only the ends of knowledge and truth, and because it does not mingle with power, its power is overpowering: only the voice which is completely silent can "overcry" all other voices. The voice of reason, silent as it may be, is the power of the powerless, the mysterious force which compels us to follow reason. It is the power which emerges at the point of reduction of all other power. *The voice is the power of reason.*

The Kantian voice of reason is closely linked to the enigma of the subject of enunciation of the moral law—and here we rejoin the line of the voice as pure enunciation. Who is it that addresses us in the second person and admonishes us: "So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as the principle giving universal law" (Kant 1993, p. 30)? Who is the subject enunciating the categorical imperative? Which authority addresses everybody as "you" in an appeal which is both intimate and universal? The source of this demand obviously cannot reside in the subject; it speaks to us from a place that is unattainable for the subject, although it is the very locus of the subject's autonomy. Here we can argue that the subject of enunciation structurally coincides with the voice of reason, the voice whose origin cannot be determined. The innermost realm of consciousness stems from a place beyond consciousness, it is an atopical voice addressing us from inside, the interior *atopos*. Kant gives way to a long tradition by qualifying this voice as divine, since any evocation of divinity directly opposes his central ambition to pose a principle independent from any divine authority, and to cut all ties between ethics and theology.

A century and a half later, Freud, in a famous passage from *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), used the very same metaphor, and in a very Kantian context:

> We may insist as often as we like that man's intellect is powerless in comparison with his instinctual life [*Triebleben*], and we may be right in this. Nevertheless, there is something peculiar about this weakness. The voice of the intellect is a soft one, but it does not rest till it has gained a hearing. [*Die Stimme des Intellekts ist leise, aber sie ruht nicht, ehe sie sich Gehör geschafft hat.*] Finally, after a countless succession of rebuffs, it succeeds. This is one of the few points on which one may be optimistic about the future of mankind, but it is in itself a point of no small importance. And from it one can derive yet other hopes. The primacy of the intellect lies, it is true, in a distant, distant future, but probably not in an infinitely distant one. (PFL 12, p. 238)

So hopes for the future of mankind are again vested in the voice of reason, which, soft and quiet as it may be, will nevertheless gain the upper hand, and will ultimately get heard. The power of reason resides, again, in its voice, whose origin escapes us. In *The New Introductory Lectures* (1933), Freud does not shy away from an even more categorical and extreme formulation: "Our best hope for the future is that intellect—the scientific spirit, reason—may in process of time establish a dictatorship in the mental life of man [*die Diktatur im menschlichen Seelenleben*]" (PFL 2, p. 208).[6] So that soft powerless voice which one can barely hear emerges as the most improbable candidate for a dictatorship; its barely perceptible sound has all the makings of a future dictator. Democracy in psychic life seems to bode ill for the future of mankind and, rather, looms as detrimental.

Freud pits reason against the life of the drives (*Triebleben*) and opposes the two in a permanent conflict. The power of the drives seems to require no explanation; it appears to be self-evident, since drives

are by definition forces exerting pressure. But where does the power of reason come from? On what force can reason rely in the battle against this most powerful of opponents, the indomitable and almighty power of the interplay of drives which always find a way, including the most unlikely and strenuous ways, to ensure their satisfaction? What force can we employ against the inexorable compulsion to repetition which drives the drives? Here Freud clearly bets on the underdog which, in the face of this formidable adversary, is endowed only with the tiny trickle of the voice. And a very soft and weak voice at that—not the blaring voice of the superego, which has no problems making itself heard. The voice of reason is not the voice of the superego, despite Freud's misleading assumption about the concurrence of the two, and it is not the voice of the subject (and his ego) either—but it is perhaps not unrelated to the unconscious. Indeed, Lacan is quick to make the connection:

> *The voice of reason* is low, Freud says somewhere, but it *always says the same thing.* The parallel hasn't been drawn to the effect that Freud says exactly the same thing about unconscious desire. Its voice, too, is low, but its insistence is indestructible. Perhaps there is a relation between the two. (Lacan 1979, p. 255; translation modified)

So the strange fate of Freudian reason would have to be linked to the unconscious. Reason is ambiguously described not simply in terms of the agency of repression, despite its purported dictatorial role, but rather in terms of the repressed: as that which will always make itself heard, however much we try to suppress it—it will get heard under the harshest of censorships, just like unconscious desire. Reason would be powerless if it did not have an ally in the unconscious, and its voice seems to be precisely the pivotal point which links the formality of intellect to the powers of the id, and welds them together. Can we not read an indication of this already in the very motto of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, taken from Virgil: *Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo?*[7] Could we not bend its meaning in the sense that reason has to employ the infernal regions in order to get heard and to prevail? And that its tenuous link with hell is its voice?

So Freud, a century and a half later, continues Kant: the same faith in reason and its ultimate prevalence and the same reliance on its voice appear to be alive and well, even seemingly with increased self-confidence after a century and a half of steep and spectacular scientific progress and the general trust it inspired—but the quote about the dictatorship of reason is, ominously, from 1933, on the very brink of another kind of dictatorship,[8] and Freud's appeal to reason has rather the resonance of a desperate plea at a time when reason was spectacularly failing to prevail.

We must, of course, hasten to add that Freud uses the term *reason* in a definitely non-Kantian way, in a much wider and less precise sense: he includes it in a broader perspective of scientific progress and intellect as such, he uses it in the habitual common sense, whereas Kantian reason is beyond science—science is a matter for *Verstand*, understanding, not *Vernunft*, reason. Science is an affair of progress in knowledge, but reason is not, and practical reason, with its moral law, is situated in a realm beyond the possible reach of science—it concerns the non-sensual, the non-empirical. Still, both Kant and Freud share the common assumption of the voice of reason, along with its mysterious power of ultimately imposing itself and gaining a hearing against all odds. This enigmatic force has nothing to do with divinity, but it does have a paradoxical link with unconscious desire. Lacan, in another famous passage, even drew the radical conclusion that the two coincide: the Kantian categorical imperative, he says, is simply desire in its pure form.[9] Indeed, the nature of desire, as defined by psychoanalysis, is endowed with the unconditional character usually reserved for the law: it turns the unconditional of the demand into an "absolute condition" (Lacan 1989, p. 287); it introduces "an incommensurable measure, an infinite measure" (Lacan 1992, p. 316), the measure by which any object falls short and is deemed "pathological" in the Kantian sense of the word. Desire cannot bear compromise with any particular object, which is always experienced as "this is not it," in a process where desire runs into a permanent dissatisfaction. The ethics, as promulgated by Lacan in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, is the ethics of insistence on desire, of desire as an uncompromising

insistence. Hence the notorious maxim of this ethics: not to give way on one's desire: *ne pas céder sur son désir.*[10] If human psychic life has not quite yet reached the stage of the dictatorship of reason, it is not because subjects are swayed by desire instead of listening to reason—quite the contrary, they are swayed to yield on this maxim, they give way on their desire, they give up on reason because they do not persevere in their desire.

But if we follow this radical suggestion, then "reason according to Freud" would have to be divorced from simple reliance on human intellectual resources, scientific progress, and so on, and taken again in its circumscribed and restricted Kantian sense, where it would now appear in a new light: not as reason destined to tame the wild forces of the unconscious, but the reason of the unconscious desire itself. The locus of delusions and illusions (those that have a promising future, ideally held in check by the voice of reason, for Freud), as well as the locus of swaying, yielding, and compromises, would have to be situated in the ego, that is, in the authority usually held to be the site of reason; whereas reason tied to the unconscious—should we say "unconscious reason"?—could serve as an antidote to them.

So is the voice of reason, in this view, the voice of unconscious desire? Does desire have a voice, soft or loud? We will come back to that, but for the moment we could venture the following: the voice of (unconscious) reason in its persistence is perhaps not what would protect us from the irrationality of the drives but, quite the contrary, the lever which impels desire to the drive. We must remember that the "heroism of desire" (the heroism of the adage "not to give way on one's desire") is not Lacan's last word on ethical matters. Curiously, he never returned to it after the seminar on ethics (1959/60), and we find in his subsequent work a tendency to a demotion of desire: it is not to be found among "the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis," and we can read later in *Écrits*: "For desire is a defense, a prohibition against going beyond a certain limit in *jouissance*" (1989, p. 322). The heroism of desire would have to be abandoned for another principle, tentatively "from desire to drive." Schematically, the ethics of desire drives the subject to reject any compromise of finding satisfaction in any particular object; no object can measure up to desire and its negative force, every object has to be sacrificed in order to retain desire in its purity. But it is this very purity which functions as the defense and has to be sacrificed in its turn; the drive emerges when desire is driven to sacrifice not only its objects but its purity itself, and the voice is perhaps ultimately the operator which enables this transition.

Our brief history of the ethics of the voice finds its conclusion, its last and perhaps purest form, in Heidegger, with the voice which says nothing in particular but insists as a pure injunction. Very briefly: in the paragraphs of *Being and Time* (which, by the way, appeared the same year, 1927, as Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*) dealing with *Gewissen*, "The existential-ontological foundations of conscience" (## 55–60), we can find the whole phenomenology of the call (*der Ruf*) of conscience:

> *What* does the conscience call to him to whom it appeals? Taken strictly, nothing. The call asserts nothing, gives no information about the world-events, has nothing to tell. Least of all does it try to set going a "soliloquy" in the Self to which it has appealed. "Nothing" gets called *to* [*zu-gerufen*] this Self, but it has been *summoned* [*aufgerufen*] to itself—that is, to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being [*Seinkönnen*]. The tendency of the call is not such as to put up for "trial" the Self to which the appeal is made; but it calls Dasein forth (and "forward") [*vor(-nach-"vorne"-)rufen*] into its ownmost possibilities, as a summons to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self. . . . *Conscience discourses solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent.* (Heidegger 1973, p. 318)

So there is a pure call, which is not sonorous, not commanding anything, a mere convocation and provocation, the call to an opening to Being, to get out of the closure of one's self-presence. And the notion of responsibility—ethical, moral responsibility—is precisely a response to this call—it is impossible not to respond to this call; by evading it one evades one's fundamental responsibility, and one is always called upon. The very notion of responsibility has the voice at its core; it is a response to a voice.

Where does the voice come from? It comes from the innermost realm of our being, but at the same time it is something that transcends us, it is in ourselves more than ourselves, yet again, a beyond at our most intimate.

> Indeed the call is precisely something which *we ourselves* have neither planned nor prepared for nor voluntarily performed, nor have we ever done so. "It" calls ["*Es*" *ruft*], against our expectations and even against our will. . . . The call comes *from* me and yet *from beyond me*. (1973, p. 320)

The intimacy from which the call comes is described as *unheimlich*, uncanny ("The call points *forward to Dasein*'s potentiality-for-Being, and it does this as a call which comes *from* uncanniness [*Unheimlichkeit*]"; ibid., p. 325.) The call, the cry, the voice, the appeal—their proper location is *unheimlich*, with all the ambiguity that Freud has given this word: the internal externality, the expropriated intimacy, the *extimacy*—the excellent Lacanian word for the uncanny. So the call is the call to exposure, the opening to Being, which is opposed to a self-reflective monologue within oneself; it hinges on that which, within oneself, one cannot appropriate, and which starkly opposes *Dasein* to self-consciousness. The voice is pure alterity, it prevents self-reflexivity. In this role it even assumes a structural function closely akin to that of time, the central category of Heidegger's book. The analogy goes so far that some readers have proposed that instead of *Being and Time* we could rewrite (or rename) Heidegger's project as *Being and Voice*.[11]

And even more: if the voice is the opening toward Being, the opening which extracts us from submersion in the existing things and disrupts the closed circle of self-presence and self-reflection, does it not follow that the voice ultimately coincides with Being itself? Being is nothing but the opening "manifested" by the voice, and this consequence is condensed, in Heidegger's later work, in the "metaphor" of "the voice of Being," *die Stimme des Seins* (but again, where is the limit of metaphoricity?). Being is accessible only through the mute, aphonic voice, *die lautlose Stimme*:

> The only one among all entities man experiences, in being called by the voice of Being, the miracle of all miracles: *that* the existent *is* [dass Seindes ist]. The one who is called in his essence to the truth of Being is thus constantly tuned [*gestimmt*] in an essential mode. . . . The originary thought is an echo of the inclination of being [*Widerhall der Gunst des Seins*], in which the Unique glimmers and lets itself happen [*lichtet und sich ereignen lässt*]: that the existent is. This echo is the human response to the Word of the mute voice of being. The response of thought is the origin of human speech [*Wortes*], which in the first place engenders language as the reverberation [*Verlautung*] of the Word in words. (Heidegger 1976, pp. 307, 310; my translation)

So speech is "always-already" a response, a response to this voice, and always bears the responsibility in relation to the voice of Being.

Thus we have passed from the "ethical" category of the voice of conscience to the "fundamental ontological" category of the voice of Being (Heidegger will eventually give up the very term ontology). All human thinking is a response to that mute voice, the voice without statement or content, the voice as the zero-point and origin of all sense, the meaning which is adulterated in language composed of words, but which at the same time persists as its guideline, organizing language as its echo, its reverberation, its preservation. Therein lies all the ambiguity of Heidegger's position: on the one hand voice is deprived not only of all articulation but of all phonic substance, it is a silent voice which escapes presence (that which constituted the essential foothold of the voice throughout the metaphysical tradition); on the other hand he nevertheless poses it as the point of the (impossible) origin, a call before language, a call to which language responds as an echo, the meaningless source of all meaning, more fundamental than language, where the origin, although purified of all metaphysical traits, nevertheless functions as a "pure origin," as if in a perspective illusion where the voice retroactively turns into the origin[12]—an illusion since, for us, it is but the consequence of the advent of language, its extimate surplus.

I cannot dwell any longer here on this question, which demands a much lengthier elaboration.

THE VOICE OF THE SUPEREGO

Let us now return to the red thread of the voice as an ethical figure. Through all these attempts which we have briefly considered, a certain opposition has persisted between the voice, its pure injunction, its imperative resonance, on the one hand, and on the other discursivity, argument, particular prescriptions or prohibitions or moral judgments, a wide variety of ethical theories.[13] In this opposition, although it recurred in very different settings, we strangely find again, in an altered form, our initial division into the voice—as the object—and the signifier. We could say that the figure of the voice of conscience implies a certain view of morality where the signifying chain cannot be sustained by itself; it needs a footing, an anchorage, a root in something which is not a signifier. Ethics requires a voice, but a voice which ultimately does not say anything, being by virtue of that all the louder, an absolute convocation which one cannot escape, a silence that cannot be silenced. The voice appears as the non-signifying, meaningless foundation of ethics. But what kind of foundation? If it is conceived as the divine voice—infallible because divine, and thus a firm guarantee—then it would turn into a positivity which would relegate the subject to a passive stance of carrying out orders—a pitfall one can avoid only if one conceives the voice as a pure call which commands nothing specific and offers no guarantee. In one and the same gesture it delivers us to the Other and to our own responsibility.

This ethical voice can be related to the voice of pure enunciation which we have already detected in linguistic utterances. But if in linguistics voice could represent enunciation beyond statement, enunciation as the invisible internal surplus of statement, then in the domain of ethics we have to confront *enunciation without a statement*.[14] This is the crucial point, the touchstone of morality: the voice is enunciation, and we have to supply the statement ourselves. The moral law is like a suspended sentence, a sentence left in suspense, confined to pure enunciation, but a sentence demanding a continuation, a sentence to be completed by the subject, by his or her moral decision, by the act. The enunciation is there, but the subject has to deliver the statement and thus assume the enunciation, respond to it and take it on his or her shoulders. The voice does not command or prohibit, but it nevertheless necessitates a continuation, it compels a sequel.

Yet this ethical voice is utterly ambiguous: if it is at the very core of the ethical, as the voice of the pure injunction without positive content, it is also at the core of straying away from the ethical, evading the call, albeit in the name of ethics itself. The psychoanalytic name for this deflection is the superego.

It can easily be seen that the superego stems from a voice and is endowed with a voice. Freud keeps coming back to this: "it is as impossible for the super-ego as for the ego to disclaim its origin from things heard [*seine Herkunft aus Gehörtem*]" (PFL 11, p. 394). If for Freud the vocality of the superego is just one of its features, then for Lacan it is the essential feature constitutive of the superego: "the superego in its intimate imperative . . . is above all a voice and very vocal, and with no other authority than that of being the fat voice [*sans plus d'autorité que d'être la grosse voix*]" (Lacan 1966, p. 684). From this we can deduce a succinct thesis: the difference between the ethical voice and the superego runs between the voice of pure enunciation and the fat voice. Moreover, the fat voice always comes up with directions, but these can be entrusted only to the voice. It is not a suspended sentence that we would have to resume but, rather, a moral agency in relation to which we are always deficient: however hard we try, we will always fall short, and the more we try to live up to it, the bigger the gap. It is a voice that always reduces the subject to guilt, and the guiltier we are the guiltier we will become, in a self-propelling process; we even relish our self-reproaches and our failures. That is the obscene side of the superego: its malevolent neutrality, its *Schadenfreude*, its malicious indifference to the subject's well-being. To put it in Kantian terms: the voice of the superego is not the voice of reason but, rather, the voice of reason run amok, reason berserk. The superego is not the moral law, despite Freud's declarations to the contrary,[15] but a way of eluding it.

The dividing line is very thin. We can see it in Kant: there is a slide from what Kant calls respect (*die Achtung*) for the moral law on the one

side to what he calls awe (*die Ehrfurcht*) of it on the other, prostration in the face of it. Respect is the drive (*der Triebfeder*: Kant 1993, pp. 75 f.) of the moral law, the condition of its assumption by the subject, presenting the paradox of being an *a priori* feeling, the only non-pathological feeling in the Kantian edifice. Moral law can become effective only because we are driven by respect for it. But a few pages later Kant says:

> In the boundless esteem for the pure moral law . . . whose voice makes even the boldest sinner tremble and forces him to hide himself from its gaze, there is something so singular that we cannot wonder at finding this influence of a merely intellectual Idea on feeling to be inexplicable to speculative reason. . . . (Kant 1993, p. 83)

He describes the effect of moral law on the subject as essentially that of humiliation (ibid., p. 82). The purely formal moral law suddenly becomes endowed with a voice which makes us tremble, a gaze from which we cannot hide, the humiliation (*die Ehrfurcht*)[16] which is not just respect but above all fear, awe, dread: all the elements that can be connected, by a single stroke, under the heading of superego. The voice of enunciation circumscribed a certain locus of the moral law without giving it any positive substance or content, while the voice of the superego obfuscates this locus, fills it with its vocality, thus seemingly presenting the awsome figure of "the Other of the Other," the Other without a lack, the horrendous Other—not merely the Other of law, but at the same time the Other of its transgression. For the excess of the voice here functions precisely as transgression of the law, and the admonishments that this voice issues cannot be turned into "principles giving universal law" but, rather, diverge from universality.

This obscene ("non-universalizable") part of the superego is always entrusted to the voice: we can think of the secret rules and rituals which hold certain communities together—rules of initiation (including the harsh humiliation of newcomers), of belonging to an in-group, the dividing line between insiders and outsiders, and so on. Those rules could never be put down in writing, they have to be whispered, hinted at, and confined to the voice. The voice is ultimately what distinguishes the superego from the law: the law has to be underpinned by the letter, something that is publicly accessible, in principle available at all times, while in contravention and in supplement to the law there are rules entrusted to the voice, the superegoic rules which most often take the form of transgression of the law, but which actually and effectively hold communities together and constitute their invisible glue.

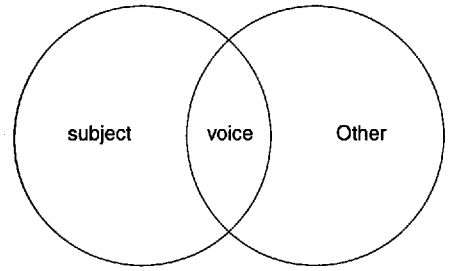
The fact that institutions rely on inherent transgressions of laws and written regulations is a matter of common experience and there is, of course, nothing subversive about it. Bakhtin described the long tradition of carnivals, to some extent still alive and well in some of the most patriarchal societies, based on a prescribed transgression of all social codes, but confined to specific times and spaces—the institutional transgressions function in this carnivalesque manner, upholding the "normal" functioning of the law, as an internal "perversion" which sustains its rule. Transgression operates in a mode which is not publicly utterable; its lure lies in offering a portion of enjoyment, of transgressive enjoyment, as if in compensation, as it were, for the hardship the law demands, but this apparent indulgence will only strengthen the law and endow it with "surplus-authority." The Other rules all the more through the transgressions of its rule which seemingly undermine it; we are caught all the more in its vicious circle.[17] The "ethical voice" of pure enunciation, on the other hand, implies a dimension of the Other which offers no guarantee and circumscribes its lack.

So if "the voice of reason" gains a positive existence—if it grows fat, as it were—then it turns into the superegoic perversion of reason. Lacan, in *Seminar I*, formulated another of his remarkable slogans: "The superego is at the same time the law and its destruction" (Lacan 1975, p. 119). In this underside of the law we can hear an echo of the primal father, the shadow which will always follow and haunt the law. If in Freud's scenario the law was instituted by the murder of the primal father, if it was the law of the dead father, that is, of his name, then the trouble is that the father was never quite dead—he survived as the voice (this was the function of shofar).[18] The voice appears as the part of the father which is not quite dead; it evokes the figure of

enjoyment, and thus adumbrates the slide to destruction of the law based on his name. There is no law without the voice,[19] and the dividing line is tenuous, but crucial: if the superego is the supplement of the law, its shadow, its obscure and obscene double,[20] then we should add that the alternative, or disjunction, between the two is not exhaustive: the voice of the moral law, at the interstice of both, does not coincide with either.

To conclude our brief survey of the ethics of the voice: we can see that the voice plays a crucially pivotal role which places it in an ambiguous position. The voice which sustains the moral law has been called divine by the whole tradition from Socrates to Rousseau, and even by Kant, and this divine transcendent law was at the same time placed at the most intimate kernel of the subject. With Heidegger this voice has been brought to its minimum: an opening to a radical alterity, an opening to Being, a call eluding self-appropriation and self-reflection, something outside the existent and situated in the realm of the uncanny. What all this tradition has in common is that the voice comes from the Other, but this is the Other within. The ethical voice is not the subject's own, it is not for the subject to master or control it, although the subject's autonomy is entirely dependent on it. But it does not pertain simply to the Other either, although it stems from it: it would belong to the Other if it were reducible to positive commands, if it were not merely an opening and an enunciation. (In simplified Kantian terms, we could maintain that reason pertains to the Other, but its voice does not.) The voice comes from the Other without being part of it; rather, it indicates and evokes a void in the Other, circumscribing it, but not giving it a positive consistence. It has no properties, yet it cannot be circumvented.

So again we find the ambiguous ontology—or, rather, topology—of the status of the voice as "between the two," placed precisely at the curious intersection. The voice can be located at the juncture of the subject and the Other, just as it was before, in a different register, placed at the intersection of body and language, circumscribing a lack in both. The schema used above can now be put to new use:



The voice is the element which ties the subject and the Other together, without belonging to either, just as it formed the tie between body and language without being part of them. We can say that the subject and the Other coincide in their common lack embodied by the voice, and that "pure enunciation" can be taken as the red thread which connects the linguistic and ethical aspects of the voice.

CHAPTER 5

THE POLITICS OF THE VOICE

The political dimension of the voice, its deep involvement in the constitution of the political, can perhaps best be approached at the origin, at the very beginning of political philosophy, on the first pages of Aristotle's *Politics*. There we can read this:

> Now, that man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals is evident. Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal whom she has endowed with the gift of speech. And whereas mere voice [*phone*] is but an indication of pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature attains to the perception of pleasure and pain and the intimation of them to one another, and no further), the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust. And it is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and an association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state. (Aristotle 2001, 1253a 7–18)

We might be rather surprised to learn that the very institution of the political depends on a certain division of the voice, a division within the voice, its partition. For in order to understand the political, we have to discern the mere voice on the one hand and speech, the intelligible voice, on the other. There is a huge divide between *phone* and *logos*, and everything appears to follow from there, despite the fact that *logos* itself is still wrapped in voice, that it is *phone semantike*, the meaningful voice which relegates the mere voice to prehistory. There is a crucial divide between the word and the voice, a new avatar of our initial divide between the signifier and the voice, which has immediate and dramatic political consequences.[1]

To follow Aristotle, mere voice is what animals and men have in common, it is the animal part of man. It can indicate only pleasure and pain, experiences shared by both animals and humans. But speech, *logos*, does not merely indicate, it expresses or, better still, it manifests: it manifests the advantageous (useful) and the harmful, and consequently the just and the unjust, the good and the evil. If one receives a blow, one may well scream, that is, emit a voice to vent one's pain, and that is what a horse or a dog would also do. But at the same time

one can say: "I have been wronged" (harmed, ill-treated), and thereby the speech introduces the measure of right and wrong. It does not just give vent to feelings, it introduces a standard of judgment.

At the bottom of this is the opposition between two forms of life: *zoe* and *bios*. *Zoe* is naked life, bare life, life reduced to animality; *bios* is life in the community, in the *polis*, political life.

> The tie between the bare life and politics is the same as the tie that the metaphysical definition of man as "the living being endowed with language" is looking for in the articulation between *phone* and *logos*. . . . The question "How does the living being have language?" exactly corresponds to the question "How does the bare life inhabit *polis*?" The living being possesses *logos* by suppressing and retaining in it its own voice, just as it inhabits *polis* by letting its own bare life be ex-cepted by it. (Agamben 1997, pp. 15–16)

This dense passage by Agamben points exactly to the crucial juncture: the analogy, which is more than an analogy, between the articulation *phone–logos* and *zoe–bios*. Voice is like bare life, something that is supposedly exterior to the political, while *logos* is the counterpart of *polis*, of social life ruled by laws and the common good. But the whole point—the point of Agamben's book— is, of course, that there is no such simple externality: the basic structure, the topology of the political, is for Agamben that of an "inclusive exclusion" of naked life. This very exclusion places *zoe* in a central and paradoxical place; the exception falls into interiority. ("Let us call the *relation of exception* the extreme form of relation which includes something by its exclusion": ibid., p. 26.)[2] This then, yet again, puts the voice in a most peculiar and paradoxical position: the topology of *extimacy*, the simultaneous inclusion/exclusion, which retains the excluded at its core. For what presents a problem is not that *zoe* is simply presocial, the animality, the outside of the social, but that it persists, in its very exclusion/inclusion, at the heart of the social—just as the voice is not simply an element external to speech, but persists at its core, making it possible and constantly haunting it by the impossibility of symbolizing it. And even more: the voice is not some remnant of a previous precultural state, or of some happy primordial fusion when we were not yet plagued by language and its calamities; rather, it is the product of *logos* itself, sustaining and troubling it at the same time.

VIVA VOCE

If the voice is excluded, and thereby included, in the very constitution of the political and its underlying *logos*, this topology has some practical and empirically observable consequences. We can see that the voice, in its function as the internal exterior of *logos*, the apparent pre-*logos*, the extra-*logos*, is called upon and necessary in certain well-defined and crucial social situations. A more detailed phenomenology and analysis of these is called for, but here are just a few examples taken from very different levels. They all concern what Althusser called Ideological State Apparatuses—Church, court, university, elections—and they all circumscribe a particular highly codified and ritualized area within them, the strategic points where their ritual character is displayed and performed, and their symbolic impact is staged.

The voice is intimately linked with the dimension of the sacred and ritual in intricately structured social situations where using the voice makes it possible to perform a certain act. One cannot perform a religious ritual without resorting to the voice in that sense: one has, for example, to say prayers and sacred formulas *labialiter, viva voce*, in order to assume them and make them effective, although they are all written down in sacred texts and everybody (supposedly) knows them by heart. Those words, carefully stored on paper and in memory, can acquire performative strength only if they are relegated to the voice, and it is as if the use of the voice will ultimately endow those words with the character of sacredness and ensure their ritual efficacy, in spite of—or, rather, *because of*—the fact that the use of the voice does not add anything to their content. It appears that this use of the voice echoes the supposedly archaic voice, the voice not bound by *logos*, and recalls the use of shofar in Jewish religious rituals that, as we have seen, Lacan proposed as a model for the object voice. The three great "religions of the Book" all rely on Holy Scripture where the truth is manifested, yet the scripture, the holy letter, can become effective only

if and when it is assumed by a living voice. It can function as a social tie, the link between the community of believers, only if and when a voice pronounces what has been written ever since the foundational moment of origin and stored by tradition, and what all believers keep in their memories anyway.

Secular examples follow the same pattern: court proceedings have very strict rules about the parts of the process and the depositions that have to be made by voice. A guide for jurors in French courts states:

> The orality of the debates is the fundamental rule of the court [*cour d'assises*]. This rule decrees that the court can form its conviction only on the basis of the elements orally and contradictorily debated in the court. This is why the court and the jurors cannot consult the files [*dossiers*] during sessions. . . . This is also why one cannot read the deposition of a witness who is going to testify before she or he has testified: the file is always secondary. (quoted in Poizat 2001, p. 75)

The fact that this is a French prescription has some significance. The same rule generally applies everywhere (for example, in the German civil code: "The parties debate the legal dispute in front of the applicable court orally [*mündlich*]"; quoted by Vissmann 2002, p. 142), but its birthplace is the French Revolution. The principle of orality, the use of the "living voice," and the principle of the public nature of court proceedings were the two main tenets pursued by the Enlightenment against various modes of corruption of legal practice in the *ancien régime*, and they were both implemented by decrees of the Revolution, such as the Law of 16–29 September 1791: "The interrogation of witnesses must always be carried out by the living voice [*de vive voix*] without writing down the testimonies" (quoted by Vissmann 2002, p. 141). This requirement was formally codified by the Napoleonic Code (1806). The degradation of the written record as secondary (to the point of its prohibition) was part of the democratization of court proceedings: the key role was assigned to the jury, and the juror could in principle be anyone (subject to certain regulations), but the difficulty was that the majority of potential jurors were illiterate. The living voice was the instrument by which the legal system could be extracted from the hands of specialists, their incomprehensible lingo and a host of anachronistic regulations.[3] The voice was the medium of democratization of justice, and it was supported by another element of "political fiction," namely that democracy is a matter of immediacy, that is, of the voice; the ideal democracy would be the one where everybody could hear everybody else's voice (hence Rousseau's model case of Geneva). The prohibition of writing was a revolutionary oddity, soon to be replaced by the requirement that every legally relevant word, uttered by the living voice, should be written down; its living presence must be fixed by a written protocol which alone can function as a legal *act*. Yet the written word has no power if it is not preceded by, and based in, the living voice. The authority of writing depends on its being the faithful copy of the voice. The second act, in the sense of a legal document, must follow the first one, the act of the voice, and the hierarchy of the two is the crucial legal fiction.

There are, to be sure, various exceptions to this rule, but the living presence of the voice is the element which defines the ritual nature of court proceedings. The most technical depositions by experts have to be read aloud by them, and only the voice transforms them from mere constative statements into performatives. The same statement acquires the value of a performative when read aloud in front of the court, while it remains the "dead letter" of a constative as long as it is just written down in the files. This is the point where even the President of the USA could not get away with a written deposition, but had to take the witness stand. So here again we have the scripture, the written law on the basis of which the court has to decide, yet for the law to become effective, for the law to be enacted, one has to have recourse to the voice, to orality. If the court is to decide whether the present case can be subsumed under the law, how the letter of the law applies to it, if the court is to determine the truth of the present case and relate it to the law, then it can do so only by the voice, *viva voce*. (We should note in passing the link between the voice and establishing the truth: there is a point where truth has to be vocal and where the written truth, although literally the same, will not do.)[4]

If the living voice is essential to justice as the implementation of laws, it also plays a key role in legislature. "Parliament," after all, stems

from *parlare*, it is a place reserved for speech. But here the situation is reversed in relation to justice: there the living voice was obligatory for the implementation of the letter of the law, while here debating in the living voice, oral discussion with the possibility of objection, takes place in order to result in the letter of the law. The law is not the presupposition but the consequence of the vocal ritual; it cannot be passed, at least in principle, without passing through vocality. Both situations, in their inverted symmetry, mutually support each other and form two halves of the same fictitious entity.

If in this brief survey we make another leap and go from the juridical to the university, then we can see that within Anglo-American academia there is an institution actually called *viva voce*, or just viva: the defense of a dissertation, of a doctoral thesis, which has to be made "in the living voice." In most universities all examinations and tests are nowadays done by writing, so in theory one could actually survive the whole of academic life and get a degree without ever opening one's mouth. Until the viva: at this point, when undergoing the key initiatory ritual, one has to "give voice," one must not just display one's knowledge but perform one's knowledge. The corpus of a candidate's knowledge has been written down in the dissertation, which—supposedly and optimistically—the members of the committee have all carefully read, but this is not enough, it has to be enacted through the voice and only thus made effective. The general experience of those tedious occasions shows that they are indeed simply a question of vocal display; the supposed testing and questioning of the candidate's knowledge has very little to do with that knowledge itself, and has an entirely ritual and vocal character (supplemented by narcissistic struggles and departmental politics under the banner of promoting pure science).

But if the viva presents one extreme of the school system, its ritual exit, then the voice is also omnipresent in schooling from the outset, to the point of being imperceptible. The minimal mechanism of school (this dominant Ideological State Apparatus for Althusser) depends on the teacher's voice, which defines its ritual character and functions in a way somewhat analogous to justice. The teacher is the transmitter of Knowledge by his voice: Knowledge is all stored in books, but it can become effective only when relegated to the voice. Everything may well be written in the textbook, but this will never be enough until the teacher assumes it by his or her voice which enacts it, even if she or he merely reads aloud from the textbook. All Knowledge is accessible to everyone in the textbook, but the school as institution functions only by the voice. If with the viva we had a student who had to "give voice" in order to qualify for Knowledge, then from the outset Knowledge has to be staged by the teacher's voice.

The last example is slightly different and less straightforward: elections, in a great number of languages, have retained a connection with the voice—giving one's voice for a candidate, counting the voices. In English the link is weak—one counts the ballots; it is evident in German: *für jemanden stimmen, seine Stimme abgeben, Abstimmung, Stimmabgabe*; in French: *compter les voix, donner sa voix*; Swedish: *att rösta på*; in Slav languages: *glasovanje, glasanje*, and so on. Is this, yet again, a metaphor? How is it that the voice gives rise to so many metaphors with uncertain limits? Its historic origin is voting by the voice,[5] that is, by acclamation. Catholic bishops, for example, were elected that way were for a long time; more generally, an element of acclamation ritually accompanied every coronation of a monarch. Monarchs—God forbid—were never elected; nevertheless the people had to "give its voice" when the monarch assumed his role.[6] The coronation, the inauguration of a monarch, could not be properly accomplished without formal acclamation, relying on a certain understanding of the adage *vox populi, vox Dei*. In a paradoxical connection, God's will, manifesting itself in the choice of the monarch, could be implemented only by expressing itself through the voice of the people, who had no say.[7] The people had no power of decision, they merely possessed the voice to condone God's will, and the voice of God could manifest itself only through the voice of the people. The people were called upon, and could respond only by the call. The origin of the adage *vox populi, vox Dei* is elusive, but one can trace it back at least to the coronation of the "monarch of all monarchs," Charlemagne, Charles the Great; the first mention of it comes in a letter from Alcuin to Charles the Great (in 798). His coronation, in 800,

posed formidable problems of ritual acclamation, for it was decided, in contravention of previous custom, that this acclamation should take place after the coronation and not precede it, thereby setting the model for the future.

Elections have retained an element of this ritualistic use of the voice. In our highly technically sophisticated society, one still has to give one's voice, or one has to ritually perform, as it were, the myth of a society organized and tied together by the voice, where the people are still called upon to give their voice in favor of the ruler. The underlying fantasy is that of a *Gemeinschaft* in which all members can hear each other, and the fundamental social tie is the vocal tie. But the electoral voice has to be a silent voice (a silenced voice?): it has to be given by writing (by crossing or encircling), and it has to be performed in a small cabin, a cell-like cubicle, in complete isolation (in French it is actually called *l'isoloir*), in complete silence. Furthermore, it has to be done one by one, so that the collective outburst of the acclamatory voice is broken down, nipped in the bud, seemingly deprived of its essential qualities and its spectacular effects. It is the voice measured and counted, the voice submitted to arithmetic, the voice entrusted to a written sign, a mute voice deprived of any sonority, but no matter how hard they try to smother and dismember it, it is still a voice. If the letter of the constitution is to be enacted, in democratic societies, it has yet again to be enacted by the voice.

THE ANTIPOLITICS OF THE VOICE

Those reemergences of the voice in the midst of social life, which in principle is based on "the letter of the law," those occurrences linked to quasi-sacred or ritualistic occasions, present some highly telling and symptomatic points where the element of the voice as such is called upon to perform a crucial social function. They point to the necessary appearance of the voice at certain ritualistic points of a society which is thoroughly governed and organized by written laws, rules, and prescriptions—it is the fiction of the universal accessibility of the letter and of its unchangeable nature which makes the law possible, as opposed to the fleeting nature of voices. When the voice is needed on those occasions, it is the voice properly circumscribed, tamed, pacified, yet the voice which is absolutely necessary to complement the letter, or to complete and accomplish the letter; it is like its lost half which enables its enactment. It is the voice which, ritually, ensures the proper authority of the letter.[8] This is also where the ritual use of the voice differs from its attachment to the superego: what is at stake in the ritual is the codification of the voice and its public presentation, it is used as the lever of social performativity, as a seal of community and the acknowledgment of its symbolic efficacy, the voice as the practice of the letter; while with the superego the main point is to escape publicity and to keep its code hidden—if it makes a public appearance, it always produces an effect of the obscene.

But this ritual use of the voice is not the only story or the whole story—far from it. All the cases which were briefly given here as examples rely on a structure of division of labor, as it were: there is a coexistence of the letter and the voice, and it is quite clear where and when the voice should intervene in order to enact the letter. The two functions are clearly delimited and circumscribed, and the intervention of the voice is called upon in specific and well-defined places and times. This division gives an impression of a peaceful coexistence, a complementarity, as if the letter would find in the use of the voice the missing half it has been seeking. The voice is used only in the place and at the time allotted to it, and everything depends on the boundary being maintained, although it can be blurred or problematic. The division of labor between the letter and the voice can no doubt acquire a variety of perverse forms, but it is nevertheless at the same time a remedy, a tool to oppose obnoxious effects of power and to limit its misuse, although its value and efficacy have to be carefully examined in particular cases.

In sharp contrast to this, there is another kind of voice, a very different use and function of voice which has the effect not of enacting, but of putting into question the letter itself and its authority. It is precisely the (appropriately called) authoritarian voice, voice as authoritarian, the voice as the source of authority against the letter, or the

voice not supplementing but supplanting the letter. Most tellingly, all phenomena of totalitarianism tend to hinge overbearingly on the voice, which in a *quid pro quo* tends to replace the authority of the letter, or put its validity into question. The voice which appears limitless and unbound, that is, not bound by the letter, the voice as the source and immediate lever of violence.

To give a light-hearted and entertaining example of what is in itself rather sinister, we can think of Chaplin's rendition of "the great dictator." Indeed, the structural use of the voice in "totalitarianism" has never been depicted more convincingly. Several things have to be noted.[9]

1. What we hear in the famous opening speech by the Tomanian dictator Hynkel is a nonexistent language with all the makings of German (some ludicrous identifiable German words are mixed in). We don't understand a word (or literally just a word here and there, like sauerkraut); it is the voice and its theater which are isolated as the essential feature of the dictator, the voice beyond meaning. The whole speech is but a staging and a choreography of the voice.[10]

2. At the same time, we have an invisible English translator interpreting the speech, that is to say, providing the senseless voice with a meaning in a sort of consecutive translation. This mechanism is formidable and striking, and seems to be literally ubiquitous: the anthropologist Junzo Kawada, who has studied the (political) role of the voice in various societies, tells us that in the Mosi tribe in Burkina-Faso, for example, the chief (king) always speaks in an incomprehensible low voice and needs an interpreter who explains to the people what the chief really said.[11] But it is essential that the chief is there as the source of the voice; he has to emit the voice, pure voice without signification, and his vizier, as it were, some second-in-command, then takes care of the meaning. This device seems to have functioned in many societies—Salazar (1995) has scrutinized it in seventeenth-century France, a society very much ruled by "the cult of the voice," as the title of his book runs.[12] We can isolate it, as we have seen, on a completely different level, in the biblical "originary scene" where Moses has to interpret the voice of God heard on Mount Sinai for the people who could hear only the thunder and the trumpet, in a clear division between the voice and the law. This same device is now enacted here in this caricature: the master as the source of funny voices, side by side with the invisible interpreter in charge of the meaning.

3. But the great appeal of the scene is that it is quite clear that what the interpreter is saying is not an accurate translation of the speech but, rather, its transformation into something that is "politically correct," fit for the ears of outsiders. It is clear that for insiders the dictator is saying something that can only be entrusted to the voice, and does not bear translation. We can surmise that he is promising them relief from the strict laws, the "license to kill"; there is an implied promise of spoils, loot, plunder, an orgy, a promise to suspend the law—something that could not be publicly put into words—while the interpreter is presenting the whole thing for the ears of the big Other, for the historic record, and consequently playing it down, providing it with a rationale, unsuccessfully struggling to put it into a good perspective. So the interpreter does not need to translate the funny voices for the public, who understand it only too well; he has to act as a mediator for the Other, which is different from the audience of insiders. The paradox of the scene is that we have two versions, the dictator's speech and its translation, but we don't understand the one, yet nevertheless know that the other is false. Still, we know perfectly well what is going on: the very discrepancy between the two versions provides the exact clue: it is in the mirroring of the two versions that "the object dictator" appears. Note that the whole thing is placed under the sign of the double cross, so we have been amply warned that this is a matter of "double-crossing."

4. The speech at the beginning—the speech of the dictator Hynkel—is then mirrored by the final speech, the speech made by the Jewish barber disguised as Hynkel, the barber who is the exact double of the dictator and, being mistaken for the dictator, has to address the masses in that role. His speech is the very opposite of the initial speech; it is presented in forceful words filled with humanism, an appeal to humanity and brotherhood. Yet, in a final irony, the response of the masses appears to be the same: there is the same enthusiasm,

despite the fact that the conveyed meaning is the very opposite. This is intriguing, since the masses don't know that this is not the real Hynkel but his Jewish double—are we to understand that the masses are infinitely gullible, susceptible to any manipulation? On top of that, the final scene is accompanied by music from *Lohengrin*, of all things, a gesture that can only heighten the final ambivalence. Can the final scene cancel, obliterate, retroactively undo, *aufheben*, the effects of the first one, of which it is a remake? Or does the voice resound beyond the alleged humanist message, irreducible to it, threateningly pointing to something else?

The totalitarian use of the voice is not at all in the same vein as instances of the division of labor. We should not read it as an invocation of the sacred and of ritual,[13] or rather: precisely because this is not the dimension of the sacred and of ritual, it has to make even more of a pretense of it, it has to mimic, to emulate, to ape the ritual as closely and spectacularly as it can. The voice, although put at the very core, has a very different function here: the Führer may well be Chancellor of the Third Reich, commander in chief of the army, and occupy many political functions, yet he is not the Führer by virtue of the political functions he happens to be charged with, not by election and also not on the basis of his abilities. It is the relationship of the voice which makes him the Führer, and the tie that links the subjects to him is enacted as a vocal tie; its other part is the answer to the voice by mass acclamation which is an essential feature of the speech. It is the voice that makes the law—*Führerworte haben Gesetzkraft*, as Eichmann will say in Jerusalem; his words supported by the mere voice make the law, the voice immediately turns them into law, that is, the voice suspends the law. This is what Carl Schmitt proclaimed in 1935: the "Führer's will and plan" are manifested in oral guidelines (*Leitsätze*), which are "in immediate and most intense way positive law" (quoted by Vissmann 2002, p. 139). Schmitt was a great legal theorist, and he could not have been more explicit.

In the person of the Führer, *zoe* and *bios* coincide.[14] He represents the unity of *Volk* and its aspirations, its biopolitical ambition and endeavor—and Foucault's term "biopolitics" aims precisely at the annihilation of the distinction between *zoe* and *bios*—that is, in our particular perspective, at the same time between voice and *logos*. The biopolitical swallows the sacred, the voice swallows the letter, the division collapses. The collapse of that distinction necessarily brings forth the emergence of the "bare life" on the other side: the life which anybody can kill with impunity, yet the life which cannot be sacrificed, that is, subjected to an economy of sacrifice, gift, atonement, expiation, in some gesture of exchange with the (divine) Other. Such is the life of Jews, the paramount *homines sacri* of our day.[15]

The use of the voice in Stalinism (usually seen as the other part of the spurious entity of "totalitarianism")[16] indicates a different kind of structure. It is immediately obvious that Stalinist rulers—starting with Stalin himself—were never good public speakers. The voice of the Stalinist ruler is the very opposite of the Führer's voice and its spectacular efficacy. When the Stalinist ruler makes a public speech, he reads in a monotonous voice, without proper intonation and rhetorical effects, as if he himself doesn't understand what he is saying. Party congresses were always staged as monotonous readings of an endless string of endless speeches, during which history was supposed to take place, but which had an irresistibly soporific effect—this was definitely history without any drama. The speech will be published anyway the next day in densely covered pages of the official newspaper, so nobody listens (nor does anybody read the paper). Yet the performance is essential and indispensable—not because of the delegates in the hall, nor of the people supposedly gathered in crowds around radios and loudspeakers, but as a scene staged for the benefit of the big Other. The performance is meant for the ears of the big Other of history, and after all, Stalinist measures were always justified in terms of the realization of the great historical laws, in view of a future which would supposedly validate them.

If the main objective of the fascist ruler was to produce an Event here and now, if fascism put all its resources into the mechanisms of fascination and spectacle, if the voice was the ideal medium of producing such Events in establishing a direct link between the ruler and

the masses, then the main concern of the Stalinist Party congresses was that nothing would happen, that everything would run according to the preestablished scenario. The written script is not to be disguised—on the contrary, the Stalinist ruler is but an agent, a functionary of the script, and the point of monotonous reading is to present as few diversions as possible. Not the authority of the voice, but the authority of the letter is the guideline—it is the letter which is the Event, the voice is but its appendage, a necessary appendage since speeches have to be read aloud to be effective; publication doesn't suffice; but the voice is to be reduced to the smallest possible quantity. The fact that the speaker appears not to understand what he is reading is thus structural, not a reflection of his intellectual capacities, although at times it was hard to tell the one from the other. This situation is almost the opposite to that of fascism: the Führer's words, supported by the immediate charismatic presence of the voice, were immediately legislative, as we have seen, while the Stalinist ruler endeavors to efface himself and his voice; he is merely the executor of the text, just as he is the mere tool of the laws of history, not their creator. He is not the legislator, but merely the secretary (albeit Secretary-General), carrying out the objective and scientifically established course of history, the humble soldier in the service of the Other. He acts not in his own name but in the name of the proletariat, progress, the world revolution, and so on, and in the big Other nothing is entrusted to the voice—it's all in the letter and its law.

If Stalinist rulers were bad speakers, then it is perhaps telling that those who opposed Stalinism were also great orators. Trotsky, the archenemy, was a brilliant orator; Tito, while not brilliant, was obviously ill at ease when reading and often relied on spontaneous asides in popular language, directly addressing the "simple people" of which he was, allegedly, part himself. The special case is that of Castro: hardly an opponent of Stalinism, but following a very different logic in his public appearances. He presents something like an impossible synthesis of two opposing elements: on the one hand he delivers his speeches as a rule without a written prop, in fiery style, relying infinitely on the inspiration of the moment, with baroque rhetoric and unwavering confidence in the immediacy of the voice; yet on the other hand his improvised monologues take hours and hours, become crushingly repetitive and spontaneously turn into orations by Party leaders with equally soporific effects, thus achieving their telos in spite of the opposite starting point.

If in Stalinism everything happens in the name of the big Other of history, then in fascism the Führer himself assumes the role of the Other. He has no need for objective laws; his justification is to embody the unity and the aspiration of the Nation, its "will to power," its need for life-space and for racial purification. Life, strength, power, blood, soil—and the voice in continuation of this series, the voice instead of, in place of, the law. In this light, all the legacy of the Enlightenment—human rights, democracy, and so on—could only appear as an obstacle to the biopolitical agenda. The catastrophe of Stalinism, on the contrary, was that it was heir to the Enlightenment, and represented its inner perversion. Its terror was the terror of the letter and the law in the name of the Other, but the very hiding of the voice behind the letter was the source of perversion: the Stalinist's voice was weak and monotonous, a mere appendage to the letter, yet this staging, this reduction of the voice to the minimum, its self-effacement, in order to exhibit the letter as all the more objective, independent of the subjectivity of its executor—this reduction was the source of the Stalinist's power. The smaller he showed himself to be, the greater his power, reduced to the hidden appendage, the tiny addition of the voice, but one which decides the validity of the letter.

THE VOICE AND THE LETTER

Agamben, in the first pages of *Homo sacer*, defines sovereignty, following Carl Schmitt, as a paradox:

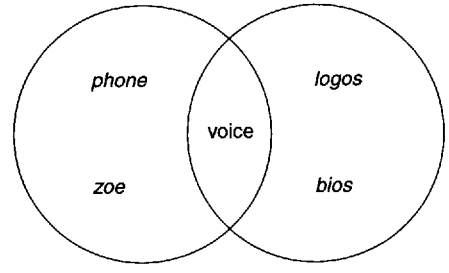
> The sovereign is at the same time outside and inside the juridical order. . . . The sovereign, having the legal power to suspend the validity of the law, is legally situated outside the law. This means that the paradox can equally be formulated in this way: "The law is exterior to

itself," or rather: "I, the sovereign, who am outside the law, declare that there is no outside of the law." (Agamben 1997, p. 23)

So sovereignty is structurally based on exception. The sovereign is the one who can suspend the legal order and proclaim the state of emergency where the usual laws are no longer valid, and the exception becomes the rule. The state of emergency has the most intimate link with the dimension of "bare life": indeed, it is proclaimed when our bare lives are endangered (with natural catastrophes, wars, upheavals, September 11, . . .) and when one is obliged, in the name of bare life, to cancel the validity of the normal rule of law. But it is up to the sovereign to decide whether the danger is indeed such that it calls for this extreme measure, so the very rule of law depends on the decision and the judgment emanating from a point outside the law. And the very moment when it is declared that this is now a matter of our bare lives, survival and therefore a non-political matter, we are dealing with sovereignty and politics in their pure forms, with the showcase of the political.

We can see that this paradox largely coincides with the relationship between the voice and the letter that we have been examining. The letter of the law, in order to acquire authority, has to rely, at a certain point, on the tacitly presupposed voice; it is the structural element of the voice which ensures that the letter is not "the dead letter," but exerts power and can be enacted. This can take the form of a division of labor and a "peaceful coexistence," problematic as it may be, but the tension between the two permanently threatens something far more sinister: *the voice is structurally in the same position as sovereignty*, which means that it can suspend the validity of the law and inaugurate the state of emergency. The voice stands at the point of exception which threatens to become the rule, where it suddenly displays its profound complicity with the bare life, *zoe* as opposed to *bios*, that Aristotle was talking about. The emergency is the emergence of the voice in the commanding position, where its concealed existence suddenly becomes overwhelming and devastating. The voice is precisely at the unlocatable spot in the interior and the exterior of the law at the same time, and hence a permanent threat of a state of emergency.

A "politics of the voice" follows from there, displaying the voice as pivotal and ambivalent. The passage from voice to *logos* is an immediately political passage which, in the second step, entails the reemergence of the voice in the midst of the political. If the relation voice/*logos* is analogous to the relation voice/letter, we can see that the voice, the object voice, is again placed at the intersection of both. There has to be a part of voice which endows the letter with authority, there is a point where the letter has to rely on a tacitly presupposed voice for its authority, and this inaudible part of the voice reemerges with quite a bit of glamor in the ritualistic use of the voice where the hidden voice appears in a positive sonority, as a stand-in for itself, as it were. The paradoxical topology of the voice as essentially between-the-two that we have been pursuing all along can be prolonged here to the relation between *phone* and *logos* as well as *zoe* and *bios*.



In all our cases the two entities overlap in an element which does not belong to either of them, yet holds them together. This location—the intersection, the void—turns the voice into something precarious and elusive, an entity which cannot be met in the full sonority of an unambiguous presence, but is not simply a lack either. The moment this voice is taken as something positive and compelling on its own, we enter the realm where obnoxious consequences are quick to follow. In politics it quickly turns into His Master's Voice, supplanting the law.

But in the realm of the "politics of the voice," we should also pursue the same operation as in the realm of ethics: the ritualistic social

uses of the voice and its "authoritarian" perversion do not cover the whole field. It is also here that we have to disentangle, from the sonorous and shrill voices, the non-sonorous voice of pure enunciation, the enunciation without a statement: the enunciation to which one has to supply the statement, the political statement in response to that voice—not by listening/obeying, not by merely performing social rituals, but by engaging in a political stance. It is a voice tacitly implied not only in the law, but also in the wide social-symbolic texture, the symbolic fabric stored in tradition and mores, something we can never simply assume by compliance and submission, but something which demands an act, a political subjectification which can take many different forms. The symbolic efficacy depends on the excess of the voice it inaudibly hides in its entrails—if I started this section by invoking Althusser, I can conclude it by briefly touching upon his mechanism of interpellation, which is but another name for that voice, the call which sustains social injunctions and symbolic mandates. Althusser saw very clearly that the assumption of the symbolic implies a response to a call, and he provided it with an excellent name, but there is a divide, a precarious shifting line, in the interpellating voice: on the one hand there is the process of becoming a subject by recognizing oneself as the addressee of that call, which would then be a version of His Master's Voice issuing positive prescriptions; on the other there is at the same time a voice which interpellates without any positive content—something one would perhaps rather escape by obeying the sonorous voice of statements and commands; nevertheless this pure excess of the voice is compelling, although it does not tell us what to do and does not offer a handle for recognition and identification. If one wants to become a subject, recognition and obedience are never quite enough; in addition to and apart from these, one has to respond to the "mere voice" which is just an opening, a pure enunciation compelling a response, an act, a dislocation of the imposing voices of domination. If in the first case one turns into a subject precisely by assuming the form of the autonomous "I," disavowing its heteronomic origin, so that ideological domination and autonomous subjectivity work hand in hand, as Althusser has forcefully shown, then in the second case one becomes a subject only by fidelity to the "foreign kernel" of the voice which cannot be appropriated by the self, thus by following precisely the heteronomic break in which one cannot recognize oneself. The ideological interpellation can never quite silence this other voice, and the distance between the two voices opens the space of the political.[17]

In a famous quote in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (1937), Freud talks about three impossible professions in which one can be certain of an unsatisfactory outcome: government, education, and psychoanalysis (SA Supplementary volume, p. 388).[18] If we look at this from our biased perspective, it is obvious that all three crucially involve the voice at their core. They are the professions of the voice, and perhaps it is the cumbersome element of the voice which makes them impossible in the first place. From another angle they appear to be impossible because they all involve transference, and maybe there is a close tie between the two: the voice may well function as the kernel or the lever of transference, as the transferential voice, and maybe transference is but another name for the mechanism of the enactment of the letter by the voice which we have been examining.

We have been considering the first profession, government, with some of the paradoxes of the politics of the voice. I have only briefly touched upon the second, the voice in education, a book with many long chapters which would need much closer scrutiny; but I want to provisionally finish, somewhat abruptly, on the note of "the voice as the pivot of analysis." Indeed, psychoanalysis is also one of those things which can be carried out only *viva voce*, in the living voice, in the living presence of the analysand and the analyst. Their tie is the tie of the voice (analysis by writing, or even by telephone, will never do). But whose voice? The patient, the analysand, is the one who has to present his or her associations, anything that comes to his or her mind, in the presence of the analyst. So the patient is (in principle) the principal or, at the limit, the sole speaker; the dubious privilege of the emission of the voice belongs to him or her. The analyst has to keep silent, at least in principle and the great majority of the time. But here

a curious reversal takes place: it is the analyst, with his or her silence, who becomes the embodiment of the voice as the object. She or he is the personification, the embodiment, of the voice, the voice incarnate, the aphonic silent voice. This is not His Master's Voice, not the voice of a command or of the superego, but, rather, the impossible voice to which one has to respond. It is the voice which does not say anything, and the voice which cannot be said. It is the silent voice of an appeal, a call, an appeal to respond, to assume one's stance as the subject. One is called upon to speak, and one would say anything that happens to come into one's mind to interrupt the silence, to silence this voice, to silence the silence; but perhaps the whole process of analysis is a way to learn how to assume this voice. It is the voice in which the linguistic, the ethical, and the political voice join forces, coinciding in what was the dimension of pure enunciation in them. They are knotted together around that pivotal kernel of the object voice, of its void, and in response to it our fate as linguistic, ethical, political subjects has to be pulled to pieces and reassembled, traversed, and assumed.